

# **SEX, RACE AND CLASS**

**Selma James**

**with contributions from  
Barbara Beese, Mala Dhondy,  
Darcus Howe and correspondents  
to RACE TODAY.**

DONALD OXE

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# SEX, RACE AND CLASS

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To Beverley Jones, born 26 September, 1955, murdered 13 September, 1973, by the bullets of the Trinidad government; sister of Jennifer and Althea, and of us all.

## Foreword by the Editor of *Race Today*

'Sex, Race and Working Class Power' was first published as the feature article in the January 1974 issue of the 'new' *Race Today*.

In that very issue of the journal we outlined our political and journalistic starting point as follows:

Our editorial policy . . . has been formed and shaped out of the conflict between liberal mediation, of whatever colour, and the newly-emerging social forces of black revolt. Our task is to record and recognise the struggle of these emerging forces as manifestations of the revolutionary potential of the black population. . . *Race Today* opens its pages to the tendency which seeks to give theoretical clarification to independent grass roots self-activity with a view to furthering its development.

So that from this the first issue of the new *Race Today* we sought to do two things: firstly to register the independent self-activity of the black working class and secondly to break the organisational and theoretical impasse to which the movement had succumbed.

For us here in Britain, the autonomy of the black movement within the British working class is an established fact, established against the tendency to have us subsume our particular experience within the working class in service of some vaguely defined general class interest. Most of us have only been in Britain over a period of 25 years. Mass emigration from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia disrupted the continuity of our development in the struggles against the colonial regimes in our countries of origin. We had to 'adjust', that is, to re-form the battle lines in a strange land and almost from scratch—it was a new beginning. The failure of the working class-based nationalist movements back home to break the stranglehold of the colonial economies left a demoralised working class no other alternative but mass emigration. Demoralisation coupled with the disruptive effects of a break in continuity served to expose the immigrant workforce as highly vulnerable to capital's merciless rule.

Yet from the very inception we proceeded to develop independent organisations in every single immigrant community throughout Britain. To point to this tendency is at the same time to state what we did not do—integrate into any of the existing working class organisations in Britain. We did not join the Labour Party or the white left; we joined the unions where we could or had to, but as a tactic, not as part of the process of laying the strategic groundwork of struggle.



Hundreds of social clubs flourished within which the new arrivals etched what is today described as the Black Community—organisations which were to provide the bases for the first national organisation of blacks in Britain—the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (and with it the first Establishment backlash of liberal mediation).

The transformation of these independent groupings into a national organisation was greatly influenced by the civil rights movement in the United States, and the subsequent development of the black movement here in Britain has always been enriched by the ideas and actions of blacks in the U.S. By the beginning of the seventies, we had established on both sides of the Atlantic that 'the working class movement is something other than the [traditional white] left have ever envisioned it to be'. We had succeeded in broadening and deepening the definition of working class—to include ourselves, to include new forms of organisation, to include a new historical experience.

Yet at the same time it was clear that the political formations and formulations which sought to represent this autonomy were in rapid decline. It was a crisis of theory which is at once an organisational crisis. That is to say, where the black working class in its daily struggles had revealed by its actions its own particularity within the working class, its specific position within the class, there was an absence of a corresponding generalisation of that mass practice which is the very basis of organisational strategy.

Then the women's movement took the political stage. The Wages for Housework tendency incorporated at one and the same time the lessons of the black movement and its own mass practice. A new political tendency if it is revolutionary always stands on the shoulders of what has gone before. It takes what it needs from the old and brings new insights to the revolutionary process as a whole.

'Sex, Race and Working Class Power' is an example of that development. It incorporates the experiences of both movements; in doing so it is the first document that we know of which has broken through the crisis of theory of those movements and offers, therefore, new strategic and organisational possibilities to the whole class. Selma James, a Marxist feminist, here teases out a Marxist formulation which begins to establish in theory what both movements have established in fact.

If any single document has informed the theoretical perspective of *Race Today*, 'Sex, Race and Working Class Power' has.

Darcus Howe  
London, December 1974

# Introduction

For those of us who have been denied power by both Capital and the organised 'left' in Britain, Selma James' essay, 'Sex, Race and Working Class Power' offers a new and revolutionary perspective for class struggle.

This perspective is based on the seemingly less powerful sections of the class—the wageless. We see for the first time what the class really is. It is black and white workers, women and men, children and the unemployed. And thus:

If sex and race are pulled away from class, virtually all that remains of class is the truncated, provincial, sectarian politics of the white male metropolitan left.

The racist/sexist, class purist nature of the organised left in Britain has been responsible for re-enforcing those divisions within the class created by capitalist production. They told us that unless we worked, say at Fords, and joined the unions we were not in a position to wage class struggle, and even worse, that we were not struggling at all.

It is no accident that Selma 'draws throughout on the experience of the struggle against capital by Black people'. We were the first section of the class to find for ourselves a lever of power outside the factory. We extended the struggle from our place of work into our communities where our strength lay with the young wageless brothers and sisters. We created our own forms of organisation in opposition to the arrogant factory theory of the left, and resisted on the streets the brutality of the police whose job it is to drive us back into the work we are refusing any longer to do.\* Instead of joining with us the left said we were splitting the working class. We responded at the time by saying that the working class had already been divided—and not by us. We had experienced the reality of this division by our further exploitation and had begun to deal with it by our own self-organisation.

A major contribution of the Black Power Movement to working class

\* See 'Fighting Back: West Indian Youth and the Police in Notting Hill' by Darcus Howe in *Race Today*, December 1973.



struggle was that it posed concretely the possibilities of an international revolutionary movement. For instance, the struggle against imperialism in Africa was actively linked with the struggle against racism in the United States (for example, in the Polaroid workers' strike\*). The white left could not see that this was class struggle. They insisted that a fight against racism and police brutality was not necessarily a fight against capitalism. They told us that the *real* working class struggle could only be fought through the unions.

The parallels that are made between the black movement and the white women's liberation movement indicate the extent to which the one has influenced the other (and thus the opposition of the left to the autonomous organisation of women was predictable). Several tendencies in the black movement have their counterparts in the women's movement. These are some.

1) The Nationalist tendencies. These are best identified by their calls for separatism. They were saying the source of our oppression and exploitation was not only capitalism, but also the fact that the white victims of capital had a primary racial loyalty to their masters as opposed to a class loyalty to us. Viewed in this way the only alternative to the present situation is separatism or suicide.

2) The Integrationists. Their social base is the black middle class and they aspire only to give colour to the white power structure. Their sole complaint is that they are excluded from centres of power within the ruling class because of their colour. Their demands are for black judges, lawyers, teachers, police, social workers etc. It is from this section of the movement that a number of black people have been employed by the Race Relations Industry—on the surface to see that we get a fair deal. In reality, their function is to mediate the struggle of black people and to keep the ruling class informed as to the nature of our rebellion.

3) The Black Left. Many of these organisations have reproduced the white left in the black communities, with one difference. They added the struggle against racism and imperialism to their manifestos.

Each of these tendencies at some stage of the struggle was temporarily able to capture the leadership of the movement and to mobilise thousands of

\* Black workers in Cambridge, Massachusetts, refused to work on the production of the Polaroid 'Instant Identification Systems' because of their use by the South African government for passbooks. These passbooks are required by law for all Africans, women and men, for the obvious purpose of social control in general and also to regulate the flow of black workers to kitchens, factories, mines, agriculture and Bantustans.

black people who were daily carrying out struggles within their specific situations—the worker in production and the unemployed. But organisations are not the movement. Stripped of these political tendencies, what we see is the class moving in its own specific interest.

All these tendencies faithfully repeat themselves in the women's movement. The Radical Feminists are the Black Nationalists. By identifying the man as being the sole enemy, their solution is total separation. But where the Black Nationalists in the U.S. demanded a separate State, the Radical Feminists would settle for a separate commune.

Equal Righters, like the black integrationists, demand that they be allowed to participate in the power structure on an equal basis with men—and fight for legislation to back this up. They too complain their problem is 'discrimination'.

The Socialist Women have merely added the term sexist to the definitions of the white, male dominated left.

What we want to stress is that none of these tendencies, within either movement, has been able to resolve the apparent contradiction posed by class and caste. *They see class as subordinate to caste or the other way around and as a consequence remain politically and organisationally stagnant.* They have been unable to put forward a political strategy based on what the class as a whole has achieved in dealing with this contradiction. Selma shows that caste and class are not two different entities. That caste exists as a result of power relations within the working class. And that capital has used this division to perpetuate its hierarchy of labour powers which keeps the class divided against itself. She says,

Racism and sexism . . . [train] us to acquire and develop certain capabilities at the expense of all others. Then these acquired capabilities are taken to be our nature and fix our functions for life, and fix also the quality of our mutual relations. So planting cane or tea is not a job for white people and changing nappies is not a job for men and beating children is not violence. Race, sex, age, nation, each an indispensable element of the international division of labour.

We decided to write this introduction because, although Selma can speak of what the black movement has done and what the women's movement is doing, she cannot speak for black women. As black women, from our position at the bottom of the labour hierarchy, we have looked at and at times participated in the organisations of the black movement. Our greatest influences have been the black movement and to some extent the white women's liberation movement. We never joined the organisations of the women's liberation movement because we knew it was not for us.



Historically we have been placed in an antagonistic relationship to white women, and the calls for unity on the basis of 'Sisterhood' were for us like the shouts of 'black and white unite and fight'. It denied the day to day reality of our experience. For us, the black movement has been both positive and negative. The organisations within it, like other organisations in which there are men and women, are male dominated. Our growing awareness of this created a collective of black women. We address ourselves to the relation of *our* role to capital, something that the black movement never adequately did. They never attempted a serious analysis of the black woman's exploitation in the context of labour and capital. Any analysis that was made started and ended with an acknowledgement of the black woman's doubly exploited position—as black and as woman. The solutions that resulted were morally reformist—promises on the part of the brothers to be less male chauvinistic. It was not the problem—nor the solution that could release our power.

On the other hand, 'Black Power' gave us social power as black people. It also gave us a voice and focussed attention on that voice. We drew the attention of the white women's movement for the first time, through the platforms that 'Black Power' gave us. The women's movement began to take a look at our particular situation but had no basis on which to integrate our experience.

As black women in our own collective we have no choice to make between the two movements—we are products of both and not in opposition to either. Our existence poses no division in the class. It poses instead the potential for a linkage of its power.

Barbara Beese and Mala Dhondy  
January, 1974

# Sex, Race and Working Class Power

There has been enough confusion generated when sex, race and class have confronted each other as separate and even conflicting entities. That they are separate entities is self-evident. That they have proven themselves to be not separate, inseparable, is harder to discern. Yet if sex and race are pulled away from class, virtually all that remains is the truncated, provincial, sectarian politics of the white male metropolitan left. I hope to show in barest outline, first, that the working class movement is something other than that left have ever envisioned it to be. Second, locked within the contradiction between the discrete entity of sex or race and the totality of class is the greatest deterrent to working class power and at the same time the creative energy to achieve that power.

In our pamphlet which Avis Brown so generously referred to\* we tackled '... the relation of women to capital and [the] kind of struggle we [can] effectively wage to destroy it' (p.1), and draw throughout on the experience of the struggle against capital by Black people. Beginning with the *female* (caste) experience, we redefined class to include women. That redefinition was based on the unwaged labour of the housewife. We put it this way:

Since Marx, it has been clear that capital rules and develops through the wage, that is, that the foundation of capitalist society was the wage labourer and his or her direct exploitation. What has been neither clear nor assumed by the organisations of the working class movement is that precisely through the wage has the exploitation of

\* 'The Colony of the Colonised: notes on race, class and sex', Avis Brown, *Race Today*, June 1973. She refers to *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, Falling Wall Press (for details, see inside back cover). Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from this pamphlet.



the non-wage labourer been organised. This exploitation has been even more effective because the lack of a wage hid it . . . *Where women are concerned their labour appears to be a personal service outside of capital.* (pp.25/6)

But if the relation of caste to class where women are concerned presents itself in a hidden, mystified form, this mystification is not unique to women. Before we confront race, let us take an apparent diversion.

The least powerful in the society are our children, also unwaged in a wage labour society. They were once (and in tribal society for example still are) an integral part of the productive activity of the community. The work they did was part of the total social labour and was acknowledged as such. Where capital is extending or has extended its rule, children are taken away from others in the community and forced to go to schools, against which the number of rebels is growing daily. Is their powerlessness a class question? Is their struggle against school the class struggle? We believe it is. Schools are institutions organised by capital to achieve its purpose through and against the child.

Capital . . . sent them to school not only because they are in the way of others' more 'productive' labour or only to indoctrinate them. The rule of capital through the wage compels every able-bodied person to function, under the law of division of labour, and to function in ways that are if not immediately, then ultimately profitable to the expansion and extension of the rule of capital. That, fundamentally, is the meaning of school. *Where children are concerned, their labour appears to be learning for their own benefit.* (p.26)

So here are two sections of the working class whose activity, one in the home, the other in the school, *appears* to be outside of the capitalist wage labour relation because they themselves are wageless. *In reality*, they are facets of capitalist production and its division of labour.

One, housewives, are involved in the production and (what is the same thing) reproduction of workers, what Marx calls *labour power*. They service those who are daily destroyed by working for wages and who need to be daily renewed; and they care for and discipline those who are being prepared to work when they grow up.

The other, children, are those who from birth are the objects of this care and discipline, who are trained in homes, in schools and in front of the telly to be future workers. But this has two aspects.

In the first place, for labour power to be reproduced in the form of children, these children must be coerced into accepting discipline and especially the discipline of working, of being exploited in order to be able

to eat. In addition, however, they must be disciplined and trained to perform a certain kind of work. The labour that capital wants done is divided and each category parcelled out internationally as the life work, the destiny, the identity of specific sets of workers. The phrase often used to describe this is the international division of labour. We will say more of this later, but for now let the West Indian mother of a seven-year old sum up her son's education with precision: 'They're choosing the street sweepers now.'

## A mass movement teaches

Those of us in the feminist movement who have torn the final veil away from this international capitalist division of labour to expose women's and children's *class* position, which was hidden by the particularity of their *caste* position, learnt a good deal of this from the Black movement. It is not that it is written down anywhere (though we discovered later it was in what would seem to some a strange place). A mass movement teaches less by words than by the power it exercises which, clearing away the debris of appearances, tells it like it is.

Just as the women's movement, being 'for' women and the rebellion of children being 'for' children, appears at first not to be about class,

The Black movement in the U.S. (and elsewhere) also began by adopting what appeared to be only a caste position in opposition to the racism of white male-dominated groups. Intellectuals in Harlem and Malcolm X, that great revolutionary, were both nationalists, both appeared to place colour above class when the white left were still chanting variations of 'Black and white unite and fight', or 'Negroes and Labour must join together'. The Black working class was able through this nationalism to *redefine class*: overwhelmingly Black and Labour were synonymous (with no other group was Labour as synonymous—except perhaps with women), the demands of Blacks and the forms of struggle created by Blacks were the most comprehensive *working class* struggle . . . (p. 4)

It is not then that the Black movement 'wandered off into the class struggle', as Avis says. It *was* the class struggle and this took a while to sink into our consciousness. Why?

One reason is because some of us wore the blinkers of the white male



left, whether we knew it or not. According to them, if the struggle's not in the factory, it's not the class struggle. The real bind was that this left assured us they spoke in the name of Marxism. They threatened that if we broke from them, organisationally or politically, we were breaking with Marx and scientific socialism. What gave us the boldness to break, fearless of the consequences, was the power of the Black movement. We found that re-defining class went hand-in-hand with rediscovering a Marx the left would never understand.

There were deeper reasons too why caste and class seemed contradictory. It appears often that the interests of Blacks are contradicted by the interests of whites, and it is similar with men and women. To grasp the *class* interest when there seems not one but two, three, four, each contradicting the other, is one of the most difficult revolutionary tasks, in theory and practice, that confront us.

Another source of confusion is that not all women, children or Black men are working class. This is only to say that within the movements which these form are layers whose struggle tends to be aimed at moving up in the capitalist hierarchy rather than at destroying it. And so within each movement there is a struggle about which class interest the movement will serve. But this is the history also of white male workers' movements. There is no class 'purity', not even in shop floor organisations. The struggle by workers *against* organisations they formed there and in the society generally—trade unions, Labour parties, etc.—is the class struggle.\*

## Caste and the international division of labour

Let's put the relation of caste to class another way. The word 'culture' is often used to show that class concepts are narrow, philistine, inhuman. Exactly the opposite is the case. A national culture which has evolved over decades or centuries may appear to deny that society's relation to international capitalism. It is a subject too wide to go into deeply here but one

\* For an analysis of the antagonistic relationship between workers and trade unions see S. James, *Women, the Unions and Work or what is not to be done*, London, Nottingham Group, 1972 (to be republished by Falling Wall Press, with a new postscript, early 1975).

basic point can be quickly clarified.

The life-style unique to themselves which a people develop, once they are enmeshed by capitalism, in response to and in rebellion against it, cannot be understood at all except as the totality of their capitalist lives. To delimit culture is to reduce it to a decoration of daily life.\* Culture is plays and poetry about the exploited; ceasing to wear mini-skirts and taking to trousers instead; the clash between the soul of Black Baptism and the guilt and sin of white Protestantism. Culture is also the shrill of the alarm clock that rings at 6 a.m. when a Black woman in London wakes her children to get them ready for the baby minder. Culture is how cold she feels at the bus stop and then how hot in the crowded bus. Culture is how you feel on Monday morning at eight when you clock in wishing it was Friday, wishing your life away. Culture is the speed of the line or the weight and smell of dirty hospital sheets, and you meanwhile thinking what to make for tea that night. Culture is making the tea while your man watches the news on the telly.

And culture is an 'irrational woman' walking out of the kitchen into the sitting room and without a word turning off the telly 'for no reason at all'.

From where does this culture spring which is so different from a man's if you are a woman and different too from a white woman's if you are a Black woman? Is it auxiliary to the class struggle (as the white left has it) or is it more fundamental than the class struggle (as Black Nationalists and Radical Feminists have it) because it is special to your sex, your race, your age, your nationality and the moment in time when you are these things?

Our identity, our social roles, the way we are seen, appears to be disconnected from our capitalist functions. To be liberated from them (or through them) appears to be independent from our liberation from capitalist wage slavery. In our view, identity—caste—is the very substance of class.

Here is the 'strange place' where we found the key to the relation of class to caste written down most succinctly. Here is where the international division of labour is posed as a power relationship within the working class. It is Volume I of Marx's *Capital*.

Manufacture . . . develops a hierarchy of labour powers, to which there corresponds a scale of wages. If, on the one hand, the individual labourers are appropriated and annexed for life by a limited function;

\* For the best demystification of culture I know which shows, for example, how West Indian cricket has carried in its heart racial and class conflicts, see C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, London, Hutchinson, 1963.



on the other hand, the various operations of the hierarchy are parcelled out among the labourers according to both their natural and their acquired capabilities. (Moscow 1958, p.349)

In two sentences is laid out the deep material connection between racism, sexism, national chauvinism and the chauvinism of the generations who are working for wages against children and old age pensioners who are wageless, who are dependants.

A hierarchy of labour powers and scale of wages to correspond. Racism and sexism training us to acquire and develop certain capabilities at the expense of all others. Then these acquired capabilities are taken to be our nature and fix our functions for life, and fix also the quality of our mutual relations. So planting cane or tea is not a job for white people and changing nappies is not a job for men and beating children is not violence. Race, sex, age, nation, each an indispensable element of the international division of labour. *Our feminism bases itself on a hitherto invisible stratum of the hierarchy of labour powers—the housewife—to which there corresponds no wage at all.*

To proceed on the basis of a hierarchical structure among waged and unwaged slavery is not, as Avis accuses the working class of doing, 'concentrating . . . exclusively on the economic determinants of the class struggle'. The work you do and the wages you receive are not merely 'economic' but social determinants, determinants of social power. It is not the working class but organisations which claim to be of and for that class who reduce the continual struggle for social power by that class into 'economic determinants'—greater capitalist control for a pittance more a week. Wage rises that unions negotiate often turn out to be wage standstills or even cuts, either through inflation or through more intense exploitation (often in the form of productivity deals) which more than pays the capitalist back for the rise. And so people assume that this was the intention of workers in demanding, for example, more wages, more money, more 'universal social power', in the words of Marx.

The social power relations of the sexes, races, nations and generations are precisely, then, particularised forms of class relations. These power relations within the working class weaken us in the power struggle between the classes. They are the particularised forms of indirect rule, one section of the class colonising another and through this capital imposing its own will on us all. One of the reasons why these so-called working class organisations have been able so to mediate the struggle is that we have, internationally, allowed them to isolate 'the working class' which they identify as white, male and over 21, from the rest of us. The unskilled white male worker, an exploited human being who is increasingly disconnected from capital's perspective for him to work, to vote, to participate in its society,

he also, racist and sexist though he is, recognises himself as the victim of these organisations. But housewives, Blacks, young people, workers from the Third World, excluded from the definition of class, have been told that their confrontation with the white male power structure in the metropolis is an 'exotic historical accident'. Divided by the capitalist organisation of society into factory, office, school, plantation, home and street, we are divided too by the very institutions which claim to represent our struggle collectively as a class.

## Power bases outside the factory

In the metropolis, the Black movement was the first section of the class massively to take its autonomy from these organisations, and to break away from the containment of the struggle only in the factory. When Black workers burn the centre of a city, however, white left eyes, especially if they are trade union eyes, see race, not class.

The women's movement was the next major movement of the class in the metropolis to find for itself a power base outside the factory as well as in it. Like the Black movement before it, to be organisationally autonomous of capital and its institutions, women and their movement had also to be autonomous of that part of the 'hierarchy of labour powers' which capital used specifically against them. For Blacks it was whites. For women it was men. For Black women it is both.

Strange to think that even today, when confronted with the autonomy of the Black movement or the autonomy of the women's movement, there are those who talk about this 'dividing the working class'. Strange indeed when our experience has told us that in order for the working class to unite in spite of the divisions which are inherent in its very structure—factory versus plantation versus home versus school—those at the lowest levels of the hierarchy must themselves find the key to their weakness, must themselves find the strategy which will attack that point and shatter it, must themselves find their own modes of struggle.

The Black movement has not in our view 'integrated into capitalism's plural society' (though many of its 'leaders' have), it has not 'been subsumed to white working class strategy'. (Here I think Avis is confusing white working class *struggle* with trade union/Labour Party *strategy*. They are mortal enemies, yet they are often taken as identical.) The Black movement has, on the contrary, in the United States challenged and continues to challenge the most powerful capitalist State in the world. The most powerful at home and abroad. When it burnt down the centres of that



metropolis and challenged all constituted authority, it made the way for the rest of the working class everywhere to move in its own specific interests. We women moved. This is neither an accident nor the first time events have moved in this sequence.

It is not an accident because when constituted power was confronted, a new possibility opened for all women. For example, the daughters of men to whom was delegated some of this power saw through the noble mask of education, medicine and the law for which their mothers had sacrificed their lives. Oh yes, marriage to a man with a good salary would be rewarded by a fine house to be imprisoned in, and even a Black servant; they would have privilege for as long as they were attached to that salary which was not their own. But power would remain in the hands of the white male power structure. They had to renounce the privilege even to strike out for power. Many did. On the tide of working class power which the Black movement had expressed in the streets, and all women expressed in the day-to-day rebellion in the home, the women's movement came into being.

It is not the first time either that a women's movement received its impetus from the exercise of power by Black people. The Black slave who formed the Abolitionist Movement and organised the Underground Railway for the escape to the North also gave white women—and again the more privileged of them—a chance, an occasion to transcend the limitations in which the female personality was imprisoned. Women, trained always to do for others, left their homes not to free themselves—that would have been outrageous—but to free 'the slave'. They were encouraged by Black women, ex-slaves like Sojourner Truth, who suffered because, being women, they had been the breeders of labour power on the plantation. But once those white women had taken their first decisive step out of the feminine mould, they confronted more sharply their own situation. They had to defend their right, as women, to speak in public against slavery. They were refused, for example, seating at the Abolitionist conference of 1840 in London because they were women. By 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, they called their own conference, for women's rights. There was a male speaker. He was a leading Abolitionist. He was Black. He had been a slave. His name was Frederick Douglass.

And when young white women headed South on the Freedom Ride buses in the early '60s of this century and discovered that their male (white and Black) comrades had a special place for them in the hierarchy of struggle, as capital had in the hierarchy of labour power, history repeated itself—almost. This time it was not for the vote but for a very different goal that they formed a movement. It was a movement for liberation.

The parallels that are drawn between the Black and women's movements

can always turn into an 11-plus: who is more exploited? Our purpose here is not parallels. We are seeking to describe that complex interweaving of forces which is the working class; we are seeking to break down the power relations among us on which is based the hierarchical rule of international capital. For no man can represent us as women any more than whites can speak about and themselves end the Black experience. Nor do we seek to convince men of our feminism. Ultimately they will be 'convinced' by our power. We offer them what we offer the most privileged women: power over their enemies. The price is an end to their privilege over us.

## Why wages for housework?

The strategy of feminist class struggle is, as we have said, based on the wageless woman in the home. Whether she also works for wages outside the home, her labour of producing and reproducing the working class weighs her down, weakens her capacity to struggle—she doesn't even have time. Her position in the wage structure is low especially but not only if she is Black. And even if she is relatively well placed in the hierarchy of labour powers (rare enough!), she remains defined as a sexual object of men. Why? Because as long as most women are housewives part of whose function in reproducing labour power is to be the sexual object of men, no woman can escape that identity. We demand wages for the work we do in the home. And that demand for a wage from the State is, first, *a demand to be autonomous of men on whom we are now dependent*. Secondly, we demand money without working out of the home, and open for the first time the possibility of refusing forced labour in the factories and in the home itself.

It is here in this strategy that the lines between the revolutionary Black and the revolutionary feminist movements begin to blur. This perspective is founded on the least powerful—the wageless. Reinforcing capital's international division of labour is a standing army of unemployed who can be shunted from industry to industry, from country to country. The Third World is the most massive repository of this industrial reserve army. (The second most massive is the kitchen in the metropolis.) Port of Spain, Calcutta, Algiers, the Mexican towns south of the U.S. border are the labour power for shit work in Paris, London, Frankfurt and the farms of California and Florida. What is their role in the revolution? How can the wageless struggle without the lever of the wage and the factory? We do not pose the answers—we can't. But we pose the question in a way which assumes that the unemployed have not to go to work in order to subvert capitalist society.



Housewives *working* without a pay packet in the home may also have a job outside of their homes. The subordination to the wage of the man in the home and the subordinating nature of that labour weakens the woman wherever else she is working, and regardless of race. Here is the basis for Black and white women to act together, 'supported' or 'unsupported', not because the antagonism of race is overcome, but because we both need the autonomy that the wage *and the struggle for the wage* can bring. Black women will know in what organisations (with Black men, with white women, *with neither*) to make that struggle. *No one else can know.*

We don't agree with Avis that 'the Black American struggle failed to fulfil its potential as a revolutionary vanguard . . .', if by 'vanguard' is meant the basic propellant of class struggle in a particular historical situation. It *has* used the 'specificity of its experience—as a nation and as a class both at once—to redefine class and the class struggle itself'. Perhaps the theoreticians have not, but then they must never be confused with the movement. Only as a vanguard has that struggle begun to clarify the vital questions of our age, the organisational unity of the working class as we now perceive it on an international level.

It is widely presumed that the Vanguard Party on the Leninist model embodies that organisational unity. Since the Leninist model assumes a vanguard expressing the total class interest, it bears no relation to the reality we have been describing, where no one section of the class can express the experience and interest, and pursue the struggle, for any other section. The formal organisational expression of a general class strategy does not yet anywhere exist.

Let me quote finally from a letter written against one of the organisations of the Italian extra-parliamentary left who, when we had a feminist symposium in Rome last year and excluded men, called us fascists and attacked us physically.

. . . The traditional attack on the immigrant worker, especially but not exclusively if he or she is Black (or Southern Italian), is that her presence threatens the gains of the native working class. Exactly the same is said about women in relation to men. The anti-racist (i.e. anti-nationalist and anti-sexist) point of view—the point of view, that is, of struggle—is to discover the organisational weakness which permits the most powerful sections of the class to be divided from the less powerful, thereby allowing capital to play on this division, defeating us. The question is, in fact, one of the basic questions which the class faces today. Where Lenin divided the class between the advanced and the backward, a subjective division, we see the division along the lines of capitalist organisation, the more powerful and the less powerful. It is the experience of the less powerful that when workers

in a stronger position (that is, men with a wage in relation to women without one, or whites with a higher wage than Blacks) gain a 'victory', it may not be a victory for the weaker and even may represent *a defeat for both*. For in the disparity of power within the class is precisely the strength of capital.\*

How the working class will ultimately unite organisationally, we don't know. We do know that up to now many of us have been told to forget our own needs in some wider interest which was never wide enough to include us. And so we have learnt by bitter experience that *nothing unified and revolutionary will be formed until each section of the exploited will have made its own autonomous power felt.*

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class.

Selma James  
August, 1973

**Note:** When this article first appeared, there was a note to inform the reader that it would be expanded into a pamphlet where "the redefinition of the working class will be applied to those who have been called, for want of a more accurate term, 'the peasantry'." Pressure of other work has made this impossible, but this redefinition has been the basis of other writing and of work still in progress. We felt it would be a mistake, however, to delay further the publication of this article in pamphlet form.

\* From a letter by Lotta Femminista and the International Feminist Collective, reprinted in *L'Offensiva*, Musolini, Turin, 1972 (pp.18/9).



# Discussion

Race Today invited readers to participate in discussion of 'Sex, Race and Working Class Power' in 'Backlash', its discussion section, and asked Selma James to comment on the contributions. The following were published in the February and March 1974 issues of Race Today.

## February 1974

The great thing about Selma James' pamphlets and her article in last month's *Race Today* is that they ask the essential questions—what makes up the particular political and social power of black workers and of women? What is their relation to capitalist production? How do we organise given the immediate conflict of interests between them and the white male working class? What are the connections between the black and the women's movement, and what implications does this have for both struggles? To disagree with some of the answers she gives is not just for the sake of argument, but because the forms of struggle that arise from them may not be the most effective at this time.

Selma rightly attacks the myth that women's work in the home is just a personal service with no connection to capitalist production. She points out that a 'housewife' both produces labour power and services it. But one difficulty in analysing this role in production is that the result of women's work is not a commodity whose value can be measured, but a person, with whom she has a very different relationship from the worker's alienation from the product he or she produces.

So to talk of a 'wage' for this work gives a misleading illusion of power. The power of a labourer is precisely that he can withdraw his or her labour. Selma says that a wage for housework opens 'the possibility of refusing forced labour . . . in the home itself'. But there is a difference between housework and childcare. Women can, and do, withdraw their domestic and sexual services from their men. But the point is that the majority of women *don't* express 'the day-to-day rebellion in the home', and they won't easily be drawn into a movement which they could see as asking

them to go on strike against the interests of their kids. This especially affects black women, many of whom are unsupported mothers.

Surely what we should be demanding is more socialised forms of childcare and domestic work, not paying people to stay in the isolation of their own homes; we should be insisting on men and women sharing this work, not justifying the 'women's place' by giving her the money to stay there.

It might well suit the purposes of capitalism in a period of unemployment to do just that. But if so, who will pay for it? 'The State' says Selma—which means higher taxes on workers' wages, not on profits. It's true that you could see this as a way of redistributing income from men to women through the taxation system. But over one third of the labour force is made up of women.

There's another way of looking at the demand for 'Wages for Housework', not as an immediate demand around which to organise, but as a useful means of changing people's consciousness by challenging their assumptions. This isn't just a question of 'seeking to convince' men or whites of the rights of those they oppress, but of politicising both the groups themselves, and the organisations which have so blatantly failed them in the past. For in spite of this failure, the tradition and gains of the organised labour movement can't be ignored at this moment. Selma writes that the wage rises negotiated by the Unions are cancelled out 'either through inflation or through more intense exploitation (often in the form of productivity deals) which more than pays the capitalist back for the rise'. But one of the chief reasons for the present crisis in British capitalism is that wage demands over the past few years have so successfully bitten into profit margins. The majority of these demands have been made by official union action, albeit forced on compromising leaders from below.

An economic crisis without political consciousness does not make a revolutionary situation, without which no true liberation can be achieved. In the political practice of the left, women are constantly put down; much of the theory interprets the black and the women's movements as secondary both to the goals and to the course of the struggle. But this must be challenged from within, as well as from the external strength of autonomous movements.

Hermione Harris

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For a short article, Selma James' 'Sex, Race and Working Class Power' is a perceptive piece. The sooner the analysis is expanded into the pamphlet form



the better. I would like to make some comments.

1) Nationalism and Class. Selma James has developed a very clear alternative analysis to the two stock analyses that have emerged in the last decade in North America and Europe. For it is as different from the slavish Third Worldism, to which Maoist groups from the student movement have succumbed, around the world, as it is different from the sectarian anti-nationalism of the other wing that flew from the student movement, represented in the U.S. by Progressive Labour and by traditional Trotskyism internationally. Up to now there has been either an idolatry of national liberation movements or a complete rejection of their role.

If the present crises teach us anything it must be the dialectical relationship between Arab movements of national liberation (and thus others) and the working class movements in advanced capitalist countries. This is particularly clear in Britain where the two crises co-exist, that is, the 'oil' crisis and the crisis caused by class militancy over the past few years. Together they have combined to produce a 'ruling class crisis' whereby Heath is attempting to politically manage the crisis to split the working class movement and make it pay.

Thus, organisations like the P.L.O., which, although basically 'nationalist', head mass proletarian movements, have been very influential in developing the present oil crisis, with all that it means for the class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries. Whereas, whenever these movements have won power alone they have been condemned to build state capitalist regimes based on an extreme militarisation of labour, when *combined* with a working class attack on capital in the 'metropolitan' countries, their real revolutionary content emerges. With both movements attacking, one can actually see how the international socialist revolution will develop, how the national liberation movements of the Third World will transform and be transformed by the workers' movement, e.g., in Britain.

The question of the new International will not be solved by the socialist sects as they set up their own 'internationals'. It has, however, been posed by recent events, and by the massive migration of workers in the last 50 years. Immigrant workers are in a real sense the only international that presently exists. It is their struggle that points the way. And they are international because, as Selma points out, capital is international and has an international plan for the working class.

2) The question of a politics of sexuality; Selma did not address this question directly. Yet there is a striking need for the development of a revolutionary politics of sexuality. It is something that I hope Selma includes in

her pamphlet. The question that Reich and others posed 30 years ago must be taken up today in a practical and organisational way, not just in a theoretical sense. And in many ways the autonomous women's movement is the only movement in the *position* to begin this work.

3) The question of revolutionary organisation; those organisations in Britain that want to see the autonomous development of the class struggle in different sectors and also the unification of those struggles as they develop, have only the most minimal level of communication and exchange. They must begin to work together much more if they are to indeed help in *building* the struggle, as opposed to the vanguard groups that concentrate on recruitment and flag-waving. The time for do-your-own-thingism disguised as autonomy, is over. The 'crisis' has ended that. It's now a luxury we cannot afford.

Dave Feickert

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From her commitment to the Women's Movement and the Black Movement Selma has consistently tried to formulate a Marxist understanding of the oppression of women and black people and from that a strategic direction which gives us a crucial role in any revolutionary programme.

In doing this the basic category of her analysis is the division of the working class into the waged and unwaged. She sees this fragmentation as arising from the hierarchy of labour powers and a corresponding scale of wages which capitalist manufacture necessarily creates. She argues that these divisions amongst the working class become reified in a cluster of cultural and social roles which are seen as necessary states, e.g. black people are only fit to plant tea, women are only fit to have babies. However, the strategic way forward is not for these castes, in this case women and blacks, to dissolve themselves in a false category—'the Working Class'—but to recognise themselves as castes and to struggle against the hierarchy of labour and wages which has produced them. This is the meaning of black liberation, it is the meaning of women's liberation. This is the necessary redefinition of class. Seductive as this analysis is I disagree with it for the following reasons.

1) Although Selma rails against the white Trade Union movement she only uses one category of Marxist analysis, and that in an historical sense, to analyse the complex totality of sexual and racist oppression. This category of the international division of labour and the hierarchy of wages, whilst useful, concentrates attention only on the causes of racial and sexual oppression which spring directly from the point of production. If the problem



is posed solely in terms of wage differentials then you can say, change the differentials and you've got a revolution. I think that the argument is one dimensional and leads to a one-sided strategy.

In relation to women I particularly feel it fails to give enough importance to the role of women in reproducing labour power and the way in which this role has been historically shaped during different periods of capitalism. Selma does say herself (page 17) that it is because it is the historical role of women to reproduce labour power that they come to be seen as sexual objects, useable feasts, so to speak, for men, but because she has a primarily economic analysis she sees this as soluble by the wage, when at the very least one would expect her to endorse what has always been the prime achievement of the women's movement, the fight against sexism. Paradoxically I feel Selma as a feminist often forgets her feminism.

In a similar way, I feel that for the black movement she may underestimate the constant need for the ideological struggle against racism. Also, although knowing comparatively little about the black movement, I think it would be difficult to work out any understanding or strategy on wage differentials between the Third World and western capitalism and between black and white, within western capitalism, except in the context of an historical analysis of monopoly imperialism.

2) I think this one dimensional analysis leads to a destructive sectarianism. To take Selma's apparent diversion on children. Capitalism didn't steal children from a golden age of productivity in the community and lock them behind desks. Capitalism tried to lock them down mines, in front of unguarded machinery, and in doing so killed and maimed thousands. The demand for education for children was fought by many millions of white working class men and women. The demand was won, partially, by the class, against bitter opposition. Granted that in acceding to these demands, capitalism attempts to create new structures to ensure its hegemony, but it did so at the price of higher and higher levels of contradiction. For instance, the demand for and control of education for all people is still crucial to the struggle of the class, e.g. May 1968. Indeed, when I was in New York in 1970 black women seemed to be playing a vanguard role in the educational struggle, demanding not just education from the state but control over what we would all agree is a particularly vital part of the state structure.

3) This leads me to my final point. I think Selma consistently falls into a conspiracy theory of history. Capitalism may have used the Trade Union movement, but the Tolpuddle Martyrs weren't agents of the C.I.A., nor are the miners now. Again, to take one of Selma's favourite examples from *Women, the Unions and Work*. The women who fought for and obtained

higher education were not just simple tools of capitalism. Their fight led to the contradiction between their formal liberal freedom and the actuality of their treatment as sexual objects, literally reproducers of labour power. It was these contradictions subjectively experienced, and now increasingly being analysed, which led many of these women, indeed—charged with the experience of Black liberation, along with women like Selma, who had courageously been thinking of the problem for years—to form the Women's Liberation movement in Britain.

Angela Weir

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It was with a sense of excitement that we saw the cover of *Race Today*, January 1974 and read the article by Selma James.

Many strands that concern us in the women's movement were pulled together: the divisions of race and sex have been a source of confusion for some time. The view of the straight, white, male left is that these questions are secondary to the 'real' working class struggle around work in the factory which, for them, is waged through the unions (as if there was no work and struggle in the home). This article places the struggles of black people and women fairly and squarely (as central to) the working class struggle for power and denies what we have so often been told, that it is divisive of it. That is, capital's divisions which give rise to independent struggles are blamed on us. The apparent contradictions between black and white, men and women, young and old, waged and wageless, have mystified our relationships, and allowed the state to use us one against the other. It is not a question of solidarity between the black movement and the women's movement, but that there is no successful working class struggle that excludes either. Racism and sexism, therefore, are not 'immoral', but anti-working class. It is no coincidence, then, to find this new definition of the class from the feminist point of view in the pages of a journal of the black movement. This is not to say that black men have dealt with their sexism, or that white women have dealt with their racism. It is to say that racism and sexism, being political questions can only be dealt with by the political power of movements and by a political perspective. If the black movement does not deal with sexism and white women do not deal with racism, then the power of both our movements will be undermined, and therefore, the power of the working class. Black women are in a unique position to show the way of both movements and are finding their own ways of organising.

As feminists we base ourselves on the wageless condition of the housewife, which sustains capitalism, and determines the situation of all women. We sustain capitalism by working for it in the home. We also sustain capitalism by being at its disposal whenever they want cheap labour power.



Having no money of our own, we are often eager for whatever pay they offer. We aim to change that. We don't want to be their industrial reserve army any more. Nor do we intend to be their slaves in the kitchen. As Selma wrote, 'We demand wages for the work we do in the home. And that demand for a wage from the state is, first, *a demand to be autonomous of men on whom we are now dependent*. Secondly, we demand money without working out of the home, and open for the first time the possibility of refusing forced labour in factories and in the home itself.' Those who call themselves revolutionaries, black or white, male or female, and who do not support our struggle against forced labour, who do not see that sexism is the ideology based on the sexual division of labour which we are all undermining, had better change their names.

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class.

Esther Ronay & Judy Macdonald  
(Power of Women Collective)

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Although I am not certain, it may be Selma James' concern with the 'working class' that allows her to write 4,000 words about women without mentioning what I think are the two most explosive women's issues of today—the tension between black and white women, and positive sexuality. By ignoring these issues, Selma implicitly affirms their opposites: that there exists such a thing as a homogeneous 'women's movement' and that it is (or should be) anti-men and anti-sex.

Perhaps more fundamental is the need for a set of values to which we can aspire. These values must be put out through the media by all means possible. This is important precisely because women are *not* a homogeneous constituency. Some women are struggling for highly-questionable goals, in a proto-fascist manner. It has been my experience that these women are usually the most intense (hysterical?) and articulate, and they dominate the group.

It is essential that a struggle against ideas and actions which are anti-freedom and anti-humanity go on within women's organisations. These ideas include the notion of 'man-as-enemy' and 'sex as trial and exploitation'.

There is also growing tension between black and white women over black men. It cannot be ignored from day to day. At least in the United States it is out there, explosive and cannot be swept under the rug of theory. I don't find it very helpful to say, as Selma does, that the basis for

black and white women coming together is the struggle for an equal wage. Tension would persist even with equal wages. And a prior coming together of women is necessary if we are to win equality in employment: the mere 'wages for housework' cry is too weak for rallying.

Ishmael Reed, poet, wrote recently that young Americans are realising that you don't have to be 'black' before you can be a person. Similarly you don't have to be a 'woman', whatever that is, before you can be a person. To be a person is to decide the conditions and quality of your existence—to be self-actualising. Nevertheless, we are easily trapped into 'blackism' or 'feminism'. It is a dead-end street because being black or female means nothing other than a mass of social conventions, norms and power relations which are our inheritance. Some we accept, others we don't. Since these are undefinable abstractions, the easy route to being 'black' or 'feminist' is to cultivate animosity respectively towards whites or men. Let's get underneath ideology, starting immediately with people, their interests and ideals.

True, many women are flaming angry with men. I don't think the fires should be fed. I don't see how female anger towards men can move from sexism to positive sexuality. And that is the transformation we all want. My reading of the anger of many young, especially white, women towards men is that it has developed because their men are unwilling or perhaps unable to breach the hard, girdle-bound, sex-fearing veneer which women have had imposed on them by their mothers, religion and culture. (Here we should also mention the fathers who really wanted a son and viewed girl children as threats to their masculinity.) Many women in their early twenties are frantic about their chronic virginity. Anxiety reinforces the hard veneer and the circle becomes more vicious. They get screaming angry with men, all the time wanting tenderness, pleasure and friendship.

It is a disservice to wrench wider the yawning gulf between men and women.

The task at hand is self-actualisation. Our roles need total redefinition, in action. We have no models. The women that raised it can give little guidance, except insofar as they are examples of motherlove, humanity and grace. We have to strike out and make our own definitions—of professionalism, motherhood, 'marriage' and citizenship. In the course of this self-actualisation we cannot help but confront the monotheistic, monogamous, money-based society we are caught up in. While undermining this decrepit system we are redefining and actualising ourselves and our social relations.

Selma defines the working class as the unifying category, since all its members work for capitalists in offices, factories, schools and in the home. I agree and am using her concepts and analysis to understand the situation



I find myself in. But I'm saying that it is self-actualising, pro-human values that should and do cross-cut race, sex and age groups to unite us in the task of destroying this system, and replacing it with a society that will permit us to love one another.

Teri Turner

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I find Selma James' observations on the status of the housewife's labour interesting but her conclusions deplorable. 'We demand wages for the work we do', she says. Who are 'we'? As an active member of the women's liberation movement I was under the impression that her demand for a housewife's wage had been rejected by the women's movement as a whole in this country. As a sociologist, concerned with the position of women, and as the author of a book on the housewife to be published in 1974, I cannot agree that wages for housework are the answer to anything, except perhaps the sexist-reactionary demand that women should stay in the home.

There would be no better way of affirming our role as housewives than to be paid by the State for doing housework in our own homes. Exploitation by the State in a fundamentally unsatisfying and socially isolated work role would be added to our other exploitations; it would not surmount them. A housewife's wage would act as an obstacle to the sharing of housework between men and women. It would intensify the obligation that many women feel to be psychologically involved in the cleanliness and tidiness of their homes, and physically involved in long and repetitive housework routines.

Of course, the unpaid work of women in the home should be valued, rather than ignored and belittled as it is now. But this is not the way to do it. From the viewpoint of women's situation, generally a more progressive cry than 'wages for housework' is the abolition of the housewife role. 'Housewife' is a label society puts on us. We must shake it off, by refusing to identify with the housewife role. Men must wash their own shirts and clean their own lavatories. The domestic images held out to small girls of their adult roles must be changed—and so on and so forth.

Does Ms James incidentally think that her demand would ever be met in fact? If there were a State wage for housewives, what kind of wage does she think it would be? If we are to ask for payment, let us ask instead for wages for motherhood or fatherhood—but that is a different point.

Ann Oakley

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March 1974

My response to some of last month's Backlash is made easier by my sisters in the Power of Women Collective, who have already covered important ground.

Angela Weir doesn't agree with my 'seductive' analysis. As she presents it, neither do I. 'The working class' is *not* a 'false category'! It is made up of a hierarchy of castes from white skilled men to Black unwaged and unskilled schoolgirls. The caste of women produces the commodity labour power in the home; the home is a point of commodity production.

Women are involved in refusing 'our' work. This work reproduces adults and children in the form of commodities to be chewed up by capital and *in the process* reproduces the ideology of female inferiority—sexism. *Being forced to do* 'women's work' convinces all of us that 'women's work' is our natural bent and nothing else is. *Capitalist commodity production is simultaneously capitalist ideology production.*

Angela proposes instead of the fight to refuse work, a fight against the ideology of sexism.

Politics, however, is about power. Revolutionary politics is about working class power. Marxism (in this case Marxist feminism) aims to destroy capitalist power to force us to work making commodities (in home and factory) and being commodities (sex objects and factory hands; marriage market and labour market), and thinking of ourselves and each other as commodities (sexism, racism, etc.). Idealism (in this case male leftism) sets out to destroy ideas—ideology. But as long as we don't destroy the *work* of producing commodities and ideology, we destroy neither the commodities nor the ideology. Angela is close to Teri Turner who proposes 'self-actualising, pro-human values'. Good religion. Disastrous politics.

Hermione Harris can say 'Women can, and do, withdraw their domestic and sexual services from their men' (i.e. refuse 'women's work') and in the very next sentence deny it: 'But the point is that the majority of women *don't* [her emphasis] express "the day-to-day rebellion in the home" . . .'. It seems the white male left of both sexes loses its cool when housewives are posed as a revolutionary force.

As a result, the points the article made were not dealt with.

- 1) The Black movement is a working class movement. Is it or isn't it?
- 2) Ditto the feminist movement. Is it or isn't it?



3) Ditto the rebellion of children against schools and family. Is it or isn't it? (We recommend Farrukh Dhondy's article in last month's *Race Today*.) Would you tell Black children (or for that matter white ones) breaking up the school system that they shouldn't, because workers once fought for education? Perhaps you'd like to warn their parents, but know in advance that would be scabbing.

4) Like schools, the organisations which the working class, internationally and of both sexes, made a revolutionary struggle to form are now the class enemy. Len Murray of the Trades Union Congress and his merry men are frequent visitors to Downing Street. If things get even tougher for British capital they might move in. The *Morning Star* [newspaper of the Communist Party] accuses Heath of being unpatriotic and says he could have avoided his crisis if he'd taken their advice. Neither could do a better job for the CIA if they were on its payroll. Why is it so difficult for Angela to distinguish between miners and Tolpuddle Martyrs on the one side and these excrescences on the other?

5) Among the lower levels of the hierarchy of labour powers, comprised internationally mainly of Third World peoples and white women, is to be found capital's industrial reserve army. We are making a struggle for money, free goods and services—*wages*—to be able to resist entry into the factory. Is that revolutionary or isn't it? Is that anti-imperialist or isn't it? Between demanding jobs and demanding wages is a class line, that is, a race line and sex line, that is, a line between a pink rag and a red flag.

6) Male chauvinism and racism are not moral infirmities but an expression of class divisions and therefore class weakness. When we have the power internationally to 'change the wage differentials', then the weakest of us will have gained the power to forge unity on our terms and, though Angela doubts it, that unity and that power are the basic elements of a revolution. Either class power and unity make the revolution or 'The Party' does. Choose.

7) Wages for housework is at least as political as wages for mining or transport or any other forced labour. Last month's editorial in *Race Today* quotes the *Financial Times* about the miners: 'The objective fact is that in the process of getting their money they cannot avoid damaging the economy, frustrating a central policy of the Government and seriously undermining, if not actually destroying its ability to govern. They are therefore engaged in political action whether they like it or not.' Why are wages political for miners and economic for miners' wives or daughters or mothers or sisters? Do they or don't they all work for the same boss?

8) Finally to the woman who identified herself 'as a sociologist . . . and as

the author of a book on the housewife to be published in 1974', and then goes on to say "'Housewife' is a label society puts on us. We must shake it off, by refusing to identify with the housewife role', I can only add the following. If housewives were getting as much an hour as sociologists, she would not have a crisis of identity. Housewives are a crucial section of the working class and therefore crucial to the revolution. Sociologists are a crucial section of the State and therefore crucial to the counter-revolution. We identify ourselves as revolutionary slaves, not as counter-revolutionary masters.

Selma James  
(Power of Women Collective and  
International Feminist Collective)

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Selma James' paper in the January 1974 issue is welcome.

A most important part of her paper is that which deals with the relationship between the different layers of the exploited class, i.e. the relationship between 'the more powerful and the less powerful' in our class.

The last 25 years in Britain have produced a history of one area of this relationship—Black workers and their communities having to extend the definition of politics, of socialism, of revolution, and maintain autonomous but fraternal organs of struggle because the existent left and metropolitan workers' movements denied the Black experience.

Within the Black movement, Black males deny the Black females' experience, in fact any females' experience. Definitive documents coming out of the Black movement in Britain either don't mention the experience of Black women, or are Black males' attempts to define and control the experience of 'our women'. There are exceptions. These are a very small minority.

The response of parts of the Black movement is roughly as follows: first, that to expose the experience of Black women is distracting and creates disunity when we need Black unity; second, that the liberation of women is a foreign white middle-class concept that subverts the unity of Black struggle.

Black women are oppressed and exploited, and have been, whether or not a White women's liberation movement exists. Generations of wasted, sacrificed, bottled-up, as well as rebellious female lives in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean lie behind the experience of today's Black female immigrants.



This is the submerged and largely voiceless stratum in the Black movement. It is not that Black women do not rebel; it is not that they do not say loud and clear and repeatedly what their experience is. They do every day in all sorts of ways. It is that their statements, their actions, their definitions, their perspectives and resistance are all drowned in the overwhelming tide of the Movement's exclusive concern to highlight the relationship of the Black male working class to capital and the relationship of the Black and White male working class. Very, very rarely is our major weakness as a class examined and exposed, i.e. the colonial relationship between men and women in the Black movement and in the Black communities.

I do not write on behalf of women. I write as a man criticising our practice in the Black movement. Nor do I ask for males to suddenly start writing about women. I'm simply emphasising the fact that there is an experience in the Black working population which is usually unrepresented in its formal political stances.

What, for the Black female immigrant worker, are the most persisting experiences historically? What experience and tradition of struggle and resistance did she develop in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean? How does this experience flow into her total experience as a worker, mother, wife and sexual object in Britain? Where the hell is her voice and the volume of her experience in *Race Today*?

Every time a Black woman of any age refuses to conform to the existing pattern of private and public relationships . . . this is a political act. Sometimes, like when she sticks a knife into her master, this is big news, at least locally. Can *Race Today* begin to report all these actions as political news of struggle within the Black working population, since *all* news of political struggle by the oppressed helps to strengthen the movement?

The unity of the class, the unity of the Black working class, cannot be achieved so long as the different layers within it continue to oppress each other. There is only the prospect of a necessary and difficult struggle by Black men; this is to continue ridding themselves privately and publicly of all the vestiges of capitalist culture (and this includes the way we perceive women, the way our most intimate identities depend on their various submissions, their public and private subordination). What the women, White and Black, do in the meantime, and how they do it, is for them to decide. But their struggles inevitably involve a new and more profound definition of struggle, of politics, of class and of revolution.

That definition does not cancel the existing definition that this is a racist and capitalist society. The struggle against racism and capitalism must

intensify through greater mobilisation, but we mobilise for more profound visions than those held by white-supremacist, sexist Marxists of the existing Left. We mobilise for a socialism that will be neither sexist nor racist.

Gary Burton

\* \* \* \* \*

In the Backlash columns of your February issue, I feel Angela Weir deserves an answer, so, as a Black worker, I feel obliged to do so.

I'm surprised to have someone attacking an article like Selma James' 'Sex, Race and Working Class Power' on a personal basis, accusing Selma of 'railing', and in her opening paragraphs completely distorting most of what the article had to say.

In her three main points:

1) She says that Selma rails against the white trade union movement. Does Miss Weir really think that the trade union movement is a Sacramental Movement that should not be attacked? Black people have had to struggle on many fronts, against discrimination in work and out of work, by unions and bosses alike, and now against the new beast in our midst, the Race Relations Industry. I think for a woman the position is similar in many respects, and for a Black woman in this society it is even more overbearing. To go on to say that she knows comparatively little about the Black Movement is very insulting. The mere fact that Black people in this country and many other parts of the world are challenging and breaking down institutions shows there is no excuse for ignorance. The burning down of ghettos was not a directive from the Communist Party, and one does not have to wait for anything to understand the wage differentials between the Third World and Western Capitalism to know about this society, to understand it in its most oppressive form. These wage differentials are imperialism in action. And this is what Selma's article is about.

2) Now Miss Weir, are you really serious about your second point? Even the capitalist understands that in order 'to ensure its hegemony' children must be brainwashed from an early age. Thus the school system. The demands of the white working class weren't for the educational system we know today. By saying that, you are misconstruing everything they have fought for. If to say, as Selma does, 'schools are institutions organised by capital to achieve its purpose through and against the child' is a one-dimensional analysis, as you call it, then please tell me what other analysis you can give.



3) By the nature of its organisation trade unions cannot exist without capitalism, and capitalism without trade unions, whether that capitalism is state capitalism or any other type. It is simple as that, and it is being made clearer every day. The Tolpuddle Martyrs weren't and the miners aren't agents of the CIA. To even conceive of such a thing shows how little you understand about the role of the official trade unions. Thus, I strongly recommend you re-read *Women, the Unions and Work*.

Finally, Mr. Editor, I must say how pleased I was to see an article such as 'Sex, Race and Working Class Power' appearing in your magazine and sincerely hope you keep up the good work.

Theophilus Phillip

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All items chosen for the *Book Review* are available from the Book Service by mail order.

From the beginning of 1975, the *Falling Wall Book Review* will be published three times a year—in winter, spring and autumn—and at greater length than the first two single issues. No.3/4 (January/75) is therefore a transitional issue. Each issue, beginning with No.5, will contain at least one article that is not a review.

The main article in No.3/4 is a long review by Jeremy Mulford of the new magazine, *Teachers' Action*, produced by a group of London teachers. It discusses the importance of *Teachers' Action's* analysis of the main function of teachers in capitalist society—the production of labour-power as a commodity; and relates this to the politics developed notably in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (see facing page).

The contents of No.3/4 also include 'Trinidad Working Class' by Franklin Smith (on Bukka Rennie's *History of the Working-Class in the 20th Century*), 'Revolt of the Dispossessed' by Ian Macdonald (on *20 Years* by the Paul, Jimmy and Mustafa Support Committee), 'Marxist Feminist Journal' by Dorothy Kidd (on the *Power of Women Journal*), 'Sexual Politics' by Selma James (on *Selected Sex-Pol Essays* by Wilhelm Reich & Karl Teschitz), and 'Shopfloor at Ford' by Dave Feickert (on Ferruccio Gambino's *Workers' Struggles and the Development of Ford in Britain*).

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**SELMA JAMES** was born in Brooklyn, New York. She has been an active feminist for many years, and has been involved as a feminist in the struggle for independence and federation in the West Indies, and in her close association with the struggle of black people in Britain. She is a member of the International Feminist Collective and of the Power of Women Collective in the U.K. This organisation, along with others in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Switzerland and the U.S., form a Marxist-feminist network which is organising and developing theory through the political perspective of Wages for Housework. Books, pamphlets, posters and leaflets are available in various languages.

Power of Women Collective, 64 Larch Road, London N.W.2., England

**BARBARA BEESE** from England and **MALA DHONDY** from India have for years been activists in the black movement. 'Beese' was a successful defendant in the trial of the Mangrove Nine, an attempt by the British State to discipline the growing rebellion in the Black Community. Both are members of the Black Women's Group, formed in the last year.

**RACE TODAY** was taken over by the present collective in January 1974. Its new political departure was to break with its previous function as an arm of the Race Relations Industry. Darcus Howe, its editor, was born in Trinidad. Both there and in Britain he has been a political activist and journalist and was also a defendant in the Mangrove Nine trial, defending himself. The impact of the new *Race Today* is being felt in every corner of the political arena here and, increasingly, abroad, but particularly in the struggles of black workers, male and female, waged and wageless.

*Race Today*, 74 Shakespeare Road, London S.E.24., England

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