

Clifton Rd Women



BLACK
WOMAN'S
MANIFESTO

INTRODUCTION

Racism and capitalism have trampled the potential of black people in this country and thwarted their self-determination. Initially the physical characteristics of those of African descent were used to fit blacks into the lowest niche in the capitalist hierarchy - that of maintenance. Therefore, black women and men of today must not encourage division by extending physical characteristics to serve as a criterion for a sexual hierarchy. If the potential of the black woman is seen mainly as a supportive role for the black man, then the black woman becomes an object to be utilized by another human being. Her potential stagnates and she cannot begin to think in terms of self-determination for herself and all black people. It is not right that her existence should be validated only by the existence of the black man.

*The black woman is demanding a new set of female definitions and a recognition of herself as a citizen, companion and confidant, not a matriarchal villain or a step stool baby-maker. Role integration advocates the complementary recognition of man and woman, not the competitive recognition of same.**

Role integration encourages a broader mental and emotional growth in black women and men as they share the responsibility of working towards liberation. Neither of them should be relegated to a narrow experience in life. Neither of them should have their potentiality for self-determination controlled and predetermined by the opposite sex. That is a type of slavery that will not deliver us as a people. That is a form of bondage which is an integral part of the racist and capitalist system which black women and black men must work to oppose and overthrow.

(Gayle Lynch)

* Linda La Rue, *The Black Movement and Women's Liberation*, The Black Scholar, Vol. I, May, 1970, p. 42

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Some subjects are so complex, so unyielding of facile insight, that it will not do to think about them in the ordinary way. Black women - their lot and their future - is for me such a subject. Thus, the new crop of literature concerning women - attuned to the peculiar relationship between white women and white men in America - has inspired me much, but less than the poetry of the great black poet, Gwendolyn Brooks, who writes for me and about me. Take, for example Miss Brooks' poem, "Sadie and Maude," * a sad ballad that in a few stanzas touches in some intimate respect all of us who are black women:

Maude went to college.
Sadie stayed at home.
Sadie scraped life
With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in.
Her comb found every strand.
Sadie was one of the livingest chits
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies
Under her maiden name.
Maude and Ma and Papa
Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long
Her girls struck out from home.
(Sadie had left as heritage
Her fine-tooth comb.)

Maude, who went to college,
Is a thin brown mouse.
She is living all alone
In this old house.

*Gwendolyn Brooks, Selected Poems, Harper & Row, N.Y. 1963

Sadie and Maude are blood sisters, each in her own way living the unrequited life of the black woman. Sadie has two children out of wedlock, but the Sadies of this world also include black women who have been married but have lost their husbands in America's wars against the black family. Maude "went to college" - or wherever black women have gone over the years to escape the perils of living the nearly pre-destined half-life of the black woman in this country. Maude, the "thin brown mouse" lives alone rather than incur Sadie's risks or risk Sadie's pleasures.

The difference in the lives of these two women cannot conceal the over-riding problem they share - loneliness, life lacking in the chance to develop a relationship with a man or satisfactory family relationships. The complexities of the problem facing black women begin to unfold. Not only must we work out an unoppressive relationship with our men; we must - we can at last - establish a relationship with them de novo.

In this respect, we conceive our mission in terms that are often different from the expressed goals of many white women revolutionaries. To be sure, our goals and theirs in their general outlines are the same, but black women confront a task that is as delicate as it is revolutionary. For black women are part of a pre-imminent struggle whose time has come - the fight for black liberation. If women were suddenly to achieve equality with men tomorrow, black women would continue to carry the entire array of utterly oppressive handicaps associated with race. Racial oppression of black people in America has done what neither class oppression nor sexual oppression, with all their perniciousness, have ever done: destroyed an entire people and their culture. The difference is between exploitation and slavery. Slavery partakes of all the worst excesses of exploitation - and more - but exploitation does not always sink to the miserable depths of slavery.

Yet black women cannot - must not - avoid the truth about their special subservience. They are women with all that that implies. If some have been forced into roles as providers or, out of the insecurity associated with being a black woman alone, have dared not develop independence, the result is not that black women are today liberated women. For they have been "liberated" only from love, from family life, from meaningful work, and just as often from the basic comforts and necessities of an ordinary existence. There is neither power nor satisfaction in such a "matriarchy." There is only the bitter knowledge that one is a victim.

Still the stereotypic image of matriarchy has basic appeal to some black men who, in their frustration may not see immediately the counter-revolutionary nature of such a battle cry. To allow the white oppressor to share the burden of his responsibility with the black woman is madness. It is comparable to black people blaming Puerto Ricans for competing with them for jobs, thus relieving the government of the pressures it must have to fulfill its duty to provide full employment. Surely, after hundreds of years black men realize that imprecision in detecting the Enemy is an inexcusable fault in a revolutionary.

But our problems only begin with the reconstruction of the black family. As black men begin to find dignified work after so many generations, what roles will their women seek? Are black people to reject so many of white society's values only to accept its view of woman and of the family? At the moment when the white family is caught in a maze of neurotic contradictions, and white women are supremely frustrated with their roles, are black women to take up such troubled models? Shall black women exchange their ancient insecurity for the white woman's familial cocoon? Can it serve us any better than it has served them? And how will it serve black men?

There is no reason to repeat bad history. There is no reason to envy the white woman who is sinking in a sea of close-quartered affluence, where one's world is one's house, one's peers one's children, and one's employer one's husband. Black women shall not have gained if Sadie and Maude exchange the "fine-tooth comb" and the "old house" for the empty treasures white women are today trying to turn in.

We who are black have a chance for something better. Europeans who came to this country struggled to be accepted by it and succeeded. Occasionally they changed America - for the better and for the worse - but mostly they took it as it was, hoping it would change them. Black people imitated this process pitifully, generation after generation, but were just so much oil on all that melting pot water. Today we are close to being true outsiders, no longer desiring to get in on any terms and at any cost. Racial exclusion has borne ironic fruit. We are perhaps the only group that has come to these shores who has ever acquired the chance to consciously avoid total Americanization with its inherent, its rank faults. On the road to equality there is no better place for blacks to detour around American values than in foregoing its example in the treatment of its women and the organization of its family life.

With black family life so clearly undermined in the American environment, blacks must remake the family unit, not imitate it. Indeed, this task is central to black liberation. The black male will not be returned to his historic strength - the foremost task of the black struggle today - if we do not recreate the strong family unit that was a part of our African heritage before it was dismembered by the slave-owning class in America. But it will be impossible to reconstruct the black family if its central characters are to be crepe paper copies acting out the old white family melodrama. In that failing production, the characters seem set upon a course precisely opposite to ours. White men

in search of endless financial security have sold their spirits to that goal and begun a steady emasculation in which the fiscal needs of wife and family determine life's values and goals. Their now ungrateful wives have begun to see the fraud of this way of life, even while eagerly devouring its fruits. Their even more ungrateful children are in bitter rejection of all that this sort of life signifies and produces. White family life in America today is less than a poor model for blacks. White family life is disintegrating at the moment when we must reforge the black family unit. The whole business of the white family - its softened men, its frustrated women, its angry children - is in a state of great mess.

But it would be naive to think that the temptatious aspects of this sort of life are incapable of luring black people into a disastrous mockery. The ingredients are all there. We are a people in search of what for us has been the interminably elusive goal of economic security. Wretchedly poor for 350 years in a country where most groups have fattened, we could come to see the pain of much of white family life as bearable when measured against the tortures we have borne. Our men, deliberately emasculated as the only way to enforce their servile status, might easily be tempted by a family structure which, by making them the financial head of the household, seemed to make them its actual head. In our desperation to escape so many suffering decades, we might trip down the worn path taken by so many in America before us.

If we are to avoid this disaster, the best, perhaps the only, place to begin is in our conception of the black woman. After all, the immediate tasks of the black man are laid out for him. It is the future role of the black woman that is problematical. And what she is allowed to become - or relegated to - will shape not simply her future but that of the black family and the fate of its members.

If she is forced into the current white model, she is doomed to the fate of the "Empty Woman" about whom Miss Brooks has also written:

"The empty woman had hats
To show. With feathers. Wore combs
In polished waves. Wooed cats."

If so she will be unfit for the onerous responsibilities she must meet if the struggle for black freedom is to bring us out of our ancient bondage into a truly new and liberated condition.

In any case it is too late for any group to consciously revert to old familial patterns of male dominance and female servility. Those roles have their roots in conditions of life that are rapidly disappearing, and especially so in this country. If the woman's place has historically been at home, it was at least in part because there was much work to be done there, and as the natural custodian of the children, it seemed logical for her to do it. But today there is neither so much work to be done there, nor so many children. Do-it-all appliances and technology are making housework a part-time job, freeing millions of women to do something else. An increasing array of birth preventatives has released women from the unwanted multiples of children it was difficult to avoid in the past. The effect on the family of these work and child liberating phenomena will reverberate in ways we still cannot foresee.

Yet it is certain that the institution of the family will undergo radical alteration largely through the new roles women will have to seek. With birth preventatives and with world over-population, many couples will rethink whether it is wise to have children at all. And even though most may choose to have children, it is doubtful that it will any longer be prestigious or wise to have very many. With children

no longer the universally accepted reason for marriage, marriages are going to have to exist on their own merits. Marriages are going to have to exist because they possess inherent qualities which make them worthy of existing, a plane to which the institution has never before been elevated. For marriage to develop such inherent qualities, the woman partner heretofore oriented toward fulfilling now outmoded functions will have to seek new functions. Whether black or white, if American women are to find themselves, they must begin looking outside the home. This will undoubtedly lead them into doing and thinking about matters now pretty much reserved for men. Inevitably, women are going to acquire new goals and a new status.

We who are black are taking up the long-delayed work of family-building at an historic moment in history. We embark upon this goal at a time when the family institution in America is in a state of great flux. This is fortunate happenstance, for had we been about this task in the years immediately following World War II, we might have fallen into the mold which today traps white families, and especially white women.

As it is, we have a chance to pioneer in forging new relationships between men and women. We have a chance to make family life a liberating experience instead of the confining experience it more often has been.

We have a chance to free woman and with her the rest of us.



Photo by Sid Sattler

Women demonstrating in New York march demanding repeal of state
abortion laws, March 28.

In the early part of the sixties, social scientists became more and more interested in the family structure of Blacks. Unemployment and socalled crime among Blacks was increasing, and some of these "scientists" decided that the problems of the Black community were caused by the family pattern among Black people. Since Blacks were deviating from the "norm" - more female heads of households, higher unemployment, more school "dropouts" - these pseudo-scientists claimed that the way to solve these problems was to build up a more stable Black family in accord with the American patriarchal pattern.

In 1965, the U.S. government published a booklet entitled "The Negro Family - The Case for National Action." The author (U.S. Dept. of Labor) stated, "In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole." According to this theory, the institution of slavery led to a breakdown in the Black family and the development of a so-called matriarchy, in which the Black woman was "dominant." This "matriarchal" structure was held responsible, in turn, for contributing to the "emasculation" of the Black man. In other words, as these people would have it, the oppression of Black people was partly caused by the chief victims of this oppression, Black Women!

This myth of the Black matriarchy has had widespread influence, and is even widely believed in the Black community today. It is something we have to fight against and expose. To show just how wrong this theory is, let's look at the real condition and history of the so-called dominant Black woman.

Under slavery, once arriving on American soil, the African social order of Black people was broken down. Tribes were separated and shipped to different plantations. Slaves underwent a process of de-socialization

BY MAXINE WILLIAMS

and had to adopt a new culture and language. Black men greatly outnumbered Black women. Sociologist E.F. Frazier indicates in his book *The Negro Family in the U.S.*, that this probably led to "numerous cases of sex relations between Negro slaves and indentured white women." The "marriage" rate between Black men and white women became so high that interracial marriages were banned.

Prior to this time, Black men were encouraged to marry white women in order to enrich the slavemaster's plantation with more human labor. The Black man in some instances was able to select a mate of his choice. However in contrast, the Black woman had little choice in the selection of her mate. Living in a patriarchal society, she became a mere breeding instrument. Just as Black men were chained and branded under slavery, so were Black women. Lying nude on the slave ship, some women gave birth to children in the scorching hot sun.

There were economic interests involved in the Black women having as many offspring as she could bear. After her child was born, she was allowed to nurse and fondle the infant only at the slavemaster's discretion. There are cases of Black women who greatly resisted being separated from their children and having them placed on the auction block even though they were subject to flogging. And in some cases, the Black woman took the life of her own children rather than submit them to the oppression of slavery.

The Master's Household

There are those who say that because the Black woman was in charge of caring for the slavemaster's children, she became an important figure in the household. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Black woman became the most exploited "member" of the master's household. She scrubbed the floors, washed dishes, cared for the children and was often subjected to the lustful advances of Miss Ann's husband. She became an unpaid

domestic. However, she worked outside as well. Still today, many Black women continue to work in households as underpaid domestics. And as W.E.B. DuBois stated in his essay *The Servant in the House*, "The personal degradation of their work is so great that any white man of decency would rather cut his daughter's throat than let her grow up to such a destiny."

In this way arose the "mammy"image of Black women - an image so embedded in the system that its impact is still felt today. Until recently, the mass media has aided in reinforcing this image of portraying Black women as weighing 200 pounds, holding a child to her breast, and/or scrubbing floors with a rag around her head. For such a one, who was constantly portrayed with her head to the floor and her behind facing the ceiling, it is ludicrous to conceive of any dominant role. Contrary to popular opinion, all Black women do not willingly submit to the sexual advances of white men. Probably every Black woman has been told the old myth that the only ones who have had sexual freedom in this country are the white man and the Black woman. But, in many instances even physical force has been used to compel Black women to submit. Frazier gives a case in his book where a Black woman who refused the sexual advances of a white man was subdued and held to the ground by Black men while the "Master" stood there whipping her.

In some instances, Black women stood in awe of the white skin of their masters and felt that copulation with a white man would enhance her slave status. There was also the possibility that her mulatto offspring would achieve emancipation. Her admiration of white skin was not very different from the slave mentality of some Blacks which caused them to identify with their master. In some cases, the Black woman who submitted herself sexually played a vital role in saving the life of the Black man. If she gave the master a "good lovin'," she could sometimes prevent her husband

from being horse-whipped or punished.

"Emancipation"

The myth that is being perpetrated in the Black community states that somehow the Black woman has managed to escape much of the oppression of slavery and that all avenues of opportunity were opened to her. Well, this is highly interesting, since in 1870 when the Fifteenth Amendment guaranteed citizens the right to vote, this right did not apply to the Black woman. During reconstruction, those Blacks who served as justices of the peace and superintendents of education, and in municipal and state governments, were men. Although the reconstruction period was far from being an era of "Black Rule," it is estimated that thousands of Black men used their votes to help keep the Republicans in power. The Black women remained on the outside.

To be sure, the Black man had a difficult time exercising his right to vote. Mobs of whites waited for him at the voting booth. Many were threatened with the loss of jobs and subjected to the terror of Klan elements. The political activity for the Black man was relatively ephemeral, but while it lasted, many offices for the first time were occupied by them. The loose ties established between Black men and women during slavery were in many cases dissolved after emancipation. In order to test their freedom, some Black men who remained with their wives began flogging them. Previously, this was a practice reserved only for the white master. In the later part of the 1860s and early 70s, female heads of households began to crop up. Black men who held jobs as skilled craftsmen, carpenters, etc., were being driven out of these occupation. Since the Republicans no longer needed the Black vote after 1876, the "welfare" of Blacks was placed in southern hands. Black men found it very difficult to obtain jobs and in some instances found employment only as strike-

breakers. Black men, who were made to feel "less of a man" in a racist oppressive system, turned toward Black women, and began to blame them for the position they occupied.

The Black woman, in some cases, left to herself with children to feed, also went looking for employment. Many went to work in the white man's kitchen. DuBois in the same essay mentioned earlier, *The Servant in the House*, gives a vivid portrayal of the exploitation of domestic workers. He speaks of the personal degradation of their work, the fact that they are still in some instances made to enter and exit by the side door, that they are referred to by their first name, paid extremely low wages, and subjected to the sexual exploitation of the "master." All this proves that because the Black woman worked, it did not make her more "independent" than the white woman. Rather, she became more subject to the brutal exploitation of capitalism - as Black, as worker, as woman.

The "Free" Labor Market

I mentioned earlier that after emancipation Black men had a difficult time obtaining employment, that after emancipation he was barred from many of the crafts he had been trained in under slavery. The labor market for Black women also proved to be a disaster. Black women entered the needle trades in New York in the 1900s, as a cheap source of labor for the employers, and in Chicago in 1917, Black women who were willing to work for lower wages, were used to break a strike. There was general distrust between Black and white workers, and in some cities, white workers refused to work beside Black women and walked off their jobs.

The Black woman has never held high status in this society. Under slavery she was mated like cattle and used as a mere breeding instrument. Today, the majority of Black women are still confined to the most menial and

lowest paid occupations - domestic and laundry workers, file clerks, counter workers, and other service occupations. These jobs in most cases are not yet unionized.

Today, at least 20 percent of Black women are employed as private household workers, and their median income is \$1200. These women have the double exploitation of first doing drudgery in someone else's home, and then having to take care of their own households as well. Some are forced to leave their own children without adequate supervision in order to earn money by taking care of someone else's children. Sixty-one percent of Black married women were in the labor force in 1966. Almost one-fourth of Black families are headed by females, double the percentage for whites. Due to the shortage of Black men, most Black women are forced to accept a relationship on male terms. In Black communities there sometimes exists a type of serial polygamy - a situation where many women share the same man, one at a time.

Black is Beautiful

As if Black women did not have enough to contend with, being exploited economically as a worker, being used as a source of cheap labor because she is a female, and being treated even worse because she is Black, she also finds herself fighting the beauty "standards" of a white western society. Years ago it was a common sight to see Black women wearing blond wigs and rouge, the object being to get as close to the white beauty standard as one possibly could. But, in spite of the fact that bleaching creams and hair straighteners were used, the trick just didn't work. Her skin was still black instead of fair, and her hair kinky instead of straight. She was constantly being compared to the white woman, and she was the antithesis of what was considered beautiful. Usually when she saw a Black man with a white woman, the image she had of herself became even more painful.

But now, "Black is beautiful," and the Black woman is playing a more prominant role in the movement. But there is a catch! She is still being told to step back and let the Black man come forward and lead. It is ironic that at a time when all talents and abilities should be utilized to aid in the struggle of national liberation, Stokely Carmichael comes along and declares that the position of women in the movement is "prone." And some years later, Eldridge Cleaver in referring to the status of women said they had "pussy power." Since then, the Black Panther Party has somewhat altered its view, saying "women are our other half." When writing their political statement, the Republic of New Africa stated they wanted the right of all Black men to have as many wives as they can afford. This was based on their conception that this is the way things were in Africa. (In their publication *The New Africa* written in December 1969, one of the points in their Declaration of Independence seeks "to assure equality of rights for the sexes." Whether this means that the Black woman would be allowed to have as many husbands as she can afford, I have no way of knowing.)

Abortion and Birth Control

So today, the Black woman still finds herself up the creek. She feels that she must take the nod from "her man," because if she "acts up" then she just might lose him to a white woman. She must still subordinate herself, her own feelings and desires, especially when it comes to the right of having control of her own body. When the birth control pill first came into use, it was experimentally tested on Puerto Rican women. It is therefore not surprising that Third World people look at this example and declare that both birth control and abortion is a form of genocide - a device to eliminate Third World people. However, what is at issue is the right of women to control their own bodies. Enforced motherhood is a form of male supremacy; it is reactionary and brutal. During slavery, the plantation masters forced

motherhood on Black women in order to enrich their plantations with more human labor.

It is women who must decide whether they wish to have children or not. Women must have the right to control their own bodies. And this means that we must also speak out against forced sterilization and against compelling welfare mothers to accept contraceptive methods against their will. There is now a women's liberation movement growing in the United States. By and large, Black women have not played a prominent role in this movement. This is due to the fact that many Black women have not yet developed a feminist consciousness. Black women see their problem mainly as one of national oppression. The middle class mentality of some white women's liberation seem to be irrelevant to Black women's needs. For instance, at the November 1969 Congress to Unite Women in New York, some of the participants did not want to take a stand against the school tracking system - fearing that "good" students thrown in with "bad" ones would cause the "brilliant" students to leave school, thus lowering the standards. One white woman had the gall to mention to me that she felt women living in Scarsdale were more oppressed than Third World women trapped in the ghetto! There was also little attempt to deal with the problems of poor women, for example the fact that women in Scarsdale exploit Black women as domestics.

The movement must take a clearer stand against the horrendous conditions in which poor women are forced to work. Some women in the movement are in favor of eliminating the state protective laws for women. However, poor women who are forced to work in sweatshops, factories and laundries need those laws on the books. Not only must the State protective laws for women remain on the books, but we must see that they are enforced and made even stronger.

Women in the women's liberation movement assert that they are tired of being slaves to their husbands, con-

fined to the household performing menial tasks. While the Black woman can sympathize with this view, she does not feel that breaking her ass every day from nine to five is any form of liberation. She has always had to work. Before the Emancipation Proclamation she worked in the fields of the plantation, as Malcolm X would say, "from can't see in the morning until can't see at night."

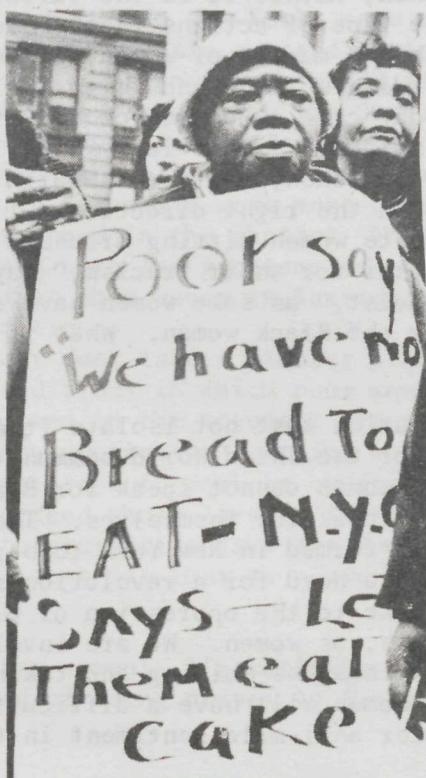
And what is liberation under this system? Never owning what you produce, you are forced to become a mere commodity on the labor market. Workers are never secure, and their length of employment is subject to the ups and downs in the economy. Women's liberation must relate to these problems. What is hampering it now is not the fact that it is still composed of mainly white middle class women, Rather it is the failure to engage in enough of the type of actions that would draw in and link up with the masses of women not yet in the movement., including working and Third World women. Issues such as day-care, support for the striking telephone workers, support for the laws which improve working conditions for women, and the campaign to free Joan Bird are a step in the right direction. I don't feel, however, that white women sitting around a room, brow-beating one another for their "racism," saying, "I'm a racist, I'm a racist," as some women have done, is doing a damn thing for the Black woman. What is needed is action.

Women's Liberation must not isolate itself from the masses of women or the Third World community. At the same time, white women cannot speak for Black women. Black women must speak for themselves. The Black Women's Alliance has been formed in New York to begin to do this. We felt there was a need for a revolutionary Black women's movement that spoke to the oppression of Black women as Blacks, as workers, as women. We are involved in reading, discussion, consciousness raising and taking action. We feel that Black women will have a difficult time relating to the more bitter anti-male sentiment in the women's liber-

ation movement, fearing that it will be a device to keep Black men and women fighting among themselves and diverting their energies from the real enemy.

Many Black women realize it will take both men and women to wage an effective struggle. However, this does not negate the necessity of women building our own movement because we must build our struggle now and continue it after the revolution if we are to achieve real emancipation.

When the Third World woman begins to recognize the depth of her oppression, she will move to form alliances with all revolutionary forces available and settle for nothing less than complete destruction of this racist, capitalist, male-dominated system.



In attempting to analyze the situation of the black woman in America, one crashes abruptly into a solid wall of grave misconceptions, outright distortions of fact and defensive attitudes on the part of many. The system of capitalism (and its after birth...racism) under which we all live, has attempted by many devious ways and means to destroy the humanity of all people, and particularly the humanity of black people. This has meant an outrageous assault on every black man, woman and child who reside in the United States.

In keeping with its goal of destroying the black race's will to resist its subjugation, capitalism found it necessary to create a situation where the black man found it impossible to find meaningful or productive employment. More often than not, he couldn't find work of any kind. And the black woman likewise was manipulated by the system, economically exploited and physically assaulted. She could often find work in the white man's kitchen, however, and sometimes became the sole breadwinner of the family. This predicament has led to many psychological problems on the part of both man and woman and has contributed to the turmoil that we find in the black family structure.

Unfortunately, neither the black man nor the black woman understood the true nature of the forces working upon them. Many black women tended to accept the capitalist evaluation of manhood and womanhood and believed, in fact, that black men were shiftless and lazy, otherwise they would get a job and support their families as they ought to. Personal relationships between black men and women were thus torn asunder and one result has been the separation of man from wife, mother from child, etc.

America has defined the roles to which each individual should subscribe. It has defined "manhood" in terms of its own interests and "femininity" likewise. Therefore, an individual who has a good job, makes a lot of money and drives a Cadillac is a real "man," and con-

versely, an individual who is lacking in these "qualities" is less of a man. The advertising media in this country continuously informs the american male of his need for indispensable signs of his virility - the brand of cigarettes that cowboys prefer, the whiskey that has a masculine tang or the label of the jock strap that athletes wear.

The ideal model that is projected for a woman is to be surrounded by hypocritical homage and estranged from all real work, spending idle hours primping and preening, obsessed with conspicuous consumption, and limiting life's functions to simply a sex role. We unqualitatively reject these respective models. A woman who stays at home, caring for children and the house often leads an extremely sterile existence. She must lead her entire life as a satellite to her mate. He goes out into society and brings back a little piece of the world for her. His interests and his understanding of the world become her own and she cannot develop herself as an individual, having been reduced to only a biological function. This kind of woman leads a parasitic existence that can aptly be described as "legalized prostitution".

Furthermore, it is idle dreaming to think of black women simply caring for their homes and children like the middle class white model. Most black women have to work to help house, feed and clothe their families. Black women make up a substantial percentage of the black working force and this is true for the poorest black family as well as the so-called "middle class" family.

Black women were never afforded any such phony luxuries. Though we have been browbeaten with this white image, the reality of the degrading and dehumanizing jobs that were relegated to us quickly dissipated this mirage of 'womanhood'. The following excerpts from a speech that Sojourner Truth made at a Women's

Rights Convention in the 19th century show us how misleading and incomplete a life this model represents for us:

"...Well, chilern, whar dar is so much racket
dar must be something out o'kilter. I tink dat
'twixt de niggers of de Souf and de women at
de norf all a talkin' 'bout rights, de white
men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's
all dis here talkin' 'bout? Dat man ober dar
say dat women needs to be helped into carriages
and lifted ober ditches, and to have de best
place every whar. Nobody ever help me into
carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives me
any best places,...and ar'nt I a woman? Look
at me! Look at my arm...I have plowed, and
planted, and gathered into barns, and no man
could head me - and ar'nt I a woman? I could
work as much as a man (when I could get it),
and bear de lash as well - and ar'nt I a woman?
I have borne five chilern and I seen 'em mos'
all sold off into slavery, and when I cried
out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard
--and ar'nt I a woman?"

Unfortunately, there seems to be some confusion in the Movement today as to who has been oppressing whom. Since the advent of black power, the black male has exerted a more prominent leadership role in our struggle for justice in this country. He sees the system for what it really is for the most part. But where he rejects its values and mores on many issues, when it comes to women, he seems to take his guidelines from the pages of the Ladies Home Journal.

Certain black men are maintaining that they have been castrated by society but that black women somehow escaped this persecution and even contributed to this emasculation. Let me state here and now that the black woman in america can justly be described as a "slave of

a slave." By reducing the black man in america to such abject oppression, the black woman had no protector and was used, and is still being used in some cases, as the scapegoat for the evils that this horrendous system has perpetrated on black men. Her physical image has been maliciously maligned; she has been sexually molested and abused by the white colonizer; she has suffered the worst kind of economic exploitation, having been forced to serve as the white woman's maid and wet nurse for white offspring while her own children were more often than not, starving and neglected. It is the depth of degradation to be socially manipulated, physically raped, used to undermine your own household, and to be powerless to reverse this syndrome.

It is true that our husbands, fathers, brothers and sons have been emasculated, lynched and brutalized. They have suffered from the cruellest assault on mankind that the world has ever known. However, it is a gross distortion of fact to state that black women have oppressed black men. The capitalist system found it expedient to enslave and oppress them and proceeded to do so without signing any agreements with black women.

It must also be pointed out at this time, that black women are not resentful of the rise to power of black men. We welcome it. We see in it the eventual liberation of all black people from this corrupt system under which we suffer. Nevertheless, this does not mean that you have to negate one for the other. This kind of thinking is a product of miseducation; that it's either X or it's Y. It is fallacious reasoning that in order the black man to be strong, the black woman has to be weak.

Those who are exerting their "manhood" by telling black women to step back into a domestic, submissive role are assuming a counter-revolutionary position. Black women likewise have been abused by the system and we must begin talking about the elimination of all kinds

of oppression. If we are talking about building a strong nation, capable of throwing off the yoke of capitalist oppression, then we are talking about the total involvement of every man, woman, and child, each with a highly developed political consciousness. We need our whole army out there dealing with the enemy and not half an army.

There are also some black women who feel that there is no more productive role in life than having and raising children. This attitude often reflects the conditioning of the society in which we live and is adopted (totally, completely and without change) from a bourgeois white model. Some young sisters who have never had to maintain a household and accept the confining role which this entails, tend to romanticize (along with the help of a few brothers) this role of housewife and mother. Black women who have had to endure this kind of function as the sole occupation of their life, are less apt to have these utopian visions.

Those who project in an intellectual manner how great and rewarding this role will be and who feel that the most important thing that they can contribute to the black nation is children, are doing themselves a great injustice. This line of reasoning completely negates the contributions that black women have historically made to our struggle for liberation. These black women include Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary McLeod Bethune and Fannie Lou Hamer to name but a few.

We live in a highly industrialized society and every member of the black nation must be as academically and technologically developed as possible. To wage a revolution, we need competent teachers, doctors, nurses, electronic experts, chemists, biologists, physicists, political scientists, and so on and so forth. Black women sitting at home reading bedtime stories to their children are just not going to make it.

ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION OF BLACK WOMEN

The economic system of capitalism finds it expedient to reduce women to a state of enslavement. They often-times serve as a scapegoat for the evils of this system. Much in the same way that the poor white cracker of the South who is equally victimized, looks down upon blacks and contributes to the oppression of blacks, --So by giving to men a false feeling of superiority (at least in their own home or in their relationships with women,) the oppression of women acts as an escape valve for capitalism. Men may be cruelly exploited and subjected to all sorts of dehumanizing tactics on the part of the ruling class, but they have someone who is below them - at least they're not women.

Women also represent a surplus labor supply, the control of which is absolutely necessary to the profitable functioning of capitalism. Women are systematically exploited by the system. They are paid less for the same work that men do and jobs that are specifically relegated to women are low-paying and without the possibility of advancement. Statistics from the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor show that the wage scale for white women was even below that of black men; and the wage scale for non-white women was the lowest of all:

White Males-----	\$6,704.
Non-white Males -----	4,277.
White Females -----	3,991.
Non-white Females-----	2,861

Those industries which employ mainly black women are the most exploitative in the country. Domestic and hospital workers are good examples of this oppression; the garment workers in New York City provide us with another view of this economic slavery. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) - whose overwhelming membership consists of black and Puerto Rican women has a

leadership that is nearly lily-white and male. This leadership has been working in collusion with the ruling class and has completely sold its soul to the corporate structure.

To add insult to injury, the ILGWU has invested heavily in business enterprises in racist, apartheid South Africa. --with union funds. Not only does this bought-off leadership contribute to our continued exploitation in this country by not truly representing the best interests of its membership, but it audaciously uses funds that black and Puerto Rican women have provided to support the economy of a vicious government that is engaged in the economic rape and murder of our black brothers and sisters in our Motherland - Africa.

The entire labor movement in the United States has suffered as a result of the super exploitation of black workers and women. The unions have historically been racist and chauvinistic. They have upheld racism in this country (and condoned imperialist exploitation around the world) -and have failed to fight the white skin privileges of white workers. They have failed to fight or even make an issue against the inequities in the hiring and pay of women workers. There has been virtually no struggle against either the racism of the white worker or the economic exploitation of the working woman, two factos which have consistently impeded the advancement of the real struggle against the ruling capitalist class.

This racist, chauvinistic and manipulative use of black workers and women, especially black women, has been a severe cancer on the american labor scene. It therefore becomes essential for those who understand the workings of capitalism and imperialism to realize that the exploitation of black people and women works to everyone's disadvantage and that the liberation of these two groups is a stepping stone to the liberation of all oppressed people in this country and around the world.

BEDROOM POLITICS

I have briefly discussed the economic and psychological manipulation of black women, but perhaps the most outlandish act of oppression in modern times is the current campaign to promote sterilization of non-white women in an attempt to maintain the population and power imbalance between the white haves and the non-white have nots.

These tactics are but another example of the many devious schemes that the ruling elite attempt to perpetrate on the black population in order to keep itself in control. It has recently come to our attention that a massive campaign for so-called "birth control" is presently being promoted not only in the underdeveloped non-white areas of the world, but also in black communities here in the United States. However, what the authorities in charge of these programs refer to as "birth control" is in fact nothing but a method of outright surgical genocide.

The United States has been sponsoring sterilization clinics in non-white countries, especially in India where already some 3 million young men and boys in and around New Delhi have been sterilized in make-shift operating rooms set up by the American Peace Corps workers. Under these circumstances, it is understandable why certain countries view the Peace Corps not as a benevolent project, not as evidence of America's concern for underdeveloped areas, but rather as a threat to their very existence. This program could more aptly be named the "Death Corps."

The Vasectomy which is performed on males and takes only six or seven minutes is a relatively simple operation. The sterilization of a woman, on the other hand, is admittedly major surgery. This surgical operation (Salpingectomy)* must be performed in a hospital under

*Salpingectomy - Through an abdominal incision, the surgeon cuts both Fallopian tubes and ties off the separated ends after which there is no way for the egg to pass from the ovary to the womb.

general anesthesia. This method of "birth control" is a common procedure in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico has long been used by the colonialist exploiter, the United States, as a huge experimental laboratory for medical research before allowing certain practices to be imported and used here. When the birth control pill was first being perfected, it was tried out on Puerto Rican women and selected black women (poor), using them like Guinea pigs, to evaluate its effect and its efficiency.

The Salpingectomy has now become the commonest operation in Puerto Rico, commoner than an appendectomy or a tonsilectomy. It is so widespread that it is referred to simply as "la operación." On the Island, 20% of the women between the ages of 15 and 45 have already been sterilized.

An. now, as previously occurred with the pill, this method has been imported into the United States. These sterilization clinics are cropping up around the country in the black and Puerto Rican communities. These so-called "Maternity Clinics" specifically outfitted to purge black women or men of their reproductive possibilities, are appearing more and more in hospitals and clinics across the country.

A number of organizations have been formed to popularize the idea of sterilization such as the Association for Voluntary Sterilization and The Human Betterment (!!?) Association for Voluntary Sterilization which has its headquarters in New York City. Front Royal, Virginia has one such "Maternity Clinic" in Warren Memorial Hospital. The tactics used in the clinic in Fauquier County, Virginia, where poor and helpless black mothers and young girls are pressured into undergoing sterilization are certainly not confined to that clinic alone.

Threatened with the cut-off of relief funds, some black welfare women have been forced to accept this sterilization procedure in exchange for a continuation

of welfare benefits. Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City performs these operations on many of its ward patients whenever it can convince the women to undergo this surgery. Mississippi and some of the other Southern states are notorious for this act. Black women are often afraid to permit any kind of necessary surgery because they know from bitter experience that they are more likely than not to come out of the hospital without their insides. (Both Salpingectomies & Hysterectomies are performed.)

We condemn this use of the black woman as a medical testing ground for the white middle class. Reports of the ill effects including deaths from the use of the birth control pill only started to come to light when the white privileged class began to be affected. These outrageous Nazi-like procedures on the part of medical researchers are but another manifestation of the totally amoral and dehumanizing brutality that the capitalist system perpetrates on black women. The sterilization experiments carried on in concentration camps some twenty-five years ago have been denounced the world over, but no one seems to get upset by the repetition of these same racist tactics today in the United States of America - land of the free and home of the brave. This campaign is as nefarious a program as Germany's gas chambers and in a long term sense, as effective and with the same objective.

The rigid laws concerning abortions in this country are another vicious means of subjugation, and, indirectly of outright murder. Rich white women somehow manage to obtain these operations with little or no difficulty. It is the poor black and Puerto Rican woman who is at the mercy of the local butcher. Statistics show us that the non-white death rate at the hands of the unqualified abortionist is substantially higher than for white women. Nearly half of the child-bearing deaths in New York City were attributed to abortion alone and out of these, 79% are among non-whites and Puerto Rican women.

We are not saying that black women should not practice birth control or family planning. Black women have the right and the responsibility to determine when it is in the interest of the struggle to have children or not to have them. It is also her right and responsibility to determine when it is in her own best interests to have children, how many she will have, and how far apart and this right must not be relinquished to anyone.

The lack of the availability of safe birth control methods, the forced sterilization practices and the inability to obtain legal abortions are all symptoms of a decadant society that jeopardizes the health of black women (and thereby the entire black race) in its attempts to control the very life processes of human beings. This repressive control of black women is symptomatic of a society that believes it has the right to bring political factors into the privacy of the bedchamber. The elimination of these horrendous conditions will free black women for full participation in the revolution, and thereafter, in the building of the new society.

RELATIONSHIP TO WHITE MOVEMENT

Much has been written recently about the white women's liberation movement in the United States and the question arises whether there are any parallels between this struggle and the movement on the part of black women for total emancipation. While there are certain comparisons that one can make, simply because we both live under the same exploitative system, there are certain differences, some of which are quite basic.

The white women's movement is far from being monolithic. Any white group that does not have an anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideology has absolutely nothing in common with the black woman's struggle. Are white women asking to be equal to white men in their pernicious treatment of third world peoples? What assurances have black women

that white women will be any less racist and exploitative if they had the power and were in a position to do so? These are serious questions that the white women's liberation movement has failed to address itself to.

Black people are engaged in a life and death struggle with the oppressive forces of this country and the main emphasis of black women must be to combat the capitalist, racist exploitation of black people. While it is true that male chauvinism has become institutionalized in american society, one must always look for the main enemy...the fundamental cause of the female condition. In fact, some groups come to the incorrect conclusion that their oppression is due simply to male chauvinism. They therefore, have an extremely anti-male tone to their dissertations.

Another major differentiation is that the white women's liberation movement is basically middle class. Very few of these women suffer the extreme economic exploitation that most black women are subjected to day by day. If they find housework degrading and dehumanizing, they are financially able to buy their freedom - usually by hiring a black maid. The economic and social realities of the black woman's life are the most crucial for us. It is not an intellectual persecution alone; the movement is not a psychological outburst for us; it is tangible; we can taste it in all our endeavors. We as black women have got to deal with the problems that the black masses deal with, for our problems in reality are one and the same.

If the white groups do not realize that they are in fact, fighting capitalism and racism, we do not have common bonds. If they do not realize that the reasons for their condition lie in a debilitating economic and social system, and not simply that men get a vicarious

pleasure out of "consuming their bodies for exploitative reasons," (This kind of reasoning seems to be quite prevalent in certain white women's groups) then we cannot unite with them around common grievances or even discuss these groups in a serious manner, because they're completely irrelevant to black women in particular or to the black struggle in general.

THE NEW WORLD

The black community and black women especially, must begin raising questions about the kind of society we wish to see established. We must note the ways in which capitalism oppresses us and then move to create institutions that will eliminate these destructive influences.

The new world that we are struggling to create must destroy oppression of any type. The value of this new system will be determined by the status of those persons who are presently most oppressed - the low man on the totem pole. Unless women in any enslaved nation are completely liberated, the change cannot really be called a revolution. If the black woman has to retreat to the position she occupied before the armed struggle, the whole movement and the whole struggle will have retreated in terms of truly freeing the colonized population.

A people's revolution that engages the participation of every member of the community, including men, and women, brings about a certain transformation in the participants as a result of this participation. Once you have caught a glimpse of freedom or tasted a bit of self-determination, you can't go back to old routines that were established under a racist, capitalist regime. We must begin to understand that a revolution entails not only the willingness to lay our lives on the firing line and get killed. In some ways, this is an easy

commitment to make. To die for the revolution is a one-shot deal; to live for the revolution means taking on the more difficult commitment of changing our day-to-day life patterns.

This will mean changing the traditional routines that we have established as a result of living in a totally corrupting society. It means changing how you relate to your wife, your husband, your parents and your co-workers. If we are going to liberate ourselves as a people, it must be recognized that black women have very specific problems that have to be spoken to. We must be liberated along with the rest of the population. We cannot wait to start working on those problems until that great day in the future when the revolution somehow miraculously, is accomplished.

To assign women the role of housekeeper and mother while men go forth into battle is a highly questionable doctrine for a revolutionary to profess. Each individual must develop a high political consciousness in order to understand how this system enslaves us all and what actions we must take to bring about its total destruction. Those who consider themselves to be revolutionaries must begin to deal with other revolutionaries as equals. And so far as I know, revolutionaries are not determined by sex.

Old people, young people, men and women must take part in the struggle. To relegate women to purely supportive roles or to simply cultural considerations is dangerous doctrine to project. Unless black men who are preparing themselves for armed struggle understand that the society which we are trying to create is one in which the oppression of ALL MEMBERS of that society is eliminated, then the revolution will have failed in its avowed purpose.

Given the mutual commitment of black men and black women alike to the liberation of our people and other

oppressed peoples around the world, the total involvement of each individual is necessary. A revolutionary has the responsibility of not only toppling those that are now in a position of power, but more importantly, the responsibility of creating new institutions that will eliminate all forms of oppression for all people. We must begin to re-write our understanding of traditional personal relationships between man and woman.

All the resources that the black community can muster up must be channeled into the struggle. Black women must take an active part in bringing about the kind of world where our children, our loved ones, and each citizen can grow up and live as decent human beings, free from the pressures of racism and capitalist exploitation.

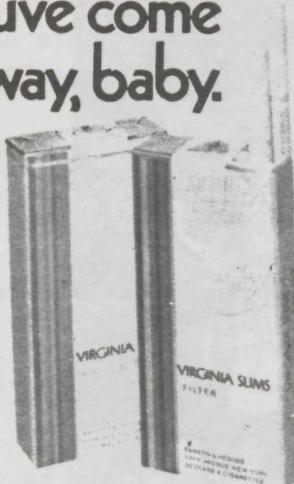


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BUT IS THIS WHERE
YOU WANT TO GO ? ?



Let us first discuss what common literature addresses as the "common oppression" of blacks and women. This is a tasty abstraction designed purposely or inadvertently to draw validity and seriousness to the women's movement through a universality of plight. Every movement worth its "revolutionary salt" makes these headliner generalities about "common oppression" with others - but let us state unequivocally that, with few exceptions, the American white woman has had a better opportunity to live a free and fulfilling life, both mentally and physically, than any other group in the United States, with the exception of her white husband. Thus, any attempt to analogize black oppression with the plight of the American white woman has the validity of comparing the neck of a hanging man with the hands of an amateur mountain climber with rope burns.

"Common oppression" is fine for rhetoric, but it does not reflect the actual distance between the oppression of the black man and woman who are unemployed, and the "oppression" of the American white woman who is "sick and tired" of *Playboy* fold-outs, or Christian Dior lowering hemlines or adding ruffles, or of Miss Clairol telling her that blondes have more fun. Is there any logical comparison between the oppression of the black woman on welfare who has difficulty feeding her children and the discontent of the suburban mother who has the luxury to protest the washing of the dishes on which her family's full meal was consumed?

The surge of "common oppression" rhetoric and propaganda may lure the unsuspecting into an intellectual alliance with the goals of women's liberation, but it is not a wise alliance. It is not that women ought not to be liberated from the shackles of their present unfulfillment, but the depth, the extent, the intensity

the importance - indeed, the suffering and depravity of the *real* oppression blacks have experienced - can only be minimized in an alliance with women who heretofore suffered little more than boredom, genteel repression, and dishpan hands.

For all the similarities and analogies drawn between the liberation of blacks, the point remains that when white women received their voting rights, most blacks, male and female, were systematically disenfranchized and had been that way since Reconstruction. And even in 1970, when women's right of franchise is rarely questioned, it is still a less than common occurrence for blacks to vote in some areas of the South. Tasteless analogies like abortion for oppressed middle class and poor women idealistically assert that all women have the right to decide if and when they want children, and thus fail to catch the flavor of the actual circumstances. Actual circumstances boil down to middle class women deciding when it is convenient to have children, while poor women decide the prudence of bringing into a world of already scarce resources, another mouth to feed. Neither their motives nor their objectives are the same. But current literature leads one to lumping the decisions of these two women under one generalization, when in fact the difference between the plights of these two women is as clear as the difference between being hungry and out of work, and skipping lunch and taking a day off.

If we are realistically candid with ourselves, and accept the fact that despite our beloved rhetoric of Pan-Africanism, our vision of third world liberation, and perhaps our dreams of a world state of multi-racial humanism, most blacks and a good many who generally exempt themselves from categories, still want the proverbial "piece of cake." American values are difficult to discard for, unlike what more militant "brothers" would have us believe, Americanism does not end with the adoption of Afro hairstyles on pregnant women covered in

long African robes.

Indeed the fact that the independent black capitalism demonstrated by the black Muslims, and illustrated in Nixon's speeches, appeared for many blacks as the way out of the ghetto into the light, lends a truthful vengeance to the maxim that perhaps blacks are nothing more than black anglosaxons. Upon the rebirth of the liberation struggle in the sixties, a whole genre of "women's place" advocates immediately relegated black women to home and babies, which is almost as ugly an expression of black anglo-saxonism as is Nixon's concept of 'black capitalism.'

The study of many developing areas and countries reflects at least an attempt to allow freedom of education and opportunity to women. Yet, black Americans have not adopted developing area's "new role" paradigm, but rather the Puritan-American status of "home and babies," which is advocated by the capitalist Muslims. This reflects either ingrained Americanism or the lack of the simplest imagination.

Several weeks ago, women's lib advocates demanded that a local women's magazine be "manned" by a woman editor. Other segments of the women's movement have carried on a smaller campaign in industry and business. If white women have heretofore remained silent while white men maintained the better position and monopolized the opportunities by excluding blacks, can we really expect that white women, when put in direct competition for employment, will be any more open-minded than their male counterparts when it comes to the hiring of black males and females in the same positions for which they are competing? From the standpoint of previous American social interaction, it does not seem logical that white females will not be tempted to take advantage of the fact that they are white, in an economy that favors whites. It is entirely possible that women's liberation has developed a sudden attachment to the black liberation

movement as a ploy to share the attention that it has taken blacks 400 years to generate. In short, it can be argued that women's liberation not only attached itself to the black movement, but did so with only marginal concern for black women and black liberation, and functional concern for the rights of white women.

The industrial demands of two world wars temporarily offset the racial limitations to mobility and allowed the possibility of blacks entering industry, as an important labor force, to be actualized. Similarly, women have benefited from an expanded science and industrialization. Their biological limitation, successfully curbed by the pill and by automation, which makes stressing physical labor more the exception than the rule, has created an impressively large and available labor force of women.

The black labor force, never fully employed and always representing a substantial percentage of the unemployed in the American economy, will now be driven into greater unemployment as white women converge at every level on an already dwindling job market. Ideally, we chanced to think of women's liberation as a promising beginning of the "oppressed rising everywhere" in the typically Marxian fashion that many blacks seem drawn to. Instead, the spectre of racism and inadequate education, job discrimination, and even greater unequal opportunity will be, more than ever before, a function of neither maleness nor femaleness, but blackness.

This discussion has been primarily to ward off any unintelligent alliance of black people with white women in this new liberation movement. Rhetoric and anathema hurled at the right industrial complex, idealism which speaks of a final humanism, and denunciations of the system which makes competition a fact of life, do not mean that women's liberation has as its goal anyone else's liberation except its own. It is time that definitions be made clear. Blacks are oppressed, and

that means unreasonably burdened, unjustly, severely, rigorously, cruelly and harshly fettered by white authority. White women, on the other hand, are only suppressed, and that means checked, restrained, excluded from conscious and overt activity. And there is a difference.

For some, the dangers of an unintelligent alliance with women's liberation will suggest female suppression as the only way to protect against a new economic threat. For others, a greater answer is needed, and required, before women's liberation can be seen in perspective.

To say that black women must be freed before the black movement can attain full revolutionary consciousness, is meaningless because of its malleability. To say that black women must be freed from the unsatisfactory male-female role relationship which we adopted from whites as the paradigm of the good family, has more meaning because it indicates the incompatibility of white role models with the goal of black liberation. If there is anything to be learned from the current women's lib agitation, it is that roles are not ascribed and inherent, but adopted and inter-changeable in every respect except pregnancy, breastfeeding and the system generally employed to bring the two former into existence.

Role integration, which I will elaborate upon as the goal and the strength of the black family, is substantially different from the role "usurpation" of men by women. The fact that the roles of man and woman are deemed in American society as natural and divine, leads to false ego attachments to these roles. During slavery and following Reconstruction, black men felt inferior for a great number of reason, among them that they were unable to work in positions comparable to the ones to which black women were assigned. With these positions often went fringe benefits of extra food, clothes, and perhaps elementary reading and writing skills. Black women were in turn jealous of white women, and felt inadequate and inferior because paraded in front of

them constantly, was the white woman of luxury who had no need for work, who could, as Sojourner Truth pointed out, "be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and ...have the best place everywhere."

The resulting "respect" for women and the acceptance of the dominating role for men, encouraged the myth of the immutability of these roles. The term "matriarchy" Frazier employed and Moynihan exploited, was used to indicate a dastardly, unnatural role alteration which could be blamed for inequality of opportunity, discrimination in hiring and sundry other ills. It was as if "matriarchy" was transgression of divine law or natural law, and thus would be punished until the proper hierarchy of man over woman was restored.

Black people have an obligation, as do white women, to recognize that the designation of "mother-head" and "father-head" does not imply inferiority of one and the superiority of the other. They are merely arbitrary role distinctions which vary from culture to culture and circumstance to circumstance. Thus to quip, as it has been popularly done, that the only place in the black movement for black women, is prone, is actually supporting a white role ideal, and it is neither a compliment to men or women to advocate such sexual capitalism or sexual colonialism.

It seems incongruous that the black movement has sanctioned the revolutionary involvement of women in the Algerian revolution, even though its revolutionary circumstances modified and often alternated the common role models, but have been duped into hating even their own slave grandmothers who, in not so admirable yet equally frightening and demanding circumstances, also modified and altered the common role models of the black family. Fanon wrote in glorious terms about this role change:

The unveiled Algerian women, who assumed an increasingly important place in revolutionary action, developed her

personality, discovered the exalting realm of responsibility.. This woman who, in the avenues of Algiers or of Constantine, would carry the grenades or the submachine gun charges, the woman who tomorrow would be outraged, violated, tortured, could not put herself back into her former state of mind, and relive her behavior of the past....(1)

Can it not be said that in slavery black women assumed an increasingly important place in the survival action and thus developed their personalities and sense of responsibility? And after being outraged, violated and tortured, could she be expected to put herself back into her former state of mind and relive her behavior of the past?

The crux of this argument is essentially that blacks, since slavery and through their entire existence in America, have also been living in revolutionary circumstances and under revolutionary pressures. Simply because the black liberation struggle has taken 400 years to come to fruition does not mean that it is not every bit as dangerous or psychologically exhausting as the Algerian struggle. Any revolution calls upon the best in both its men and women. This is why Moynihan's statements that "matriarchy" is a root cause of black problems is as unfounded as it is inane. He does not recognize the liberation struggle and the demands that it has made on the black family.

How unfortunate that blacks and whites have allowed the most trying and bitter experience in the history of black people to be interpreted as the beginning of an "unashamed plot" to usurp the very manhood of black men. But the myth was perpetuated, and thus what brought the alternation of roles in Algeria was distorted and systema-

(1) Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, New York:
Grove Press, 1965, p. 107

tically employed to separate black men and women in America.

Black women take kindness for weakness. Leave them the least little opening and they will put you on the cross....It would be like trying to pamper a cobra....(2)

Unless we realize how thoroughly the American value of male superiority and female inferiority has permeated our relationships with each other, we can never appreciate the role it plays in perpetuating racism and keeping black people divided.

Most, but not all, American relationships are based on some type of "exclusive competition of the superior, and the exclusive competition of the inferior." This means essentially that the poor, the uneducated, the deprived and the minorities of the aforementioned groups, compete among themselves for the same scarce resources and inferior opportunities, while the privileged, middle class, educated, and select white minorities, compete with each other for rather plentiful resources and superior opportunities for prestige and power. Competition among groups is rare, due to the fact that elements who qualify are almost invariably absorbed to some extent (note the black middle class) by the group to which they seek entry. We may well understand that there is only one equal relationship between man and woman, black and white, in America, and this equality is based on whether or not you can force your way into qualifying for the same resources.

But instead of attempting to modify this competitive definition within the black movement, many black males have affirmed it as a way of maintaining the closure of male monopolization of scarce benefits and making the

(2) Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul On Ice*, New York:
McGraw Hill, 1968, p. 158

"dominion of males" impenetrable to black females." This is, of course, very much the American way of exploitation.

The order of logic which makes it possible to pronounce, as did Dr. Robert Staples, that "black women cannot be free qua women until all blacks attain their liberation," (3) maintains, whether purposely or not, that black women will be able to separate their female-ness from their blackness and thus they would be able to be free as blacks, if not free as women; or, that male freedom ought to come first; or, finally, that the freedom of black women and men, and the freedom of black people as a whole, are not one and the same.

Only with the concept of role integration can we hope to rise above the petty demarcations of human freedom that America is noted for, and that are unfortunately inherent in Dr. Staples' remark. Role integration is the realization that:

--ego attachments to particular activities or traits must be abolished as a method of determining malehood and femalehood; that instead, etc attachments must be distributed to a wider variety of tasks and traits in order to weaken the power of one activity in determining self-worth, and

--the flexibility of a people in effecting role alternation and role integration has been an historically proven asset to the survival of any people - witness Israel, China and Algeria.

Thus, the unwitting adoption and the knowing perpetuation of this American value reflects three inter-related situations:

(3) Robert Staples, *The Myth of the Black Matriarchy*,
The Black Scholar, Jan.-Feb., 1970, p.16

~~ain't~~ --black people's growing sense of security and well-being, and their failure to recognize the expanse of black problems;

--black people's over-identification with the dominant group, even though the survival of blacks in America is not assured, and

--black people's belief in the myth of "matriarchy" and their subsequent rejection of role integration as unnatural and unnecessary.

While the rhetoric of black power and the advocates of cultural nationalism laud black people for their ability to struggle under oppressive odds, they simultaneously seek to strip away or incapacitate the phenomenon of role integration - the very means by which blacks were able to survive! They seek to replace it with a weak, intractable role separation which would completely sap the strength of the black movement because it would inhibit the mobilization of both women and men. It was this ability to mobilize black men and black women that guaranteed survival during slavery.

The strength of role integration is sorely overlooked as blacks throw away the hot comb, the bleach cream, the lye, and yet insist on maintaining the worst of American values by placing the strength of black women in the traction of the white female status.

I would think black men would want a better status for their sister black women; indeed, black women would want a better status for themselves, rather than a warmed-over throne of women's inferiority, which white women are beginning to abandon.

Though most white women's lib advocates fail to realize the possibility, their subsequent liberation may spell a strengthening of the status quo values from which they sought liberation. Since more and more women will be

participating in the decision making process, those few women participating in the "struggle" will be out-numbered by the more traditional middle class women. This means that the traditional women will be in a position to take advantage of new opportunities which radical women's liberation has struggled to win. Voting studies now reflect that the traditional women, middle class and above, tend to vote the same way as their husbands. Because blacks have dealt with these husbands in the effort to secure jobs, housing and education, it does not seem likely that blacks will gain significantly from the open mobility of less tolerant women whose viewpoints differ little from those of their husbands.

If white radical thought has called upon the strength of all women to take a position of responsibility and power, can blacks afford to relegate black women to "home and babies" while white women reinforce the status quo? The cry of black women's liberation is a cry against chaining a very much needed labor force and agitating force to a role that once belonged to impotent, apolitical white women. Blacks speak lovingly of the vanguard and the importance of women in the struggle, and yet fail to recognize that women have been assigned a new place, based on white ascribed characteristics of women, rather than on their actual potential. The black movement needs its women in a position of struggle, not prone. The struggle blacks face is not taking place between knives and forks, at the washboard, or in the diaper pail. It is taking place on the labor market, at the polls, in government, in the protection of black communities, in local neighborhood power struggles, in housing and in education.

Can blacks afford to be so unobservant of current events as to send their women to fight a non-existent battle in a dishpan? Even now, the black adoption of the white values of women has begun to show its effects on black women in distinctive ways. The black liberation movement has created a politicized, unliberated copy of

white womanhood. Black women who participated in the struggle have failed to recognize, for the most part, the unique contradiction between renunciation of capitalistic competition and the acceptance of sexual colonialism. The failure of the black movement to resolve and deal with this dilemma has perpetuated the following attitudes in American politicized black women:

--The belief in the myth of matriarchy. The black woman has been made to feel ashamed of her strength, and so to redeem herself she has adopted from whites the belief that superiority and dominance of the male is the most "natural" and "normal" relationship. She consequently believes that black women ought to be suppressed in order to attain that "natural balance."

--Because the white woman's role has been held up as an example to all black women, many black women feel inadequate and so ardently compete in "femininity" with white females for black males' attention. She further competes with black females in an attempt to be the "blackest and the most feminine," thereby, the more superior to her fellow black sisters in appealing to black politicized men. She competes also with the apolitical black female in an attempt to keep black males from "regressing" back to females whom she feels have had more "practice" in the traditional role of white woman than has she.

--Finally, she emphasizes the traditional roles of women, such as housekeeping, children, supportive roles, and self-maintenance, but she politicizes these roles by calling them the role of black women. She then adopts the attitude that her job and her life is to have more children which can be used in the vanguard of the black struggle.

Black women, as the song "Black Pearl" relates, have been put up where they belong, but by American standards. Is it so inconceivable that the American value of respect

that child or feed it? Does the vanguard, of which Dr. Staples so reverently speaks, recognize the existence of the term "bastard?"

Someone once suggested that the word "bastard" be deleted from the values of black people. Would it not be more revolutionary for blacks to advocate a five-year moratorium on black births until every black baby in an American orphanage was adopted by one or more black parents? Then blacks could really have a valid reason for continuing to give birth. Children would mean more than simply a role for black women to play, or fuel for the legendary vanguard. Indeed, blacks would be able to tap the potential of the existing children and could sensibly add more potential to the black struggle for liberation. To do this would be to do something no other civilization, modern of course, has ever done, and blacks would be allowing every black child to have a home and not just a plot in some under-staffed children's penal farm.

What makes a healthy black baby in an orphanage different from "our own flesh and blood?" Except for the American value of inferiority-superiority, and the concept of "bastard" that accompanies it, there is nothing "wrong" with the orphaned child save what white society has taught us to perceive.

We can conclude that black women's liberation and black men's liberation is what we mean when we speak of the liberation of black people. I maintain that the true liberation of black people depends on their rejection of the inferiority of women, the rejection of competition as the only viable relationship between men, and their re-affirmation of respect for general human potential in whatever form, man, child or woman, it is conceived.

