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Rape, Racism,
and the
White Women's Movement

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These articles are a contribution to Sojourner Truth Organization's discussions on revolutionary strategy for women. After full debate the organization will adopt theses which will be STO's official position.

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Every little girl is taught to refuse candy from strangers. By the time she reaches her teens she speeds up when a strange man walks behind her on the street. No girl reaches womanhood without an entrenched fear of rape.

In the last few years the women's movement has been channeling those fears into action, making women and men recognize rape as a political crime against women, a crime that is often ignored in this country.

Capitalizing on all these fears and on the current anti-rape movement, Simon & Schuster published Susan Brownmiller's book, *AGAINST OUR WILL: MEN, WOMEN, AND RAPE*, in time for Christmas, 1975. The book, modestly described as a "classic" by its author, has been almost universally acclaimed by the press: front-page review in the *NEW YORK TIMES* book review section, a selection of most major book clubs, serialized in four major periodicals, and the subject of countless promotional forums for the author.

Never before has the media been so friendly to radical feminism. But then again, never before has radical feminism been so eager to place itself at the forefront of the "fight against crime," wholeheartedly supporting the basic premises and institutions of our society that underlie all oppression, including that of women.

AGAINST OUR WILL, behind its strident feminist rhetoric, and precisely because of it, is a dangerous book. It is a law-and-order book that is picking up liberal support because in the case of rape, the victims of crime are members of an oppressed group. Like all cries for law and order these days, it is a book with strong racist overtones. It is a book which, unless repudiated, will serve to fan the fires of racism.

Susan Brownmiller would, of course, disagree. In her defense, she would point to her dazzling denunciation of Fogel and

Engerman's outrageous book, *TIME ON THE CROSS*. (That book states, among other things, that Black women weren't all that exploited by slavery, which wasn't really that bad.) And she would point to her own analysis of slavery, where she describes how "black women's sexual integrity was deliberately crushed in order that slavery might profitably endure." Her portrayal of racism in the special case where Black women are the direct victims is admirable.

This understanding, however, is negated by her steadfast refusal to recognize that Black women in U.S. society have at least as much in common with Black men as with white women, and that in some respects, notably relating to the legal system, racism has been considerably more oppressive to Black men than to Black women.

IDEAS NOT UNIQUE TO BROWNMILLER

Unfortunately, the ideas advanced in *AGAINST OUR WILL* are not unique to Brownmiller. She is representative of a majority tendency in the white women's movement, a narrow view of women's consciousness which prevents the movement from developing programs making possible alliances with other oppressed groups. Any movement for women's liberation which limits itself to issues affecting only women shuts itself off from dealing with all other forms of oppression and thereby rules out alliances with some of the strongest *women* throughout the world, on issues of the most decisive importance.

This pamphlet is divided into two parts. The first part is a critique of *AGAINST OUR WILL* and the tendency it represents. The second part calls for a new form of women's movement with a program and theory that will enable women to build a base powerful enough to begin to change society in such a way as will some day end the oppression of women, including the crime of rape.

PART I

According to Susan Brownmiller, rape is the source of women's oppression. To put it another way, the ability to rape is the source of man's domination of woman: to overcome oppression women must first divest men of the power to rape.

. . . we cannot work around the fact that in terms of

human anatomy the possibility of forcible intercourse incontrovertibly exists. This single factor may have been sufficient to have caused the creation of the male ideology of rape. When men discovered they could rape, they proceeded to do it. (p. 14)

From this hypothesis, Brownmiller draws her theory of civilization.

. . . one of the earliest forms of male bonding must have been the gang rape of one woman by a band of marauding men. (p. 14)

Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe. (p. 14)

After a thunderbolt of recognition that this particular incarnation of hairy two-legged hominid was not the Homo Sapiens with whom she would like freely to join parts, it might have been she, and not some man, who picked up the first stone and hurled it. (p. 14)

Female fear of an open season of rape . . . was probably the most important key to her historic dependence, her domestication by protective mating, (p. 16)

From prehistoric times to the present, I believe rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which ALL MEN keep ALL WOMEN in a state of fear. (p. 15)

Susan Brownmiller shares with other feminists the view that men as a group are the primary enemy of women as a group. Most feminists have concluded that women's oppression goes back to the overthrow of matriarchal society. Brownmiller goes back even further to the self-consciousness of the first male "hairy hominid." What these views have in common is a strategy for women's liberation isolated from the fight against all other forms of oppression.

This analysis overlooks the connection between the social condition of women and their role in the process of production. The basic division in this society is between one class that owns

and controls the means of production and another which does the actual work. Ruling class power rests on the competition among the workers. This competition is maintained by various kinds of inequalities imposed by the ruling class on different sectors of the population, or adapted by it from earlier social systems to serve current needs. Such is the case with the oppression of women.

Non-white people and women are kept in a state of inferiority vis a vis white people and men. When hard times come along, non-white people and women are the hardest hit: cutbacks in jobs, in services, etc. As times get better, everyone's position tends to improve. But whites and men make gains from where they already are, namely, better off than non-whites and women.

Women's oppression takes various forms. It is directly economic. Women get less pay than men for the same work. They are channelled away from the more financially (and intellectually) rewarding jobs. Because the better-paying industrial jobs are also the important ones to the functioning of the economy, women are thereby excluded from key areas of production. When jobs are scarce, like now, they get laid off before men. When needed by the ruling class, as in wartime, women are trotted out to fill jobs temporarily vacant. Being economically dependent on men, women are the stable element in the family — the unseen worker, without whose maintenance and upkeep many men could not work the long hours required of them by their employers. Many wives are the unpaid employees of their husband's boss. The drudgery of housewifery in turn molds the social oppression of women — the dependent sex, the soft sex, the stupid, uninteresting sex, and the readily available sex. It is these factors that have shaped the politics of rape.

SOCIAL RELATIONS, NOT BIOLOGY

By viewing their status as a product of social relations rather than biology, women can devise a strategy for liberation based on alliances with other groups fighting oppression. From Susan Brownmiller's analysis, that women's shared oppression by men outweighs all potential for alliances along other lines, the decisive alliance is among women. In this framework, Happy Rockefeller has more in common with a Black woman in an auto plant than has a male Black autoworker.

The hostility with which the white women's movement has frequently viewed movements which it fears might intrude on such an alliance is shared by Susan Brownmiller. Throughout her book

she tries to divide society into the male oppressors and the female oppressed, with astonishing disregard for the shared oppression of Black and third world men and women. A revealing example of this viewpoint is her discussion of the campaign of terror waged by the Ku Klux Klan during the Reconstruction period.

Gerda Lerner . . . in her documentary history, BLACK WOMEN IN WHITE AMERICA, makes the point that 'there are no records of rape and violation of white women whose husbands or male relatives were associated with the Republican cause. Such practices were confined to black women.' Since she calls attention to an omission for the purpose of making a case for the SPECIAL political abuse of black women . . . I feel I must try to set the record straight, (p. 131)

Brownmiller fails to come up with any examples of rape of white women by the Klan during Reconstruction. Instead she cites one case in 1925 where the Grand Dragon of the Klan was actually arrested, tried and convicted of the rape and murder of E. white woman. She also reports that, "Klansmen often whipped white women they accused of adultery." From this paltry evidence, seemingly in opposition to Gerda Lerner's point of view that Southern Black women were special victims of Klan terror, Brownmiller draws the following conclusion:

No one would want to deny that blacks were the special target of the Klan, and that black women suffered special abuse because they were women, but rather than try to separate out white women and claim they got off scot-free, a higher political understanding is gained by recognizing that sexual intimidation knows no racial distinctions, and that sexual oppression of white women and black women is commonly shared, (p. 131)

The function of the Ku Klux Klan was to terrorize the freed slaves who were the main force in the revolutionary Reconstruction governments. The Klan, therefore, directed its attack at Black political candidates, and Black and white people connected with the Freedmen's Bureau and freedmen's schools. The point is that the Klan, like any army, acted in a systematic manner with specific goals in mind. Rape of Black women, if not a calculated part of its plan of action, was at least a useful byproduct. Rape of

white women would have undermined its efforts.

In other words, sexual intimidation certainly did know racial distinctions. It was precisely these distinctions that were used by the Klan and others to smash Reconstruction. All but a handful of progressive whites (both men and women) eventually succumbed to the pressure and lined up with the reactionaries against the Blacks. As Gerda Lerner writes:

... the Southern black community was, in fact, reduced to subsistence at the lowest economic level in a system of social oppression based on white racism. (BLACK WOMEN IN WHITE AMERICA, p. 181)

White women were not blameworthy for not being raped, nor did they do any raping themselves. By silent acquiescence, however, and by eventually lining up on the wrong side, they were a part of the force that pushed down the Southern Black community.

It is this kind of defensiveness on behalf of white women, seen over and over in her book, that blinds Brownmiller to political reality and leads her not to a "higher political understanding," as she claims, but to a position of isolation, and appalling racism and anti-communism. The most blatant examples of these tendencies are in the chapter devoted to ... "A Question of Race."

A QUESTION OF RACISM

There is a serious error in isolating rape statistics from the rising rate of crime in general. All crime is on the increase in the United States. Unemployment is the highest in thirty years. What is more important, the unemployment rate for non-whites is double that for whites, and the rate for non-white youth is six times that of the most favored group, white males over twenty. Public housing funds have been cut, medical care has deteriorated. There is an increase in the police and prison repression of third world communities. The U.S. economic system, itself built on world-wide violence, is in crisis. As people sit home, frustrated, unable to find work, often without the most elementary necessities, they lash out at each other. And there are plenty of violent models to choose from: movies, television, police shootings, and the activities of the government itself.

In times like these, with the ruling class trying to shift the burden of the crisis onto the backs of the Black and other third

world people, white supremacy becomes even more lethal than usual. Today, one out of every ten Black youths will die a violent death before age thirty. To focus on the increase in rape, particularly Black on white rape, in isolation from the entire pattern and its causes, can only contribute to the repression and terror against Black people. It is in this context that racism, including the racist use of the rape charge, must be examined.

An entire chapter in AGAINST OUR WILL deals with ... "a question of race." Here Brownmiller maintains, among other things, that the left, by its strenuous efforts over the years on behalf of Black men falsely accused of raping white women, has actually undermined the fight against rape. With sanctimonious fervor usually displayed by reformed alcoholics, she devotes several pages to baring her leftist path. Rhetorically setting forth how she enrolled in a course taught by Communist historian Herbert Aptheker during the 1950's — "when most people could not say the word 'Communist' without trembling" — she bolsters her anti-left arguments with the personal touch and authority of one who has been there and who "knows." One can appreciate the temptation to do this, but the fact remains that it is a cheap trick and not an argument. A serious reader will not be fooled by it.

In this chapter and elsewhere, Brownmiller lambastes the left, specifically the Communist Party, for buttressing male supremacy and for opportunism in its defense work on such cases as Scottsboro and Willie McGee. She dilutes her comments with a few drops of liberalism to make the whole thing seem "objective," but her point is clear: where rape is the issue, the fight against racism has been a fight against women.

The left fought hard for its symbols of racial injustice, making bewildered heroes out of a handful of pathetic, semi-literate fellows caught in the jaws of Southern jurisprudence who only wanted to beat the rap. ... (p. 237)

For its part, the left, in its increasing paranoia (during the McCarthy period) and raging impotence, vilified and excoriated the hapless white woman whose original charge had wreaked such total destruction upon the hapless black. The standard defense strategy for puncturing holes in a rape case was (and is) an attempt to destroy the credibility of the complaining witness by smearing her as mentally unbalanced, or as sexually frustrated, or

as an oversexed, promiscuous whore. In its mass protest campaigns to save the lives of convicted black rapists, the left employed all these tactics, and more, against white women with a virulence that bordered on hate. (p. 232-8)

Interracial rape remains a huge political embarrassment to liberals. (p. 254)

Brownmiller points to the statistical rise in interracial (Black on white) rape and in part blames the "radicals" and the "white intellectual establishment" for making "heroes" of the convicted rapists. In an attempt to prove her thesis, Brownmiller deals in detail with three cases of Southern jurisprudence.

SCOTTSBORO

. . . Scottsboro remains an ugly blot on American history and Southern jurisprudence, and damning proof to liberals everywhere that Eve Incarnate and the concept of Original Sin was a no-good promiscuous woman who rode a freight train through Alabama, (p. 230)

Briefly, "Scottsboro" is the tale of nine Black youths and a handful of whites, all male, who hopped a freight from Chattanooga into Alabama in the Depression year of 1931. During the ride, the whites tried to mess with the Blacks and a fight broke out. The whites, after losing, complained to a depot man at one of the stops. When he came on to investigate, he rounded up the youths, Black and white, along with two white women in overalls riding the rails. By the time they all got to Scottsboro, the nearest town, a raging mob had gathered, and the nine Blacks were accused of raping the two white women.

The Scottsboro case went through the courts for seventeen years. Haywood Patterson, who escaped from jail in 1948 after he had been tried and convicted four times, wrote a book about his ordeal, SCOTTSBORO BOY. It should be required reading for everyone who has read AGAINST OUR WILL.

Susan Brownmiller's analysis of the Scottsboro case is so outrageous it shocks the conscience. It is utterly and irredeemably obscene. She agrees that the nine youths were innocent. Nonetheless, in her efforts to portray the "rape victims," Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, as equally oppressed and innocent, she goes to extravagant lengths.

First, she states without documentation that they tried to "duck away and vanish" in the confusion "when the black, and white youths were taken off the train." Perhaps this is true. She also says that the women were merely trying to "save their own skins" from vagrancy charges. This, for sure, is true. Again in their defense, she claims that "the singular opportunity afforded Price and Bates should be appreciated by every woman."

Right-thinking women might agree. Price and Bates had an opportunity to answer a question, "no," and save nine innocent men from seventeen years in prison. But that's not the opportunity Brownmiller is talking about.

From languishing in jail cells as the lowest of the low, vagrant women who stole rides on freight cars, it was a short step to the witness stand where dignity of a sort could be reclaimed by charging that they had been pathetic, innocent victims of rape. (p. 231)

This opportunity, wholly understandable to Brownmiller, she claims is nothing more than the motive from which some of the Scottsboro boys themselves were working.

Operating from precisely the same motivation — to save their own skins — some of the black defendants tried to exculpate themselves in court by swearing they had seen others do the raping, (p. 231-2)

This is a remarkable comparison. The Scottsboro boys were literally fighting for their own skins — and their necks: death by mob lynching or judicial lynching. The two young women were not fighting at all. The courtroom, while predominantly male (a fact dwelt upon by Brownmiller), was exclusively white. Here is how Haywood Patterson described the reading of the guilty verdicts:

The people in the court cheered and clapped after the judge gave out with the date of the execution. I didn't like it, people feeling good because I was going to die. (SCOTTSBORO BOY, p. 24)

I looked around. That courtroom was one big smiling white face. (p. 25)

The women, personally benefiting from the privilege of being white in Southern society, had seized upon an opportunity to be courtroom pets at the expense of nine lives. For them, the courtroom was anything but a hostile place. While they were poor and they were women, in that particular courtroom setting they were lionized. True, they were tragic women, but the comparison of them with their victims is disgusting.

Brownmiller draws comfort from the fact that the all-white jury that convicted the nine youths was all-male.

... no one, no political grouping, no appellate lawyer, no Scottsboro pamphlet ever raised the question of the exclusion of women from the jury rolls of Alabama, although many a pamphlet charged that Victoria Price was a prostitute, (p. 232)

Women on juries is certainly an important demand. Twenty-five years later people in large numbers were talking about demands like that, to a considerable extent impelled by the example set by Blacks. But raising this to explain why nine Black youths were convicted based on false accusations of two white women misses the entire point of Scottsboro and similar cases. The Scottsboro boys didn't need a jury to convict them. They were convicted by white opinion before they got to court. And they were convicted of being Black in a society based on white supremacy.

Haywood Patterson describes the mob that gathered outside the Scottsboro jail the first evening after they were arrested:

Round about dusk hundreds of people gathered about the jailhouse. . . . We heard them yelling like crazy about how they were coming in after us and what ought to be done with MS. . . . (SCOTTSBORO BOY, p. 17)

As evening came on the crowd got to be about five hundred, most of them with guns. Mothers had kids in their arms. Autos, bicycles, and wagons were parked around the place. People in and about them. (SCOTTSBORO BOY, p. 18)

A lynching was a carnival. Women were as much a part of the public opinion bent on protecting their Southern womanhood as men were. It would not have done the Scottsboro boys any good to have been officially convicted by twelve women. Only a wholly

Black jury — men or women — could have fairly judged the Scottsboro Boys.

The essence of Brownmiller's outrage at the left seems to be that Victoria Price was portrayed in their defense campaigns as what Brownmiller calls "a woman of murky virtue." When a woman has, in fact, been raped, and she is accused of asking for it by virtue of her reputation, this indeed is inexcusable. This has been the pattern when Black women are rape victims, and such character assassination certainly has been used to discredit the testimony of white rape victims as well. In this area, the women's movement has made commendable advances in several states, reforming evidence codes to make a woman's past sexual history irrelevant. The Scottsboro case, however, is an entirely different matter. Victoria Price had not been raped at all. (Her companion, Ruby Bates, in 1933 repudiated her testimony and admitted there had been no rape.) The fact remains that the Scottsboro Boys were convicted four times on Victoria Price's perjured testimony — testimony that was corroborated by semen found in her vagina. The fact also remains that she had had intercourse in a Chattanooga hobo jungle the night before, and in Huntsville, Alabama, the night before that. These facts were not gratuitous slander, but a crucial part of the evidence that the semen was not put there by an accused Black rapist, let alone by nine of them. These facts, of course, Victoria Price elected to lie about and send nine men to death sentences, to "save her skin from a vagrancy charge."

To prove the righteousness of her outrage at the treatment given the complaining witness, Brownmiller quotes from the judicial opinion which overturned Patterson's second conviction. Judge Horton had ruled in a long, painstaking opinion that the jury's guilty verdict was contrary to the weight of the evidence.

'History, sacred and profane', he wrote, 'and the common experience of mankind teaches that women of the character shown in this case are prone for selfish reasons to make false accusations both of rape and of insult upon the slightest provocation, or even without provocation for ulterior purposes. . . . The tendency on the part of the women shows they are predisposed to make false accusations upon any occasion whereby their selfish ends may be gained.' (p. 234)

Susan Brownmiller spent four years meticulously researching this book. How odd that she should overlook the judge's middle

sentence (. . .), which reads as follows:

These women are shown, by the great weight of the evidence, on this very day before leaving Chattanooga, to have falsely accused two negroes of insulting them, and of almost precipitating a fight between one of the white boys they were in company with and these two negroes. (SCOTTSBORO BOY, p. 294)

Why does Brownmiller work herself up into such a frenzy to protect this woman's reputation?

ANTI-COMMUNISM

According to Brownmiller, the left took on defense of Black men framed on rape charges with selfish opportunism. The men, after all, were only "pathetic, semi-literate fellows" and were therefore sitting ducks for exploitation by an American Communist movement that needed a rallying point to bring it out of the death throes of McCarthyism.

In 1951 the last Scottsboro 'Boy', then a man of thirty-eight had finally won his freedom, his name superseded in the pantheon of obscure Southern black men suddenly elevated to the position of international martyr by a succession of new cases. . . . (p. 235)

The early fifties were a bad time for the American left. . . . To Communists and those within their orbit who believed in the political strategy of mass action built around an emotional symbol, the Southern interracial rape case came to epitomize everything that was rotten or unjust about the American way of life. (p. 235)

As a natural outgrowth of its politik, the Communist Party deliberately propagandized a series of interracial rape cases as symbolic of the perfidy of the American system, (p. 235)

Going still further, Brownmiller states, again with little documentation, that not only white women, but also those Black men aided by the left in the 1950's were actually hurt by those efforts.

. . . because of the national hysteria of the McCarthyite years, any case the Communists took on and publicized became for all practical purposes a Communist cause from which others ran as if from the plague. . . . Many a case was decided in the timid court of public opinion on the basis of whether or not a modest compromise — a commutation of the death sentence — would give aid and succor to the Communist cause, (p. 237)

This is the old outside agitator theory. "If only the reformers would shut up and go home, we could get on with the business of reform." Here, however, the accusations are more serious. Although the South was lynching Blacks long before the Communist Party of the United States came to their defense, Brownmiller is actually accusing the commies of sending Black men to the death chair by their interference in Southern affairs.

Her prime example of Communist opportunism and symbolic work derived from a position of "impotence" and "paranoia" is the defense campaign on behalf of Willie McGee. McGee, a Black man, was sentenced to die for rape of a white woman in Laurel, Mississippi. His accuser was a woman whom people in Laurel, Black and white, all knew had been having an affair with McGee for a long time. The woman, Wilametta Hawkins, claimed she was raped by a Black man she could not identify. Whether she was actually raped by someone other than McGee, and McGee was merely arrested as a likely victim, or whether she was not raped at all, but blew the whistle when she figured out the whole town was talking, it was obvious to the people of Laurel that Willie McGee was innocent. Brownmiller herself, after casting doubt on McGee's innocence for several pages, grudgingly acknowledges his innocence, based on the account by Carl Rowan. Rowan, at the time a northern news reporter, having interviewed many Laurel townsfolk who knew about the affair between McGee and Hawkins, chose not to come forward with the information, for fear of playing ball with the commies. Later, after McGee had been executed, Rowan apparently got his courage back. He then wrote his story, with what Brownmiller calls "great sensitivity to its lasting ambiguities."

Brownmiller sees the McGee case as another example of vilification of a white woman and an isolated gasp of the Communist Party for recognition at her expense. The truth is something different and something everyone should know. For all the dismal errors the Communist Party of the United States has made, in its

defense of Black men framed on rape charges, it has had a distinguished career.

Laurel, Mississippi, was a one-industry town dominated by the Masonite Corporation. Masonite employees had been organized into a militant CIO union, where Black and white workers had the makings of a unified workforce. During the middle 1940's, the CIO was engaged in an organizing drive through the South. McGee was arrested November 3, 1945, during the wave of strikes that swept the country after World War II. His frame-up was instrumental in disrupting the growing unity between white and Black workers. This case was not an isolated incident. At the same time, in the same county, there was a celebrated "miscegenation" trial.

It was a losing battle for McGee. The governor of Mississippi publicly declared that if the State did not kill McGee, he'd do it himself. A coalition of women from all over the country was put in jail "in protective custody" when they went to appeal to the governor shortly before McGee's execution.

In this context, the leftist explanation of the rape charge as one method by which the state assists private enterprise for power and profit is not the ferocious, ridiculous rhetoric Brownmiller claims. It is an accurate description of a mechanism used, with others, to further divide an already divided working class — a useful tool to pit white against Black workers to prevent successful strikes and moves for higher wages and better working conditions. In Laurel the ploy succeeded. Fifteen hundred whites on the courthouse lawn cheered McGee's execution the night he was finally electrocuted. There were women in that crowd.

Brownmiller ignorantly counterposes what she calls the "authentic, black-originated southern civil rights movement" of the 1960's with the situation in Laurel in 1945.

. . . the new movement started not with symbolic cases, but with pragmatic efforts at lunch counter desegregation and voter registration, (p. 235)

She apparently knows as little about the rape charge and the civil rights movement of the 1960's as she knows about the rape charge of 1945. In 1961, at the height of the "authentic" lunch counter sit-in movement, Thomas Wansley, age sixteen, was arrested in Lynchburg, Virginia, and convicted of rape. The hysteria that pervaded the community not only convicted Wansley, it crippled the civil rights movement. A protest movement got his death sentence reversed and reduced to life, but in 1976 he is still in prison.

A white man found guilty of raping an eleven-year-old girl in Lynchburg at that time got five years. In late 1959, during the "authentic" voter registration drive, Mack Charles Parker, charged with rape, was turned over to a Mississippi mob by jail guards and lynched by seven men. The list goes on and on.

"WOLF WHISTLE"

It is her account of the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, however, that reveals the extravagant lengths to which Brownmiller's one-sidedness leads her. She is aghast that Till, age fourteen, was tortured, mutilated, shot with a .45 and dumped in the Tallahatchie River. "Nothing in recent times can match it for sheer outrageousness, for indefensible overkill with community support." Even with all her disclaimers, the use of the term "overkill" to describe the lynching of a child is a shock. What could this boy's crime possibly have been — a crime so dreadful that lynching is merely an *overreaction* to it? One figures this kid must have raped and tortured a whole nursery school full of little girls.

He didn't. Fourteen-year-old Chicagoan Emmett Till was vacationing in Mississippi for the summer with his uncle. Egged on by a few buddies, he whistled at a white, married woman named Carolyn Bryant. Wearing what must be the largest pair of horse-blinders anyone has ever seen, Brownmiller goes on to analyze the shared guilt of the killers (the woman's husband and his half-brother) and Till.

Rarely has one single case exposed so clearly as Till's the underlying group-male antagonisms over access to women; for what began in Bryant's store [where Till whistled] should not be misconstrued as an innocent flirtation. . . Emmett Till was going to show his black buddies that he, and by inference, they, could get a white woman. . . The accessibility of all white women was on review, (p. 247)

We are rightly aghast that a whistle could be cause for murder, but we must also accept that Emmett Till and J. W. Milam shared something in common. They both understood that the whistle was no small tweet. . . it was a deliberate insult, just short of physical assault, a last reminder to Carolyn Bryant that this black boy, Till, had in mind to possess her. (p. 247)

This remarkable analysis unbelievably puts Till and his murderers in one class — oppressor — and Mrs. Bryant (who had chased Till with a gun for his melodious violation of her womanhood) in another — oppressed. Brownmiller entirely misses the point that Mr. and Mrs. Bryant, though not equals by any means, share a position in this society wholly separate and unequal from Emmett Till. Black people, including Black men, did not contribute to Carolyn Bryant's oppression. She, on the other hand, not only chased Till with a pistol, she sat in the courtroom as a reminder to the jury of their duty to protect white womanhood, and stood approvingly by her husband's side as he admitted the murder and bragged of the motive. They did their duty and acquitted the killers.

Perhaps Brownmiller's analysis of the Till murder would not have been so outrageous had it not been for the intervention of a curious figure. In the aftermath of the Till holocaust, Eldridge Cleaver became a rapist. He analyzes this conscious decision in *Soul on Ice* — how he had a minor breakdown, when, upon seeing a picture of Carolyn Bryant, he got turned on. His next step was to learn how to defile white man's property. After practicing on Black women, he learned the trade and reached journeyman's status: a certified rapist of white women.

The point is not to defend Eldridge Cleaver. For all his self-analysis and introspection, he still finds it more comfortable to manufacture exhibitionistic men's trousers called, of course, "Cleavers," than to maintain the fight against racism or sexism. But Cleaver did have some useful insights into rape that went beyond his individual psyche: victims of white supremacy are apt to vent their anger on women, who symbolize white man's property. In other words, white supremacy is a contributing cause of male supremacy, at least insofar as it affects relations between Black men and white women. An interesting analysis could be made along these lines. At the very least, Cleaver and others shocked the nation into looking at racism more seriously, by connecting it to what is nearest and dearest to white men: their female property. Brownmiller, however, misses all this. To her, Cleaver is nothing but a rape peddler.

The spectacle of white radicals and intellectuals falling all over each other in their rush to accept the Cleaver rationale for rape was a sorry sight . . . when the Neanderthal slogan 'All black prisoners are political prisoners' was a rallying cry of the New Left. (p. 252)

By equating Cleaver's thoughts about himself and his criminal past with the Black movement's understanding of white supremacy as the institution that fills up the jails with Black people, Brownmiller is able to draw her racist, reactionary, and terribly dangerous conclusion about the oppression of women.

History is never behind us, and we must not forget how the white man has used the rape of 'his' women as an excuse to act against black men. But today the incidence of actual rape combined with the looming spectre of the rapist in the mind's eye, and in particular the mythified spectre of the black man as rapist to which the black man in the name of his manhood now contributes, must be understood as a control mechanism against the freedom, mobility, and aspirations of all women, white and black. The crossroads of racism and sexism had to be a violent meeting place. There is no use pretending it doesn't exist, (p. 255)

Now her position is unmistakable. It is rape and the threat of rape, by Black men in particular, which is responsible for the subjugation of women. And she has the nerve to accuse the left of driving a "wedge between two movements for human rights."

Yes, the "crossroads of racism and sexism had to be a violent meeting place. There is no use pretending it doesn't exist." But others might see that crossroads not as Brownmiller does, in rape of white women by Black men, but in the fact that Black women have four times as high a likelihood as white women of dying in childbirth, or that thirty-three percent of Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age have been sterilized. This absolute blindness to that relationship and the failure to grasp what the real source of women's oppression is, leads Brownmiller to her inevitable law-and-order conclusions on how to stop rape.

LAW AND ORDER

Before examining Brownmiller's law-and-order solutions, the historic record of United States rape laws should be examined. Death was first made a penalty for the crime of rape as part of the Southern slave codes before the Civil War. The Mississippi slave code had a mandatory death penalty for a slave found guilty of raping a white woman. Rape of a slave woman by a slave carried no penalty. And rape of a slave woman by a white man was his

property right.

After the overthrow of Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws were passed, prohibiting Black and white associations of any kind. (Virginia's miscegenation laws, giving a bounty to anyone who reported a Black-white marriage, were not repealed until 1968.) Slave codes were re-enacted as civil codes, making rape punishable by death. Also during this time, thousands of Blacks, mostly men, were lynched, often under the pretext of avenging rape or protecting women from rape. The Socialist Women's Caucus of Louisville summed it up like this:

The most effective tool for this division was the cry of rape. An atmosphere was created in which every Black man was pictured to the white community — poor and rich — as a savage potential rapist, who must be kept under control. Rich men raised the cry —and poor white men echoed it, obsessed with the idea that they must protect their women, their property from savage beasts. Rich white women were put on pedestals and treated as dolls. Poor white women lived in poverty and drudgery — in return for the 'privilege' of being the symbol of pure white womanhood, the precious piece of property, 'protected' by white men. (RAPE AND THE RACIST USE OF THE RAPE CHARGE)

In this context, although the rape laws did not specify "for Blacks only," that is what they meant. Out of 455 executions for rape in the last forty years, 405 have been of Black men. And there have been countless prosecutions of Black men for "insulting glances" at white women or such crimes as "assault with intent to ravish." No white man has ever been executed for raping a Black woman.

With this kind of history, the use to which rape laws have been put is clear. These laws do not protect women. Nor were they intended to. When a woman successfully defends *herself* against rape, the law calls her a murderer. It took a national effort of women and Black people to free JoAnne Little. In the 1940's it took a ten-year national effort to free Rosa Lee Ingram and her two sons, who shot a white man who had attacked her.

Rape, like other crime, is on the increase. Obviously, the criminal laws do not stop crime. And the rape laws are still being used to keep Black people in a state of oppression. Random prosecutions of Black men for raping white women, and false

accusations still happen.

1. In Tarboro, North Carolina, a white woman hitchhiker flagged down a car with three Black men. They let her out in a public area where some curious white folks were watching. Several days later she claimed they had raped her. A protest movement overturned their convictions and death sentences.

2. In Louisville, Kentucky, a white woman said she was raped in a laundromat and described her attacker. The police picked up a man who did not match the description and witnesses say he was not the man they saw leaving the laundromat. Willie Burnett was convicted anyway and sentenced to life.

3. Also in Louisville, Kentucky, a fifteen-year-old girl said she was raped by a Black man and gave a description. The police started their hunt for the criminal, but the girl came clean: she had had intercourse with a friend and was afraid she might be pregnant.

4. In Florida, Delbert Tibbs, a Black poet and theologian from Chicago, was convicted of raping a white woman and murdering her male companion. The woman originally described her assailant as a very dark-skinned Black man with a pock-marked face. She also said he had "wooly hair like they all have," and that he drove a green truck. No truck was ever found, and Tibbs has light skin and a clear complexion. At trial, faced with the discrepancy, the woman said he must have changed color. It had been suggested that the woman's former boyfriend might have committed the crime. The police did not even investigate that possibility. (RAPE AND THE RACIST USE OF THE RAPE CHARGE.)

It is in this light that the law-and-order solutions of the sort posed by Brownmiller must be viewed.

Brownmiller, first of all, does not examine the general increase in crime. Nor does she care what causes crime: rape or otherwise. Finally, she is not in the least concerned with the functioning of the legal system or with whether prison actually does anything to stop crime.

Whether or not a term in jail is truly 'rehabilitative' matters less . . . than whether or not a guilty offender is given the penalty his crime deserves. It is important to be concerned with the treatment offenders receive in prison, but a greater priority . . . is to ensure offenders actually go to prison, (p. 379)

Given the realities of prison, and its utter failure as a deterrent as well as a rehabilitative measure, one can ask whether Brownmiller is really interested in ending rape. It is obvious that she is interested in selling books. Her approach ignores the reality of U.S. prisons, which are breeding grounds for crime, particularly for rape, as homosexual rape seems to be universal in men's prisons. A prisoner who comes out of jail is angrier, more economically deprived, and less able to deal with the world than when he went in. Her approach also fails to deal with the realities of the criminal justice system. The legal system in this country is an automatic railroad for Black defendants. A solution to rape that calls for more prosecution is a solution that is designed to put more Black men in jail, whether or not they have committed any crimes.

Brownmiller's solutions are consistent with this approach: fifty percent women on the police forces, vigorous prosecutions, reduce the penalty for rape so juries won't be so reluctant to convict, outlaw pornography and clean up prostitution, and karate lessons for women.

I am convinced that the battle to achieve parity with men in the critical area of law enforcement will be the ultimate testing ground on which full equality for women will be won or lost. (p. 388)

A fine solution. Brownmiller calls it a "revolutionary goal of utmost importance to women's rights." It is The Fifty Percent Solution. Brownmiller suggests an equal demand in the army and national guard, state troopers, sheriffs, and among the ranks of prosecuting attorneys. Why stop there? How about a movement for women's revolutionary right to drop 50% of U.S.-made napalm from 50% of all U.S. bombers, or to spy on 50% of citizens the president characterizes as his enemies (women might be especially good spying on other women), or maybe to plot 50% of the assassinations of leaders of third world countries engaged in struggles for national liberation? Susan Brownmiller probably just didn't think of those ideas.

BACK TO REALITY

A just society would not have prostitution and would not have pornography. There is no question that pornography is group libel of women. Brownmiller is correct to compare it to the ridicule of Frito Bandido or Little Black Sambo in its maintenance of the

ideology of oppression. However, a reform movement of the type she proposes would not stop pornography. If successful, it would merely give pornography a protective tariff, making it more expensive to run porno houses underground and to pay off the cops (men and women) not to prosecute and the judges not to convict. Furthermore, it would give extra money to those hustlers enterprising enough to run the risks. In other words, it would be very much like dope peddling — and prostitution.

Prostitution is already illegal. Yet it flourishes. Prostitution is a profitable enterprise, built on the decadence of a society that sees access to women's bodies as a man's financial right. China and other socialist countries have drastically reduced the incidence of both prostitution and rape, but capitalist countries everywhere seem unable to cope with the problem. In the United States, the fact that prostitution is a crime is irrelevant. It is enforced only insofar as the prostitutes or their pimps fail to pay off the cops, in dollars or in services, so the cops will look the other way.

There is no evidence that female police will be less corrupt than males. The entire law enforcement systems at least of large cities are based on corruption. The F.B.I. spreads deathly rumors about one group of Black youths to another, to prevent unity among Black people and keep them at each other's throats. The city police bring heroin into Black and Latin communities for the same reason, giving one faction the exclusive franchise to deal. A good lawyer is one who knows who to pay off and how much: witnesses, police, prosecutors, courtroom personnel, judges — all the positions Brownmiller wants to fill up with women. Women certainly have the right to 50% of capitalism's graft. But that is not a revolutionary demand.

A genuine movement against pornography would rely on mass action, not legalistic maneuvers. It would mobilize large numbers of women to stop, by direct action, the printing, showing, shipping, and circulation of books, films, and other items which contribute to the degradation and subjugation of women. (One example has recently been reported from Britain, where in one town, the opponents of a dirty movie house greet its patrons with cries of "shame," snap their pictures, and publicize them. Reports are that business has fallen off considerably.)

Brownmiller's solutions are the only ones a narrow feminist can propose. They pose absolutely no challenge to the structure of our society. In fact, they bolster its framework: make more laws, put more criminals (Black people) in jail, beef up police forces and make them half women, give guns to women to shoot

men, make our streets safe for women, and build more jails, even if they don't do a thing to stop crime. This is why the press loves Susan Brownmiller's book. And this is why any liberation movement, including the movement for women's liberation, should hate it. Law-and-order solutions won't liberate women. Law-and-order solutions will just create a police state in which nobody will be free.

PART II

Most white women who join the women's movement start with at least some of the premises set forth by Susan Brownmiller. While they may not go so far as to call rape the origin of women's oppression, they consider male domination to be the perpetuating force of women's inequality. From here, the white women's movement concludes that all women share a common oppression which forms a tie that binds women more powerfully than any other.

By deliberately picking programs designed (at least theoretically) to draw in women of all races and classes, the movement seeks to unite women based upon this shared oppression. Thus, women's centers all over the country have consciousness-raising sessions and legal clinics that concentrate on divorce. They have rape crisis centers, pregnancy testing services, abortion referral services, and legalistically oriented employment discrimination task forces that inevitably get bogged down in a few cases as they crawl upward through the courts for years.

Every one of these problems does, in fact, exist for all women. But the programs built around them fail to draw in large numbers of women from any group except the white middle class. Other women may revolve through the organizations for services or check out the groups for a time, but they do not join the movement.

Many committed members of the women's movement, as well as many of its sympathetic critics, have long voiced concern that, "Women's Liberation is all white." These are women who do not want the women's movement to retain its narrow focus and constituency, yet the trend of bourgeois whiteness continues. Why is this happening?

One answer to this question is that the problems most immediate to non-white women are not those that have been taken up by the women's movement. While some women from all races and classes get raped, need divorces, or do the same job as some man for less money, these are not the salient problems for Black and

third world women. Let us take an example of a married, pregnant, Black woman who already has two sons and two daughters.

(A) She has a four times greater chance of dying in childbirth than a pregnant white woman (before World War II she had only a two times greater chance, and in 1949 a three times greater chance);

(B) The chance that her baby will die at birth is twice that of a white woman's baby;

(C) Each of her sons has a 10% chance of dying a violent death before he is thirty years old. If the baby she is carrying turns out to be a boy, there is a 33 1/3 % chance that one of her sons will die this way before age thirty;

(D) She is more likely than a white woman to come out of the hospital having been sterilized;

(E) Her nine-year-old daughter has been suspended from a 98% Black public school for kicking a teacher who was pulling her hair;

(F) The economic crisis has resulted in her husband losing the job he had held for eight years. Although the layoffs at his company have left an all-white workforce, the union says they can't do anything for him. Under the union seniority agreement, the last person hired is the first person fired, and before the 1964 Civil Rights Act there were no Black people hired;

(G) Her chances of getting a job are slim. Black women now have the highest unemployment rate in the U.S., above Black men, whose unemployment rate is far above white women. (White men over age twenty are the most favored group.)

What does the women's movement have to offer this woman?

Historically, the most menial, unskilled, lowest-paying jobs in this society have been reserved for Black women. For this reason, they have often been able to find jobs when Black men could not (a trend that now seems to be changing, perhaps as domestic and unskilled production work has been further automated). Thus, Black women have always accepted the need to work to survive?. More fortunate Black women whose families could come up with

a little money tended to become teachers and nurses. Because of the lack of comparable jobs for Black men, families would often send their daughters rather than their sons to school. This is not to suggest that there are not many Black men with steady jobs. Nor is it to suggest that Black women have any power in the United States — any more than Black men. But as between Black men and women, as a group, there is a greater sense of equality and a greater sense of independence on the part of Black women than there is in the relationships between white men and women.

For these reasons, getting out of the kitchen and into a job is not a liberating goal for Black women as a group. Nor is there much to relate to in the various concepts of women's consciousness raised by the women's liberation movement: rape as the source of women's oppression, "femininity" as a control mechanism to keep women weak and in constant competition with each other, sexist jokes as a mechanism to keep women down by humiliation and ridicule, sexual equality, shared housework, etc. To Black women over the years, the fight has been for survival of their families and survival of Black people generally. And Black women have almost unanimously agreed that their liberation as women depends on improvement of life in their communities and cannot be won apart from the liberation of Black men. A movement that does not take this into account will not win Black women. And a women's movement without Black women will not free itself of bourgeois domination and become a revolutionary movement. In fact, a white women's movement that does not align itself with Black women's struggle for liberation cannot be considered a women's movement at all.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT?

It is time for white women to develop an alternative strategy to the white Women's Liberation Movement. It is time to pose programs that will build a mighty, unified movement — a force that can deal a decisive blow to the network of capitalism, racism and sexism that devours women. Such a movement must take up as its own and as its priority the fight against white supremacy.

It is important to be clear what this means to women. It *does not* mean that Black people as a group are more oppressed than women. There is no "oppressometer" by which one group's oppression can be measured against another's. In fact, if such a gadget existed, it would probably register oppression of the elderly

highest, followed by children. Who is more oppressed is at best a moral question and has little strategic significance to a movement for proletarian liberation. Similarly, directing the main blow against white supremacy *does not* mean that white supremacy is a more important force dividing the working class than male supremacy. An argument can be made, in fact, that it is male supremacy that has been a greater prop to capitalism. After all, it is the family structure that provides a husband who labors for an employer, and a wife, economically dependent on her husband, who *also* works (free) for his employer by providing for and maintaining the man and all the future little workers. Finally, the struggle against male supremacy is not less revolutionary than the struggle against white supremacy.

The importance of taking up the fight against white supremacy is this: OF ALL STRUGGLES IN WHICH A POPULAR VICTORY WOULD FATALLY WEAKEN CAPITALISM, IT IS THE ONE WHICH HAS THE GREATEST CHANCES OF SUCCESS. U.S. capitalism is more vulnerable to attack in the area of white supremacy than of male supremacy for three reasons:

(A) Black women and men in this country are geographically and socially segregated in ways that facilitate development of forms of organization and culture that lead to a strong movement against their oppression. The Southern "Black belt" and key Northern cities like Detroit and Gary are such Black enclaves. (Eighty-one percent of the U.S. Black population lives in urban areas, fifty-eight of those in the inner city. By contrast, only thirty percent of the white population lives in the inner city.) This pattern has had military significance in the form of slave uprisings and will again have decisive importance as Black people are able to take and run strategic areas as their own. Women, on the other hand, live in such a way that they are hardly ever apart from members of the oppressor group, men, who generally partake of the most intimate relations of trust.

(B) Black people as a group are more highly proletarianized than women as a group. This means that they are concentrated socially in the most crucial areas of bourgeois production, areas from which women are to a considerable extent excluded: mining, steel, transportation, power, etc.

(C) The fight against white supremacy in the United States is directly linked to the world-wide struggles for national liberation,

which are at present dealing the sharpest blows at the capitalist system: China, Cuba, Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, etc.

The white women's movement has from time to time rallied around isolated struggles of Black women. This work is important and has been commendable. The nationwide women's campaign to free JoAnne Little is an example of the unity which can be built among women if the cause is right. To successfully build a multinational mass organization of women, however, the women's movement cannot limit itself purely to issues of women's consciousness. It must fight for all issues of concern to women, including areas where the fight itself is on behalf of men. This is precisely what the white women's movement has refused to do.

In 1975 several strongly feminist groups that had fought hard to free JoAnne Little backed off when the time came to fight for Delbert Tibbs. They felt as women they could not support a man accused of rape. This is indicative of the parochial view of liberation which has kept the Women's Liberation Movement from building a mass base.

A movement to defend a Black man unjustly accused of raping a white woman is not a movement that justifies or condones rape. It is a movement that fights injustice at precisely that strategic point designed to deal the most decisive blow to the U.S. ruling class: white supremacy. And it is a struggle in which white women have a particularly significant contribution: the role of refusing to sit quietly while a man is picked at random and accused of a crime because he is Black, and the rape victim is white, so some Black flesh must be sacrificed. A women's movement that will not take up such a fight because "women's issues come first" has lost sight of the fact that Black women are part of the women's movement. Our movement must take up the struggles of *all* issues which affect women, whether or not they affect *only* women: education, health care, repression, etc. And each of these issues should be viewed creatively, analyzing both how each affects women, and how each can best be utilized to direct an attack against white supremacy.

During the height of the anti-busing movement in Boston, Dr. Kenneth Edelin, a Black physician, was convicted of manslaughter for performing an abortion on a Black woman at Boston City Hospital. Dr. Edelin's indictment was the first major attack on women's right to abortion since the favorable 1973 Supreme Court decision. The location and timing of this "test case" was no coincidence, a fact which the anti-busing leaders knew. These

facts are impressively analyzed in a pamphlet called IT'S NOT THE BUS, published by the Proletarian Unity League of Boston.

The anti-busing movement supported the indictment of Dr. Edelin and exploited the trial for "right to life" publicity among their white constituency in Boston. Thus, while the anti-busing movement was attacking the rights of Blacks to equality in education by stoning buses filled with Black children, its leaders were at the same time attacking the rights of women by "protecting" unborn "children." The attack on women, not surprisingly, came in the form of an attack on a Black doctor who had performed an abortion on a Black woman.

As part of their "right to life" campaign in the white communities, leaders of the anti-busing movement attacked Dr. Edelin with grizzly stories about experimentation on fetuses. The pattern is not a new one. The connection between the anti-busing movement and the Edelin trial reminds us of the connection between the CIO organizing drive in Laurel, Mississippi, and the rape frame-up of Willie McGee. It reminds us of the connection between the sit-in movement in Lynchburg, Virginia, and the rape frameup of Thomas Wansley. The setting is different, but the theme is the same: a Black struggle against white supremacy that is picking up some white support, interrupted by a lurid trial of a Black man, all in the name of protection of women and children — and now of unborn fetuses.

The anti-busing movement justified their stand on busing in the name of quality education. They did not want funds diverted from education to busing. Their stand on abortion they justified in the name of quality health care. But of course they did not oppose the already-huge budget cuts from Black Boston City Hospital. This unusually clear connection between white and male supremacy was not exposed or exploited by the women's movement in Boston. That racist attacks by the right were a central focus of both situations is a fact that should have been recognized by the women's movement, and perhaps it would have been recognized had the movement already had the kind of programs that could have drawn in Black women in numbers.

A word should be said about community groups, which invariably are made up mainly of women. ROAR and other racist groups in Boston and elsewhere are no different. The reactionary leaders in the U.S. know what the decisive issues are and enlist willing women as their troops. The forces of liberation must do the same. In such struggles, progressive white women absolutely must be in there, with Black women and men, joining their fight

for equality. What is more, as part of the struggle, white women have a special responsibility to try to win over white women on the other side. This is hard, but it is not impossible. The right-to-life marches drew only small numbers of women in Boston, in spite of leadership from the respected leaders of the anti-busing movement. This is an important fact and a possible key to the vulnerability of the reactionary movement. In this struggle, for example, the women's movement should have tried to win white women to the following positions:

(A) The attack on Dr. Edelin was an attack on all women;

(B) Dr. Edelin was singled out, of all the doctors performing abortions, because he was Black;

(C) The anti-busing movement's leaders who oppose busing don't give a damn about the rights of women. In fact, they are solidly against them;

(D) Just as the racists are opposing women's rights under the cover of quality health care and "protection," they are opposing Black children's rights under the cover of quality education and "community protection."

By recognizing these connections and others, and by a lot of hard work, at least some white women can be won away from their acquiescence in, and even their active support for white supremacy.

The women's movement has a strong history of this sort in the struggles of Black people, following their leadership in the abolition movement and in the movement against lynching. It is these programs that today's movement for women's liberation should emulate.

PROGRAMS

A proletarian revolution is an absolute necessity for the liberation of women. Conversely, an autonomous women's movement is an absolute necessity as part of a strategy for proletarian revolution. Without an independent women's movement, there is no guarantee that the male supremacy now rampant in bourgeois society or, for that matter, within the proletarian movement or in any party, will be challenged. Thus, without a women's

movement there is no assurance that even under socialism the ideological superstructure of male dominance and male superiority will be undercut. Furthermore, without a revolutionary struggle against male supremacy, the fight against capitalist domination will not succeed.

The task of the women's movement is to win liberation for women by aligning itself with the proletariat. Tactically, this means developing programs which focus on issues of special concern to women and which are, at the same time, able to mobilize women for mass action. Within this category of programs, those of special concern to non-white women must be taken up as a priority, and those which in any way undermine the fight for equality by non-white people must be rejected, whether or not they have organizing potential for women. Projects which involve working alliances with the police and prosecutors almost invariably fall into the latter category.

The second part of a successful women's movement must be to educate those women active in its mass programs about the nature of imperialism and capitalism, and their direct link to oppression of non-white people and women in the United States and elsewhere. This task is particularly significant in areas where support groups exist for various movements for national liberation in third world countries.

A wide range of programmatic possibilities exists within this framework. Some concern purely "women's issues," but many do not. Health care, jobs, and children's education are areas of immediate concern to women. Within each of these areas, there are issues which mainly affect third world women; white women can begin to be drawn to these issues. Occasionally, the issues are what have traditionally been considered "women's issues" as well.

HEALTH CARE

Involuntary sterilization of women is a "women's issue" in its purest sense. It also is a crucial issue in the struggle for national liberation of Puerto Rican people, and it is becoming an increasingly serious issue for Black women in the United States. As was pointed out earlier, a mind-boggling 33% of all women of child-bearing age in the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico have been sterilized. Black women, with some frequency, have for one reason or another come out of city maternity hospitals unable to have any more children. And it is common knowledge that unnecessary hysterectomies have long been performed on women of all races

and classes. Every thinking person in the U.S. understands the dangers of this government deciding who has the right to have children and who doesn't. The concept of a master race was purportedly repudiated by this country and others in response to Hitler and his army of Aryans in the 1940's.

The issue of sterilization is one issue where the relationship between white supremacy and oppression of women needs no explanation. A mass movement of women is needed to demand information on how many caesarean deliveries, hysterectomies, tubal ligations, and other related operations are performed on various groups of women all over the country. There should be groups of women in the obstetrical section of every city hospital acting as patient advocates, so that every woman who signs a consent form for sterilization has had ample time to make a reasoned decision, and so that no consent is obtained by duress or by promises of financial rewards. Radical associations of nurses, aides and midwives should be organized to monitor the hospitals and doctors. Hospitals guilty of these practices should be shut down by masses of angry women and struck by hospital personnel. In individual cases, where the damage has already been done, there should be lawsuits against the hospital, publicizing the abuses of women by sterilization. Legislation should be scrutinized for any suggestion that rights of women (like public aid) should be tied to consent to sterilization.

While local work is going on opposing involuntary sterilization, women must at the same time be exposing the violence against the women of Puerto Rico. The practice of mass sterilization should be attacked as dramatically as was the napalming of Vietnamese villages. The role of imperialism is inextricably linked to this issue as it affects third world women. Using sterilization as a starting point for education on the nature of U.S. capitalism and imperialism should «be a way to reach women who might otherwise think the broader issues were too remote to merit attention. Other programs certainly could be suggested.

Birth control is an area very much like sterilization in its oppression of women, particularly non-white women. Hundreds of thousands of women in the U.S. have been fitted with the U.S.-manufactured "Dalkon Shield"; this is an intrauterine device which was inadequately tested, promoted by inaccurate advertising of its safety and effectiveness for women, and sold to women without a word of warning by physicians and clinics who accepted the sales pitches of the manufacturers without one iota of independent knowledge.

The Dalkon Shield has received considerable publicity recently, as hundreds of women in the U.S. have filed lawsuits against the manufacturer, A. H. Robins Co. The device has caused infection, septic miscarriages, uterine abscesses, perforations, sterility and even death in large numbers of women.

Of course, nobody knows how many women in third world countries have suffered from these injuries, nor is it likely the manufacturer is liable for them, since the devices were sold directly by the manufacturer to the United States, which in turn distributed them through the Agency for International Development. Largely through the efforts of the Rockefeller-funded World Population Council, IUD's have been sold throughout the third world. Twelve million women have them embedded in their bodies; only three million of these women are in the United States. And nobody knows how or why the device works.

Beyond birth control is the issue of birth. Since 1955, the maternal death rate among Black mothers has been four times that of white mothers. In North Carolina, a state with a large percentage of Black population, there are seven times as many Black maternal deaths. Many Black babies are born to malnourished mothers who have had inadequate pre-natal care. The children themselves then grow up poor and malnourished, and consequently suffer from school failure, social deprivation, and early death. Malnutrition among pregnant women contributes to mental retardation, as does lead poisoning, still a form of violence against Black and poor white and third world children. The list goes on into adulthood. Hypertension kills fifteen times as many Black men as white men between the ages of fifteen and forty. Hypertension kills seven times as many Black women as white women of any age group. All these statistics are analyzed in the May, 1974 issue of BLACK SCHOLAR in an article by J. N. Gayles, Jr. called "Health Brutality and the Black Life Cycle." The conclusion is clearly that Black people are brutalized by the U.S. health system, and Black women are particularly abused.

A similar analysis and set of suggestions could be made in the area of education or jobs or police repression. TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND Chicago school children were summarily suspended last year. A large proportion of them were Black. Inequality in education between whites and non-whites is obvious in many ways: cutbacks in bilingual education programs, poorer facilities in Black neighborhoods, resistance to busing to achieve better education for Black children — when Black children have been being bused past white schools to achieve segregation for a long

time, and plenty of white kids are bused to parochial school without an outcry. Girls and boys are both affected, but the issue is of most concern to mothers.

Seventy percent of all killings by police in Chicago, the killer-cop capital of the U.S., are of Black people, with an unknown number of the remaining thirty percent being of other non-whites. Although most of the immediate victims are not women, every male fatality is a woman's husband, or brother, or son, or friend. Police repression is an issue of concern to women. As the seniority system in the economic system is laying off women and non-white people who were last hired, gains made in the 1960's are being stolen away. A movement to set aside the seniority system where it interferes with the employment rights of non-white people and women should be taken up. Women should be demanding daycare from industry and from their cities, rather than taking the tempting but less militant route of setting up small, co-operative daycare arrangements among their friends.

Movements around these issues and others must be slowly and painstakingly built. Sometimes issues arise that can and should be seized upon as immediately important for organizing women. Defense of Jo Anne Little is an example. These must be picked up and developed. But just as frequently, the crisis situation is one where women will be likely to line up on the side of reaction: women-led racist walkouts in schools and jobs are such examples. It is imperative that a progressive women's movement exist, independent of these crises, which will be organized, educated to the importance of proletarian unity, and able to act when such events occur. For this, we need a new form of women's movement.

This pamphlet was originally printed in January, 1976. Since then a lot has happened. Congress has all but eliminated Medicare money for abortions, making safe, legal abortions for poor (disproportionately Black and Third World) women, very hard to obtain. At the same time, the government now pays for 90 percent of Medicaid sterilization procedures. The proportion of sterilized Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age over age 20 has increased to 37 percent. The ruling class spent five million dollars for an ERA organizing conference and the government extended the ERA ratification deadline, but the amendment asserting women's equality under the law still has not, passed. Cutbacks in tax/spending have fallen heavily on health services: venereal disease is again on the rise, after a 15.2 percent decrease in syphilis last year and a 1.1 percent decline in gonorrhea. Reproductive hazards at the workplace and elsewhere have just begun to be exposed: birth defects (and worse) from lead compounds, uranium, and photocopying machines, to name just a few.

The death penalty is back, in grizzly horror. Though a disproportionate number of those on death row are Black men, those coming up first for execution are not at all coincidentally white, so as to undercut any constitutional arguments for unequal treatment under the law. Media impact of the Spunkelink execution, the first in more than 15 years of a person who did not want to die, was obscured by the fact that a McDonnell-Douglas airplane fell apart on take-off the same day, killing 275 people, a figure unprecedented in U.S. aviation history. It will therefore be left to another execution to determine whether the mass catharsis surrounding such an event will take a predominantly law and order form or its opposite.

There are victories and concessions as well. Congress passed legislation making disability benefits for pregnant women

mandatory to the extent that an employer pays *any* disability benefits to workers. While affirmative action in education was dealt a harsh blow by *Bakke*, the more important issue of affirmative action in jobs can claim victory in *Weber*.

Away from the sheltered halls of government, there is more visible unrest and organized protest than at any time since the late 1960's. The accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor and the coldly calculated risks taken by Edison and the government have awakened even white people to the fact that their lives are nothing more than dollars in the eyes of their rulers. Interminable gas lines have already led to riots, and summer is just beginning. Rosalyn Carter is stumping the country begging for "confidence in Jimmy," but she's not likely to have much success. Evening news reports now tell of industrial accidents and workers' actions as much as of crime and police action. Neighbors taking up a collection to pay for some sick kid's doctor bills are sought after by every major network, just so the news won't be all bad.

Organized protest takes contradictory forms: the Ku Klux Klan is gaining strength, but Anita Bryant, once standard-bearer of the right, was rendered irrelevant by mass mobilizations of protesting gay people. Black united front organizations are gaining strength and publicity. The anti-nuclear movement appears to be the largest mass movement in the U.S. since the 1960's. It seems that cynicism, still rampant among the people, is being supplemented and at least potentially replaced by productive rage.

The women's movement is not isolated from the broader political climate of the country (and world). A combination of increased militancy generally and organized attack from the right-wing Right-To-Lifers has given new vigor to the movement. A mass movement of angry women is once again a possibility. If we are to learn from our mistakes of the 1960's, we must now figure out how the movement for women's equality, a movement which opposes all forms of male supremacy, can rekindle women's imaginations, encourage militant action by women, and at the same time link up with other struggles, particularly those of other oppressed groups. All these factors are necessary to build a movement likely to deal a decisive blow to male supremacy. In this context it is worthwhile looking at Susan Brownmiller's influence since publication of *Against Our Will* and seeing where her theory of women's oppression has led those sectors of the women's movement that agree with her.

Following publication of *Against Our Will*, Brownmiller

became a movement celebrity. Legislative committees called her as an expert witness on rape. Talk shows paired her with Eldridge Cleaver as a media gimmick (though seldom with representatives of opposing positions from the women's movement). University women's programs paid her several thousand dollars a shot to speak on their campuses. And women in droves turned out to hear her talk about rape. I attended several of these speeches. The address was always the same: the same summary of her book, with one exception. If she expected organized opposition (which she claims happened only twice — once in Kansas City and once at Northwestern University in Chicago), she omitted the section about race.

Unopposed, Brownmiller is a witty, engaging speaker. A listener who had read her book would have been bored by the presentation — even the jokes were the same. For the uninitiated, however, the speech was lively and entertaining. Young college women in the audience were heard to remark more than once that she was a "great role model" for women. When questioned about racism as regards rape, however, even in a polite, serious, intelligent manner, Brownmiller's demeanor changed dramatically. She launched into ferocious, increasingly shrill attacks on (1) the woman asking the question, (2) the "left," which she lumps into one large, woman-hating garbage heap, and (3) Black rapists in the abstract. I am told she once asked a critical news reporter if she were Alison Edwards, and I was present when she stated in public the fiction that the only two women reviewers who didn't like her book were Angela Davis and me. This kind of defensive-ness makes serious dialogue and clarification of differences difficult. It is compelling testimony to the depth of her personal rage that she responded as starkly as she did to challengers. It was at Northwestern University, one of the most expensive colleges in the country, where she was prepared in advance for organized confrontation, that her remarks were the most startling, even to those of us who had read and criticized her book.

Brownmiller was confronted during the question-and-answer period by a Black antagonist who spoke of the racist use of the rape charge. After some shouting back and forth about whether "old leftists" are "all the same," Brownmiller shifted gears. She indicated she understood why a Black person might be emotional and overly sensitive, but that the woman just misunderstood the issues. The challenger angrily retorted that Blacks who disagree with whites have always been accused of being physically and mentally defective: not hearing right, not seeing issues correctly,

and being too emotional or overly sensitive. Brownmiller interrupted her to call for another question, but by then another disrupter was on her feet. This one was white. Brownmiller seemed stunned. She expressed amazement that anyone white could have such views, while she reiterated her "understanding" that a Black person might react emotionally, given the racism that "used to be a problem" in the United States. The white woman shot back, "Can't white people be against racism?" Brownmiller evaded the question. "You can't intimidate me with charges of racism. I was right there in the civil rights movement in the 1960's. . . ." The disrupters escalated their attack. A couple more stood up. Brown-miller, hands on her hips, strutted toward the front of the stage. The white antagonist began moving down the aisle toward her. It looked like the sides were squaring off, and I was feeling pretty nervous about the whole business. We were outnumbered by about 100 to 1, and the audience was none too friendly toward our point of view. "We came to hear Susan, not you." "Go back where you came from." The podium committee, all women, were anxious and upset. They were young, ingenuous, and clearly unfamiliar with the tactics of the '60's. They pleaded for peace. We took advantage of the easy out and sat down, but Brownmiller had to have the last word. "I hope you don't get it on the way home."

Two other remarks by Brownmiller at Northwestern University were revealing. When asked (in a hostile manner) what she intended to do to support Delbert Tibbs, picked at random in a Florida town and charged with rape of a white woman and her white male companion miles away, Brownmiller shot back with an answer worthy of Perry Mason:

"Who did that rape?"

"Who did that murder?"

"If you're so concerned about Delbert Tibbs, why don't you go find the rapist and murderer!"

Finally, when a Black woman in the audience made a passing but clearly critical reference to the "white women's movement," Brownmiller interrupted her angrily. "I resent that characterization of the women's movement as white. The women's movement is made up of all races and classes." The audience applauded.

Several points are clear here. First, though Susan Brownmiller produced only one treatise on rape and was not part of any specific anti-rape program, she spoke for large numbers of white women. Her audiences loved her: the stronger and more militant her defense of her position on rape and racism, the louder the

applause. Those women in the audience sympathetic to the challengers tended to be (1) Black, (2) press reporters, and (3) members of organized left groups already predisposed to dislike her — not for what she said about women or about race, but for her anti-communism. In Kansas City some independent white women approached us afterwards (none did at Northwestern), but not many.

Perhaps there were large numbers of white women in the anti-rape movement who opposed Brownmiller's analysis of race and rejected her law-and-order solutions. Several critics sympathetic to the thrust of this pamphlet have suggested this, and a few have published impressive anti-racist propaganda as well. If true to any significant extent, however, neither these women nor their criticisms were visible at her speeches. Their absence cannot be excused with arguments about process and tactics, or by fears of alienating otherwise reachable women if there were confrontations. Absence of visible opposition to Brownmiller spoke extremely poorly for the organized women's movement. When a white star like Brownmiller is given such wide media coverage and opportunities to reach hundreds of thousands of women, in large part *because* of her feminist attack on crime, particularly and explicitly Black crime, it is imperative that opposing voices from the women's movement be seen and heard. And they must be seen and heard as widely and loudly as is (was) Brownmiller's. Unless the women's movement is willing to take a strong, vocal, and highly visible stand against racism, particularly racism within its ranks, it will never bridge the gap between itself and autonomous Black and Third World movements.

Trying to organize vocal opposition to Brownmiller was both instructive and disheartening. Many women who should have known better refused to leaflet or protest. Some were just opportunists from the organized left, afraid of offending potential recruits (or so they thought) from the organized women's movement. Others waffled on the issues.

"What about when a Black man really does rape a white woman?"

"Rape is a serious problem. I'm not going to attack anyone who is trying to deal with the problem."

"Susan Brownmiller is a sister, even if she is a little off the mark on some points."

"She's not the enemy. Why should we confront her speech by leafletting and protesting?"

Some of these remarks were made by women who were among

those doing dedicated organizing against U.S. racist imperialism in South Africa and Puerto Rico. Sadly, their feminism blinded them to racism in their own back yard. Others were veterans of the women's movement. *Their* feminism stifled their politics by having them subordinate the substance of their ideas on racism to the form of their ideas of "sisterhood" and "good process." None would have remotely considered calling Anita Bryant a sister. When feminism is abstracted and distorted to obscure otherwise obvious instances of racism, it becomes a serious obstacle to any revolutionary movement, including one for women's emancipation. Brownmiller's obsession with woman as victim, a one-sided, passive, non-revolutionary conception of woman's role in history, has distorted militant feminism precisely that way. Women should not have let racist, reactionary, ultimately anti-woman ideas pass for feminism. It is time to bury the myth that movement sisterhood precludes confrontation of women by women, and that disagreements among women in the movement must be transcended by consensus rather than fought out openly. It is this insidious, stultifying conception of the women's movement that has allowed demagogic arguments about "getting it on the way home" to pass for politics.

Though Brownmiller herself has pretty much faded away into private life (she resurfaced with Kate Millett and Gloria Steinem for a time to attack the Khomeini government for trampling on women's rights achieved under the overthrown Shah of Iran), she has left a powerful legacy in the women's movement. A large sector of the movement has made its priority fighting violent acts by men against women: rape, street crime, and domestic violence. The theory that gives rise to this strategy for women's emancipation is that the principal source of women's oppression is men, and the principal reason for male supremacy is man's combination of big muscles and a penis. By confronting and halting this physical domination, women build a movement to halt male supremacy. In addition, a few Black women have taken up the view put forth by Brownmiller that this form of feminism transcends racial, if not class, lines. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* by Michele Wallace is the most explicit and most widely publicized statement of this position. It merits careful attention.

FEMINISM AND THE BLACK MOVEMENT

Michele Wallace, a well-educated, successful, and highly articulate Black woman, has put forth the position that the Black

movement of the 1960's failed because its leaders were "macho men." Urging Black women never to forget "how the black man has let us down," she sums up the 1960's as follows:

Come 1966, the black man had two pressing tasks before him: a white woman in every bed and a black woman under every heel. Out of his sense of urgency came a struggle called the Black Movement, which was nothing more nor less than the black man's struggle to attain his presumably lost "manhood."

The theme of manhood as the engine driving the movement appears and reappears throughout the book:

It was not equality that was primarily being pursued but a kind of superiority — black manhood, black macho — which would combine the ghetto cunning, cool, and un-restrained sexuality of black survival with the unchecked authority, control, and wealth of white power.

Although Wallace quotes Stokely Carmichael as saying Black Power meant both Black majority control and minority representation, she has a more elemental view of the popular meaning of Black Power — the meaning she says she herself understood:

Here was a black man with an erect phallus, and he was pushing it up in America's face.

. . . white men were perversely obsessed with the black man's genitals but the obsession turned out to be a communicable disease, <and in the sixties black men came down with high fevers.

On the one level, the emotional, hysterical level and the level on which most powerless white men react, white men feared the black man's sexual dexterity, the black man's sexual appeal, and the black man's attraction for the white woman. But on another level, on the level at which actual power changes hands, white men feared the black man's penis as the starting point of black families, of the strength of numbers, of the perpetuation of the race, and the resourcefulness gained from centuries of oppression.

Wallace's interest in what she sees as sexual causality in Black American history is its effect on contemporary Black women. According to her analysis, white racism and sexual stereotypes shaped the Black movement in such a way as to glorify Black men and to deny Black women anything but a servile, subordinate role in the movement.

Could you imagine Che Guevara with breasts? Mao with a vagina . . . ? . . . Womanhood was not essential to the revolution. Or so everyone thought by the end of the 1960's.

Wallace rejects the popular, bourgeois image of Black woman as matriarch and the movement image of her as a pillar of strength in the Black community (i.e., the "superwoman"). Like Brown-miller, her perspective of history sees women principally as victims. She describes the Black woman as the most "lamentable," "vulnerable" figure in American history, viewing the Black woman's role in the movement as follows:

She stopped straightening her hair. She stopped using lightener and brighteners. She forced herself to be submissive and passive. She preached to her children about the glories of the Black man.

As an antidote to such degradation, *Black Macho* argues for a Black feminist movement along the lines of the currently organized (white) women's movement but uniquely sensitive to the conditions and needs of Black women. She defines these conditions and needs indirectly, but she seems to be arguing for women to organize principally, if not exclusively, against their personal oppression by Black men. She criticizes middle-class Black women for their "mindless rejection of feminism" and for having babies outside of marriage as a "means of self-affirmation" in the absence of a women's consciousness and ideology with which to identify. Angela Davis she laments as "a brilliant, middle-class woman with a European education, a PhD in philosophy, and a university appointment . . . willing to die for a poor, uneducated black male inmate," and cites her favorable image in the movement as acceptable for a woman because she "... did it for her man ... a woman in a woman's place." She decries Black movement women "having babies for the revolution." These points, plus Wallace's painfully personal reflections, indicate fundamental agreement with the

kind of feminism put forth by Brownmiller, from whom she quotes at length and with approval.

Wallace's theory of sexual causality is vulnerable to attack on a variety of grounds: logical and historical, Marxist and feminist. She lacks the complexity of the Freudians, who see historical events as motivated by many intertwined factors played out within the individual and collective subconscious, genital sex being one of those factors but by no means decisive among them. Even contemporary feminists sympathetic to Freud (and few are) try to reconcile Freud's notion of the subconscious with an analysis of those less vague aspects of women's oppression, such as isolation in the home and super-exploitation in the labor force. It is hard to take seriously a treatise on Black history which reduces 400 years of slavery and oppression, on the one hand, and survival, resistance and revolution, on the other, to the individual male's pursuit of individual male power to be attained by virtue of a (supposedly) superior individual male sexual organ. It is, in fact, capitulation to the *worst* aspect of both white supremacist and male chauvinist sexual stereotypes. This capitulation is not rendered less damaging given her criticisms of Black leadership for defining *itself* in sexual rather than political and economic terms.

In spite of its theoretical weakness, however, *Black Macho* has a side to it which has to be taken seriously. Wallace is Black, female, capable, and angry. The issue she raises — relations between Black women and Black men, both individually and collectively as part of a movement — is a critical one which will have to be fought out within the Black community and in the Black movement. Whether the specific area of concern is rape in the Black community, the wisdom and feasibility of having healthy babies outside of marriage, the role of Black women in the movement, or the condition of the Black family, the experience of Black people — men and women — has been so acutely and forcibly shaped by white racism and theories of white supremacy in this country that only the Black community, on its own terms and in its own way, can deal adequately with conscious resistance and change. Some of us may disagree factually with Wallace's claim that the Black movement of the 1960's failed principally because ". . . black men did not realize they could not wage struggle without the full involvement of women," noting instead the conscious, calculated, and admitted program of the U.S. government (COINTELPRO) to destroy the movement by any means, up to and including burglary, arson, and assassination. Some of us may disagree that the movement, in its totality, was a failure

at all. Nonetheless, if substantial numbers of Black women agree even in part with Wallace, the issue is on the agenda. At the very least, the system of male supremacy and its symptoms in the form of male chauvinism have likely not escaped either Black men raised in this country or the Black movement — a fact Black movement women have struggled with for years.

What is disturbing about *Black Macho* is not so much its analysis of male supremacy in the Black movement, but the use to which portions of the white feminist movement will (and have) put such an analysis. It is one thing to speak of unity in the women's movement and toward that end to emphasize solidarity with Black women. It is quite another for whites, even if asked, to join a Black woman in an all-out attack on Black men, on the Black movement, and on Black women who have rejected the Women's Movement. The task of white revolutionaries, whether they are in the feminist movement or in other sections of the movement, must be to support Black liberation, not to look for ways in which Black women can be split off from Black men in order to swell the ranks of the women's movement. The latter is the job of the K.K.K. — or the U.S. government.

If one recognizes the right-wing potential of dividing the Black movement, particularly at a time when it is just beginning to recover ground lost by the savage repression of the '60's, one will not look with favor upon white feminists jumping on the *Black Macho* bandwagon and using it to build up the women's movement. Three of four promotional statements on *Black Macho's* dust jacket, however, not surprisingly including one by Susan Brownmiller, do just that:

What Sexual Politics was to the seventies, Michele Wallace's book could be to the eighties. She crosses the sex/race barrier to make every reader understand the political and intimate truths of growing up black and female in America.

— Gloria Steinem

Something wonderful has happened. A fresh, clear voice has been added to the existential dialogue between black and white, woman and man. This is the most original discussion I've read in years. Sing in praise of Michele Wallace, for she may save us all.

— Susan Brownmiller

Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman is a brilliant new work of extraordinary importance to all feminists, black and white — indeed to all people. Michele Wallace dares to think and say and write what has not been hazarded before, ever. Not aloud. This book will change the women's movement — and it could change history.

— Robin Morgan

In spite of Robin Morgan's extravagant praise, this book is not likely to change the women's movement. It does nothing to challenge any of the assumptions or practices of the movement that so far have made it less than attractive to most Black and Third World women. Rather, its challenge is to Black men and to Black women for rejecting it. It is an embarrassment that the illusions of a prominent white feminist that Black women will read this book and recognize their errors appears on the back cover. At most, *Black Macho* will make the same movement, with the same limited orientation toward fighting male supremacy, somewhat more multi-racial. And it probably won't do that.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AGAINST CRIME

A central orientation of much of the women's movement has recently been fighting crime in those cases where women are its victims. The anti-rape movement, proliferation of shelters for battered women, and mass women's mobilizations to "take back the night" have drawn numerous feminists to their ranks. Broadly defined, this movement attacks "violence against women." By orienting toward the crudest and most salient aspect of male supremacy, the "anti-violence against women" movement seeks to challenge sexism at its most explicit and vulnerable point: exploitation and degradation of sexuality.

The anti-violence movement has had substantial impact on people's consciousness about the nature of crime against women. It has made it general knowledge that rape is not a crime of passion, but a crime of power; that domestic violence is not a private matter of female neurosis, but a widespread social problem based on male-supremacist reaction to alienation; that pornography is not a matter of individual taste but group libel of women. At the same time, however, the principal thrust of this movement (though not the exclusive emphasis) has been on developing alternative services for women. There are problems inherent in

building any movement through service, as any youth organizer who tried to "serve the people" in the 1960's knows. People overwhelmingly come for the free or almost-free service (whether legal assistance, medical care, breakfast, or shelter), not for politics. Add to this limitation the racist pitfalls of fighting "crime," whether at home or in the street, *plus* the fact that men's violent crime against women, like women's violent crime against children, is an individual manifestation of extreme frustration and alienation at the same time it is a crime of power and dominance, and you have a movement that is (a) not likely to do much to stop male supremacist violence, and (b) likely to add weight and legitimacy to racist, law-and-order demands to stop crime. Although it goes against one's instinct to criticize a movement which unrelentingly fights abuse of women, the violence issue, however popular at the moment, is not one which should be taken up as an organizing point by white revolutionaries or radicals — feminist, Marxist, or both. This next section examines why.

STOPPING VIOLENCE

"Violence against women" refers both to specific acts of physical abuse and domination (such as rape and battering) and to male supremacist attitudes that degrade women's sexuality (such as sexual harassment or pornography). The former aspect of violence, probably because of its compelling immediacy, is the one which has drawn the largest numbers of women into organizing against it. Some anti-rape groups and women's shelters shun traditional channels for dealing with crimes against women — the police, the prosecutors, and the courts. Most don't. Since prosecution is sometimes what the individual victim wants, many programs follow her wishes regardless of their own political preference. Revenge certainly is a legitimate want after an attack, particularly after a rape, and for this reason many programs make it a point of principle to assist the woman in any action she wishes to take.

Programs which work with the criminal justice system need little analysis beyond what has been said in the previous article in this pamphlet. Although it may be understandable and quite legitimate for an individual victim to seek such assistance (especially in cities that have monetary assistance to victims of crime), to build a movement around this kind of revenge is another matter entirely. Santa Cruz Women Against Rape, a socialist-feminist organization which boycotts those services, says it this way:

It is crucial that anti-rape groups fight the racist myths, stereotypes, and institutions that are associated with rape. The first step in this process is to stop supporting the criminal justice system, because no matter what our intentions are, the system is racist through and through. Prisons are used to keep all Third World people down. We cannot turn our backs to the racism of the system when a Black man is being prosecuted, and expect that same racism not to be used against Joan Little, Yvonne Wanrow, Inez Garcia, etc. As we've said before, we must not support a racist process for any end. We must fight racism and sexism together. ("Dealing With Rape," a letter to Through the Looking Glass: a Women's and Children's Prison Newsletter, April 1979, page 7.)

Groups like Santa Cruz Women Against Rape are complex. They make good statements about racism in their publications. They reject prison as a solution to fighting violence against women. They recognize that rape will end only ". . . with the development of a new system that provides a context for . . . changes in people's lives." One wonders, then, how and why they are fighting rape.

Santa Cruz WAR seeks community-based alternatives for dealing with the problem of rape, tentatively offering some suggestions:

- 1. We encourage people to get together to discuss ways to watch out for each other. This includes block watching to make neighborhoods safe, organizing at work places to get support to deal with hassles from bosses and fellow workers, and organizing at schools to get self-defense classes, etc.*
- 2. We try to create the consciousness in people that they should respond to a scream or a call for help, and that they should go to a woman's aid if it looks like she's being hassled.*
- 3. We print the descriptions of men who rape, hassle, and assault women so that rape will become a public issue, so that these men will lose their anonymity, and so women can be warned of some particular men.*

4. Confrontations of rapists, etc. by women (or women and men). The message we want to present to men is that we know who they are and what they did, that they are responsible for their actions, and that they have the responsibility to change. We try to offer follow up re-education by anti-sexist men. Although we think that each individual confrontation is important, we hope that each one will have the more widespread effect of encouraging people to force men to stop violent and sexist behavior. This means that people have to deal with the men close to them — their family, friends, etc., as well as with strangers who hassle women.

There is a superficial appeal to anti-violence programs which emphasize community action. Ultimately, it is the sense of belonging to a community (in more than the "neighborhood" sense), with its requisite solidarity, responsibility, and pride, that will both make people want to live with dignity and a respect for the collectivity and force those who err to conform to a minimum level of community standards. Development of this sense of community in terms of eventual solidarity of the working class internationally is what the movement is all about.

Unfortunately, there is very little evidence that, at least among white people, this kind of communal responsibility can to any significant degree be attained in one community (i.e., geographical area) in the absence of massive social change generally. On the contrary, where white people have developed community solidarity in those areas where Black and Third World people live anywhere near the whites (like in the same city), this solidarity has overwhelmingly meant exclusion of Black and Third World people and defense of what privileges and benefits the whites have from being white. Community Control as a slogan for white people has the effect (sometimes conscious, sometimes not) of perpetuating racial divisions in society.

This society has evolved into one manifest by alienation at the increasingly large and impersonal workplace and isolation in the increasingly small and excruciatingly personal home. It is hard to fight effectively on a small scale. In fact, it is impossible. And it will take major upheaval to fight it on a mass scale. A real sense of community, even in a narrow sense, requires substantial control over one's environment: labor oriented toward the welfare of the community, intersection of living and working in one area, continuity of people's lives, ability to make the welfare of children a

community responsibility, and a resulting sense of belonging that makes the individual want to subordinate private gain to collective good.

The trend today is away from collective control and individual responsibility. Anonymity and acquiescence to factors beyond one's immediate physical control are the general rule. Certainly this trend can change. In periods of revolutionary upsurge, solidarity with the aims of the movement brings out the best, most militant, and most generous side of people. Revolutionaries of all stripes frame their estimates of massive social change on the projection that under the right circumstances people will change (though they differ dramatically on what constitutes those circumstances). The questions for those who organize to fight violence against women are (1) whether the sense of community required to stop rape, or even to halt its dramatic increase, can be demonstrated on a small scale in one place, in the absence of more fundamental change, and (2) if in rare cases it can, whether building a movement directly attacking this specific kind of abuse is the most effective way to stop abuse of women generally.

The history of racism in this country has seen to it that Black and Third World people by and large live in segregated neighborhoods. There, the fight against crime, including the fight against abuse of women, is a fight for community solidarity. Similarly, the fight against abuse of women taken up by the Black movement is a fight to strengthen the movement. Calls for increased city services in oppressed neighborhoods, such as demands for Black cops, are attempts to deal with problems on a community basis. Third World police are demanded in the often-futile hope that their street knowledge in general and their specific familiarity with people in the neighborhood can cool out situations where white cops would just bust in and shoot. In this context, programs emphasizing block watching, publicity about accused rapists, and confrontations have some legitimacy. The solidarity made possible by necessity, while generally absent, under proper circumstances can give to people in the community the moral authority productively to confront men who abuse women.

Although the women's movement speaks of a "women's community," this term has meaning in spirit only. Solidarity among women has been a decisive component of the movement, and in that sense these may indeed be a "community" in the hearts and minds of its members. There is no such community, however, in the sense of a territory to build and defend. However hard women have tried — and the lesbian movement has come closer to making

the term "community" have concrete meaning than other sectors — men are everywhere. And if men are everywhere, so is male supremacy. In this context, alternative services calling for "community responsibility" toward women are not likely to succeed. Women at this point have neither the moral authority, on the one hand, nor the physical power, on the other, to stop men from abusing women. Unless one believes that men in this society can currently be talked out of male supremacy (and if they can, why haven't they?), one cannot reasonably expect well-meaning pressure to halt abuse of women. The confrontation tactic, with its poignant corollary of "re-education by anti-sexist men," may work in the isolated case where a man hits a woman and is overcome by remorse immediately afterward, but in the more common event of male supremacist abuse triggered by alcohol or drugs or job pressure or no-job pressure or screaming kids, it is hard to imagine that intervention by an "anti-sexist man" would be very helpful. (This is particularly true since anti-sexist men are barely anti-sexist at all but exhibit instead a more highly refined form of arrogance and male chauvinism, allowing them to think they are better not just than women — who seek them out with great expectations — but than other men as well. This is a new form of competition among a certain class of men where the self-proclaimed anti-sexists define themselves as having already won.)

Abuse of women tends to occur in private places. Rape rarely happens in front of witnesses. Wife-beating generally occurs in the home. (Its dramatic increase over the last couple of generations may be the result of the increasingly private nuclear family, where intervening adults are rarely present.) Women's block patrols may be a militant statement of women's intention, but the patrols are simply not likely to be effective. At best, the violent man will find another more private place to vent his frustration and display his power. Finally, vigilantism is fraught with what should be obvious dangers. The Kitty Genovese Women's Project in Texas, a state with a long history of racist lynchings, distributes names and pictures of *accused* sex offenders. Local sheriffs used to do precisely that, very subtly inviting interested citizens to *spontaneous* lynchings. The fact that the court has replaced the rope and a women's movement has replaced the sheriff does not change things sufficiently to justify this kind of activity. The project was heralded as ground-breaking by many feminists.

A concrete example of the racist pitfalls of fighting crime in a racist society are two well-publicized attacks on sexist judges for dealing too leniently with convicted rapists. One atrocity

several years ago in Wisconsin involved a judge's scurrilous remarks about how today's women invite sexual aggression by their lewd manner of dress. In the case before him the woman, a high school student, was reported as having been wearing pants and a turtle-neck shirt. The judge then gave the convicted rapist probation, saying, in effect, his conduct was improper but really no big thing. A campaign to recall the judge was successful and a feminist was elected to fill the vacancy. It was only by accident that some of us found out the offender was Black, the victim white.

A second, more recent case involves a Utah judge who reversed a jury verdict of rape, stating that it would be a "miscarriage of justice to sentence a man to prison for an invited rape." There, the victim and offender had been drinking together at a local bar, left the bar, and drove together to a site where he raped her. The judge, reviewing the evidence, made a statement about the woman wearing a "flimsy dress" and "sitting in a bar with a Black man, . . . taking his affection, eating his food, drinking his drinks . . . there is a whole lot to be said here about mutual consent."

Women's groups attacking the Utah judge call his decision and his remarks both racist and sexist, for presuming a white woman who drinks in a bar with a Black man consents thereby to sexual intercourse. If the judge is white (which he seems to be, given attacks on him for racism), they are probably correct. Assuming the judge correctly stated the facts, the woman involved still should have the right to change her mind after getting into the car. Viewed from the perspective of the Black community, however, this must be a case of a Black man entrapped by a white woman and tried and convicted for being Black. White men almost never get brought to trial in situations like this and even less frequently get convicted. Even if it is true that it is male supremacy rather than the fight against racism which led these judges to deal leniently with Black defendants before them (a safe bet with white judges), their actions in these cases had the effect of equalizing an unequal, racist judicial system for two Black men. The issue is difficult, but what to do (and not to do) is not. Attacking a judge for such an action is inexcusable when pursued by white people, even women.

SHELTERING AND MALE SUPREMACY

Battered women's programs pose similar problems to those presented by the anti-rape movement. A high proportion are funded by government agencies and those closely related to the

government, particularly the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), whose purpose it is to develop bigger, better, and more technologically efficient methods to detect and stop crime. As part of its crime prevention program, LEAA gives money to a variety of so-called "social programs," among them, numerous shelters for abused women and children.

Feminists working in shelters who apply for LEAA and other governmental assistance argue that they are merely *using* LEAA, which has to fund a limited number of socially useful projects to maintain an image of impartiality and independence from the state. *"Why shouldn't we use their money to do what we want to do with it?"* A more appropriate question is who is doing the using and who is being used?

The notion that it is legitimate for radicals and revolutionaries to take blood money from an outfit like LEAA and do with it what they want is itself rather dubious. LEAA provides resources both to state and federal law enforcement efforts and concentrates substantial efforts on "national security." Since "national security" within the boundaries of the U.S. means nothing less than protection from subversion by movements seeking fundamentally to change the system, an organization that pours money into national security is keeping the state safe from the movement. Furthermore, COINTELPRO and other post-Watergate revelations have made it clear that regardless of the strength or weakness of any particular movement, it has been the Black movement, generally under the guise of national security, which has received the greatest attention and the most savage repression by law enforcement agencies. What does it mean, then, for feminist groups to help legitimize LEAA, whose function it is to contain and, if necessary, to smash social movements? One thing it means is that the groups taking the money are assisting in their own containment and control. Worse still, it means that they are legitimizing an operation which assists principally in smashing Black and Third World movements.

There is an additional and more subtle reason, however, why taking money from LEAA is selling the movement's autonomy and militancy for a puny grant. Projects funded by LEAA are projects designed to direct revolutionary energy to passive, reformist (at best) projects. Next to the women's movement, the best example of this misdirection of movement energy through tempting grants has been the prison reform movement. After a run of prison rebellions exposed the brutality and inhumanity of U.S. prisons, prison reform became a hot item. Government money

began appearing for prison projects, usually legal projects. Idealistic movement people with bar cards could get jobs making \$15,000 a year (low by lawyers' standards, but a fortune by movement standards) to assist prisoners with legal problems. Prison law libraries sprouted up all over. Prisoners were given time to study law surrounding their cases, and prison law blossomed as an area of legal study inside and outside the institution. The fact that prisoners still rebel is eloquent testimony that in the twentieth century, the U.S. working class cannot be pacified so easily. But some of the best revolutionary brains inside the prisons are stifled by obsessive legal study, concentrating, naturally enough, on their own cases. Few win. Fewer still can use their fragmentary legal skills upon leaving the institution. While prison legal programs are progressive in the limited sense that good services should be available to prisoners, containment and misdirection of militancy are more salient than anything progressive about these programs. For anyone naive enough to think that this sounds like a lot of far left paranoia, one of the explicit goals of COINTELPRO was misdirection of militant energy.

Governmental assistance to the women's movement is analogous to the situation described above. If women are going to join the movement anyway, it is preferable from the point of view of the state to direct their energies *away* from potentially revolutionary programs (such as the campaigns against sterilization abuse, which attack population control of the Third World through abuse of Third World women, and which have assisted the American Indian Movement in exposing genocidal use of sterilization procedures on the reservations) toward programs dealing with crime control.

Money for social workers, whether professionally trained or community educated, housing relocation, and salaries for lawyers connected with abused women's legal needs are important services for individual women, just as food distribution is an important service for poor or infirm people. There is nothing heinous about movement women taking paid jobs in such services. What is wrong is their making that work their movement activity and thinking they are doing revolutionary or feminist work through these jobs. At best, they are using their jobs as a political platform to try to reach women using the services — a dubious use of a captive audience and one not likely to work often, since people experiencing a crisis tend overwhelmingly to be inner-directed and anxious primarily to emerge from the crisis intact. Issues like racism (for white women), heterosexism, and alternative life

styles, while in the last analysis relevant particularly for abused women, at the moment of crisis are just too much to cope with.

GRASS ROOTS SHELTERS

What about those few projects which are not locked in by government money? These retain confidentiality of women using the service and have some measure of autonomy. They are therefore less suspect than those fed by LEAA. Users are less likely to be pressured to seek solutions like criminal prosecution and less likely to be recruited as informants by local police agencies. The shelter is less likely to be scrutinized by covert but nonetheless watchful state eyes for bigger and better mechanisms by which militant, angry women can be pacified (whether by writing grant proposals or by "helping" women needing therapy). In spite of being somewhat less encumbered by Big Brother (seen now as Big Sister — progress of sorts), however, many independent shelters suffer from many of the same problems as those funded by the state. The political gap between "staff" and "clients" is still there, even if those words aren't used. The orientation is still individual and still principally passive. Often a cultural gap is there as well: differences in diet, child-raising, and handling the woman's drunk and irate husband when he comes around. What is more, without ample funding women work at starvation wages — or none — making continued dedication dependent on sainthood, on extreme social-worker mentality, or on misplaced political convictions that they can, through kindness, hard work, and a good line, recruit women using the service to the women's movement.

For user and worker alike, the sheltering movement, while providing a useful service, channels energies not merely away from militancy and revolutionary action, but even away from programs like media campaigns and workplace anti-harassment organizing that can have a mass impact on male-supremacist ideology.

TAKING BACK THE NIGHT

*In the home, in the street
Women getting raped, Women
getting beat!*

Something should be said about mass mobilizations of women against street violence.

A lot of women are drawn to the anti-violence movement through actions to "take back the night." Though the night, like everything else, has never belonged to women, mobilizations to reclaim it pick "unsafe neighborhoods," march through in numbers (flanked by police escorts), and rally for demands to make life safer for women "and all people." Tangible demands tend toward money for shelters and rape crisis centers, free medical care for victims of sexual attack, better laws on rape and self-defense, and increased police protection for women. Propaganda includes attacks on sexually exploitative media advertising and discussion of harassment at the workplace. Although those who attend frequently report feelings of solidarity, exuberance, and collective strength (they'd never walk there *alone*), these good feelings must be weighed critically against what campaigns like this are likely to achieve. These marches, regardless of their composition and regardless of their militant feminist or even anti-racist rhetoric, are nothing more than campaigns for safe streets.

Like sheltering and rape crisis intervention, these marches challenge not violent action itself, which is not at present susceptible to successful challenge, but methods of diverting, detecting, and punishing violence. Like all campaigns to stop crime, the movement is absolutely unable to deal with its causes. As a substitute, it is forced to rely principally on coercion, which women are not in a position to achieve on their own in a male-supremacist society. The result is the movement to "Take Back the Night": an appeal for more repressive services and ultimately a strengthened view of woman as victim requiring such protection. The movement is quite safe for the state and for men as well. No wonder politicians are eager to speak at such gatherings (and in some cities have actually been invited). No wonder the movement is now receiving unprecedented cooperation from the state.

EFFECTIVE ORGANIZING AGAINST VIOLENCE

Women's campaigns against media exploitation and sexual harassment at the workplace are in a wholly separate category from those that challenge individual acts of violence (i.e., crime). Public abuse can be challenged publicly. *Abusive entertainment can be shut down by women* sitting on the stage or blocking the entrance. "Adult" (infantile, male-supremacist) bookstores have glass windows that can be smashed and inventory that can be destroyed. Though women cannot stop harassment on the job, collective action can make sexual come-ons from men a humiliating

event for the man, rather than for the woman. The exhilaration and solidarity derived from this kind of action have their roots in power: women collectively taking control of an aspect of their lives. Marching to protest "crime" or individually seeking assistance after humiliating instances of abuse are not productive self-activity of women (except in the rare case of women who voluntarily become enmeshed in abusive relationships and need individual therapy to determine why). They are a substitute for it. The unfortunate fact is that there simply are no reformist answers to violence in this society, whether its victims are women or men. In China, the one country which seems to have had some measure of success in eradicating rape and eroding domestic violence as well, the revolutionary *process* which for a time changed the class forces of society affected all aspects of people's lives. In those revolutionary situations, being part of a revolutionary process brings out the very best in people and makes possible a successful campaign against all forms of male supremacy, including male-supremacist violence. In the absence of such an upsurge, the best women can do to protect themselves is to be careful and to participate in building a movement likely to create the conditions of upsurge where male supremacy can decisively be defeated.