

# OUR LIVES

CANADA'S FIRST BLACK WOMEN'S NEWSPAPER

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Vol. 2 No. 4

## Sisters In Struggle Building A Global Movement Linking the Struggles For Liberation

All through the month of February there have been events highlighting Black history and Black heritage in Canada. This Black History Month Event will focus on women's struggles locally and internationally. The Black Women's Collective in presenting this event, in co-operation with the Graduate Students' Union, the U of T Women's Centre and with the help of progressive organisations and groups in Toronto, believes that there is no better time than in the celebration of our history that we attempt to link the struggle for equality.

As part of their ongoing work in agitating for liberation and dignity for Black women and Black people, the Collective has invited Sister Angela Y. Davis to speak at the event. A major figure in Black History, Angela Y. Davis exemplifies and symbolises conviction and commitment to freedom from sex oppression, racial and class oppression. For more than twenty years she has engaged in the struggle against racist and political repression, surviving state persecution, a massive FBI hunt and imprisonment. She has shown us by her fighting and teaching that it is possible and necessary to continue to wage the struggle for liberation and equality for all of humanity.

The Collective has also invited women of the various communities of Toronto to share the platform with Sister Davis in an examination of the political issues in coming together across race and ethnicity and moving toward a global movement. Having a twofold purpose, firstly to celebrate our history as Black women and secondly to make links and share that history with other sisters, the Black women's Collective hopes that the event will be a mark in the building of women's political organising in Toronto.

Panelists: Susan Numzana - African National Congress, Maddy Howe - Native Women, Winnie Ng - Chinese Women,

Marlene Green, Faith Nolan - Black Community / Black Women's Collective, Gladys Klestorny - Latin American Women, Carmencita Hernandez - Filipino Women, Eun-Sook Lee - Korean Women, Simin Kalhori - Canadian Congress of Women, Rita Kohli - South Asian Women.



Angela Y Davis

Friday February 26th 1988  
Convocation Hall at 7:30 p.m.



# Reaffirming OUR LIVES

Reading June Jordan's introduction to her book of political essays, "On Call", I was struck by a theme that haunts my own writing well as that of other Black writers in Canada. Jordan writes: *Here, supposedly, we do not have "dissident" poets and writers--unless they are well rewarded runaways from the Soviet Union. Here we know about the poets and writers that major media eagerly allow us to see and consume. And then we do not hear about the other ones. But I am one of them. I am a dissident American poet and writer completely uninterested to run away from my country, my home. Because my politics devolve from my entire real life, and real phone calls and meetings about real horror or triumph happening to other real people, ...*

Jordan punctuates her introduction with the line, 'I am learning about American censorship.' I was also brought back once again to the reasons that we started *Our Lives*. Struck by our absence in main stream as well as 'alternative' media we

decided that we would make our own way, and not simply this, for, making our own way we could have set up (or perhaps we could not because we didn't have enough money to do that,) something that carbon copied main stream and alternative culture but actually did not reflect us really or deeply. But we understood that our absence or the misrepresentation of our presence in these media was of a deliberate and disfiguring nature; was designed to say something against us as human beings on the planet, and, that the daily repetition of that absence and misrepresentation was used essentially to exploit us.

Like June Jordan, being dissidents in what is called a 'free' society makes us constantly have to say the unspoken, to reveal the unpleasant. Being dissidents in the 'free world' also mean that we must dig deep, at times, to stand up to pressures of all kinds. Our discomfort with the way the world is, however, our discomfort at being de-humanised daily because

we are women and Black and working-class, gives us the freedom to speak against this 'free' society that we live in.

This newspaper is our offering to women who share our history and our experience. A small offering against the spectre of white supremacist culture, a small weapon against the massive brow of capitalism but a gift to ourselves; the beginnings of a self portrait struck in struggle and beauty. What were we going to

talk about in this newspaper? We were going to talk about Black women's lives - *Our Lives*. How did we live, what were our problems, what were our concerns, how did we struggle, how did we analyze the world? If we were domestic workers, clerks, service workers, writers, painters, singers, what happened to our Black woman-selves in this process?

### Announcement

3e Foie internationale du livre féministe 1988  
3rd International Feminist Book Fair 1988, Montreal June 14-19/88

GREETINGS FROM THE BLACK WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE TO ALL WOMEN ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY - MARCH 8TH 1988 IN STRUGGLE TOGETHER!

THE BLACK WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE AND UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO WOMEN'S CENTRE, GRADUATE STUDENTS' UNION EXTENDS MANY THANKS TO OUR SISTER AND BROTHER ORGANIZATIONS FOR THEIR SUPPORT IN MAKING **Sisters In Struggle A HAPPENING.**

A-SPACE COMMUNITY ARTS COMMITTEE, ZAMI, CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN - TORONTO CHAPTER, CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN - NATIONAL, THIRD WORLD BOOKS AND CRAFTS, CENTRE FOR CARIBBEAN DIALOGUE, ALEXANDER PARK

COMMUNITY CENTRE, TIGER LILY, BLACK SECRETARIAT, COALITION OF VISIBLE MINORITY WOMEN, SOUTH ASIAN RESOURCE INFORMATION, IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRE, BLACK WOMEN OF YORK UNIVERSITY, IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S JOB PLACEMENT CENTRE, SHIRLEY SAMAROO HOUSE, EMILY STOWE SHELTER, ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR WOMEN'S COMMITTEE, VOICE OF WOMEN, YCL, YOUTH AGAINST APARTHEID, TORONTO BOARD OF EDUCATION, LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE, NATIVE WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER, DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATION OF



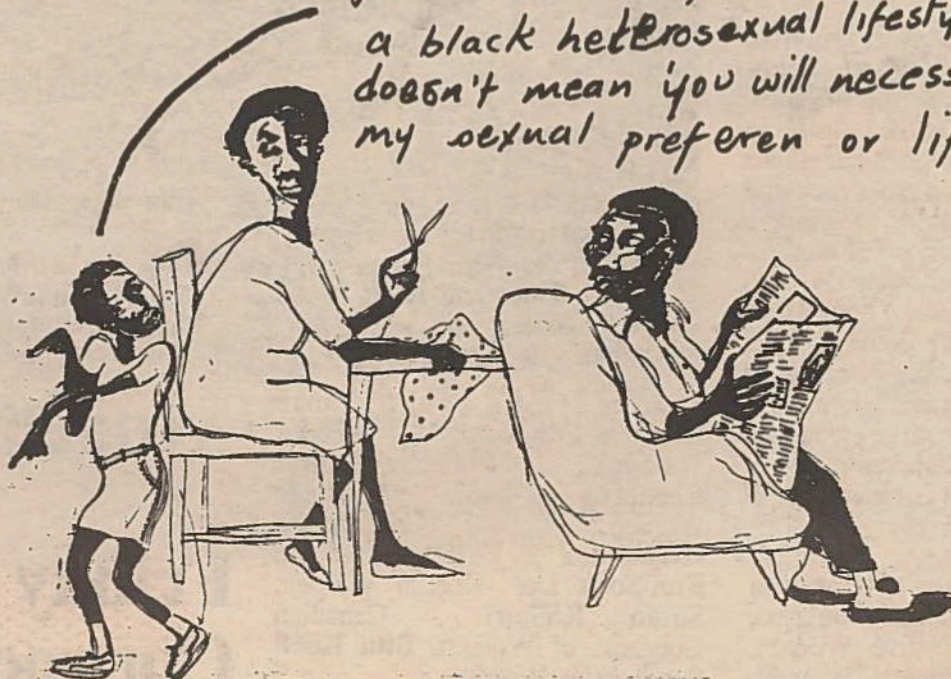
God is a Black ♀ and she has dreads!



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*Just because you live a black heterosexual lifestyle doesn't mean you will necessarily prejudice my sexual preferen or lifestyle.*



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# Class Class Class Class Class Class Class Class

Faith Nolan

All our lives we are taught that 'class' means someone having good manners, knowing which fork to use when you have more than one. People who had money and lived in nice houses had 'class'. We use the word 'class' meaning upper class, money status.

Upper class meant, a person was better, superior. In stories in grade school we learned that Prince Charming was rich which meant that he was automatically handsome charming and superior. We learned to sing 'God Save Our Gracious Queen' and saw pictures of her wearing her jeweled crown, satin dress with every hair on her head in place. That was 'class'. In another children's story Cinderella of course is beautiful and later becomes wealthy, her working class poor stepmother is both wicked and ugly. The peasants and working class in childrens stories are depicted as ugly and mean. Remember Rumpelstiltskin, he could spin straw into gold and as we all know workers do indeed spin straw into gold for the big manufacturers and corporations. But Rumpelstiltskin of course was mean and low and evil and wanted the lovely princess' baby in payment. The moral of the story being that he deserved nothing for his hard labour. These stories although fantasy, form or mold our thinking, our images, attitudes and actions toward working class people. So too do sitcoms on television such as 'Good Times' and 'All in the Family'; the poor or working class are louts, uncouth, racists. The rich in contrast are seen as beautiful, civilised, mannered as on 'Dynasty', 'Texas', and 'The Young and the Restless.'

Working class peoples' lives are seldom portrayed in comparison to the wealthy although we make up the overwhelming majority. Working class white, Black, Asian and other peoples of color are depicted as vulgar or only forming a background ground for rich peoples' lives, and, made to feel less human than those born into money. Even the self made 'man' millionaire is shown to be lacking in couth and manners because he has arisen out of the working class.

For Black women this has meant images of Aunt Jemima, (poor uneducated and able only to do kitchen work, smiling all the while), Mammy (babysitter who is only seen suckling young children, shewing whites from the kitchen, and offering simple ass solutions to the rich white families' problems).

Black women like every other peoples take in these media images and believe that the rich on 'Dynasty' are somehow better and the poor are ignorant, vulgar and less human. We are told that we need to act like, dress like and even aspire to be like the character played by Diahann Caroll on 'Dynasty'. For Black women 'high class' means having chemically straightened hair, being thin, tall and looking very much like an anglo saxon with a dark tan. These days even wearing contact lenses to change the colour of our eyes. You only have to look at the nose jobs and cheekbone jobs on Black celebrities to see that Black people are having surgery done to make their features look white as if looking black were a sickness or an ugliness that should be corrected by surgery.

'Class' means looking, being 'white'. Black people spend more money on hair products than any other race and it is to make ourselves look acceptable as if what we are born with is not acceptable.

We share in the American dream of making it - the big house, fine car - even if we don't have the

money we try to imitate the upper class. We've been taught that their way of exploitation of others is the best thing we could hope to achieve. We are conditioned to want the 'supposed' best in life. The system of whos who on the ladder remains in place because we buy into it and therefore help it to continue at the same time as it keeps us under.

Blacks, who make it and become upper middle or upper class, frown on the majority of us who are workers employed in average low paying jobs. They believe everyone can be wealthy just like them if they work hard. --- If you've ever worked on an assembly line in a factory or in the back of a restaurant, hotel or kitchen, then you know what working hard is and if you've ever sat on your ass in a boss' chair watching the workers then you know what working hard isn't.--- -- These people are really so few in number they are only a good example of a bad thing. If we only want to make money we have to trade with silence. We grow our children up to think less of not only us, who are not rich, but themselves too. When we buy in we let it pass that jobs, daycare and affordable housing are not available; we allow our tax money to be used to steal the land of

Native peoples and to be invested in the killing of Black people of South Africa. We swallow the bull that poor people, Black or white are lazy and stupid. We reinforce the same stereotype held against Black people by slave owners and todays South African apartheid government.

When we as working class Black women stop respecting those very very few Black who by luck of the draw or tokenism become rich in North America (only 2% of Blacks become wealthy) we will truly be liberated. Most people born poor stay poor; the American dream of gold sidewalks never was. One look at the condition of Native people here shows how the Anglo-Saxons in Canada became wealthy just as one need only look at the suffering of Black Africans to see the contrast in the rich Afrikanners in South Africa. In Nova Scotia the neglect of Black communities show the treatment Blacks in Canada have suffered.

All we need to do is look around and see how the majority of us live - high rents, no housing, very few jobs especially good paying ones. Then look at who has the money. Who owns the T.V. stations that portray us so badly? Who has more money and luxury than anyone has a right to in a world where babies starve? This is a class structured society and most of us end up at the bottom of that structure. Only when we realize and fight to change this class structured society for all peoples will we see an end to inequality and racism. We have a right for all to be employed, housed and fed as equals and not on the basis of superiority and charity but acknowledgement of our equal worth. First we must change ourselves not to become "royalty" -- better than the rest - but humans struggling for an end to racism and upperclass greed.

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New Wave of Propaganda - Immigrant Women Get The Shaft

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women has published a report, 'Immigrant Women in Canada: A Policy Perspective', which joins the anti-immigrant campaign conducted in the mainstream media. The report says that immigrant women earn more money than Canadian born

women but fails to distinguish between white women from Britain, Northern Europe and the United States and Black, chinese, south Asian and and Hispanic women. It failed to look at women, where they are located in the work force, their wages or the number of jobs individual Black, Chinese, South Asian, Portuguese, Italian women have to occupy (sometimes three) before they can make a living. Lumping the statistics of all women who emigrate to Canada, the report hides the racial and economic inequities which women who are

not white or english speaking face.

The writers of the report also failed to interview or consult with any 'immigrant' women's groups. Their major conclusion, that 'immigrant' women are better off than Canadian born women, adds to the ongoing hostile anti-immigrant and racist hysteria about 'immigrants' taking away jobs from Canadians. In recent months



the 'refugee' issue has seen many groups such as Sikhs, Tamils and Latin American refugees used as racist-bait in the mainstream media. Politicians quickly jumped on the band wagon. In election times the public which is deemed to be 'WASP' need to be focussed on an enemy from without so that they don't focus on the enemy within - the big spending, patronage peddling, country selling politicians.

The *Immigrant Women in Canada* report is a background paper done by Shirley B. Seward and Kathryn McDade of the Institute for Research on Public Policy. The Advisory Council who commissioned the report advises the Federal government on policy. With this report all of the organizations of immigrant women across the country have been ignored and the concerns of immigrant women or their right to determine those concerns have been given the boot.



## FAT LIBERATION

reprinted from *Spare Rib*/September 87. *Our Lives* reprints this article in solidarity with the big and beautiful Black women in our community where big is beautiful and very normal.

We are fat women who have chosen to work on challenging fat oppression because fat women in Britain receive no support or recognition as an oppressed group.

Fat has different cultural and historical meanings and our analysis of fat oppression is specific to contemporary British context. Although our own experiences and backgrounds vary and we are oppressed in other ways as well as being fat, we cannot expect to represent the hopes, fears, and demands of all fat people in this country. We hope to open up a debate on this issue which has limited and damaged our lives and contributed to the development of a constructive fat politics. We want to begin to challenge the myths about fat and to define fat as positive rather than negative. We want to stress that fat is not always a question of personal choice and control and not a sign of visible failure. The issue for us is not why we are fat but why we are treated badly because of being fat. We perceive fat oppression as linked to other oppressions and want to make parallels where possible.

OUR LIVES

the cutting edge

Debbie

Douglas

A few months ago, a Black colleague was disciplined because the police and a white neighbour found her telephone manner offensive. The coordinator of the programme, a self-defined feminist, did not think to question these complaints because she believed that Black women were very angry and this anger came through in their tone.

Several months ago, a Black Azanian sister was fired from her position in a Black programme, run by a white organization, in a Black community. Her letter of termination stated that she was deceptive and had used programme money to pay for personal long distance calls. No charges were pressed by the organization but her white colleagues and her white male union representative did not question these allegations because they believed that all Blacks were dishonest and tried to get what they could from white establishments.



### What Is Fat Oppression?

Although 'acceptable' size varies according to fashion, contemporary western culture promotes an increasingly thin ideal: we have no positive image of fat women in mainstream western culture. More people would seem to be affected by fat oppression today because definitions of what is fat have changed and there is an 'obsession' with fat and how to get rid of it - either from a 'health' or 'beauty' perspective - in women's magazines and the media generally. This is of course aimed at all women. In a society where the onus is on women to 'appear' - where looks and sexual objectification are prioritised and used to control women - we need to question all physical 'norms' imposed on us and work towards a position of self-acceptance and self-love. Many women, both fat and

thin, punish and hate their bodies, starve themselves, spend money and invest dreams in useless and often damaging diet foods and programmes. There is a crucial difference, however, between a thin person's dissatisfaction in not matching an impossibly thin 'ideal' and the daily harassment and discrimination experienced by fat people because everyone views them as too fat. It is important to acknowledge where inequality exists: that to be thin is an advantage acquired at the expense of fat people. We are not blaming thin people for not being fat or claiming that fat is best - we just want equality.

Fat oppression is the fear and hatred of fat which leads to individual and institutional discrimination against fat people. Fat oppression takes many forms: together with continual and often extreme pressure on fat women to get thin, we are excluded from a

wide range of activities and possibilities. In Britain fat women experience direct and indirect discrimination in job selection and face harassment at work. In the U.S. fat women have won court cases proving discrimination in recruitment and/or employment practices. We are often prevented from taking part in sport and leisure activities such as dancing or swimming because of fear of ridicule. Public transport and the design of public spaces often excluded fat people - too small seats, very little spaces in pubs, restaurants, cinemas. In school fat children can be ridiculed by peers and stereotyped by teachers. Fat women are oppressed by the lack of choice in clothes as the majority of clothes shops sell nothing we can wear. We are degraded by the media who define us a problem whose solution is eradication or who stereotype us as lazy, pathetic, out of control, stupid, greedy, ugly, jolly, maternal, asexual or sexually rampant. Fat people experience hatred in every area of our lives - our bodies are policed by friends, family, lovers and strangers. Whether we are lesbian or heterosexual, we are often regarded as asexual and sexually unattractive or so sexually desperate that we are not expected to exercise any discrimination in our choice of lovers. This rejection or perversion of our sexuality can be very damaging and lead to a loss of self-esteem. When we do enter into sexual relationships, we are often made to deal with the ambiguities/embarrassment felt by our lovers who may in turn ridicule and abuse us. There are some fat women who feel positive about their bodies and who have



A few weeks ago I received a letter of suspension from the coordinator of my programme. I was suspended for taking a young (21 year old) programme participant home for Thanksgiving (Harvest) Dinner. When the young woman in question was interviewed, questions such as "what 'type' of relationship do you share?" and "were there any drugs?" were asked. The coordinator did not see anything wrong with her line of questioning because she believed that Black women were overly sexed and drugs were an inherent part of their culture.

All three of us are victims of white feminists. We have all attempted to gain some sort of autonomy within our work structure which was quickly put in check. White women in positions of power often use that power to intimidate or force Black women into roles they've designed for us. White feminists at the

managerial level often carry out actions which are reactionary and in complete contradiction to the feminist politics they preach.

White women who are our colleagues often become oblivious when these oppressive situations occur. Their line of political accountability is forgotten when they are called on to stand up and be accountable.

What these three situations have reaffirmed is that white feminist have power because of colour privileges. Like their white male counterparts they see the attainment of social, economic and political power by Blacks - especially Black women - as a lessening of their own power and they are not willing to give up what they believe to be their right.

Racist stereotypes are weaved into the Canadian social fabric. It's normality makes it very difficult to prove, thus, making

whites and Blacks complacent in their belief that racism does not exist in this society. For too many of us, racism is perceived as name-calling and other overt actions directed at a specific non-majority group. It is only this proof that is considered valid - in situations where racism is named. The deletion of racist language from our lives or the removal of "white only" signs from housing agencies and employment places are not enough. Racism works at the unconscious level. Stereotypes we were taught as children remain a part of our psycho-emotional make-up and often influence actions that we take. To rid ourselves of racist stereotypes we must be conscious! We must put our beliefs and values on the table and consciously look them over keeping those that are healthy and discarding those which have the potential to be oppressive. Before racist attitudes can be permanently removed from our socio-economic and political systems we must become aware of



# It Only Hurts For A Minute



That's what the doctor said after putting in the last stitch over my left eye. To tell you the truth, I couldn't feel a thing. It's like, the freezing affected my whole body. I was numb and felt cold. My mind felt like a movie going through rewind and fast forward. I know this scene real well. This was another one of my monthly visits to emergency. After telling the doctor another little white lie about falling on the ice, I was stitched up and on my way home again.

I went through this scene for about seven years and after each beating I would leave for a week, the longest, a couple of months. But I kept going back. I've been asked before, why did I keep going back to the abuse. I haven't figured out all the answers yet. I do know that each woman stays for her different reasons. Also, these men not only beat you down physically, they beat you down mentally. After a while, you stop fighting and begin to get into a pattern.

Mine started with things being real nice for a while then he would start an argument, usually about something small, during which he would tell me to shut up or else. The "or else", might be a slap, punch or having something thrown at me. Out of fear I would deal with it by being silent. I wouldn't

say a word. Then it would just get to me. After listening to the verbal abuse for what seemed like hours, I would shout something brilliant like "fuck off". Then the chase was on, through the living room, through the bedroom, then for the showdown with me locked in the bathroom. We'd exchange insults. This would go on until I said something that would "mess with his manhood", as he put it. This would justify him kicking down the door, removing me bodily, then proceeding with, as he put it "putting me in my place".

I left him on November 16th. three years ago, and its all still very fresh in my memory.

On occasion I receive a phone call from a sister who is still in the leave-and-return phase. I try to give her more reasons other than the good ones she already has to leave, in hoping that for her this leaving will be the last time. But I recognize the signs. It's like going through stages of a sickness, just like the abuser, and, sometimes you can't convince the victim to leave and get help in starting over or, convince the abuser to acknowledge that they have a problem and that they should get help for themselves.

I'm still going through self healing. The hardest part was finally believing that no matter what was happening in the relationship, at no time did he have the right to abuse me. Love doesn't have to hurt. And it shouldn't. If it does, it isn't love.

Women in abusive relationships, must realize that there are alternatives. Some of them will not be easy, but look at your future and your children's future; set some obtainable goals, in other words, take that step. The hardest step will be leaving and maybe having to decide that he can keep the house or apartment and bedroom set, even if you paid for them. These things are replaceable. Your mind and body are not. You have to break this cycle. If you don't your sons will grow up to become abusers and your daughters will themselves become victims.

To my knowledge twelve women were brutally murdered in 1987 in domestic violence by the hands of so called loved ones. For these women a candle light vigil was held at Queen's Park. The weather was more than appropriate. It was cold, windy and wet but most of the women stayed and acknowledged that these dead women were not just statistics. Telegrams were read from shelters all over Canada.

Oppression comes in many forms, oppressed women have the right and duty to resist their oppressors. Start fighting back today and keep in mind your goals can be reached --mine were -- peace of mind, and, making my house a home and not a prison.

In Sisterhood,  
Annette Russell

# A SYMPOSIUM ON VIOLENCE IN THE BLACK FAMILY

You Are Not Alone - A Symposium on Violence in the Black Family, was held at Oakdale High School on Saturday, November 21, 1987. This symposium was the first of its kind to be held in Toronto directly addressing the topic of abuse in the Black family. The day-long event was sectioned into 3 major areas dealing with wife abuse: community resources, the impact of violence on our children and the criminal justice system.

Kay Blair, facilitator and a member of the symposium's planning committee began the discussions going with this statement: "We as women need to sit down and talk about wife assault in our families, as we also have the right to live our lives with freedom and safety." All too often the Black Community closes its eyes and ears to the cries of help from the women in its community. Their total attitude consists of, 'this does not happen in our families and our community.' Until this symposium, a concerted effort by the Black community, in addressing the violence that women are experiencing had not even been attempted. The general lack of understanding of violence in the family and the far reaching effects that it has on the family as a whole has been left to the women to deal with on their own. As one participant who is a former victim of wife abuse stated: "We are the majority in this case, so we have to look after our selves."

It has always been that the women have to shoulder all the burden and responsibility of violence and its effects. We have to question whose responsibility it is to begin dealing with the problem, women, men, men and women or our society as a whole. Ultimately, it is society which breeds abusers but it is time for the abusers to begin taking responsibility for their own actions. Until this happens, women have to look out for the safety of their children and themselves.

The symposium far from answered all the questions raised by the women and the few youths who attended, but it brought the issues out of our community's closet so that every one can see. It is sad to say that this large effort was not well attended by the community, even though it was well advertised. Where were all the 'leaders of our community', the movers and the shakers? It is time for the community as a whole to realize that it really is "Time to Break the Cycle of Violence"

Carol Ann Allain



cont'd pg. 10

cont'd pg. 9

## AIDS UPDATE What Black women need to know about AIDS

As of Nov. 9, 1987, thirteen hundred and forty-five (1345) people had the Aids virus, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, in Canada. Aids is a virus which breaks down the body's immune system. According to the Aids Committee of Toronto of these 642 people are still alive, Ontario has 515 people of these 268 are alive, metro has 366, of these 172 are alive.

In the United States as of July 20/87 there were 38,808 aids diagnosed cases - of those 22,328 have died.

In the U.S. a Black woman is 13 times more likely to contract AIDS than a white woman, and a Hispanic woman 11 times.

There has been a lack of informative response in newspapers in the Black communities about AIDS because of the taboos and the anti-african and anti-homosexual propaganda

attached to the disease in the mainstream response to AIDS. Discussions in some Black press in Toronto for example have instead centred on the ridiculous arguments about where AIDS started, joining in assigning blame for the disease rather than educating. But AIDS is not a crime, it is a fatal disease.

In the U.S.A. money used for education on AIDS is not given to Black community health agencies, schools, libraries as it is to middle class white communities. In not knowing about the virus Black people become vulnerable. Prevention through safe sex is the best methods of not catching the AIDS virus.

In Canada 57 of 1345 cases of people with AIDS are women. The World Health Organization established that women who have AIDS have a 50% chance of passing the disease on to their babies, if they become pregnant.

Because of the false notion created that at first it was only Haitians, Africans and gay men who got Aids, a majority of people remain ignorant about transmission and prevention. People who were said to be not at risk were heterosexual women in urban areas. In fact bisexuals began getting AIDS and education has come late.

In the United States the Gay community has been working to educate people about AIDS Since 1980 the cases reported by gay men have gone down from 91% in 1981 to 60/75% in 1986. What was once a cruel, untrue, homophobic joke about gay men is now a worldwide death threatening virus that knows no color, sex, sexuality, age or geographic region.





# Native, Black, South Asian, Chinese, South East Asian Women

The City of Toronto recently revealed in a statistical report, by City departments, the damning information that equal employment at the city itself is a far far distant thing. The City of Toronto employs only 42 Black women out of a permanent workforce of 5777. In the total city workforce of 7630, including permanent, temporary and casual workers, 61 Black women are employed by the City in total. White men make up 63.4% (4841) of the total work

**Women occupy 2104 jobs out of 7630 city jobs.**

force of the city of Toronto. Whites make up 84.9% of jobs. Native women fare even worse than Black women. A grand total of 10 Native women are employed by the city. Thirty-three (33) South Asian women, 139 East and South East Asian women and 9 women of mixed heritage are City employees. Forty-three (43) disabled women are employed though the City does not give their race in its statistics. White women make up 21.5% of the total

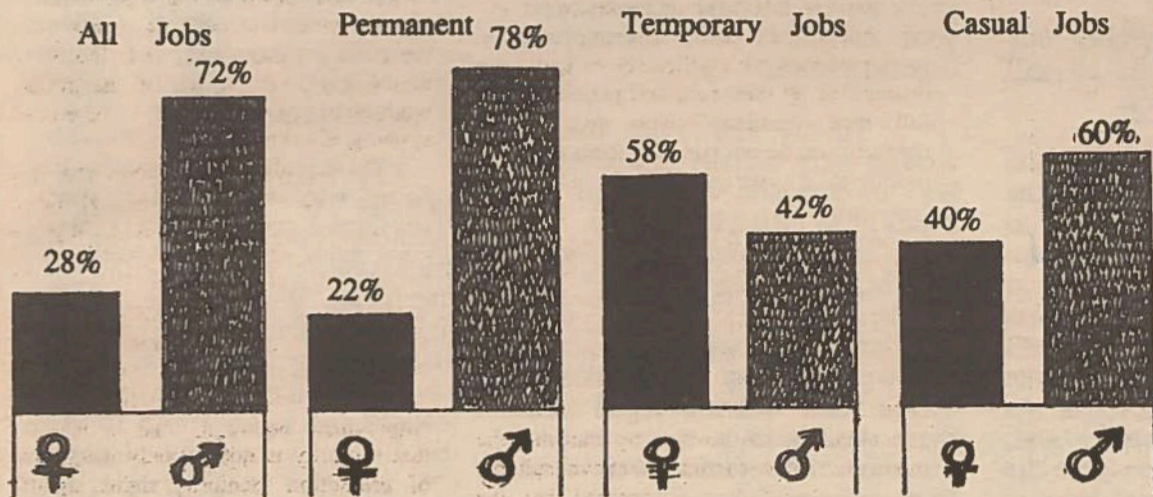
workforce of the city with 1639 white women workers.

The report verifies what most of us have known all along, that there is discrimination in employment at all level of the society, City government being no exception. This is what we mean by institutional racism. The fact that the city conducted this statistical study is significant of the years of agitation by community groups to get a handle on racism

and discrimination in employment. Of course it is not sufficient to merely show these figures. Something must be done to redress the inequity in employment. Twenty percent (20%) of the working population of the Toronto area is not white yet only 9.5% of city employees are not white. Black women are 0.8% of the city's work force.

At hearings conducted at City Hall the intransigence of the Department head of Public Works was evident. He insisted that the department didn't get applications from the communities affected so he could not forecast a change in his workforce or propose any realistic goals for employment equity. He wasn't about to look for people who are not white to employ. Disabled people registered a zero percent goal in his vision of the future.

It's obvious that Black women and other affected groups cannot wait for guys like this to move. We have to put a little more push in our efforts and keep the pressure up on the city.



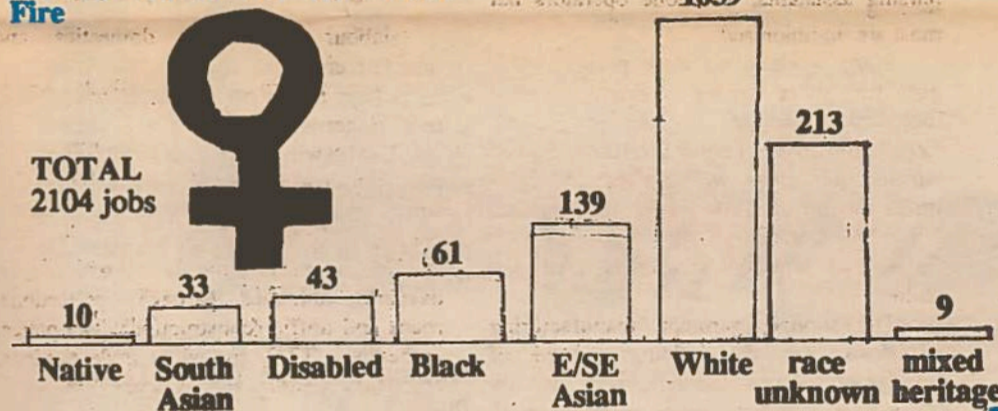
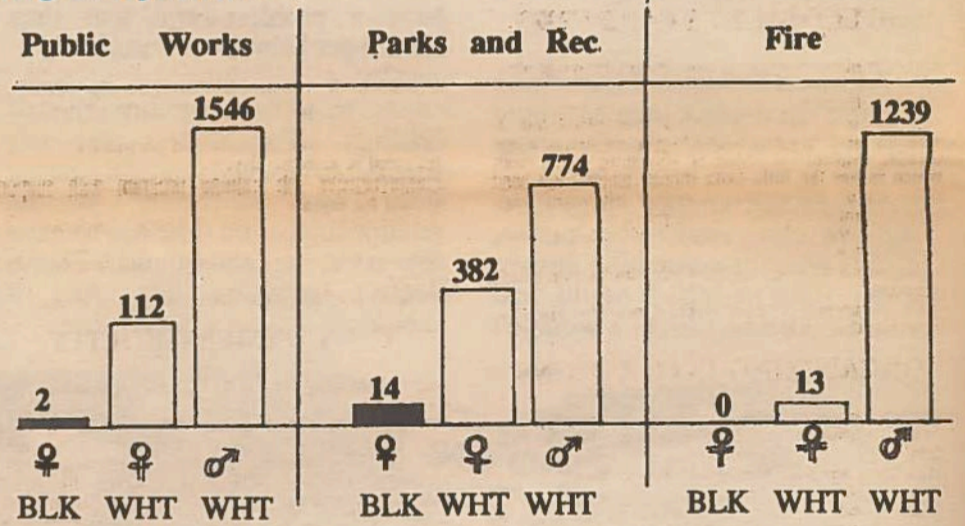
All Jobs include Permanent Casual and Temporary

There are only 61 Black women employed by the city of Toronto out of 7630 jobs

62% of all jobs are in these three departments - Public Works, Parks & Rec. and Fire

Of 61 Black women working for the city of Toronto 26 are employed in the Public Health Dept.

### Largest Departments



The three largest departments, Parks and Rec, Public Works and Fire, taken together only have 2 permanent Black women workers.

Of the 61 Black women working for the city of Toronto only 42 are permanent. The rest are temporary or casual.

These Statistics are based on the City of Toronto Employment Equity Data.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A DOMESTIC WORKER

(This is an actual work schedule given to a domestic worker by her employer)

- 7:30 am - 9:00 am**
- Breakfast for Michelle and Christine.
  - Get Nicole dressed and ready for school.
  - 9:00 am - Michelle at school.

- 10:00 am**
- Christine to have her bath, to be dressed and her hair combed.
  - Christine to be taken to the park.

- Evenings**
- Michelle is to be picked up at 5:00 pm
  - After dinner, kitchen to be cleaned, (ie: dishes washed and put away, kitchen floor swept and garbage emptied).

### Specific Duties (Mandatory)

- Mondays**
- Damp dust all of the furnitures.
  - Clean both bathrooms.
  - Make the beds.
  - Do the ironing.

- Tuesdays**
- General cleaning (ie: polish the furnitures, wash kitchen floor, vacuum).

- Wednesdays**
- Clean bathroom tiles.
  - Kitchen cupboards and washroom cupboards to be cleaned as needed.

- Thursdays**
- All appliances to be cleaned. (ie: fridge, stove, check oven and clean once every two weeks, telephone to be cleaned, all appliances should be thoroughly polished inside and outside).

- Fridays**
- General cleaning as per Tuesday.
- If off day occurs on Friday all general cleaning is to be done on Thursday.
- All ironing must be completed by Friday and laundry basket to be completely empty.

- Saturdays**
- Michelle to be bathed and dressed.

- Both children to be taken to the park.
- Michelle to be ready for her ballet lessons.
- Lunch for both children.
- NB - House is to be maintained in order.

**Sundays**

Follow Saturday schedule, (excluding ballet).

If this is your present workday as a Domestic Worker, know that you do not have to perform this 24-hours, 7 days a week, type of Slave Labour. Your workday should be a total of 8 hours, including a break (1/2-1hour). You are also entitled to one day off per week, at an appointed time. If you are asked to work more than 8 hours a day or more than 6 days a week, it is your right to receive compensation in the form of over time pay. Also, as of October 1, 1987, the rate of pay per hour for



# only 3.3 percent of the City of Toronto's Employees

## WOMEN AND WORK: COMMON STRUGGLES

Summaries of discussions

-Dionne Brand-

### 'Promotion, slim Wages, low'

with

Leila Imeish

Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre

Job Placement sees Black, South Asian, chinese, vietnamese, and spanish-speaking. Largely ununionised they work in areas where chances of promotion are slim, wages are low.

Wages range \$5.25 -\$8. per hour. Women sometimes have to work very far from home. Considering cost of housing and transportation, the picture is bleak.

The work involves lots of shift work and women suffer for not having daycare or sometimes children suffer.

wage as other engineers she worked beside because she had no canadian experience. Advancement for her and others like her is limited.

Women in employment training programs are discriminated against by making them dependent on men's salary. Married women receive \$53 wkly. training allowance, single women \$107wkly.

Women are interested in training programs but the incentives and benefits are low. Fluctuating government policy makes one or another course available at arbitrary times.

Women over forty-five are not wanted despite their capabilities.

Skills which they acquired outside the country are used by employers but underpaid.

For example a woman from Hong Kong who was a drafting engineer worked in the same job here for below the appropriate

## WOMEN AND WORK: COMMON STRUGGLES

Summaries of discussions

### SUMMARY OF LEGISLATIVE & POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

- higher minimum wage; present minimum wage does not allow for the cost of living
- better work hours
- abolition of piece work should take place but it must go hand in hand with a higher minimum wage because women will object to abolishing piece work which makes the little extra money which they need since wages are so low. A higher minimum wage must be comparable to the loss of piece work.
- more vigorous application of Employment Standards Act
- overhaul of Human Rights Code and enforcement procedure
- most portuguese women workers not unionised so legislation their only chance

#### ORGANIZING INTO UNIONS

- more active unionisation
- union education stressing solidarity across race lines
- legislation should review and lower the 55% vote for union ratification
- pass anti-scab laws
- farm workers' and domestic workers' rights should be recognised under labour laws and standards
- cleaners should have protected contracts
- clerical workers need to be organised

#### HEALTH & SAFETY

- workplaces-factories etc should get spontaneous and regular inspection by the Department of Public Health (not labour ministry); needs well informed inspectors who know the chemicals used at various factories and who will not alert the factory owner regarding visits.
- Health and safety laws do not cover workplaces of small size, with smaller factories mushrooming. As employers take to money saving strategies women will be subjected to worse and worse conditions not only in terms of wages but in terms of health and safety and employers will use the small workplace strategy to escape regulations as well as save on wages.

#### IMMIGRATION LAWS

- women on work permits are afraid of taking job action
- change sponsorship laws so that women are not taken as dependent on men, husbands and any newcomer should have access to paid ESL

#### TRAINING

- Younger women would like paid training in occupations if it were possible since they could not give up the wages from their jobs to go to a training program.
- accessible and paid language and job training
- universal & accesible daycare
- comprehensive job training program with support systems for daycare
- development of job training program in consultation with clients
- recognition of professional qualification and training
- recognition of education and training from abroad

#### EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

- employment equity with goals, timetables and enforcement
- metro which is a large employer should take the lead in mandatory employment equity. Metro runs the police, ambulance, the ttc, large clerical staff inclusive, Welfare, MTHA Homes for the Aged, Hostels, daycares, nurseries, garbage collection?, roads and traffic (construction). The police, ambulance, TTC, are white male bastions, employment equity should begin here.
- Right to equal results, mandatory employment equity with goals and time tables.
- Metro and the city should determine socio demographics of particular areas so that employment equity is reflective of this;
- Develop plans which take into account the vacancy expectation in the next two - three years and so on and set goals for filling them;
- target those positions for "visible minority" women;
- Set up a monitoring agency to see if the goals are being met, to follow workers in the positions to see if the system is working or if the worker are being eroded by systemic discrimination.
- These goals and timetables should only be the seen as the minimum standard of employment equity and should not preclude other hiring of "visible minority" women workers.
- The issue of compensation for past discrimination should be researched for its application to employment equity.
- Where seniority is posed as a barrier to employment equity it must be understood that seniority is not the only determination of promotion. Seniority rights should be strengthened at the same time.

### 'Equal results should be the measure'

with

June Veacock

OFL Race Relations

Co-ordinator

Equal opportunity only gives the right to apply but that is where equal opportunity ends. Equal results should be the measure.

In predominantly female work places like nursing homes, women have nothing to compare on pay equity. In hospitals and care institutions the heavy chronic floors are Black, the light floors are white.

Some women working for metro and the city though well qualified remain in entry level positions which themselves had been determined by their race and gender. When full time positions come up, internal competitions do not consider them qualified despite their experience but go outside for new candidates.

A great pool of these women exist who have worked in the institutions of metro and city for years but are never considered for new or vacated positions. Women are often on contract or as temporaries with no hope of full employment. When women, Black, South asian etc. are hired, failure is structured into the position by choosing the most unsuitable candidates above suitable ones so that failure is ensured but the institution can say that they tried.

In some unionised factories where overtime is not covered in the collective agreement, women are harrassed, overtime is given out as reward.

#### Legislative & Policy Solutions -

-Right to equal results, mandatory employment equity with goals and time tables.

Metro and the city should determine socio demographics of particular areas so that employment equity is reflective of this; develop plans which take into account the vacancy expectation in the next two - three years and so on and set goals for filling them ;target those positions for "visible minority" women; set up a monitoring agency to see if the goals are being met, to follow workers in the positions to see if the system is working or if the worker are being eroded by systemic discrimination.

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-Where seniority is posed as a barrier to employment equity it must be understood that seniority is not the only determination of promotion. Seniority rights should be strengthened at the same time.

### Health, service and domestic work: Black women's work - OCBTU

Health, service and domestic work are the holding grounds of Black women's employment. Their rate of unionisation is twelve percent largely made up of nurses, nursing assistants, telephone operators but most are un-unionised.

Some workers on work permits, (this goes for other women workers discussed too), are reluctant to take job action. Legislation does not cover housekeeping and isolated job areas with no labour rights limits job action. Low wages are received. Some 33 percent of Black women are "heads" of households with at least one child.

The service, garment, manufacturing industries, are the holding ground of immigrant women workers who are not white and those who come as dependents.

There is no job protection in these areas. The existence of these job reservations see women in same jobs for generations.

#### Legislative & Policy Solutions

-labour rights for domestics and farmworkers

-raise minimum wage, Black women need higher wages

-Metro which is a large employer should take the lead in mandatory employment equity. Metro runs the police, ambulance, the ttc, large clerical staff inclusive, Welfare, MTHA Homes for the Aged, Hostels, daycares, nurseries, garbage collection?, roads and traffic (construction). The police, ambulance, TTC, are white male bastions, employment equity should begin here.

## Latin American Women

with Maresa Masini Immigrant Women's Centre

Latin American women work largely cleaning, some factory work. An office building may contract one cleaning firm which contracts another which contracts another. By the time that they all get their take, women make barely minimum wage with no benefits and no overtime pay. Some women have two or three cleaning jobs which they go to in one night. Subcontracting is a major barrier to unionisation and better wages. If you're unionised, which is the exception, the subcontractor can subcontract another cleaning firm and wipe out the union.

A lot of Latin American women are refugees. There are problems with language, housing, daycare and job training. Men in the family get language and job training while women do not. When they do, the manpower subsidy is inadequate, and if they have children day care not readily or inexpensively available. If they find a job, which most want to and do, the subsidy they receive as refugees is cut and the rents on housing go up leaving them in a bind.

#### Legislative & Policy Solutions

- paid language and job training
- universal daycare

OHRC,OLRB: Too weak

## South Asian Women

with Tania Das Gupta South Asian Women's Group

Women are found largely in farmwork, factory work, work in small restaurants and groceries. These areas are largely un-unionised and women face systemic discrimination. First in getting jobs and then because of their race and class they often get less pay for the same work done by other workers in the same factory or workplace.

The conditions of work too are often unhealthy. In two cases Delta Plating and Pizza Crust, Women workers who were

The Employment Standards Act, the Human Rights Code and the Ontario Labour Relations Act are too weak and inadequate to support workers. In the former case the provision that 'a person who has been dismissed for asserting their rights cannot be fired' was found to have never been won by any workers, since 'proof' of the cause of firing was illusory in the eyes of the enforcers of the act.

Human rights cases are drawn out to

tire and discourage the complainant and obscure the issue for workers whose need are immediate. The union drive at Pizza crust failed through eroding of the workers support through firing (dismissed workers were not allowed to vote and management brought in stooges to vote). being paid less for same work and who objected and were dismissed, tried to respond with application to the employment standards act, 'protection' under the human rights code and a union drive.

domestic work has gone up to \$4.55 per hour. Please make sure that your employer is paying you the proper hourly rate.

If any of your rights as a Domestic Worker are being abused, please do not hesitate in getting help to deal with and correct these problems.

#### Where to get Help

Any Centre serving Immigrant Women.

Carol Ann Allain



# SISTER WRITE



Patricia Hayes

## Food for Thought

**HUGS-** We all tend to forget the amount of people in this world who would do almost anything to receive a sincere hug. A warm embrace can make the temperature of the coldest person rise a few degrees. It is all too common to take the sister we work with, laugh and talk with, make love to or just plain ol' hang out with for granted; a hug shows appreciation and will be appreciated.

Bell Hooks author of *Ain't I A Woman* (South End Press) was in town during the month of September. Her visit was sponsored by the National Congress of Black Women. The highlight of her visit was not so much her lecture at OISE, but the informal discussions she had with women from the community during a luncheon and a post lecture gathering. The discussion on sexuality and desire which went on until 2a.m. was wonderful. With Black women of varied backgrounds and diverse points of view participating, the rap sessions were great tool in understanding one another and where we are all coming from.

"Sexism", Hooks says, "operates both independently of and simultaneously with racism to oppress Black women" Hooks started *Ain't I A Woman* at age 19. It was 8 years later that the

book was published. I find it to be a concise, well researched and illustrated discussion on the impact of sexism and racism on the social status of Black women past, present and future. The Black woman will only achieve freedom and take her rightful place with full respect in society when racism and sexism are both eradicated. There's talk of Bell Hooks coming back some time soon for more rapping.

## Record Review

Faith Nolan showcased her versatility with the launching in October of her second album *Sistership*. On this album, Faith playing electric bass, 12 string guitar, 6 string guitar, slide guitar, harmonica and tamberine. I found that it took me a while to digest this new work, but it was my fault. I was not prepared to experience and appreciate five decades of musical sounds and the artist's ability to slip so easily from folk to blues to gospel to contemporary in one album. "Sistership", the title cut written and composed by the singer/songwriter (as are five other songs on the album) is a warm dedication to sisterly love supporting and setting the spirit for the rest of your listening. Whether done deliberately or not "Things 'bout Coming My Way" and "Long Time Woman" have a 30's-40's recording sound - the sound you would get if you were listening to Ida Cox mournfully singing on a 78 record. The folksy sound of Joan Baez in the 60's (singing about love and peace) is captured by Faith in her renditions of "Celebrate" and the traditional "Sinnerman" with words relevant for today. If Faith had been singing "Oh Freedom" in one of those old Southern Baptist churches she would have evoked joyous hand clapping and shouts of hallelujah. "TV Stereo" gives us the funk of the 80's. Nolan deserves great recognition for this latest endeavour.

*Sistership* also available in cassette and songbook. Produced by Multicultural Women in Concert. Available at Third World Bookstore, Toronto Women's Bookstore.

## Art Show

Beatrice Bailey a member of *Our Lives* and the Toronto Black Women's Collective has a show of her art work at Albert Campbell Library - 496 Birchmount Road (at Danforth Road) from February 1 - 29, 1988.

## Black History Month

Although Black History Month is February, Black activities started as early as January in honour of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. His official birthdate is January 15, but to follow the American celebration (3rd Monday in January) cultural activities were held on the Monday at Harbourfront. Black History Month grew from Black History Day which was February 28th, to Black History Week - the celebration first started in the U.S and was only acknowledged and celebrated by Black activists. Now, Black History Month has become a much respected celebration not only by the Black community but with educational institutions, media and libraries taking part with special events and displays. The recognition is coming slowly but surely.



The Toronto Black Women's Collective is celebrating Black History Month by bringing Angela Davis, the celebrated scholar, lecturer and fighter for human rights, to speak in Toronto on Friday February 26, 1988 at Convocation Hall. The theme of this event is **SISTERS IN STRUGGLE - BUILDING A GLOBAL MOVEMENT**. Focus will be on women's struggle locally and internationally. Women of the various communities of Toronto will share the platform with Sister Angela in an examination of the political issues in women coming together across race, ethnicity and moving toward a global movement.

To date The Black Women's Collective is pleased with the response to co-sponsor the event from women's organizations, labour and community groups. *Women, Race and Class* (Random House 1982) is probably Angela's best known work. *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* was published in 1974 and *If They Come in the Morning*, her prison experience in 1971. (New American Library)

## New Publications

Toni Morrison author of *Sula*, *Tar Baby*, *Song of Solomon* has a new book out, *Beloved*. I hear that it is 'the' novel. Gloria Naylor's new publication is *Mama Day*, her two previous works were *Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*.

Look for the reviews in the next edition of *Our Lives*.

## cont'd from pg 2

As one sister in the collective said, "Look, according to this society, everything Black women say or do is a mistake. As far as they are concerned, the fact that we exist is a mistake. So we can't wait for anyone to give us a sign or anything." This sister echoed Toni Morrison in *Sula* when Morrison says of the Black woman: "She had nothing to fall back on, not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality she may well have invented herself."

That is what we wanted to do when we began this paper, and, as difficult and dangerous as that will be, it is still the task ahead - -- inventing ourselves..

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

**Our Lives Collective**  
Carol Allain  
Beatrice Bailey  
Dionne Brand  
Grace Channer  
Patricia Hayes  
Faith Nolan

## Debbie Douglas

Carol Thames' Play (In)visible

### ...Fight 'Child, Fight...

...Fight 'Child, Fight... These ageless words from an ageless Black Woman are the beginning of the struggle for Nancy Walker, a Black Woman, a Lesbian...

Playwright and Director Carol Thames' (In)visible, is an exploration of the conflicting complexities which are part and parcel in the lives of the oppressed.

Her central character is faced with issues running the gamut of personal/political issues. She is faced with the conflicting beliefs and actions of the white establishment which is determined to nail her for something: colour, class or sexual preference.

The distinction between the

action oriented anti-racist and the passive non-racist; the difference between class oppression, race oppression and oppression based on sexual preference are all on a 1-10 pain scale is shown to create unnecessary confusion when the end result is the same. Oppression. At an unconscious level the character knows this. After all, she is poor because she is black and she is a lesbian. She knows that her sexuality is all wrapped up in her colour and her sex and her economic position.

For political action and issue specific agendas, it is necessary to know the root of our oppressions but it is the actions taken against us that we must battle. In other words, my Blackness is not a problem. It is the barriers set up against me because I am Black that is the problem.

None of this is new. All of the above issues have been written

about and discussed at our many group meetings and conferences. For the politically active, there has been a shift from discussion and naming of oppressions to concrete political action to eradicate these oppressions. Our consciousness has been raised. We know who we are and are rightfully proud.

I can only assume that this work is meant for the politically young among us and for the white liberals who show up at our conferences, concerts and other artistic productions. If this is the case then the play is successful because Ms. Thames did a superb job of depicting the jealousy and insane bigotry of white society against anyone they perceive to be the Other.

The staging of the play in its sparse setting offered a refreshing contrast to the unclarity and confusion of the complex political themes the play explores.



ourselves and our place in the world.

White feminists claim to have done this. Too many incidents in the recent past however, point to the contrary. Two years ago, the white International Women's Day Coalition of Toronto showed that in spite of the theories they were developing and in spite of the re-defining of the term feminist to include all women, racism was still common practice. They were offered the chance to put their theories into practice but instead reacted to a perceived threat to the power they held.

The examples cited above also points to this matter-of-course racism. They point to a pattern which is evolving in white employment agencies who claim service to the Black community and receive funding based on these claims. White women who believe that their economic and political power are threatened by Black women react in the same oppressive ways like the society they claim to have moved beyond.

These are not the only examples of oppression that Black women face in their working lives.

There are the many Black women who suffer or fight alone because they do not have access to a community group or to the press.

The Black community must be aware of the practices of white organizations which impact on the lives of a significant portion of our community. We must demand accountability to the community, especially from programmes specifically geared towards Black participants or having a large Black participant population.

We must see racism as a social and political dis-ease which must be attacked at every level. We cannot afford to ride along on the tokenistic good-will of a few whites. We must use the political, economic and social power we have fought so hard to attain to make real changes. Not affirmative action policies or appointments of new Human Rights personnel but laws that reflect political belief of Anti-racism. As sister Delicia Crump from the National Black Coalition of Canada said in a recent editorial, "with legislative laws racism cannot be (openly) perpetuated or practised by persons who affect our daily lives."



Employment Equity • Lesbian Rights • Sexual and Reproductive Freedom •

Solidarity Against Imperialism • No to Free Trade

Date: Saturday, March 5, 1988



- Rally:** 10:00 a.m. sharp. Convocation Hall, King's College Circle, U. of T.
- March:** 12:30 p.m. to Ryerson Polytechnical Institute
- Fair:** 2-6 p.m. Jorgenson Hall, Ryerson P.I. Sponsored by Ryerson Women's Centre. Childcare Available.

**Dance:** 9 p.m., Concert Hall, 888 Yonge Street. All Women Welcome. Tickets \$7 advance, \$8 at door. Available at SCM Books, Glad Day Books, Toronto Women's Bookstore. Sponsored by Committee for Fifth International Lesbians and Gays of Colour Conference, Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, and Toronto Rape Crisis Centre.



Information: Call U. of T. Women's Centre 978-8201

**Thursday, February 25, 7 p.m.**  
Refugee Women - Breaking Down the Barriers  
U. of T. Library Sciences Building, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor Lounge.  
Sponsored by U. of T. Refugee and Immigration Coalition and March 8 Coalition.  
Info: 598-2199 or 979-9629

**Friday, February 26, 7:30 p.m.**  
\$6.00 with sliding scale  
Angela Davis  
Sisters in Struggle - Building a Global Movement  
Convocation Hall, U. of T.  
Sponsored by Toronto Black Women's Collective  
Info: 535-4309 or 532-2672

**Monday, February 29, 7 p.m.**  
Workshops for International Women's Day  
OISE, 252 Bloor St. W., 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Sponsored by March 8 Coalition  
Info: 530-4691

**Wednesday, March 2, 8:00 p.m.**  
\$2.00 donation  
Higher Education and the State: The Case of Iran 1981-1987 with Sharzad Mojab  
OISE, 252 Bloor St. W., 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sponsored by Socialist Feminist Discussion Series, Marxist Institute  
Info: Lorna Weir 533-0798 or Kari Delhi 536-0414

**Friday, March 4, 7 p.m.**  
Sophia Montenegro, Nicaraguan Feminist  
Harbord Collegiate, 286 Harbord St.  
Sponsored by Canadian Action for Nicaragua  
Info: 965-3878

**Tuesday, March 8, 7:30 p.m.**  
The Effects of Free Trade on Women  
Debate sponsored by Women Against Free Trade  
Info: 441-2731

**Wednesday, March 9, 1:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.**  
Mary Shaughnessy: Changing Images of Leadership  
Scarborough Civic Centre, Cttee rooms 1 and 2  
Sponsored by Scarborough Social Planning Council

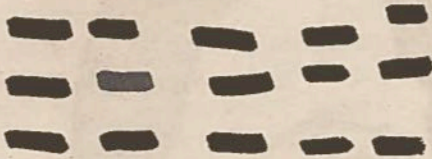
**Sunday, March 6 to Friday, March 11**  
NFB Lunch Time Film Exhibition  
Films about women  
Bloor Cinema, 506 Bloor St. West  
Sponsored by National Film Board  
Info: 973-0895





## Black Women's Tracks

by June Gabriel



The writer has known Peggy Downs for a number of years. We both arrived in Toronto in the 50's from Halifax. Peggy was always a very ambitious, progressive Black woman. She is very modest when talking about her accomplishments that span a variety of areas. When I arrived at her lovely home I found Peggy busy watering her plants, keeping one of her grandchildren entertained and cooking something at the same time. She displays indefatigable energy and strength, a quality that is to be admired.

In her youth, Peggy danced at the now defunct W.I.F. club. We reminisced about the fun we enjoyed there. I admired Peggy when she was the only female marching member of the Negro Colour Guard, an organization

headed by the late Aubrey Sharpe. We, The Ladies' Auxiliary, attended most of the parades. A lot of fun was shared at the Colour Guard Club and Peggy attended most functions.

Peggy joined the Royal Canadian Army Services Corp. Militia in 1955 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and later was promoted to the title of Major. On October 1, 1980, Major Downes became the first Black female to receive the appointment as an honorary Aide-De-Camp in the province of Ontario. Peggy now serves the Honourable Lincoln Alexander, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

Peggy defies all boundaries when it comes to gospel music, as arranger, accompanist, director. She directed her choir, "Voices of Joy", and when Theatre Fountainhead presented the play "The Sty of the Blind Pig", it was her choir that supplied the music. Among her other accomplishments was arranging a choir of 106 voices for a service honouring Bishop

Desmond Tutu at St. Paul's Anglican Church. Bishop Tutu was quoted as saying "She has a remarkable musical ability - Thank god for her". Recently at a Martin Luther King inter-denominational service, she directed a mass choir consisting of 92 voices representing 16 denominations. Peggy did this in a span of three weeks.

Peggy has done a remarkable job raising her four children on her own. She gives her sister Elsie a lot of credit for being supportive of her in her hour of need. She enjoys a wonderful relationship with Elsie. Peggy is a very down to earth person and her philosophy is "Try to do what you can, set your goals, ones you know are attainable. Thank god for each day and never have a defeatist attitude."

Working with senior citizens as much as possible is very rewarding for Peggy, however; she would like to see more emphasis on upgrading the living standards of the elderly and poor.

Peggy believes that if we encourage our youth and lend

support, the end result would be a better world for all. Peggy has appeared on Black World, T.V. Ontario and has had many write-ups by various newspapers. She was up for the "Woman of the Year Award". Peggy acknowledges these accolades with great modesty.

It was a very interesting afternoon, one that passed quickly for both of us. Peggy had to rush off to a reception with Lincoln Alexander, something she enjoys immensely, and the rushing is the norm for her. She exudes a sense of dignity and confidence, a quality indicative in a Black woman of her stature. Peggy Downes is a Black woman to be admired, one who has the courage of her convictions. I am sure she represents to Black youth a sense of pride, dedication and success. As a Nova Scotian and Black woman I am honoured and proud to be writing about such a successful Black woman.

Peggy summed up her outlook on life with a quotation "To have a friend, you must be a friend." Our Lives salutes you Major in your past and future endeavours.

*If you are a Black woman,  
you've got  
something to say. Say it Here!  
Send stories, articles, poems,  
letters,  
reviews and ideas.*

such as being unable to be naked in front of friends and lovers, feeling alienated or disgusted by our own bodies. As with many other oppressions, fat oppression can be internalised - if someone tells you you are disgusting for long enough, you grow to believe it.

Fat people are nearly always stereotyped as greedy people. Because body size is often mistakenly linked with food consumption, fat is often defined as an eating disorder. While some fat people, like some thin people, are or have been compulsive eaters, many don't eat compulsively or have a 'problem' with food. Yet both the diet and medical industries combine in promoting the idea that whatever a fat person eats is 'too much' if we remain fat. We have to assess carefully the notion of 'too much' in relation to food. The kind of food we eat should be a matter of concern to us all in terms of nutrition and dangerous additives/pollutions. Similarly, mass starvation in many third world countries as a direct result of imperialism should be a priority issue for us all. But we need to challenge simplistic direct links made between food and size. Just because we can starve ourselves until we are five stones doesn't mean we should do so; if we eat healthily but still remain fat are we to accept that we must go hungry through out our lives in order to be

thin?

Most fat people know that diets don't work and that whatever we do, we remain fat in the long term. Yet many of us continue to punish ourselves by deprivation and self-hatred. If the diets fail it is our fault. People whose bodies and lives have been transformed by massive weight loss are paraded before us on television and in magazines. If they can do it why can't we? Isolated from each other we never hear the follow-up stories, we are not told that over 99% of the people who lose weight regain it and usually more. We deny our experiences and blame ourselves for being fat.

Self-starvation is presented to us a reasonable option and when our bodies and our minds resist we hate ourselves and others hate us for being 'weak willed'. Because fat people are seen to have 'chosen' to be fat, we are also taken to deserve punishment and ridicule. Such thinking is integral to right-wing ideology: If we all (literally) got on our bikes our 'problem' would find its solution.

We need to examine whose interest are really being served. The diet industry is multinational and extremely profitable. The market is flooded with food diets, pills and 'foods'. Both the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health Investigating Committee have researched diets foods and there is growing opinion that they can be not only expensive and ineffective, but also dangerous. Ironically, the hugely profitable 'Weightwatchers' is owned by a food company. Food diet and profit remain intertwined. Who benefits and who pays?

Good health is usually cited as

the important reason for losing weight. Fat people are perceived as a medical 'problem': our fat is a disease and thinness is the cure. American fat liberationists contend that fat is not necessarily unhealthy and dispute what they feel to be biased and inconclusive medical research and opinion. But leaving that aside for the moment, even if we suppose that fat does put people at risk in relation to certain diseases, this does not explain or justify the extent of the prejudice fat people face or the 'solutions' doctors subject us to. For if health really were the issue, why aren't smokers ridiculed in the streets, denied jobs or abused by the medical profession?

If doctors really cared about our health they would be taking care of it. Yet because many of our ailments are automatically attributed to our fat (this can include anything from sprained thumb to a common cold) we are often denied proper treatment until we lose weight. The medical profession claim that prevention is better than cure and yet because of the harassment it so often affords us, many fat people postpone consulting a doctor until we absolutely have to. In the U.S. doctors make thousands of dollars while fat women have their stomachs stapled, their jaws wired, extensive plastic surgery such as breast reduction, fat removal suction operations, and

get addicted to diet pills. More research needs to be done concerning medical crimes committed against fat women here in Britain. We know that fat women have their jaws wired, many more have used diet pills, and that some plastic surgery does take place. It is ironic that fat women are being mutilated and even killed in the interests of 'good health'. The American Surgeon

(August 1978) summarized mortality rates for intestinal bypasses (rather than the stomach being stapled most of the small intestine is disconnected) as ranging from 1 to 15%. Stomach stapling may be slightly better, but most reports cite mortality rates from 1 to 5%. Such procedures often turn healthy fat people into ill thin people. Side effects include malnutrition, diarrhea, liver damage, kidney failure, nausea, vomiting, hernias, stomach perforation and spleen injury. In one year in the U.S. 2700 women died from bypass operations.\* It is an indication of the extent of suffering and humiliation fat people experience in their lives that many are still prepared to go through with these operations.

It is not then necessarily fat but fat oppression that can damage our health. Fat people are told that we should exercise more but then laugh at when we try. We live in a society in which our bodies are literally under siege, which leads to tremendous daily stress and anxiety. Doctors persist in putting us on diets which not only continually fail but encourage an unhealthy and problematic relationship with food. Prejudice is repeatedly put before fact, at the expense of our well-being, by a medical profession that largely believes that while we are fat we can't and don't deserve to be well. We are physically and emotionally hurt by external and internalized oppression and then we are blamed if this results in ill health - as if health or size were simply a question of individual choice and control and divorced from social and political issues. People justify their oppression of fat people with self-righteous hypocrisy: they are trying to save our lives, they are doing it for our own good.



# Free Trade Agreement:

## What it means to immigrant and visible minority women

Take a picture at the corner of King and Spadina at 7:30 in the morning, the heart of the fashion industry in Ontario. One of the vulnerable industries and sensitive to import penetration and job loss as a result of Free Trade, currently this industry is protected by tariffs.

Who will you see in this snapshot — immigrant women, most of them learning English on the job from their co-workers, most of them visible minorities forced to find employment in the job ghettos of the sewing mills and the piece work of the garment trade. For many of these women it will be their first and only job in Canada.

Garment, textile footwear, leather and electronics industries where we immigrant and visible minority women work are presently protected from the larger American companies by taxes and other non-tariff barriers, but as these come down we fear those jobs — sometimes the very first job we ever have in Canada — will be lost. Our jobs will be lost as much larger companies in the United States simply increase production and ship goods to Canada free from taxation.

Immigrant women understand Free Trade all too well: "To an immigrant woman, free trade means being pushed out of her home country because of economic and political instability and being pulled by the North American dream. And immigrant women know too well what

economic ties to the United States have meant to their home countries: Vietnam, Haiti, Chili, the Philippines, Guyana, Nicaragua, Korea. We have already experienced it."

Some of us were shipped here under colonialism and some of us understand colonialism from our home countries.

We fear for our sisters in South Africa and Nicaragua, as Canadian foreign trade policies become inevitably and inextricably bound with those of the United States. Canadian foreign trade policy should be free to impose sanctions against oppressive regimes like those in South Africa or to support those democratically elected governments as those in Nicaragua.

And so, we immigrant and visible minority women are fighting against Free Trade. We are in dialogue with the Federal government. We have submitted briefs to the Provincial government. We are allied with our sisters on the picket lines at MacGregor Hosiery Mills. We are working within our community organizations, with unions and with the provincial government to protest Free Trade.

We are educating ourselves about the implications of Free Trade. We are educating others on the impact Free Trade will have on immigrant and visible minority women.

—Coalition of Visible Minority Women at the Rally Against Free Trade, Nov. 25, 1987.

## The Free Trade Agreement and the Garment industry

The clothing and textile industry is the second largest industrial employer in Canada, employing twelve per cent of the manufacturing labour force (second only to the food industry). 39 per cent of Canada's clothing industry is located in Ontario. The clothing industry is the largest industrial employer in the city of Toronto.

Of the 100,000 Canadian jobs, 79 per cent are held by women. These are 80,000 Canadian women who work in clothing. This industry employs the highest

percentage of women on any manufacturing sector. Approximately 80 per cent of these women were not born in Canada, most speaking English as a second language. The clothing industry has provided employment for thousands of immigrant women for many years. The free trade deal threatens the jobs of these immigrant women, putting our only livelihood at stake. I am a single mother and have three dependent children. I depend on my job to provide my living.

The industry is already weakened by off-shore competition and is listed as one of the weakest Canadian industries by the MacDonald Commission on free trade. Free trade will only put the future of the clothing industry as a major industrial employer at stake.

The Canadian clothing industry is currently protected by high tariff barriers from American garments. The tariff is on the average about 22 per cent, varying on the type of garment and its fabric composition. Currently, because of these tariffs, only ten per cent of Canadian clothing imports come from the United States. A free trade deal will mean an increased volume of American imports that will not seriously compete with offshore imports, but will provide further competition for our domestic production.

There are a number of reasons why the Canadian clothing industry cannot compete with the American industry on an equal footing. Probably the most important factor is the abundant supply of cheap labour in the Southern United States, providing cheaper garment production to Canadian manufacturers who want to serve the American market as well as the Canadian market from the south.

Phasing out the high tariff barriers in the clothing industry will have a disastrous effect on the working lives of Canadian garment workers. Thousands of immigrant women will lose their

only employment they have known while in Canada. We are estimating that 20,000 - 25,000 jobs will be lost in Ontario alone.

Job retraining has never been successful for the typical middle-

aged immigrant women, who will be the dislocated worker if this free trade deal is approved. Women have always been under-represented in government training programs, making up less than 20 per cent of the participants. Immigrant women, speaking English as a second language, make up even less proportion of participants in training programs than Canadian-born women. The dislocation and effects on our lives will be massive.

The few garment jobs that will remain in Canada will be subject to significantly increased downward pressure on wages and working conditions, in order to remain competitive with the American industry.

We are urging the federal government to cancel the free trade deal as the only just solution to the disastrous effects the deal will have on the standard of living of immigrant women workers in the clothing industry. Free trade will increase women's unemployment, decrease the ability of women to pursue better working conditions and to further increase the wage gap between men and women.

On a personal level, I have just received notice from my employer that the company has been put up for sale. The owner has said that the operation can-

not compete with offshore competition and that on the onset of free trade with the U.S. means further competition for him.

The Americans benefit from longer production runs which is highly important in the lower-end of garment production. The factory will be closing in the spring. Some of my fellow garment workers have also received notice that their factory will not continue to be open. The owner makes baby clothes, and he applied for a \$100,000 bank loan to improve his capital base. His loan was refused on the basis that the bank manager did not have sufficient confidence in his industry to survive with free trade.

500 garment workers have already lost their jobs in Toronto in the last two months. There are more on the horizon. The manufacturers are also united with us in opposing the free trade deal. We are worried, and I am not sure where I will be able to get another job in the spring when my factory closes down.

I need a job where I can provide a decent living for my family. The garment industry, although not the highest paid jobs around, does pay an industrial wage. Service jobs are much lower paid, with little or no benefits. How will I and thousands of others like me survive? (The above statement was made by Alvarine Aldrige, factory worker at G.H. Sportswear Ltd. during a meeting with Hon. Min. Barbara McDougall.)



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New office! - 579 St. Clair Ave. W (at Vaughan Rd.) #203. 658-9719

### Upcoming Events

**April 16**  
afternoon gathering for womyn artists/musicians/dancers to discuss our role in the arts, alternative venues etc.

**April 30**  
Blues in the Night concert featuring well known womyn blues artists at A-Space. For more information please call 658-9719

### Kingston Women's Music Festival

GAIA  
P.O. Box 1792  
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K7L 5J6  
July 22-24, 1988  
\$45/weekend  
call: 613-542-5868

### Black Women's Collective

will be having an Annual General Meeting, Saturday, March 26/88, 2:00 p.m. at 579 St. Clair Ave. W. #203. This is an open invitation for all Black womyn interested in building our community. For more information please call 658-9719.



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