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TOP RANKING:

A Collection of Articles on Racism and Classism in the Lesbian Community

compiled by
Joan Gibbs and
Sara Bennett

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We are interested in hearing your thoughts, reactions, and comments about this book. Please write to us at the address listed on the back cover. We would also appreciate receiving any copies of reviews.

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The following articles were sent to us in response to a leaflet we made and distributed requesting articles for a booklet on "Racism and Classism in the Lesbian Community." We decided to do this book because we felt that the on-going discussions of racism and classism in the lesbian community are important, and saw the need for a book that would hopefully contribute to these discussions in a positive way.

From the beginning, we decided to print all the articles that were sent to us with only a minimal amount of editing where necessary for clarity, in order to allow as many lesbians who wanted to, to express their views without putting them through a subjective scrutiny and editing process. In fact, we didn't edit the articles at all, except to correct what were clearly typographical errors.

Unfortunately the book has limitations: for example, there is only one article by a lesbian in prison, and none, to our knowledge, by Native, Latina or Asian lesbians. However, more than one third of the articles are by Black lesbians.

And finally, since we wanted to make the book available, not only to women who wanted to express their views, but also to those who want to read it, we are selling it on a more if you can/less if you can't basis, and free to women in prison. Anyone who can't afford the cover price should write to us for a copy.

—Joan Gibbs and Sara Bennett

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RACISM AND CLASSISM IN THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY: TOWARDS THE BUILDING OF A RADICAL AUTONOMOUS LESBIAN MOVEMENT

By Sara Bennett and Joan Gibbs

Introduction

Although some lesbians have argued that it's "divisive" to raise the issues of racism and classism in the lesbian community, and some of us have even gone so far as to suggest that it's a drain of our energies to organize against anything other than our oppression as lesbians, our position is exactly the opposite. We think that it's divisive not to raise the issues of racism and classism in our community and also not to at least recognize the need to address all the issues that effect lesbians whether or not they effect all of us in the exact same way, if at all.

Racism and classism exist in the lesbian community because they exist in the whole of what today is defined as the "United States."[1] We can not liberate ourselves in a vacuum and/or by assuming that the solution to all of the oppressions that lesbians face, particularly those of Third World lesbians, lies in the liberation of our heads and spaces of men. Thus, while we recognize the need to continue to build solidarity among all lesbians based on our oppression as lesbians, we feel that this solidarity—if in fact it can be achieved—can only be based on a clear understanding of both the similarities and differences in our oppression. Differences primarily caused by differences in our race and class backgrounds.

Our concern over the issues of racism and classism in the lesbian community stems both from our desire to be a part of a lesbian community that expresses concern for all lesbians and also our desire to aid in the building of a lesbian movement that fights for the liberation of all lesbians. At present, we are not part of such a lesbian community but instead one which manifests all

the problems of the "U.S." as a whole And despite significant changes in our movement during the past few years, it continues to be dominated, for the most part, by those whose actions and statements express concern for only part of our community.

Our experiences as a Black and white lesbian, individually and collectively, inside and outside the lesbian community, have convinced us that the solution to our oppression lies in the building of a radical autonomous lesbian movement. Radical because we see our liberation as lesbians as being tied to the liberation of all oppressed peoples and the total destruction of the present system. Autonomous because while recognizing the need for unity among all oppressed peoples, we also feel that our complete liberation from our oppression as lesbians can only be ensured by building a strong lesbian movement. A movement, however, that not only targets heterosexism and sexism, the institutions of the patriarchy, but also target domestic colonialism, the roots of racism, and imperialism—all the systems that oppress lesbians.

Before we proceed any futher, we would like to briefly try to explain why we have rejected lesbian separatism as a/the solution to our oppression. In truth, we were never separatists because it was neither an option or a desirable goal to us. Separatism, we feel, is based on the erroneous assumption that the patriarchy is the only system that we must overthrow and seems to suggest that the needs and interests of all lesbians are somehow identical. To us, neither of these are the case. We also have to overthrow domestic colonialism and imperialism. And the needs and interests of all lesbians are not now, and probably never will be identical.

Joan: *I was never a separatist because it doesn't speak to the reality of the world I live in or my needs as a Black lesbian. Coming from a working class background, I've always had to work or hustle to survive. As a child, growing up in the South and later, after I moved North, I learned that I would never be* free *until I was free from the oppression that I faced as a Black person. Like, when I was in the fourth grade down South in school, a cousin of mine, a Black woman, was found hanging from a tree with her*

body full of bullets. Just before my 21st birthday, my only sister died of a drug overdose. Now some people may feel that that was her fault and not think or care about the conditions that led her to drugs in the first place, or that led her back to drugs after spending six months on Rikers Island—her not being able to get a job, for example—but I know that drugs are deliberately brought into our community, into Black and other Third World communities, to keep us down, to keep us from fighting back. And I could go on and on with stories; stories of the people I knew, relatives and friends that were killed or died from the conditions that we, Third World people, face. So, when separatists talk about the problem being men or straight people, I know that they are not talking about my problems. When separatists talk about moving to the country and buying land, I know that I can't and don't want to do that—isolate myself from Black women, men and children. Why would I, a Black woman, even be interested in buying land in the first place, when Third World people, Black, Native and Hispanic peoples—within the current borders of the U.S. are fighting for liberation, for land?

More concretely, lesbian separatism ignores or relegates to a secondary status, race and class oppression, and negates the validity of a shared struggle by Third World women and men.

The Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist group in Boston outlined their disagreements with a lesbian separatist position in *Capitalist Patriarchy and The Case for Socialist Feminism*. We include part of their statement here because their disagreements with separatist theory are similar to our own.

> We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g. the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression.
>
> Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the frac-

tionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.

As we have already stated, we reject the stance of lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis or strategy for us. It leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly Black men, women and children. We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression negating the facts of class and race.[2]

These same views were recently echoed by Zulema, a Black women's collective in San Francisco, after a concert at which tomatoes were thrown at Linda Tillary, a Black lesbian musican when she appeared with a male accompianist.

> Many white women have the mistaken notion that there is only one women's community and that it's needs and goals are a reflection of white society. This premise is not only narrow, it is incorrect. The presumption of separatism is one that we, as Third World women, vehemently object to. On a day-to-day basis we have consistently fought against and been the victims of separatism in the form of racism. Because of our history, we can not afford to separate ourselves from Third World men. Many white women ignore the fact that as Third World women we have to struggle against racism as well as sexism. What hope do we as Third World people have if we separate according to our sex? True, we struggle against sexism in our various Third World movements, but we also struggle against racism in the women's movement. We do not see masses of white women coming forward to eliminate the racism in this society. To cut ourselves off from Third World men and to turn our backs on the problems of racism in this society would be akin to suicide.[3]

As lesbians, it is especially important as we enter the 1980s that we begin to recognize that we can no longer—if in fact we ever could—be solely concerned with our liberation from oppression as lesbians and not also interested about our own and others liberation from racial and class oppression. During the past few years, the gains of Third World people in particular, and women, lesbians and gay men have all come under increasing attacks. The "Right" has gained steam. And the Klan, which was never really "dead" is resurfacing as evidenced by the shootings of five anti-Klan demonstrators in Greensboro, North Carolina in November 1979, and in April, 1980, the shootings of four Black women in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and a nine-year-old Black girl in Wrightsville, Georgia. All of these events, and the struggles around them concern us too.

We realize that the tasks confronting our movement are difficult and also that they will take years and years of hard work to accomplish. We also recognize the extent to which heterosexism and sexism are ingrained in the "U.S."—to say nothing of the world as a whole—and effects a lot of people who also share our commitment to revolutionary change. However, since our movement began, support for our demand for liberation from our oppression as lesbians has grown, and as more and more of us begin and continue to struggle against our own and others oppression both inside and outside the lesbian community, this will continue to occur.

We would like to devote the rest of this article to a brief examination of the historical roots of racism in the "U.S."; an examination of the class differences among women in general and

lesbians in particular; some of the ways these differences manifest themselves in our community; and finally some ways that we can begin to concretely struggle against these issues. Our interest here is not to provide a blueprint for our movement, but to contribute to both the ongoing discussions of racism and classism among lesbians, and the development of our movement.

The Historical Roots of Racism in the "U.S."—A Brief Survey of "U.S." History

We decided to confine our discussion here primarily to a brief examination of the historical roots of racism in the "U.S.", in part because we feel that it is important to understand why racism exists. Also, by proceeding in this manner, we hope not only to convince white lesbians of the need to fight against their own manifestations of racist ideas and attitudes, but also to fight against racism wherever it exist.

1492–1800

The historical roots of racism in the "U.S." can be traced back to the 15th and 16th centuries when Christopher Columbus, preceded and followed by other "European explorers," arived here and "discovered" a "New World"—a world already inhabited by Native peoples. And although this was by no means the first appearance of racism, these voyages by European explorers to what today is called the U.S. and others to other parts of the world, in our opinion, marked the beginning of the deliberate development of racism in order to justify the colonial subjection of Third World peoples.

> It is often forgotten that when Europeans gained enough maritime skill, and gunpowder to conquer most of the world, they not only colonized the bulk of the world's people but they colonized the interpretation of history itself. Human history was rewritten to favor them at the expense of other people. The roots of modern racism can be traced to this conquest and colonization.[4]

In his book *Capitalism and Slavery,* Eric Williams explains the significance of Columbus' trip as follows:

> When in 1492, Columbus, representing the Spanish monarchy, discovered the New World, he set in train the long and bitter international rivalry over colonial possessions for which, after four and a half centuries, no solution has yet been found. Portugal, which initiated the movement of international expansion, claimed the new territories on the gound that they fell within the scope of the papal bull of 1455 authorizing her to reduce to servitude all infidel people. The two powers [Spain and Portugal], to avoid controversy, sought arbitration and, as Catholics, turned to the Pope—a natural and logical step in an age when the universal claims to the Papacy were still unchallenged by individuals and governments. After carefully sifting the rival claims, the Pope issued in 1493, a series of papal bulls which established a line of demarcation between the colonial possessions of the states: The East went to Portugal and the West went to Spain.[5]

This bit of history is important for several reasons; chief among which is that it shows how racism stems out of colonialism and also how it was and still is supported by the prevailing ideology. In much the same way that Christianity, with its theory of all people being created equal before the "eyes of God," in practice provided a cloak of respectability for the enslavement of African people, today Jimmy Carter's and other "official's" human rights speeches and talks of "democracy" serve to cover up the genocide and subjection of Third World peoples.

The vicious assault on Native peoples that quickly followed the arrival of European settlers to these shores stands out as one of the greatest crimes ever committed. It has been estimated, for example, that during the first 21 years after their arrival on what is now known as Puerto Rico, Spanish settlers exterminated 95 percent of the Native population, the Taino Indians.

This pattern of genocide was repeated again and again, and is still being repeated.

> The first permanent English colony began in 1607 when three vessels dropped anchor several miles up the James

River in Virginia at a site then named Jamestown. Financed by the Virginia Company of London, a joint-stock corporation, and settled by ambitious young men employed by the company, the colony was expected to produce lucrative profits by locating old mines and water route through the continent to the fabulous markets of Asia.

The colonists themselves demonstrated equal ignorance. They chose a malarial swamp on which to erect their village, and then they allowed their meager supplies to dwindle while they searched for gold. Afflicted by disease and famine and divided by petty squables, they succumbed at an alarming rate. . . .

. . . The agony of settlement promptly shattered their dreams. Some investors also hoped to use native labor, much as the Spanish had enslaved the peoples they conquered. But the tribes of North America successfully resisted such plans.[6]

To solve their labor shortage, the Virginia Company began to contract with individual English laborers, known as "indentured servants," who agreed to work on company lands, stolen from Native peoples, for a specific period of time in exchange for a trip here and a promise of land. Indentured servitude, however, did not solve the labor shortage and also was difficult to manage. Thus another solution was sought and soon discovered in the kidnapping of African peoples from their homeland.

Over 350 years ago, African people were brought to these shores against our will—chained and bound as slaves. The societies that we came from were not idyllic. They knew wars and some forms of involuntary servitude—but nothing remotely resembled the mass murders, the destruction of societies, the uprooting of families, the suppression of cultural, economic and social development and the degrading existence that our people have been, and are forced to live under. Dubois estimates that anywhere between 20 million and 100 million people were lost to Africa because of this trade. The historian, Philip Curtin established the sad

figure that of that number only about seven million ever reached the western hemisphere alive. What happened to the African continent as a result of the slave trade makes the horrible and horrendous crimes of the Nazi's fascism almost child's play. The result of that trade in human bodies is still reeking havoc among African nations and peoples and today among us, the descendants of those people.[7]

The profit motive alone, however, does not explain the treatment and conditions of African peoples then or now. As Peter N. Carroll and David W. Noble point out in their book *The Free and the Unfree: A New History to the United States*, "more than an eye for the Marketplace" was and still is needed to keep African people oppressed.

The vision of Africans as potential slaves had deep roots in Western culture; there were predispositions in the Western mind which, given the specific historical conditions such as a need for labor, encouraged the establishment of black slavery in the colonies.

There were, first, the visible differences—dark skin and kinky hair, for example—which distinguished the African from the Europeans. As in dealing with the Native Americans, Renaissance Europeans attempted to incorporate these strange beings into their preexisting cosmology. Black complexions suggested images of the curse of Ham, the swarthy son of Noah condemned for his sins. Such biblical metaphors reinforced cultural prejudices against blackness itself—black as dirty, evil, sinful, inferior. Then, as with the Native Americans, there was the question of religion. From the Christian perspective, the Africans had no religion, no spiritual relations with the true God. They were mere heathens who worshipped devils disguised as Gods. Such notions justified slavery as a missionary institution, a way of saving souls from the snares of Satan.[8]

In his book, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, W.E.B. Dubois exposes the myths about slavery that attempt to perpetuate the illusion that it was not as horrible as it was.

On the other hand, it is just as true that Negro slaves in America represented the worst and lowest conditions among modern laborers. One estimate is that the maintenance of a slave in the South cost the master about $19 a year, which means that they were among the poorest paid laborers in the modern world. They represented in a very real sense the ultimate degradation of man. Indeed, the system was so reactionary, so utterly inconsistent with modern progress, that we simply can not grasp it today. No matter how degraded the factory hand, he is not real estate. The tragedy of the black slave's position was precisely this; his absolute subjection to the individual will of an owner and to the cruelty and injustice which are the invariable consequences of the exercise of irresponsible power....

The proof of this lies clearly written in the slave codes. Slaves were not considered men. They had no right of petition. They were 'divisible like any other chattel.' They could own nothing; they could make no contracts; they could hold no property, nor traffic in property; they could not hire out; they could not legally marry nor constitute families; they could not control their children; they could not appeal from their masters; they could be punished at will. They could not testify in court; they could be imprisoned by their owners; and the criminal offense of assault and battery could not be committed on the person of a slave. The 'willful, malicious and deliberate murder' of a slave was punishable by death, but such a crime was practically impossible of proof. The slave owed to his master and all his family a respect 'without bounds, and an absolute obedience.' This authority could be transmitted to others. A slave could not sue his master; had no right of redemption; no right to education or religion; a promise made to a slave by his master had no force nor validity. Children followed the condition of the slave mother. The slave could have no access to the judiciary. A slave might be condemned to death for striking any white person...[9]

Thus we see that contrary to the stories that we are told in school, the "U.S." was founded on the backs of African slaves and on the conquest of Native peoples land.

It is also important to know that Third World people fought back against their oppression from the very beginning. This history, however, has also been carefully concealed or rewritten to create the illusion of "good, noble white people" fighting back against "savages."

> The magnitude and effects of the black people's defiant rejection of slavery has not yet been fully documented and illuminated. But there is more than ample evidence that they consistently refused to succumb to the all-encompassing dehumanization objectively demanded by the slave system. Comparatively recent studies have demonstrated that the few slave uprisings—too spectacular to be relegated to oblivion by the racism of ruling class historians—were not isolated occurrences, as the latter would have us believe. The reality, we know now, was that these open rebellions erupted with such frequency that they were as much a part of the texture of slavery as the conditions of servitude themselves. And these revolts were only the tip of an iceberg: resistance expressed itself in other grand modes and also in the seemingly trivial forms of feigned illness and studied indolence.[10]

In September, 1774, representatives of the settlers convened the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia. A few months later, on April 18, 1775, the first shot in the so-called "War for Independence " was fired. In May, the Second Continental Congress was held and delagates at it decided, among other things, to raise a volunteer army, issue paper money and to reorganize the "people's milita" into a "Continental Army" commanded by slaveowner George Washington. On July 4, 1776, at another meeting of the Continental Congress, the Declaration of Independence was passed.

Each year millions of "Americans" religiously celebrate the above events. However, when you look closely at some of the things that happened before, during and after the "American Revolution", the one thing that is unmistakenly clear is that Third World people, particularly Native and African people, have no reason at all to parade on the fourth of July unless it is to call attention to the fact that this day is a cruel hoax. While it is true that the British government exploited and oppressed the settlers by attempting to make the colonial economic system serve its interest, levied heavy taxes, etc., the interests of the settlers were definitely not the same, or in most cases even similar to, the interests of Native and African people. During the war, for example, George Washington and his army burned several Native villages to the ground and immediately after it was over, the settlers using their "new" freedom to move westward, increased their genocidal assaults on Native peoples. Consider also, the following Articles adopted at the Constitutional Convention[11]:

> Article I, Section 2: Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed ,*three fifths of all other persons*.
>
> Article II, Section 9: The migration or Importation of such persons as any of the states now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person.
>
> Article,4 Section 2:*No Person held to Service or Labour in one State under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.*(emphasis added)

In a speech given on July 4, 1852, Frederick Douglas voiced his, and undoubtedly millions of other African people's, then and now, feelings about the "American Revolution."

> What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.[12]

The Civil War and Reconstruction

The years directly preceding, during and after the Civil War are particularly important to understand, especially since so many myths exist about them. With this in mind, we would like to focus our discussion here briefly on attempting to answer the following three questions: 1) What caused the Civil War; 2) Did Lincoln, or the North, free the slaves and 3) Why did Reconstruction fail?

Our readings on this period has convinced us of the necessity of locating the causes of the war in two factors—the growing conflict between the Northern and Southern systems of production and the continual and increasing resistance of African people to slavery. Mention should also be made of the white women and men, who joined and supported the Abolition movement. Among other things, the history of African people's resistance to slavery, which continued during the Civil War, undercuts the myths about this period that we are told in school, read in books and generally have drummed into our heads by those who would have us believe that the North magnanimously freed the slaves without any particpation at all from African people.

In his book, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, Dr. Dubois underscores the importance of challenging the lies about this period.

> The North went to war without the slightest idea of freeing the slaves. The great majority of Northerners from Lincoln down pledged themselves to protect slavery, and they hated and harried Abolitionists. But on the other hand, the thesis which Beale tends to support that the whole North during and after the war was chiefly interested in making money, is only half true; it was aboliton and belief in democracy that gained for a time the upper hand after the war and led the North in Reconstruction; business followed abolition in order to maintain the tariff; pay bonds and defend the banks. To call this business program "the program of the North" and ignore abolition is unhistorical. In growing ascendency for a calculable time was a great moral movement which turned the North from its economic defense of slavery and led it to Emancipation. Abolitionists attacked slavery because it was wrong and their moral battle cannot be truly minimized or forgotten. Nor does this fact deny that the majority of Northerners before the war were not abolitonists, that they attacked slavery only in order to win the war and enfranchised the Negro to secure this result.
>
> One has but to read the debates in Congress and state papers from Abraham Lincoln down to know that the decisive action which ended the Civil War was the emancipation and arming of the black slave; that as Lincoln said: 'Without the military help of Black freedmen, the war against the South could not have been won.' The freedmen, far from being the inert recipients of freedom at the hands of philanthropists, furnished 200,000 soldiers in the Civil War who took part in nearly 200 battles and skirmishes, and in addition perhaps 300,000 others as effective laborers and helpers. In proportion to population, more Negroes than whites fought in the Civil War. These people, withdrawn from the support of the Confederacy, with threat of the withdrawal of millions more, made the opposition of the slaveholder useless, unless they themselves freed and armed their own slaves.[13]

Northern industrialists and financiers, thus were motivated primarily by their desire to gain control, or bring into control the entire "U.S." market. This they saw could be best achieved by limiting or eliminating slavery. In 1860, for example, the year before the Civil War began, the value of U.S. industrial production reached 1,885 million dollars, nearly ten times more than its value in 1810 and making the "U.S." fourth in the world after England, France and Germany. And as a result of its continual territorial expansion, war against Native and Mexican people, the size of the "U.S." jumped from 2.3 million square kilometers in 1785 to over 7.7 million square kilometers at the beginning of the Civil War. In 1848, for example, as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo forced on Mexico, one half of the territory that Mexico possessed in 1821, and all the citizens of Mexico residing within the conquered territory, who did not to leave within one year, came into the greedy hands of the "U.S." Thus the question of the expansion of slavery gained importance.

Still, though the above is central to fully understanding this period, the resistance of African people can not be ignored. In 1793 Toussaint L'Ouverture led a slave revolution in Haiti that frightened slaveowners everywhere and, not surprisingly was quickly followed by a series of others in the South. To name only the most famous—Gabriel Prosser's in Virginia in 1800; Denmark Vesey's in South Carolina in 1822; the Amistad Mutiny in 1831 and also in 1831, Nat Turner's in Virginia in 1831. Resistance also took other forms, with another major one being escaping. In his book *From Slavery to Freedom*, John Hope Franklin notes that estimates of the number of slaves that escaped between 1810 and 1850 range from 40,000 to 100,000. And to all of this, must be added the work of African women and men such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas, David Walker and Sojourner Truth, who consistently worked for the liberation of African people.

Tubman, for example, perhaps the most famous conductor on

the Underground Railroad, and despite a large bounty on her head, continually returned to the South to aid other slaves to escape and also was a militant advocate in the fight against slavery. John Franklin notes the following about her:

> She tolerated no cowardice and threatened to kill any slave who wished to turn back. Well known in Philadelphia, New York and Boston where she frequently delivered the escaped slaves, she preferred to lead them all the way to Canada after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, explaining that she could not trust Uncle Sam with her people any longer.[14]

And Douglas, who published a paper called *North Star*, urged those who though morally opposed to slavery did not support armed resistance by African people to support all phases of the struggle.

> If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing the ground. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.[15]

In the eyes of the Southern slaveowners and other supporters of slavery, Lincoln appeared as a menace. During his campaign, he had among other things voiced opposition to the Dred Scott decision handed down by the Supreme Court in 1857, which held that Congress lacked the authority to exclude slavery from the new territories. Thus, in December 1860 shortly after Lincoln's election, the South Carolina legislature summoned into special session, voted to repeal the state's ratification of the Constitution and within six weeks, was joined by Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas. A short time later, in February 1861, representatives of this states met in Mongomery, Alabama to form the Confederate States of America.

How did Northern officials, and particularly Lincoln, initially respond to these actions?

> While the Deep South created the Confederate government, the national politicians sought to avert civil war. President Buchanan, the lame duck incumbent, declared that secession was unconstitutional, but made no proposals to resolve the crisis. Representatives from the border states, most notably John J. Crittenden, sponsored compromise resolutions that would have restored the old Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean, guaranteed slavery where it existed, and compensated slaveowners for fugitive slaves. In his inaugural address of March 4, 1861, President Lincoln reaffirmed his willingness to protect the institution of slavery in the South. He proposed, moreover, to enforce the fugitive slave trade. But Lincoln remained adamant in opposing the extension of slavery, and on that single issue, as symbolic as it was, the Union would flounder.[16]

Consider also the following remark made by Lincoln in 1862:

> If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that.[17]

Clearly, Northern white officials were not *adamantly* opposed to slavery. It was rather as Frederick Douglas noted in Boston in 1865, "in the interest of slavery on both sides" that the war began. "The South was fighting to take slavery out of the Union, and the North fighting to keep it in the Union; the South fighting to get it beyond the limits of the United States Constitution, and the North fighting for the old guarantees; both despising the Negro, both insulting the Negro."[18]

Moreover, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, emancipated only those slaves in the Confederate states and not those in states "loyal to the Union." Mindful of the significance of African resistance to the entire Union, Lincoln also took pains in it to warn freed slaves "to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense." African people were also not welcomed into the Union Army at first and it wasn't until it became clear that the war could not be won without the participation of African people that they were welcomed.

Let's look next at Reconstruction. Few people, unfortunately, know of the accomplishments of this period. For example, it was during Reconstruction that a free public school system was established for the first time in the South. This period witnessed the foundation of several of the Black colleges in the South that for decades after were the only schools that African people could even think of attending. During this time also, 23 African people were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate from the South. It was also during this time that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were passed, in July 1868 and March of 1870 respectively.

What caused Reconstruction to fail? White historians, with the exception of a very small number, have almost all ascribed the failure of Reconstruction to African people and their supporters. "The Negroes," says D.H. Montgomery in *The Leading Facts of American History* "got control of the states. They had been slaves all their lives, and were so ignorant they did not even know the letters of the alphabet Yet they now sat in the state legislatures and made the laws."[19] Others, however, in an attempt to correct these distortions, have assigned the entire blame for Reconstruction's failure on the ruling class, and denied or ignored the fact that it wasn't only the white ruling class, but rather members of the white working class as well that caused the defeat of Reconstruction.

True the Southern ruling class wasted no time in making their intentions known. Almost immediately after the war ended, for example, a series of laws, known as the "Black Codes," were enacted throughout the South that denied African people the right to vote, and severely restricted the movement, right to work or not work, and protection of African people. In 1865, South Carolina had enacted a law that declared "that no person of color shall migrate into and reside in this State, unless, within twenty days after his arrival within the same, he shall enter into a bond, with two freeholders as sureties. . . in a penalty of one thousand dollars, conditioned for his good behavior, and for his support."[20] A Mississippi law stated that it "shall be the duty of all sheriffs, justices of the peace, and other civil officers of their

respective counties in this state to report to the probate courts of their respective counties semi-annually, at the end of the January and July terms of said courts, all freedmen, free Negroes and mulattos, under the age of eighteen,...who are orphans, or whose parent or parents, have not the means, or who refuse to provide for and support said minors, and thereupon it shall be the duty of said probate court to order the clerk of said court to apprentice said minors to some competent and suitable person, on such terms as the court may direct, having a particular care to the interest of said minors; *Provided*, that the former owner of said minors shall have the preference, when, in the opinion of the court, he or she shall be a suitable person for that person."[21] Laws such as these demonstrate that indeed Reconstruction was a hard battle, one that could possibly be said to have been a loosing one all along. However, the animosities, of white working class Southerners towards the slaves can not be ignored.

Dubois speaks of the involvement of the white working class during and after the Civil War.

> While revolt against the domination of the planters over the poor whites were voiced by men like Helper, who called for a class struggle to destroy the planters, this was nullified by deep-rooted antagonism to the Negro, whether slave or free. If black labor could be expelled from the United States or eventually exterminated, then the fight against the planter could take place. But the poor whites and their leaders could not for a moment contemplate a fight of united white and black labor against the exploiters.[22]
>
> Indeed, the plight of the white working class throughout the world today is directly traceable to Negro slavery, on which modern commerce and industry was founded, and which persisted to threaten free labor until it was partially overthrown in 1863. The resulting color caste founded and approved by white labor, and resulted in subordination of colored labor to white profits the world over. Thus the majority of the world's laborers, by the insistence of white labor, became the basis of a system of industry which ruin-

ed democracy and showed its perfect fruit in World War and Depression. . .[23]

We still talk as though the dominant social class in the South persisted after the war. But it did not. . . Of the names of prominent Southern families in Congress in 1860, only two appear in 1870, five in 1880. Of 90 prominent names in 1870, only four survived in 1880. Men talk today as though the upper class in the white South is descended from the slaveholders; yet we know by plain mathematics that the anscestors of most of the present Southerners never owned a slave nor had any real economic part in slavery.[24]

The lawlessness in the South since the Civil War has varied in its phases. First, it was the kind of disregard for law which follows all war. Then it became a labor war, an attempt on the part of impoverished capitalists and laborers to force laborers to work on capitalists' terms. From this, it changed to war between laborers, white and Black men fighting for the same jobs. Afterward, the white laborer joined the white landholder and capitalist and beat the Black laborer into subjection through secret organizations and the rise of a new doctrine of race hatred.[25]

Reconstruction, simply put, was defeated as a result of a wholesale terror campaign waged against African people and any white person who would stand up against this terror. A campaign of terror that was carried out or supported or ignored by white people from all classes. According to an admittedly minimal count by the Tuskegee Institute between 1889 and 1901, 1,955 African people were lynched in the South. Other figures are much higher than this. The significance of the defeat of Reconstruction, however does not stop here for it occurred, and laid the basis for, the imperialistic terror that followed as the "U.S." having reached its territorial limits here began to cast its eyes abroad.

In 1863, in what has been characterized as the "opening shot" of the "U.S.'s" new territorial aggression, Alaska was purchased from Russia. In 1898, Hawaii was "annexed" and following the defeat of Spain, Puerto Rico was invaded. During this same time, Cuba, Guam and the Phillipines all came into the hands of the "U.S." Not, however, without resistance, resistance which, justifiably so, continues to this day.

Each time, among the weapons used to validate aggression and conquering of Third World people and their countries, was racism. "I don't like the Puerto Rican," Senator Henry M. Teller of Colorado frankly admitted in 1900, "...Such a race is unworthy of citizenship."[26] Senator Bate of Tennessee after surveying the new "U.S." colonies, described the people of Puerto Rico and the Philippines as "savages addicted to head-hunting and cannibalism."[27]

Also, not surprisingly, the man who directed the "U.S." invasion of Puerto Rico, Nelson A. Miles, had gained his military expertise in military expeditions against Native peoples. Miles, among other things, bears major responsibility for the massacre of 400 Native women, men and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1890 and also the capture and death of Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Geronimo and Chief Joseph, three of the major Native leaders of the 19th century.

Puerto Rican people,like Native, African and Mexican people, have continually resisted the "U.S." colonization of their country and also, more recently, plans to make Puerto Rico the 51st state. As Maria Haydee Torres, one of 11 members of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) arrested in Evanston, Illinois earlier this year, stated in a statement she prepared but was not allowed to give to the court that convicted her:

> As a result of the yanki invasion, we Puerto Ricans see that 95 percent of our country people are unemployed, and 45 percent of those who are industrial workers. Aside from having over 70 percent of our people dependent on food stamps doled out by the yanki government (a good way of keeping our necks inside a noose) our people can have little economic hope. While our people suffer, we see that 60 percent of our land is in the hands of North American corporations, with the single purpose of devouring our natural resources. To this we must add that 80 percent of the entire production of Puerto Rico is controlled by North American capital. Another 13 percent of our land is in the hands of the U.S. Armed Forces. Thus can we understand the forced migration of our people to this country; forced by the conditions created by their exploitation and continuous presence in Puerto Rico.
>
> My fellow patriots, I ask you to continue to struggle daily. A free and struggling spirit cannot be broken. We need each other, and I feel happy and proud to know that our people continue to struggle. Because both I

and my companeros will not cease our struggle for an instant. This country does not know how to combat the revolutionary spirit of a people in arms. Until Victory, my people; In Struggle,

Maria Haydee Torres, Puerto Rican Prisoner of War in the U.S.[28]

Hopefully, the above brief survey of the historical roots of racism in the "U.S." from the 15th to the 20th century has demonstrated that racism is rooted in and a fundamental part of the "U.S." Its existence today in almost every aspect of "American" life from the educational and legal systems to the media to the language we use everyday is thus no accident. Nor, is the frightening reality revealed by statistics that indicate that of the "400,000 people in U.S. prisons, 300,000 are Black"[29] or the sterlization of 35.3 percent of all women of child-bearing age in Puerto Rico, 24 percent of all Native women and 20 percent of all Black women of child-bearing age. The struggles against racism, against the colonial subjection of people of color within and outside the current borders of the "U.S.", in Azania (South Africa), Chile, Puerto Rico, etc. are important struggles that we, as lesbians, can not afford not to, and in truth must, support.

Classism and the Class Struggle in the Lesbian Movement

This section has been a very difficult one for us to write. Although we consider ourselves socialists, and therefore recognize the importance of developing a class conscious lesbian movement, we are concerned that our analysis neither obscures the reality of racism in the "U.S." nor the continual need to challenge *all* the ways we are oppressed. Many of those who consider themselves Marxists or socialists, for example, adhere to the notion that class is the "primary contradiction," and sometimes act as though everything else, including racial, sexual, and heterosexual oppression, is of secondary importance. While we have serious difficulties with this approach, we find little comfort in those, who in attempting to correct some of the problems of the "white male left," simply assert a new "primary contradiction" or tack on an ever-expanding list of oppressions. In our opinion, the world in general, and the "U.S." in particular is much more complicated than this.

We would like to examine some of the difficulties we have with some of these approaches, primarily because they pinpoint some

of the problems we, as radical lesbians, face in organizing a class conscious lesbian movement. In his book, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, James Boggs tackles the first of our disagreements with those who single out class as the primary contradiction.

> The slogan "black and white, unite and fight" which is explicitly or implicitly accepted by many liberals and radicals is based on the erroneous idea that there has been a working class unity between the races in North American history. The fact is that the white workers have been gaining at the expense of the Negroes for so long that for them to unite with the Negroes would be like cutting their own throats. After the Negroes were set aside to be systematically exploited, every white immigrant who walked off the gangplank to make his way in America was walking onto the Negroes' backs. This back-climbing has only been possible because there has always been a Negro under-class at the bottom of society to take the leavings of the jobs, homes, schools, public buildings, etc. as technological development and economic expansion created better opportunities for whites. All he could get was the menial job of porter or elevator operator; all he could live in were the buildings which had been abandoned as too old and too dilapidated for the white man.[30]

Though written in 1963, Boggs' word paint a clear picture of the situation today. Consider the following statistics included in an article by Lynora Williams in a recent issue of the *Guardian*, aptly titled, "Miami reflects national frustration."[31]

- In many urban Black centers, the unemployment rate among Black youth is estimated at as high as 80 percent. According to government statistics, the overall Black rate stands at 13 percent. Actual figures are generally believed to be twice the government figures.
- According to the National Urban League (NUL), some 77 percent of Black families are forced to rely on some form of public assistance in order to survive.
- Black family income stands at 59 percent of white family income.

- According to the Federal Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD), 37 percent of Blacks need to spend more than a quarter of their cash income to live in decent housing.
- Black housing is flawed more than twice as often as the housing of the total population.
- Infant mortality among Blacks in 1977 stood at 23.6 for every 1,000 babies, as compared to 12.3 for whites.
- Of the 435 members of the House of Representatives, only 17 are Black.

What these statistics and the others mentioned earlier indicate to us is that there are considerable differences in the lives of Black people and white people, and differences between what it means to be a Black working class person and a white working class person. These differences, we feel, can not be glossed over by those who assert class as the "primary contradiction," and then proceed to ignore, take over, or challenge any other approach.

Ruth Milkman, in an article in *Socialist Review*, tackles another of the many questions we have—specifically the problem of many sectors of the working class having reactionary ideas.

> Yet, while workers *as a class* do have an interest in building unified opposition to capital, *individual* workers who derive immediate benefits from the segmentation of the labor market will want to protect their relative privilege. Indeed, while the links between labor market position and skin color or gender may be ideological, racial and sexual "divisions" in the labor market may be jealously guarded by the workers who benefit from them once they are established. Moreover, to the extent that sex and race are linked to differentials in social position outside the capitalist labor market prior to its ascendancy, the more privileged groups may be instrumental in establishing the old differentials in the new context.[32]

Another important factor we feel must be recognized when looking at class, is that it is much more than just an economic relationship, but rather involves behavior, basic assumptions about life, experiences (determined by class), how we are taught to behave, what we expect from ourselves and from others, in sum how we think, feel, and act—in a word, "classism" or classist attitudes, something that has yet to be recognized by many as either an issue at all or anything to be struggled against.

Having said all of this, we would like to look next at the way the development of capitalism heightened the oppression of all women and also laid the basis for the continual oppression of lesbians and gay men. Though the oppression of women predates the development of capitalism, attempts to locate the shaping of our present oppression must inevitably lead to capitalism with its replacement of communal ownership of the means of production with private property, and which over a period of time produced antagonistic classes. In pre-capitalist societies all members of society—women, men and children—were involved in what was regarded as meaningful, although different, labor. Under capitalism, however, the meaning of labor changed and along with it the role of women. Having assimilated the essential features of the patriarchal family, specifically its sexual division of labor, capitalism furthered this division, assigning to women primarily the roles of domestic laborers, and "objects" dependent on men. Outside the home, the majority of work available to women coincides with our "inside" roles. Women's work is thought to be supplemental, with the result being that it is frequently of a secondary and temporary nature, and almost always at lower wages than men.

Re-enforcing all of this is an ideology designed specifically to keep us "in our places." Capitalism, far from rejecting this ideology, uses and manipulates it to serve its own end. Though women have always worked—and in fact, in the "U.S." women and children were the first industrial workers—it's interesting to examine the way we are used and viewed as a reserve army of labor, a necessity under capitalism to keep wages low through competition among workers for an inadequate amount of jobs.

around such issues as police brutality, affirmative action, reproductive rights, the Klan. These experiences have been helpful to us—in particular, because they brought us into contact with other people who either shared or had very different ideas from our own and thereby helped broaden and clarify our own understanding and goals.

We also feel that it is important not only to develop an understanding of racism and classism but also to be willing to struggle with other people (friends, relatives, lovers, strangers, co-workers) around them as well. As the saying goes, "there can be no unity without struggle." However, we would like to emphasize the need for principled struggle as opposed to unprincipled struggle. While name-calling may be a good way to let off steam, it is not neccessarily the most constructive way to help someone to change. Of course, there are alot of people who will never change.

Organizing lesbian anti-racist or lesbian groups whose primary focus is on issues connected to racism and classim within and outside our commmunity is also important work. Such groups, can be a way for us to bring these two issues to our community and our movement.

Another thing that is particularly important is that when planning events or actions, we should try to make sure that they are accessible to all the women in our community. Seemingly little things like outreach, charging more if you can/less if you can't, childcare and wheelchair accessibility are critically important. By the same token, it is also important for us to struggle to work collectively—all women should share equally in decison-making and work—and share our skills and information with others.

In conclusion, we would like to say that such work or activity as participating in demonstrations against police brutality, against the Klan and Nazis, prisoner support work, supporting politically and materially the struggles of Third World people within and outside the present borders of the "U.S." are important for both showing support and better understanding what's going on and for gaining allies in our own struggle against our oppression as lesbians.

NOTES

1. We put quotations marks around the "United States," or "U.S." because we feel that it's important to draw attention to the fact that contrary to what we're constantly bombarded with, we're not living in a country made up of 50 voluntary states.
2. "The Combahee River Collective: A Black Feminist Statement," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. edited by Zillah Eisenstein, Monthly Review Press, pp. 365-367.
3. "Zulema Responds," in *Plexus*, April, 1980.
4. Clark, John Henrik, "Race: The Historical Development of a Myth," in *Strategies and Tactics for Confronting Racism*, Black Liberation Press, NY, 1980, p. 8.
5. "The Origin of Negro Slavery," from *Capitalism and Slavery*. by Eric Williams, Capricorn Books, New York, 1966, Chapter 1, pp. 3-29.

(Footnotes continued on inside back cover)

FEMINISM—A SOCIO-POLITICAL-CULTURAL-SPIRITUAL VISION: TOWARD A PARTICULAR UNDERSTANDING OF RACISM AND CLASSISM IN THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY

By Linda J. Brown

I have trouble with most of the 'ism' concept ideologies today—at least the popular ones: socialism, capitalism, communism, fascism . . .

The thing is: most of these 'isms' are the definite ideologies of white men. Being a black person—woman, feminist, lesbian—the idea of white men governing my life is far from acceptable. The things one needs . . . to work, to follow, to learn . . . namely faith, trust, believability—are decidedly absent there among the 'isms.' The reason I am here walking and alive in the first place, violates the ideologies and wishes of white men.

Ideologies are formed out of concepts. On studying the more positive concepts of the 'ism' group, I have found that these particular positive ones go back beyond the lives of the white men who are taking credit for fathering them. The concepts go back clearly beyond existing society. Almost down the line, they throw back to tribal societies.

The vast majority of tribal societies consisted exclusively of people of color. Surely, it has been documented already that people of color existed on the earth longer than people of anglo-saxon origin. Today, there is no surviving anglo-saxon tribal community; while some of people of color still flourish. History speaks of anglo-saxons living in groups; living basic survivors' lives in the vast coldness and bareness of their land regions. It is said they only had a little time to formulate or practice any kind of social or political activity; living being so difficult and time consuming. Tribes were more than survivor groups. They were

where cultural, social and political ideas were practiced, in addition to survival tasks. History, while not telling the entire stories or documenting the entire extent of the cultural, social and political definitions and practices of the tribes, does relate societies rich in all.

It is known, also, that anglo-saxons left their land early (largely due to its inhabitability and poor resources) and travelled to other regions, looking to better their lot. It is pretty obvious who they came across in their travels.

History tells of the raping, thieving and plundering practiced by these ancient anglo-saxons during their journeys.

I will not speculate, here, the reasons for taking, instead of asking; for attempting to conquer, rather than share . . . because the factors involved are too complex. And being a descendant of people of color, I would have a slightly one-sided view.

The fact remains: the robbing of lives, culture and concepts from the tribes of people of color.

I have never heard credit given to any concept the 'ism' inventors now use. It is as though the thoughts sprang from the tops of their heads, dressed and formed. There have been volumes of ideas written with instructions on how to proceed with them; and nowhere, have I seen, even a preface crediting the origins of some of these basic ideas. Surely, it's wrong to formulate such vast systems based on stolen ideas.

The tribal cultures had large parts of matriarchal ideology, lineage and rule. These cultures, with their roots in matriarchy are the ones I can relate to. Being who I am—a black woman who loves and is devoted to women—it makes little sense, to me, to look for my origins elsewhere: the early tribal people being people of color; matriarchies being societies where women were central.

Little is known (or said) about the ancient anglo-saxon women and their role in their societies. Or their role in the raping and plundering these societies practiced. It seems, from various sparse historical accounts, that anglo-saxon women were severely oppressed under anglo-saxon men. It brings the question as to whether these women were unwilling participants in the oppression of people of color; or whether they had anything to do with it at all. There are a few reported accounts of matriarchy being practiced among ancient anglo-saxon women, as well. Was there any of this matriarchal ideology being practiced before they invaded the tribes? Was it a choice anglo-saxon women made—to identify with the matriarchal cultures of the tribal women? As history will again document, they suffered from the practice of matriarchy; much as people of color suffered at the deeds of the ancient anglo-saxons; and as *surely* as matriarchal women of color suffered/suffer now under a white supremacist, male supremacist system.

It is also proven that the "piecing out" of various groups under oppression and the creating unnatural conflicts (modern classism) is significantly effective. Thus some modern examples: male supremacy concepts being embraced by men of color; racial supremacy concepts being embraced by white women; same race, same face oppressions are aimed at such factors as economic and social definitions.

We talk of societies that have become entwined, sometimes beyond recognition of the originals. Of surviving in the whole, practical realities of today.

Women of color, whether matriarchal (read lesbian) or not, suffer the most under various oppressors (white . . . male . . . female). White women suffer under some of the same oppressors; as do men of color; people of different economic and social means than the oppressors.

In the context of feminism, I am concerned with women. The logical thing (in my mind) is for all women to combine forces; both to be a stronger body with which to fight off oppressors, and to practice the concepts of "modern Matriarchy".

Inside the basic 'isms' are derivative 'isms' that enable the grand 'isms' to be carried out. Two are racism and classism. Racism is the oppression of a race of people by those of a different race (in this case, people of color by whites). Classism is the oppression of people by those of different economic, social, cultural, spiritual ideologies. Power is the deciding factor in both of these 'isms'. Those in power are the ones that practice the oppression. There is never a reverse of this situation; thus, for any group to maintain a semblance of power over another, insures the continuing of the situation.

For white women, today, who are sincere about building any society whose base is matriarchal (in a broad sense) and equilateral (in concepts, determination and practice), there are basic things that have to be done: 1. the denunciation of past and existing white, male supremacist ideologies; 2. the cessation of practices which enable these ideologies to flourish; 3. the joining together with women of color, in the formation of a NEW society, with different concepts. White women must realize their positions of power: that they have acquired power from being white women in a white, male dominated society. In this society, being women aims oppressions at them, but being white gives back as many privileges. They must, in denouncing white male supremacist ideology and practice, also give up the privileges they get from such a society. They must correct inequalities: actively elevating women of color (from the society's keeping them down) and deflating themselves (from the *in*flated position offered them by white men) to equal, level, non-oppressive conditions. There are many courses of action to take to bring this about. White women must search to find the answers.

In addition, the inequalities brought about by various distribu-

tions of wealth and culture (modern classism) must be similarly dealt with.

It also stands, that the most oppressed women's voices in this society must be heeded and followed—as there can be no change without new directions. None while women are still oppressed.

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SOMEWHERE

By Rita D. Brown

Somewhere . . . most everywhere i hope . . . there is an obvious movement of progressive womyn. Quite naturally the queers are moving, too. i mean washington d.c. must've really been something else in Oct. '79. So there is a lesbian feminist community as well. We all exist & that is evidence of our strength as a positive force in the world. Now this is amerikka so we know that racism & classism are the norm for any organization. These are facts based on the reality that we are products of our environment. We can not instantaneously change that reality. But change it will—cuz that is the natural order of life. The important element is who is in control of the efforts toward change. We are working toward positive change rather than the negative ones so traditional in this country. We do this thru awareness of the current reality & continuous effort on every level to produce beneficial-to-all-humanity changes. Like being always aware of racism & classism around us. Like sharing our resources without demanding a "token" in return. We only waste time when we wallow in guilt about a reality based on hundreds of years of carefully executed conspiracys. We can only learn by doing. We got to stop being afraid that we might do something wrong. You just never know til you try (like the madison billboard brigade, wisconsin). We must always work toward the lessening of our personal oppression. At the same time we can not ignore this society's double barreled shotgun of racism & classism.

Somewhere along the roads to getting our consciousness raised we got angry at the discovery of our personal oppression. That anger sometimes distorts our view of the world. It makes us narrower instead of broader cuz it is so big and so ugly. It clouds our brains & fogs our vision so that all we can see is "what they are doing to me". Even when we find theory that teaches us the importance/necessity of thinking in the most broadest terms, we still react first in narrow defensive ways. This is all product of

cultural brainwashing. We are all products of our "me first" environment. This amerikkkan taught survival method allows the divide and conquer syndrome to prevail on the most personal levels. We often let our righteous anger produce the behavior of spoiled brats. We forget that everything we feel, even our anger, is suspect. Not that it is bad to feel anger, but how do we deal with it? i mean, look whose institutions taught it all to us, right?

Somewhere along the roads to getting our consciousness raised we learned a new language with all sorts of "isms" & clever intellectual phraseology. Now we get even more arrogant cuz we know the lingo & know we have really learned something. We believe we are the only korrect ones & damn anyone else who don't agree with us. Some of us go so far as to order the korrect clothes to wear, the korrect people to sleep with, the korrect children to raise etc etc etc ad infinite nasium. We literally do unto others what we do not allow done to ourselves. We create even more OTHERS to scorn & hate instead of dealing with "the man"*. Which is not to say that we shouldn't get our own house in order. But we should realize that our misdirected energy is extremely dangerous, especially to us. We should think about how this big wonderful cake we are attempting to make is just so big & so wonderful cuz it requires the widest possible use of all ingredients. Shit, a recipe like that could conceivably help to feed the world.

Somewhere along the roads to getting our consciousness raised we forgot that it is a privilege to have the space to be a politico. It is a privilege to even get the education that enables one to understand all those big words & big rhetoric. Sometimes it's true that people struggle hard to get that education but it's still in the privilege category cuz it aint readily available. It is even a privilege to drop out & create our own lil' community. Which is not to say that we shouldn't try to live our politics when we can; but that we should be aware of just who we are & where we come from. We must seek the roots of our oppression thru the clouds

*this is no reference to any one male; but rather to an entire system

of privilege. We can not escape reality. It is a privilege to be white and have class position. We take our privilege for granted cuz we always had it & don't know anything else. We should not run away from these privileges, but we should learn how to use them to everyone's advantage.

Somewhere along the roads to getting our consciousness raised we have to deal with some hard facts. Herstorically there are some reasons for not trusting any movement of womyn. The suffragettes did sell out Black people. The current anti-rape campaigns aint real clear on how specifically Black men are set up to take the rap for all crimes of all men against womyn. It's true that we even try to push Black folks into joining the white on white anti-nuke movement. It never occurs to us that Black people have more pressing jobs to do. Like dealing with the genocidal facts of the current incarceration rates that show how every new jail bed in the next 5 years will be for a Black body. It is true that some of us have been so presumptuous as to tell womyn of color not to relate to men of color & just how to run familys of color. Now what would you do if someone you didn't even know well & didn't even ask tried to tell you all about how to deal with your closest people? Shit, some of us have even suggested it would be a good idea to kill nearly half of the earth's population. All of this in the name of revolution?

Somewhere along the roads to getting our consciousness raised we became a community of extremely diverse ideas. It's really a wonder just how we manage to live together. But then we really do respect strong womyn even if they do seem to be over reacting at times & we do need each other. We are fairly young & we are insecure with our lack of experience. This insecurity adds to the already indoctrinated fears of being lesbian womyn in this society. Now we are even more different cuz we are standing up & speaking out. We fear the unknown but rather than draw further into ourselves we should figure out how to throw it off . . . how to deal with it as we move forward. Maybe it's really how to move forward in spite of that fear. This movement is overcoming those very fears that keep us in line & inactive. This movement is about moving forward!

We can not pretend to be what we aint. We are nationally overwhelmingly white & middle class. Even the workers among us are able to be here cuz they aint got children or less responsibility. Maybe that's changing i hope so. Anyway, we can only let our actions over time speak for us. We got to continue to be a visible & material support for all progressive struggles. How else can the karma begin? We need to learn the lessons of these struggles; to pick up the tools shown us & adapt them to ourselves. Either we are or are not trustworthy based on our practice. Unity can not be a must except for specific short terms; it can only grow with trust. If we are about taking care of our business & not meddling in other peoples when we aint asked, then we will earn respect for our differences by showing respect for those differences.

We can not sit around & wait for some messiah type to come along to guide us from without. We must guide ourselves & create our own leadership from within. These carefully chosen & tested leaders will be strongly influenced by international struggles & the reality that we are a mere part of an entire world. Our leaders will perhaps meet with other leaders just as carefully chosen & tested by their peers. Ideas will be exchanged for all of us to rediscuss. Alliances with other peoples will be forged. Only thru trust, respect, willingness to learn, & willingness to be independent enough to lead ourselves will we truly move toward such alliances with other people in struggle. The earned inner actions of such alliances will provide additional practice for lessening race & class contradictions.

We can not afford too much impatience with our work tho sometimes it is frustrating. We gather our knowledge from all corners/curves of the earth & digest it. A process that is not instantaneous if we want good results. Sometimes we let impatience immobilize us. Sometimes we let it blow the whole thing by uncontrolled emotional reactions. Perfection is not really a human characteristic and that is part of our beauty. Only robots have predictable behavior. So let's get a strong hold on our patience, mix it thoroughly with our determination, forget the useless strive for perfection, & let's continue our work building ourselves & alliances. It sure won't be easy to build better ways & days . . . but we can do it!!

THINGS HERE

By Rita D. Brown

Here is an old tired gay bar scene . . . very tired. You hear more womyn called 'man' then men called 'men'. i mean if you're a dyke then you must want to be a man, right? and besides most womyn do relate to men on the street & are only looking for a substitute. Of course dykes don't have to let other womyn do this to them but it's so much more easy & perhaps profitable to do so. We are even still so fucked over that some of us have yet to realize that we really aint substitute men. So they call us bull daggers . . . whatever in the fuck that means . . . & we answer cuz we know who they talking to. Sometimes we question the term & sometimes we talk about all this shit & we always say we understand but then we don't do shit about it. After all we'll be back on the streets in a little while so we'll just do what they want us to do to get over while we're here . . . . . forget today . . . . It is a mean problem. But, if we don't deal with today how can we ever hope to have a better tomorrow????

Somewhere between 70-80 percent of womyn here are womyn of color—mostly Black. At least 50 percent of staff are male & overwhelmingly white. All sorts of incidents occur subtely & not so subtely to remind us all of our positions in this game of doing time. The lone white womon on a bus of new admissions is the only one staff assumes would be interested in key punch training (skilled labor here).

Black womyn are by far the ones who receive incident reports and do lock up time. White womyn are much more adept at dealing with the white staff. Black couples always go to lock up for being too close while white couples do not necessarily. Recently a womon scheduled for release spent the last two months of her time in lock up (from isolation to the streets) cuz her and her lover were too obviously in love. They weren't the fighting kind so they couldn't be used as easily by administration. They were just too much in love to be in prison & therefore some kinda

threat to the security of the institution.

White womyn are usually the ones who get financial support from the street. This financial security allows one to work at lesser paying jobs which often mean lesser hassle jobs. No prisoner here makes much over $100 in any month out of which she must buy cigarettes, cosmetics, tampax, toiletries, food items & attempt to support her children. The jobs are very traditional: garment factory, ADP (keypunch), DDR (kitchen), hospital, clerical & small mechanical crews (plumbers, electricians, etc.). Education is also predictable: ABE, GED, cooking, sewing, cosmotology, secretarial skills, a couple of college classes that WE PAY FOR & limited apprenticeship programs in mechanical areas.

There is no real creative outlet since art programs usually occur during work hours. Womyn can not afford to take off their jobs or the boss will not let them off. So classes remain tiny & therefore there is no justification for any expansion.

The hospital has been under construction for the last year or so & is always filthy. It has no accreditation of any kind & staff is overwhelmingly white.

The cost to feed each prisoner per day is $1.66. Can you imagine the quality of food products served at that unbelieveably cheap price? County jails often spend more & we all know they are horrible.

There is no gymnasium & apparently no plan to give womyn here adequate rcreational facility. After all this place has been here for more than 50 years without one. "Ladies" do not need physical outlets. They are supposed to be quiet & smile a lot at nothing. It is common knowledge that those who smile the most will probably get out the fastest.

Although we did not receive a biographical note from Rita D. Brown, we would like to say something about her. Rita is a white lesbian and former member of the George Jackson Brigade who is presently incarcerated somewhere in the U.S. We say "somewhere," because according to the most recent information, she has been removed from Alderson Federal Prison for Women in Alderson, West Virginia as a result of federal prison officials anger over the escape of Assata Shakur, a friend of Rita's. Letters of protest should be written to: Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti, Constitution Ave. and 10th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20530.

BLACK LESBIANS AND THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT

By Cynthia R. Cauthern

White lesbians, facing homophobic purges from the women's movement, joined the gay liberation movement to fight oppression aimed at their homosexuality. Once in the movement, these women were confronted by gay males who are sexist and insensitive to the problems and needs of lesbians. Like straight men, gay males are blinded by their egos and view female homosexuality as an inferior form of sexual expression because there can be no sex or enjoyment without a penis.

Many white lesbians perceived the urgent need to protect themselves, forming radicalesbian and lesbian-feminist organizations. Lesbians from the gay movement entwined gay politics with the philosophical bases of feminism and started a separate political submovement and subculture.

Unlike the first lesbian organization called the Daughters of Bilitis, established in Los Angeles in 1954, modern lesbian-feminist organizations have little interaction with the gay community. Their energies are channeled into women's rights and the concerns of lesbians. Working, but not integrating, with feminist organizations has facilitated a subculture where women financially and emotionally support other women.

However, the lesbian-feminist subculture, like the gay subculture, is unencouraging to and void of the contributions of Black lesbians. The Black lesbian is expected to deny her herstory and culture and integrate into the white lesbian-feminist subculture. Her experiences as a Black person is secondary in this subculture; she is a woman first. When lesbian-feminist organizations strip Black lesbians of their creativity, identity, and community, they are practicing the racist policy of colonialization.

Cynthia R. Cauthern lives in Philadelphia. This article is an excerpt from a chapter entitled "Black Lesbians and the Gay Liberation Movement" in an unpublished manuscript.

Tasha: *I started the first radicalesbian collective in Ohio. When my so called white sisters were changing their names to Wildwomon, Earthmother, etc. I changed mine to Africa. They told me it was not a name from the goddess, it was a name developed by males. I wanted a CR (consciousness raising) group for Black Dykes, but the collective said a special CR group would cause us to separate. So we had a CR group about coming out in college and the pressures of being a dyke in suburbia. I left, they were just as oppressive as males.*

Lesbian-feminist organizations are afraid to establish and support anti-racism policies, because they would be confronted with their own racist attitudes and actions. White women have certain privileges Black women cannot obtain. These privileges are involuntary and built into this society; the usage of them maintains racism and creates animosity among Black Women. Until radicalesbian and lesbian-feminist recognize the racism that flourishes within them and their organizations. Until they utilize their special privileges to minimize racism, equality and liberation for all women will never be achieved!

Black lesbians must struggle to be recognized as an intricate component of the gay liberation movement. These Black women became active in the movement expecting a utopia. As the movement progressed, their white comrades shed their disguises to reveal themselves as racist, classist, and sexist. Black lesbians were tolerated for the numbers they added to the ranks and to fatten the purses of the movement. Abused and disregarded by white homosexuals, it is time for Black lesbians to unite and chart their own path. No longer will they hold onto the coat tails of others forging ahead for freedom. They will advance from the rear and transform into Black Amazons, supporting the needs of their sisters! If the gay liberation and lesbian-feminist movements will not fulfill their desires, the Black Amazons will rebel, leaving them to quake, tremble, and finally collapse. These Black Amazons will develop their resources and start the renaissance of the Black lesbian culture. They will discover a rich herstory and develop an impermeable identity and community.

PRISON WORK AND THE LESBIAN ISSUE: A PERSONAL STATEMENT

By Charoula

I am a member of **Women Free Women In Prison,*** a group involved in doing support work around issues concerning women in prison. Our collective visits the women, brings them materials, acts as liaison between them and the outside world, their lawyers, and other supporters; we go to trials and class action suits and drum up publicity for the women involved; we organize letter campaigns. Also we publish a newsletter, *No More Cages*, whose ambitious goal is to end the isolation of women in prison, and to break down the barriers between women in different prisons, but also between "them" inside and "us" outside, so that we can learn to understand each other and each other's struggles, and work together to change the system.

During the course of my work in the prison movement, I have been often asked by other lesbians, mostly "political" lesbians, why I, a lesbian, found it necessary to work with/for women in prison. Lately, having for the time being concentrated primarily on this work, I have even been asked whether I didn't feel "alienated" from the lesbian community. The collective has been criticized as a group for not including more lesbian issues in *No More Cages*. This article is in response to the white lesbians who feel that doing prison work is antithetical to the "lesbian movement". I find it necessary to write about it as I think it reflects the racism and classism of white lesbians. I have realized that it is the reason why prison work is not more enthusiastically taken up by more political white lesbians.

At this point, I'd like to make clear who the women are who end up in prison: 90% of them in the state of NY are Black, Hispanic and of other ethnic non-white groups. They are also poor. The other 10% are poor white women. Their "crimes" are

**This article reflects my own opinions and does not necessarily reflect the views of the entire group.*

mostly directed against themselves, ("victimless" crimes, as if they themselves aren't the ultimate victims), i.e. prostitution, and drug use. The other major "crime" category of women in prison is self-defense murder, usually of a husband or boyfriend who battered them and used them in a variety of ways. Thirdly, they are in prison because they are poor, most of them with children, on welfare, with no options open to them for survival—so they turn to "illegal" means of staying alive. Women in prison are those women, who, by virtue of their color and their class, are the most oppressed in this society. They are the ones most victimized by patriarchal/colonialist/capitalist America.

Women Free Women in Prison is a group of lesbian feminists. While our immediate identification is with other lesbians, and our energy is best preserved by the support and energy of other lesbians, nevertheless we are woman-identified women determined to wage a revolution for *all* women. Feminism means exactly that: women out to change the status quo for all women. Anything short of that would cut the feminism out of lesbian feminism.

While I fully agree that we should work to get a lesbian community together, and support the issues that are of immediate interest to us as lesbians, nevertheless I fail to understand the exclusivity of this way of thinking. To be thus exclusive is to be racist, and classist. It is to say that women of color, and poor women, who are in prison cannot possibly be lesbians. It is to say that to do work which is not directly related to lesbian issues is taking away from the lesbian movement, is divisive, and weakening, and not important enough for lesbians to be involved in. It is to say that the problems of every day survival which women of color and poor women are plagued with have nothing to do with our women's movement.

What then *is* our women's movement?

To be for women, and to ignore the special plight of women in prison is a contradiction. It is a hypocritical stand that denies a whole segment of the female population, just by ignoring the specific problems which they face, both when they are inside and

before they get there—which is in fact the reason why they end up behind bars. As the segment constantly ignored from our agenda is, not accidentally, women of color and poor women, this contradiction in our "women's movement" cannot be seen as anything else but racism and classism. Particularly since, increasingly over the past few years, the white women's movement is no longer centrally located within a growing grass-roots movement of women.

So, a white lesbian can say, right, but let white straight women deal with this contradiction. Let the straight take care of their own, and if you work with women in prison, make sure they're lesbians, and go tell them how we are solving things out here, how we are building a "lesbian movement".

Well, it ain't so simple. First of all, the prison struggle cannot be separated into neatly divided compartments. Women inside have a hard enough time dealing with the administration, and if they have any chance of winning, it's going to be because they will stand united. To go in there and support just the lesbians, that indeed would be divisive and destructive. Anyway, they are all involved in the same struggle: it's very clear to them who the enemy is, and the enemy is the same for both lesbians and straight women. I only wish we would acquire the same clear insight in our struggles out here.

Second, the lesbians who eventually come out of, say, Bedford Hills, half an hour away from New York City, will be faced with the same problems they had before going to Bedford—in fact even more so—surviving in a society that is homophobic, yes, but also, and *primarily* for them, racist and capitalist. The issue of lesbianism for most of them, though for sure not all, will probably be secondary to race and class identification. In fact, survival might make it necessary that they do not come out as lesbians at all.

But if women coming out of Bedford did choose to find out how the NYC lesbian community is faring, what would they be confronted with but a lot of alienation between the white and Black communities, and a lot of distrust caused mainly by the

white women's lack of willingness to deal with their racism and classism.

And how does this relate to "building a community" vs. doing prison work? Yes, I am extremely interested in working to build a community. It is highly important to me to know there is a core, there are spaces I can go to, services I can avail myself of, places where I can hear nurturing women's music and poetry, where I can be supported, soothed and revitalized so I can face this hostile world. And yes, I want the lesbian and gay oppression pushed all the way to the back of the closet. But I don't believe we as white women are contributing towards the creation of such a community when we don't even have the energy to examine our racism, to deal with the differences amongst us, differences that perpetrate *within* the sisterhood the horrors of the larger society, the conditions of racism and classism which the system fosters and perpetuates for *specific economic reasons*. There is *no* unity when we are afraid to recognize these conditions in our midst, when our fears of losing our skin (and class) privilege prevent us from seeing the viability of working, as white lesbians, for issues that are essential in the lives of women of color, such as employment, welfare, housing, abortion, and prison, to mention only a few.

I want to be part of a lesbian community where white women will be developing an awareness which will lead us to concretely work toward achieving a tangible strong basis for unity, so that the distance between Black and white women can start closing up.

And I also don't believe that working for lesbian and gay issues *alone* will ever get me any more rights than I have now. We must grow a historical perspective in our struggle, we must begin to see ourselves as part of a mass movement of oppressed peoples. To work side by side with other movements, as for instance the prison movement, is not only a way to provide support for women in prison, though that is a primary reason. It isn't only a way of gaining an understanding of the reality of the lives of women of color, which can provide a concrete basis for dialogue

and change. It is also a *means of attacking the state itself*, prisons being just one of its many forms, though clearly one of the most horrifying. When we attack prisons, we attack the state, the same state that is unleashing its Anita Bryants, its Klan and its Nazis against lesbians and gay men, against all women, against Blacks, against Jews, against Native Americans, and Hispanic peoples, against illegal aliens, against draft protesters and anti-nukers—against us all. This state is best served when we are divided by racism, and by classism, and by homophobia.

In the long range, fighting for women in prison is fighting for our own interests as well—our own survival. Refusing to see the connection and the commonality of our struggles is self-destructive; it is wresting privileges for white and middle class women from those in power at the expense of women of color and poor women, which divides us, destroys our self-esteem, and keeps us forever enslaved to the man, in his power, never free.

Charoula, a Greek lesbian activist, works on issues pertaining to women in prison and lesbians. She also works on the publication *No More Cages*, P.O. Box 283, Nyack, NY.

THE "ALL WOMEN'S INTERESTS ARE THE SAME" LINE: A TRAP FOR NON-PRIVILEGED WOMEN? (excerpt)

By Alison Colbert aka/Sarahgold

I. Introduction

In 1949, in Washington, D.C., mother, a white, assimilated Jewish professional, hired a maid, who was Black, uneducated. In order to return to work, my mother had to have someone take care of her three-month-old daughter—me. This maid, Eleanor, looked after me and housekept for my family for seventeen years. She is now in her 60s, blind from glaucoma long left untreated by inadequate public clinics. She faces an isolated old age on social security. My mother, who is the same age, has a full pension, a house, and gets the best health care available. I cannot pretend that my mother's survival needs and Eleanor's are the same. Yet at one time I could.

When I was a child, I shared hopes and fears with "Elny" I couldn't tell my more judgmental parents. It's probably only due to the fact that she listened that I survived at all. Even so, at the time I saw her as a family appendage, my appendage, an extension whose needs and interests were the same as mine. Her real person was invisible, trapped behind my assumptions.

Certainly, the white upper-middle-class society I lived in—the church I attended, with its one patronized Black family, for instance—gave off strong messages that people who were not white and middle-class, were supposed to be invisible. So, by the time I was a teenager, these assumptions were ingrained in me. For instance, in the early integrationist period of the civil rights period (1960-3), I like many other white middle-class people, assumed that all Blacks really wanted was to join with us in white society. And, later, despite my support of Third World liberation movements' demands for autonomy from white society, the

messages I'd gotten when I was growing up still stayed rooted in my head. So, I brought them with me when I joined the feminist movement; then into the Lesbian community when I came out.

When non-privileged feminists whom I had unwittingly treated as my appendages began to confront me, I was hurt. But, since then, I've tried to challenge these societally-ingrained patterns in myself. I've tried to understand how useful they are for the white, upper-class men in power, how they function to keep women divided and unable to challenge that power. In the course of trying to understand this process, I've become sensitized to how some feminists, white middle-class and above, treat women with less privilege.

One incident riveted me. A feminist-theory summer school held a benefit in a posh office building. A co-founder announced proudly that in order to insure maximum thoroughness the sessions would be six weeks long. A woman in the audience pointed out that it would be difficult for her and many other women to attend such a long session: two to three weeks a year was all the time they got off from their full-time jobs. The co-founder, a white, upper-class writer who taught college nine months a year, drawled, "Well, I'm sure you-all'll work something out," and changed the subject. This response ignored the difficulties, which full-time workers encounter when they try to get leave from jobs, such as scheduling hassles, or (if they can actually take off) loss of pay. By dismissing these difficulties, the co-founder consciously or unconsciously made such survival needs undiscussable. Women less privileged than herself were trapped into invisibility.

Over my years in the movement, I've lived through many such incidents. Recently, I've been trying to analyze why they happen. For one thing, they occcur because the movement is predominantly white, and middle class (either by class origin or marriage) in population. When we take our privilege for granted as the co-founder was doing we "white out" the survival needs of less privileged women, both within and outside the movement. We assume "all women's interests are the same" as ours.

The article I am now writing poses the question: 'The 'All Women's Interests Are the Same' Line: A Trap for Non-privileged Women?" In the following excerpt, I ask: What was the relationship of this line to the basic tenets of radical feminism? Did privileged women use this line against non-privileged women? Did they recreate the assumptions white middle-class people employ against non-privileged people between *women*? How did this line affect the demands of the early radical feminist movement (1968-72)? How did *Ms* brand of "getting yours" feminism increase its influence from 1972 on? Is the "all women's interests are the same line" a trap for non-privileged women?

II. Defining the "All Women's Interests Are the Same Line"

Did radical feminism assume "all women's interests are the same" right from the beginning? The women who split off from the civil rights and anti-war movements were white middle-class. The politic they developed posited: because we share certain oppressions: lack of access to decent jobs and childcare, lack of control over our bodies, *all* women are oppressed *as a class*. This analysis could have been a powerful way to unite women. Unfortunately, in practice, it has far too often been watered down into the line that all women's interests are the *same*, thus, that all women share *identical* oppression. This belief overlooks the fact that non-privileged women are *more* oppressed in this society than white middle-class women. (Certainly many Caucasian middle-class women—myself included—have suffered discrimination as members of ethnic minority groups. But we still have white skin and class privilege.) However white working class women have class chains on them as well as sexual. Third World women have race and sex chains laying on them to keep them down. And, if a non-privileged woman is gay, the homophobia of both her own culture and of middle-class dominant society weighs her down as well. The oppressions are many, they weigh heavily, they are *there*. But, because white middle-class women have been oppressed as women *first*, we tend to assume *all* other women have been as well. Thus, we often have

had difficulty seeing that non-privileged women *have* to deal with race and class oppression. When we discount the effects of such oppression, our societally-ingrained belief—non-privileged people don't have interests of their own—conquers us. We white middle-class women then use this belief against non-privileged women. *Our* version of this belief—"all women's interests are the same"—is dividing us from such women. It is also silencing non-privileged feminists.

How does this line trap these feminists? In "*To All My Middle-Class Sisters,*" Donna Cashell, a white working-class feminist, speaks for many:

> In a women's group, when I tried to tell you middle-class women how I spent many years wishing I were you, I was told that my hunger was merely an error judgement. A middle-class feminist once told me... poverty was noble... I didn't answer her...
>
> I related to you... accepted the images you projected about women's oppression... even wore these images as my own...
>
> And all the women's movement rhetoric—we were all sisters and we all shared the identical oppression—totally invalidated my feelings of being different. *So I carefully learned to suppress my reality in order to be acceptable to you.*[1] (Emphasis mine)

Our assumption that all women "share identical oppression" has had an unintended effect on non-privileged women, who, like Donna, have been upwardly mobile. She remembers: "...in college... all the while I was pretending to be part of your middle-class elite, I felt as though I were keeping a deep, dark secret—my childhood and my poverty."[2] And, in the movement: "I... continue to be invisible to you. I only gave you [white middle-class feminists] the images you wanted to see; *again I have had to play the imposter among the middle class.*[3] Thus, such women have had to assimilate themselves to *us*, to keep silent about their backgrounds, just as they've had to in white middle-class society generally.

What other white middle-class patterns have we replicated?

We have unwittingly made non-privileged women's survival issues, which are invisible to white middle-class people, invisible in the movement too. We do this by generalizing from our own needs when we are trying to determine the priorities of non-privileged women. Thus, we often overlook survival issues crucial to their lives. For instance, we may assume that because sexual objectification is oppressive to *us*, it is equally oppressive to poor women. But, Donna Cashell speaks for many such women when she pointed out: "I worry more about how to put food in the pantry than whether or not someone calls me chick. Not that I like being called a chick, but it's just *less* important than going hungry."[4] (Emphasis in original) Similarly, some pro-choice groups stress the right of *all* women to *choose* between having a legal abortion and bearing a child. But they may overlook the fact that the gut issue for poor women is whether they can *avoid* forced sterilization and *keep* Medicaid abortions.

In all these ways, we recreate the invisibility of non-privileged women and their survival needs in white middle-class society. Our assumption that all women's interests are the same has often been unconscious. The generalizing from our needs which accompanies it has often been well-intentioned. The invisibility of non-privileged women's survival needs we come up with is certainly not something we *want*. But, these assumptions alienate non-privileged women. Thus, the "all women's interests are the same" line has helped insure that feminism which began as a movement of mostly privileged women has *stayed* privileged. Still, we want to unite with *all* women, to change *all* our lives. For this reason, it is crucial that the roots of our privilege/lock be discussed.

III. The Early Radical Feminist Movement (1968-72)

One important question is: did early movement demands serve the needs of non-privileged women? Certainly radical feminists founders had a strong theoretical stance against privileges. The 1969 Redstockings Manifesto proclaims: "We identify with all women. We define our best interest as that of the poorest, most brutally exploited women. We repudiate all economic, racial,

educational, or status privileges that divide us from other women."[5] But, as the movement grew, and feminists demonstrated in large numbers against male controlled institutions, did their demands express "the best interest" of the poorest women? Certainly their demand for free, community-controlled child care spoke to the survival needs of non-privileged women. Since many poor women are forced on to welfare and off their jobs when they have children for whom no free day care is available, this demand had the potential to ensure that such women could keep working. The call for equal job opportunities held out the hope that such women might be able to obtain something more than dead-end work. But, this demand tended, in practice, to focus on moving women up from office work. This emphasis may well have alienated Third World women. As a Black woman put it, "You white women are trying to be liberated from your typewriters. Black women, still scrubbing your floors, wish to hell we could get off our knees long enough to get up to the typewriters."[6]

What about other radical feminist concerns? Their groundbreaking analysis—unpaid housework keeps the system going—*may* have given some women a sense of greater power. But the radical feminist demand that husbands or male housemates *share* housework may have been less appealing to the many non-privileged women, often Third World, who were single heads of households. And, surely, some of the sex-desegregation cases against environments—the university clubs and posh stag bars—which would always be for the privileged no matter what, were not addressing survival needs of poor women. But, most important, the radical feminist analysis of women's oppression by unrealistic beauty standards didn't fit the lives of non-privileged women. For one thing, this analysis left out how such standards functioned among Third World women: how they make them feel inferior not only as women but also as non-whites. And, as the comment from Donna Cashell makes clear, the analysis of women's sexual objectification was of secondary importance to women living on bare subsistence.

What about the radical feminist call to action, "free abortion

on demand for all women"? Unquestionably, this rallying cry addressed a survival need of non-privileged women. But, did different cultural conditions affect how women saw this demand? In *"We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum,"* Cynthia Washington, a Black civil rights worker who is now a feminist recalls:

> The white people I talked with often assumed the basic necessities. That gave them the luxury of debating ideology and many things I felt would not change the basic position of Black women. Abortion . . . did not seem an important issue for Black women. *Women who already had children might need abortion in the future, but in the present they needed a means to support children other than welfare, a system of child care, decent homes and medical attention, oppportunities for meaningful employment and continuing education.*[7] (Emphasis mine)

It's difficult to generalize, but it seems to me that the needs Washington cites are important in the lives of all non-privileged women. As we've seen, the radical feminist movement attempted to address some of the needs—child care, for instance. Others—"providing a means to support children other than welfare," for instance— it didn't really tackle.

Yet, when we look back at the radical feminist movement, what fact stands out? The most important victory this movement won for non-privileged women was Medicaid abortion. Having the right to work in non-traditional jobs also materially improved the lives of non-privileged women. (Since the number of women able to take advantage of this right has remained small compared to the total female population, it's difficult to gauge how many.) Thus, it was when the early movement addressed survival issues important to all women—free abortion, equal job opportunities, for instance—that it had the potential to empower most women. When it assumed "all women's interests are the same"—as when Third World women's oppression by white beauty standards was overlooked—it failed to empower *all* women.

educational, or status privileges that divide us from other women."[5] But, as the movement grew, and feminists demonstrated in large numbers against male controlled institutions, did their demands express "the best interest" of the poorest women? Certainly their demand for free, community-controlled child care spoke to the survival needs of non-privileged women. Since many poor women are forced on to welfare and off their jobs when they have children for whom no free day care is available, this demand had the potential to ensure that such women could keep working. The call for equal job opportunities held out the hope that such women might be able to obtain something more than dead-end work. But, this demand tended, in practice, to focus on moving women up from office work. This emphasis may well have alienated Third World women. As a Black woman put it, "You white women are trying to be liberated from your typewriters. Black women, still scrubbing your floors, wish to hell we could get off our knees long enough to get up to the typewriters."[6]

What about other radical feminist concerns? Their groundbreaking analysis—unpaid housework keeps the system going—*may* have given some women a sense of greater power. But the radical feminist demand that husbands or male housemates *share* housework may have been less appealing to the many non-privileged women, often Third World, who were single heads of households. And, surely, some of the sex-desegregation cases against environments—the university clubs and posh stag bars—which would always be for the privileged no matter what, were not addressing survival needs of poor women. But, most important, the radical feminist analysis of women's oppression by unrealistic beauty standards didn't fit the lives of non-privileged women. For one thing, this analysis left out how such standards functioned among Third World women: how they make them feel inferior not only as women but also as non-whites. And, as the comment from Donna Cashell makes clear, the analysis of women's sexual objectification was of secondary importance to women living on bare subsistence.

What about the radical feminist call to action, "free abortion

on demand for all women"? Unquestionably, this rallying cry addressed a survival need of non-privileged women. But, did different cultural conditions affect how women saw this demand? In *"We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum,"* Cynthia Washington, a Black civil rights worker who is now a feminist recalls:

> The white people I talked with often assumed the basic necessities. That gave them the luxury of debating ideology and many things I felt would not change the basic position of Black women. Abortion . . . did not seem an important issue for Black women. *Women who already had children might need abortion in the future, but in the present they needed a means to support children other than welfare, a system of child care, decent homes and medical attention, oppportunities for meaningful employment and continuing education.*[7] (Emphasis mine)

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the social training of women which causes them to accept their second-class positions."[10] Our "conditioning" is at fault, not the racism, classism of the system. This "conditioning" line switches the responsibility for the change back to the individual, who has to "make it" under the terms of that system. Obviously, this prescription is particularly oppressive to non-privileged women.

2. [*Ms* has] "an emphasis on successful women (never mind successful at what, or whose expense) as models." In October, 1974, *Ms.* stockholder and *Washington Post* owner Katherine Graham was featured in a cover story, "The Power that Didn't Corrupt," by Jane Howard. Among other things, this article described how management ran the *Post* during a strike which Graham called a "together time." It tells how she took classifieds over the phone, how pleased she was when a caller described her as "overqualified." Nowhere in this personality portrait is any discussion of *Post* working conditions for the mostly female clerical workers Graham was replacing.[11]

3. "*Ms.* has a pervasive class bias. It takes upper-middle class privileges and values for granted."[12] In a June 1973 issue on women and money, "What Is so Rare as a Woman on Wall Street?" by Lisa Cronin Wohl, suggests giving girls stocks as a way to teach them how to handle finances.[13]

4. "Basic economic issues are avoided."[14] In addition to the Wall Street article, the women and money issue featured "How the Small (Very Small) Investor Can Make the System Work for Her (For a Change)" and "People's Money Hangups." Nowhere in this issue were the causes and effects of the widespread economic crisis which was despoiling so many women's lives and budgets, even mentioned. Much less was there any discussion of how many women could organize to challenge the institutions, such as conglomerates, which control our economic lives.

At a benefit for the National Committee on Household Employment, (given by the Women's Lobby) *Ms.* editor and keynote speaker Gloria Steinem told the audience: "*Ms.* ran a pledge . . . where we asked that each individual woman who might be in a position to employ a domestic . . . to pledge that

she would never again ask another human being to work for less than" the minimum wage. "It was also a pledge from the household workers that . . . they try to do their best never to work for anything less than that."[15] At the time (1973) domestic workers didn't have the guaranteed minimum wage. To believe that an employer would stop paying slave wages because she had a change of heart when she signed this pledge shows an appalling ability to blot out the economics of exploitation. Even more important, it is extraordinarily patronizing to non-privileged women, a *mockery* of their societally-imposed lack of options, to ask that they pledge to "try to do their best" not to be underpaid.

5. "The concerns of non-affluent/educated/'successful' women are written about in a 'we, the real people, are reporting on the natives' tone."[16] A cover article headline proclaims, "Pam Grier: Super Sass: The Mocha Mogul of Hollywood." (August 1975) The title of the household worker article gushes, "A Domestic Finally Tells All."

All these examples clearly demonstrate how *Ms.* has ignored and patronized the survival needs of non-privileged women by taking "upper-middle-class privileges and values for granted." (The "all women's interest are the same line," *Ms.* version) Furthermore, the basic assumption of its "getting yours feminism"—all women can overcome their "conditioning" and self-improve themselves up the ladder to Bosshood—totally "whites out" the lack of options racism and classism imposed on non-privileged women. This is yet another version of the "all women's interests are the same" line. It is unquestionably a trap for poor women; it has undoubtedly played a large part in keeping the movement cut off from such women. By popularizing this line from every newstand everywhere *Ms.* has played a major role in insuring that the movement is for white middle class women only.

Not only that. Certainly it has been in the interest of white upper class men in power to keep the movement isolated from non-privileged women and their needs. White upper-class men like the ones whose corporations capitalized *Ms.* and buy its ad space. Men whose control over this society would be threatened by a movement of *all* women, a movement which genuinely spoke for *all* women's needs.

NOTES

1. Donna Cashell, "To All My Middle-Class Sisters," *Sister*, July 1975, page 1.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Redstockings Manifesto, *Masculine/Feminine*, ed. Betty and Theodore Roszak (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), page 274.
6. Interview with Edna, in "Women's Movement: For White Women Only," Judy Graybill, *Sister*, July 1975, page 3.
7. Cynthia Washington, "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum," in a special issue on women. "Generations: Women in the South," *Southern Exposure*, (Vol. IV, No. 4) page 15.
8. The term "getting yours" was actually coined by *Ms.* editor Letty Cottin Pogrebin.
9. Ellen Willis, "The Conservatism, of *Ms.*", *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Kathie Sarachild (New Paltz: Redstockings, 1975) page 173.
10. Quoted by Colette Price, "New Ways of Keeping Women Out of Paid Labor," *Feminist Revolution*, page 86. *Feminist Revolution* contains the best analysis of *Ms.* content available. However, I deplore the homophobia present in much of its other discussions on other topics.
11. Jane Howard, "The Power that Didn't Corrupt," *Ms.*, October 1974, page 123.
12. Willis, op. cit.
13. Lisa Cronin Wohl, "What is So Rare as a Woman on Wall Street?", *Ms.* June 1973, page 115.
14. Willis, op. cit.
15. Madeline Janover, "Lobbying and Partying," *Off Our Backs*," February-March 1974, page 5.
16. Willis, op. cit.

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Alison Colbert aka Sarahgold: I am taking a matrilineal name, Sarahgold, the maiden name of my maternal great-grandmother, who was a suffragist, pacifist, and socialist. Under my legal name, I've recently published poems and articles in *Big Mama Rag*, *Home Planet News*, *Dykes Opposed to Nuclear Technology (DONT)* newsletter and *Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization (CARASA) News*. My book of poems, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, which was published in 1976, is available from Women Writing Press, P.O. Box 1035, Cathedral Station, New York City 10025

NOTES FROM A THIRD WORLD WOMAN*

By Anita Cornwell

Until I finally joined the Women's Movement almost three years ago, I had always been reluctant to socialize with white people because I felt most of them *really* did not want to associate with black people on a socially equal basis.

Yet, oddly enough, by the time I entered the Movement, I had somehow convinced myself the color of my skin would have little or no bearing on how Movement women would accept me. Although I am hard-pressed now to understand where I got the notion from, I felt the fact that I was Gay would count more against me than the fact that I was black.

After I formally became a part of the struggle, however, it was a pleasant surprise to find that Gay was considered good, by some women at least. Consequently, since I thought "Black is Beautiful," I felt I had at last found my place under the sun. And so anxious was I to hold to this illusion, nearly six months passed before I finally faced the truth. Racism does exist in the Movement.

The first major unsettling episode occurred at a weekend conference about two months after I had entered the Movement. At this fairly large gathering, two white women discussed the actions of several black women, who the white sisters felt were not patriotic enough.

"Of course, I can understand why they feel the way they do," one of the white sisters added when she evidently noticed me staring at her.

There seemed to be a frightened, or guilty, look on her face as she spoke, and it struck me that she had absolutely no comprehension whatsoever why those aforementioned black sisters were not ardent flag-wavers.

Of course, it's always more difficult to deal with subtle racisms than the more blatant variety. One thinks, "Oh, I'm just being too sensitive." And perhaps you are. But, in the meanwhile, you can't help but notice that so-and-so was given a going-away party and invitations were issued all around your head but *not* to you.

Likewise, one may think, "Well, I'm older than most of them, that's why they're a bit standoffish at times."

But when you see another black woman—in her early twenties—who has wandered into the fold, isn't exactly being overwhelmed with the welcome mat either. Whereas, any strange young white woman who casually approaches the group is usually greeted with open arms and smiling faces.

How can such women call themselves feminists while denying over ten percent of the female population the right to join the fight on an equal basis? What do they think they are going to accomplish by such an exclusive tactic?

That such an exclusion is not the official policy of the Movement is beside the point. The lynching of thousands of black people in this country was never "official" policy either. Nor is the raping and maiming of hundreds of thousands of women legally sanctioned, yet few of us venture out alone at night without casting apprehensive glances over our shoulders and inwardly quaking at every unexpected sound.

Black women know racism is a fact of daily life in America that affects all organizations and institutions in one way or another, so they stay away from the Movement in droves, to the detriment of both races. For I believe this nation is slowly yet inevitably headed toward racial warfare.

And the one sure way of preventing such a catastrophe would be the coming together of black and white women in true sisterly fashion, thereby showing black and white men that harmony between the races is possible.

Yet most white women seem to be as burdened with racism as white men, but few appear to be aware of the fact. Most seem to feel it's "Out there somewhere," not lodged deep within our own psyches. Or they seem to think, "It's only a little thing that will go away eventually."

In the meanwhile, tensions and hostilities mount as young blacks of both sexes grow more outraged at blatant discriminations they encounter on every front.

The need for our white sisters to begin dealing with their latent fears is acute because not only does their racial attitude keep them from a healthy interaction with black women, but it also prevents them from having more cordial relations with one another.

In all fairness, however, I must add that some white sisters seem to have got their heads together on this race business, or more together than most. Also, I realize that in a racist society such as this, it is virtually impossible not to succumb to the national sickness in some form or other.

At any rate, as Ti-Grace Atkinson said in a lecture once, "Movements do not *just* happen at any time. And they can die before they accomplish their intended purpose." She thinks the Women's Liberation Movement is on the verge of dying because we have no ideology or formalized tactics ready for use.

I think it's because most of us have so little *self-understanding*, and worse yet, possess no real insight as to just how desperately such knowledge is needed.

Also, I am greatly puzzled as to just how white women think they are going to get rid of sexism in white men while the racism in both remains intact.

For the truth is, *men are never going to give up their sexist attitudes until women change their behavior,* which is to say, not until women free themselves of their slave mentality. And white women can never do that until they deal with the racism that dwells within them. Because racism, like sexism and classism, is based on fear, and those infected with such deep-seated fears are slaves to that fear.

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FACE-TO-FACE, DAY-TO-DAY—RACISM CR

By Tia Cross, Freada Klein, Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith

On April 4, 1979, four women met together to discuss consciouness raising guidelines for women's groups that are working on the issue of racism. All of us—Tia Cross, Freada Klein, Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith—have had experiences as white and Black women thinking and talking about racism in the women's movement, through leading workshops on racism for white women's groups or through participating in ongoing racism groups ourselves. We taped our discussion and the ideas and guidelines that follow are based upon our conversation.

We feel that using consciousness raising to explore our racism is particularly useful and appropriate. It is a feminist form based upon the ways that women have always talked and listened to each other. It provides a place of validation and support for our feelings as well as the emotional support we need to change. The CR format encourages personal sharing, risk-taking and involvement, which are essential for getting at how each of us is racist in a daily way, and it encourages the "personal" change that makes political transformation and action possible. The women's movement has begun to address racism in a way in which no previous movement has, because we have a growing understanding that our racism as women often manifests itself in how we interact with other women. Doing CR acknowledges that how we feel can inhibit or lead to action, and that how we actually treat people does make a difference.

Theoretical and analytical comprehension of the political and historical causes of racism is essential, but this understanding on an intellectual level doesn't always help to make face-to-face meetings with women of color real, productive or meaningful. We need both a political understanding of racism and a personal-political understanding of how it affects our daily lives. Many

women start doing CR about racism because they are already confronting it in other areas of their lives and need a place to explore what is happening. CR about racism is not merely talk, talk, talk and no action, but the essential talking that will make action possible. Doing CR is based upon the fact that as a person you simply cannot do political action without personal interaction.

We also want to stress, however that these guidelines are not instant solutions. You can't spend 15 minutes on each topic and assume that you're done. Racism is a much too complex and brutal system for that. CR is just one step in the whole process of changing the legacy of oppression (based upon difference) that white-male rule has imposed on us.

Actions can grow out of the CR group directly. For example, the group can find out and publicize the resources which exist in their area such as other CR groups, study groups and coalitions of Third World and white women. The group can compile reading lists about Black woman, racism and white women's anti-racist activity. It can spread the word about the CR process through writing articles, giving workshops and talks. It can compile its own CR guidelines. The legacy of racism in this country is long. It will take a great deal of time and ongoing commitment to bring about change, to alter the insidious and deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes we learn from the time we are children. It is important for women to show other women what's possible.

* * * *

The guidelines which follow are divided into three sections: 1) Early Memories/Childhood Experiences, 2) Adolescence/Early Adulthood and 3) Becoming a Feminist/Racism in the Women's Movement. The group should plan to spend a substantial amount of time sharing personal histories and feelings in order to build trust, especially at the beginning. It's good to constantly pose questions to make women back-track and remember their pasts. General questions which applied to any topic and which should be raised along the way are, "How do you experience yourself as a white person?"; "What were your fears and what was your anger?" and "What did you do with your fears and anger?"

We have included some guidelines that deal with anti-Semitism, but the primary focus of the guidelines is white racism against Black people. It is important for groups to discuss the ways in which anti-Semitism in America is similar to and different from racism against Black people. It is also important to connect racism aimed at Afro-Americans to the racism and oppression aimed at all people of color and to the discrimination and oppression aimed at white nationality groups who are not Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Insights about how class identity connects to racism should also be an ongoing topic for discussion.

Early Memories/Childhood Experiences

1. When were you first aware that there was such a thing as race and racial differences? How old were you? Recall an incident if you can. How did you feel?
2. What kind of contact did you have with people of different races? Were they adults, children, playmates?
3. How did you experience your own ethnic identity?
4. How did you first experience racism? Who did you learn it from? What did it mean to you? How did it function in your perception of yourself? How did it affect you in relation to other people?
5. When did you first notice yourself treating people of color in a different way?
6. When were you first aware that there was such a thing as anti-Semitism? How old were you? Recall an incident. How did you feel?
7. What did you learn at home about Black people and other people of color?
8. What did you learn about Jewish people?
9. How was what you learned about Black people and what you learned about Jewish people connected?
10. What terms did you parents use to refer to Black people and other people of color? If these terms were negative, how did hearing these terms make you feel—curious, uncomfortable, angry?
11. In the groups say out loud and make a collective list of *all* the terms you were ever taught or heard about people of color. Also do the same activity with all the terms used for other ethnic and religious groups.

Adolescence/Early Adulthood

1. What kind of messages did you get about race as you entered adolescence? Did your group of friends change?
2. Discuss the connection between coming of age sexually and racist separation. (When the four of us discussed being a teenager, one woman pin-pointed the sexual and racial dichotomy by saying, "It's about who you date!")
3. If you went to integrated schools what message did you get about Black people in general and about Black males specifically.
4. In what ways was race used by you or your friends as a subject of so-called teen-age rebellion?
5. How did different groups of students get along in your school? Were you aware of divisions by race and class? How did it feel?
6. How were different groups of students treated by teachers and the school and the school administration?
7. If you were growing up during the 50's and 60's, what kind of information did you get about Black people through the media? How much of it was specifically about Black men? How much of it was specifically about Black women?
8. If you had interactions with Black people through work during the 50's and 60's, political groups or socially, what proportion of these interactions were with Black men? with Black women?
9. What were your experiences as white women with Black men? What were the racial-sexual dynamics of these relationships, that is, in what ways did they fuel your own racism and on the other hand how did they affect your developing feminism? Were you making connections at that time between the racial and sexual aspects of what was going on?

Becoming a Feminist/Racism in the Women's Movement

1. When did you begin to believe in your connections with all women?
2. As you became a feminist to what degree did you feel connected to women of all different background and lifestyles?
3. How does your class background affect your racism and

making connections with women different from yourself? What are the barriers you have to overcome to connect?

4. How do you see yourself as different from a Black woman? How do you see yourself as the same?
5. Everyone in the group fills in the blanks in the following statements. This exercise could be done out loud or by each person writing her response down first before hearing from the group. "Black women always _____." "When I am with Black people I always feel or usually feel _____." "I wouldn't want Black people to _____." "I'm afraid that _____." "I'm afraid I will_____." "I'm afraid they will _____."
6. Discuss different values you think white and Black women have around child-rearing, clothes, food, money, upward or downward mobility.
7. Each week the group has the "homework assignment" of noticing racist situations—things each member sees, hears or reads. Begin each session by sharing the things you've noticed.
8. Discuss what happens when you call another white woman on her racism. What are your fears? How does it feel to do this?
9. Discuss the ways in which white women lower their standards for being feminist for Black and other Third World women. Do you find yourself "hiding" your feminism in a situation where there are Third World people? Are you afraid to confront a Black woman's anti-feminism?
10. Discuss issues that the women's movement has worked on which might be considered racist. Discuss feminist issues which are classist. Discuss feminist issues that cut across racial and class lines, touching the lives of all women. Which of all these issues have you worked on or considered a priority?
11. In what ways does being a Lesbian connect to the whole issue of racism between white and Black women? What kinds of racism have you noticed in all women's social situations, at bars and at cultural events? In what ways can shared Lesbian oppression be used to build connections between white women and women of color?

This article was prepared for publication by Barbara Smith. © Tia Cross, Freada Klein, Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith.

RIGHTEOUS ANGER IN 3 PARTS: RACISM IN THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY— ONE BLACK LESBIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

By Gwendolyn!!

"Among the thousand white persons, I am a dark rock surged upon and overswept, but through it all I remain myself. When covered by the Waters, I am; and the ebb but reveals me again."

—Zora Neale Hurston

I conceive of this paper as a process. One nurtured in the souls of many sisters. A process which must now move beyond the realm of private thoughts and into the realm of conscious commitment and responsibility. It is only my passionate love and respect for Wimmin, and my very special bond with my Black sisters which make it possible for me to risk sharing the process.

Part I

I emerged in the Lesbian community/movement after years of trying to be "bisexual." My first contact was a group of white Wimmin musicians and singers working on a production. Most of them identified as Lesbians, almost all were feminist. From this group, I was introduced via various social networks to several different avenues of what I've come to know as the New York Lesbian Community. I was lovingly showed around somewhat like a "new girl in town." Very often I found myself to be either the only Black Lesbian present, or one of a few. I must admit my joy at finally having found my Lesbian sisters sometimes overshadowed my lurking awareness of tokenism. I so wanted to believe that *we*-are-all-lesbians-&-feminists-therefore-sisters-regardless-of-ethnicity line, I almost forgot about the "pet negro system."

My involvement in political circles working with the more "militant" lesbians varied somewhat, except that here too I was often one of a few or the only Third World Lesbian present.

Through a rather painful process I was forced to admit to myself that the honeymoon was over. I got tired of trying to explain how or why I seemed different (to white wimmin) when in the presence of mostly Third World Wimmin. I got tired of being told: "I'm so glad I met you—I miss interacting with Black people since I no longer work in Harlem, live in California, *or* date Black men." I also got tired of being reduced to an abstraction. I got tired of white Lesbians trying to explain to me the what's why's or wherefores of the Third World Lesbian Community. I needed to feel whole again.

My first encounter with *blatant* racist behavior on the part of white lesbians left me feeling intense rage and a deep sense of betrayal. (The subtle stuff I had been dealing with on a one to one basis.) Having been overly familiar with tokenism, I had slipped into understanding and explaining oppressive behavior: it's because of class differences, they aren't feminists so what do you expect, or they're not political. Sisterhood notwithstanding, racism—metaracism, smeared its messy self into my Black face.

"So I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again."

—Sojourner Truth 1867

Part II

I've been giving a great deal of thought to the issue of racism in our Lesbian Community/movement, feeling a personal/political need to name, explore, expose and understand the particular ways racist attitudes and behaviors impact upon us as Lesbians! The need for Lesbians to engage in active anti-racist struggle *on all levels*—simultaneously—seems crucial at a time when the media, social and political institutions are fostering "the new patriotism," solidarity and cohesion among whites—particularly

middle class whites. In reaction to perceived threats to their vital interests, the powerful forces of oppression are forging stronger, clearer alliances. Racist madness is taking on new and not so new forms of expression. In trying to put these ideas into a Black Lesbian feminist perspective, the effectiveness of racism as a tool became increasingly clear. In our Lesbian Community, white supremist attitudes, racism as well as classism serve *not* only to keep Black wimmin and white wimmin alienated, but also to keep Black wimmin from each other. Even more painful, racism and classism sometimes serve to keep Black wimmin isolated from our personal selves!!

As in the dominant culture, issues involving racism within our movement occur in patterns—intrinsically woven, circular in nature. Occasionally the intricacies of a pattern in a given situation are so clear one feels pressed to use it as an example—to demonstrate a larger phenomena. Keeping this concept in mind I wish to describe and discuss events which I consider excellent examples of the manifestation of racism in our community.

Some months ago, another sister and I led a workshop on "Racism in the Lesbian Community." The initiator of the workshop conceived of the idea of opening a dialogue between Third World and white lesbians at the West Side Discussion Group (in NYC) mainly as a result of the realization that while she had many Black wimmin friends, Black lesbians were not a part of her political life.

The workshop took place shortly after Assata Shakur had liberated herself from prison. Consequently, after being introduced to the group of approximately 40 Wimmin, I dedicated the evening to Assata.

Betty and I had decided to discuss how the complexities of events which take place in the larger society impacted upon us within the Lesbian Community. We spoke on many levels with hopes of demonstrating that racism and racist behavior do not occur in isolation, are not static, but in fact are reflected in myriad ways depending on the situation.

Having made it clear that we spoke from our own experiences, and from a Lesbian Feminist perspective rooted in process, struggle and dialogue; Betty made the point that one evening was not enough to deal with the complexities of issues—that in fact many more dialogues were needed. This was the beginning. The need to embrace history and to educate ourselves as wimmin was stressed. In response to one question as to what kinds of materials, we gave (verbally) a partial bibliography of Feminist and Black materials we thought would be helpful. Tensions were high at several points, on one hand there appeared to be a high level of involvement as well as a great deal of resistance.

One Black sister said she'd had enough theoretical stuff and wanted to get down to real issues such as the reluctance of white wimmin to dance with her. Frustrated, she asked "We're all gay aren't we?" A white sister challenged a non-sighted Black sister as to why she felt it necessary to describe herself as Black when speaking to another non-sighted person. Another Black sister pointed out the group's reluctance to deal with racism and the ease with which *prejudice* was being discussed. Much debate revolved around this point. A militant Latin Lesbian spoke up from her perspective.

White wimmin asked what could they do to rid themselves of racist attitudes—if indeed they were racist. When we (Betty, Dianne, a Black sister who belonged to an anti-racist group, and I) all said in different ways—*white wimmin must deal with their own attitudes of white supremacy*, Women asked how could they do this without the presence of Black wimmin. Two white wimmin responded in strong terms pointing the oppressive nature of the demand for third world presence in order to justify dealing with racism. The question then came up as to "Where are all the Third World Lesbians." Betty and I explained that Third World Lesbians are doing what we feel we need to be doing at this time in history. The issue of token *inclusion* was discussed. So much took place that evening—I think some wimmin experienced anxiety and hopelessness. In fact, one Third World sister from the "old gay" tradition was moved to ask why we found it necessary to "burden" ourselves with a "negative" level such as *Black*. The Latin sister thanked Betty and I for our par-

ticipation. We had raised points she hadn't thought of. The *solidarity* especially from this highly commited Lesbian feminist was heartwarming.

Color blindness, assimilation, tokenism, solidarity, liberalism, Black separatism, "reverse racism," feminism, Black feminism, prejudice, racism, power, all touched upon in one evening. Some more so than others. The evening went on way past its usual time. Some white wimmin had walked out. Betty and I felt drained, flooded, uncertain and angry; there was so much work to be done with our Lesbian sisters. So much they needed to do for themselves. A white womyn from the group asked if I'd come back—I mumbeld "Yes." Several sisters—mostly Third World—thanked us. Some ethnic looking white wimmin with whom I attempted to make conversation, looked confused and surprised that I was really talking to them.

Several weeks later I was asked to participate in "Racism in the Lesbian Community Part II." I agreed to lead the workshop (Betty could not participate for personal reasons). Approximately a week before the workshop was scheduled, the group moderator and I were able to agree on a meeting time. She brought along a copy of an article she had written on the workshop ("West Side Women," *The Westsider*, Dec. 1979). The article which did not deal with *content* of the workshop, was critical and self serving. In it, Ginny described the objective of the discussion ("an effort to open a dialogue between Third World and white lesbians," as being "only partly realized." The focus of her comments was our (mine and Betty's) anger. To quote from the article:

> "I felt that many of the white women who participated were intimidated by the righteous anger expressed by our Third World Sisters. This feeling of intimidation led to anger on the part of some of the women who felt that Betty and Gwendolyn were interested only in their own agenda and did not wish to engage in a true dialogue. . . . I saw little inclination on the part of many of the white women present . . . to challenge the assumptions and assertions of our Third World sisters."

She goes on:

> ". . . while I understand their anger from both an historic and contemporary perspective, I question whether it is appropriate or constructive to focus it on white lesbians. After all as women we share many, though clearly not all, of the oppressions perpetuated by the straight, white, male power structure. In short, we have more in common as women than we have differences based on race or ethnicity."

Ginny goes on to warn us against falling into "the age old divide and conquer trap."

Other criticisms offered (verbally) during this meeting included: wimmin felt Betty and I were "too didactic and not personal enough." We did not sufficiently deal with the question of why is there so much separation on the part of Black Lesbians. We failed to answer the questions as to how white lesbians should "deal with their racism." We did not adequately explain the differences between racism and prejudice. And as far as power was concerned, many of the wimmin felt in no position (as Lesbians) to oppress *anyone*—not even third world lesbians. And as for the dedication to Assata—wimmin said they had not come for *that*! Ginny had also decided to take a more active role as moderator to guard against a recurrence. In other words as Ginny herself pointed out, the evening was not what she had envisioned. She, and the other wimmin as well, was still faced with the same questions.

I read, reread the article, Betty and I talked at length. Two days later I called Ginny and explained that I, a Black Lesbian Feminist, could not return to the group for a second discussion. I explained the wimmin wanted something I could not—and did not want to give. That to even attempt to do so would be arrogant, unproductive and as far as I could see, politically incorrect. I promised to try and draft a reply to their criticisms and send them a statement as soon as possible.

The reaction of wimmin from Westside Discussion Group to the Workshop on Racism in the Lesbian Community led by me

and Betty Powell, as printed in *The Westsider*, and the verbal criticisms reported by Ginny led me to cancel my agreement to participate in a second workshop of this nature. The racist, reactionary and antifeminist tone of the criticism indicated a certain lack of commonality necessary for any real struggle to take place.

First of all, as a Black person I am quite used to being labeled angry. After many years, I've come to realize when a white person labels me, my mood or actions as *angry*, she-or he really means *emotional*. I've also come to understand *emotionalism* as being taboo in white "cultures"—particularly white middle class or middle class identified cultures. I find the use of the epitaph "angry" even more oppressive in this case since it is white wimmin using it against Black wimmin the same way men label wimmin "hysterical"—to keep us in line! In essence we are being told that as Blacks in a white space—we were uppity, ("too didactic") our emotionalism/anger prevented white wimmin from dealing with the business at hand, namely open dialogue. At no time is recognition given to the wide range of subtopics raised that evening; the questions and comments made by at least 15 wimmin obviously does not constitute "dialogue" in Ginny's mind.

As a feminist, I reject outright the assertion that wimmin were intimidated and/or induced into passivity as a result of any sense of injustice expressed by us. The wimmin at Westside reacted with rage (after the fact) to what they rightfully saw as an attack on their group. The group with which they were identifying however was not the group labeled white lesbians, but rather the larger group with which they are identified: white society. It is this group narcissism, a manifestation of racism, which allowed them to deny the experience of Third World Women, reducing our experiences to "assumptions and assertions" which they MUST feel compelled to challenge. The rhetoric of sisterhood, common oppression, and historical understanding put forth by Ginny is just that rhetoric. For it calls for action that has little or no relevance to the reality of the lives of Black Lesbians.

The preoccupation with divisiveness is also more academic than real in the sense that it reflects an anxious awareness that we

may not all be sisters in the truest sense of the word. If this is the case—why not focus our "righteous anger" on the very wimmin who by their silence, passivity and privilege participate in a racist power structure?

White women have a responsibility to learn the *real* history of the dominant culture as well as the history of Black Wimmin.

Dealing with their racism does not mean expecting Black sisters (or anyone for that matter) to offer simplistic solutions to complex problems. To do so would be arrogant. For Black Wimmin to participate in these abstract exercises seems self destructive.

I
am a black woman
tall as a cypress
strong
beyond all definition still
defying place
and time
and circumstance
assailed
impervious
indestructible
Look
on men and be
renewed.

—Marie Evans
I Am A Black Woman 1970

Part III

Sometimes it seems as if by defining myself I frighten everyone, White Wimmin, Black Men, the white patriarchy, and sometimes other Black sisters. I refuse to allow anyone the privilege of naming me or my experience. White men defined Black people—named us negro in order to justify his treatment of us. As Black Lesbians we can not allow this denial of our experience to continue. But while we struggle for dialogue, com-

munication, we must also make it clear: Black Lesbians do not wish to change places with our white sisters. Communication should not, need not imply merging—loss of separateness. Not only is pluralism tolerable, it is a necessity if our community/movement is to survive. We as Lesbians must do something not done in the larger world. We must grapple with this concept of racism, transform it from an abstraction, weave it into a common mold which will allow a celebration of difference, a validation of all experience. Only then will we be on our way to a higher level of Sisterhood.

Gwendolyn is a Black lesbian feminist mother, living in New York City. She is a member of the *Astrea Foundation* and the *Committee for the Visibility of the Other Black Woman (CVOBW)*, whose address is c/o Brooks, P.O. Box M564, Hoboken, New Jersey 07030.

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THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL REVISITED: AN EXPLORATION OF RACISM AND CLASSISM IN THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY

by Laura Calderone and Charoula

The need for this article became undeniable after a November 6, 1979 discussion at the Gay Women's Discussion Center in New York City on "Racism in the Lesbian Community." We are two white women who focus on this November 6th discussion because we feel that it is indicative of the problems white women in the lesbian community have in handling racism.

At the discussion, the only "conclusion" we drew was that "we barely touched the tip of the iceberg." The white women who spoke with the two Black women facilitators after the discussion ended commenting along the lines of "thank you but I'm not sure what I think..." Some women were clearly angry while others seemed confused. As it developed, some white members of the group had been afraid to express their anger with the two Black women, and it manifested itself in an article in the group's newsletter. [This article was never sent to the two Black women, who meanwhile had been asked to return for a second installment. Any criticism levelled against them had been kept from them until *two days before the second workshop*!] Throughout this article, we will use quotes from their newsletter, to illustrate the scope of racism in the lesbian community.

* * * *

"...many of the white women who participated were intimidated by the *righteous anger* expressed by our Third World sisters. This feeling of intimidation led to anger on the part of some women who felt that Betty and Gwendolyn were interested only in their own agenda and did not wish to engage in a *true dialogue*." (Italics ours)

We believe that these feelings of "anger" and "intimidation" arose because a roomful of white women were forced to confront their own racism by two Black sisters who didn't say what the white women wanted to hear. Such "anger" and "intimidation" is *not* caused by the "lack of interest" on the part of Third World women to engage in dialogue with us. Rather, we feel very strongly, it is based on deep-seated guilt combined wth an arrogance that is rooted in our skin and class privilege. Instead of opting to deal with this guilt in a constructive way, and to find ways to eradicate its causes, we white women project it onto Third World women and end up blaming *them* for our lack of willingness to do something about it. The issue then becomes not "what *we* can do to deal with our racism?" but "Why don't Third World women help us deal with our racism?"

This issue in fact came up during the November workshop. During the discussion white women wanted to know how to educate themselves on the subject of racism. Lurking behind this is the idea that Black women owe us something, must teach us how to deal with our own problems. This is essentially saying, since it is you who are different, the historical problems have been your fault and if you don't like the way things are now, you must *show* me how to change. That this is a preposterous idea can become instantly clear if we put it within the context of feminist thinking: Do we allow men to ask for help in dealing with their sexism? Or straight people to deal with their heterosexism? It is *our* duty to deal with our racism ourselves, it is *our* problem. We cannot bother Black women with our guilt, our horror stories of racist behavior, our chest-beating in public. Certainly not with our "hurt" feelings, like children who were chastised. We should act like grown up women, aware of

the world-wide situation and able to take criticism against the background of historical and current reality. Black women have traditionally bent over backwards in good faith. Each time they have worked with us on a number of issues only to be left dangling from dangerous heights while we decided to omit them from *our* agenda. As for the present wave of feminism, with the exception of small radical groups of women, where is our concern with Black women's issues: welfare, housing, prison, etc.? And yet, Black lesbians are still participating in racism groups with white women, and in "dialogues" (witness this workshop). And we still dare to ask them for help!

There is another aspect of this issue of anger and intimidation. We feel it's unreal to talk about how "angered" and "intimidated" we are when Third World women criticize us, and then turn around and accuse *them* of anger. At least they have a right to their "righteous" anger. They've been betrayed and persecuted throughout the centuries, and if we can only open our eyes to the historical truth, there are plenty of accounts of how white *women*, not just men turned against them, repeatedly during *and* after the slavery years. It's the sort of betrayal that has created a deep well of distrust, and anger that must be allowed to express itself, air itself out. Instead, we call such an expression of outrage "divisive," and want to push it back inside where it will simmer and boil until its explosion will truly rip us apart.

* * * * *

"While I understand their anger from both an historical and contemporary perspective, I question whether it is appropriate or constructive to focus it on white lesbians...As women, we share many though clearly not all, of the oppressions perpetuated by the straight, white, male power structure. In short, we have more in common as women, than we have differences based on race or ethnicity..."

Such a statement reflects how closed up we are in our perceptions of the reality in the lives of non-white women. It is a phenomenon called color-blindness which Aderienne Rich, among others, has well described: "Color blindness in this world is a form of naivete and moral stupidity. It implies that I would look at a Black woman and see her as white, thus engaging in white solipsism to the utter erasure of her particular reality ...White feminists today, raised white in a racist society, are often ridden with white solipsism—not the consciously held belief that one race is inherently superior to all others, but a tunnel vision which simply does not see non-white experience or existence as precious or significant." (*Chrysalis*, Number 7, A. Rich, *Disloyal to Civilization*) In other words, color blindness is the *liberal* attitude which magnanimously perceives everyone as being alike as long as they subscribe to the white standards of western civilization. This perception keeps us from being truly liberated from the notion of white supremacy. It means "we'll accept you as one of us if you act like us." It's ironic that we who pride ourselves on being "different, lesbians, tradition breakers," nevertheless cannot even acknowledge or allow the different expressions of women of color.

We white lesbian feminists must never allow ourselves to think our work around our *own internal* racism is ever finished, no matter how progressive or radical we may perceive ourselves to be. It is naive and superficial to assume that we have come to the point where we are more united by our femaleness than divided by race or class, especially since guilt and intimidation are constantly stopping us from engaging in a continuous thorough "true dialogue" with ourselves. The reality is that today racism in society at large is still alive and in fact is doing better than ever before. This is evidenced by the rise of the Klan in the south and north as well, by cries of "reverse discrimination" as legitimized by the highest courts on behalf of racists like Bakke and Weber, by the increased harassment of people of color everywhere in this country, their high rates of unemployment, and unbearable living conditions. Today, in 1980, this country is still based on the system of slavery, and it is in the interest of the system to keep racism alive and thriving. Racism is a prejudice, but a prejudice perpetrated by specific economic colonialist/capitalist interests. In view of this, it is highly unrealistic to believe that our lesbian community is immune to such pollution. White middle class privilege is intrinsic to this system, and we as white lesbians partake of it in our daily lives at the expense of Third World people. Our denial to see this perpetuates the patriarchal economic system that keeps racism alive.

During the workshop, the issue of Black lesbian visibility or the frequenting of white spaces by Black women came up in the form of comments such as "Why don't they come to our functions?...How can we all get united if they don't?" To the Black women's question, "How come white women don't frequent *our* spaces?", white women answered that theirs were "Black spaces, while ours were lesbian spaces, and we don't feel comfortable in yours..." This is clearly a refusal to see and understand how Black women have always felt in our presence and in our spaces, isolated, and powerless. It also emphasizes our lack of willingness to put ourselves in a position where *we* are the minority for a change, where *we* are *not* in control; it reflects our lack of willingness to give up our power and, for once, understand from a gut point of view the Black women's experience. Try giving up some of your white privilege and then see if you doubt how much power a white *anything, child, woman, or man, has.*

We lesbian feminists cannot allow ourselves to be divided over anything, especially the issue of racism, which is one of the keystones to our understanding of, and eventual liberation from, the patriarchal power structure. To be thus united, we must show a willingness to understand the differences in our realities, to feel the outrage of Black women, and allow them their space to express it. To say that their expression of pain and anger is divisive isn't only racist, it also doesn't give much credit

to our feminist integrity and ability to withstand thorough self-examination and criticism. Wounds are healed, true unity achieved, only when we have the courage to hear and accept such criticism, the willingness to allow for our differences, and the perseverance to work towards eliminating the long-standing historic roots of our division.

Laura Calderone is a white lesbian who just finished five years in the Navy and is looking forward to the rest of her life.

TOWARD AN ANTI-IMPERIALIST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

By Karen Johanns

During Abortion Rights Action Week I had occasion to speak with a feminist who has been active in the women's movement for several years. We talked of world politics, and I mentioned that I was an anti-imperialist. She replied, "That stuff is irrelevant to our movement, and I wish the Left would leave us alone." Is this an extreme example of racism in our community, or is it the unspoken—yet prevailing—attitude?

I am a white, working class lesbian/feminist/socialist committed to a politic of anti-imperialism. I have worked as an herbologist and health care worker at St. Marks Clinic and Chelsea Clinic (NYC) and have swung the political spectrum of feminism to separatism to socialist feminism. In this article I will attempt to criticize/self-criticize our community and offer what I believe to be the correct political line we ought to take. This article specifically addresses white women in our community.

We are women, we are lesbians. We have borne the burden of second-class citizenry for millenia. As feminists, we vigorously fight our oppressors and seek to transform our society. But who is our oppressor? Have we correctly identified them? Do we have a relationship to them? What is it?

I contend that our oppressors are not males as a class, race or gender. Males, especially white males, nutured by the male supremacist line prevailing in this society, are only shock troops. Do men, whom we have discussed in CR groups, dissected in forums, and reviled in our lives, hide the face of the head honcho, the ultimate oppressor? Have any of us looked right in the face of it? No, unless we have direct access to the representatives of imperialism—Rockefeller, Carter, Kissinger, Pinochet, Pahlevi—we have not met them, although their presence has a daily impact on us. They represent a system which we incorrectly

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call "patriarchy." They exercise their power over people all over the world, most especially people of the Third World. It is imperialism/capitalism that tosses us a few crumbs by glorifying Bella Abzugs (ex-Special Advisor to the Presidents) Midge Constanzas and (President of Now) Ellie Smeals while engaging in active genocide against the people/women of Puerto Rico, Zimbabwe, Vietnam and the Black Nation within the U.S. borders. It is imperialism that hands middle class white women an economic goal of integration while setting up fascist regimes in Chile and South Korea. It gives CETA funding to "safe" women's groups while pouring capital into the apartheid government of South Africa/Azania which has forcibly sterlized the majority of Black women there. This is an enemy we have not collectively recognized. It is an enemy that we must recognize, organize against and smash.

So now that we've named it, the monolithic raper of races and cultures, now what? We are women, we are lesbians. We are under imperialism's heel. But we're white, so we are privileged in having an alternative. First we can consciously or unconsciously accept capitalism's plan for our community. We can whiten it, brighten it, package it, make it acceptable, deradicalize it. We can follow the "vanguard" of Gloria Steinem, Susan Brownmiller and NOW. We can rely on Big Brother. We can ask Ford to fund our "revolution." We can seek integration with the oppressor by virtue of of our whiteness. White feminists in this country live in a huge contradiction. As women, we are second-class. As whites, we are privileged members of an oppressor nation, On the other hand, we can disavow bourgeois Feminism, break ties with white supremacy, and build an anti-imperialist women's movement, under the leadership of national liberation struggles, which unites to fight imperialism, white supremacy, homophobia, classism and male supremacy. Since the principal political contradiction in the world today is between struggles of Third World people to reclaim their land and U.S. imperialism, it is only natural that we recognize that women's liberation is led by the women of the Third World, not white women of the U.S. As white radical women, we must form and maintain a base of solidarity,

politically and materially with the revolutionary vanguard. A first step towards dealing with our own white supremacy is to recognize Third World leadership, and then to put that principle into practice.

Right now the white women's/lesbian community sees itself as the folks calling the shots. This politic is just another facet of white supremacy. We must begin to repudiate bourgeois feminism. White feminists leading the fight for "integrationist feminism" should be clearly told to step aside in favor of the leadership of revolutionary women of the Third World and that their actions are against the masses of women. We must begin criticism/self-criticism of the mistakes the white women's community has made through racism; building a self-defense movement without studying the politics of rape and the Black community; refusing to politically or materially support the stuggles of Puerto Rico, Zimbabwe, Chile and the Black Nation within this country. We must begin to reverse our present with solid political actions.

These things are difficult. The more we analyze our relationship to revolution and imperialism, more contradictions crop up. We have softened, become complacent. We listen to Bella Abzug over Madame Binh, act with Now instead of the ZANU Women's League. This has to change.

I think that many women/lesbians will have trouble with this essay. I intended to attack the theories of bourgeois feminism, separatism and isolation which I espoused at one time. My intention is not to persuade women to abandon a feminist dialectic, but I think we must form a new one.

Others may say, "There's no contradictions in the movement. Gains are made slowly." Whose gains? If we improve the quality of health care for ourselves and not for others, is it a gain? If our gains come off someone's back, is it worth it?

This essay is not original. I am voicing an old, often debated dialectic. I write it in recognition of national liberation struggles and as a repudiation of my racism and separatism. I hope that we as a community understand our political errors and will rectify them. The fight against imperialism and white supremacy is going into the '80s, and liberalism is dying. Will we be left behind?

AN OPEN LETTER TO MARY DALY

By Audre Lorde

Thank you for having *Gyn/Ecology* sent to me. So much of it is full of import, useful, generative, and provoking. As in *Beyond God the Father*, many of your analyses are strengthening and helpful to me. Therefore, it is because of what you have given to me in the past work that I write this letter to you now, hoping to share with you the benefits of my insights as you have shared the benefits of yours with me.

This letter has been delayed because of my grave reluctance to reach out to you, for what I want us to chew upon here is neither easy nor simple. The history of white women who are unable to hear black women's words, or to maintain dialogue with us, is long and discouraging. But for me to assume that you will not hear me represents not only history, but an old pattern of relating, sometimes protective and sometimes dysfunctional, which we, as women shaping our future, are in the process of shattering, I hope.

I believe in your good faith toward all women, in your vision of a future within which we can all flourish, and in your commitment to the hard and often painful work necessary to effect change. In this spirit I invite you to a joint clarification of some of the differences which lie between us as a black and a white woman.

When I started reading *Gyn/Ecology*, I was truly excited by the vision behind your words, and nodded my head as you spoke in your first passage of myth and mystification. Your words on the nature and function of the Goddess, as well as the ways in which her face has been obscured, agreed with what I myself have discovered in my searches through African myth/legend/religion for the true nature of old female power.

So I wondered, why doesn't Mary deal with Afrekete as an example? Why are her goddess-images only white, western-european, judeo-christian? Where was Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior-goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan? Well, I thought, Mary has made a conscious decision to narrow her scope and to deal only with the ecology of western-european women.

Then I came to the first three chapters of your second passage, and it was obvious that you were dealing with non-european women, but only as victims and preyers upon each other. I began to feel my history and my mythic background distorted by the absence of any images of my foremothers in power. Your inclusion of african genital mutilation was an important and necessary piece in any consideration of female ecology, and too little has been written about it. But to imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women, is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how those tools are used by women without awareness against each other.

To dismiss our black foremothers may well be to dismiss where european women learned to love. As an african-american woman in white patriarchy, I am used to having my archetypal experience distorted and trivialized, but it is terribly painful to feel it being done by a woman whose knowledge so matches my own. As women-identified-women, we cannot afford to repeat these same old destructive, wasteful errors of recognition.

When I speak of knowledge, as you know, I am speaking of that dark and true depth which understanding serves, waits upon, and makes accessible through language to ourselves and others. It is this depth within each of us that nurtures vision.

What you excluded from *Gyn/Ecology* dismissed my heritage and the heritage of all other non-european women, and denied the real connections that exist between all of us.

It is obvious that you have done a tremendous amount of work for this book. But simply because so little material on non-white female power and symbol exists in white women's words from a radical feminist perspective, to exclude this aspect of connection from even comment in your work is to deny the fountain of non-european female strength and power that nurtures each of our visions. It is to make a point by choice.

Then, to realize that the only quotations from black women's words were the ones you used to introduce your chapter on african genital mutilation, made me question why you needed to use them at all. For my part, I felt that you had in fact misused my words, utilized them only to testify against myself as a woman of color. For my words which you used were no more, nor less illustrative of this chapter, than *Poetry Is Not A Luxury* or any number of my poems might have been of many other parts of *Gyn/Ecology*.

So the question arises in my mind, Mary, do you ever really read the work of black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotations which you thought might valuably support an already-conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us? This is not a rhetorical question.

To me, this feels like another instance of the knowledge, croneology and work of women of color being ghettoized by a white woman dealing only out of a patriarchal western-european frame of reference. Even your words on page 49 of Gyn/Ecology

> "The strength which Self-centering women find, in finding our Background, is our *own* strength, which we give back to our Selves."

have a different ring as we remember the old tradition of power and strength and nurturance found in the female bonding of african women. It is there to be tapped by all women who do not fear the revelation of connection to themselves.

Have you read my work, and the work of other black women, for what it could give you? Or did you hunt through only to find words that would legitimize your chapter on african genital mutiliation in the eyes of other black women? And if so, then why not use our words to legitimize or illustrate the other places where we connect in our being and becoming? If, on the other hand, it was not black women you were attempting to reach, in what way did our words illustrate your point for white women.

Mary, I ask that you be aware of how this serves the destructive forces of racism and separation between women—the assumption that the herstory and myth of white women is the legitimate and sole herstory and myth of all women to call upon for power and background, and that non-white women and our herstories are noteworthy only as decorations, or examples of female victimization. I ask that you be aware of the effect that this dismissal has upon the community of black woman, and how it devalues your own words. This dismissal does not essentially differ from the specialized devaluations that make black women prey, for instance, to the murders even now happening in your own city. When patriarchy dismisses us, it encourages our murderers. When radical lesbian feminist theory dismisses us, it encourages its own demise.

This dismissal stands as a real block to communication between us. This block makes it far easier to turn away from you completely than to attempt to understand the thinking behind your choices. Should the next step be war between us, or separation? Assimilation within a solely western-european herstory is not acceptable.

Mary, I ask that you remember what is dark and ancient and divine within your self that aids your speaking. As outsiders, we need each other for support and connection and all the other

necessities of living on the borders. But in order to come together we must recognize each other. Yet I feel that since you have so completely un-recognized me, perhaps I have been in error concerning you, and no longer recognize you.

I feel you do celebrate differences between white women as a creative force toward change, rather than a reason for misunderstanding and separation. But you fail to recognize that, as women, those differences expose all women to various forms and degrees of patriarchal oppression, some of which we share, and some of which we do not. For instance, surely you know that for non-white women in this country, there is an 80% fatality rate from breast cancer; three times the number of unnecessary eventurations, hysterectomies and sterilizations as for white women; three times as many chances of being raped, murdered, or assaulted as exist for white women. These are statistical facts, not coincidences nor paranoid fantasies. I had hoped the lesbian consciousness of having been 'other' would make it easier to recognize the differences that exist in the history and struggle of black women and white women.

Within the community of women, racism is a reality force within my life as it is within yours. The white women with hoods on in Ohio handing out KKK literature on the street, may not like what you have to say, but they will shoot me on sight. (If you and I were to walk into a classroom of women in Dismal Gulch, Alabama, where the only thing they knew about each of us was that we were both Lesbian/Radical/Feminist, you would see exactly what I mean.)

The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those boundaries. Nor do the reservoirs of our ancient power know these boundaries, either. To deal with one without even alluding to the other is to distort our commonality as well as our difference.

For then beyond sisterhood is still racism.

We first met at the MLA panel, The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action. Shortly before that date, I had decided never again to speak to white women about racism. I felt it was wasted energy, because of their destructive guilt and defensiveness, and because whatever I had to say might better be said by white women to one another, at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing. This letter attempts to break that silence. I would not like to have to destroy you in my consciousness. So as a sister Hag, I ask you to speak to my perceptions.

Whether or not you do, I thank you for what I have learned from you.

This letter is in repayment.

In the hands of Afrekete,

Audre Lorde

MAKING VISIBLE THE INVISIBLE: SOME NOTES ON RACISM AND WOMEN-IDENTIFIED RELATIONSHIPS OF AFRO-AMERICAN WOMEN

By Vickie M. Mays

While on campus recently, I passed two young Black women walking together. Their interaction with each other carried an air of intensity and familiarity. They interrupted their conversation long enough to exchange an acknowledging nod with me but quickly returned to their talk. I watched as one woman playfully pushed the other and they both laughed. As I walked on, I though about our brief interaction. I began to question why I see so many more Euro-American women than Afro-American women whose lesbianism is visible and evident. Other questions began to flood my mind. Do lesbian relationships take a different form in the Black culture? What are the sociopolitical conditions that facilitate the "outness" of lesbianism, and how do these differ for Black and White women? Why is it that the Black lesbian seems to be "invisible" in the United States? These questions began to form the basis for these notes on the impact of racism on the Afro-American lesbian woman.

I have chosen to focus on the experience of the Afro-American woman who is a lesbian. My intention is to help make visible the invisible by pointing out some of the ways the patriarchal structure of society aggressively participates in perpetuating the invisibility of the Black lesbian. This paper will also attempt to sketch out some of the ways in which women, particularly the Euro-American woman through racism, capitalism, and the maintenance of privilege, help silence the voices and obscure the visibility of the Afro-American lesbian.

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The basic premise of this paper is that the climate created by an Euro-American world philosophy of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy has served to keep the Afro-American lesbian from appearing visible. This Euro-American philosophy has resulted in there being lesser numbers of visible Afro-American lesbians in comparison to Euro-American lesbians. This invisibility appears to be even more deliberate when one comes to know the herstory of woman-identified marriages of the African woman, pre-Euro-American colonization. This invisibility is manifested in the form of the Afro-American lesbian's fears and trepidations for her existence and safety in acknowledging her lesbianism in an open and "out" manner. This invisibility is manifested by the impact of the multiple oppressions of capitalism, racism, and sexism which leaves the Afro-American woman with the illusion of possible equality, power and privilege in the choice of heterosexuality as a lifestyle. This invisibility is exhibited in the form of a silencing and subterfuging in which there is lacking a significant body of literature which reflects a Black feminist or Black lesbian feminist ideology. Along with this is the silencing of the Afro-American woman's herstory of woman-identified relationships in Africa. Such knowledge could guide the Afro-American lesbian in strengthening and building a visible Black lesbian community. This visibility could potentially facilitate an overall alliance in the Black community where the Black lesbian is often times alienated and viewed as a "freak." Invisibility of the Black lesbian allows oppression in the form of capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and other isms to go unchallenged. An important understanding of this point is it is not merely the citing of isms which is important but rather the underlying representations of these isms in the form of power, privilege, the right to self-definition and existence which are being oppressed. It is this thought which forms the foundation of these notes on the impact of racism on the Afro-American lesbian.

Increasing numbers of Afro-American women are coming to discover that there is a herstorical past of women-identified relationships for African women. For example, Audre Lorde refers to a tribe in West Africa, the Fon of Dahomey, in which thirteen

forms of marriage exist.[1] One of these forms of marriage is called "giving the goat to the buck." It is a marriage in which a woman of independent means marries another woman. They become co-wives. The other woman may or may not bear children by a male, but all children will be controlled by her and her heirs. Some of these marriages are entered into to allow women of means to continue to control their economic resources and jural authority, while at other times these marriages clearly are lesbian marriages.

Melville Herskovits, who studied and lived among the Fon, supports the idea of the existence of lesbianism.[2] On the other hand, other researchers attempt to deny this as a possible explanation for the marriages. Interestingly enough, I have found that those who attempt to silence this piece of history are primarily Euro-American women.[3]

One researcher explains these woman-to-woman marriages as occurring between "those women who are unable to lead satisfying lives in man-woman marriage and are unwilling to assume the roles of helpless martyrs, who remain in frustrating and unrewarding unions usually for the sake of the children."[4] This researcher quotes an African woman, who let it be known to her friends that she was interested in marrying a "woman of good character and a hard worker... A man who borrows money for beer from a woman is useless as a husband-father. I could not walk into such unhappiness with my eyes wide open."[5] This woman already had two children, so clearly her intent to enter into a woman marriage could not have been based on her barrenness, and she was not a woman of means. (These are the reasons often times proposed by the researchers to explain woman-to-woman marriages.)

Woman-to-woman marriages are much more widespread than history wishes to acknowledge. This form of marriage is found in northern Nigeria among the Yoruba, Yagoba, Akoko, Nupe, and the Gana-Gana communities. It has been reported in southern Nigeria for the Iba and the Kalabari; other tribes include the Dinkas', the Barenda of the northern Transvaal, the Neurs, the

Lovedu, and the Kamba in East Africa. I am sure the list will go on as we are able to uncover and write our own herstory.

The point I wish to make here is that lesbian bonding by African women is something that has and does herstorically exist. Lesbian relationships are recognized and legitimized social relationships in certain African societies. This raises the question about the type of social system and prevailing philosophy characterizing those particular African social systems. It is my guess that such societies are based more on an African philosophical orientation which stresses an inter-connectedness of relationships and flexibility in relationships and roles.[6] It is within the Euro-American framework that roles in the family become monolithically defined and restructured as a way of maintaining patriarchy and capitalism.[7] In capitalism Black women in this country are the backbone and foundation for its maintenance. It is therefore in the interest of the Euro-American that the Afro-American woman not come to know of her lesbian heritage. The aim instead is that she remain controlled and defined within a capitalist-patriarchal social structure.

Afro-American women as a group struggle with and exist in a social system in which being Black and female is defined as being powerless and inferior. As Barbara Smith so aptly points out, "Self-definition is a dangerous activity for any woman to engage in, especially a Black one [woman]."[8] There is an added danger in self-definition for the Afro-American woman-identified-woman based on the dimension of the combination in terms of what it threatens for heterosexual males and females, both Black and white, and for non-Third world lesbians.

Lesbianism in the Black community has traditionally been labelled as something white, middle-class and bourgeois. It is viewed with distrust and contempt, and in some instances the Afro-American lesbian who acknowledges or evidences her lesbianism is met with violence from Black males. Black lesbians still today are derisively referred to as "bulldaggers." Some Afro-American lesbians find themselves faced with a fury of abuse both physical and verbal from Black men. This abuse is

qualitatively different from the abuse the Euro-American lesbian suffers at the hands of white or Black men. Cynthia Cauthern presents an example of such abuse.

Marcia: *Donna and I were walking down 3rd St. holding hands. We passed a bunch of guys as we were going on our way. They turned around and followed us for about 4 blocks. There were about 5 guys. When they caught up to us, one of them grabbed Donna by the arm and asked her what did she want with me. He said she was too fine to be a stud and he had something that would make her feel good. He put her hand on his dick. I tried my best to kick his ass... Between he and his brothers I received a broken jaw and two broken ribs. Donna was in the hospital for two weeks with a concussion.*[9]

This is not to negate the fact that Euro-American women do experience violence, but the incidence of it is lower, the degree of physical abuse many times less severe, and the options and avenues of recourse and protection more numerous for white women, including the white lesbian. It is not unusual for a Black woman to call the police and have them never arrive. If they do arrive, they side with the male, particularly if he is white and middle class.

The reaction of Black males to Black women, especially those who are woman-identified is based on the Black male's experience of racial oppression, capitalism, and his male privilege, all of which have defined the Black woman as a commodity. She is also one of the few things that the Black male can "own" and control. Toni Cade attributes the antagonism between the Black male and the Black female to an acceptance of Euro-American capitalist and misogynist definitions of manhood and womanhood.[10] Therefore when the Afro-American woman, particularly a lesbian, rejects the Euro-American definition of womanhood it shakes the foundation of the Black males' manhood since his manhood is defined as controlling the Black woman and making her subservient.

The Afro-American woman in the United States has been abused by being stripped of her power and privilege. The Black woman has been taught from early childhood that one of the ways to survive in this society is through marriage or in a male-female relationship. The Black woman has been raised with the notion of work as an expectation, as she will need to assist in the support of her family. She will also be asked to do all she possibly can to advance the Black man and to sacrifice for the sake of the Black race, all at the cost of ignoring the oppression of sexism. This the Afro-American woman does especially if she wishes to keep a heterosexual relationship. I agree with Barbara Smith when she writes:

> Heterosexual privilege is usually the only privilege that Black women have. None of us have racial or sexual privilege, almost none of us have class privilege, maintaining 'straigtness' is our last resort... I am convinced that it is our lack of privilege and power in every other sphere that allows so few Black women to make the leap that many white women, particularly... have been able to make this decade.[11]

What Black men and some Black women have failed to see both in the past and today regarding the Afro-American woman who chooses to bond with other women is the asset to the Black community. Audre Lorde eloquently notes this when she points out:

> Black women who define ourselves and our goals beyond the sphere of a sexual relationship can bring to any endeavor the realized focus of a complete and therefore empowered individual. Black women and Black men who recognize that the development of their particular strengths and interest does not diminish the other.... Black women sharing close emotional ties with each other, politically or economically, are not the enemies of Black men.[12]

Traditionally, as Lorde points out, Black women have always bonded together in support of each other. Black women are very woman oriented in their relationships. They tend to maintain close and primary relationships with women both within their

biological families and outside. In one of the courses I teach entitled, "The Insurgent Black Woman in the United States," when we analyzed the roles and interpersonal relationships of the Black woman it became clear that many of the female relationships in her life were extremely significant. The depth of feelings, of love, kinship, and bonding among Afro-American women runs very deeply. One need only examine the grandmother-mother-daughter relationships of Afro-American women to see the quality of woman loving in the Black community.

Yet the Black woman who chooses to seek her emotional support and create her power from bonding with other women does not have the same types of support systems that are available to Euro-American lesbian women. The Afro-American woman who chooses to be open and visible about her lesbianism may often lose the support of her friends and society at large, as does the Euro-American lesbian, but she also loses the support of her family and the Black community. In contrast to the Euro-American lesbian who may find support and a family in the white lesbian community the Afro-American lesbian sometimes loses a bond which is crucial to her vitality in her struggle as a Third-World woman in a white/racist/patriarchal society. While the Afro-American lesbian may adopt the predominantly white lesbian community as her support system, she does so at the expense of an integration of her Blackness with her lesbianism, leaving her feeling fragmented and hungry for the type of emotional bonding she grew up with. One need only to read the excerpts of letters from Black feminists collected by Barbara and Beverly Smith so appropriately entitled, "I AM NOT MEANT TO BE ALONE AND WITHOUT YOU WHO UNDERSTANDS."[13] One Black lesbian feminist writes:

> *Your letter has really lifted my spirits. It's important to me to know that my sisters care about me, understand and support me."*

Because of invisibility the Afro-American lesbian does not easily find her lesbian sisters. This occurs not because there are not Black lesbians, but because racism, along with other previously

mentioned isms impact on the Afro-American lesbian's visibility and her freedom to be open about her lesbianism.

According to Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg, in their study, Black lesbians reported feeling more lonely, tense and paranoid than white lesbians.[14] These feelings held true for Black women in general in comparison to white women, although Black lesbians more frequently reported these experiences. However, it was also found that Black lesbians though about or attempted suicide *less* frequently than white lesbians, which points to a fundamental difference between Black and white women in their approach to life. A friend of mine calls this the "make do" syndrome, while I refer to it as "there's no such thing as can't." These attitudes taught by Black mothers lead to less thoughts of suicide and to more thoughts of survival. Historically, Black woman experienced some of the most brutal and aversive conditions one could imagine, and they survived. This survival resulted from a knowledge passed on through Black culture which taught them an ethos of "you must." One need only read books such as those by Toni Morrison,[15] Zora Neale Hurston,[16] Alice Walker,[17] or Angela Davis[18] to understand this characteristic survival of Black women, especially Black lesbians.

The Afro-American woman has rarely had the privilege in her life to "cop-out" as it would mean non-survival (i.e., annihilation). I have at times heard the Afro-American lesbian in her relationships with Euro-American lesbians remark about being tired of the "Miss Ann" behavior on the part of Euro-American women. Such behavior in the form of emotional naivete and fragility in political awareness and grappling with emotional levels at a depth level. The Euro-American lesbian for some parts of her life has not been forced to analyze her political role in the social system, or come to grips with her own oppressive behaviors. At the same time some Euro-Americans, never having to struggle or face life-threatening hardship in which they must rely on only an inner strength to get them through, have developed shallow emotional patterns in their social relationships. This becomes a source of frustration and tension for the Afro-American lesbian who has been taught from an early age

that life would be a series of struggles, and in order to make it there is no such thing as "CAN'T." Rather you do your best and the Lord will take over.

The Euro-American woman by virtue of her race maintains a level of power and privilege in society not available to the Afro-American woman. The Euro-American woman who chooses to be open about her lesbianism does not necessarily lose her privilege and power in the social system. The Euro-American lesbian many times may have access to resources because of family, past education, or mobility in the world which has given her the game playing strategies for acquiring more privilege based on her whiteness. Such resources even when individually maintained help promote the visibility of the Euro-American lesbian. These resources may range from the time to generate and produce a body of lesbian feminist ideology, which supports the white women's movement and facilitates the coming out of the Euro-American lesbian, to being able to occassionally volunteer time to a community project. The Afro-American lesbian who lacks resources and privilege in society finds herself without a women's center which caters to her needs or without a body of literature readily available to tell her about her lesbian sisters. Yet many times the Euro-American lesbian community fails to provide this supoprtive function by the sharing of resources or by facilitating the gathering of resources so that the Afro-American lesbian may build a community and be visible. Instead the Afro-American lesbian receives numerous invitations to help the Euro-American community work on its racism or relieve its guilt by being the token in its group. I refer the reader to Lorraine Bethel's poem, "What Chou Mean *WE*, White Girl?..."[19] to fully explain the racism and classism in this behavior.

Racism extends beyond an individual level to institutional and cultural forms which Euro-American women help to perpetuate by their silence or participation. These points are emphasized here not to "guilt-trip" Euro-American women but to energize them to realize their oppressive behavior in the social structure in order that they may utilize their limited privilege and economic resources to not only fight sexism or heterosexism but racism as

well. If there is to be a cohesive lesbian-feminist movement it will only come when the Euro-American lesbian recognizes her racism and chooses to deal with her power and privilege in a manner which seeks to facilitate such a movement.

In ending, I would like to share a poem by Julie Blackwomon which illustrates the dangerousness of racism as it effects the Afro-American lesbian.

Revolutionary Blues

And when I say to my sisters
my lesbian feminist sisters
my angry white sisters whose chains still mesh with mine,
when I say sister help me,
the noose tightens on my neck
I cannot breathe
it is because I am black
my sisters say
yes
But what has that to do with our revolution?

And when I say to my brothers
my angry black brothers with leopard dashikis
whose roots intwine with mine in Africa
when I say brothers help me
I am encircled by fire,
the flames grow nearer
it is because I love women
my brothers say
yes
But what has that to do with our revolution?

And when the revolution comes
and it is time for choosing sides
and radical lesbian feminists are fighting the oppression of men
when the revolution comes
and it is time for choosing sides
and militant black nationalists
are fighting the oppression of whites
I expect to be shot in the back
by someone who calls me
sister

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10. Toni Cade, "On the Issues of Roles." (Edited) *The Black Woman: An Anthology.* (New York: New American Library, 1970), pp. 101-110.

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16. Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1935) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1937).

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SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT RACISM, CLASSISM AND SEPARATISM

By Cathy McCandless

I was born 30 years ago—white, female and middle class. These are four things you have a right to know before you read what I have to say, for they are absolute and unchanging and like it or not they determine my vantage-point to a large extent. These things begin as accidents of birth but become, in the end, a matter of attitude. As far as I'm concerned, there is no such thing as ex-white, used-to-be female, or formerly middle class. Something else you have a right to know: I am a Lesbian now but I wasn't always. Unlike my era, race, class and gender, that was a choice, and it's something (again unlike the other four) I've never regretted.

It isn't easy to talk about race or class at all, let alone racism and classism in the Lesbian community. Not that there isn't enough to say; there is too much, in a way. These things are everywhere, racism and classism. Talking about them is like trying to describe the taste of the water you drink every day or the texture of the air you breathe. Oh sure, I can say that air is a colorless gas composed of nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide and assorted garbage likely to cause cancer, but that doesn't say a thing about suffocation, or what it *feels* like when you can't catch your breath, or all the damage high-speed winds can cause.

And so it is with racism and classism, I have a feeling. You can itemize and categorize til the cows come home, but words aren't sufficient to describe them. Chances are you've heard all the words before anyway, for there's been plenty of talk about both of these subjects. Plenty of talk and not enough action, it goes without saying. Some of us like to talk to bring about change. Some of us like to act. Some of us do both and some do neither. That too—which of us is which—is related to race and class I have a hunch.

Racism and classism, it seems to me, exist far more in the realm of actions than in the realm of words. Some of the actions are blatant, like the cold-blooded murder of Black and Puerto Rican people in New York City. Men, women and children shot down in the street, day after day, year after year, while their murderers are never even tried. Or the wholesale unprosecuted rape of women of color. The systematic starvation of the children of the poor. The legal lynching that passes for justice in the U.S. courts; the price of a lawyer, the enormity of bail. The various forms of torture that exist in the U.S. prison system, where the great majority of inmates are 3rd World people and most of the relatively few white prisoners are poor. Forced sterilization of Black, Puerto Rican and Native American women. Or the early death that workers in mines and mills and factories throughout the U.S. face because of criminally unsafe working conditions.

This is what racism and classism mean, first and foremost. They are not (as I was led to believe growing up) merely unpleasant and a little bit crass, as in who said what bad word to whom. Sometimes fast, sometimes slowly—racism and classism kill. There *are* some more subtle forms, however. "Ordinary" acts. Tiny assumptions. Millions of them. This is the sort of racism and classism that seem to run rampant in the Lesbian community. To the best of my knowledge, white Lesbians haven't taken to shooting their 3rd World sisters dead in the streets, nor are we generally in positions of enough power to dictate who will eat and who will starve, who will rot in prison, and who will die slowly and painfully of Brown Lung. But we do perpetuate acts of subtle violence in the classic racist/classist pattern of the white supremist capitalist patriarchal system that we live in (or should I say "under?") This "pins-and-needles" racism and classism, while it may not be as blatant or as violent as what the Klan and the Nazis do, is constant, damaging and powerful. Sort of like death by pinprick or a thousand poison darts. So if you're expecting the racism and classism within the Lesbian community to be in the form of a single fatal bullet (a cannonball perhaps?) you may be missing the darts that are falling all around you, particularly if (in the case of middle class white women) they aren't being aimed at *you*.

So here is the question: shall I write lists about racism and classism? Fling accusations? Name names and mention the sting of each separate jab? As if I even knew. Being white and middle class makes mine a fairly comfortable existence. There are very few pins *or* pricks in my life. Yet, if I talk about "Issues" (with a capital I, of course) something rings untrue. Racism and classism are anything but abstract. They are fact, not theory; they are daily and real. Nevertheless there *are* some theoretical questions that seem to pop up again and again in the Lesbian community—certain hard-to-resolve conflicts or differences of opinion—and these, very often, involve racism and classism at the core, or rather they involve economics (from which, I believe, racism and classism under capitalism have grown).

Take "Lesbian separatism," for example. Mind you, I don't think that such a thing yet exists, for I know of no individual Lesbian or Lesbian community that is not economically involved with men in some way. All of us buy things from the businesses rich white men control, live in buildings they "own," use products made with forced or underpaid labor from materials they stole from Native people throughout the world. We buy fruit and vegetables at prices that couldn't possibly pay for the value of the labor of the people who picked them (primarily 3rd World people, of course) and most of what we do pay ends up in the pockets of the capitalist entrepreneurs. These same rich white men determine how much money we will have for spending in the first place (how much we "earn" they call it). If we are lucky enough to get paid for our labor, they are the ones who put the price tag on our heads. If we're not being paid for the work we do, they begrudge us even the pittance they call "welfare." In short, they currently control every aspect of our economic lives. In this capitalist economy, none of us are truly separate. Certainly not yet.

Socially, it's another matter entirely. The richer you are, the less you generally have to acknowledge those you depend upon. Money can buy you a great deal of distance. Given enough of it, it is even possible never to lay eyes on a man. It's a wonderful luxury, having control over who you lay eyes on, but let's face it:

most women's daily survival still involves face-to-face contact with men, whether they like it or not. It seems to me that for this reason alone, criticizing women who associate with men not only tends to be counterproductive; it borders on blaming the victim. Particularly if the women taking it upon themselves to set the standards are white and upper or middle class (as has often been the case in my experience) and those to whom they apply these rules are not.

Which brings me to a difference I have noticed between white middle class and 3rd World and/or working class Lesbian separatists. I don't believe that I have ever known a 3rd World or working class separatist who was not involved in various kinds of struggles against the capitalist economic system. (I guess you could say that to be a working class or 3rd World woman at all is already to be involved in such a struggle just for survival, but I mean struggle in a more conscious, more organized and more systematic way.) On the other hand, I have known any number of white Lesbians from the middle and higher-than-middle classes who considered themselves true separatists merely by virtue of the fact that they didn't associate with men. That's what I call the social definition of separatism, by the way, and I think it's basically bullshit. It's the political equivalent of sulking, of picking up your marbles and going home. I don't see how it accomplishes anything, not anything good at least. I mean, who the hell really cares who you're speaking to anyway?

Unfortunately for all of us, just ignoring the patriarchy won't make it go away. Yet middle and upper class women have traditionally had the luxury not to have to consider the world from an economic point of view. They are the ones who in all sincerity can insist that you are a separatist if you never come in contact with a person who isn't a Lesbian. The economic girders that hold their world together are comfortably padded, hidden from view, and covered with social amenities. Instead of giving greater vision, wealth brings a certain blindness, I think, if only because the economic structure supporting these women *is* so unobtrusive, so nearly invisible. They needn't ever come to terms with the simple fact that under this capitalist system we live in, *some-*

one's going to end up dong the shitwork for white high-class men, and if you merely withdraw and refuse to do it without doing anything to change the system itself, you just leave that much more shitwork for others, generally women who are poorer and more exploited than you are.

What economic alternatives have we actually provided for women who really want to sever their connections with men or (much more to the point, I think) with the white supremist capitalist patriarchal system itself? Precious few, in my experience. Yet to my way of thinking, this is the crux of true Lesbian separatism. I'm not saying that Lesbian separatism is absolutely necessary (I personally believe that it's too soon to tell), only that women who claim to be separatists should take these kinds of questions into account. For I believe that separatism has very little to do with gender of the folks with whom you pass the time of day; rather it has to do with *economics*—with what kind of work you are able to do and with who benefits from your labor—and ultimately, I suppose, it has to do with women claiming the tools and the land and the resources we are going to need to survive.

We should remember, however, that it isn't so easy to wrest anything away from white men, whether it's money or power or land or technology or resources or whatever else we want and need and believe to be rightfully ours. Too often we fall to fighting others for the scraps instead of going after the rich white men who are pulling the strings, attacking the system itself. And sometimes we do more damage than good. White middle class Lesbians, for example, have been moving en masse into 3rd World communities, pushing out people who've lived there for years and often showing little or no respect for the neighborhood and its culture. Clearly this is no way to build solidarity.

Even when we do get involved in anti-white-supremist struggles such as fighting the Klan and the Nazis, we often tend to focus more on kicking ass among the rednecks (for whom most middle class white folks seem to have a deep class hatred) than confronting the source of the problem directly and going after

those in power. And look at the racism and classism within the so-called women's movement, a movement in which many white middle class Lesbians were involved during the 60s and 70s. To be sure, these women did manage to seize a certain amount of control from white men, but with it they inherited the power to inflict white supremist exploitation. What real good have they done with their newly-acquired wealth and opportunity? Things are getting worse, not better, for the majority of women in this country, in spite of the middle class white women's movement. This experience, if nothing else, should prove forever and always that men are not the only carriers of the white supremist elitist capitalist scourge.

Given such incidents of racism and classism within the Lesbian and overall women's community, we should proceed with considerable caution as we begin to claim what we think of as ours. To begin with, we should pay very close attention to who we're taking it *from*. For more than any other single issue, I believe, how we go about seizing economic control is going to determine whether we as Lesbians constitute a common interest group at all, and, if so, whether we are to become part of the solution or yet another aspect of the problem.

Once we have the wherewithall—the tools, the land, etc.—and assuming that we have not allowed ourselves to be co-opted in the process, we're going to be faced with another decision: how to divvy it up. I cannot see how we will ever be free from patriarchal values so long as we distribute the wealth we create and control unevenly among ourselves, maintaining the class system we all grew up with, creating finer and finer divisions within these classes, and finally defining a new "feminist elite." The merely social withdrawal from men (divorced from political and economic struggle) which has so often passed as Lesbian separatism among middle class white women has created just such an elitist caste, for by and large (though of course there are exceptions) the women who have most easily been able to avoid social contact with men have had the resources to create their own non-traditional jobs, to augment the low pay of most "alternative" employment, or simply to drop out and move to the

country on big expensive chunks of land, thereby controlling who they have to come in contact with.

Meanwhile, the social definition of Lesbian separatism has gotten pickier and pickier. I remember a time when a woman was considered a separatist if she made it a point not to socialize with men. Then that alone wasn't good enough, she couldn't associate with straight women either, and finally, many separatists weren't even friendly with other *Lesbians* who hobnobbed too much with straight women or with men. In this way, these women set out to build a buffer between themselves and the world of men. The cost of that barrier was high, however, and they weren't the ones who had to foot the bill. The price was paid by the community as a whole, for the barrier these women had so systematically constructed served as often as not to sever women from other women and even divided Lesbians up into castes, each more-separatist-than-thou (and therefore holier). With each successive purer caste came the hidden question in dollars and cents: how many people could you *afford* to "do without" simply because of who their friends were?

Quite a few Lesbian separatists were convinced that men themselves were the ultimate enemy. When these women also happened to be upper or middle class, they somehow conveniently managed to forget that their wealth had descended to them through men in the first place, white men who had stolen it from 3rd World people in the form of their lives, their resources, their labor and their land. (Think about it: did you ever know a "self-made woman" who was rich?) At the very least these women were hoarding wealth that wasn't theirs. Moreover, in their attempts to hold onto control of it, they were doing the work of the white supremist capitalist patriarchy itself, and that's about as *un*separatist as you can get. Nevertheless, many of these relatively wealthy white women claimed to be true practicing Lesbian separatists, the vanguard of the feminist revolution. It was they, I believe, who gave separatism a bad name throughout the progressive political community. Not that they intended to have that effect.

Take Rachel, for example (not her real name), a white woman whose father was a rich American industrialist overseas. In a 3rd World country, in fact (where else?). She called herself a Lesbian separatist and, to the best of my knowledge, never said a kind word to a man in all the time I knew her. Yet she'd buy thousands of dollars worth of stuff with her father's Bloomingdale's credit card. Granted she gave all the loot to women (I still have the orange flannel Bloomingdale's shirt she gave me.) Generous, yes; separatist, no. Not with that charge card in her pocket, supposedly paid for by her father but actually financed through the exploited labor of 3rd World people. And yet she was perfectly sincere. She quite honestly believed in this thing she called separatism, expected it to lead to a workable women's culture and to the eventual demise of the patriarchy, best I could tell.

To me, for all her warmth and honesty, Rachel was like an ostrich with her head stuck in the sand. Sincere but misguided. And ultimately dangerous. Far too often the "women's space" created by women such as Rachel was won at the expense of other women (3rd World women and poor women, both Lesbian and straight, and probably 3rd World men as well). Certainly not at the expense of rich white men. But that is the way this system tends to work, to pit us against one another, and you cannot escape it, no matter how far you run or how carefully you hide yourself or how deeply you manage to bury your head in the sand. In the end, you are left with two simple options: either you "beat" the system or you join it, and since for women the latter is clearly impossible (you will never be a first-class citizen of the capitalist patriarchy, by definition), there's really only one option after all. The battle lines, at this point, are pretty clear I think.

What's a little less clear is who's going to be on which side. I do not think that having two X chromosomes automatically makes you into part of the solution. Ditto for being a Lesbian. Not with the residue of racist and classist garbage so many of us carry around inside us. The trick, I guess, is to keep it inside, to try not to act on it, or maybe even to get rid of some of it, though I have to confess that I'm skeptical as to whether white middle class women will ever be able to give it up entirely. (Still, it couldn't

possibly hurt for us to try.) No matter what, though, simply "dropping out" and denying the capitalist patriarchy the pleasure of your company and the fruits of your labor accomplishes less than nothing in and of itself. In fact, it makes one more self-proclaimed person of leisure for the working class to feed. *Unless* you put that labor into "beating" the capitalist patriarchy and building a system where all of us share both the wealth and the workload.

Luckily, there are plenty of women around who are doing exactly that. I suppose that such women have always existed, particularly in 3rd World communities and in the lower-than-middle classes, in numbers the history books and newspapers don't begin to reflect. It would be a difficult thing to "prove," of course (in the "factual," "logical" way white men tend to prove things) for often the records have been "lost," destroyed or stolen, and some things, for safety's sake, I'm sure, were never written down. There are stories, though, passed down for generations, and these I'm inclined to believe. Also, I've been lucky enough to see some of these women in action. The modern ones, I mean, whose struggles are going on right now. Nearly always they have been 3rd World women and/or women from the working and (so-called) lower classes.

Take the Bronx Household Technicians, for example, whose demands include "respect for our work, as paid and unpaid workers" as well as other "benefits that *all* workers deserve." They go on to explain that "respect for the work of household workers, *Women's* work, the product of our hands, minds and hearts, means respect for all working women." Consider the women in heavy industry battling against unsafe working conditions. Or the women who have fought for the right to work as carpenters, as electricians, as construction workers or on the docks, demanding equal access to union jobs and equal pay for equal work. Take New York City homecare workers who have been fighting the city bureaucracy for years to win the simple right to organize against attrocious working conditons and hideously low wages. Or women from rural Pennsylvania mining towns demanding the economic benefits their orphaned kids

deserve—and winning!—while New York City welfare mothers wage a similar battle on another front. These women are winning victories that all of us are eventually going to profit by. They deserve our respect, our solidarity, and whatever support we can possibly give them for Lesbian or straight they are fighting our battles as well as their own. Lesbian oppression, I believe, grows out of women's oppression, and we as Lesbians will not be free until all women are.

Whether or not most white Lesbians are willing to admit it, we also have common cause with oppressed people internationally, not because we are similarly oppressed (I think it's clear that we're not) but because we have a common enemy. Everyone who fights capitalist imperialism—man, woman or child—is helping to break our chains too. White Lesbians must begin to realize that throughout the world, 3rd World people are fighting our battles for us while, in a great many cases, we sit back in relative comfort, complaining about our oppression. Throughout history, we have benefitted from the struggles and the vision and the culture of 3rd World people. Even the present-day middle class white "women's movement," such as it is, owes its very existence to the Black Liberation Movement of the 60s. Today, through their active participation in national liberation struggles, women throughout the 3rd World are laying the cornerstone for women's full social and economic participation in society. Consider the women of Vietnam, Cuba, Chile, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Puerto Rico and Zimbabwe, as well as 3rd World freedom fighters here inside the belly of the monster. The victories these women are winning will benefit us well. If now, in the heat of battle, we give less than our fullest committed support to those on the front line of revolution, we do not deserve the rights and respect we are demanding.

The illusion that we can escape individually (or even in small groups) is a myth we can no longer afford to believe if we really do mean to build a culture separate from the white supremist capitalist patriarchy, for none of us will truly be free from it til all of us are, and that will never happen until that system itself is dead. Then and only then will true Lesbian separatism even be

possible; then and only then will we be able to determine if it's necessary.

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DEAR CHRYSALIS

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

I was dismayed by Carol Fox Schmucker's analysis of *Gone With the Wind*. I also grew up in the South, in a small central Alabama town that boasted of being the "Heart of the Heart of Dixie." I also sat up all night reading my mother's copy of Margaret Mitchell's novel, and was fascinated by Scarlett. And, like my mother and Mitchell, I lived in a white South that publicly and privately revered the white men who had rebelled a hundred years previously in the name of individual and states' rights and who yet refused to grant these rights to blacks and women. In my segregated high school in the late 1950's, we continued the hero worship of these men, every year writing papers on them for the United Daughters of the Confederacy essay contest. Some of us looked for heroines also—one of my essays was "Heroines of the Confederacy"—and Mitchell offered us one in Scarlett, who as Schmucker notes, did show "the unconquerable spirit of a woman." But I do not think she was a heroine to me because she showed the strength and power women can manifest in their lives even under oppressive conditions," as Schmucker maintains. I had no notion then that a class of people, women or blacks, could be oppressed within a culture, and *GWTW* did not aid me in developing such a concept. I was enthralled by *GWTW* because the novel offered the possibility of the South risen again, from the defeat of The War, from economic and cultural disaster; it offered a chance that the rebel, as Scarlett, might win this time. I, and surely many other Southern white women, got to participate through Scarlett in the Great Rebellion and in the rebellion of one woman against some minor social strictures. We were able to participate vicariously and comfortably in her rebellion because Scarlett broke no major taboos of her culture, of Mitchell's culture, of my mother's culture, or of mine: she, above all, did not break the racial taboo. For me to read *GWTW* as a Southern white woman was to enjoy the pleasure of revolt without having to consider what actual rebellion against social taboos, against the racial taboo, would be in my life.

When the movie *Gone With The Wind* came to my hometown every four years during my girlhood, I would go down to the Ritz, stare at the posters where Vivien swooned against Clark in vivid tempera colors, pay my 25 cents and go into the theater through the swinging door to the left of the ticket booth. To the right of the booth was another door; it led up steep stairs to the balcony where the black people of the town sat when they came down to the Ritz. Schmucker's failure to discuss forthrightly the racism in *GWTW* makes me think of that balcony. She cites comments from other sources (A. Rich, A.F. Scott) to prove that Southern white women had positive attitudes toward black women and men. She does not point out that in 1936, the year of *GWTW*'s publication, black women and men were *still being lynched*, both in the South and elsewhere (see *lynching* in the *New York Times Index 1900-1916*) and she does not point out that Mitchell reproduces the very excuses used by lynch mobs to justify their actions. In chapter 37, when Scarlett hears of the rise of Klan activity during Reconstruction and of the black man murdered by a white "gentleman" supposedly in defense of a white woman's honor, Scarlett is said to feel *for the first time* "a kinship with the people about her." As she sees the "tired helplessness" vanish from the face of the defeated white men to be replaced by "cold ruthless bitterness" and the "Old spirit . . . beginning to burn," she identifies with the determinations of *the men* that the South was "too dear a homeland to be turned over to ignorant negroes drunk with whiskey and freedom." Mitchell, in writing a "historical" romance that condones the worst actions of racism, actions that continue at the very time of her writing, evades a struggle with a significant moral issue. She, like her heroine Scarlett, participates in, and agrees with, the immoral actions of white men.

Can we then discuss Mitchell, as Schmucker wants us to do, as the author of a "serious" piece of work? Some white women in the South in the 1930's opposed racist murder done "for" them. (See Lillian Smith's chapter on "The Women" in *Killers of the Dream*.) Margaret Mitchell did not do so. *GWTW* endorses acquiescence in women, not true rebellion or revolution, not true

transformative change. It particularly approves of white women accepting the worst manifestations of racism. To fail to see that *GWTW* offers us a heroine who is reactionary, not revolutionary, to fail to see in what way Mitchell's endorsement of racism may have actually increased or sustained the novel's appeal to white women readers, is to continue to accept this racism and a Southern (and national) culture that promotes hatred, fear, and contempt for women and blacks.

If we are to read *GWTW* nowadays, we should read it with the knowledge of the white terrorism that reigned in this country from the 1890's through the 1930's (and again in the 1960's), with the knowledge that Klan activity is rising today and that incidents are reported from California to Colorado to New Jersey (UPI, 10/21/79), with the knowledge that white men at West Point have dressed up in Klan regalia and harassed black students "for a joke" (AP, 11/79), that the Klan runs a summer camp for white children in Decatur, Alabama (and doubtless elsewhere) where white boys and girls are given lessons in white supremacy and target shooting (WBRC, Birmingham). If we read *GWTW* now, we should consider that last fall people participating in an anti-Klan rally in Greensboro, North Carolina, were gunned down by Klan men and five of them, four white men and one black woman were killed (AP, 11/6/79). A woman who was married to one of the killers said, "I knew he was in the Klan, but I don't know what he did when he left home." If we are white women, we must ask what's going on outside our "home," outside our accustomed, familiar view. To analyze *GWTW* as if the attitudes toward blacks and women that are expressed in it no longer exist in the South or this country is to evade moral responsibility, as Mitchell did.

Many women are working anew at unity with other women across racial lines. It is not useful for us in this struggle to understate the reality of woman-hating and black-hating that we have been raised with, the attitudes that Mitchell expresses through Scarlett in *GWTW*. What is useful is to rebel against the presence of those hatred in our lives and to work for change.

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THE CLASS AND THE CLOSET

By Carol Seajay

She didn't know why these thoughts preoccupied her but they did. She kept coming back to them. Kept thinking about Class and about living in The Closet.

It wasn't as if they were issues in her life, consciousness drawn to them by some event or sequence of interactions. Her life was generously filled elsewhere. Filled with work that was as satisfying as it was demanding, constantly redefining itself as it did. Filled with the new housemate as they created patterns of living together and with the old, remaining housemate who had become a best friend over the many months of living together. Filled with friends who were not lovers except occasionally for a night. ("Which is not the same thing at all!" she would tell herself.) No, this was a time of work and friends. A time to find out more clearly (again) who she was.

Or maybe she was thinking about Class and Closet as a way to distract her attention from her lack of lover. She had, after all, known herself to pull some pretty outrageous numbers to distract herself from that reality in the past. But no, she would decide each time this thought occured to her, she went to outrageous numbers, not to political meditations. But what *did* Class and Closet have to do with each other?

She didn't suppose she had much more class than lovers when she looked at it that way. She had left her family early on while still in high school and had supported herself through college so she didn't feel that she had much of her family's class in her, having left them so young and all. And just as she had begun working "professionally" and establishing her own class standing she had dropped out and had become a movement worker (albeit feminist) and did shit-jobs to support her real work or worked

movement jobs for shit pay. So what kind of class standing do they give to revolutionaries and movement workers? Not much. And she hadn't lived in The Closet for years. Budding feminism and gay liberation had opened those doors eight years ago. Then she left the whole contraption behind her when she moved west to The Dyke Capital Of The World.

So why was she thinking about Class and Closet all the time? Like lovers, were they something to be mused over when she didn't have one? But she *wanted* to be lover-free and was not preoccupied with past ones nor future fantasy ones, either, whereas she didn't mind thinking about Class and Closet so she rejected that thought. And she *was* preoccupied with thoughts about Class and memories of Closet. Not constantly, but they just kept coming up, somehow. Just kept popping into her head at odd moments.

But sometimes she just sat and laughed when she found herself thinking about class. "Now class, honey, is something you just ain't got," she would jive herself. "I mean, like cool, girl, you just weren't there when they passed it out, You've done missed that boat altogether!" And it was true. She had. She'd look down at her pass-me-on jeans and her second-hand store shirts. She knew what Suave and Sophisticated were and knew that she was neither. She couldn't even pull off Dyke-Dressed much less Well Dressed Lesbian, politically incorrect as that was. And it wasn't even a matter of money. Other dykes pulled it off on the same income that she had. Not that she hadn't managed to "pass" in her closet days. Not with pizazz of course, but who wanted to? What lesbian wanted the attention that being a good looking straight woman brought down on you? She certainly didn't, but she had to admit that she just didn't have the class to do it.

Or maybe she did. Actually, she did when she got right down to it. She remembered her last years in high school. The color coordinated skirts and sweaters she had loved so much. New feminist friends in San Francisco had given her a hard time about them when she first moved out there. They said that she looked too middle class in her still coordinated clothes (pants now, instead of skirts, of course) and refused to sit next to her in political meetings. And she remembered the ranch style house, two car garage and big yard that she'd left. Then she had to admit that she really was middle class. Even in her present life she was acting like a good middle class girl working off her guilt doing movement work. "Ah, well," she comforted herself, "guilt or no, I'm doing good work."

Now The Closet was something else. She *knew* she'd lived in The Closet. How and when it began and every painful minute of it. It began at fifteen, just thinking about women. And at sixteen, falling in love with her best friend and keeping it a secret right under their parents' noses. It began in the school lunchroom the day Cindy B. came screaming down the hall saying that she had just called Jem a QUEER, and he'd gotten real mad. So Steve told her what "queer" really meant and she hadn't meant anything like THAT! Sitting there (queerly) silent, praying no one would notice her red face, her nothing-to-say. *That* was the beginning of The Closet in earnest.

Closeting grew in complexity at seventeen when she moved into a lesbian household as a boarder and into her first gay community, right there in her old home-town. Before she had found that gay community she had thought that she could just be herself, by herself. But when her equally young lover left her saying she wasn't strong enough to be a lesbian all her life, she knew she needed the gay community for support. She tried to talk about all this with her friends, now, but she always ended up telling stories—stores of how it was BF* which was a lot different than talking about it. Her friends had all come out with the women's movement. Hadn't played roles, butch/femme, seduced/seducer. They were all righteously "out" to their parents. Things were different now, they told her. And she, too, was clearly Different. But she could still have a good time and was a good friend and tried to live as a good feminist, too.

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*Before Feminism.

But sometimes it wasn't so simple as all that and she was just lonely. Alone. Unlike any of her friends. Thinking about Class and Closet in those times didn't help, either. Though sometimes she knew that she was lonely for someone to speak Closet-ese with. And she knew that the best affair she'd had in years was with a woman who had lived in the closet, too. She had thought that they spoke a common language when, in fact, they were just seducing each other in the Old Tradition. But they'd had a wonderful time of it and she'd felt more alive than she had in years.

Class would pop into her head at odd moments. Like when this psychic was telling her about this fight her parents had when she was seven or eight. Her mother was saying to her father "I don't know how you expect me to feed these kids, even. Much less clothe them. I slept with you, I married you, I bore your children, I've done my part. Now you get out there and do yours. Earn us some decent money!" The psychic said that's where her stomach problems came from, her fears about food. But her own mind flashed: "This is a class fight. My mother is telling my father that he has to get a better job. A middle class job. One with more money and a Future." Then all week long little memories popped into her head to hassle her: Her father HAD a new job soon after. Then all of the sudden she'd had eight appointments worth of dental work done when she'd never even been to the dentist before. Worse, crashing in came the memories of her mother's sicknes, her achy tiredness. It had gone on for years, then suddenly (at almost exactly the same time as the new job), her mother was well. She remembered her mother's trip to the doctor that very hot summer, the scariness of it. Her diagnosis of "anemia". What a difference that white powder in her mother's orange juice at breakfast and liver for lunch had made! Then, like a thunderclap, like a noise she couldn't bear to hear, came the realization that the next child born after her own self must have been conceived within months of that white powder appearing at breakfast, that her mother had been too SICK, too

dehabilitated for lack of an office call, a few blood tests and a little liver to conceive. For nine years. She refused to believe it, then finally remembering her mother saying that she had never used any kind of birth control until the sixties. Then she remembered that her older brother's tonsils had been removed in that same year he had stopped missing so much school and started doing better. Shivers rattled her spine the day she heard herself giving her own standard rap decrying the injustices of the patriarchial/capitalist system that denied health care to the poor and realized she was talking about her own family and herself as a child. And yes, the second car, the lot in the country where her parents had built their house had all come later, in the following years when her father had settled down and "flown right" as her grandmother used to say. Those years, the ones *after* had been middle class years. The ones before were not.

Then she felt nauseated for a while. For weeks. She didn't like remembering these things. Even equipped with a class analysis as she was, finding her own pain, her family's poverty, their many lies pushed into silence, into guilt and shame that would not be articulated. But it was true. It was all true. And wondering about class, she wondered, if middle-class had come to her family when she was in high school, just a couple years before she left them, what kind of class *did* that make her.

Memories continued to flash on her, though she might have stopped them if she could. She remembered the school she attended until fourth grade. How fine and tough they all were. For three years the basic playground game was "war". That and kickball. Your side against my side. Boys against girls. Westside against eastside. The teams didn't matter, just the fighting. Then the school board had redrawn the school boundaries to separate the black kids and the white kids and she had to go to the rich-kids school. It was further away from home and the other kids made fun of the kids from her school. They were called "tough-kids" and "dirty kids" and "trash". After the first few girls' mothers wouldn't let them go home with her to play after school, she had quit asking. Reading was harder at the new

school. So was everything. They had a class called "phonics" at the new school and she didn't know how to do it at all. The new teacher called her a liar when she said they didn't have phonics at the old school. There it was enough that she had learned to read. Here she was just dumb.

But she had recouped herself. Learned phonics enough to get B's where before she had always gotten A's easily. She figured out that you had to have a boyfriend in this school, so she chose and won the cutest, most popular boy in the class, even though she had to share him with the cutest, most popular girl. She didn't know until later that what she had done ensured her a certain status. She remembered pushing away the boy from the old school that had genuinely liked her, who was at the least interesting to talk to, just because he was from the old school. That year her mother had started buying her store-bought clothes and that made a difference, too.

Innocent afternoons turned into profound realizations. Feeling loose and free riding home from a day in the country with an ex-lover turned friend she heard herself jive: "You just drive on and turn when you get a mind to and we'll get there all the same." She wouldn't have noticed how she said it but she felt her friend stiffen beside her and look over at her out of the corner of her eye. One of the rules of their relationship was that there be no such clowning: no slipping into dialects or roles or characters. Her rules. Those kinds of things had always left her uptight. She didn't know why, but they did, and here she was breaking her own rules. "It's OK," she told her friend. "This is my dialect," she added lightly.

Then her heart sank. She flashed on Uncle Dale riding her on his lap on the big tractor. All her aunts. Nameless faces. Sunday afternoons of the farm where her grandpa grew up. Other relations. Aunts and cousins. All her mother's relatives. What had happened to them?

"Don't you talk like that, Carol-Jean." Her mother's voice broke in. When had her mother used her middle name? When had she stopped?

Thoughts, ideas. People tumbled in her head so quickly she could hardly touch them. Memories. She was a litle girl. Four. Five. Six years old.

Seven. Why didn't they go see Uncle Ken and Aunt Vivian any more? Why couldn't she play with her cousin Sherry anymore? Eight. "You know better than that Carol. Your mother raised you better than that." Her mother's best friend had said angrily. What had she done wrong. Her mind exploding, her stomach sinking—she knew after all these years. It was language. It was her words. She had talked wrong. "Don't you talk like that Carol Jean" meant "Don't talk like the relatives." It meant "Don't you talk like we used to talk." They had stopped seeing the relatives at the same time her mother started pushing her dad for a better job. It was a part of this whole upward mobility thing. Her mother had just up and left her whole family behind.

The pieces started to settle. That was why she was so afraid of languages, of dialects, even theater and films—because the language—the language she had first learned to speak, was "wrong." She had learned to talk, and then without anyone even saying what was going on they made her unlearn her first language and learn a different one and speak that second language only. By the time she was ten they had cut her off from everyone she had ever known who spoke her first language.

She couldn't decide whether to ask her friend to stop the car so she could throw up or if she wanted to keep it hidden inside herself. They were on the freeway now, so she just didn't say anything. The ride home was very quiet. Her friend made the right turns and they got home quickly if very quietly.

She mulled over this question of language for a long time after. She tried to remember what her first langauage had been like and couldn't. She tried to make it up but she kept coming up with black dialect. Sometimes it was from books and movies and sometimes it was from the black kids in her class when she

was seven and eight, from when she was learning how not to talk. She tried to find books where the characters spoke Michigan Dirtfarm and couldn't find them.* She found that not having the language and words of those years of her life made her real life harder to recall.

She saw that by the time she was nine she had learned to "pass" for the next higher class. Had learned to lie, in some way, and to choose her friends accordingly and that she never even knew that she was doing it. And she felt very scared. Frightened, as if she didn't know who she was, or who she had been, or who she might have been if she hadn't learned to be something else. If she hadn't started lying. Why had she started lying? This passing? she asked herself. And herself answered: To survive. She felt queasy on and off for months this time. Finally she remembered the next year of her life, and the year after that when her family moved into the partly-finished house in the country and she went to the little country school where none of the things that she had learned in the fourth grade mattered anymore. She had a chance to find herself again. She remembered that and didn't feel quite so sick so often. But sometimes she thought about all the other girls who had learned to pass and never moved to a country school and unlearned it and she'd feel sick again.

She thought all this and reflected that in many ways passing for middle class was a lot like passing for straight. Saw that the ease with which she had moved into the gay life came from already knowing how to "pass" in another situation. That in both cases she had learned to "pass" to survive. That lying was essential to passing, though when she was passing for Class she had lied to herself to survive. To pass for straight, to Closet, she "only" had to lie to straight people. She could speak true with her own gay community once she had found them and herself.

*until November 1979 when she found out that the dialect used in *Patience and Sarah* (Isabel Miller/Alma Routsong, Fawcett) really IS Michigan Dirtfarm!

She realized that by the time she had to, or could (which? she wondered) pass for middle class again, she was already so busy passing for straight that passing for middle class was just pulling an old trick out of the hat and she hadn't even much noticed that she was doing it.

"At least with The Closet," she thought to herself, "You get to keep your own self intact even if you have to cover it up with lies sometimes." That made Closet easier to remember than Class. The only thing she could find to read about passing was a novel* by a black woman about passing for white. She remembered that they had been witty and outrageous and sometimes daring in their Closet keeping. She remembered the deal she had with one of the gay fellows, an elementary school teacher: He went with her to office parties and she passed as his all-but-live-in girlfriend for his fellow teachers. One night they were entertaining one of his co-teachers and his wife for dinner and she had excused herself and walked into the coat closet instead of the bathroom (the doors being right next to each other and she NOT being very familiar with the house and all) and had had to stand in the closet for the presumed period of time, then extricate herself and return to the table, bladder bursting. Jim sitting there choking back his laughter for the rest of the meal. She hardly dared look at him for fear she crack up and pee her pants. She hooted just to think about it now! What a story that had been to tell in the gay crowd! Everyone had such stories, one topping the other until they had a whole foklore and humor, too, to sustain themselves. My but they were eloquent there on the thin edge of survival! Eloquent in their lies. In the way they ridiculed the fooled! Life in this day and age was dull by comparison.

"The trouble with the closet," she thought, not being able to remember when these thoughts began coming to her, having no conversations to tie them to, having read no books that sparked her thinking on this question, "is that you never knew where the edges were. Never knew how much *not* to say." It was pretty clear that she had had to lie to everyone at her data processing job. But had she really had to Closet to everyone at the univer-

*Passing, Nella Larson. Macmillan

sity? Might it not have been OK with some of her more liberal professors if she had been "out" to them, then, there in the midwest at the end of the sixties? What would they have done if they had known that she and her "housemate" were lovers? Had they figured it out for themselves? If they had known, *would* it have cost her lover her graduate's assistantship? Both of them their careers? She would never know. The only way you even knew was if you didn't closet well enough. Then it all blew up in your face.

At nineteen she had witnessed the painful results of not closeting well enough. A friend, a high school counselor had not been careful enough. Had been reported to the school authorities as a suspected lesbian, setting off a lesbian witch hunt in that tiny rural school district that had cost three lesbians their jobs and their teaching credentials. The gym teacher she didn't know and never knew what happened to her. The librarian, a Quaker and once her girl scout leader, fought the charges and got her record changed to read: "misappropriation of school funds " (meaning theft) and "Not recommended for rehire in public schools." After two years of searching she found another job in a big city public library and moved away. The counselor committed suicide a few years later. One never knew how just one slip-up would turn out. Never knew until it was too late, if you were going too far. So she had learned to lie all the time. To keep her fronts up, her lies intact and consistent and to always juggle her real life and her covers.

And then there was the danger. The overt physical danger. She and her lover hadn't closeted well enough one summer afternoon. Had forgotten to pull a shade when they were rough-housing, tickling, kissing on their bed. Not too many clothes on, she remembered. One of them had happened to look up and see the man across the street looking into their window with binoculars. That wouldn't have been too bad—they had thought themselves liberated by then and didn't much care what anyone thought—but the next day his little boy came over while she was watering her window boxes. He said, "How's your flowers growing, lesbian?" and "My daddy's cleaning his shot-gun on

you." Not such an idle threat. There'd been one stabbing come out of that house already that summer. A gay boy had just been beaten to death in a neighboring town, just for being seen holding hands on the street with another boy. She wasn't saying, but maybe the whole episode had something to do with her moving to California a few months later.

So it was that she had learned her lessons well—had learned to lie with apparent spontaneity, to duck and dodge, to be evasive. She had learned to be exquisite in her closet-keeping—an art form and survival skill no less important than milking cows, spinning wool or putting food by were to other women in other times. She had learned to live with the closet's constant tension in her body and her soul and only now wondered if it would follow her—haunt her—for the rest of her life.

Would she *always* find herself with a lie/and evasion/a dodge about her lesbianism, her lovers, her *real* life, ready on the tip of her tongue? Perhaps not always. But it still happened under stress. The stories and the evasions just popped out, as if through no control of her own. Sometimes it took months to clean up the damages. And when her mother called, those times when she summoned up all of her courage and said, "Well, Carol, how's your life?" the habit of silence was too long and even these years later she always found nothing to say.

She had been thinking about the last time her mother had asked how she was and she hadn't been able to answer. She *wanted* to answer (she thought) so she started practicing things to say—honest things like "I'm very happy." or "I'm in a hard place." or "Sherry (Mary, Katherine, Patty or whoever) and I are just coming to an understanding." or "Our relationship is this...and it contents me." Underneath it all she was thinking "I've been out to her for five years—why is it still so hard!?" She fell to musing over the time when she had come out to her folks. It was her first year in San Francisco. Those times had been such bright times, full of richness and promise. She had felt so free to be lesbian here in this big city twenty-one hundred miles away from everyone she had ever had to closet to. It seemed the adventure of her life

to explore this big lesbian community. It was such a year—! It seemed as if all of San Francisco was exploring the connections between lesbianism and socialism and feminism. The study groups kept her high for months—interweaving lesbian tenderness with a philosophy that would end everyone's oppression—poor people and black people *and* women and even gay people's oppressions, if they were careful enough with it. And the oppression of these Asian people she was just beginning to meet. And the Chicanas and solve problems all around the world.... All this interwoven with the tenets of feminism as well....

In the midst of all that she had come out to her parents, *quick*, before she became a flaming revolutionary and they'd have to deal with that too!" She got to laughing, fondly remembering that year. She saw that she'd left her closet and her middle-classness behind in the same year. Or left them behind as much as one could. Hindsight is pretty funny—that year she had so stridently left her middle class ideals and identity behind was pretty funny because all through that year she had truly believed that she was totally middle class.

Once she had seen that she had left her "class" (middle) and her closet behind at the same time, she began to see how intermeshed Class and Closet had been for her all those years.

One of the first things her first gay community had taught her was that she was going to have to fend for herself all her life. The boys were especially adamant. "Girl, there ain't gonna be no sugar-mamas for you in your life. Daddy ain't gonna be there to pick up the pieces, neither. You might just as well get used to taking care of your self right now! You better start making plans right away!" David had told her time and again. She had always taken herself seriously, so then, instead of just "deciding to go to college" she began to plan for a career. College first—and then... The way to take care of herself was to get a good middle class job—sick leave, retirement, vacations and all. She opted for university teaching, trusting that she could closet well enough to get tenure and trusting that the "liberal nature" of the university community would make her life a little easier.

Her new gay community was as middle-class as her mother. Not totally middle class by a long shot but everyone knew, just as her mother did, that the people with the middle class jobs were the "lucky" ones. They had more security, seemed to closet easier. Had easier lives. It was something you envied if you didn't have, so she studied hard, learned to closet and worked towards getting it for herself.

It meant working nights in the data processing factory and going to school days. Always being too tired and not getting good enough grades and trying to carry-on with her lover(s) in between.

There was always some temptation—to just haul off on Friday night and sneak into the bar. To spend carefully hoarded tuition money on a cocktail dress or whatever, because someone was having a *dress* Christmas party and she needed desperately to go—to touch and dance (and to cut loose and be outrageous) and be with the women and men who were all week as silent and well behaved as she had been. To dance cheek to cheek with her lover if she had one and to dance sexy and "nasty" with the women if she didn't.

Dress parties or dinners. Drinks or Pizza or recreation room parties. Always the need to be "with" her own people, even when she didn't go out for months at a time for the work and the need to study. For the money it took, the time and the conflicts. Partying late with people she didn't necessarily even like. "One thing about the gay life," her friend M. would say, "is that it cuts across all the race and class lines, for better or worse." And A., M's lover, would hiss: "For worse."

Sometimes she couldn't decide who she liked less or disliked more—the careful almost prissy "professional" women or the tough macho energy she kept running into in the bar. The ones who always said they had their jobs to think of were basically boring. They had no sense of adventure in their carefully planned lives, carefully bought houses (blinds carefully drawn against

their straight neighbors), carefully *discrete* love affairs. She didn't think she could always be so careful. Besides, they were always drinking (or drunk) because they couldn't stand it either. And she just couldn't drink very well. She had the same problem (not drinking so well) in the bar. There she had to deal with a ready emotion, almost like an intense drama to fill the boredom, that erupted into fist fights and passionate love affairs. She ran from her first fist fight and didn't talk about it for seven years. How to go to work with a black eye? To school? The other problem, and more serious one was outside the bar: always having to park far enough away from the bar so that the local boys-in-blue didn't take down her license plate number with the rest of the regulars then having to negotiate the distance between the bar door and her car without being followed or beat up or raped or whatever were the horrors outside the bar doors. There weren't many 'incidents' outside her bar, but still she worried. She couldn't ask someone to walk her to her car partly because it would look like a proposition but mostly because she was too ashamed to let anyone know she was afraid to park in the bar parking lot. And *that* got in the way when she *wanted* to proposition someone. ("My car or yours?" "Well, mine's two blocks away?" "What for?" end of proposition.) It wasn't a matter of who she liked, but a matter of safety. Where would she NOT get busted, beat-up, found out? She knew that class was integrally connected with survival (her mother had taught her that) and that as a lesbian she already had two strikes against her. To be "caught out" being queer was, if nothing else, a lot less violent in the middle class than it was elsewhere.

So the decision to be middle class was no decision at all. It was a survival tactic. Being carefully middle class was a part of closeting for survival. Being "nice" to "pass" because the roles were a little looser (it appeared) in Middle Class America and a woman attracted less notice working in a "nice" profession than being independent in a working class world. Class and Closet had come to her hand in hand, literally, one feeding the other. Then she tried to put them down together that first year in San Francisco—oh that politically correct and liberating year—only to

find that she wasn't as middle class as she had thought and that the closet was within her (instead of her in the closet) and finally to see that almost everyone she knew was still closeted in some way (to their grandmother or Aunt Mary) if not to their boss or the postman or just the teenaged boys on the bus.

So no wonder she kept thinking about "Class" and "Closet" as if they were connected. As if they were passions that would fill her when she had no lover. No wonder she was thinking about them both now, in the time when she was trying to find out more clearly (again) who she was. As if these ideas had something to do with the basis and foundation of her life—for they did.

So then she thought about Class and Closet and feminism and class consciousness and how neither feminism nor class consciousness had ever talked to her about this connection between Class and Closet. She thought about survival and the very high costs of survival in patriarchy and thought about the silence that had always surrounded consciousness of class in the closet and knew it would never be quite so pervasively quiet in her life again —because she had a *lot* to say.

Carol Seajay, "I'm a white mid-westerner. I co-founded Old Wives' Tales bookstore in San Francisco and edit The Feminist Bookstores' Newsletter. In between the two, I try to find the time to write! I'm caught in a bind between hungering for the country and needing the connections/stimulation I get working in a big city's feminists bookstore. Chicken Lady (OOB) is my literary heroine."

RACISM IN THE PRISON SYSTEM

By Through The Looking Glass

Through The Looking Glass (TTLG) is a collective of fifteen women from a wide range of ethnic and class backgrounds. Currently one of us is Black; the rest of us are white. Most of us are lesbians. In addition to doing jail and prison support work, we publish a newsletter each month for and about incarcerated women and youth. The main purpose of the newsletter is to provide and encourage a radical analysis of different forms of incarceration. It also provides space for women and youth inside to communicate with the outside and tries to break the isolation of women and youth in prison. We feel it is important to take direction and input from women and youth on the inside.

Racism pervades all the issues we encounter in our prison and jail support work, in the news we get from prisoners and in our group discussions. This article, orignially written to introduce a special *TTLG* issue on racism, is important to the women's and lesbian communities in that we must be aware of the issues that arise for women in prison and in doing the outside support work. Racism, in particular, is accentuated in prison and needs to be understood in the larger context of our society as a whole. We also need to understand that women inside and out are not so different as the system would like us to believe—women in prison are a part of our community.

"When we look historically at the prison and the composition of the prison, we see it as a product of the colonial policies of white dominant societies in relationship . . . to [people of color], and this colonial policy, historically and contemporarily, has attempted to destroy or change the cultural values of these groups . . ."

This analysis of racism and colonialism in the U.S. was made by a sociologist from the University of Nebraska in an attempt to remove a racist white man from the Nebraska parole board. As

he points out the result of this colonialism is the genocide of many peoples of color—prison is one tool of this colonialism.

COLONIALISM*

The domination and exploitation of a people by a foreign power through control of all economic, political and cultural aspects of that people's life for the sake of profit.

**definition by African Peoples Socialist Party*

In this article we want to make connections between colonialism, institutional racism, and personal racism. Colonialism is the domination and exploitation of a people by a foreign power through control of all economic, political, and cultural aspects of that people's life for the sake of profit. Colonialism is maintained by institutional racism, the racism that is built into every institution (government, education, the criminal justice system, etc.) in order to survive or to get power within the institution and consequently within the society.

An example of a colonized people in North America is the Black/African people, taken from their homeland for the economic and political benefit of the white U.S. government. In continuing its colonization of Blacks/Africans, the U.S. government has: disproportionately drafted Blacks; locked up Blacks more frequently; forced Black people into the worst jobs and the worst housing. When the U.S. government has no use for Blacks in the work force, or when Black communities appear to be growing stronger, the government aggresses, using its police and the U.S. criminal justice system. Other colonized people within U.S. borders are Mexicanos and people of all Red Nations, people of Asian heritage, and people of the Pacific Islands, Puerto Rico and the Phillipines.

People of color in the U.S. are arrested more often, convicted more often, sentenced to longer terms, and returned to jail more often than white people. Clear examples of this can be seen in the following facts: all states incarcerate Blacks at least three times more than they incarcerate whites; thirteen states incarcerate Blacks ten times more than they incarcerate whites; two-thirds of

the women at the federal prison at Alderson, West Virginia are Black.

Once people of color are on the inside, institutional racism is apparent when inmates of color get written up (for breaking the rules) more than white inmates; when white inmates get paroled sooner than inmates of color; when white inmates get prison jobs or favors or get into training programs before inmates of color; and when capital punishment is used on *far* more people of color that it is on white people. Another blatant example of institutional racism is the support prison guards have been getting from prison administrations and the courts for openly being members of the KKK.

1. From a population that was about 15% non-white, 46.5% of prison inmates in the U.S. were non-white. (1978)
2. At Purdy Women's Prison in Washington State, 57% of the inmates are white, 32% are Black, 4% are Native American, 2% are Mexican-American, none are Asian, and 5% are "other". Six percent of the state's population are people of color.
3. In Florida State the percentage of Black women in prisons increased from 65% to 90% within one year (1979–1980).
4. At the Nebraska State Penitentiary (1972–1973) 60.7% of Caucasian prisoners who were eligible for discretionary parole received parole, while 39.3% of Indian prisoners who were eligible received parole, and 29.4% of Mexican American prisoners who were eligible received parole.
5. With respect to males in prison between the ages of 18 and 34, we find one white male prisoner for every 153.6 males outside, but 1 non-white male in prison for every 22.4 non-whites on the street. (1978)
6. There are four times more police patrolling Black communities than white communities.
7. Fifty-eight percent of people on death row are Black.
8. One of four Black men goes to prison in his life.
9. Thirty eight of the forty people gunned down last year by the Los Angeles police were Blacks.

10. The average rate of release-by-parole at Nebraska Penitentiary (1973–74) was over 40% greater for non-Indian prisoners than for Indian prisoners in the same crime category.
11. It is projected that of the perspective prisoners (all male youth) to be housed at the new Olympic Prison, 60%–75% will be people of color.

NOTE: The words referring to peoples' races in the above quotes are taken directly from the literature.

Racism is not the only tool that the prison administration uses to keep people down. All people inside know the threat of violence, of isolation, and of deprivation of "privileges". Everyone gets written up for breaking rules they never knew about. Prison officials deny all women inmates training for any useable or money making job. All women inmates are treated as if they are incapable of decision making or taking responsibility. That's sexism.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

The racism that is built into an institution (e.g., schools, workplace, media, criminal justice system) in order to systematically make it difficult for people of color to survive or to get power within the institution, and consequently within the society.

Another way that people in power, whether it is the government or the prison staff, keep their power is by keeping control over poor and working class people of all colors. Most people inside are poor, working class and people of color. It's no accident. After people are locked up, the continued classism, racism and sexism of the prison staff, the warden, and the parole board attempt to keep inmates separate, distrusting of each other and powerless.

Although this institutional racism is built into the prison structure, the prison administration and staff take it further. One way they do this is to try to manipulate women inside on a racial basis.

For example, women of color may struggle for the formation of separate groups or clubs. Then the administration proceeds to either promote it to the extent that white women feel resentful or they punish women of color because of their participation in those groups (more time in the hole or more infractions).

The staff may also individually discriminate against women of color by giving an infraction (a mark against you that can affect your "privileges", relative freedom within the prison or chance of parole) to a woman of color and then letting a white woman off for the same thing. This can pit the two women against each other. It works even better for the staff, of course, when women come to prison with the racism we're taught on the outside. The prison will use this "personal racism" to produce or ensure more divisiveness among the women.

In the *TTLG* slide show on Women in Prison, there is a quote by a woman inmate about why prison food is so bad (as told to her by a kitchen staff member). The staff said "What would you do with 500 energetic and healthy women...?" Well, racism is like bad food—what would the prison do with 500 women who were strong and united?

We all learn racism from day one and as we grow older we may or may not unlearn it. Personal racism is, in part, based on the belief that your culture/race is better than others and that others are inferior in some way. It is important to recognize that the roots of racism in whites and in people of color are quite different. White racism is an integral part of the very fabric of the U.S. It reflects white supremacist values, which are tools of colonialism in this country. That is, white supremacist attitudes help maintain white control, and so, the domination over people of color. Whereas, racism in communities of Chicanos, Jewish people, Blacks, Asian Americans, Native Americans and other peoples of color arises in part as a *response* to their cultural genocide. This, in turn, needs to be distinguished from ethnic pride which *affirms* a person's culture/race. Ethnic pride strengthens *all* of us while racism is used in destructive and divisive ways. (We

PERSONAL RACISM
Taking on and/or acting upon racist values and attitudes.

see this explanation as only one aspect of personal racism. We do not intend the above to be a complete analysis. It is more complex than we're able to present in this article.)

Fighting racism (in all its forms) is an essential part of prison support work. While doing this work, we need to be sensitive to the vulnerable position of women inside. To strike back at the very people who control your entire physical and mental health risks all you have. Women outside must have an understanding of the situation inside prisons, so that we—inside and out—can work most effectively together in this struggle.

Fighting the exploitation of people of color is twofold: 1) changing our personal racism, such as the ways we relate to people of races/cultures other than our own and 2) fighting against the racism and colonialism of the U.S. government and society as a whole. White people in particular must actively support and work with people of color in the struggle against racism and colonialism, whether or not whites identify with the U.S. government or the white dominant culture. Putting an end to racism and colonialism in this world is in the self interest of all progressive peoples.

THE UNITED NATIONS DEFINITION OF GENOCIDE

A. Killing members of the group;
B. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to the group;
C. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
D. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
E. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

DEFINITIONS

Individual vs. Institutional Racism

Racism is overt and covert. It takes two, closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual blacks, and acts by the total white community against the black community. This is individual racism and institutional racism. The first consists of overt acts by individuals, which cause death, injury or the destruction of property. This type can be recorded by television cameras. The second type is less overt; it originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society.

When white terrorists bombed a black church and killed five black children in Alabama in 1967, that was an act of individual racism which was deplored by most people. However, when 500 black babies die each year because of lack of food, clothing, shelter and proper medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically and emotionally as well as intellectually because of poverty and discrimination in the black community, that is obviously a function of institutional racism.

Ethnocentrism

A tendency to view alien cultures with disfavor and a resulting sense of inherent superiority.

Cultural Racism

When whites use power to perpetuate their cultural heritage and impose it upon others, while at the same time destroying the culture of ethnic minorities.

Power + Ethnocentrism = Cultural Racism

Paternalistic Racism

Whites set standards to which all peoples are expected to conform. These standards perpetuate the assumption of white superiority.

These definitions were submitted by Tia Cross who said, "I don't know where these definitions originated—they've been handed on from politico to politico I guess."

Racist Society

Is one in which social policies, procedures, decisions, habits and acts subjugate a race of people and permit another race to maintain control over them. Any nation which permits race to affect those who benefit from social policies is racist.

Who is a Racist?

All white individuals in our society are racists. If by chance a white is free of all conscious racial prejudice she/he remains a racist as that person receives benefits distributed by a white racist society through its institutions. Our institutional and cultural processes are so arranged as to automatically benefit whites, just because they are white. **Whites must recognize that they receive most of these racist benefits automatically, unconsciously and unintentionally.**

Examples of Racism

Textbooks which teach: Columbus discovered America; Pioneers settled the West, and have a chapter on "The Negro Problem," "The Indian Problem," and never discuss "The White Problem."

Prejudice

Unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand without knowledge, thought or reason.

Racism

Any attitude, action or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of their color. Racism is not just a matter of attitudes: actions and institutional structures can also be a form of racism.

Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred or discrimination. **Racism involves having the power to carry out systematic discriminatory practices through the major institutions of our society.**

White Racism

Power + Prejudice = Racism.

In the U.S. at present, only whites can be racists, since whites dominate and control the institutions that create and enforce American cultural norms and values. Blacks and other Third World peoples do not have access to the power to enforce any prejudices they may have, so they cannot, by definition, be racists. Racism automatically refers to white racism, if we are referring to practices of major institutions and dominant societal patterns in this country today. White people are in the majority; consequently, government, business, industry, unions, churches, educational and other institutions are almost always dominated by white people. When you combine power with racial discriminations the result is racism.

Institutions

Are fairly stable social arrangements and practices through which collective actions are taken. (Example: schools, churches, courts, police, government, business.)

Institutional Racism

Institutions have the power to reward and penalize. Career opportunities are available to some and closed to others. They reward by the way social goods are distributed, deciding who receives training and skills, medical care, formal education, political influence, moral support and self-respect, productive employment, fair treatment by the law, decent housing, self-confidence and the promise of a secure future for self and children. The most obvious form of institutional racism is the exclusion of blacks from positions of control and leadership.

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compiled by Sara Bennett and Joan Gibbs

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We are currently working on a longer article on the oppression of lesbians and gay men and capitalism.

IV. The Withdrawal from Confrontation; The Rise of "Getting Yours" Feminism

As the movement grew from '72 into the mid-'70s, did it continue to attempt to address the survival needs of all women? Did it continue to challenge the institutions which controlled women's lives? Probably not as much as it had before.

Why? In this period, many politically conscious people, including some feminists, withdrew from confrontations with powerful institutions. The roots of this withdrawal are complicated, but here are some speculations. For one thing, a procapitalist "getting yours" lifestyle was beginning to surface among such people. Possibly these attitudes were fueled by the disappointment many radicals were experiencing after years of sacrifice in social-change movements. There, they had dreamed of their access to power and a total transformation of society. In this period, they started to realize that this transformation was light-years away, that the institutions they had been challenging were stronger than they'd thought. There was the Nixon repression against radicals—arrests, telephone tapes, infiltrations and, in the case of the Black movement, assassinations of leadership. The power of the state was only too evident. The anti-war movement sputtered out, the Black movement began to lose momentum. Demonstrations of all kinds diminished; sit-ins and takeovers became less common. Perhaps people who had been radicals began to feel it was time to focus on *themselves*. Perhaps they were tired; perhaps it was *safer*.

How did this "getting yours" withdrawal affect feminists? For one thing, women tired of confronting work establishments began to think about setting up their own. "Women's" businesses proliferated. (Liberation Enterprises, for instance, sold Wonder Woman T-shirts, stickers, and the like.) Most were small; some were collectives. But, as this withdrawal/style spread, larger, more procapitalist "women's" businesses were started. There was a women's bank, a feminist management consultants' firm. Most important, *Ms.* was founded. Corporate-backed, mass circulation, *Ms.* pushed what I can only call "getting yours" feminism:

self-developing yourself up the corporate ladder.[8] Previously, a woman's initial contact with the movement had most likely been through a grassroots publication; now *Ms.*' huge distribution insured that more women would be exposed to its brand of feminism first. Thousands of women, many of whom had never been politically active before, got their first taste of the movement through its pages. Many of them were sold on its "getting yours" feminism; the movement whose numbers they swelled reflected that fact. But, as numerous *Ms.* readers profiles—to attract advertisers—have proclaimed, these women were mostly middle-class to affluent. So, they were almost all white as well. Undoubtedly, *Ms.* "Getting yours" feminism alienated and perhaps angered many non-privileged women. Because such women have to fight so hard for daily economic survival, it's extremely difficult for them to bootstrap themselves up the business ladder.

But, *Ms.* has functioned during a period when worsening unemployment and massive cutbacks were falling with most force on poor women. So the question—what kind of assumptions about these women did *Ms.* display? is crucial. Did Ms. bring the "all women's interests are the same" line to its coverage of their lives? To answer these questions, I would like to refer to Ellen Willis' "The Conservatism of *Ms.*", which contains a thorough analysis of these issues. (This article was originally written as a resignation letter from the magazine. In the following section, the quotes are from "Conservatism," the examples are mine, taken from a variety of sources.)

1. "Conservatism": "The common theme [of *Ms.*' line] is a denial of a need for militant resistance to an oppressive system. We don't need to fight men, only our conditioning. We don't need to attack the economic system; we too can make it . . . At best, *Ms.' self improvement, individual liberation philosophy is relevant only to an elite . . . .*"[9] In "Heaven Won't Protect the Working Girl," (spring '72) Louise Bernikow described the struggles faced by a Latina woman working full-time at a checkout counter, going to school full-time to get a better job. The author summarizes: "Of course, the root problem of discrimination is