

OUR LIVES

Vol. 2 No. 5 + 6

CANADA'S FIRST BLACK WOMEN'S NEWSPAPER

Summer/Fall '88

\$1.00

Statement of the Black Women's Collective on the 32nd Anniversary of South Africa Women's Day

We bring greetings to our sisters in South Africa and our South African sisters around the world who continue to fight to defeat apartheid. We're here today as a declaration of our solidarity with you in that struggle.

It was 32 years ago today that South African women held the largest women's protest that that country has ever seen to register their objections to the government's demand that all women would have to carry passes from that year, 1956. On this day in 1956, the women travelled from all over South Africa to Pretoria to march in protest against the pass laws. They were well organized, they were adamant, they saw the last vestiges of their dignity being stripped away and they were intent on fighting to keep it. In the last instance however, the organized violence of the South African state was stronger than the women and they were forced into living with the pass laws. The government virtually held them hostage in forcing them to give in. Old women were refused the meagre state pensions unless they produced the pass; patients were refused admission to hospital unless they

carried their pass. Women farm workers were trucked in like cattle to pass offices by their employers and forced to collect their passes; and innumerable other cruelties and indignities were forced upon the women until they succumbed.

Today, South African women continue their struggle for basic rights and privileges to allow them the decent existence which they deserve. We are here to support them because we realize that until they're free there, none of us can be free here.

The struggle of our South African sisters is not separate and apart from the overall struggle of all Blacks against apartheid, but the brutalities of that system affects the women most acutely. They are oppressed along side their husbands and sons as workers without rights; they are oppressed as Black people just because of the colour of their skin; and they are oppressed as women. That is why we have to fight with them, their liberation is our liberation.

Our sisters in South Africa are still fighting for maternity leave with full benefits. They're fighting for equal pay for equal work. They're fighting against the migratory labour laws which take away their husbands and sons for the better part of each year--this division of families is one of the most inhuman acts of apartheid. They're fighting for decent daycare, so that when they must leave their children to take care of apartheid's privileged white children, someone will take care of their own. They're fighting for the basic amenities of life such as adequate shelter and running water in a land of plenty where their labour produces those basic amenities which the minority take for granted.

Our sisters in South Africa are the mothers of the 600+ children whom the barbaric Pretoria regime murdered in 1976. They are the mothers of the children Botha and his gang of thugs continue to murder with the blessings of the "west." We want the so-called "western democracies" to know that they have the blood of South Africa's murdered Blacks on their hands. While they spend time having multi-million dollar summits debating why they cannot impose sanctions on Pretoria, the children continue to die!

But our sisters will *never* give up. Indeed, they are becoming stronger and more militant against the world's most inhumane regime. The struggle which the women brought together 32 years ago, and continue to fight today represents the very essence of the fight of all the oppressed people of South Africa. A struggle for freedom.

STATEMENT OF THE ANC WOMEN'S SECTION ON THE OCCASION OF THE 32nd ANNIVERSARY OF AUGUST 9th, INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE STRUGGLE OF WOMEN OF NAMIBIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

On this day, the South Africa Women's Day, a day which has been declared by the United Nations as International Day of Solidarity with the struggling women of South Africa and Namibia, we extend our greetings to our women and combatants at home and abroad and to our friends throughout the world, particularly those still involved in battles for liberation of Namibia, Western Sahara,

East Timor and El Salvador and those fighting in defence of their hard won independence in Angola, Mozambique and Nicaragua.

Our revolutionary greetings go to our brothers and sisters of Namibia led by their vanguard movement SWAPO and its women's council. We together on this occasion resolve to carry out our historic task of leading

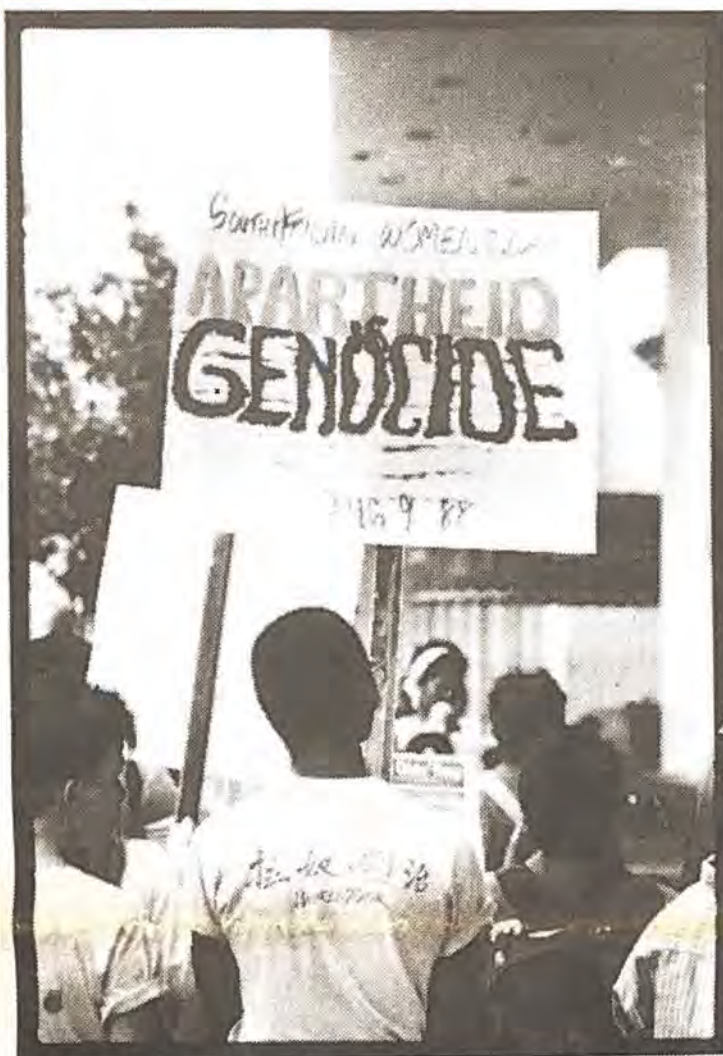
our people to liberation, more especially now in the height of humiliating defeat of the South African aggressors in Angola.

We salute the women in the frontline states and express appreciation of the role they play in the grim struggle against Pretoria's destabilization, in particular our sisters in Angola and Mozambique who daily make great sacrifices in defence

of revolution.

We salute our sisters in the African continent, who though independent continue to suffer in the hands of multinationals, who unashamedly are doing everything possible to keep the African people in a position of perpetual economic dependency.

continued pg. 2



ANC continued

Our sisters, particularly in the other frontline states, who continue to bear the brunt of racist aggression and destabilizing activities of the South African regime.

We salute the people, women and the heroic youth of Palestine who have raised the struggle to new heights by turning houses and streets into battle fields.

We further extend our warm greetings to the women of Cuba whose husbands and sons have made an outstanding contribution to African independence as seen most particularly in the recent battles in Southern Angola, where South African Defence force is suffering a humiliating defeat indeed as Fidel Castro said, "The history of Africa will have to be written as before and after Cuito Canavale."

AUGUST 9th SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN'S DAY.

While apartheid affects the lives of all Black South Africans with relentless brutality, it is harshest in its effects upon the women. Black women suffer a triple oppression: they are oppressed as Blacks, they are controlled as workers and they are discriminated against because they are women.

The women's struggle is not divided from the overall liberation struggle and it is not in opposition to the fight being waged by the people against exploitation. Yet, at the same time, women need to achieve the abolition of all sexual inequalities as part of this wider struggle. We the women who are struggling for peace and friendship, must demand that women receive equal pay for

equal work. We must ensure that women be given maternity leave with full unemployment benefits both before and after the birth of their children. Creches and Day nurseries be made available and free of charge for the children of workers. Women should have a choice to abortion.

In South Africa, women have given particular emphasis to certain issues and have spearheaded certain struggles as a result of the discrimination they experience as women. The struggle against the pass laws has always been a basic part of the women's fight. Passes are the means of enforcing the migratory labour system and the inhumane division of families and form the core of apartheid. An African woman who marries a man qualified under "Section 10" can apply for permission to live with him, but this is rarely granted. But if an African woman who, herself, qualifies under "Section 10" marries a man who is not qualified to live with in the same urban area, then she is immediately forced out into poverty and desolation of the bantustan.

The regime announced in the early 1950's that all women would have to carry passes from 1956. Immediately the women started organising against this. Protests grew month by month in every corner of the country. In March 1956, 2000 women attended a conference organized by the Federation of South Africa Women and resolved, not only to intensify the campaign against passes, but to organise a second protest march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria - to the very heart of the regime.

During the night of August 8th, the night before the demonstration, women began

assembling in Pretoria. Homes in the townships were opened to the thousands of women who travelled from all over the country -- in cars, buses, trains and many on foot. Halls and churches were packed to capacity with women and children sleeping on the floor. Protest meetings and all night "wakes" were held. The racist railway officially stopped selling tickets, road blocks were set up and many cars and buses were prevented from reaching Pretoria. Finally, the sun rose and 20,000 women came together singing, "Strydom, you have now touched the women you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed."

The women took two and half hours to file through the gardens and into the amphitheatre. Nine women, representing women of all races, carried huge piles of signatures, and left the forms at Strydom's office. They then stood in complete silence for thirty minutes before bursting into song.

Despite all the efforts and protests and country-wide resistance, gradually, the women were literally forced into accepting the hated passes. Old age pensioners were refused their small pension unless they produced their pass; nurses and teachers were fired unless they registered for the pass; officials everywhere refused to accept rents, to issue marriage certificates, to accept hospital patients unless the women had their pass numbers. In the country, women who worked on White farms were taken in truckloads to the pass offices by their employers and forced to accept passes. Leaders were banned or imprisoned. The passes were eventually imposed.

It is now 32 years later, during which time the women have consistently fought every battle

on every front against apartheid. This year, on the 9th of August, we celebrate the 32nd anniversary of South Africa Women's Day. It is a day on which we must take courage from our women, be guided by their dignity and discipline. It is a day which signifies the thousands of women who have been and continue to be galvanised into militant action against the regime. It is a day which represents clearly the nature of the struggle of South African women, namely a struggle against the apartheid regime and for our freedom.

OUR LIVES

the cutting edge

OUR LIVES

Carol Ann Allain
Dionne Brand
Linda Carty
Grace Channer
Dionne Falconer
Carol Camper
Faith Nolan
Angela Robertson
Leleti

Contributors to this Issue

Pauline Peters
Leleti
Cynthia Gray

Special Thanks to Cynthia Gray from the Native Journalism Programme at the University of Western Ontario for her time, energy, patience and dedication to this issue of *Our Lives*.

Lee Maracle is a Native Writer and Poet from Vancouver. We thank her for including her piece in this Issue of *Our Lives*.

Also thanks to Alzira Rufino for allowing us to reprint her presentation to the Third International Feminist Writer's Conference.



D. Maltby

Some of the views expressed in *Our Lives* are not necessarily those of the *Our Lives* Collective.

Building Bridges

Pauline Peters

One of the things that struck me most about Angela Davis' visit to us here in Toronto was the emphasis she placed on the connection of all things; of racism to homophobia, of homelessness to capitalism, of Palestine to South Africa, of feminism to racism, of Canada to the United States. All are connected to one another, to each of us and as we look around ourselves, it becomes increasingly clear that there are fewer and fewer places to hide.

One of the dangers of being involved in a "progressive" movement is that it is often easy to forget the importance of these connections. It is as though the hypnotic powers of our oppressors who lull thousands asleep inside of shopping malls and in front of televisions, has found a way to lull us to sleep inside of our safe, protective organizations. We start to lose the power to see each other or to see ourselves. Strange creatures emerge from our circles. We have radical feminist homophobics, anti-racist racists, right-wing leftists, sexist gays, racist feminists and misogynistic lesbians. We have all assortment of wild and curious combinations while our "leaders" (the capitalists and the warmongers) smile with satisfaction as they ringlead our circus.

As Black women we have for a time been victim of a myth that "feminism" is a term which covers every woman, no matter what her race or class. We were (some of us) led to believe that this was a mature movement, long past the stage of nurturing a single body of theory for the sake of unity and confident enough to incorporate differences. We know now that this is not true. We know now, that inside the safety of the feminist movement there exists a real resistance to change—to allowing the movement to *move*. It has within it those who cannot deal with you if your skin

is not white, who become extremely nervous if they know you are a lover of women, who get confused if you are not middle-class, and are embarrassed if you are in some way disabled.

What is so exciting and difficult about now, about 1988, is that it has become clear, even to the most frightened (and don't forget that the most frightened will often masquerade themselves as the most enlightened) it is becoming more and more apparent that:

...in order to take the next step we've got to do it with some folk we don't care about too much.

(Bernice Reagon)

It is becoming a question of bringing together differences in the movement because as Audre Lorde says:

...difference is where our strength lies... [it is an] essential source of power, control and knowledge.

She believes that we ...need to use these differences in constructive ways, rather than in ways to justify our destroying one another, [because more and more, after all] all our asses are in this sling together.

Audre Lorde sees bringing difference together as a source of power because putting many differences together is the only way to make a whole, and a whole is a very powerful thing.

I can't say that all of this makes me comfortable. In fact, it makes me very uneasy and eager to learn how to give and at the same time protect our particular source of power, which is our culture.

This is the beginning of a series of discussions and interviews with women of different racial, cultural backgrounds, sexual preference and age to find out how they feel about feminism and building bridges.



D. MALTBY

International Lesbians and Gays of Color Conference - Grass Roots

On July 28 to 31st, 1988, the 5th. International Lesbians and Gays of Color conference was held here in Toronto. Participants attended from around the world, they came from countries such as England, New Zealand, Mexico, the United States and from various provinces in Canada.

The womyn and men at this conference were as diverse as their particular cultures.

As a black lesbian parent this conference validated for me the importance of my existence, and gave me a place in the struggles of Lesbians and Gays internationally. I'm choosing to use this space for sharing with the sisters who could not for whatever reasons, attend the workshops, some of the positive points on Grassroots.

I don't know how many of the conference participants are out in their various communities but as I danced in Caribana with them, went to local restaurants and other establishments and places where Gays and Lesbians were not in the majority we were out, we openly kissed embraced

and held hands with our lovers. For me to have the freedom to do so if only for a weekend was powerful. Because for so long the homophobia of the white and in particular the Black community prevented me from openly enjoying a very important part of my life. The strength of Gay pride came out not only from our diversity but also by our number.

There were 12 workshops organised by the core committee for Grassroots many of which were facilitated by different individuals attending from various countries. One of the workshops I attended was "Coming out coming on" which addressed ways of coming out to family, friends and co-workers. We also dealt with the kinds of stress we encounter as Lesbians and Gays of Color.

There were workshops on homophobia, cross lines/class lines, Aids, Racism, and my particular favourite styles of loving which showed me the many ways in which we relate to each other.

Through the conference the participants constantly stressed the importance of us not only in recognising our differences but respecting them and to use this strength to build a stronger international political movement.

Leleti



S U B S C R I B E
T O
O U R
L I V E S



Third International Feminist Bookfair, Montreal, June 14-19, 1988; Statement read by Black women at plenary session, June 19th

"Take Our Word For It"

I read this on behalf of women of color and indigenous women who have met, some of us meeting each other for the first time. Yesterday, during the readings of indigenous women Joy Harjo said that this was indeed a historic occasion for it provided the space for indigenous women to share their stories and build on their memory, that subjugated memory which we are continuously replenishing. The space for this happened because of this conference. It is in the spirit of that sharing that we invite you to listen to the message which we bring with openness and a recognition of the spirit in which it is offered. As women of color, we are not a homogeneous group. We have different experiences of racism, colonialism, and imperialism, and of religious and caste hierarchy. We are lesbian and heterosexual and have had to struggle with differences amongst ourselves. We are not the homogeneous, exotic "Third World" women whom the "West" has constructed.

We have had a great deal of discussion in the last three days about the meaning of racism in political struggle. What does racism have to do with political struggle? How in the 1980s can we understand the subtle and not so subtle workings of racism so that we can be involved in the kind of coalition politics necessary to bring us into the 21st century? How can we forge political practice whose foundation is not simply assumed on the basis of gender and sexuality but which comes with active engagement in political struggle? Why is it necessary to establish a hierarchy of oppression... Your oppression is more significant than mine; your nationality or language is more important than mine; sexism is more pervasive than racism... As women of color, we recognize that the major systems of oppression all emerge from the same source and mutually reinforce each other. For us, experiencing the ways in which racism,

sexism, heterosexism and class affect us separately and together help us to understand and structure our politics. For us, race, class, sex, and sexuality are intertwined.

We want to reaffirm the spirit with which the Third International Feminist Bookfair has made a solid commitment to deal with racism. Some of the major problems we have experienced over the past few days relate to racism and Eurocentric ways of thinking. But dominant history is not the only history and for an international gathering to be truly international it must bring to the center the histories of peoples who form two-thirds of the world's peoples. These are "Third World" peoples and indigenous peoples.

Racism and Eurocentrism helped to produce the following:

1) Women of color were treated as other, not as equals. We were kept out of the decision-making for this conference.

2) Black women were viewed as a monolith. There were no panels for instance where Francophone Black women could talk about their experiences. These are not the same as Kenyan women. Anglophone does not necessarily specify the experiences of Black women or women of color.

3) Differences of language were neither dealt with consistently, sensitively, or politically. All translations were organized around French and English the two major colonizing languages.

4) There were no communal spaces for women of color and indigenous women to share our mutual concerns. Simultaneous panels were organized so that women whose central experience was colonialism could not learn from each other. For instance, we had to choose between competing panels on South Asian women and women in the African diaspora.

5) The meaning of class was not adequately addressed either in terms of conceptual understandings, political strategy or the cost of the conference. No attention was paid to the differentially abled; sessions were not signed. What does this say about our ability to deal with difference?

6) Cultural practices were not acknowledged. How can we be expected to do this intense level of emotional work without providing basic necessities such as food?

7) There were also certain artificial separations which need to be addressed:

i) academic panels were the larger ones with huge lecture halls. Writers from whose work we have drawn strength and who have helped us through painful rememberings, were cramped into smaller spaces. What does

this say about the kind of knowledge we think is important?

ii) the politics of publishing, who publishes, and what gets published are all feminist concerns and ought not to have been narrowly focused on the "trade" days. Also, publishers, particularly those from small alternative presses, need not have been trapped and isolated in publishers booths.

In view of what we have expressed here, we would like for the following to be adopted by the Third International Feminist Bookfair:

i) that the text of this document become part of the planning for the fourth bookfair.

ii) that there be considerable input from indigenous women from the country where the next conference is held.

iii) that working class women, indigenous women, women of color and differentially abled women be involved in all levels of planning for the conference.

iv) that conference planners adjust for the insidious inequities of class and provide scholarships for indigenous women, women of color and those least able to defray economic costs.

v) that in thinking about the stories we construct about ourselves, the oral tradition be honored.

In adopting these principles this conference has been able to achieve what its predecessors have not been able to do. We have underscored our commitment to develop pro-active, anti-racist, anti-imperialist feminist strategies. This is a working document from which we can move forward and of which we can be proud.



Coming Out Crushes, Friendships and Attractions

Annette Russell

One of the hardest lessons I've had to learn, while going through this process called coming out, is that there is no set pattern for loving womyn.

I've spent endless hours looking for a particular way of dealing with the fact that there is no blue print. No one category for defining caresses and intimate conversations.

The womyn who make up my family in the black womyn's community have become my lifeblood, they give me the necessary ingredient I need to grow politically, Intellectually, emotionally, and sexually.

And it's through this giving and support that we connect. One of the ways is through dancing.

I like the way my body stretches while dancing, it is the only time I am truly at ease and by closing my eyes I can grove with the sensuality of me. This particular connection is always nice.

But sometimes this energy and caring feels so good it leaves its place and often becomes confusing.

It hurts me when the space I'm sharing becomes filled with tension and with her ignoring me. I think because she doesn't want to do or say anything to encourage me.

So, as a baby dyke, how do I deal with my crushes and attractions while coming out.

I've been told that I'm still viewing my attractions by heterosexual standards, that's possible because looking back on past relationships when I met a man I liked there really was only one course to follow.

And through I've had to dismantle and review not only who I love but how I love, and the myths that I had accepted about womyn as taught to me by a society that places little or no value on the closeness and connections between us is what I'm trying to deprogramme myself from, while at the same time enforce new and positive ones.

I can remember that one of the first things that my marriage did was get rid of girlfriends, and my husbands negative comments about girlfriends belittled and devalued the closeness and support I depended on. After a period of time I ignored these vital connection, by not trusting womyn, not getting close and became very afraid of any physical closeness like hugging.

When I came out and focused my energies into being a womyn identified womyn I realized how afraid I was of enjoying this sistership of touching and communicating. And to heal myself I first had to accept and respect me which in turn empowered me and gave me the confidence to begin to accept and respect the connections with my sistrens as friends, allies, sparing partners, and lovers. For me trying to get to this point, has helped me through the misunderstandings and hurt feelings, that happen between us. Also while working it out I've finally placed the value on and recognised the importance of my relationships with womyn through the different connections that we make, regardless of our sexual preferences.

With Kisses and Revolution

Subscribe

OUR LIVES
the cutting edge

OUR LIVES

the cutting edge

RACISM, SEXISM AND PATRIARCHY

by Lee Maracle

This paper is concerned with the historical development of racism and sexism and their relationship to patriarchy. It is not concerned with the pre-history of racism or sexism, that is it is not concerned with either of the two subjects prior to their conjoining after the development of colonialism. There is some speculation that the colonial process is a continuation of patriarchy on a world scale — but I am unconcerned with that. Further, some authors argue that racism has its roots in the development of Mediterranean civilizations, again, I remain somewhat aloof. The reason for that is simple: the colonial system of Europe which seeded the industrial revolution was the only social order to birth a system, global in extent, that joined both racism and sexism ideologically and guaranteed patriarchy a much longer life than it deserved. I, here, categorically negate any pleas to pay attention to the fact that certain Asians conquered the "known world of their time". At no time were any parts of the world completely unknown to human beings.

Neither, am I willing to concede that certain feudal systems were both patriarchal and chauvinist. Feudalism lacked two things to bind racism and sexism together in an unholy marriage against women: vestiges of matriarchy, in which the lady of the fief's house shared power with the males as young women and as grandmothers assumed power and control over the household, and, second an inability of the feudal lord to entrench this philosophy so deeply that it actually reflected class differences between serfs of different race or sex. A serf was a serf regardless of race or sex.

The previous paragraph is almost irrelevant and is written for the pedants of history, because of course, feudalism never did achieve global proportions. My last reason is rather pragmatic. The study of the history of development of patriarchy, racism and sexism is a fascinating subject, however, it is its modern context that currently prevents the defeat of either. Therefore, I am very much concerned with its modern context because I suffer from all these three mountains.

Very few Native women writers, or colored women writers in general are terribly concerned with the history of European women in the Americas. The reason for this is also quite simple. White women have with terrific consistency negated our sexuality. For instance, "the suffragettes were the impetus behind the women getting the vote". Now, A-holt and Audre Lorde both know that the suffragettes did not get them the vote. There I begin. How did some 15 million women in North America become non-women?

You see I remember well, the eloquent statements of the likes of our grandmothers made to the hypocrites in Canada, who decried the racism of Americans, when discussing the civil rights movements of the 1950's and 1960's. It was a battle waged by Blacks that won us our votes. It was not because anyone seriously considered us people entitled to full citizenship that changed things but the threat of a mass movement of Natives. We are not known historically, for our non-violence when upset.

The Canadian Voice of Women, bless their hearts, pointed to Pauline Johnson and the threat of violence in their quest for our right to citizenship. Few women today know that Natives were confined to the department of immigration until 25 years ago. But I remember the day of sorrow that our family suffered when my sister married a Native man from the U.S. Standing in the immigration hall before a citizenship judge was my sister, swearing allegiance to queen and country and "immigrating" to the country of her birth and the birth of all her

ancestors! In exchange for dis-enfranchising herself, she became Canadian, white in the eyes of the law and thenceforth, entitled to vote and drink with other white folks. She lost her status as "child in the eyes of the law". She became an adult.

The gains for Canada in this sort of institutionalized race and national oppression were enormous. Canada gained the second largest country in the world, a country rich in natural resources. The decimated population of Natives was easily conquered, erased and consigned to small reserves. Racism, never travels alone, however. Sexism is always close behind. Native women, alone, were forced to relinquish their right to be Native and live off the reserve if they married 'non-Natives'. White women gained status, Native women lost. Racism/sexism eclipse. Because white women gained by these circumstances and Native women lost — no unity around "womanhood" was in danger of springing up. The racial distinction between white and Native eclipsed the issue of sexism.

Unfortunately, since the colonial process began the issue of race has eclipsed sexism, where the conflict involves women of color the cause is usually racism. In general, the major economically profitable division in the world is along racial lines. The dark nations of the world are the producers of wealth; the light nations of the world are the privileged consumers of this wealth. Racism is the social division of people along racial lines. It is rooted in the actual conditions of the people of the world. The ideological justification used to be racial superiority. Few people will argue racial superiority in today's world. Yet racism persists. It is a condition, not just an ideology.

It is my contention that racism is the culture that arises out of the division between people along racial lines: "you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich". The consciousness that arises out of our different social reality is much more difficult to deal with than the more obvious myths of racial superiority. It is an automatic response for Canadians to ignore Natives. In the classrooms of the nation they sit — apart from the rest of the students. The children pretend that the Native kid isn't really there — after all, she will not finish grade school or she will move away because "these people are drifters".

When the school my children attended realized that I had lived in the same spot for two years and had no intention of 'drifting', they stopped ignoring me. They were visibly afraid of me. They listened very carefully to every word I had to say. They were overly careful about choosing their own words. This is not seen as racism, but it is. A division between people that is based on race is racism.

The division is quite simple: Canadians stole our country and have done nothing to redress that theft. Until they do, there will be a racial division between us. I have often heard white people accuse Natives of being racist. There is a real difference between not respecting white people who do nothing about the racial division between us and them and being the perpetrator of racial divisions. The Native who has no love and respect for white folks is responding naturally to an unnatural condition. White people who perpetrate this division are protecting their racial interests.

It is not in the interests of white Canadians to be anti-racist. The basic redress of the racist history of their country is going to be personally costly to all Canadians. No Canadian person will admit that he ought to be burdened with the cost. Get it from the government, get it from the corporations but leave us alone. That is protection of your racial interests at the expense of another race of people. That is racism.

What is little known to white women is that it was the birth and growth in strength

of racism that gave rise to sexism. Legalized sexual discrimination of sorts did exist before the 1500's in Europe. But the total subordination of women to men is a recent phenomenon which was hothoused by the birth of capitalism and the consummate industrial revolution. What preceded the glorious revolution that transformed language, culture and consciousness for Europe was: the enslavement and commercialization of an entire race of people in Africa and the enslavement of the more populace Natives of Central America; the transformation of European women and children into beasts of burden, cheap labor; and, the plunder of the colonies as both sources of raw material and markets for the dumping of excess goods and people. This major re-organization of the world's hitherto separate economies into a single global system gave rise to the ideologies of racism and sexism among the oppressed classes. The cultural renaissance of England that preceded capitalism's ascendancy, included equality between men and women and the weakening of patriarchy. The industrial revolution, the supremacy of science over nature, production over humanity and the negation of love and morality in the interest of profit invigorated patriarchy.

All sorts of debates about the "humanity" of people of color arose. In Spain, the debate within the church about whether or not "Indians" were people of culture. In England, the naturalists and civil society philosophers and in France, Rousseau and finally Chauvin. Chauvin won the day. Nationalism and racism infused life into patriarchy and bent the direction of feminism before it was ever fully conceived.

The 'women's movement' in Europe, and most particularly North America, was exclusively white and centered on achieving white male status for themselves. Yet, the granddaughters of the suffragettes were mightily surprised at the strength of patriarchy 80 years later. Imperialism can always re-arrange the world in the interest of keeping a minority silent. It cannot re-arrange the world to appease the demands of the majority.

Imperialism has shown that it will always concede to the demands of the white minority if they exclude people of color. The trade union movement owes its peaceful existence in North America and its satiate concessions to its white exclusivity, historically. Had the union been made up of Natives, Blacks, and Asians (who by the way, formed the majority of workers in this province until 1909), massacres, jailings, etc, would have been their reward.

Every concession made to white people in their exclusivity strengthens their own enemy against themselves. It is very much like picking up a stone to drop it on one's foot. Women organize, demand certain things from government — white women are conceded too — and the next thing you know it is more difficult, more complicated to secure the concession and you are spending all your time securing the concession and not fighting patriarchy. The government is now extending privileges to certain Native groups. We started off, determined to dismantle the colonial empire, once and for all and rid ourselves of this beast- racism. Funds are handed out to the organized. Within a decade, the goal is all but forgotten and much time is spent in organizational self-perpetuation. We can't see the forest for the trees. Patriarchy wins again.

The reason for that is simple: self-interest. It is hard to put the struggle of people on a world scale ahead of your own national interests, particularly, when your nation has so little. White women are raw with the lash of male superiority. Natives hunger for land. We are on an escalator of our own making marching backward against our long term interests. Patriarchy is secure

continued pg 8

"SISTERS IN STRUGGLE"

by Angela Davis, February 26, 1988

"I would like to thank the Toronto Black Women's Collective for having invited me to participate in this wonderful celebration of Black history. I am proud to be able to reach out to my Canadian sisters on behalf of Black women in the United States as part of the process of internationalizing our vision of the historical as well as contemporary quest for Black equality. And I'm especially proud to participate in events which symbolize the multiracial unity we should all be working diligently towards. We may be running a little late but sometimes it's necessary to take that time and hear from all of us. We have been so long silent ourselves, we should have patience to listen to each other.

And I think it's wonderful that this event which comes on the cut of Black History Month and International Women's Day, or International Women's Week, or International Women's Month, we keep expanding our celebration. I think it is very significant that we are able to listen to the perspectives of women representing our various people, and our class. And I think that it is extremely important that there are interested brothers who have come this evening to see us. And I think that the Black Women's Collective here in Toronto is working in the tradition of Black women who have fought for emancipation throughout the history of North America.

As a matter of fact around the end of last century when Black women in the United States began to organize the Black Women's Club Movement, the motto they chose was, "lifting as we climb." Lifting as we climb. We cannot be free until all of our oppressed sisters and brothers are free. And reflecting on Black history, we are aware that many Black people here in Canada today are descendants of fugitive slaves who were compelled to leave the United States entirely as a result of the fugitive slave law. Canada was a place of refuge from slavery. And in a sense, Canada was once Black people's home. At one time Canada was synonymous with freedom and there was a spiritual called, "I Got Shoes," which may very well have referred to the exhilaration Black people felt when reflected on what it must be like in free Canada. And of course, although the reference in the spiritual, is to heaven, it is Black people's way of clandestinely referring to a real place where they could be free, and the spiritual goes, "I got shoes, you've got shoes, all God's children got shoes we're gonna get to heaven go put on the shoes go walk all over God's land."

Canada at that time was a place where Black people could walk free from the surveillance of the slave controllers and this role that Canada played in accepting fugitive slaves has provided the basis for a mythical perception of Canada as entirely free with all the racism displayed quietly. And I have to admit myself that when I have come to Canada over the last ten / fifteen years I have been astonished when I have learned about the racism which is no less horrendous for us and indeed no less systematic than in the United States. The last trip I have personally made to Canada was in Montreal a month ago and when I arrived today I was stopped by the immigration officers and I looked around the room where the people were being diverted to when they were getting off the plane and looked at the people who were waiting in both instances, they were all people of colour. And when I was in Montreal in November.

At the hotel where I was scheduled to stay and the university had made reservation for my room they insisted that they had no room for me although they had not even looked at the records. And quietly I suggested

that I would have my attorney get in touch with them that they miraculously found the reservation. But I mention that because it is very clear that you have an enormous problem and I think that an event such as this is very significant because it does symbolize the growing awareness of the need to build a mass movement against racism in this country.

Black history month is a time when we acknowledge and celebrate the contribution of Black people attempting to counterbalance the racist inspired exclusion of Black women and men from the historical records. We should not have to celebrate Black history we should be integrated into the history of North America. We should be studying Black history 365 days a year, but at least we do have one month I can remember as a child we had a week. Ironically, it is the shortest month of the year, we all should celebrate Black history month simply for the sake of a celebration or even simply for the sake of correcting the valuable records which we definitely must do.

The job I see of Black people are perseverance, resistance, unrelenting struggle, to achieve the goal of full equality for every woman, man and child on this planet. And therefore the most appropriate ways in which to celebrate Black History month is to recommit ourselves to the struggle initiated by our ancestors, and therefore we should affirm as we celebrate Black history month that we are standing on the shoulders of those who preceded us, of those who fought before us. We stand on the shoulders of Nat Turner and Harriet Tubman. We stand on the shoulders of MaryAnn Shadd and Marie Joseph Angelique. We stand on the shoulders of Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. Dubois, and Ida B. Wells, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X. We stand on their shoulders, and it is incumbent upon us to continue the struggle they initiated for our own sakes and for the sakes of those who come after us.

We are bound together, Canadians and people who live in the United States. We are bound together not only by our geographical proximity but we are bound together by the similarities that mark many of the political faculties which we are today. We are bound together in our efforts to end brutal, racist violence. We are bound together in our efforts to extend solidarity to Native peoples who continue to fight the genocidal campaigns waged against them. And indeed we are bound together, we must be bound together in our resistance to the anti-working class alliance that has been established between Reagan and Mulroney. But we promise you our sisters and brothers in Canada that we will respond by extending our solidarity in the struggle to eliminate the so-called free trade agreement.

The perspective of this gathering this evening is a global one. And it is important that we broaden our circle. Many of us are concerned about the issues which appear to affect us and certainly we should be concerned about what happens to our families and our communities. But our community is also the world and if we do not succeed for example in building the kind of movement that will indeed commit our sisters and brothers to smash apartheid, there will be no hope for us here in North America.

As our sister pointed out, our sister representing the A.N.C., pointed out the recent intensification of repression in South Africa which the banning of virtually all of the remaining legal progressive organizations including the United Democratic Front, which has more than two million members, effect a declaration of war against the people of South Africa. And it is our responsibility to guarantee that our movements are regenerated and revitalized and extended. You here in Canada need to escalate the pressure on the Mulroney government. Call for complete and total

divestment of all interests in South Africa.

And, of course we in the United States have the same responsibilities, to escalate the pressure on the Reagan Administration. Ronald Reagan, throughout the seven and a half years as president has been intent on preserving the alliance with Pretoria.

As a result of movement organized in the first place by the Black community, movement which grew to such magnitude as a direct result of the participation of the Trade Union Movement, a movement which expanded to include the Women's Movement, the Peace Movement, the Gay and Lesbian Movement and all the progressive movements in the United States.

We have been able to tell Ronald Reagan that his policy with respect to South Africa will not prevail. And as a result of those movements, the states have divested, cities have divested, counties have divested, pension funds have divested, universities have divested. And what we intend to do is to guarantee that when Reagan leaves, and fortunately he will be leaving soon and there are those like myself who are very tired of his face, and will be very happy when he must finally make his exit from the White House, but we also want to guarantee that when he leaves his policies leave with him. We want to guarantee that racist, sexist, anti-working class, pro-contra, pro-apartheid policies are evicted from the White House this November.

And as we reflect on this international perspective we are reminded that our sisters in Central America have taken their place, not only on their country's battlefield against the terroristic contras, but in their country's government as well. And I would like to again pay tribute to Nora who represented the voice of women in the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. It is very sad that she was taken from us at such a young age but we carry on the struggle in this spirit.

There is a place in the world where we should all be focussing very seriously. I'm referring to the Middle East. Our Palestinian sisters and brothers are presently waging a courageous resistance to the murderous campaigns of the Israeli government. And I am reminded as I look at the photographs of the uprising in the occupied territories of the similarities between the struggles being waged by the Palestinians and the struggles against apartheid in South Africa. And when we talk about the iron fist of repression in South Africa, we have to talk of the iron fist of repression in Israel. Palestinian women are playing a pivotal role in challenging the occupying Israeli forces.

The Federation of the Palestinian Women Workers Committees for example which was founded in 1981 is doing its best to carry on its tradition of progressive Palestinian and international women's movement even as their communities are besieged by the murderous forces of the Israeli government. The Federation for example has organized a literacy campaign, it has established kindergartens for Palestinian children who would otherwise be denied day care and education altogether. It has set up medical clinics and vocational training centres. Much like their South African counterparts, Palestinian women are not merely resisting the racist repression of the occupying forces they are building a revolution to defeat it.

And what is most heartening about the present moment is that all over the world and within Israel itself, there are many Jewish people who are finally waking up and recognizing that in order to defend their rights they must challenge the repressive Zionist policies of the Israeli government.

Let me suggest that we should also begin to organize the kind of solidarity movement which we have in the past organized with respect to our sisters and brothers in South



OUR LIVES

cutting edge

Africa. That is to say we need to talk about boycotting products made in Israel. Talk about divestment from Israel and we need to bring to bear the kind of pressure on the Canadian government and the U.S. government that will force our governments, or who's ever they are, from continuing giving material and moral support to the government of Israel. And we should support peace negotiations in the Middle East. We should bring pressure to bear on the Reagan government to put pressure on the state of Israel to sit down and negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Our voices must be heard. Our voices must be heard. We are governed by governments that do not represent us so that we must find ways to make our voices heard so that those of our sisters and brothers who are fighting on the frontline in El Salvador, in South Africa, in the Occupied Territories will be able to hear us and will be able to know that we stand together with them and that we have a common vision of building a world which will eventually be free of the plagues of racism, and sexism, and imperialism. This is our duty, my sisters and brothers and we should take it seriously.

As we reflect upon the international women and our battle as women to achieve gender equality we must recognize that it is hardly possible as women to be free until all of our people are free. While as women there are specific concerns which we must voice the issues that kept all of our communities are women's issues. Racism is a women's issue and we know that we share that concern that the United States and Canada about the upsurge in racism in overt racist violence over the recent years. Hardly a day, there has not been a day

over the last seven and a half years as a matter of fact in the United States where someone was not the victim of racist, anti-Semitic, anti-gay violence. As a matter of fact a report was recently issued by the National Council of Churches compiled by the Centre for Democratic Reunion. That report is called "They Don't All Wear Sheets". The chronology of hate violence, and that report documents over 3,000 separate instances of hate violence since Ronald Reagan took office.

In the recent period there was a case of a young Black woman in the state of New York who was found in a plastic bag, beaten, maimed, with the word 'nigger' scrawled on her body. That woman was 16 years old; she said that she had been attacked and raped by 6 white men, one of whom was wearing a police officers jacket and carrying a badge. This happened in the month of November and as a matter of fact Bill Cosby just recently announced that he would provide a large sum of money as a reward for any information on the assailants of this young woman. I could speak for the next several hours about similar outburst of racist violence in the United States.

One of our main struggles today is the fight for stronger and stronger legislation defining racist crime as such. Racist crimes are not even categorized in a separate category. There was recently a case where someone who had burnt a cross on a Black family's lawn was charged and convicted of "Burning Without A Permit." So you see why it is absolutely necessary to have legislation that specifically penalizes racist acts of violence. As a result of the explosive upsurge in racist violence we discover that hate violence directed at other groups is also on the rise. And if we look at the history of Black people in the United States we see that whenever Black people have been targeted then it is someone else who's going to be next, and that someone else will follow. This is why it is in the interest of all oppressed people regardless of the nature of their oppression to challenge that racist violence before it gets out of hand.

There has been over the last years of the Reagan administration violence directed against women who attempt to exercise their

reproductive rights. And I am talking about the bombings and burnings of the abortion clinics all over the country. I am talking about harassment of women who attempted to make use of abortion services. You here in Canada would do well to look at the movement that unfolded over the last period in the United States because you are at the stage we were in 1973 when abortion was finally decriminalized. And there are many lessons to be learnt about the way in which racism can insinuate itself into what otherwise appears to be a legitimate defence of women's reproductive rights. It is extremely important to understand the extent to which the racist violence, which is on the rise, is directly instigated and given fuel to violence directed against women of all racial backgrounds.

Who do you think are the people who go out there and do the bombings of the abortion clinics? They are the very same ones who are involved in racist violence, members of the Klu Klux Klan, members of the Nazi Party, and other far right terror organizations. There is an increase in violence against the lesbian and gay population, as a matter of fact, in the San Francisco Bay area in recent times during recent months there has been a number of murders of gay men and no doubt also urged on in a general wave by the overall climate of racism. If it is alright to attack and rape, and even kill a Black person, or a Latino person, or a Native American person, then it is also alright to attack or even kill a gay person whatever that persons racial background might be.

We should understand the interconnectedness of our oppression. And speaking of the assault on the rights of the gay community we have a special responsibility to stand up and demand that more funds in Canada and in the United States be directed toward Aids research, and more provisions of social services, and medical services for those who have been stricken with AIDS. And, of course, as people of color we are affected in a very tragic way by the AIDS epidemic. There has been the attempt to portray AIDS as the disease which primarily afflicts white and gay men, but that is not true.

People of color are disproportionately victims of AIDS in all categories, there are more gay men who are Black, and Latino proportionately than white who have AIDS. There are proportionately many more women of color who have AIDS than white women. Latino women have AIDS in numbers that are nine times as much as white women, and Black women contract AIDS twelve times more so than white women. Therefore, our children, the most tragic statistics refer to Black children and well over half of all the children who have AIDS are Black.

This is an extremely important issue and in the United States what we are doing is urging people to support; especially now given the impact of the AIDS epidemic, a national health plan. The U.S., of course, remains the only industrialized country outside of South Africa that does not have a national health insurance plan. And there are people who die in the streets because they cannot afford to pay for health care.

There was recently a woman in the area where I live, the San Francisco Bay area, whose child was born dead as a result of the fact that she was dumped from one hospital to another because they refused to believe that she had a health insurance. She was a welfare mother and did as a matter of fact have a health insurance plan. They sent her to three hospitals before they finally treated her and when they finally treated her it was too late. So this is the kind of thing... now talk about South Africa. We have South Africa in our own back yards.

And when we speak about the poverty, the violence occurring in the Third World and the need to support those who are moving toward the building of a new order, we also have to reflect upon what is happening in our back yard. Last year was designated the year of shelter for the

homeless by the United Nations. At the time the United Nations made that designation no one thought about the fact that the United States should be considered as one of the countries where homelessness is an enormous problem. As a matter of fact, it soon became clear that while the resolution focussed on the developing countries it should also be focussing on the developed countries like the United States.

And, of course, this is an important moment for us and for you as you will certainly be affected by the outcome of the 1988 election in our country. And I want to suggest that there are some very exciting developments in the elections. Not only the fact that Reagan is going to be kicked out of the White House one way or another. But the fact that the level of discourse in the campaign has been heightened by the presence of Jesse Jackson.

There are issues that no one would be talking about if it were not for the fact that Jesse Jackson is in the campaign and pushing questions of South Africa, and talking about what none of the other candidates are talking about: what's happening in the occupied territories right now. None of them, none of the other candidates are talking about racism in the way that Jesse Jackson is talking about racism. Jesse Jackson should be the next president of the United States.

He is supported not only by Black people, not only by Latinos, and Native Americans, and Asians, he is supported by the gay movement and most important of all he is supported by the labour movement.

And I say that there are some exciting things happening because many people who voted for Reagan three and a half years ago in places like Iowa and Minnesota are now supporting Jesse Jackson. But let me say this, the most important approach in the approach that we are taking for the campaign is that the issues are what is important. And we should be able to unite around issues because whoever is elected in November our people's struggle will go on. We can never be willing to allow a single individual to be responsible for our destiny because it is our destiny.

Let me say, finally to conclude that with all the problems that we confront all over the world, we are moving towards a new historical moment. And we are understanding to an ever increasing degree that the certainty to stand together, to reach out to one another, to overcome the barriers of racism, and sexism, and anti-working class elitism. It is incumbent upon every single one of you to examine the influences

on your own attitudes. Because this is the moment when we really need to come together and consolidate our unity, and we will not unite if there are those who dismiss the influences of racism and argue, "Oh, I'm not a racist, some of my best friends are....." And of course racism can be a de-humanizing influence. And white people must recognize the extent to which the goals of the ruling class over the last century or more has been to de-humanize the masses of white people for the sake of pitting them against their sisters and brothers of color.

And I can remember as a child, growing up in a segregated Birmingham, Alabama when it was not allowed for a Black person to have any relationship with a white person that was not economic in nature, you could work for a white person, you could buy from a white person; otherwise all other relationships were illegal. And I remember thinking then, because I didn't know any white people, I literally did not know a single white person, they lived across the street, but I didn't know them because you see Black people were not allowed to walk across to the other side of the street. That was the white zone, we were of course in the Black zone.

continued pg. 9



RACISM continued

for a while yet.

The women's movement embraces 2-1/2 billion women in the world. The enemy of women (and men) is imperialism. This system of financial enslavement that organizes and re-organizes the world is beset with financial chaos, recession, and political rebellion. None escape the web of this voracious spider. Apartheid in South Africa, war in the Middle East, rebellion in Africa, Asia and Latin America characterize its strength and its weakness. The women's movement is ill-concerned with the imminent monetary crisis that threatens whatever gains have been made by North Americans. Yet, we are all threatened with the collapse of an aging empire.

Imperialism is a maddened patriarchy gone wild. It requires white male kings of finance and their (ex-colonial) cousins to hold it together. It requires a definite lack of unity between North Americans and third world people. Racism is the fulcrum of this dis-unity. It is rooted in the condition of whiteness that is barely 100 years old.

In 1949, a peasant in Asia stood up on a balcony and announced to the multitudes below that "China has stood up". The shock of it, the magnitude of this statement has never been understood. Despite the ups and downs, the twists and turns of the Chinese revolution a profound point was made by people of color in 1949: we are capable of standing up. Never again would the pragmatism of success or not success deter us. Under the most severe police state, black youth of Soweto rose up and took on South Africa. Children inspired the armed struggle of the Blacks, coloreds and even white supporters of Black majority rule in South Africa.

Mothers rose to the defense of children. Mothers, armed with only a sense of justice, organized themselves and launched the only resistance to military rule in Chile, in Argentina, Guatemala and host of other countries. Women are on the move. It does not surprise us that "Cory Aquino" effected the only 'peaceful revolt' in modern history.

It is time to take a breath and look at what has happened. Everytime a person of color stands up in the world its significance emboldens women of color here. It confuses white folks. White women are baffled when they open the doors of their organizations to ungrateful women who assume that they are entitled to share power, not just presence.

What a mess. Here we all are, trying re-order our minds and hearts and we have no standard, no starting point from which to take example. The culture of Patriarchy precludes exhibiting the kind of honesty between us that could lead to our untangling the mess. Based on cutthroat competition and profit-making as this system is, the culture of patriarchy is steeped in mutual deception, power-mongering, the manipulation of hidden agendas. Gossip, hearsay, and the hoarding of certain types of knowledge, specifically the methods of organization and the contact lists, etc., are common practice.

White people still invite people of color to participate in social actions as subordinate to the organization as a whole. The bureaucratic machinery to ensure continuity is withheld from the people of color. The real planning takes place on a level separate from people of color. We remain a peripheral validation of the lack of racism in white organizations.

The hidden agenda of white folks involved in their organizations is the security of power that they think goes hand in hand with resistance to the power of the established order. Old habits die hard. A good many of these people are not even conscious of their own hidden agendas. They are simply repeating the style of work of the patriarch, their defences ring out much the same as the defense of patriarchy in excluding women. "No wonder us guys still



Cynthia Gray

Lee Maracle

rule the world, women aren't capable". There is an assumption that in order for the thing to work, power must be hoarded by the few who think they know what they are doing and that is the basic style of work of patriarchy. For women of color it translates into racism from white women directed at women of color.

Most of the conflicts between women of color and white women are a result of the patriarchal style of work inherited by white women that have them deadlocked against us.

To alter conduct and attitudes requires a fundamental change in character. It requires that white women consciously test their motives at all times; question their actions and test their attitudes in the crucible of relations between themselves and women of color. It also requires that women of color differentiate between what is stock patriarchal style of work and what is truly racism. It requires painful honesty.

All dis-empowered people seek *empowerment*. Patriarchy defines empowerment as the equivalent of power — over someone. This is the unifying philosophy that binds racism and sexism together. Power over the natural world, power over people, power over the seas, the air, time itself. Empowerment is the personal quest for oneness with nature, oneness with people, the seas, the skies, and time. The quest for power dis-empowers the very people who need to be empowered in order to alter the course of our story.

Our very survival on this earth is at stake, yet we find time to waste in bickering over who has power. The answer is simple, patriarchy has power firmly in his hands with every quarrel between us that goes unresolved. Arrogance is the opposite of empowerment. To submit oneself to nature, people and time requires great modesty. Yet so humiliated are women of color by racism

and so humiliated by sexism are white women that modesty between ourselves is the very thing we lack. We are mutually influenced by patriarchal styles of work. Our mutual survival requires that we cut the strings that tie us to patriarchy and find a new thread to bind us together.

We are going to have to give up the quest for power and seek self empowerment. Our language will have to change. When there is a quarrel between us, each will have to look in the mirror at our own self to try and figure out "what could I have done to prevent this discord and promote unity". Instead, we point at the other person and say "she did this and that". What happens when you point the finger at someone else as the cause and perpetrator of discord? You dis-empower yourself. No one *makes* you behave in a certain way. Force is not useful to the enemies of empowered people. "The spirit of people is greater than technology". A person in command of their spirit, at one with humanity, will labor over discord between allies until a solution is arrived at. She will take responsibility for the conflict, in order to resolve it. An empowered person always has the initiative in her own hands. She is in command of herself at all times. An empowered woman will never bow to pressure or abuse, nor will she promote discord between natural allies.

Subscribe

OUR LIVES

the cutting edge

Interview with Ellen Kuzwayo: South African Activist and Writer

By Cynthia Gray, Student at the Native Journalism Programme at the University of Western Ontario.

Cynthia Gray: Could you tell me where you are from?

Ellen Kuzwayo: I come from Johannesburg in South Africa and I live in Soweto. I am the author of a book, called, *Call Me A Woman* which was published by the Women's Press in London in 1985. In my opinion, it has done very well because it has been published in six languages. Into Dutch, into German, into French, into Swedish, into Danish, and into English, yes, English is another language, but it was originally published in English. I think there is yet another language but because the book has not come out yet it's difficult to say. I have not seen the copies so I'm not sure whether its already been released by that. But these are the six languages in which the book was published."

Cynthia Gray: Why did you write this book?

Ellen Kuzwayo: Why? Why did I write the book? I'm a social worker by profession or I was at the time a practicing social worker and I worked with Black women for a long time in my country. And in some of my contact and relationship with Black women I realized that they were very discriminated people and also oppressed and deprived in many ways. But what surprised me is to find, or was to find that particularly things in rural areas where the husbands go out on migrant labour and these wives support remaining children with old people and they have all sort of responsibilities and they are not even getting sufficient financial support from their husbands because of the very, very low wages. I was very much impressed to see how these women did everything possible to cope in a very frustrating and depressing situation. And how they succeeded to bring up their children, to look after the old people, to look after the land, to look after the stock on the farm, and to make ends meet and to still see that their children go to school. And I saw this against the discrimination that they suffer, and the way that they are always despised by the people that they work for. And to me, I saw in them very great, strong women and I told myself that one day when I had time I'd leave, you know, the social work practice and sit down and write about these women. And this is how the book came about. And, of course in 1985 after it was released in London, it was also released in South Africa in July. And when the Central News Agency decided to hold there annual awards selection for the best books of the year, and it was the best book in English, it won the English Award in 1985. And to me, this has said, 'This book is really a great book in its own right and the fact that today in South Africa too, I hardly have rest, I have got to be talking to groups in book shops, sometimes groups of women in the white community, universities. And the remark that has always

come back to me has always been, people look at me particularly white people, they say, 'This is the history that we have never known.' And it is very true, I believe because of the apartheid system in that country where the government has succeeded to divide communities and one does not know what is happening to the other. And I

can well understand this. And I think this is one thing that makes me particularly feel very good that this book has been published and even if nothing is changed but people are beginning to know what the truth of South Africa is, particularly those who live in South Africa."

Cynthia Gray: How old are you?

Ellen Kuzwayo: I'm in my 74th year, this year.

Cynthia Gray: Who were you writing this book for, for everyone?

Ellen Kuzwayo: Yes, I wanted it to be read in South Africa but at the time because I felt the government was going to ban it, I had to get out and publish it in England, in London. And after that then, I was particularly happy because I always had a fear that it might not be read in South Africa but the fact that it has never been banned and it is being read in South Africa makes me feel very good about it. It has reached the readership that I think deserve to read it and to know more about to know more about their own country.

Cynthia Gray: Did you have a specific audience that you wrote this book for?

Ellen Kuzwayo: Well, I was writing it for every South African but in particular, for the white South African, to know because they are the people who don't pay minimum wages to the husbands, to the wives, to the mothers, to the fathers in the Black community. And I wanted them to know how some of us perceive this Black community who are despised by other people. And I think any person, any person, be it a man or a woman, a person who can nurse and nurture children and bring them up and make sure that these kids take their rightful place in life, I think those are great people. To me this is one of the things, that to me sees Black women are great mothers because they are able to bring up children of other mothers and to bring up their own children under very difficult conditions and circumstances.

Cynthia Gray: Would you like to comment on apartheid in South Africa?

Ellen Kuzwayo: Well, apartheid in South Africa. We live with apartheid, and I think that we all know that people talk about racism in all countries. We are aware of this. Racism is spoken of in the United States of

continued pg. 11

SISTERS continued

But I remember thinking, I remember feeling sorry for all of those white people who believed that we, as Black people were inferior. And I felt sorry for them because it seemed to me that because they could not understand the essential equality between us all they were not able to grasp their own humanity.

The same kind of dynamics is true of our men who in this day and age still refuse to recognize that their sisters are equal in every respect. As we organize our movements, purging ourselves of these detrimental influences of racism, of sexism, of anti-working class elitism; because I know some of us are students even though we may come from working-class backgrounds often time we attend institutions like this one where we are holding this event this evening, and we forget from whence we came.

And there are those of us who although we may be progressive in many other respects will not understand the importance

of joining our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in fighting the ravages of homophobia, and our differently abled sisters and brothers. And I would like to thank the signers for making this event accessible to the differently abled sisters and brothers.

We must know there are never things that we must take for granted in building a movement which will reflect our essential power. We have to begin to work on ourselves as we work for the building of that movement.

And finally, and I am concluding now, as we struggle around all those issues which we have discussed we should be aware of the controversy of the quest for world peace, especially in this day and age, peace unfortunately cannot be taken for granted. And however honorably we are fighting to achieve a particular goal if we do not also integrate into our struggle a campaign for complete and total nuclear disarmament we may never see the moment when we celebrate those victories. We are approaching the 21st century and I think that we should be very grateful to the Soviet Union for having emphasized over and over again to enter the 21st century without any nuclear weapons at all. Sisters and brothers let us march confidently towards the 21st century together with No More Racism, No More Sexism, No More Economic Injustice, and, Peace. Thank You.

Ellen Kuzwayo



Cynthia Gray

"BUILDING A GLOBAL MOVEMENT"

The Black Women's Collective, February 26, 1988

We wish to thank all of those who came here whether in solidarity, curiosity or generosity and dream that for many it is a road to working together to stop the destruction of the planet and the peoples.

The Toronto Black Women's Collective began organizing formally as a group in 1984. We began struggling in the women's movement around issues of race and representation. We fought for our right not only to define ourselves and our struggle against racist sexist oppression but to control just how that struggle would look. We fought for the right of all women who were outside the mainstream movement to speak of their own struggle. We fought for a representative movement which would acknowledge the different power relations among women, brought on by white supremacy and discrimination. We fought and still fight to deepen the analysis of feminism so that the poorest women, the most oppressed women could find liberation through it. We fought and still fight to make feminism a weapon of the oppressed and not of the privileged. We are not interested in which women 'make it' under capitalism, we are not interested in those who become prime ministers or ministers in oppressive regimes, we are not interested in women who 'make it' to the corporate board rooms. That is not progress, that is co-optation. Our definition of feminism is not narrow and nationalistic it is deep and socialist. We fight to live in a society where everyone is privileged and not a just few.

We fight in our own community to put and end to sexism and recognize that Black men are no less sexist than other men just because we share the oppression of racism. Though we stand in solidarity with them against racism we stand in struggle against sexism. For Black women racism and sexism are inextricable. We can't fight one and not the other, we can't win one and lose the other.

In these past few years we have worked to express our sexuality as Black lesbians who reject heterosexism, that is, the assumption that only male-female relationships exist and are valid.

We have fought against the opportunism of Blacks and Whites who wish to become state experts on racism and gain high paying jobs. This has brought the issue of connecting to the working class home to us. We do not seek government funding and we have to therefore be connected to non state aligned individuals and groups in order to organize.

We have grown. There are now two other Black Women's Collectives in Canada, one is in Kingston, Ontario and one is in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This happened because of our networking and political work with sisters in these areas. We are working class women and we fight for our class. We struggle daily to gain a better political understanding and to affirm our life experience as Black women in a country which has historically ignored and oppressed us.

We seek solidarity with all progressive groups in the hope that we can build a coalition that will defend each others rights against capitalism. We work all our lives for barely a living wage while others less than 10% of the population live off our backs - hold all the material wealth, live in splendor and do no work. This must end.

We seek solidarity with all progressive groups against race and sex oppression — the violent killing of Lesline Senoir by a Black man, the killing of Katherine Wright

of Halifax by a white man, the killing of Albert Johnson, Buddy Evans and Anthony Griffin by white policemen — all these offend and attack us equally. As women we are paid less than men, beaten and abused, unpaid for housework, lacking in daycare, underemployed, unemployed, lack in housing. These too must end.

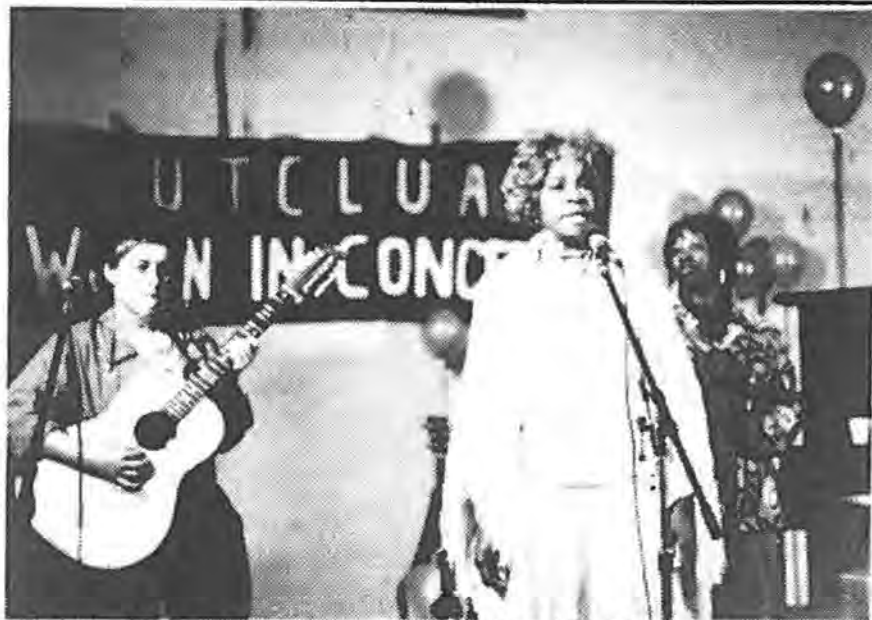
We stand with all people in the world in an effort to save our environment from multinational polluting, nuclear bombs, and unsafe nuclear plants.

We stand against U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa and Asia. We stand with our sisters and brothers in South Africa. As Black people in the rest of the world we know that until they are free we will not be free. Liberation in South Africa is part of our liberation.

It is our hope that by networking with so many progressives who've supported us in this Black history month celebration we will more and more work together in supporting each others struggles toward a more just, equal and humane society. The task at hand now for us is to build a united peoples movement. We live under the very real threat of the conservative government's free trade sell out — Imperialism is coming home to roost, it is eating on itself. We need to defeat it. We can do this by supporting each other's causes - fight for, more and reasonably priced housing, a higher minimum wages, equal pay for work of equal value, stopping the destruction labour unions who fight for job safety and security, a fair and non-racist immigration policy. You've seen in the newspapers the attack on Sikhs, Tamils and Latin Americans, they will be coming for us next.

We must fight for livable social assistance that brings women, children, differently abled people, for once in our history, to above the poverty line. We must fight more jobs and an end to regional disparity.

The Black Women's Collective and Black women are willing to struggle. Are you?



Black Women's Blues Night April 30



Benefit for CKLN summer '88



Freedom Ride to Montreal March 19

I, BLACK WOMAN, RESIST

Alzira Ruffino

This Statement was read to the Participants of the Third International Feminist Book fair, Montreal, June 14-19, 1988

As a member of a group of Brazilian Black women, I bring my report on the present situation of the Black woman in Brazil. We, feminists, are quite aware of the struggle, that women all over the world have to face for equal rights concerning laws, work, education, even concerning their own bodies and their lives in general.

We, as Black women, have a much narrower space in the Brazilian society than white women. In spite of its image of a racial democracy, Brazil is a very racist country, and this fact along with male chauvinism is responsible for the serious economical exploitation and our social segregation.

The double discrimination, racial and sexual, is accountable for the Black women's low level of schooling. According to a 1980 statistic data from governmental source, nearly half of Black women are illiterate. 90% attend school for 4 years, at most, and only 1% get to universities.

Even obtaining a university degree, the Black woman won't probably be able to practice her profession because the society has determined, since the times of slavery, that the Black woman must work as a maid, a cleaner, do rural work, prostitution or, if she is pretty, a samba dancer for tourists.

Where is the Black woman in the salary rank? Beneath the white man, the white woman, the Black man. 62.7% of the female Black workers receive about 50 dollars monthly. The majority, about 85%, receives 100 dollars at most.

This matter of chauvinism is present in the fact that the Black man receives a salary up to 72% higher than the Black woman. The trouble is that besides being Black, she is a woman.

In the face of this double discrimination, the Black woman can't even aspire to the traditional roles of housewife, "queen of the muse" or 1st class sexual object that society imposes on the white woman. The beauty standard is the white woman and the mass media uses the Black woman just to sell cleaning material as a house maid.

The Black teenagers are persuaded to have their hair straightened and to disguise their racial features to get closer to the beauty standard of the white woman, although they never reach the social status of the white woman. In general, the Black woman that accepts her ethnic traits and demands equal treatment is considered a radical agitator and racist.

Recent studies focus on the loneliness in which Brazilian Black women live. For the white man she is a second rate sexual instrument, like a prostitute. The Black man doesn't think she is suitable for marriage, for the white woman represents more social status. This was, Black women are also rejected by the men of her own race, undergoing a situation of institutional abuse similar to slavery times.

The historical process of slavery, by separating the Black man from the women and children, left its marks on the Black family. There are a great number of Black women who are the bread-winners due to the absence of their companions who have abandoned home.

To stop the demographic growth of the Black population and "whiten" the Brazilian population, some birth control projects are being developed which are aimed at the low income population and have racist connotations. This could be noticed in advertisements of Family Planning Societies that used ads associating color to messages such as: "manufacturers defect" and "unfortunately, there are children that are already born delinquent." Statistics show that sterilizations have been performed on a great

number of poor teenagers and women, most of the Black, which has caused serious denouncement by the women's movement and by the Black movement in our country.

Private multinational organizations act freely without any government control, and besides sterilization, they distribute contraceptives in large numbers without examination and without clinical supervision.

According to medical research the Black woman is four times more likely to develop myomas (tumours) and is twice more likely to develop hypertension, factors that indicate the use of birth control pills.

In spite of all these factors of segregation and oppression, Black woman has been responsible for the preservation of the Black community, religion and culture. She is the one who performs the most important roles in the Afro-Brazilian religion, the candomblé, (Brazilian voodoo), as opposed to other religions where the man occupies all places in the religious hierarchy. The Tlaloriza Mother Menininha of Gantois is a recent example of a Black religious leader who due to her influence on artists and politicians has become a national personality.

In the cultural area, the Black woman has transformed the "escolas de samba", groups which parade on Carnival, into community Black spaces. The Brazilian music, dance, painting, folklore and cookery reveal a rich African contribution that the Negroes and particularly the Black woman have brought to Brazil.

If the Black woman is hardly mentioned in the official history it is not that she hasn't taken part in the struggle for the race's freedom. Research has redeemed the historical images of Luisa Mahin, Maria Filipa, Aqualtune, Mother Aninha, Mother Senhora and we have at present a symbol of the female Black fighter, the congresswoman Benedita da Silva, the only Black woman to participate in the elaboration of the new Brazilian Constitution facing the discrimination of being a woman, being Black and being poor.

In Brazilian literature, recent research discovered a small number of Black writers who never had any kind of publicity, as with the case of Carolina de Jesus who had one of her books translated into 13 languages, and is completely unknown to Brazilian readers.

About a century ago, Black women, such as Maria Firmina Reis and Auta de Souza, confronted, as writers, the prejudice of a racist society which has always considered the Negroes unable to produce intellectual works. And, if the Brazilian Black is in the slum of literature, for the female Black writer the difficulty has been to overcome this barrier by taking part in literary contests, exhibits, and meetings publications and international fairs like this one.

In the last years the women's movement and the Black movement of Brazil, began discussing Black women's specific issues as a result of mobilization and pressure from all the groups of Black women that have been arising in the country.

This year we will have state and regional conventions and the 1st National Congress of Black Women in December in Rio de Janeiro at the national level, the Winnie Mandela Court that will judge the Centennial of the of the Abolition of Slavery in relationship to the present situation of the Black woman.

As a Black woman, I am here bringing my literary work, not as a victim of establishment, but as an artist conscious of our capacity, in spite of the restriction to the color of our skin.

Finally, I want to express my solidarity to Winnie Mandela and to all the anonymous Black women, writers or not, still oppressed by racial prejudice. I add my voice to theirs: **I BLACK WOMAN RESIST!**

ALZIRA RUFFINO

KUZWAYO continued

America, in England, and everywhere, maybe even here in Canada but the major difference about South Africa is that it is legislated racism or that apartheid itself is a legislated thing. You know, it is something else for me to choose who I want to speak to, but it is something else when the government legislates that I may not eat breakfast with so and so but I must eat it with so and so. It is this legislated discrimination, racism in South Africa that is most appalling and that goes above all other types of discriminations, of racism, all over the world. I think that it has no parallel anywhere in the world."

Cynthia Gray: Why did you come to the Third International Feminist Bookfair?

Ellen Kuzwayo: Well, I came because I'm a writer and I came to join other writers and to come and deliberate and share with writers, publishers, editors in the feminist world and which I feel is a very useful programme for us to begin to know where one is and to give support systems at all levels in different countries particularly in that some of us are always labelled people from the Third World. I suppose it is good to come and hear how the people in the First world live so that at least if they have anything to offer us, we can make use of that. But I want to believe too that the Third World too has something to offer to the First World."

Cynthia Gray: Do you know very much about Native people here in North America?

Ellen Kuzwayo: Very little, very little indeed. I know very, very little about the Indian people. What we hear in my country about not only in Canada but also in the States, we hear of the concentration camps, I don't know what that is?

Cynthia Gray: Reservations.

Ellen Kuzwayo: Reservations. And when we come to realize that the Indian people are the aborigines of some of these countries, of America possibly of Canada, we can't stop to marvel at the insensitivity of white communities all over the world. Where they come and they remove the aborigines of the country and they call the country their own. And they even have the audacity of putting people into camps and feeling that they are the only free people who must enjoy the work of the country, you know the social level of the country, and the political rights of the country at the complete, you know, disregard of the aborigines, the people that they found in that country. And I must say even if I know of that little bit of history, I need to know more about it. I know very little about it. I suppose, you are a part of that community."

Cynthia Gray: Yes. And I know so little about you. So it's a good place to come together.

Ellen Kuzwayo: That's right. How very true. It is very true that it is important. I think people that are disadvantaged like we are, dispossessed like we are, we need to know one about the other. If we can't help one another, we can at least have some solidarity and feel that we are supportive even if we are not able to give material support, but we can always give emotional support."

Cynthia Gray: Would you like to say anything, anything at all?

Ellen Kuzwayo: Well, except to say thank you for giving me this opportunity, that we have chatted together, I know you are a young person, you are a student. But I think it is the young people who are going to be the leaders of tomorrow. It is good at this time it is the young people that are beginning to want to know more about what happens in other countries to other communities. Thank you very much. "

THIRD INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST BOOKFAIR
JUNE 14-19 1988
MONTREAL

*OUR LIVES is a non-profit newspaper
run for, by and about Black Women.
If you are a Black woman, you've got
something to say. Say it Here!
Send stories, articles, poems, letters,
reviews and ideas.
OUR LIVES invites submissions from
Black women living all over Canada.*

Subscribe to

OUR LIVES

individuals \$15.
organisations \$25.

Send Subscriptions to
OUR LIVES
P.O. Box 248
Station P
Toronto, Ontario.
M5S 2S8

OUR LIVES is a non-profit newspaper run by Black women.
Subscribe and support this brave endeavour in the cold north.
For individual subscription send \$15.00.
For institutions - \$25.00.

NAME

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....PROV.....POSTAL CODE.....

Payment must accompany order. Make all cheques payable to
OUR LIVES and send to
P.O. BOX 248 STATION P TORONTO, ONTARIO M5S 2S8
