

# Pornography: Who Benefits from the So Called Sexual Revolution?

By JIM GRIFFIN

When many of us were kids the drive-in was a place for "family entertainment". . . triple features, cowboy flicks, Walt Disney, Martin and Lewis, Rock Around the Clock. The nearest thing to sex that ever appeared on the silver screen was Rock Hudson in hot pursuit of Doris Day. If the drive-in had any place in our sexual development, it was because of what went on in the back seat, not because of anything we saw on the screen.

Been to a drive-in lately? Good chance you'll see triple X rather than triple features of stuff for the kids. Last week one local drive-in, for example had a special feature. . . five XXX-rated films all dealing with nurses.

It's all part of the new "permissive" attitude toward sexuality. Not only can you see X-rated movies at the local drive-in, but the regular movies now as a matter of course usually manage to include a minute or so of footage of exposed breasts or a simulated rape scene to spice things up.

And of course it's not just movies . . . the "adult" book business has pushed out from the seamy downtown tenderloin districts into the suburbs and shopping malls. The Playboy or Esquire "cheesecake" photos of the fifties which tamely restricted themselves to the upperhalf of the female anatomy have given way to photo magazines that deal with explicit sexuality in full color.

While the 1950's saw great legal battles and moral controversies over the language and relatively restrained descriptions of sexual activity in novels like D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover* and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, today's literary masterpieces use four letter words routinely and report freely on all the varied sexual exploits of their characters.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION OR PROFITS?

How did this situation come about and what does it all mean? From a strictly legal standpoint the present "permissiveness" is the result of hard-fought battles by artists and intellectuals, joined by civil libertarians, to expand free expression. . . to free the creative process from the restrictions imposed by small-minded, puritanical censors.

But the irony is that the main beneficiaries of these legal victories have been the pornographers who have utilized recent court interpretations to build a multi-million dollar industry based on the exploitation of sexuality. Meanwhile legitimate artists, who for the most part have nothing but contempt for pornography, find themselves struggling even harder to make a living from their work. The market for legitimate publishing is shrinking under the impact of an expanding pornography industry.

The changes in the law are themselves only one expression of changing cultural definitions regarding sexuality . . . the so-called "sexual revolution." The apostles of this "revolution," like Playboy's millionaire publisher Hugh Hefner, claim that whereas in times past, sex was a dirty word and something to feel guilty about, today people are free to enjoy sex in all its forms. . . and that this is a form of liberation.

They refer to the work of sociologists like Kinsey and Masters and Johnson who have studied sexual behavior and report the growth of extra-marital and pre-marital sex, the growth of sexual activity formerly regarded as taboo. These changes in sexual norms and values are reflected culturally, so the argument goes, in the growth of "erotic" literature, films, etc.

The great debate around pornography between advocates of "sexual liberation" and establishment circles, clergymen and politicians centers around the whole question of whether or not pornography stimulates sex crimes and deviant behavior. This whole debate manages to sidestep the real questions about the cause and effect of pornography.

## PORNOGRAPHY AND PURITANISM: TWO SIDES OF SEXISM

Pornography is at its roots an expression of male supremacy in capitalist society and its effect is to further



degrade women. Neither the advocates nor the critics of the new permissiveness see this, because both are operating from the same set of assumptions regarding the position of women in society.

The so-called "sexual revolutionists" want women to be "free" to satisfy all the sexual and emotional needs at the expense of the women themselves, while our critics merely want to keep the women locked into the traditional role as subservient wife and homemaker. It is a debate between men over what version of womanhood, the permissive or the traditional, will be best for men.

Let us look more closely at the "sexual revolutionaries" notions of the new "liberated" woman. It is most clear in its crudest expression -- hard core pornography. In the X-rated movies and "adult" books, women are portrayed purely and simply as objects to satisfy men's sexual fantasies. In real life, women are complicated sexual beings with their own set of needs which require sensitivity on the part of males to satisfy. Not so in the fantasy world of pornography. . . women are simply extensions of the sexual needs of men.

Pornographic films are peopled by lusty uninhibited women who are ready to go at a moment's notice and who seem to get all their pleasure from doing what men enjoy. This "adult art" also specializes in promoting myths that are deeply rooted in male supremacist ideology regarding sex. Pornographic films regularly feature sexual assaults in which the woman initially resists but realizes half-way through the act that she really loves being raped.

And rape isn't half of it! Women are subjected to every form of brutality: whips, chains, manacles and foreign objects being shoved into their genitals. The latest form of this degradation is a rash of films featuring men urinating on women to the mutual pleasure of both parties.

The message is clear: women exist to satisfy the needs of men, no matter how warped. And most of the time, they're pictured as actually enjoying their humiliation just so men won't have to feel any twinge of guilt.

Pornography also specializes in racist sexual myths. Pornographic movies feature interracial sex that is a throwback to slavery and the plantation south. One film features a man who looks like Colonel Sanders offering "his" young Black woman to another white man who of course willingly takes up the offer. Black men appear in pornography as mindless sexual machines to fulfill the jaded fantasies of white women, as imagined by white men.

Let's get out of the peep shows and into the pages of our more sophisticated "men's magazines" like *Playboy*. Here they put away the whips and the chains, but the message remains the same. The thing about our new "liberated" woman that is repeated over and over again is that women today are much "freer" to meet the varied needs of men. Women today don't go for all that crap about courtship and marriage . . . today you can get

a woman into bed without promising her anything. . . you don't have to tell her you love her or commit yourself in any way. . . in many cases you don't even have to spring for dinner and entertainment. Our "mature and liberated" woman understands that men need variety so she is not going to complain about extra-marital affairs. She's too "sophisticated" to expect a sense of responsibility from a man.

Whereas in hard-core pornography women have no identity separate from their sexual attributes, the ideal woman of *Playboy* is blessed with a mind, although it is far less important than the size of her bust. But the intellectual or artistic achievements of women are not seen as something important in their own right. Instead they are "extra added attractions" that boost the value of the man's female property in the eye's of other men. The guys at the office are even more impressed if your well-proportioned "playmate" also has a PhD in Chemistry.

Racism is another stock in trade of *Playboy*. In recent years the photo sections of *Playboy* have been integrated so that occasionally there is a Black Playmate of the Month. But the *Playboys* for which this whole world of sports cars, \$300 sweaters, revolving beds and women to fill them exists are solely white men, and white men who make upwards of \$25,000 a year at that. The sometime inclusion of a Black woman only makes the magazine's racism more blatant.

The sexual revolution as it's portrayed by *Playboy* is a sham. All the rhetoric about the "liberated" woman is nothing but an attempt to conceal the fact of the continued sexual exploitation of women.

## WOMEN WON'T BE VICTIMS OF "LIBERATION"

But women themselves are in the process of staging a "sexual revolution" of their own, one that threatens the *Playboys* and the Pornographers. Spurred by the women's movement, women are increasingly speaking out openly about what they want out of a sexual relationship with a man. Needless to say it is not to be urinated on and paraded around like a new set of golf clubs.

New research and the growing candor of women has made it clear that many if not most women are sexually and emotionally unfulfilled by relationships with men. . . largely because of the sexist notions men bring to these relationships. Women want their sexual needs addressed in a relationship and they want to be taken seriously as complete human beings instead of being treated as sex objects. Women are rejecting the "anything goes" version of sexual revolution because they realize the first thing to "go" is the woman's emotional needs and dignity.

continued on next page

continued from last page

While women show no signs of wanting to return to an earlier version of sexuality in which repression of their needs was the order of the day, they see no "liberation" in a situation which legitimizes selfish and irresponsible behavior for men while freeing women to be the victims of this behavior. Women understand that there is little liberation involved for a pregnant teen-age girl, a prostitute, or a married woman whose husband plays around.

From the vantage point of the working class, the "sexual revolution," Playboy style, is a fraud for men as well. Certainly working class men under the influence of male supremacist ideas victimize women. But where do these ideas come from and who really benefits from them?

### **MALE SUPREMACY HURTS ALL WORKERS**

Capitalism needs to put women down. Inequality

between men and women is part of its foundation. The capitalist system needs women to provide free labor in the home so a future generation of workers can be raised up to be exploited. It needs women to provide a reserve army of unemployed, so that the employers can secure the labor of women at a wage below that of men and thus drive down wages for all workers.

To maintain the oppression of women, the capitalist class in a thousand different ways promotes the ideas and attitudes that women are inferior and less than fully human. Male sexuality is not by nature selfish or bestial. Men are conditioned in their sexuality by capitalist society. Very early on in life, from what they see in the home, what they learn in school, what they read and see on T.V. and ultimately what they get from other men, they learn that women are there for them.

These ideas and attitudes and the behavior they breed, prevent working class men from seeing the basic unity of interest between laboring men and women and the interest the whole working class has in ending male supremacy as part of the fight to emancipate itself. The whole ideology of male supremacy blinds the workers to the reality that they, men and women, are all victims and it is only the capitalists who benefit from the oppression of women.

In a socialist society in which women realize full equality, sex will be neither a dirty word nor a warped male religion. It will be, for both men and women, a more mutually satisfying and richer part of our lives.