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# THIRD WORLD WOMEN

*the politics of being other*

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**HERESIES A Feminist Publication on Art & Politics**



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*Heresies* is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact, and that in the making of art and of all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role. We hope that *Heresies* will stimulate dialogue around radical political and aesthetic theory, encourage the writing of the history of *femina sapiens*, and generate new creative energies among women. It will be a place where diversity can be articulated. We are committed to the broadening of the definition and function of art.

*Heresies* is structured as a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, marxists, lesbian feminists or anarchists; our fields include painting, sculpture, writing, anthropology, literature, performance, art history, architecture and film-making. While the themes of the individual issues will be determined by the collective, each issue will have a different editorial staff made up of women who want to work on that issues as well as members of the collective. Proposals for issues may be conceived and presented to the *Heresies* Collective by groups of women not associated with the collective. Each issue will take a different visual form, chosen by the group responsible. *Heresies* will try to be accountable to and in touch with the international feminist community. An open evaluation meeting will be held after the appearance of each issue. Topics for issues will be announced well in advance in order to collect material from many sources. It is possible that satellite pamphlets and broadsides will be produced continuing the discussion of each central theme. In addition, *Heresies* provides training for women who work editorially, in design and in production, both on-the-job and through workshops.

As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience, and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. As a step toward a demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of criticism to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women. We are not committed to any particular style or aesthetic, nor to the competitive mentality that pervades the art world. Our view of feminism is one of process and change, and we feel that in the process of this dialogue we can foster a change in the meaning of art.

*Heresies Collective*—Ida Applebroog, Patsy Beckert, Joan Braderman, Su Friedrich Janet Froelich, Harmony Hammond, Sue Heinemann, Elizabeth Hess, Arlene Ladden, Lucy Lippard, Melissa Meyer, Marty Pottenger, Carrie Rickey, Elizabeth Sacre, Amy Sillman, Elke Solomon, Pat Steir, May Stevens, Sally Webster.

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This issue was typeset by Nancy Goldberg and Myrna Zimmerman, with headlines and graphics by Talbot Typographics Inc. and Van Allyn Graphics Inc. Printed by Capital City Press, Montpelier, Vermont.

*Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* is published Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall by Heresies Collective, Inc., 225 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10012.

Subscription rates: \$15 for four issues; \$22 for institutions. Outside the U.S. and Canada add \$2 postage. Single copies: \$5 each.

Address all correspondence to *Heresies*, P.O. Box 766, Canal Street Station, New York, N.Y. 10013.

*Heresies*, ISSN 0146-3411. Vol. 2, No. 4. Issue 8.

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Indexed by the Alternative Press Centre, P.O. Box 7229, Baltimore, Maryland 21218.



Member COSMEP, Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers.  
Box 703, San Francisco, California 94101.



## Editorial Statement

Some of us came to this editorial collective wanting to work with other Third World women to break the isolation of racial/sexual tokenism experienced in college, on the job, in the women's movement and in the "art world." To exchange ideas. We realized our invisibility in the women's, feminist and art communities. Some of us had questions about accomplishing the work of putting out this magazine, given the myths about us and our lack of experience in working together. Others did not question the work itself, given the energies and skills that we have used to survive. Some were leery and frightened of the interactions that might occur during the process; others were intrigued by these possibilities.

To describe who we are is exciting. We are painters, poets, educators, multi-media artists, students, ship-builders, sculptors, playwrights, photographers, socialists, craftswomen, wives, mothers and lesbians. In the beginning we were Asian-American, Black, Jamaican, Ecuadorian, Indian (from New Delhi) and Chicana; foreign-born, first-generation, second-generation and here forever. We are all of these and this is extremely hard to define. The phrase Third World has its roots in the post-World War II economic policies of the United Nations, but today it is a euphemism. We use it knowing it implies people of color, non-white and, most of all, "other." Third World women are *other* than the majority and the power-holding class, and we have concerns *other* than those of white feminists, white artists and men.

Those of us on the collective spoke of being non-marketable artists. We talked about how our creativity is drained off by menial labor in order to survive, and how, as Third World women artists, we are invisible in the white feminist art culture that operates on a buddy system like that of the white male culture at large.

It was frightening when we spoke of not always understanding each other, not trusting each other, and valuing different ideas and ways of being. With all the sameness of our double racial/sexual oppression, our differences frequently did get in the way. We had a lot to learn about each other, our varying class identifications, cultural history, symbols and tones of our lifestyles, customs and prejudices. It was too much to learn even in almost two years of working together. We still do not always understand each other in terms of who our cultures, lifestyles and oppressions have made us be. But in working together we had to acknowledge the personal power inherent in who we are.

Our initial meetings were exploring, supportive, reaffirming—sometimes like group therapy. But this changed as we got deeper into the work. We estab-

lished various kinds of working relationships around the tasks to be done, based on skills, interests, work schedules, proximity, etc. Sometimes becoming very close and remaining that way; other times the closeness fading as soon as the shared task was done.

Certain questions arose and were only partially answered. Is there a difference in the way feminism functions among Third World women and white women? Can working relationships be established and maintained between lesbian and heterosexual Third World women? Can Third World women afford to participate in volunteerism, since we have little, if any, financial security as it is? Can we as Third World women work collectively? Do we recognize that many of us actually practice feminist modes of being while rejecting them in theory?

There is one issue that was a surprise, but maybe we always knew about it. It is the intensity of our way of relating to each other. We trigger deep feelings and equally intense responses. We yell and shout and curse and laugh, get angry or protective or critical, caring or domineering, all on a grand scale. It can be frightening, and it probably was for most of us. Some realized that it was all right, while others couldn't take it and left. There are probably very real and sound reasons for this to be the way we relate to each other. In the future, when we understand it, we will probably be able to change. But until then we should not let it stop us from working together. Too often in the past it probably has. We *can* and *will* move beyond this.

Another issue that plagued us throughout the year and a half was our relationship with the Heresies collective. It vacillated from our being vaguely aware of their presence while we were engrossed in our work, to reactions of anger and suspicion because of unclear or double messages that we felt were racist and paternalistic. Interestingly enough, we all recognized these incidents when they happened. Since there are no Third World women on the Heresies collective, our editorial group did not have a liaison who was knowledgeable or sensitive to Third World women's issues. Communications were frequently awkward, confusing and presumptuous. Some writers, artists and activists would not submit their work, viewing the Heresies collective as racist and feeling the collective was using us, making no real efforts to correct the ongoing situation. When decisions were being made about our efforts and issues without any consultation with us, it was enraging and exploitative. We found ourselves without the resources, organizations, connections or the finances to do anything about it. Too often we had to come to a reassessment of why we were here in the first place.

What did we envision the end product to be? A reflection of all of us—those of us who stuck it out and those who couldn't take it. Those women we understand in terms of their lives, their art and their politics, and those women who live their lives very differently from us, who express themselves differently through their choice of subject matter, media and style. Of course, we realized it was impossible to actually represent all the experiences and concerns of every Third World woman, but omissions on our part in no way deny the meaningfulness of their existence or art. We tried to put their work and ideas out there for others to see, for *that* was our primary reason for coming together. Isn't that what the "politics of being other" should be about? Let all our sisters come out of the shadows. We are alive and real and creating, too.

Lam  
Su



# Criticism/or/Between the Lines

Howardena Pindell

© 1979

February 1979

The following notes were prepared for publication after I participated in a symposium on art criticism organized by John Goodyear and held at Douglass College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, April 20, 1978. The panelists were Joseph Kosuth, Rosalind Krauss, Morse Peckham, Alan Coleman, Leon Golub and Howardena Pindell, with Donald Kuspit as moderator. The following questions were addressed to the panelists by Kuspit prior to the symposium:

Is the critic a legitimator of values? The artist carries the burden of his/her own justification, but what is the role of the critic in this? Is it possible to eliminate any hierarchical relationship between artists and critics—to eliminate any residue of feeling that the one is better than the other? The working relationship between the artist and the critic: how does one deal with the possible promotional value of criticism, both bad and good, favorable and unfavorable to the artist? Does criticism exist as a thing in itself, can it exist as such, or does it only function along with the works with which it deals?

The effects of criticism on the art work are rarely confronted. Somehow the examination of any activity in the art community, criticism being only one, is taboo, "tasteless and crude." I decided to tackle the subject despite the anticipated disapproval, motivated partly by some of my riper experiences in the art world (during my exhibition at A.I.R. Gallery in 1973 a young white male critic confided to me that he hesitated to review my exhibition because he heard that I was black—and told me how relieved he was to find that the work was good). In spite of some experiences to the contrary, I recognize that a few critics, and even a few dealers, those who pioneer in showing work considered "difficult" by the "art world," do attempt to be open and fair and aware of their own motivations. It is to the remainder that I direct the following.

I have decided to take a rather subjective approach to the questions presented. When I read through the topics to be discussed, my first response was a feeling of negativity towards

criticism and the institution of art writing as it is manifested in art periodicals, mass-produced art books, and newspapers. From my vantage point as an artist, I find that critics usually view an artist's work while it is on exhibition in a gallery and, occasionally, while it is on view in a public institution. A number of critics do not as a rule go to the studio independent of an exhibition. More often than not the gallery exhibition brings them forth, prodded by the dealer or the artist, or coaxed by financial necessity... the need to earn money or "brownie points" by having reviews or articles published. The critic is therefore viewing work which has been preselected by the dealer. A gallery is a business. Making money is its primary objective. The critic is used by the dealer as a means of endorsing the "product" (work of art), ripening it for sale. (If a reproduction of a work appears in a review or an article, it is often sold as a result of the endorsement.) Criticism is contaminated by the fact that it is used to market a "product." A parallel in the non-art world can be seen in the subtle manipulations utilized by advertising to create a need for a particular product in order to increase profits. The critic is therefore used as a means of "hying" an artist's work.

A number of unconscious factors determine what is marketable and what is not, who is written about and who is not. These unconscious factors include learned attitudes reflecting the negative and positive fantasies and taboos of a culture. In this culture work by white males is more marketable than work by non-white males or females. (Occasionally "honorary status" is given to a non-white if a market is temporarily created for the work.)

The needs of the buyer are based on class, caste, fashion, and personal preference, guided by unconscious factors. The buyer will tend to select that which appears to enhance self-image and improve status. The dealer is influenced by the needs of the buyer. The critic is used to "blessing" this interchange and making it appear on the surface to be something other than what it is... a form of barter with hidden incentives. The critic is often a pawn, although he/

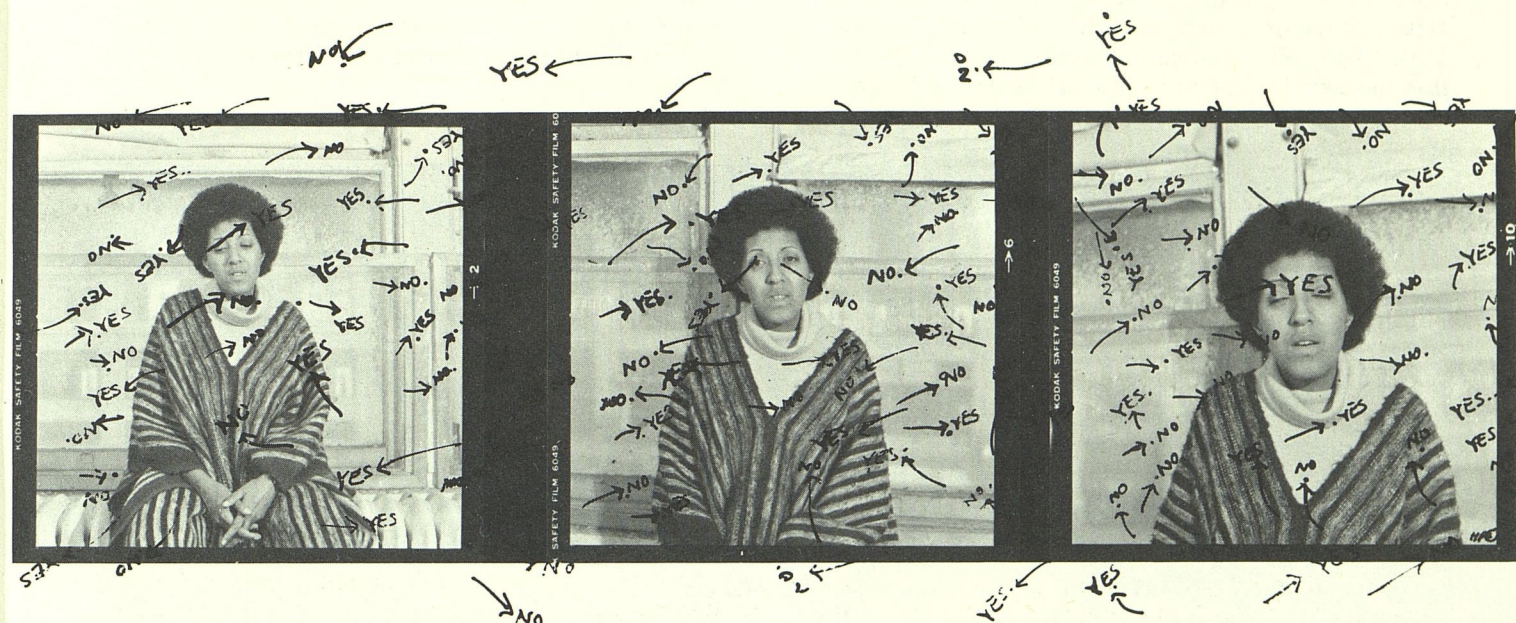


she attempts to cloak the transaction in elaborate syntax in an effort to fabricate an artificial "moral" detachment. Critics rarely examine their own unconscious needs and goals for status or power, needs which seem to keep them locked into writing about what has already been approved and sifted by the dealers, avoiding controversy or controversial artists.

A simplistic allegory about the system could be set forth: Some critics are gourmets (others, gourmands) who prefer to eat at the best restaurants (i.e., galleries). The maitre d' (i.e., dealer) knows the critic by name. Flattered by this recognition the critic accepts the menu (gallery staple) which lists the special of the day (current exhibition). The critic may praise or damn the cooking but returns for more. The critic rarely cooks at home (goes outside the established system to see work).

The "mongrel" hordes represent the taboos and negative fantasies of the tribe. The "mongrel" hordes, or alternate clans, are made up of men and women, shamans and bards who are non-white or whites who have been outlawed by the main clan. Honorary status in the main clan may be achieved through death or a temporary economic demand.

I would like to address a few of the topics suggested by our moderator. "The working relationship between the artist and the critic: how does one deal with its promotional aspects?" How is the critic influenced to select work to write about? It would be enlightening if a test could be devised to study how critics are influenced on a subconscious level by setting up a method for reviewing the same work in different settings. What would the critic say about the same artist who exhibits his/her work in a



Howardena Pindell. Yes—No. Pen and ink on acetate. Photo credit: Amy Stromstem.

One could see the art world and the critic's place within that world through the following: The art world is a neolithic, loose association of clans within a larger tribe. The clan chiefs are the dealers. The critics are the bards who sing the praises of the clan and its leaders. Artists are the shamans whose talents are sold through the chief. Rituals, reinforcement of the tribal structure, are performed in huts or compounds designated for this purpose (private and public institutions, auction houses).

Advancement within the clan to higher rank is predominantly achieved through strategies dependent on the buddy system and nepotism. White males hold most of the prominent positions as shamans, bards and chiefs; however, white females may be elevated to a position of prominence through personal financial status, ties of kinship or temporary bonds of affection.

museum space, an alternate space, or in the studio; in a blue-chip gallery or one not-so-blue-chip; in New York or out of New York? The variables are infinite. It would be additionally enlightening to see how the same work would be reviewed where the gender and race of the artist are known, and not known, as well as the artist's financial status (i.e., whether the work sells or doesn't sell). A fascinating study is discussed in Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders*. A study of behavior and motivation revealed that the same product wrapped in different packages elicited responses such as "too strong" in a package of one color and shape, "inadequate" in another package, and "wonderful" in yet another. Racial types used to display products were found to cause the viewer to project onto the product his/her positive or negative fantasies and expectations. A

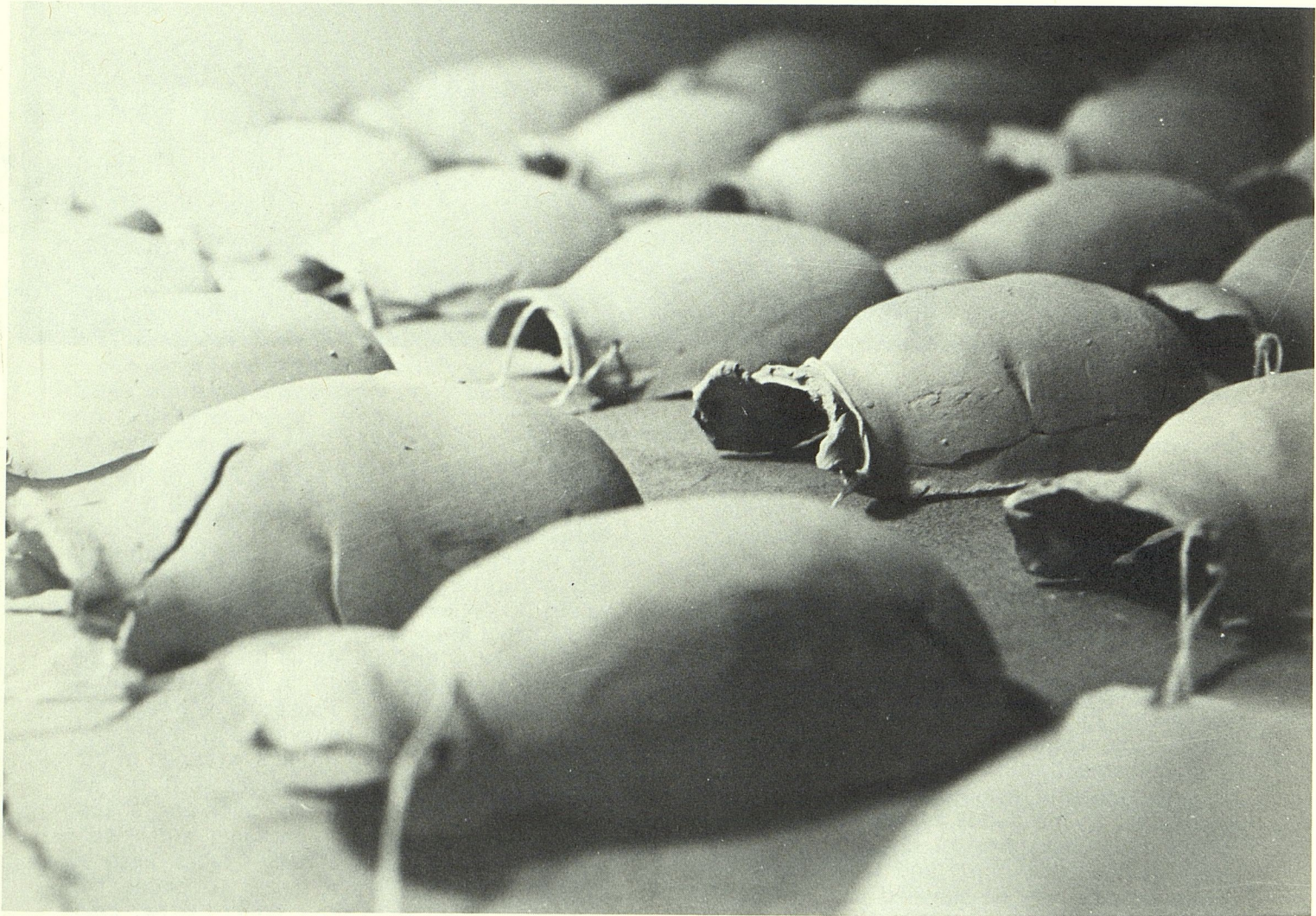


brown or black model elicited in Americans suspicion and a generally negative response to the product. The same product displayed with a blond Germanic type elicited in Americans a positive, warm, supportive response. How does the positive or negative halo effect distort a critic's judgment? (One wonders why there has never been a scientific objective study of the hidden aspects of the art world.) Who is the critic writing for and how is the critic affected and infected by the prejudices of his/her unconscious?

"Is it possible to eliminate any hierarchical relationship between artists and critics...?" As long as critics allow themselves to be used to promote "products" and the "real estate value" of art, and as long as the major part of this dialogue takes place in magazines dependent on dealer advertising, a hierarchical relationship will continue. Artist is pitted against artist, thus creating an artificial need for the critic. The IRS, ironically, continues to promote this system by defining the artist as a "profes-

sional" or "hobbyist" depending on how much work is sold. A number of "great" artists sold few works in their lifetimes.

A possible solution would be the placing of critical writing in publications which are not controlled by advertising. The alternate periodical would allow the critic to go directly to the public. A new generation of critics would emerge, a group less given to nepotism, less meshed with the cocktail circuit or bedtime grapevine, more conscious of their own limitations and prejudices. The system, itself, could be influenced by the emergence of a new buying public as increasing amounts of money, through greater employment opportunities, are made available to non-whites and women. New demands could be made on the dealer, which would force the critic, locked into the system, to be influenced by default. Artists could change the structure by working and showing in a manner which circumvents the gallery, leaving it with less power over the artist or the critic.



Gloria Rayl. *Untitled*. Clay masks pulled from manikin heads, suggests the tagging and discarding of Third World people.



# The Dilemma of the Modern Chicana Artist and Critic

Marcella Trujillo

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Because there are many Chicanas published or unpublished whose works are unknown to me, I have decided to deal with the thematic structure in the poetry of some Chicanas who have published.

It would be an impossible task to critique all the Chicanas who are writing, or to deal with the one who has been the most prolific or the most popular. The ones I have chosen to mention only reinforce a point, a thesis, I wish to make in this article.

The literary rebirth of the Chicanos in the sixties coincided with certain simultaneous contemporary historical moments: (1) the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, (2) identification with Cesar Chavez's farmworkers struggle, (3) the inception of Chicano Studies departments and (4) the initiation of the socio-economic political national Chicano movement.

Through unification and national mobilization, the Chicanos began to be aware of their history previously obliterated in U.S. textbooks. The return to Mexican history, the emphasis on Mexican culture and traditions in order to seek self-affirmation and a positive self-identification was almost in repudiation of this U.S. Anglo-European system, which has held us in second-class citizenship status since 1846, denying us the rights and privileges afforded us in the Treaty Guadalupe Hidalgo and agreed upon by the U.S. government at the close of the Mexican-American war.

As the Chicanomovement began its evolution into unification, Chicanos were faced with the problem of diversity. Not all Chicanos were brown, not all were Catholic, not all were Spanish-surnamed and not all were Spanish-speaking. It therefore became necessary to invent or borrow symbols as common denominators around which all Chicanos could unite.

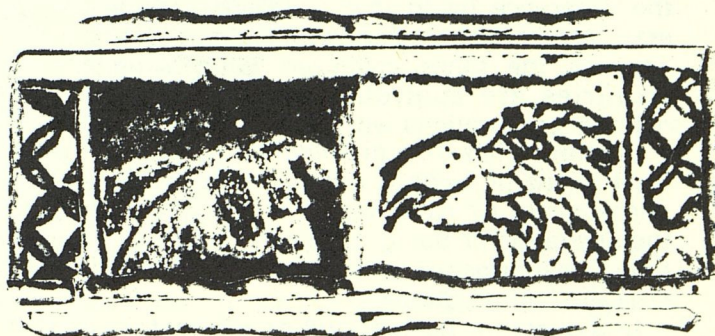
One of these was the symbol of the *mestizaje*, the tripartite face of the Indian mother, the Spanish father and their offspring, the *mestizo*. Another was the concept of a Chicano nation—*Aztlan*. Linguistically, there was an emergence of *pachuquismos* and regional dialects in the literature. The *pachuco* became an ideal Chicano type, the prototype of rebelling

against the gringo-racist society at a time when American patriotism was at an all-time high: the second World War.

Like the Latin American, the Chicano also diminished the European psyche by establishing the Chicano Amerindia concept, which emphasized the highly developed Aztec and Mayan civilizations as equal to, if not superior to, the Greek and Roman civilizations so predominant in all facets of Anglo-American education.

In the beginning, in the early sixties, the Chicanos were repeating the same concerns of the Latin American philosophers and writers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, among them: José Martí, José Vasconcelos, Leopoldo Zea, Samuel Ramos, Silva J. Herzog, Iturriaga and Octavio Paz, to name only a few. That dilemma, of being an American of this continent, but imbued and dominated by European language, culture and customs, called for ethnic self-introspection which led to a recognition of autochthonous American elements.

Hence the popularity of Mexican writers and historians, especially Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude*, which included a compilation of his predecessors' ideas on Mexicanism, Mexican philosophy, psyche, thought and all the problematics of achieving economic independence.



Paz's popularity among Chicanos may have stemmed from the fact that he wrote about a Chicano type in his book: the *pachuco*, and thus, he brought to the present a social phenomenon that Chicanos were familiar with, through oral tradition, or the experience itself.



The questions that Mexicans were asking prior to the 1910 revolution in repudiation of Positivism, the philosophy of Scientism, were repeating themselves in the Chicano movement and literature. The leitmotif "Yo soy Chicano/a" predominated in much writing; however, as the militancy decreased, the self-affirmation diluted into an anguished question. Is this due to the fact that since the Chicano movement began ten years ago, Chicanos are now realizing that the Mexican identification has not been sufficient to provide us with solutions in order to survive within this capitalist racist oppressive society?

This is more acute for the Chicana than for the Chicano, as evidenced by statistics that place Chicanas lowest on the financial and educational scale in comparison with any other ethnic group, male or female.<sup>1</sup>

The impetus of the women's movement together with the Chicano movement contributed to the Chicana's latent potential and so she began to focus in on her particular feminist experience through the arts. The Chicanas took the symbols afforded them through the Chicano movement and transformed them according to their feminist perspective. Some Chicanas' poetry is a trajectory of self-examination that terminates with a "cuestionamiento" of all the socioeconomic and political factors that have taken their toll on their individualism.

Some Chicanas' literature has been a vehicle whereby they could escape into another temporal sense of our folklore, our legends and *modus vivendi*; that particular past which seemed a safer and saner world, the world as it ought to be, albeit a very traditional romantic view.

Through the arts there is an attempt at liberation from the Anglo-European dominant culture, that system of government that has conquered and colonized us in the same way it did with Cuba and is now doing with Puerto Rico, the difference being that Chicanos are peripheral, marginal characters within the metropolis, whereas the other colonized Latin American countries are controlled by foreign multinational corporations within their midst.

Literature has also provided an outlet for the frustrations of being a woman within the sexist microcosmic Chicano world of machismo, and the alienation of being a Chicana woman in the larger macrocosmic white male club that governs the United States.

In a quest for identity and an affirmation that brown is beautiful, the Chicana has sought refuge in the image of the indigenous mother. Some Chicanas view the Indian mother as Mother Earth; some identify with the bronze reality in religious themes of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the spiritual mother, and still others identify directly with the Mexican Eve,

the historical mother, La Malinche. The latter will be explained in more detail.

### *La Malinche Theme*

The fact that some Chicanas view Doña Marina in a sympathetic manner, in contrast to the portrayal of Mexican authors, may mean that her redefinition may be a Chicana phenomenon.

According to Octavio Paz's aforementioned book, Mexicans view La Malinche as the Mexican Eve, the one who betrayed the country, the one who opened up the country to foreign invaders. This opening up, paving the way for the Conquest, has the sexual allusion of opening up her body to procreate the illegitimate sons of a rape called the Conquest. According to Paz, it was her treason, her betrayal that caused the dual Mexican society of *chingones* vs. *chingados*, with Cortes being the prototype of the "chingon," and Malinche being the highest exponent of the "chingado/a." Within this classification of Mexican types, the people who have power are the *chingones*, but the macho is the "gran chingon."



As the Chingada, Malinche is "the mother"—not a mother of flesh and blood but a mythical figure. The Chingada is one of the Mexican representations of maternity, like La Llorona or the "long-suffering Mexican mother" who is celebrated on May 10th.

The Chingada is the mother who has suffered—metaphorically, or actually—the corrosive and defaming action implicit in the verb that gives her her name.

Thus "hijos de la chingada" is a true battle cry, charged with peculiar electricity; it is a challenge and an affirmation, a shot fired against an imaginary enemy, an explosion in the air.

When Mexicans shout this cry on the fifteenth of September, they affirm themselves in front of, against, and in spite of others. And who are these others? They are "hijos de la chingada," strangers, bad Mexicans, our enemies, our rivals. The Mexican denies La Malinche, and the anguish shows when he shouts, "Viva Mexico, hijos de la chingada."<sup>2</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that the Mexicans wanted to transcend this mythical maternal



image to find refuge in a Christian feminine deity, one who could replace the Mexican Eve, and so "La Virgen Morena"—the brown virgin. La Virgen de Guadalupe became the patron saint of Mexico and is often also called "the mother of orphans." She is also called Guadalupe-Tonantzin among some of the Indian population, and this latter concept reflects the Christian-Aztec mingling of religion and culture.

La Virgen de Guadalupe is the Christian virgin, symbolizing, perhaps, the Spanish sixteenth-century concept of honor which considered virginity as the repository of family honor, a concept deeply rooted in Catholic ideology.

If Chicanas use the concept of the long-suffering mother, they revert to the identification of La Malinche. Thus, in deciphering the symbols of the historical and spiritual mothers, the word *madre* in Mexican Spanish is at once a prayer or a blasphemy, a word whose antonymical dichotomy is manifested in ambiguities, ambivalence or oscillation in Chicana literature.

Do Chicanas define their essence as a response or as a reflection of how the men define them? When Adeljiza Sosa Ridell and Lorenzo Calvillo Schmidt write, "Pinche, como duele ser Malinche," is it positive or negative? The fact that they have not stated that they are not "las bastardas de la Malinche, sino La Malinche misma" may indicate that they want to



Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patron Saint of Mexico. Also called Guadalupe Tonantzin after the Aztec Goddess of Fertility.

Tonantzin, the Aztec goddess of fertility, is viewed as Mother Nature. In Chicana literature, the technique of pathetic fallacy emerges with the symbol of the good mother, Guadalupe or Tonantzin, presenting a harmonious relationship of the universe in fusion with nature.

reinterpret history. In our contemporary situation, the gringo or the macho Chicano has taken the place of Cortes. This is implied as A.S. Ridell confronts the Chicano, first of all, to state that culturally, she is a Chicana, and second, to tell him that "a veces tu eres muy



gringo, tu.”<sup>3</sup> Lorenza C. Schmidt in her poem, “Como duele,” asks the Chicano chulo where he was when she was looking for herself. He was, she says, where the Man and all his pendejadas sent him—Dartmouth, L.A. City College, barber’s school, La Pinta, Korea and Vietnam, returning from the latter wrapped “como enchiladas in red, white and blue.”<sup>4</sup> But she was at Berkeley, where there were too few Chicanas, and even fewer Chicanos, and she questions if she ever really looked for him because she was told that he would hold her back. She questions the visible Chicanos of today, with eagles on their jackets who spout “carnales y carnalas” and “Viva la Raza,” etc. but why weren’t they visible when she needed them?

Is this then a response to an accusation that the Chicanas have had to develop their own leadership because the male leaders were so wrapped up in themselves that they could not inspire the Chicanas to develop their full potential?

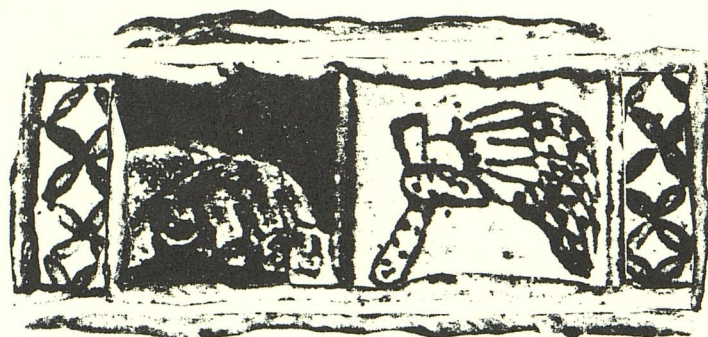
In her poem “Chicana Evolution,” Sylvia Gonzales sees La Malinche as the feminine Messiah who must return to redeem her forsaken daughters, born out of the violence of the Spanish and Aztec religions and cultures. She moves away from the cosmopolitan ambiance of Greenwich Village in New York to the nativistic world of the Aztecs to encounter Malinche.

In the closing stanza of this poem, Sylvia is the collective Chicana, the spiritual sister of the Latin Americans, Mother Nature, mother, daughter, Malinche, the totality of womanhood: “todo sere...y hasta bastarda sere, antes de dejar de ser mujer.”

Chicanos see themselves as muy mejicanos in the affinity of the woman and orphanhood concept, illegitimate sons and daughters of La Malinche. This concept, projected within the confines of the U.S. environment, reinforces the feeling of orphanhood, of alienation and marginalization in both U.S. and Mexican societies, in the prismatic view of Indian identity that pervades much of the Chicana’s literature.

However, to blame one woman, Doña Marina, for the Conquest is, in my opinion, a false historical conscience. One woman could not stand in the way of European expansion; one woman could not impede the alliance of native class interests with the foreign invader’s economic interests. God, glory and gold, economic, political and religious reasons were one total objective since Church and State were not separated at the time of the Conquest. “Independence” is a misnomer in Latin America as one foreign power after another has influenced and dominated its economic sphere to perpetuate a cycle of dependency and neo-colonial status for its inhabitants.

In the case of the Chicanos, the gringo has



replaced the Spaniard as the “gran chingon” by virtue of his having the positions of power. And those in positions of power oppress through racism, which has made Chicanos react and revert to the Indian mother to say, through her, that brown is beautiful. It is this contemporary society which has classified “brown” as inferior in the schematics of relative beauty. Thus, to refute the racism and the stereotypes, Chicanas have emphasized the bronze race which, ironically, in the past, has not appeared in the races classification. Under the present categories, only the black, white, red and yellow races are visible. And, perhaps, for that reason, Chicanos have been called the “Invisible,” the “forgotten” or the “Silent Americans.”

#### *The Problematics of the Modern Chicana*

Sylvia Gonzales in her poetry is first of all a woman, then a Chicana poetess with a mission. Maternal imagery permeates much of her poetry. She writes poetry to her future generations, and she ponders their fate as she weaves in and out of herself, from the first to the third person, in the poem that begins “Yo soy la mujer poeta.”

“¿Como sera la generacion; criada con la inquietud de la mujer poeta?” She expresses the anxieties of being a woman poet, not a poetisa, but a mujer poeta, who is faced with the Sisyphean responsibility of advising and advising well to the future generation of Chicano readers. Her mission is to write, because she has many “consejos” to give.

In her personal *Ars Poetica* she gives us her philosophy in declaring that “the artist must be true to her own soul and her own personal experiences, and in so doing, the message will be universal and eternal.”<sup>5</sup>

Sylvia speaks collectively for the Chicana and for all women when she states that “we are all sisters under the flesh.” In her poem, “On an untitled theme,” whose principal theme is machismo, she exacerbates the dilemma felt by every intellectual woman who wants to use her head, or who wants to be recognized for her intelligence, and not only for her body. She must convince her macho colleagues that her goal is not their bed. She would reject the



finality of the Chicana's life of bearing sons for wars, of being alienated after the children grow up and leave home. The choice of bearing sons for wars or as victims of a technological society whose recourse from pressures is drugs, are anxieties that every contemporary mother faces. The Chicana mother whose only life has been her children may have difficulties in her later years. She may seek refuge in the bottle or transform into a nagging wife or a "vieja chismosa."

The sanctuary of the Chicano home then becomes a replica of the conflictive society. The modern Chicana faces a double conflict. On the one hand, she must overcome Chicano family overprotection, and on the other, she faces contempt from the outside world as she emerges into the professional world, only to find indifference as answer to her questions on reality and life. These are themes that women can relate to in Sylvia's poetry, but amidst these problems, Sylvia affirms her individualism in "Te acuerdas mujer."

This assertion of intellectualism is indirect in the praises and eulogies to Sra. Juana Ines de la Cruz, the renowned genius of Mexican colonial times. Dorinda Moreno, among other poetesses, identifies with this victim of Catholic machismo, who was made to give up academic life and go out into the world where she contracted the plague and died a premature death at the age of 45, a martyr to feminine intelligentsia.

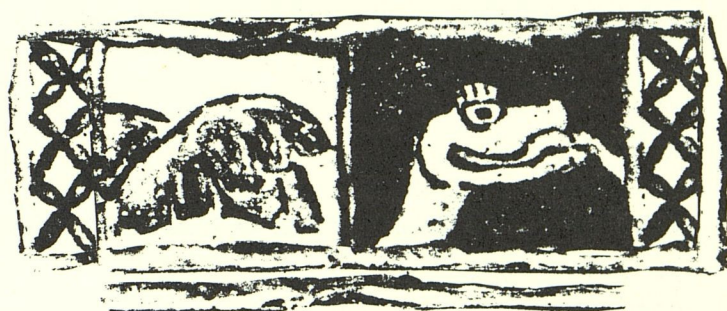
The modern Chicana, in her literature, tries to synthesize the material and spiritual conflict of her essence. Her spirit is ingrained in the roots of Mexican culture and traditions, but her body is trying to survive in a hostile capitalistic environment, and she keenly feels the technological battle of scientism vs. humanism. In trying to resolve the two, her literature often shows the contradictions that exist between the two.

Sylvia Gonzales expresses this concern in the following: "There are many Mexican cultural values that we can relate to, but are they reliable in our search for an identity within the Anglo American cultural tradition?" The answer, she says, is a link between science and the soul.<sup>6</sup>

An elaboration of that answer can be found in A. Sanchez-Vasquez's book, *Art and Society*. "Creative freedom and capitalist production are hostile to the artist... Art representing denied humanity opposes an inhuman society, and society opposes the artist insofar as he resists reification, insofar as he tries to express his humanity."<sup>7</sup>

The dilemma of the Chicano/a artist is trying to create an art for people's sake, and not for art's sake or for commercialism. He / She is working in a hostile, scientific milieu whose

marginalization is twofold: first, because the artist's creation is not scientific, but humanistic, for the enjoyment of humanity, with no utilitarian value, and second, because Chicanos' cultural values are not understood or appreciated by the dominant society. Yet, the Chicano artists and writers must continue to create and to communicate with the grass-roots people. And in so doing, they will reach the universal masses who identify with their contemporary situation whether in this or other countries, whether in this or another historical moment. For art has its own laws which transcend the artist, his/her time and even the ideology that brought forth his/her art.



Literature is a medium and a praxis whereby we can start to question our oppression, not by escaping into the mythical past in sentimental lyricism reminiscent of other literary ages, but in dealing with the everyday problems. The Chicana can question and confront the society which holds her in double jeopardy, as a woman and a minority.

Every Chicana's life is a novel, yet we have not read a contemporary Chicana feminist novel. The Chicana has had to be a cultural schizophrenic in trying to please both the Chicano and Anglo publishers, not to mention pleasing the readers who may neutralize her potential to create within her own framework of ideas.

We must examine closely the works of Chicanas who have been selected for publication by male editors and publishers. We have to ask ourselves if we have been published because we have dealt with themes that reinforce the male ego. As urban professional Chicanas, we must reinterpret our pantheistic view of the world. Are we really the prototype of the long-suffering indigenous mother? Are we co-opting and neutralizing our emotions by writing what the publishers want to read?

I remind you that *macho* in classical Nahuatl means "image, reflection of myself." Are we then only a narcissistic reflection, and consequently do we define ourselves as a reflection of the Chicano perspective, as a reaction to that definition, rather than through action?

It becomes necessary to examine the totality of the Chicana's artistic expression, her



motives for writing, the audience for whom it was intended, her biography as a product of all of her past experiences which are projected into her work, and lastly to understand why her particular content is important in this space and time. For in examining a work in this critical vein, we would also be examining ourselves, and could come to a collective conclusion as to what direction we are taking within the feministic framework of the Chicana's socio-economic and political status within the United States.

It may be somewhat premature at this time to view the present literature of Chicanas as a culmination of the Chicana experience. All of that literature has been positive in that it has provided a historical awareness, "una consientizacion," an inspiration to other Chicanas to

affirm their literary talents, and those Chicanas who have been writing and publishing for some time now are progressing steadily on the incline of their own apogee.

1. Neomi Lorenzano, *De Colores* (Albuquerque: Pajarito Publications), p. 11.
  2. Octavio Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 75.
  3. A.S. Ridell, *Chicanas en la literatura y en el arte* (Berkeley: Quinto Sol Publications, 1973), p. 75.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Sylvia Gonzales, *De Colores* (Albuquerque: Pajarito Publications), p. 15.
  6. Ibid., pp. 15-18.
  7. A. Sanchez-Vasquez, *Art and Society* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 116.
- See also: Dorinda Moreno, *La mujer es la tierra* (Berkeley: Casa Editorial, 1975).

i am Aztec. i am Olmec. i am Mayan.  
i am there in the moonlight walking united feeling  
one.

Vaults of the Ancients open up to me overflowing  
from second story warehouses.  
Dusty memories  
sunlit goldlit specks bring  
origins illuminated.  
and my clothes don't match/catch my mood  
i take them off and dance wantonly seductively  
around the room  
to chorus to song to ancient rites  
where i once belonged

my sense backward spills and i am Amazon  
living alive in the  
jungle hills.

**Gloria Jaramillo-Trout**

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# Human Word, Sacred Word

Diana Bellesi

© 1979

Translated by Tona Wilson

To speak is a potent act. One that creates or destroys worlds, makes the seed grow or the rain come, brings or drives away the winds, brings the loved ones, and delivers to our ear the voice of the divinity or opens our voice so that it may be worthy of being heard. To speak is a potent act. It brings life and opens the way to the land of the dead. When the word is true, when it has been strengthened in the interior of our heart, when it has grown in silence.

The Native American peoples were, and still are, interpreters of this simple and mysterious act: speech. Their songs translate collective wisdom and individual experience.

Here the word is not just a means of perpetuating the memory of facts and events, but rather acts on its own. S/he who speaks intends with the word that is voiced to exercise a strong influence and to bring about changes, whether in her/himself or in nature or in other people.

The word, indeed, is power. It is life, substance, reality. The word lived before earth, sun, or moon came into existence. Whenever the Indian ponders over the mystery of origin, he shows a tendency to ascribe to the word a creative power all its own. The word is conceived of as an independent entity, superior even to the gods. Only when the word came up mysteriously in the darkness of the night were the gods of the Maya enabled to bring forth the earth and life thereon. And the genesis of the Uitoto opens, characteristically, in this way: "In the beginning, the word gave origin to the Father."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of massacres, forced isolation, discrimination and death, there is still a large population of indigenous peoples on the American continent. And they will never die as long as their word survives. This selection is a small mosaic of songs and stories drawn from four indigenous cultures whose influence on the thinking of the Argentinians (and doubtless on that of other South Americans), although hidden, is vast and of unsuspected scope.

Much is omitted (the Tobas, the Matacos are not here), but even so we hear, in this brief and heterogeneous selection, the people's homage to themselves.

## *A Tehuelche Legend*

*"I want to leave these memories, and then to die."*

When Agustina Quilchaman told this story, I was not even born; nevertheless, I can see her next to the fire, her beautiful hands spinning or weaving. Doña Agustina laughs remembering the nomadic life of her childhood, weeps when in her memory the figures of her long-dead ancestors appear. But flashes of indignation animate her face when she is reminded of the injustices and crimes to which her tribe has been a victim.

"I want to leave these memories and then to die," she once said to the ethnographer who gathered from her lips this and so many other stories and teachings of her people on the eve of their extinction. They will live forever in our collective memory, we, the children of the mestizo heart.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In ancient times, the world was populated by small people or Táchul. Then there was a great cataclysm in which the earth turned inside out and trapped the small people or Táchul. But life began to be born again, and from a cave in the hill Ashpesh, in Santa Cruz, farther north than the valley of the paintings, in Pájl Káike, the people and animals of that time emerged.

The first to emerge from the cave was a woman. She emerged without coming from any parents, by the work of Seecho, the Principle of Good. She was endowed with supernatural powers, and she was *señora* and *dueña* of the earth and of the animals and plants which lived on the earth.

This woman had a child whom she loved very tenderly.

One day the fox frightened all of the other animals, who ran helter-skelter into the fields. The woman went out on foot after them, worried for fear of losing them. Her child, to join the flight of the animals, converted himself into a beautiful white pony and followed behind them at a gallop, vanishing across hills and into the pampas.

The woman also transformed herself into a white mare and ran, trying in vain to bring back her scattered property.



So then it happened that the white pony, the beloved child, died by drowning in the lake of Gootchel Áike, into which he had stepped to drink and frolic.

The woman returned to her human form to cry and lament this irreparable loss. But she said to herself, "What use is weeping? What use is lamenting? If it won't bring back my child to me."

And so she went, grieving as she walked day and night across the plains, eating nothing and drinking from the salt lakes to make death come more quickly.

"I want to die!" she said. But death did not come.

So behind a large thicket of calafate, which protected her from the wind, she decided to make use of her magic powers and transform herself into a mass of iron. But before becoming mineral, she sang in a heart-rending voice a Tehuelche song which repeats: "Lámego Táan Póguening Gué-ä" ["Heavy shackle of my race, of my blood"].

Next to the calafate thicket remained a sacred meteor. And on the bank of the lake of Gootchel Áike, where the white pony had drowned, rested another meteor, of smaller size.

From that time on, animals were distributed all over the face of the earth, and they were free,

with no master other than those who were able to hunt them.

The human beings who came after the first woman also distributed themselves all over the huge Patagonian region, without forgetting the respect and love they owed to that first *señora* and *dueña*.

Both sacred places were visited by the Tehuelche people, who held their religious ceremonies and festivals there. Behind the forest of calafate, where the sorrowing woman sang her last song, they concentrated in her remains all of their anguish.

José Chaiuy was the one who handed over the relic, which can now be found in the museum of La Plata. Bribed for a hundred pesos. His people nearly killed him, and during his whole life he was the object of reproach. Finally, as though under a curse, he went crazy and died a few years later.

"Lámego Táan Póguening Gué-ä." This heart-rending song which grandparents have repeated to their grandchildren, and these in turn to their own grandchildren, with reverence, until it reached the lips of Doña Agustina Quilchaman: Does it not seem perhaps a premonition? Doesn't the death of the beloved child seem perhaps a symbol of the death of the race?



### *Songs and Stories of the Campesinos of the Northeast of Argentina*

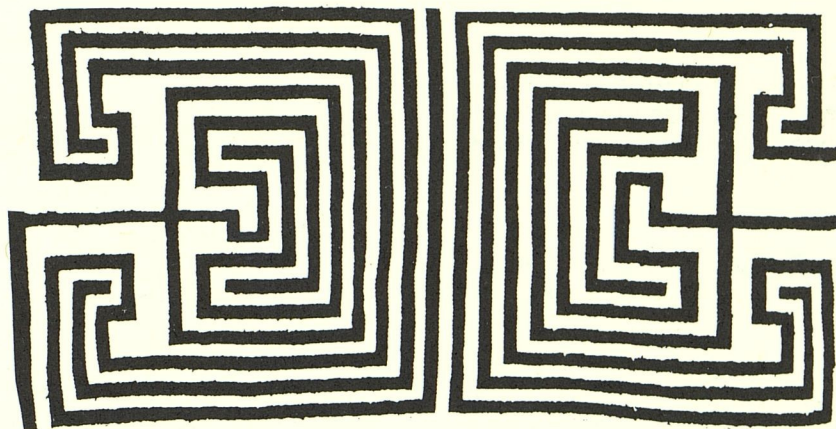
From the mouths of the campesinos (Indian and mestizo peasants) of the Northeast, Collas, Chanes or Paisano, come these narratives and songs, a pale reflection of the imagination and depth shown in their religious festivals and in their carnivals.

#### *Vidala*

De arriba yo mei venido  
porque allá no soy querida  
"Cómo noi de sentir yo"  
aquí me pongo a ofrecer  
quién compra una aborrecida  
"Cómo noi de sentir yo"  
Cómo noi de sentir yo  
cómo noi de tener pena  
"Cómo noi de sentir yo"  
Cuando ven un árbol caído  
todos quieren quebrar leña  
"Cómo noi de sentir yo"  
Ahi tienen señores míos,  
préstenme su corredor  
para cantarles una letra  
debida a mi corazón.

From above I have come  
for there I'm not loved  
"How could I not grieve?"  
Here I offer up myself  
Who'll buy a woman who's despised?  
"How could I not grieve?"  
How could I not grieve?  
How could I not be in pain?  
"How could I not grieve?"  
When they see a fallen tree  
they all want to break off kindling  
"How could I not grieve?"  
There you have it, gentlemen,  
give me the space  
and I'll sing you a song  
that comes from my heart.





*Vidala: La Brisa del Mar<sup>2</sup>*

[*The Breeze of the Sea*]

Por esta calle a lo largo  
La brisa del mar  
Juran que me han de matar  
Pa'l carnaval  
Con un cuchillo de palo  
La brisa del mar  
Quién sabe si cortará  
Pa'l carnaval

Estrellas del alto cielo  
La brisa del mar  
Prestame tu claridad  
Pa'l carnaval  
Para seguirle los pasos  
La brisa del mar  
A mi amante que se va  
Pa'l carnaval

Debajo de un limon verde  
La brisa del mar  
Entregué mi corazón  
Pa'l carnaval  
A quién no lo merecía  
La brisa del mar  
Entregué mi corazón  
Pa'l carnaval

Mientras me sabías decir  
La brisa del mar  
Que primero había de ver  
Pa'l carnaval  
Las estrellas en el suelo  
La brisa del mar  
Que dejar me ha de querer  
Pa'l carnaval

Por esta calle a lo largo  
La brisa del mar  
Juran que me han de matar  
Pa'l carnaval  
Con un cuchillo de palo  
La brisa del mar  
Quién sabe si cortará  
Pa'l carnaval

All up and down this long street  
The breeze of the sea  
They swear that I must be killed  
For carnival  
With a cruel knife made of wood  
The breeze of the sea  
Who knows if it's going to cut  
For carnival

Stars in the vault of the heavens  
The breeze of the sea  
Lend me your clear shining light  
For carnival  
So I can follow the footsteps  
The breeze of the sea  
Of my beloved who's gone  
For carnival

Under the green lemon tree  
The breeze of the sea  
I gave up my trusting heart  
For carnival  
To one who didn't deserve it  
The breeze of the sea  
I gave up my trusting heart  
For carnival

You always told me my love  
The breeze of the sea  
We'd be more likely to see  
For carnival  
All the stars fall to the earth  
The breeze of the sea  
Than that you'd stop loving me  
For carnival

All up and down this long street  
The breeze of the sea  
They swear that I must be killed  
For carnival  
With a cruel knife made of wood  
The breeze of the sea  
Who knows if it's going to cut  
For carnival



### *Little Souls in Pain*

(Two stories narrated by Doña Amalia, in Tucumán province, Argentina. Recorded by Leda Valadares, who introduced me to them and let me transcribe them.)



Listen, they say that once upon a time there was, no?, a man, now, a big man, and they say that he lived with a woman, he wasn't married, he just had this woman, that's all, and so, you know, as this man was pretty old and he couldn't please her anymore, so the woman got tired and left, she went with another and then, see, a few months later she came back, but she came back pregnant by the other man. The man took her in because he needed her, that's all, he took her in pregnant and everything, and time passed and she had the kid, but the man hated the brat, didn't love him, see, but the man was a worker, well, that man, even though he was a heretic he was a worker, that man worked hard. But one day, see, he woke up grouchy and the kid cried and cried, that annoyed him, so the man grabbed the kid and took him away and he killed the little brat and he buried him, and he covered him up with some stones, and he piled a mountain of stones on top, he covered up the brat and he went back to the house. So the woman had left him and the man had been living alone, see. But the man kept on working. Well, time passed and the man was making himself rich, he'd bought a cow, he'd planted some sugarcane, he'd planted some corn, he had sheep, he had everything, that man. He got rich, he made himself a good house out of wood, and he was the best, see, that man. But always, you see, he'd remember the crying of the little brat. All night he'd hear that the brat was crying, he could hear the little brat crying, and the brat kept crying, but the man was strong, strong, he wasn't afraid, he didn't move, "and you ain't gonna get me, brat," he said, "and you ain't gonna get me..." and he didn't get him. It looked as though the little soul had gotten tired, and had left off crying and suffering. But, you see, time passed, and one night he heard over the hill a sound like thunder, like thunder, and it started raining, raining and then he saw rushing toward him a mountain of mud and rocks and a flood and in front came the flood like a snake, as fast as a light, see, it was coming like a light, going like this and moving from one side to the other side, this light, and those thunder sounds were getting closer and closer to the house, and the man stayed calm because he said to himself, "it's not dry, so the flood won't come up here because down there there's like a gully and that's where the current always goes, that's

where the flood always goes, it never rises up to my house" but, see, this time it came, it came and it came, the flood, and it came toward the house with the light in front and it was coming, just getting closer, and so now the man began to be scared, he shut the doors and started looking through the crack in the door and so then, see, he saw that the flood, with the mud and the rocks, was coming up toward the house, see, so the man barred all, all of the doors and the flood just kept coming up the land where the man's house was and the stones started pounding on the door and he'd barred all the doors, and the man heard the flood coming and it hit the door and then it retreated and then from inside the man could see again through the crack in the door and then he saw that at the front of the flood was coming the skull of the dead kid, you see, and the little skull hit against the door and kept on hitting it until he broke it down and by then the man had gone running for the other room, and he'd barred that door too but the skull came in anyway, the little skull in front, the flood behind just like a snake, they were following the man you see until, following the man, they'd knocked down all the doors in the house. And the little skull was coming in front, moving, the little brat's skull you see, the skull of the dead one, the little angel in front of it all. And he kept chasing the man, and the man had to jump out the window, and the little skull jumped out the window too and followed him into the hills, climbing, they went climbing the highest hills, and the flood, with the skull of the little angel in front they just kept following and following the man, who, by now he was giving up, until he fell end over end, see, and then all the clouds dissolved and all the storm and thunder passed and everything was at peace. And the next day they found the man, see, who'd been covered up by the flood, been covered with mud and rocks, and the little skull on top. And this was the revenge of the little angel, the vengeance of the little skull. He'd killed the man, and he'd covered up all his property, the good house made of wood and all, and that was the revenge of the skull.

There was a man, no?, who lived with a woman, he wasn't married, he just had the woman. Now, you see, the woman had a kid. So you see the kid annoyed the man, one day he was enraged, he took the kid and he killed him, and buried him there under a *churqui* [thorny bush], there he put him and he covered him up. Well, time passed and the little soul began to cry. Wouldn't let the man sleep, man started to decay, and stayed up, poor man, because the kid just wouldn't let him sleep. And he cried all night, round and round the brat cried, and it was that little brat who cried. Well, until the man came to a seer, a fortune teller. We'll see what this fortune teller said to get rid of the crying brat. Here's what the fortune



teller said: "Look, what the little angel needs is that you give him some things he likes. Give, he'll have to leave you in peace. Give him little clothes, give him a little bottle of wine, give him little shoes, all these things you're going to give the little angel like this: put them right there under the *churqui* and then you'll see he'll stop plaguing you." So the man kept giving him things. "But now, look, now give him big things because now the little soul has grown, now the little soul is big. Now you'll have to take a man's clothes to the little brat." And the man took him some shirts and some rope-soled sandals, and so he kept on taking him clothes. Well, but the little soul kept right on plaguing him, kept right on crying. And the fortune teller said to him, "Give him more, give him more." Until one night during the carnival the man went to a dance, and there he met that seer wearing a pair of creased trousers that he'd given to the little soul. And from then on, instead of being in debt to one dead person, he owed for two. TWO!

#### *People of the Earth*

The Mapuches,<sup>3</sup> the people of the earth. People of the indigenous tribes who live on both sides of the Andes mountain range, in Chile and in Argentina, and whom the white invaders called araucanos or pampas. People of the *mapu*, of the earth, for which their prayers and songs vibrate with love. Respect for all creatures, pain before the ravage and the brutal acts by which they were exterminated and their children scattered, the Mapuches, of the earth. Profound religious sentiment of a people who communicate directly with God, by way of the *machi*, the shaman, the priestess, raised up in ecstasy on the *rehue*, on the sacred tree, in the supplications of *Nguillatún*.<sup>4</sup> Speaking with God of the rains and the crops, of the little animals and of the rivers, of the needs of her people, which are understood by the Father and the Mother of the Heavens, *Fücha Chao Nguenechen*.<sup>5</sup> The *cultrum* sounds, and the *trutruca*, the *pfilca*, the *lolquin*.<sup>6</sup> The heart of the earth and the heart of the heavens are united in this music and in this voice. A people entreats and sings and demands and knows and sings again. Tenderness of the love songs, of those told to children or to the aged, to the sheep or to the little water of the spring. Once the grandfather Kinchahuala was asked: "How is a Mapuche tradition made to last forever? Written or spoken?" And he answered: "Written things get lost, the spoken word lasts forever."

#### *Sacred Song Sung by the Machi in a Nguillatún*

The earth clear as the day  
my dream descends to me. . .  
Mount your spirited steed,  
miraculous vision, miraculous  
vision of the dream.

#### *Songs of the Papai [Mother] Maril*

Right will have been my good *iomlaku* [great grandfather], right will have been the *iomkuku* [great grandmother]; roots of trees are our feet, our hearts have the wings of a bird of passage. Who triumphs? Who will triumph? We will always have our eyes on the earth; she is the shelter. And there will be no water below, they say.

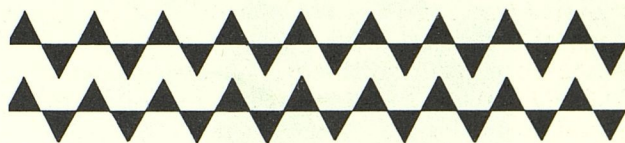
#### *Songs of the Chilena Melillan, of Panguipulli*

With *sinchull* [vines] it seemed our hearts were bound together, but the knot came untied and I alone am as the branch broken from the tree. Aiaiai, my beloved little brother [sweetheart], I am forever weeping, and I have much pain in my heart.

The *machi* asked me for a pledge, and I offered her the footprints of the horse which carried away my darling, carried him away so far, carried him to Argentina, country of sand. With the footprints, they'll return him to my heart. With the magic of the *machi*.

#### *Prayer of the Weaver* (Told by Guillermina Epullán)

What luck! Already! Yesterday I warped it, today I wove it. Today I warped it and I wove it right away. Our God willing, I'll weave faster still. I entreat you, *Fücha Chao* [Great Father]. I offer you little threads. Slender little white threads of my little sheep.



#### *Prayer for Seasoning Clay Pots* (Told by Antonia Kaiun)

Father in the river of the heavens, you see us now kneeling before you. I have ready my cook pot, three feet it has already, soon it will have ears as well. The *uidiue* polished it for me; it is too good for my little house. Now the milk is boiling to season it, now *michai*<sup>7</sup> waits to stain it, it needs only the prayer and the blessing of *Fücha Chao*, who sits on his throne of gold. Bless my cook pot, make it last long; my children and my grandchildren want to eat, Great Father.

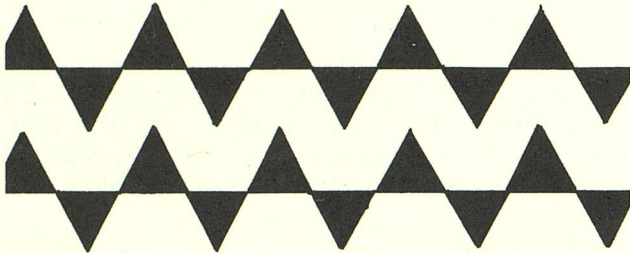
#### *Prayer to a Spring*<sup>8</sup>

Water beloved to us, I come to visit you today to tell you that I will be living here. God wants you to flow, water, every year, as you do now. I will have your mouth clean and clean will be my water jug as well, beloved water.



### A Children's Game: The Kume

It is a game of mutes: the first who speaks must pay a forfeit. Each one tries to make the others talk. There are various ways of making the others talk. In one of them there is a player called, in jest, keeper of the word, who is the one who tempts the other players to say something. Many "temptations" are permitted. It is a gleeful game.



1. Margot Astrov, *The Winged Serpent* (New York: John Day, 1946), pp. 19-20.
2. This *vidala* has been published with music, another song and an interview with Leda Valladares, the Argentinian singer who collected the two *vidalas* and the stories of the "Little Souls in Pain," in *Sing Out!* (Vol. 27, No. 3).
3. *Mapu* means earth; *che*, people.

4. The *machi* is a female spiritual leader, a soothsayer. The *rehue* is a "tree trunk-altar, decorated with branches of cinnamon and ginger, in front of the house of the *machi*, on whose platform she performs the religious ceremonies of the race, puts herself in communication with the spirits and receives her inspirations and visions" (Moesbach). *Nguillatun* consists of solemn prayers; an agrarian rite in which abundance and fertility are asked of the earth.
5. *Fücha Chao Nguenechen* is the Great Father Nguenechen (God, Creator of humanity).
6. The *cultrum* is a classical Mapuche drum, a flat kettle drum, with one head, made of skin. The *trutruca* is a cane trumpet, three to five meters long, which requires of the player a long and powerful breath. The *pfilca* is a one-tone flute. The *lolquin* is similar to the *trutruca* but smaller, made from the hollow stalk of a bush such as the hemlock or white thistle.
7. The *michai* is a bush whose roots and bark are used as a yellow dye.
8. When people arrive at a new place, where they are going to live, they dedicate to the source of the water, or the spring, this affectionate prayer.

The texts included in this section were taken—and in some cases re-created—from the following works: *El Complejo "Tehuelche"* by Federico Escalada, the records and tapes of Leda Valladares, *Tradiciones Araucanas* and *Cuentan los Araucanos* by Bertha Koessler-Ilg, and *Estudio del Nillatun y la religion Araucana* by Rodolfo Casamiquela.



"Mint" Mandan. 1832. Oil on canvas, 29" x 23". This twelve-year-old girl is shown with white streaked hair, an albinism found among many of the Mandan females. Catlin was convinced that this trait was inherited as the result of a mixture with Prince Madoc's lost Welsh colonists.



Wife of the Six. Plains Ojibua, 1832. Oil on canvas, 29" x 24". Catlin describes her as one of Six's several wives, though not the most agreeable. She is shown here wearing a painted buffalo robe with the hair side in, a common method for winter wear.



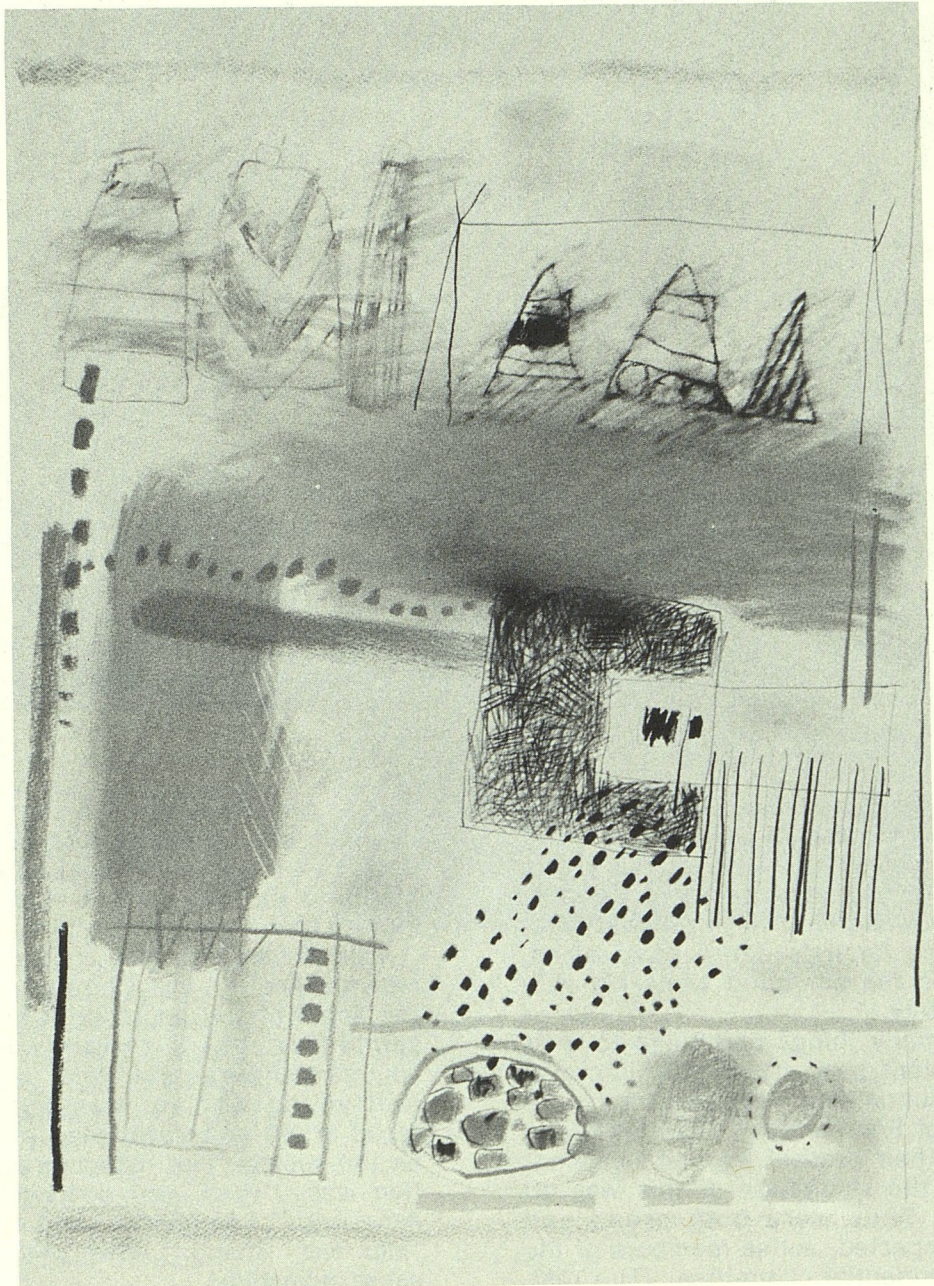
## Painter's Chant

Watch me move my hands  
They are moving  
They are moving

Watch me move my soul  
It is moving  
It is moving

Watch me make my art  
All is moving  
All is moving.

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith © 1979



Jaune Quick-to-See-Smith. *Wallowa Waterhole Series*. 1979. Pastel.



# A Photo Essay on the People's Republic of China

Vivian E. Browne

© 1979



Retired workers, Mr. and Mrs. Chou, and the author. Photo credit: V. E. Browne.

At the Tien San Workers New Residential Area we visited with Mr. and Mrs. Chou, retired factory workers who lived in one of the area's many apartment houses. The bedroom was neat and clean but crowded with furniture and what seemed to be the family's entire possessions. Mr. Chou served tea all round while his wife sat, smiling politely.

We spoke of many things pertaining to their lifestyle: the distant past, the drastic improvements the revolution had afforded them, the ways the Gang of Four affected their lives and community and their present manner of living. Their telling of the last phase of this was almost euphoric. They were both proud and pleased to be respected, active members of the neighborhood residential committee. (The resi-

dential collective in which they lived was very large. It was organized into 13 neighborhoods, each run by a residential committee.) Both husband and wife were busy in their community from morning to night.

This photograph was chosen because of my resemblance to the Chinese couple. Perhaps the angle of the photograph heightens the resemblance, but it certainly is curious. The youngest of our interpreters, a very bright, distant young woman, was puzzled about my racial origin and questioned me rather directly on the subject. Her response after my explanation was: "Well, you don't look like a Black American." I wondered what I did look like to "our Ms. Chang." This photograph may be some indication.



*I visited the People's Republic of China with a group of 20 American craftspeople. We toured six cities: Peking, Tsinan, Nanking, Soochow, Canton and Shanghai. The time was November 1977, some months after the restraint of the Gang of Four, the end of the Cultural Revolution, and approximately one year before political relations were established between the United States and China.*

*The following photo essay examines the circumstances of some of the Chinese women who impressed me during my trip.*

On the road just outside of Tsinan, we came upon a woman and her child. The landscape behind her showed well-organized farming procedures, terracing on the arid hills and irrigation on the flatlands, while she carried produce and farm implements down the road in the old manner. Contrasts of old and new were always striking in China. I wondered where this woman lived and how she managed her family and her life. I imagined her having a small house somewhere on a small plot of farmland, which she worked alone.

The circumstances of 30-year-old Huang Ling Di, a wife and mother who worked in the fields of an agricultural commune, were quite different from this fantasy of mine. The Shanghai Xian Hongqiao Ren Min Bong She covered 1,613 hectares and was only three kilometers from the city. There they used walking tractors, had installed underground canals and electric pumping stations for irrigation, produced an impressive number of crops and raised pigs, rabbits and ducks. Mrs. Di's children were either in school or at a nursery during the time of our visit. She had recently given birth to her youngest child but had returned to her 7:30 to 4:30 job. She spent part of her evenings caring for the new baby. She also attended night school and participated in recreational and political activities. Her family consisted of seven people: her home was a one-story, low-roofed building with three rooms. She evidently led a contented, busy life.

It is possible that the woman walking along the road had a similar arrangement and that she only appeared to be a throwback to the peasantry of old China.



Farm workers on the road, Tsinan. Photo credit: V. E. Browne.



Downtown Canton is the scene of much activity at all hours of the day. There is an undercurrent of excitement everywhere—in the odors of outdoor cooking, the sounds of vendors, the constant movement. People crowd the streets, the stores, the sidewalks—eating, shopping, selling their wares *and* reading. Not only do they read at bookstalls as these women are doing, but the numerous bookstores are always busy and the newspapers are posted on sides of buildings, where people take time out to read the daily editions.

In a country where secondary and higher education are at a premium, interest in reading runs very high. These women were totally absorbed. The country is absorbed with education. Great care is taken to select the gifted, the talented, the bright, the committed, who

are directed toward educational pursuits that will be most beneficial to the country. The arts and crafts factory in Peking, for example, trained apprentices at a college which was run by the factory for that purpose.

In 1952 there was a national reorganization of education in China. The educational structure now consists of four levels—kindergarten, primary and middle schools and the institute or college. Schools are not free, costing 1 yuan 50 per month (75 U.S. cents) for a middle school education, for example. For special schools, like the May 7th Fine Arts School or the Children's Palace in Shanghai, and for institutions of higher learning, students must be recommended and must undergo rigorous examinations in order to enter.



Women reading at a sidewalk bookstall, Canton. Photo credit: V. E. Browne.





Instructor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music playing the thousand-year-old Chin. Photo credit: V. E. Browne.

During a tour of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, a group of instructors performed for us. One of the instructors played the 1000-year-old Chin shown here. Most of the selections were composed by the instructors. I marveled at the timing, the precision with which each instrument was played. It was some of the most wonderful and unusual music I had ever heard.

In addition to instrumental selections, the teachers accompanied a Tibetan student who sang folk songs from her home. Teachers and students had transformed the songs from the original. They all seemed particularly delighted with their ability to perform this music as it had been forbidden by the Gang of Four, who considered it feudalistic.

We spoke with the group of teachers after the performance. We asked about creative work in music and were told that composition was

taught at all levels. An animated discussion on content followed. Here are some remarks from that discussion: "Lenin said that art, music and literature are tools in the revolutionary cause." "We are here to make music for the purpose of serving the proletariat and to attack the enemy." "The arts reflect militant life—the struggle, the life of the people. But art is not just giving a lecture on political teaching or thinking. It needs a form as perfect as possible in order to express political ideas."

Many of the teachers at the Shanghai Conservatory had been sent to farms to tend pigs and work with the crops during the Cultural Revolution or had been otherwise oppressed by the Gang of Four. That time was and is now a matter of history, but it figured prominently in all conversations we had with the faculty at the Conservatory.



Making glass ornaments was a light industry at the Peking glass factory, where this woman worked. The Bureau of Light Industry in Peking directed this factory through a committee elected by the workers. As a master craftsperson, this woman trained apprentices who were assigned to her. (Veteran workers sometimes work with as many as six apprentices at a time. The training period lasts two years.) She worked very closely with her trainees, sitting shoulder to shoulder with each one in turn. Everything was conducted with a minimum of sound, the method of instruction being demonstration and imitation, a practice followed in most educational situations we observed.

Eye strain and the general physical well-being of most workers at the factory were worrisome. They all sat at wooden benches on uncomfortable wooden seats; their eyes trained on flames with which they manipulated glass to form vividly colored, decorative objects. Among other things like talent and general good

health, good eyesight was very high on the list of selection criteria for working in this factory. Under the circumstances, however, many of the workers wore eyeglasses and the coffee break was a break for outdoor exercise.

Women were chosen for light industry because of their physical fitness for it rather than for heavier work. The responsible person (male) of another factory informed us of this. (We did encounter some women hard hats, however, who were extremely reluctant to be photographed—actually disappeared at the sight of a camera.) Not surprisingly, there were a large number of women working in the glass factory and the director and most of the apprentices were women. Their average wage was 50 yuan a month (about 25 U.S. dollars). Along with wages, workers received health benefits, gloves, caps, towels and haircuts. Women retired at the age of 50, men at 60, with a pension of 70% of their wages.



Veteran worker at the Peking glass factory. Photo credit: V.E. Browne.





Veteran painter, Fine Arts Studio, Tsinan. Photo credit: V. E. Browne.

The only woman painter we met on the entire trip was in the studio at Tsinan. (There were women painters and apprentices in the crafts factories, but their main work was composing paintings or designs "on the traditional order" to be embroidered, woven, carved, painted on fans, printed or put on whatever other products the factory made.) Our woman painter, a gentle 45- or 50-year-old veteran worker, had been taught by her father, who had been an established master painter before the revolution. Her work was original. That is, she developed her compositions from trips to the country or the parks in and around the city, where she sketched from nature. (Tsinan is called the City

of Springs and has many beautiful parks surrounding the more than 100 springs.) Her work was allegorical in style and subject matter—her own choice. Although she was confident in her creative freedom, there were echoes of a traditional 19th-century style in her work. Like her colleagues in the crafts factories, she worked a regular eight-hour day, six days a week in a confined work space. She occupied one corner of a room that measured no more than 10 by 15 feet and was shared with five other artists. Conditions were not wonderful in the Fine Arts Studio, but there is something to be said for the enforced discipline of an eight-hour day to work at one's art.



# Power Exchange 1: Chris Choy

Valerie Harris

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*The four Power Exchange Interviews that appear in this issue are the first of what I hope will be a series of dialogs with women of color. Women who are artistically and politically active, and who are experiencing their personal power by doing what they want to do and what they do best. For women, particularly minority women, to be artistically active and able to maintain themselves by their art in this society is in itself an important political coup. Anyone who has moved in or around the periphery of the visual arts, theater, or filmmaking circles in New York knows that these circles are very tight and, indeed, very white. So, what else is new? What is by no means a recent occurrence but, given the gross neglect by the establishment media, should still definitely be treated as news is that there are contributions being made to American culture every day by those of us who live and work outside of those tight, white circles. We are "making it"—making theater, making movies, making books and sculpture, and making peace and political policy. We are women—Black, Asian, Hispanic, American Indian. There is so much power in the communities we share. These interviews were taped, transcribed, and published so that we might begin to share the power.*

*The Power Exchange Interviews are with: Chris Choy, Executive Producer, Third World Newsreel; Barbara Ann Teer, Artistic and Executive Producer, National Black Theater; Suni Paz, Project Director, Encampment for Citizenship; and Camille Billops, sculptor and co-author of The Harlem Book of the Dead. Talking with each of these women was an elating experience. They affirmed my belief that fulfillment and personal power are manifested not only in creation and accomplishment, but in the process of accomplishing as well.*

*(In each interview my questions and comments are in italics.)*

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*First, tell me about the organization you work with, Third World Newsreel.*

Third World Newsreel actually started as Newsreel, which was formed in 1967. A group of people got together because they felt there was no alternative media exposing the reality of the Vietnam War. They felt an urgency to make films about what was really happening in Southeast Asia. They began to catch on nationally, you know, by plugging into the student movement, getting people involved. But it was pretty much dominated by white middle-class

males, just as the established media scene was, in terms of technical skills, access to funds, all kinds of things. By 1970-71 the women's movement began to grow, and women started taking more prominent positions in Newsreel. I came in on it in 1971.

*From where?*

I was teaching, I was a student, I did all kinds of things. I came because I'd heard it was a place where I could make social and politically relevant films. But I was the only non-white woman in the entire organization. There was one Black male. So I walked into this film group—I was all dressed up—and I walked into this hippy crib—the whole place was a mess. I just went in and said, "I want to learn how to make films." They were a little hesitant.

*You had no training?*

I had very little training. See, I'd always wanted to be an actress. I loved the movies. But I was raised in Communist China, and Asian culture in general considers actresses to be messed up, so it was decided that I should go into the sciences. I studied physics. But when I was teaching in a little community college in Jersey we rented a film from Newsreel, and when I saw it I said, "Hey, that's pretty hip!" So I looked them up. At that time in New York the Young Lords and the Panthers were hot, so when Newsreel saw that I was of the Third World people they sort of welcomed me. After being with Newsreel for about eight months it began to bother me that all these films about Third World people were being made by white people. Well, sometimes there were a few tokens involved but basically they were made by whites. Something was missing, some kind of gut feeling, something cultural, and I had problems dealing with that. So we organized a Third World caucus within Newsreel.

*And this caucus worked after hours?*

Yeah. We worked till 12 o'clock, 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock. But we were all real young. I was only 20 when I came in. So, after we organized the Third World caucus, some other people came in, like Sue Robeson, who is Paul Robeson's granddaughter, and all this created total chaos among the whites. There was a lot of antagonism because we were very nationalistic. Finally the whites decided they should disband, which was fine with us. They left us some equipment, though we had to struggle to get it. We argued that the equipment belonged to Newsreel, and whoever was left to continue to run the organ-



ization should get the equipment. But all the money, which was their personal money, went with them. So we were stuck with no money and hardly any skills. There were about twelve of us. And you know the folks are jive too, I mean, some of them didn't want to work, didn't want to learn, got into their ego trips. Still, we started making a film on Attica—*Teach Our Children*.

*Who worked on Teach Our Children?*

Sue Robeson and myself.

*Just you and Sue?*

Right—two women making a film about Black and Puerto Rican men in prison. Sounds funny. We were so nationalistic that every time a white person happened to show up in the film we'd purposely edit him out. Now when I look at that film it's a joke because it doesn't have any continuity. But the gut feeling was there... While doing that, we got evicted from our building and had to find another space. But on the day we were supposed to move only three people out of the twelve showed up. So the three of us moved and told the others bye-bye. We began to do some fund-raising while maintaining the office by renting the films left by Newsreel. The first time we applied for grants we were rejected, but the second time we received \$6,000 for three films. Soon after that there was only me and Sue left. We decided to call ourselves Third World Newsreel. Our films would focus primarily on minority peoples—Native Americans, Chicanos, Asians, Blacks, Puerto Ricans. We'd also make films focusing on women, who are even more oppressed, and we'd distribute films from Africa, Latin America, and Asia. That's how we justified the term "Third World." Now I don't even question the terminology because, domestically speaking, Third World means minority people united against their common oppression.



Chris Choy. Photo credit: Janet Goldner.

*When were you able to stop doing other things to support yourself and devote all your time to film-making?*

Never! I still can't. I was on welfare for a long time. I told them I wanted to make films, and that I was in a training program at Third World Newsreel and from that I was getting \$25 a week. So I qualified, although they told me I was crazy. But basically it comes down to this: if you want to do creative work you have to find support from somewhere or you have to do something against your will. I wanted to make films—that was it.

*You told me when we talked on the phone that you'd entered the Attica film in a Black film festival...*

Yes, International Black Film Festival, organized in Philadelphia. The film was really not that well done technically, but it was one of the first films that had that *feeling* coming through it. People still use that film... Anyway, we entered the film because we'd rented it to UCLA and the brothers there were very impressed with it, and also because Sue Robeson's name rang bells. Her name wasn't on the film because at that time Third World Newsreel had a regulation that no one's name would be used. But the festival people heard that she'd worked on it so they invited her. She told them I'd worked on it too but they said that since I'm not Black I wasn't eligible. There was a lot of arguing back and forth; I told them they were discriminating and that they should be understanding of the fact that smaller minority groups didn't have their own festival. I also felt that Blacks, who were most prominent in the Civil Rights Movement, should try to educate and unite other minorities in documenting our histories and present conditions. I personally felt that I'd learned a lot by reading the histories of other minority people. I'll tell you a story. Back in 1965 when I came to this country I was "adopted" by a white American family in North Carolina. I'd never met them, as I was in school, but they invited me down for Christmas. He was the vice-president of the First National Bank. Everything was cool until I got on the bus to go back to school and the driver told me to go to the back of the bus. I could hardly speak English but I managed to ask him why. He said, "Go to the back." And I saw that all the Black people were sitting in the back but it didn't occur to me that they might not *want* to sit there. So, I said to the driver, "No, I want to see the view," or something like that, my English was so bad. But getting back to the festival—finally we got in and we won. Later I began to realize that there were other issues that I wanted to explore, issues that didn't focus on purely nationalistic lines.

*You're billed as executive producer of Inside Women Inside, right?*

Well, those are just titles. That film happened because we'd gotten the \$6,000 from the New York State Council on the Arts to produce three films. Now, on the average, it costs a network \$40,000 to make a 30-minute film. But they gave us \$2,000. So I submitted a proposal for a film on women in prison because after Attica, we'd done one called *In the Event That Anyone Disappears* which was made in the Trenton-Rahway Prison, also male. My own



experience had been in the Women's House of Detention when I'd had problems with immigration. So subjectively I knew what it was like inside, the isolation. We started the film in 1974. It took five years to make it. We'd put out a call to women who might be interested in working with us and 50 women showed up—all colors, all classes. By the end of the project we were down to five.

*Were these five Third World women?*

All but one, but she'd done time in Bedford Hills. In fact, she's into her Muslim thing now... While we were shooting, though, the survival thing got so severe, I mean, \$25 here, \$25 there, that only Sue and me were left. Then, after five years together, Sue left, too.

*Well, how was she living all this time? Was she making it on \$25 a week, too?*

Maybe she got a little more, maybe \$50. But we were all living together in the same house, sharing expenses, so it was pretty cheap. We'd lived on the Lower East Side, Harlem, Upper West Side, Chinatown—it was cheap... So, I was left alone with the project and I was very frustrated because I feel that if you start something you should finish it. If you're one of those artists who makes art for art's sake, then you can take ten years to do it, but if you want to do something that is socially relevant you're in debt to the people you interview.

*When I saw Inside Women Inside at the Whitney I overheard a young white woman, obviously feminist, say the film was "just a cheap shot" at the prison system because it didn't address itself to the relationships women form while incarcerated. She said it was "just about prisoners, not women." What did you feel you were making a film about?*

Nothing complicated. I figured that there are a lot of people in this society who never get a chance to even open their mouths, especially women in prison. Sure, when you go in you're gonna hear a lot of complaints; they want to talk about their case. But I think it's very important for these people to be able to express whatever they're feeling. Obviously there are some more able to tie in a little logic with the situation than others but you have to look at the conditions. These women are not able to think larger than themselves because they have nothing for themselves.

*I didn't agree with this woman's remark because for me the film was about women—and these women were prisoners. For me there was no separating those facts, but maybe that was because most of those women were Black. See, it has something to do with my ambivalence toward the feminist movement. As Third World people, whether we are sympathetic toward feminism or are in fact feminists ourselves, there's no denying that we have different concerns.*

Definitely. That's why I'd gotten somewhat turned off by the feminist movement, after being very active in the International Women's Conference and all kinds of things. I found that those women who had the privilege of traveling all over the world, making reputations for themselves, were white middle-class women. In relationship to overall

society their oppression is very different. They don't encounter racism, they don't encounter the sexism that Third World men give Third World women—so it's a very different type of oppression. You can't simply lump it all together. And that's not only on the women's question, that's ethnically too. You know, most institutions, like HEW, operate on Moynihan's melting pot theory—let them all melt together and everything will be groovy. But that's incorrect because each ethnic group has its own traditions, histories, problems and struggles. There are a lot of similarities but you can't disregard the differences. Women's movement, same thing. Physically, we are all the same, but emotionally, as human beings, there is a big difference between a person living on welfare and one living in Westchester county. The women's movement fails to deal with that. Plus, Third World women should be concerned with the liberation of all people, because we'll never be free if our people are not free.

*What about the other film, Spikes to Spindles? Is that the newest one?*

No, we're just late releasing it. *Spikes to Spindles* was made in conjunction with the Chinese community. And again, more political people are talking about "Why did you not talk about the wages of the garment workers? You sound like you're pro-union a little bit." Well, the film was made for the Chinese community so the politics of the film has to be within their perspective.

*Of course, since you were funded by mostly Chinese organizations.*

Yeah, and at the end, when there wasn't enough money to do the subtitles in Chinese, those people raised \$2,000 more to have them put on the film. So I listened to the people, the garment workers, more than to the radicals. The people wanted the film.

*It seemed to me that you could have made three films out of this one. You dealt with the Peter Yew [police brutality] case, the garment workers, and the history of the Chinese in New York. Was there pressure from the community to include all of these issues?*

I'd have to say no. It was my own lack of direction. There was so much material because there weren't any other films being made about the community. I don't consider this *the* film; people will make other films, better films, but at least I've made an opening with this one. It's a good introductory film for people who have no idea what the Chinese are about.

*Have you thought of doing a film independently, without Third World Newsreel?*

I finished a film in December for ABC. It's about Asian-Americans in the Delaware Valley, and it includes Japanese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Koreans and Chinese.

*Are you and ABC pleased with it?*

Yeah, they're going to syndicate it. This film allowed me to go a little beyond what I've been dealing with. I got more into the problems of Asian families. Being confronted with Christianity and WASP values creates a real conflict for some



Asians. So the film shows how this conflict affects us as individuals. And I was more critical than I have been because Chinese don't like Blacks, that's a fact. Chinese don't like Puerto Ricans—they don't like them even more than they don't like Blacks because they live so close to the Puerto Ricans. They don't like whites either but they play with them more. The film shows some of this, although some Chinese won't want to hear about it.

*Who was your crew for this film?*

All Third World people, every one.

*You screened them and you hired them?*

Yeah, but they were mostly my co-workers at Third World Newsreel—they were all out of work. We were both women and men, and we did a very good job. We had three months to do it and we got it out on time! Shocked the shit out of them. ABC had initially commissioned Chris Choy, period, not Third World Newsreel, to do this film but we fought that and now the film is produced by Third World Newsreel. And this was important because the people at Third World Newsreel gave me a lot of support; they helped me keep my perspective. But I don't want to work for television again. Once is enough... The next thing I'm going to do is a film on battered women. We got a small grant to do it. We'll analyze how the middle-class woman, working-class woman, and the welfare mother all deal with this problem. I want to use the situation to discuss larger theoretical questions... One day I'd like to be able to make films in places where people don't normally go. Whenever there's been a war or a revolution it's been a male's task to cover it. A man is always up front.

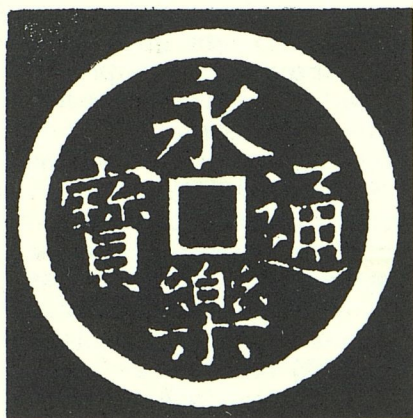
*And you'd like to be up front?*

I'd like to. I do have deficiencies, though. The camera weighs 40 pounds, I weigh 92 pounds. That's the number one problem. But the American Cinematographers Union is 99% white males. So, naturally they're not designing cameras for smaller built people. That's why I'd like to learn more about electronics—that fascinates me.



*Photo by Ray Plutnick*

**MRS. WAY-SUNG NEW OF CHINA**, a gentle, motherly woman, is expert and adviser to her delegation, and was on the Subcommission dealing with women's status. She has spent five years in the U. S. A. lecturing and studying since her 18-year-old son came here to attend Dartmouth. In China she was dean of women in the first co-educational university, a hospital administrator and director of a nursing school in Shanghai. She believes women require education in leadership "so that they will have more courage to be on their own. But I believe that men should have been on the Status of Women Subcommission, too. My idea is to have men and women co-operate, not each to work exclusively, women for women and men for men. . . . Women now have the right to vote in China, but they haven't exercised it yet, and neither have the men, because the war interfered. The constitution is still in draft form. . . . Polygamy is not legal in China any more, but it's a custom. I hope we can work it out positively, by enlightening women themselves. In Oriental countries we have to have more training for men in women's work (even home economics) and women in men's work, so that each can complement the other.





# Some Reflections on Black Women in Film

Rosemari Mealy

© 1979

I would like to present a brief outline on some important aspects of a subject about which I'm most concerned—the deletion of a correct portrayal of Black women in film. I've been in many political discussions around this topic and as a Black woman I've gone to theaters only to be insulted by what I've watched on the screen. I have thus internalized the topic based on having an understanding of my own oppression as a Black woman. One film made me so angry I wanted to leave before the first half. The film was *Which Way is Up*. The comedy of Richard Pryor became the rage of Rosemari Mealy. I was so busy verbally analyzing the sexist attitude of Pryor towards Black women that I made a few folks move to other seats. I applauded the Chicana sister when she drove off, with *his child* and *another man* leaving him to his petit bourgeois sexist antics. For me that film was a personification of the sexist decadence exemplified in “contemporary” Black film.

Since the early 70's contemporary Black films have done little or nothing to depict the correct image of Black people, much less that of Black women.

Some years ago, I read Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality*. Caudwell was a European scientist, writer, and poet. My respect for his writings increased when I learned that he was also an anti-fascist who died fighting as such. Caudwell saw art as “adapting the individual psyche to the environment, and [as] therefore one of the conditions of the development of society.” I agree with that perspective. Therefore, I cannot talk about the characterization of Black women in film without first understanding the characterization of Black people historically in film. And we all know that racism and sexism permeated that characterization.

*The Black Scholar* so amply summarized this characterization in its May 1976 issue:

The Hollywood film industry has historically been a chief arbiter of American cultural values and images. Hollywood has fashioned and purveyed a celluloid American Dream—a dream that has been extremely profitable for the white film-makers, and which has molded and titillated the psyches of millions and millions of moviegoers.

Hollywood movies created and popularized American heroes and villains—prototypically, the white cowboy-adventurer-secret agent portrayed in righteous combat against treacherous Indians, Asians or Blacks. (And when the villain was not actually dark-skinned, it was customary for him to wear a black hat and/or coat.) Movies have thus been a major institutional and ideological prop of American racism: distorting history, inculcating racist values and stereotypes, and largely excluding non-whites from participation in film-making.

The individual psyche of the Black theater audience has adapted to a dominant theme so prevalent in capitalist society. Violence then becomes the dominant theme in all social relationships. The perpetuation of racist and sexist stereotyping in film exacerbates the violence theme. Violence is an active phenomenon. Black women in film portray that violence; in reality, they are the victims of such in social and familial relationships—thousands of Black women were victims of domestic violence in the United States last year. The links between reality and the norms acceptable to institutions of society perpetuate the characterization within the film industry. Who are the heroes for our children? The pimp in *The Mack*, the super-niggers as portrayed by Fred Williamson and Jim Brown. What ingratiate these films to the bourgeoisie is the role most often portrayed by Black women—that of the victim as culprit. The extent of the Black woman's liberation on the screen is based on her willingness to take low, as well as how often she gives it up. From the historical perspective, the culprit has been the mammy, the tragic mulatto, the mammy-matriarch and the seductress.

In the March/April 1973 issue of *The Black Scholar*, Edward Mapp adequately describes the historical role of Black women in film. He cites only one example of Hollywood's portrayal of the Black woman's experience as a possible take off point for extending a positive approach to Black women in film. He cites *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972) for its depiction of the Black female's contribution to American culture and art. But even this is a totally inaccurate portrayal of the real life of Billie Holiday. I say we need films about Lucy Parsons, Black woman worker/labor organizer; the 1969 Charleston



Women Hospital workers, Ida b. Wells, Beulah Sanders, Fannie Lou Hammer, Ella Baker and Florence Wrice, ILGWU organizer; we need more films like *Nothing But a Man*, which creates a positive image in a negative context.

In the 70's, spurred on by the cultural nationalist movement, we were to produce a new image, but the very first Black multi-million dollar film set the tone for what was later to be Hollywood's economic bail-out and a contemporary version of *Green Pastures*, where porkchops and watermelon were replaced by butts, bosoms and gun-toting niggers—black-faced versions of what was once the exclusive property of the white, male, racist and sexist dominated industry. *Sweet Sweetback's Bad-ass Song* was the film—a nightmare from the mind of Melvin Van Peebles.

The initial screen image presented by the film of the "New Black Image," even before the film title was introduced, is a Black woman prostitute committing statutory rape on a 10-year-old Black child. And it is significant that the first image was created by a Black male. But lest we fall into our bourgeois or feminist trap of the simplistic notion of Black men against Black women, we must define what kind of man Van Peebles is—what is his class attitude? It was always defined by him in terms



of money!!! To be sure, the brother was talented and witty. He even got across the racist Hollywood unions to make this flick, claiming he was giving Black people jobs, providing them with technical skills and film exposure. But how many of these non-union Black men and women were to reap a significant portion of the more than \$12 million in profits? And what organizations did Van Peebles leave behind to intervene and counter the racism of the union?

How women were depicted within the supposedly "New Image" was no more than a capitulation to sexist ideology. The screen no longer reflected the passive mammies, the tragic mulattos. They were now in the modern feminist idiom: the aggressive, gun-toting and in some cases emasculating "free fucking women," perpetuated by superstars Pam Greer, Vonetta McGee, and Pamela Dodson. They headed the money-making movies with their large breasts, long legs and pretty eyes rather than with their acting abilities. Or we saw the bit players whose primary acting talents lay in their ability to moan, groan and succumb to the ex-football machos like Jim Brown and Fred Williamson, or non-football heroes like Richard Roundtree. Again, these were men and women who were more committed to the mighty dollar—Hollywood—than to

portraying a positive image to Black people. None of them had the social consciousness of our first Black film star, Paul Robeson, whose portrayal of The Emperor Jones and a Black miner in the Welsh miners film called *Proud Valley* intimidated white film-makers. Paul Robeson was an ex-all-American football player who could also sing and act, even in the so-called "legitimate theater." But he refused to be housenigger. In his book *Hear I Stand* he said, "The artist must elect to fight for freedom or slavery. I have made my choice." Between 1942 and 1946 his income dropped from \$100,000 to \$6,000.

There are some contemporary women who have refused to prostitute their talent. Cicely Tyson starved for years before she got the half-decent roles of Jane Pittman and the mother in "Roots." However, both dramas had their shortcomings due to the commercialism of the productions. Read the book to determine how Kizzy and the other women might have been portrayed. In the book, for example, Kunta didn't get caught because he stopped off to get a quicky, and it was he, not Belle, who fought to keep the slave buyer from taking his precious Kizzy. Note in the TV version that Belle's strength in fighting for Kizzy while Kunta fell crying to his knees was an excellent example of how the Black woman's image is manipulated to relegate the Black man to a demeaning, subservient position. Similarly in the show "Good Times," at one time TV's only complete and positive Black family, a strong John Amos was killed off, leaving Esther Rolle in a neo-mammy role, catering to the character played by Jimmy Walker. In this case, the demise of the strong male image manipulates the strong woman into a less than positive image.



The petit bourgeois will always level criticism at the progressive film-maker for presenting "Documentaries" as opposed to "Art" forms. This fragmented distinction between "art" and "reality" is a superficial offspring of a bourgeois capitalist society, reinforced by the artists/critics who see themselves separated and alienated from the masses.

Film-makers like Haille Gerima, Ousmane Sembene, Nana Mahomo, Chris Choy, Robert Van Lierop, and Jose Garcia will continue to have limited exposure. It is unfortunate that their creations will not reach the mass media and will never be the dominant theme of American film under the present economic system.

The internationally acclaimed Cuban cinema could never have existed in the old days. It



came only after the revolution. The award winning film *Lucia* demonstrates the ability of film to portray women in a revolutionary historical perspective. Its mass distribution is attributed to the Cuban revolution. Only now, as in Bob Van Lierop's *O Povo Organizado*, do we see a revolutionary historical perspective of the African woman. Now Mozambique's artists are able to produce revolutionary images on a mass basis through the establishment of the National Cinema Institute.

Black film-makers must now become proletarianized—organizers, building the unions that Van Peebles failed to build, going beyond the boundaries of bourgeois nationalism and making the necessary links with revolutionary film-makers on an international basis. Most desirably, when Black women themselves become involved in the film-making process there will be an appreciable change in portraying the true image of Black women in film, a portrayal which reflects our social reality.



Mrs. Rosanelle Powell Whiskey Run Road, Camden, 1966.

It ain't hot. It's hell out here.

I was paying one hundred seventy-five dollars a year for that house, and it looked like it was about to fall. I was afeared the wind would blow it away. I had about twenty acres. I didn't make much, but I managed to get my children into college. Now I farm a little corn for the cows. I don't farm no cotton, 'cause there wasn't nothing to it.

I have ten children, but they're only three left. All the rest done gone to Connecticut.

It's been sad times. Jack and Bob and King are dead. They killed them, because they didn't want the Negroes brought out from under their feet. That's how come they killed them. I don't see nothing else.

—Mrs. Powell



# On Never Quite Being Good Enough: Legal Institutional Racism, Sexism and Elitism

Yvonne A. Flowers

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*For those of us  
who were imprinted with fear  
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads  
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk  
for by this weapon  
this illusion of some safety to be found  
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us  
for all of us  
this instant and this triumph  
we were never meant to survive*

—Audre Lorde, “#40 Litany for Survival”

As the curtain of economic scarcity drops over our daily lives, Black and other Third World women are running smack into the brick wall of legal institutional racism and sexism. We are being told, “You do not qualify to do the jobs you want to do. You do not meet the criteria for what is good enough.” After the sixties and the women’s movement, tokenism and fair employment legislation, we are still being squeezed out of making money, making decisions and having control over our lives. White folks are still telling us that we don’t measure up.

In high school during the forties, I was told by my advisor that I was a C student and would always be, so I shouldn’t even bother to go to college. Coming from the big white lady who is supposed to know about these things, on some level, I believed her. There were no role models, Black women or men or other Third World people teaching there to make me think otherwise. I was well into my thirties before I began to get out from under the impact of those words from the authorities: “you’re not good enough.”

Well, I went to college twice. Once to undergraduate school for a B.A. and again to graduate school to become an occupational therapist. No role models there to assuage my doubts about any Black women being good enough. And now I teach in college and often think, “See, Mrs. Murphy didn’t know what she was talking about in 1947”...until the issue of my tenure put me right back in touch with the question of “never quite being good enough.”

Today, legal institutional racism and sexism continue to operate. Sometimes it is blatant, at other times more subtle, but rarely do we hear it publicly challenged these days. And if so, the old cries “racist and sexist” are usually dead news by the next day. Discrimination in institutions does not necessarily occur by conscious intent or personal prejudice against a group. But racism, ethnic and language group discrimination, sexual prejudice and discrimination as to gender and sexual orientation, and elitism as to educational or economic class are a part of every institution in America. Ageism and all the other “isms” are practiced there too. We are told to believe it has gone away.

In most institutions, racism is fostered and nurtured by middle-aged white men who have the inclination and the power to hire and retain those persons who are exactly like themselves, i.e., “middle-aged white men,” and exclude all others. This is especially true where critical decisions are made, and future directions and strategies are planned. You may be included if you can prove that you can think and act exactly like a middle-aged white man. (Among Black folks we call them “Oreo” cookies—black on the outside and white on the inside.)

Some women are a kind of “Oreo” too. That is, male-identified women. Women on the outside and men on the inside where their value system has incorporated all the sexist attitudes of men. These women may or may not look like men. They may or may not be lesbian women; more than likely they are not. The phenomenon of identification with the aggressor, or the oppressor as Paulo Freire defines it, does not end



there. We find it among all the "isms," "closeted" homosexuals who are really homophobic, older persons who are on the top and will not hire their peers or their seniors, etc. Many of these people make it to middle management positions, assisting the boss, overseers, keeping the "niggers" in line with even more ferociousness than the boss himself. We frequently see through their appearance because they feel like "the man."

The message to us is always "you're not good enough" and "you don't measure up to the job." But you can't measure up, because who designed the very ruler by which you are being measured? Certainly it wasn't no little Black girls. White men have set all the criteria for who and what is good enough. Women, African-Americans and other Third World people, the young, the elderly and the handicapped have had no input into those criteria that measure them, and have had little, if any, chance to meet them. For have they had the very same opportunities that are offered by money, skin color privilege, education, self-esteem, etc., that white men have had?

And if one happens to meet the criteria, that is also no insurance for facts can be distorted, criteria ignored, behind the scene manipulations can occur and technicalities are often raised; all done to ensure those with the power protection from the "others" and to stamp the "others" as not quite good enough.

So we don't get to make the rulers. If so, we might make it an 11-inch "foot" ruler or a 13-inch "foot" ruler and middle-aged white men might not fit. They might not meet the new criteria. They might be short on or lacking in spirit or humility, be overconfident and/or poor managers. Look around our world. What a mess they have made. Look at the output of middle-aged white men in charge of government, energy, health, inflation, etc., and one can see they are certainly very short on problem-solving skills.

When you step back and take a good look at who is making money off of whom, these middle-aged white men and their agents look like pimps. In ever-increasing numbers, at least in the urban areas, Third World people and women are consuming the services of the health and education industries. One might say these men are pimping off us. This seems especially true in the so-called alternative institutions and programs that were created from the aftermath of the "revolution," "riots," demands and court actions of the sixties. These same institutions quietly slipped back into subtle racist and sexist politics in the guise of a need for financial and economic feasibility. And those who did make it into the inner sanctum go the way of "the last hired and the first fired."

Well, we must consider what to do about it. One thing, we must begin to get our focus clear. We don't have to feel bad when they say we don't fit. We are not incompetent and must get beyond feeling like a "fraud" in their (our) work spaces or feeling guilty about our supposed failures. Remember, their attitudes say more about them than they say about us. They are the ones with the problem.

Well, what about the endless process of "qualifying" to meet their standards? Well, we can keep on qualifying until we get sick of it. Getting the necessary credentials is costly and time-consuming and never a guarantee. But while doing so, we ought to be careful that we do not become male-identified or "whiticized" as Sylvia Vitale says. Take measures to counteract that phenomenon. Take strong doses of the antidote like Black and Third World Studies, women's studies, and humanistic studies so that you know who you are.

We can set our own criteria and standards. When working alone and together we discover our own values and our own styles and know they are no less valid than those of the European patriarchy. We can be proud of our own when they feel "right." Yes we can get angry with the man and tell 'bout himself. Rage is an appropriate and necessary reaction to oppression which blocks our need for safety, mastery and self-actualization. It's about living not just surviving. And laugh at him too, with the silly business of covering up his inadequacies with face-saving arrogance. And above all don't forget the revolution has just begun. Get ready to struggle, you do qualify for that.



Zora Neale Hurston. 1901-1960. Novelist, folklorist and anthropologist who had more books published than any other Black American woman and epitomizes the African American woman's struggle "to be good enough." Photo credit: Carl Van Vetchen, 1935.



Friends

of

Mabel Hampton  
(b. 1902)



Maude Brown

1930



Mary Jane Taylor

1930





# Homophobia: Myths and Realities

Naeemah Shabazz

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This essay will speak to homophobia and identify some of the basic institutions that help formulate our sexual politics and reinforce societal myths about lesbians. Homophobia is a social illness characterized by the fear of being defined as, associated with, mistakenly identified for, a homosexual. At the New York Association of Black Psychologists Fourth Annual Spring Conference, Yvonne Flowers defined homophobia to the conference as "an exaggerated fear of homosexuals." This exaggerated fear is based on myths propagated by those institutions that help shape our lives. Homophobia is suffered by heterosexual and lesbian women, and is one of the major causes of division within the feminist movement. Lesbianism is often used as a "discipline" on heterosexual women to keep them "in line" and under control.

Lesbianism will be defined here as an intimate relationship between women on the conscious level; elements of this intimate relationship being love, sensitivity, spiritual nurturing, validation of self, emotional and psychological growth.

A bird's-eye view of the sexual socialization of women in this society shows the kind of input our basic institutions have in determining the norms that govern acceptable behavior, which is not to be taken lightly by lesbian or heterosexual women. The family, the church and the school are the primary institutions that reinforce a "functional role theory" for women and interpret women's behavior as "female inferior negative" and, for lesbians, "deviant inferior negative."

The home is the primary foundation for socialization, and it is crucial in the development of sexual awareness and acceptance of one's own sex. Here children are exposed to the views of parents and very early internalize them as their own. In children's play one can hear the tapes played back by children (i.e., "Good little girls don't do that"). Play is one of the ways a child forms a repertoire of the dos and don'ts of the already-existing society. The child continues to internalize and imitate the parents' views and behavior until other surrogate socializers are introduced, such as baby-

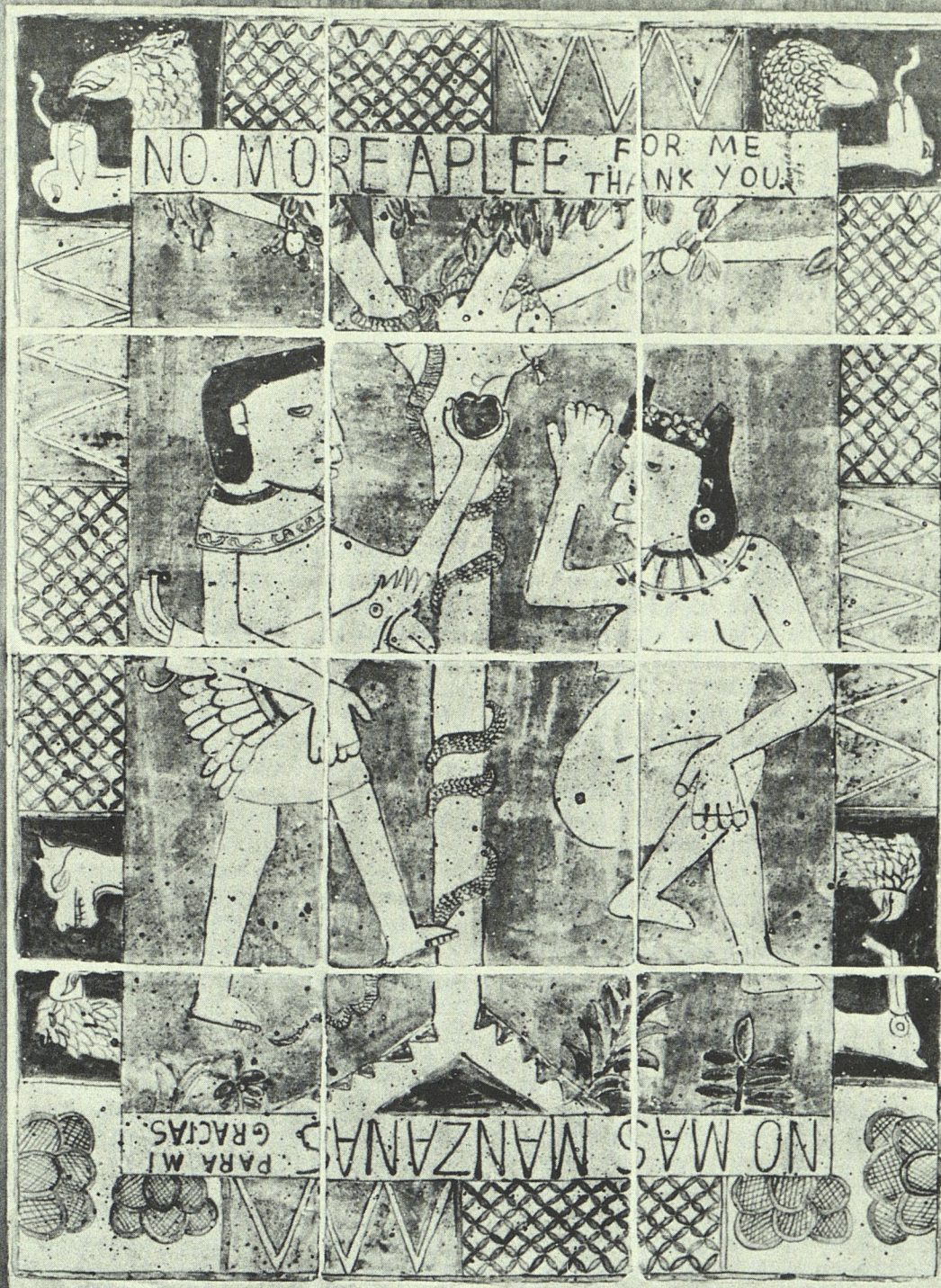
sitters, relatives, peer groups and other institutions. Elementary school educators define the goals that serve as a basic guideline for the school curriculum. One of the goals is to provide personal, social, moral, educational and vocational guidelines. The elementary school in this society has the responsibility of helping the six- to twelve-year-old learn the developmental task that goes with that age.

From a sexual orientation perspective, the developmental task for age six to twelve is learning an appropriate sexual role. In the case of the female, sex roles are dictated in elementary school and many times go unchallenged as subtle sexist philosophies are interwoven into the curriculum. Even though most elementary schools are coeducational, some classroom and playground activities are sex-typed. A classic example: teacher to class, "I need a strong boy to move a desk. Mary, would you water the plants?" Elementary school reading books continue to designate woman's primary role as mother-homemaker, teacher, nurse and volunteer service worker, while defining man's role as breadwinner, doctor, lawyer, shopowner and politician. While the defined roles of women mentioned are not any less important than those given to men, they are limited and do not lend themselves to women participating in the major decision-making arena of society.

Secondary schools continue to propagate the "functional role theory" through sex education classes that deal only superficially with the needs of women to be sexually competent outside of the realm of motherhood. Undergraduate and graduate schools continue to operate under the "female negative inferior" philosophy in the areas of faculty distribution and student admission. Ann Sutherland Harris, in her essay "The Second Sex in Academe," quoted President Nathan Pusey of Harvard, reacting to the possibility of the draft reducing male enrollment: "We shall be left with the blind, the lame, and the women." Harris asserts that "the excuse for limiting its female undergraduate enrollment to 25% of the total is that there is insufficient accommodation for women."<sup>1</sup>

The church has equal input into the sexual socialization of women. It asserts that woman,





Magdalena Suarez Frimkess. Stoneware tile.

created from the negative side of man, is responsible for the sins of the world and the pain of childbirth is a direct result of her cunning ability, intellectual inferiority and debasing nature. Consequently, she is constantly asking forgiveness for being a woman, being grateful for the inadequate space allotted her for religious administration and accepting her sexual inferiority as a divine act. The church

through its philosophy reinforces the "female negative inferior" image of women.

The church, coupled with the home and the school, laid the foundation for the existing societal myths about women, namely lesbians, who have defined themselves sexually outside the norm. These myths are used as a "discipline" on other women who *even* consider denouncing the "functional role theory" in ex-



change for personal happiness and fulfillment.  
What are the myths about lesbians?

1. A woman is a lesbian because she possesses a natural defect.  
("female negative inferior")
2. A lesbian is emotionally unstable, sexually frustrated, self-indulgent and morally degenerate.  
("deviant negative inferior")
3. A lesbian is anti-revolutionary, hates men, suffers from penis envy and is a security risk.  
("deviant negative inferior")
4. A lesbian wears men's clothes, is sexually aggressive and physically unattractive.  
("deviant negative inferior")
5. A lesbian is afraid of men based on her past experiences and has inner conflicts because she needs a man.  
("female negative inferior")

These myths about lesbians make up the symptoms of homophobia, whose basic element is fear. This unfounded fear produces a chain of defensive reactions that serve to alienate women from each other, thus weakening communication between women. Homophobia is suffered by lesbians and heterosexual women and is manifested in their oppressive behavior when addressing themselves to the lesbian lifestyle. It is not uncommon that the oppressed incorporate the values of the oppressor to maintain certain kinds of control. Women who subscribe to this behavior are said to be male-identified, in that they share the same views about women that men do. These women may fear a loss of sexual power or have unconsciously accepted the "female negative inferior" concept of themselves and act it out in their relationships with other women. In the corporate world the male-identified woman serves as a tool for stifling economic growth and creativity among women. One of the concerns of the Third World Lesbian Feminist Movement is the result of the socialization process that goes with upward mobility and its relationship to the oppressed becoming the oppressor, which takes its toll on Third World lesbian feminists.

One of the greatest fears of the homophobic heterosexual woman is to be remotely connected to a lesbian in word, action or deed. To her it may mean a loss of status among men, a destiny she cannot bear. It is the man who has defined her nature and given her a purpose in life. Homophobia serves as a defense mechanism for she may be paranoid about admitting to her own sexual experiences as a child and the implications of lesbianism. Her inner conflict relating to her sexual self may result in a

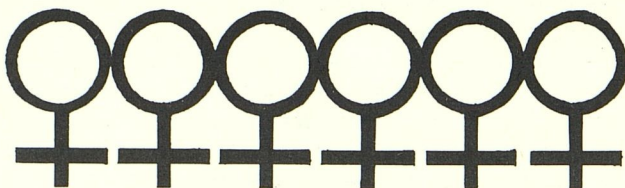
fanatical approach to heterosexuality, and she finds it easy to attach a moral judgment on lesbianism. The homophobic lesbian or heterosexual woman may doubt the political awareness and intellectual ability of lesbians in exchange for prevailing stereotypes. She may support competition as inherent in men, and limit her participation in a collective decision-making environment. She may also distrust the feminist movement, see it as counter-revolutionary, destructive, and may assist at some level in the attempt to sabotage the women's movement, based on fear and sexual contradictions.

Homophobia leaves a woman open to sexist manipulation, mind control, and can result in socioeconomic genocide for women.

Some of the prevailing myths about lesbians need to be put into the proper perspective. The lesbian suffers no more emotional stress, sexual frustration and inner conflict than her heterosexual sister. In fact much could be said about the maturity of the lesbian who relates to her sexual politics as having relevance outside of the "functional role theory." Third World lesbians, while not anti-race or counter-revolutionary, do question the role of the Third World woman in the revolution as it relates to the "female negative inferior" concept held by Third World men in the society.

While some lesbians do see themselves as sexually aggressive, their behavior cannot be linked to the high incidence of sexual violence suffered by women and young girls. All lesbians are not separatist, or feminist, or unattractive, or suffering from penis envy, or secretly craving for a man. A lesbian may or may not have had a meaningful relationship with a man. She may or may not wear men's clothing, or drive a truck, or spit between her teeth, or live in the Village, or wear purple.

The true lesbian sees herself no less than her male or female counterpart, but understands the implications of the distinct difference in the species as it relates to the spiritual development of the individual. One could say that the lesbian has turned "woman love" inside; subsequently the content became the form. She receives her emotional, psychological and spiritual nurturing from woman, and credits her highly developed sensitivity to that energy.





## Political Self-Portrait #2

Adrian Piper

© 1979

My folks had to send me away to camp when I was five because they both had to work overtime that summer and didn't want to leave me alone in that hot apartment. It was a girls' camp for the children of practicing Protestants called Camp Good Hope. I had a friend named Karl who was sixteen and came from the boys' camp across the lake. He played catch and volleyball with me and took care of me and I adored him. I told someone that he was my big brother (I'm an only child) and she said, But that's impossible; Karl's white and you're colored. She said Colored. I didn't know what she meant. Karl and I were pretty much the same color except that he had blue eyes. A few years later my mom thought it was time I started going to and from school by myself instead of her taking me on the bus. The school was far away because it was not a local public school but rather an expensive progressive prep school called New Lincoln where there were lots of rich mediocre white kids and a few poor smart white kids and even fewer, poorer, even smarter black kids. But all I knew then was that there sure was a difference between where most of them lived (Fifth Avenue) and where I lived (Harlem). Anyway I started going to school by myself and the neighborhood kids would waylay me as I was walking the two blocks from the bus stop to my house and would pull my braids and tease me and call me Paleface. By then I knew what they meant. No one at school ever called me Paleface. Once I was visiting one of my white classmates at her big fancy apartment house on Central Park West where there were four doors into the house with a doorman standing at each and two separate elevators with an elevator man for each and only one apartment on a floor and a cook and a maid and a cleaning woman and a governess (!!!). She said to her little brother I bet you can't guess whether Adrian is white or colored. He looked at me for a long time and very searchingly and said White. And she said You lose, she's colored, isn't that a scream? I thought it was really a scream. I was afraid of the black kids on my block because they bullied me and I was afraid of the black kids at school because they made cutting remarks about my

acting too white. But I wasn't afraid of the white kids because they were so stupid. Later when I was in fifth grade and getting sick a lot and hating school I had a teacher named Nancy Modiano who really bullied me. Once we all went on a hike and I became very thirsty and she wouldn't let me stop at a water fountain for some water. When my mom came to pick me up I was almost fainting. In conference with my parents she once asked them Does Adrian know she's colored? I guess she must have thought I was too fresh and uppity for a little colored girl. My folks were very upset and wanted to transfer me into another class but it was too near the end of the term. Nancy Modiano was one of the few whites who overtly bullied me because of my color. The only others were white philosophy students later when I was in college who hated me and said You don't have to worry about graduate school; a black woman can get in anywhere, even if she looks like you. But as I got older and prettier, white people generally got nicer and nicer, especially liberals. I was very relieved when my folks moved out of Harlem when I was fourteen, and into a mixed neighborhood on Riverside Drive because there we weren't so conspicuous, and besides the boys in my old neighborhood were no longer pulling just my braids when I passed them on the street. In my new neighborhood I hung out with a Puerto Rican gang that accepted me pretty well and taught me to curse in Spanish. I didn't see New Lincoln people very much because they were turning into boring and neurotic people and were really getting into being rich. But I made other friends when I started going to the Art Students' League and Greenwich Village. I noticed that all my friends were white and that I didn't have much in common with the children of my parents' very light-skinned, middle class, well-to-do black friends. They seemed to have a very determined self-consciousness about being colored (they said Colored) that I didn't share. They and many of my relatives thought it was a scandal that I went out with white men. I felt just as alienated from whites as blacks, but whites made me feel good about my looks rather than apologetic. When someone asked



me why I looked so exotic I would either say I'm West Indian (my mother's Jamaican) or if they looked really interested I would go on at length about my family tree: how my mother's family is English, Indian from India and African, and how there's a dispute about my father's family which my grandmother told me about before she died because there are now two branches of the Piper family, the rich ones who now live in Chicago and founded the Piper Aircraft Company and the poor ones, i.e. us; how they were originally a single English family who settled in the South but at some point split up and disowned each other (i.e. the rich ones disinherited the poor ones) because the poor ones publicly admitted to being partly descended from the slaves who worked on their plantation and the rich ones didn't want to acknowledge any African blood in the family; but how for the poor ones it was a matter of honor after the Civil War not to pass for white. But I would never simply say Black because I felt silly and as though I was coopting something, i.e. the Black Experience, which I haven't had. I've had the Gray Experience. Also I felt guilty about unjustifiedly taking advantage of justified white liberal guilt. But I would never deny that I am black because I understand how it can be a matter of pride and honor for my folks to positively affirm their heritage and I don't want to deny a part of myself that I'm proud of. But sometimes I wonder why I should be caught in this bind in the first place; why I should have to feel dishonest regardless of whether I affirm or deny that I'm black; and whether I, my family, and all such hybrids aren't being victimized by a white racist ideology that forces us to accept an essentially alien and alienating identity that arbitrarily groups us with the most oppressed and powerless segment of the society (black blacks) in order to avoid having that segment gradually infiltrate and take over the sources of political and economic power from whites through the de facto successful integration of which we hybrids are the products and the victims. When I think about that I realize that in reality I've been bullied by whites as well as blacks for the last three hundred years. And there is no end in sight.



#### Redeemed in Virginia

By Catherine S. Lawrence. Baptized in Brooklyn, at Plymouth Church, by Henry Ward Beecher, May, 1863. Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence, a Redeemed **SLAVE CHILD**, 5 years of age.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1863, by C. S. Lawrence, in the Clerk's Office of the district Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New-York.

Photograph by Renowden, 65 Fulton Av. Brooklyn.



# Without Consent

## THE CASE OF NORMA JEAN SERENA

Norma Jean Serena is a Native American woman from western Pennsylvania who, in 1970, was sterilized against her will and without her knowledge. Why was she sterilized? Employees of the Armstrong County Welfare Department decided that because she was poor, and a Native American who lived with a Black man, she was an "unfit mother." Together with medical personnel, the caseworkers authorized a "therapeutic" sterilization, listing her "socio-economic status" as the medical reasons. The sterilization was in no way necessary for Ms. Serena's health.

Not only was there a conspiracy to sterilize her, but her three children were taken away from her as well. She was told that her children were seriously ill, which they weren't, and that they would be returned when they "recovered." Meanwhile, plans were made for the children to be adopted. They were placed in foster homes and illegally kept from her for more than three years.

Norma Jean Serena brought suit against ten professionals (both as individuals and in their official capacities) and a hospital, charging them with seven counts of conspiracy and violations of her constitutional rights. The suit was in the courts for over five years. The judge refused to waive court fees, unusual when the plaintiff is poor. In addition, Amicus participation for ACLU was denied by the court. The State of Pennsylvania, which is subsidizing a large portion of the defense, did everything it could to keep the case from coming to court.

In January, 1979, an all-white six-person jury of two women and four men awarded Norma Jean Serena \$17,000 damages for the theft of her children, but nothing for damages for the forced sterilization. She is appealing that verdict.

This terrible outcome, along with equally racist verdicts in the case of the ten Chicano women in California (see CARASA News, Volume II, No. 7, August 1978), shows clearly that abused women cannot expect anything in the courts except more insensitivity and brutality. The only effective short-term solutions must be prevention. Remedies after the fact are useless and cannot restore lost fertility or heal psychic scars.

Ms. Serena is fighting for herself and for all poor and Third World women who face forced sterilization in the name of 'family planning' and loss of children in the name of 'child welfare'. If she wins, hers will be a precedent-setting case. It will be the first time sterilization without informed consent will be judged a violation of civil rights, and the first time social workers will be made individually accountable for their actions.

You can write to Norma Jean Serena c/o CESA P.O. Box A 244, Cooper Station, New York, New York, 10003.

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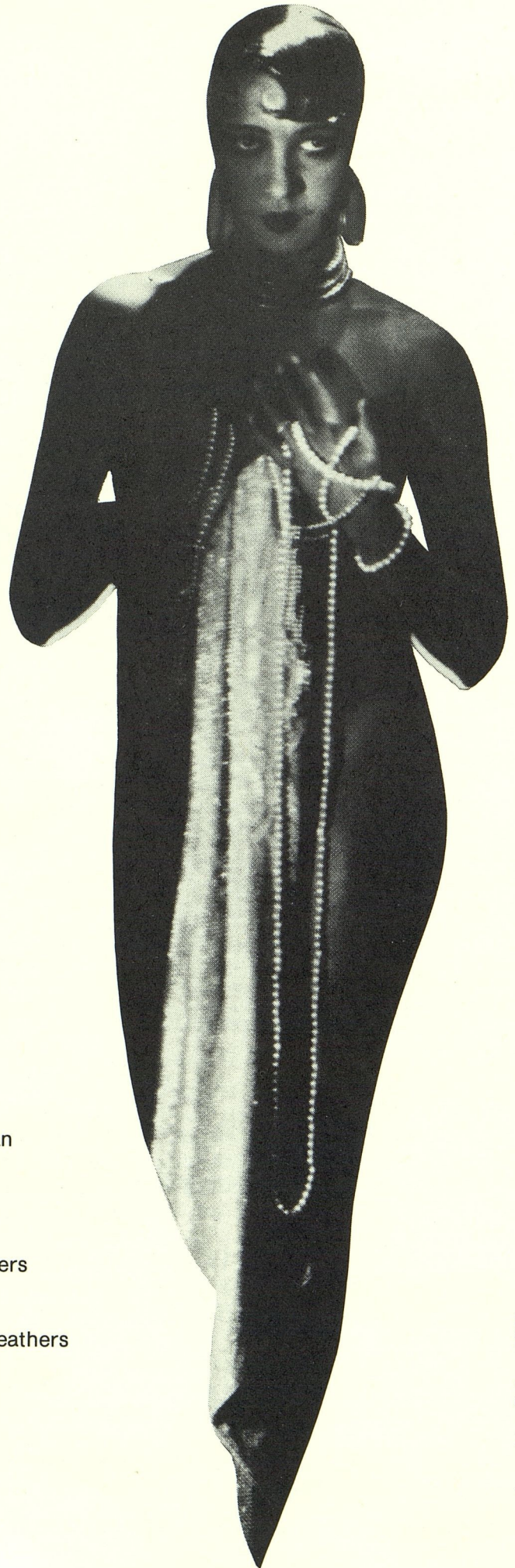
# So Many Feathers

Jayne Cortez

© 1979

You danced a magnetic dance  
in your rhinestones and satin banana G-strings  
it was you who cut the river  
with your pink diamond tongue  
did the limbo on your back  
straight from the history of southern flames  
onto the stage where your body  
covered in metallic flint  
under black and green feathers strutted  
with wings of a vulture paradise on your head  
strutted among the birds  
until you became terror woman of all feathers  
of such terrible beauty  
of such fire  
such flames  
all feathers Josephine  
This Josephine  
exploding red marble eyes in new york  
this Josephine  
breaking color bars in miami  
this Josephine  
mother of orphans  
legion of honor  
rosette of resistance  
this Josephine before  
splitting the solidarity of her beautiful feathers.

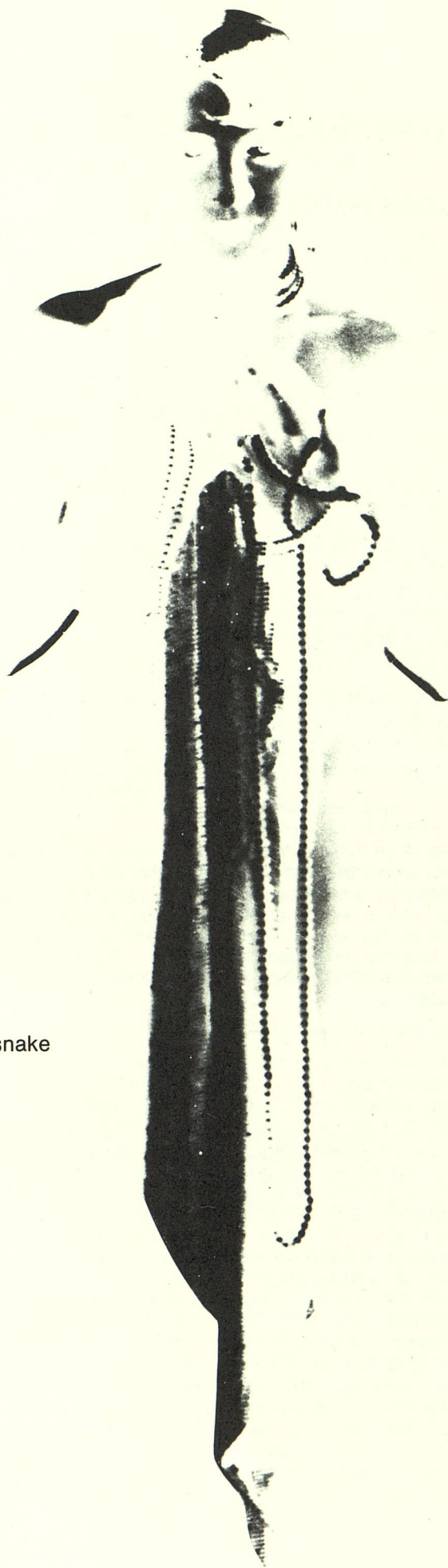
Feather-woman of terror  
such feathers so beautiful  
Josephine  
with your frosted mouth half-open  
why split your flamingos  
with the death white boers in durban south africa  
Woman with magnificent face of life mask  
why all the teeth for the death white boers in durban  
Josephine you had every eyelash in the forest  
every feather flying  
why give your beaded snake-hips  
to the death white boers in durban  
Josephine didn't you know about the torture chambers  
made of black flesh and feathers  
made by the death white boers in durban  
Josephine terror-woman of terrible beauty of such feathers  
I want to understand why dance  
the dance of the honorary white  
for the death white boers in durban



Josephine Baker. 1929.



After all Josephine  
 I saw you in your turquoise headdress  
 with royal blue sequins pasted on your lips  
 your fantastic legs studded with emeralds  
 as you kicked as you bumped as you leaped in the air  
 then froze  
 your body breaking lightning in fish net  
 and Josephine Josephine  
 what a night in harlem  
 what electricity  
 such trembling  
 such goose pimples  
 so many feathers  
 Josephine  
 dancer of the magnetic dancers  
 of the orange flint pelvis of the ruby navel  
 of the purple throat  
 of the feet pointing both ways  
 of feathers now gone  
 Josephine Josephine  
 I remember you rosette of resistance  
 southern flames  
 Josephine of the birdheads, ostrich plumes  
 bananas and sparkling G-strings  
 Josephine of the double-jointed knees  
 double-jointed shoulders double-jointed thighs  
 double-jointed breasts double-jointed fingers  
 double-jointed toes double-jointed eyeballs  
 double-jointed hips doubling  
 into a double squat like a double star into a giant double snake  
 with the double heartbeats of a young girl  
 doubling into woman-hood  
 and grinding into an emulsified double spirit  
 Josephine terror-woman of feathers i remember  
 Josephine of such conflicts i remember  
 Josephine of such floating i remember  
 Josephine of such heights i remember  
 Josephine  
 of so many transformations i remember  
 Josephine  
 of such beauty i remember  
 Josephine of such fire i remember  
 Josephine of such sheen i remember  
 Josephine  
 so many feathers i remember  
 Josephine Josephine





## Power Exchange 2: Barbara Ann Teer

Valerie Harris

© 1979

*Your fall 1978 production of Softly Comes a Whirlwind was described in the Theater Development Fund calendar as "a musical experience about the inter-personal relationships of women moving to experience their personal power." What prompted you to create a piece around that theme?*

The piece is about support. It's about people encouraging other people to love themselves, to have unconditional self-love. What motivated me to do that, well, that's my life. The piece reflects some of the steps that people have to go through to get out of their survival needs, that is, their attachments to staying on top of life while comin' from lack, comin' from less than, comin' from "I can't do it," "I'm afraid to do it," or "I don't deserve it"—comin' from all these considerations that keep us locked into not putting ourselves out into the world, that keep us from demonstrating our power. Our potential can never be realized when we have all these fears that we're not good enough. So, when you have a network of support around you you're able to go through whatever you have to go through in order to present yourself to the world. Which is ultimately what it's all about—people experiencing themselves as complete, as whole, wholesome human beings and nurturing environments that allow us to grow, to blossom, to expand. That's what we have at NBT (National Black Theater). The play reflects that.

*You know, it's not just a play...*

I'm not one who is in love with the traditional European play form, as everybody knows. I've never done straight plays with plots and romance and all that. But for ten years I've innovated new forms, we've developed them, and we've always had problems marketing our product because there are very few people who want to participate in life and share themselves with other people. Zuri McKie, who did the lead in the show, has been with me for ten years. She used to be an opera singer and she wanted to study acting so she asked if I would teach her. I had already started the mechanisms for creating a national Black theater as a workshop situation, so we all moved uptown and ten years later this is what it is. But Zuri wanted to sing again and I supported her. What I had to do was write a piece that would present her in a fashion that she'd be comfortable with. So, that's how this piece came about. I wrote it for her out of my love for her—which is really a high compliment for an artist to pay to another artist. No one ever wrote anything for me like that.

*Of course, you're familiar with the kind of work that a lot of Black theaters do, which is mostly "domestic drama." But even though the characters in those plays are Black, those plays are still European in form.*

Right, but there's no other model so it's alright, really. I used to resent it because that form suppresses or compresses the energy. You're not free to be spontaneous and to let go because the form is more important than the feeling. So what I wanted to do is to transcend the form and channel the feeling into the experience of who we are. It's difficult to come from your experience and *not* from your feelings, which are illusionary anyway—they go up, they go down—so the technique I developed, pyramid process of performing, trains people to be fearless on stage and to enjoy themselves being spontaneous and natural. Okay, what the other Black theaters are doing is fine, within that form, but I wanted to add to the form, transform the form, actually, open it up so that we could really express our magnitude, our omnipotence, our fire. That's what makes the musical so powerful. The whole Black theater movement on Broadway is coming from that, only it's through the form of the European tradition. I don't knock it. They're doing what they know how to do. But we've always had innovators, pioneers, somebody who has a vision that's bigger than the one that exists, and I'm one of those with that vision.

*When did you discover your own personal power?*

I don't know. I've been like this all my life. That's just my karma.

*What I found interesting in Softly Comes a Whirlwind was the overall tone of woman supporting woman, which is an attitude I haven't found in much of Black theater. Is this something that has come to you with the times?*

No, I've always been this way. It just so happens that the theme of woman is popular now, but I support the men in the same way. I don't view it in terms of gender, like female power vs. male power. We are who we are and we both have different experiences and different ways of expressing our powers, but basically we're all just energy systems.

*Why did you start NBT?*

I was an actress in my own right, what they call "young actress on the rise," and in the middle of being that I just got sick of the whole thing, sick of being "less than," of not experiencing my power, of



having someone telling me to do something that didn't make sense to me. So I left. There was no place for me to go but to the Black community. I was brought up in East St. Louis, in the Black community, and I'm very comfortable living with Black people. This is where I thrive. So I came uptown.

NBT started from my experiments with what Robert Hooks and I called The Group Theater Workshop, which was basically working with teenagers. We wanted to present works in a way that was beautiful and contained the essence of Blackness. The first vehicle I created to present them in was poetry by Gwendolyn Brooks which developed into a piece called *We Real Cool*. This was basically using the same form that was used for *Colored Girls*. I mean, I was doing that form 10, 12 years ago. Anyway, for two years I experimented with a group of Black actors and actresses behind closed doors, not presenting anything, just creating new forms. We created a standard of performance for Black people by recreating the oldest standard, which is the ritual form. Later we traveled to Haiti, Africa, West Indies, Trinidad, Guyana—all over the Black world. We built a base in Nigeria after testing the form and finding that it worked for Black people, African people. When we came back to this country we decided to merge the African traditional form with the Western form. We wanted to create a theatrical form that was inspiring, motivating, that would make people leave the theater feeling uplifted, like they could do whatever they wanted to do, they could have, they could be whatever they wanted to be. Now, *Softly Comes a Whirlwind* is more traditional because there is a story line flowing through it, but we're going to revive one of our classics, *The Ritual*. Zuri is going to direct it and I'm going to re-write it.

*Tell me about the form used for The Ritual.*

*The Ritual* is designed to get people involved, to participate—spontaneously. People get up on stage, they share, it's just one big celebration of life. I call *Softly* a "musical ritual" because it's my form with a story line added to it.

*You were trained to act in the traditional European form. How did you begin to distinguish between acting and experiencing?*

Well, when it didn't feel good anymore. Clearly that linear form didn't nurture me, and I'm an excellent actress. I mean, in "slice of life" drama what you see is mostly negative; they usually talk about the villains and the bitches and the prostitutes, and you get to use a lot of emotional energy, and then you chew the scenery down and talk badly about each other when it's over. The audience isn't transformed and neither is the performer. I felt that I, my instrument, was bigger than that. So the process was...

*Dissatisfaction, and then working through that...*

Right. Discovery, looking for another way.

*You're writing your own music now, too, aren't you?*

Yes, out of necessity. I can't find the right music for us so I have to write my own. Just like the plays—I can't find anybody who can write them so I do it all:



Barbara Ann Teer. Photo credit: Bill Whiting Assoc.

I create them, I develop them, I direct them, and I train the performers. And I train my people to do it all.

*Do you do writing workshops?*

We used to but it's difficult because writers are into solo, isolation. They don't write from the experience and the NOW because that value system gets in their way. They want to get the credit. When you work with us you have to be willing to work effectively.

*I've checked out some of the writing workshops around the city, I've heard the kind of plays they're developing and I've felt like an outsider at those places. My plays are rather ritualistic, but in a more psychological rather than spiritual way. I've been told that I'm not writing "Black drama." How do you define "Black drama"?*

I don't define it. I don't know what "Black drama" is. I just know that I'm a certain way, and that way nurtures me, and that's all I know to write about. And I happen to be Black so I write from there. See, I don't separate dance from singing from writing from directing. There's really only the experience, and you can put it in writing, in music, in movement, in preacher rhythms—you can put it any way you want to. If you studied with us you would have to take all the classes everybody else takes. You'd first take Master Liberation, then Pyramid Process I and II; then you'd do a presentation, and from that experience you would then write.



*What is Master Liberation?*

It's a seven-hour workshop that allows you to understand that you cause everything in your life. It allows you to translate your intentions into realities and to be responsible for those realities. You empower yourself. After those seven hours you will clearly see that you cause your life to be the way it is—you don't have to be oppressed, you don't have to be underprivileged, or culturally deprived. You can be responsible for your choice and be a victim, or you can be responsible for choosing to have it another way, that is, to come from your perfection and behold yourself as a perfect being and move from *that* space. That's Master Liberation.

*And Pyramid Process I?*

Pyramid Process I and II. They both take eight weeks. When you finish, you got it!

*You can't tell me anything else about it? What are some of the things I'd go through in Pyramid Process I?*

No, you could read about how the workshop is designed but the rest is experiential. You just have to be willing to be responsible for your art... The purpose is for you to present yourself fearlessly to the world and to enjoy that presentation of who you are.

*And that is a manifestation of personal power?*

Power is the ability to take action, period. Everybody has the potential for expressing pure power, to do what they want to do.

*But we take it for granted?*

We take our energy for granted. Energy is all you need to do anything. But to be responsible for that energy, to mold it and shape it into what you want it to be—that's power.

*And you say you've always been this way? Tonight you seem very different than the way I saw you at the theater. I wonder if there's a separation between—*

Well, I don't know how you saw me so I don't know what you're talking about. How did you see me?

*If you've always been this way then you must have always had a sense of your own power.*

I'll say this: I've always had a love for what I do. That's all it takes. If you value and enjoy your work you have to experience your power because the energy of your enjoyment is going to produce a result.

*And is there a special strength in your work that's drawn from the fact that you're a Black woman?*

Sure. The greatest gift that can happen is to be a Black woman.

*That's where your strength is?*

Sure.

*You see, I'm very interested in personal power.*

Most people are. But you didn't answer my question. How did I appear to you that night at the theater?

*Certainly not the way you appear now. Here you're very dynamic, very articulate, very present, I could say. At the theater you were, and I suppose rightfully so, more of a background figure, less dynamic. The theater, the performers, the show—those were the stars of the evening.*

That's called *empowering* people.



PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP H. HARRIS  
**SECRETARY Pauline Stout, believed to be the first Negro employed by UNO.**  
PICTURE GOLDEN



# A Note on the Woman's Building and Black Exclusion

Erlene Stetson

© 1979

Even more than the discovery of Columbus, which we are gathered to celebrate, is the fact that the Government has just discovered women.

—Bertha Honoré Palmer, 1893

Our woman's movement is a woman's movement in that it is led and directed for the good of women and men for the benefit of all humanity, which is more than any one branch or section of it.

—Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, 1896

This essay is written in part to provide a historical context and background information for reading Tereë Grabenhorst-Randall's descriptive essay on "The Woman's Building" that appeared in the Winter 1978 issue of *Heresies*. I am writing this essay as a Black feminist who feels that women historians must avoid glowing generalities on the struggles between men and women (which are no less real) that all too often obscure the real struggles of women with women and against women. But mostly I am writing out of a sense that the Woman's Building story cannot be appreciated fully unless its complete history is revealed. The first quoted passage marks the tendency to equate the struggle with male chauvinism while the second, much more realistic, equates the struggle with a wider claim for a humanistic world regardless of race and sex or despite race and sex.

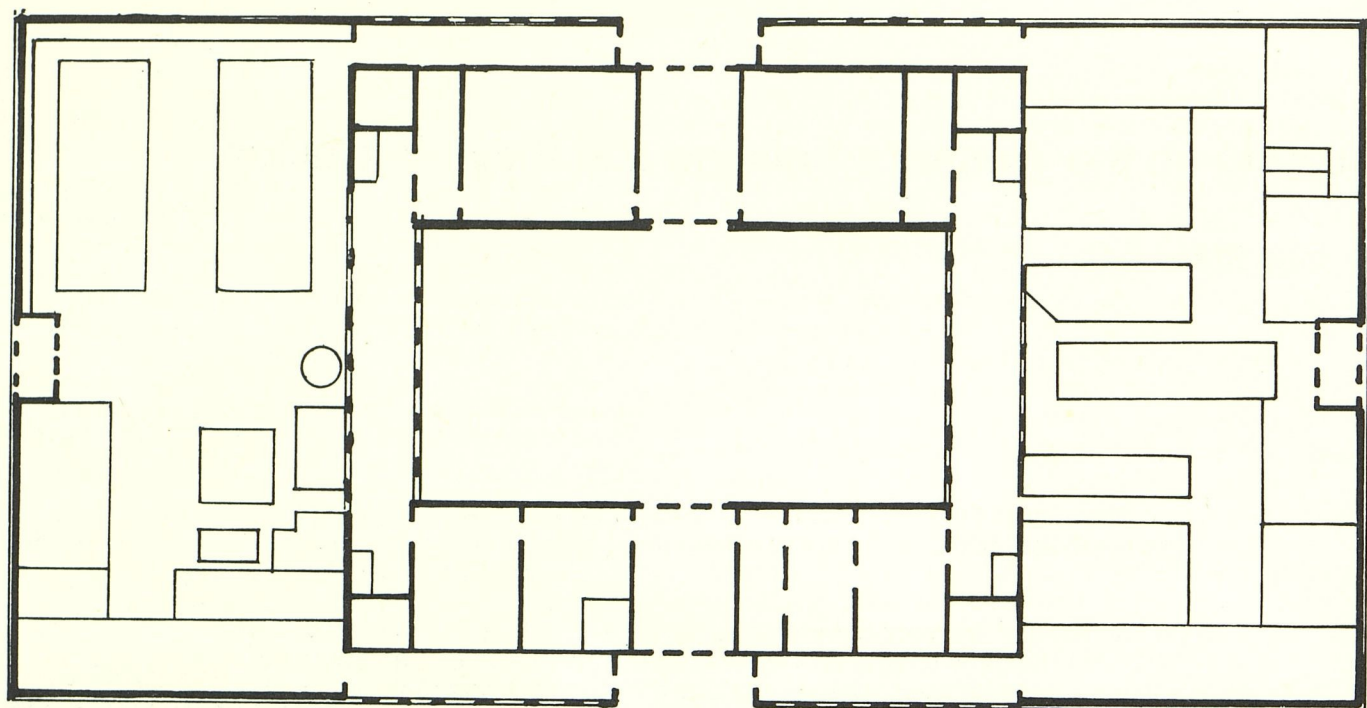
No doubt physically impressive, the Woman's Building came to be seen by Black females as more an irritation to the mind than a sight for the eyes. The significance of the exhibits enumerated by Grabenhorst-Randall fades when one recognizes the fact that non-white women were excluded. White women represented such countries as Japan, Morocco, Egypt and Mexico. More significantly, Black women were specifically excluded, and herein lies a tale of Anglo-American racism. In keeping with my own belief that Black women and white women can come together in a mutual sharing of diverse histories, I hope to direct this essay toward the full and rich Black women's history rather than make a point-for-point attack on the one-sidedness of Grabenhorst-Randall's article.

Black women's visibility as clubwomen and their concerns for moral and physical "uplift"

were given national attention as a result of an incident concerning the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Prior to 1893, Black women had preferred to organize for the purpose of relief work. This was understandable given their status as recently freed slaves or as free women of color. Long before the Civil War made relief work a practical necessity, Black women had formed organizations that directed attention to the needs of fugitives. The Female Benevolent Firm of Boston, Massachusetts was organized as early as 1848 to provide clothing and shoes to women and children who had been rescued by the Underground Railroad.

The Chicago World's Fair, advertised as a showcase through which the various nations might exhibit their industries and general achievements, was presided over by a Board of Lady Managers. Mrs. Bertha (Potter) Honoré Palmer of Chicago, a clubwoman, was to oversee the United States exhibits of accomplishment. Fearing that Blacks would go unrepresented, Miss Hallie Quinn Brown, a teacher from Wilberforce University (Ohio), requested that she be allowed to sit on the board to oversee and represent the achievements of Blacks. She was refused on the grounds that since she did not represent an organization, she could not be a board manager. Undaunted, Miss Brown returned home and organized the Colored Women's League. Her hopes of serving on the board went unrealized but a lesson had been learned nevertheless. So much so that by July 1895, Miss Brown was more than ready to heed the call of Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of the Boston's Women's Era Club. Mrs. Ruffin issued a call to Black women to come to Boston to help formulate a position paper in response to what she saw as a parti-





cularly vitriolic and slanderous, anti-Black female editorial appearing in a St. Louis newspaper. At Miss Brown's instigation, the women attending organized under one club, calling themselves the National Federation of Afro-American Women. Mrs. Booker T. Washington was elected president.

The excitement of the July 29-31, 1895 meeting in Boston is suggested by the women's heady call for a repeat. This time, no doubt influenced by both a sense of dramatics and a heartfelt need to continually reaffirm their sisterhood, they issued a call for a Congress of Colored Women for December of that same year. The location and timing were symbolic. They would meet in Atlanta, at the Atlanta Exposition. Thus began a period of activism on behalf of Black women. It happened slowly, but happen it did. This was predictable, given the momentous epoch-making Atlanta meeting. Two things of great significance occurred. With New Yorker Victoria Earle Matthews presiding as chairperson of the executive committee of the Congress of Colored Women, the Federation signaled a widening of women's concerns outside their homes and local communities. While they reaffirmed their commitment to moral reform, the needy, rescue work, mother, child and home, they also committed themselves to fight racist laws and practices (i.e., the separate car law). In their new-found confidence they promised themselves representation at the coming International Exposition in Paris (1900). These women shared their experiences of riding Jim Crow cars to attend the meeting, and perhaps this more than anything brought them face to face with reality.

They voiced their intent to create an Afro-American women's paper. Perhaps now Miss Brown enjoyed her Parthian shot directed at the Chicago Board of Lady Managers, who had called

its affair "The Congress of Women,"<sup>1</sup> though Afro-American women were conspicuously lacking.

The Atlanta Congress of Colored Women was the first congress of Black women in the United States and possibly in the world. This little-known historical fact provides compelling evidence that the first grass-roots, all-Black, mass-organized and mass-led movement for social and political good happened among Black women. Their efforts, while directed at Black women, were not without wider implications for the masses of Blacks, as punctuated by their experiences with Jim Crow laws on their way to Atlanta. Never again would Black women allow their work to remain isolated and privatized.

The first annual meeting of the National Federation of Afro-American Women was held in Washington, D.C. In 1896, much happened on the order of the Atlanta Congress. Impressive was the Federation's desire to represent all women. In recognition of the fact that the Federation was too closely identified with the club affiliations of Ruffin and Brown, the Federation decided to rename itself the Association of Colored Women. This spirit of compromise and democratic principle was laudable and lasting. The Association's aims were (1) to show the world what Black women had accomplished under the most adverse circumstances, (2) to dedicate their lives to serving the less fortunate ("lifting as they climb"),<sup>2</sup> and (3) to give strength to each other through their mutual cooperation.

The significance and relevance of the Association of Colored Women are to be seen in the visibility that it gave to existing scattered and unaffiliated clubs. This resulted in network building that not only exposed women to a larger community of women but provided a common forum for the systematic study of the conditions



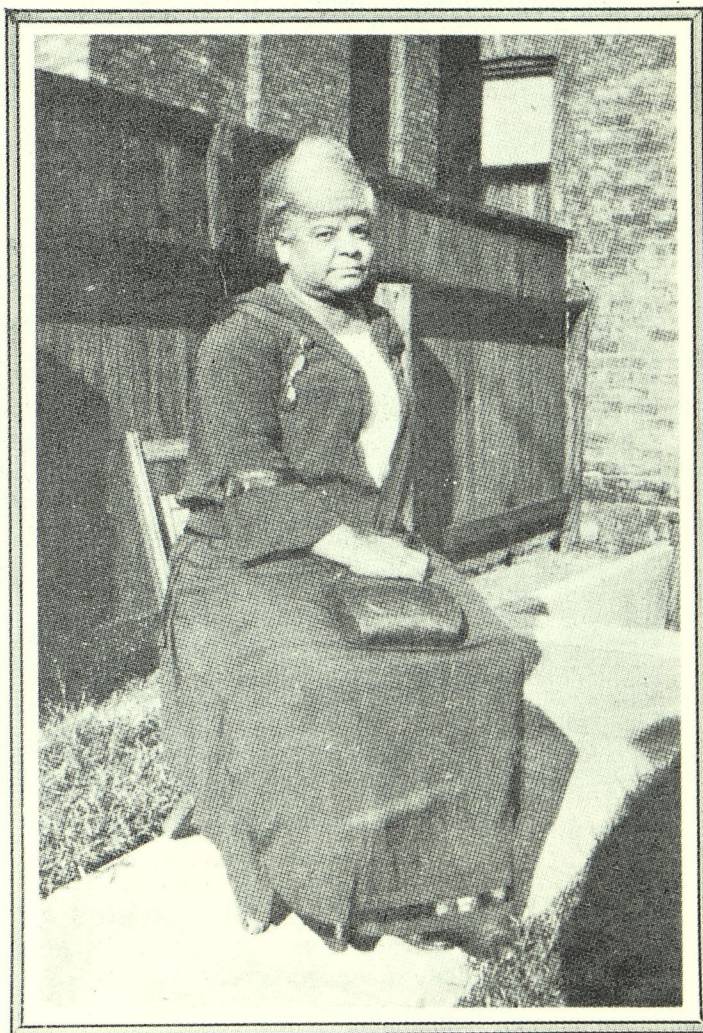
under which women lived. It gave an importance to the club work of Black women that had been unknown, and brought to public attention neglected areas of women's concerns. The Association, unlike any one club, had the advantage of the combined strength of women united. Thus it could far more credibly reflect and validate Black women's responses to socio-political realities, enabling them to incorporate necessary features of self-help, self-pride and self-respect in keeping with previous activities of moral and social reform. The latter would be especially important, given the recent experience of Black women under slavery and beginning efforts to institutionalize racism.

Perhaps more important than all this, the Association signified the recognition by Black women that the changing reality of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century society made it imperative that a united effort of women be created to meet the changing needs of rapidly increasing industrialization. Given the fact that in ever-increasing numbers Black women were getting college educations (careers outside the marriage confines) and entering industry, the Association's timing was a bit delayed if anything; women were working side by side with men in factories and industry. They were doing what had once been called "men's work." Their emergence from the home into the larger world (of work and travel) and their shifts in roles were reflected in the programmatic concerns of the Association. A look at the Association's publications reveals a distinct shift from "mother's meetings" and the "plantation women" to home-making classes, research, statistics, suffrage, anti-lynching committees, domestic work and women in industry. It is fair to say that the anti-lynching committees were the most active in Southern states, and had to be.

The accomplishments of the Association of Colored Women belied its modest aims, as is easily seen in the various homes, rescue missions, schools, nurseries and kindergartens that the Association owned and operated. A cursory look at its success is a challenge to any social service today. If there are accolades to be given, the role of the church cannot be overlooked. The churches, in the very beginning, provided meeting places for these women. What the clubs single-handedly achieved themselves was the intellectual stimulation they provided Black women. Specifically, Black women presented position papers on the WCTU, "The Status of the Afro-American Woman Before and After the War," and such topics as women in industry, labor laws and compulsory education laws, among others. The noted clubwoman Mrs. Mary Church Terrell is nationally known for her speech-making power, which was cultivated in this milieu. Temperance seems to have been a specific concern, inasmuch as these clubwomen noted a

direct relation between a broken home, alcoholic husband-father, and wife and child abuse. When it is said and done, it behooves all of us to note that early feminism was directly concerned with the preservation of the family. Indeed, it provides us with a provocative lesson that charity ought to begin at home; that a woman's humanity has to be guaranteed at home before it can be safe elsewhere.

1. See Mary Oldham Eagle Kavanaugh, ed., *The Congress of Women, World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago, 1894).
2. See Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, ed., *Lifting As They Climb* (Chicago, 1933).



Ida B. Wells-Barnett. 1862-1931. Lecturer and organizer of civic clubs for Black women. As a young editor she investigated and criticized lynchings, and published the first news campaigns to expose their true nature and extent in the United States. At the 1893 Chicago Fair she circulated a booklet, "Why the Colored American is not in the World Columbian Exposition." Her hallmark was refusal to compromise.





Beverly Buchanan. *Wall Fragment/Ga* (Revised Arrangement). 1979.



# Against Granite

It is a marble building—but like a cave inside.

In the basement—against granite—a woman sits in plain sight. She is black; and old. “Are you a jazz singer?” someone asks. “No—a historian.”

Archives are spread on the table where she works: complicated statistics of imprisonment; plans of official edifices; physiognomic studies of the type. She is writing a history of incarceration.

Here is where black women congregate—against granite. This is their headquarters; where they write history. Around tables they exchange facts—details of the unwritten past. Like the women who came before them—the women they are restoring to their work/space—the historians are skilled at unraveling lies; are adept at detecting the reality beneath the erasure.

Out back is evidence of settlement: a tin roof crests a hill amid mountains; orange and tangerine trees form a natural border; a river where women bathe can be seen from the historians’ enclave—the land has been cultivated; the crops are ready for harvest. In the foreground a young black woman sits in the sun, on grass which flourishes. Here women pick freely from the trees.

(This is all in the primary line of vision; not peripheral, but plain.)

Around the periphery are those who would enforce silence:  
slicers/suturers/invaders/abusers/sterilizers/infibulators/castrators/dividers/  
enclosers—traditional technicians/technicians of tradition.

Those who practice on women/those who practice on children:  
The providers of Depo-provera: i.e., the deprivors of women’s lives.  
The promoters of infant formula: i.e., the dealers in child-death.  
The purveyors of starvation; and mutilation—there is no way else to say it.

Because peripheral, the border guards are shadowy—their features indistinct. They wear no uniforms, only name tags: Upjohn, Nestle, Riker’s, Welfare, Rockland State, Jesus, the Law of the Land—and yes, and also—Gandhi and Kenyatta.

The historians—like those who came before them—mean to survive. But know they they may not. They know that though shadowy, the border guards have influence, and carry danger with them. And with this knowledge, the women manage.

And in the presence of this knowledge the historians plant, weed, hoe, raise houses, sew, and wash—and continue their investigations: into the one-shot contraceptive; the slow deaths of their children; the closing-up of vulvas and the cutting-out of tongues. By opening the sutures, applying laundry soap and brown sugar, they draw out the poisons and purify the wounds. And maintain vigilance to lessen the possibility of reinfection.

Each evening at dusk, the women gather under the tin roof which shelters the meeting-house: the progress notes of the day’s work are read—then they cook dinner, talk, and sing—old songs whose noise carries a long distance.

**Michelle Cliff**

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# Three Views of Black Women— The Myths, the Statistics, and a Personal Statement

Julianne Malveaux

© 1979

## *Black Women—The Myth*

The slogan on the billboard says, "You've come a long way, baby," and the model looks like she has. She exudes the aura of successful Black woman, of spokesperson pushing a product on a highway billboard. "You've come a long way, baby," the slogan says, and I'm inclined to agree, except that this Black woman, successful, suave, precedes another set of images, not so successful, not so suave, not coming such a long way. . . .

A few years ago the television image of Black women was fat, black, get back. . . . Esther Rolles on "Good Times," and Mama on "That's My Mama," Shirley and Mama on "What's Happening." It seemed that a precondition of Black motherhood, even Black femininity, was obesity. "You've come a long way, baby," says the model on the billboard. Maybe not?

The images of Black women that have permeated the literature of America focus on a few models. There is the "tragic mulatto," the "suffering martyr," the "domineering-dominant," the "bitch," the "whore," Black women all. These images permeate the minds of the consumers of mass media. Such images are foisted on us by the media, but, more tragically, they are foisted on us by each other. "You've come a long way, baby," says the slogan on the sign. The new myth is that we do have it made, Black working women in the world. I attended a seminar on minority managers at MIT in January 1979, and was horrified to hear a Black man suggest that Black women were surpassing Black men in the corporate arena. When clarification was requested the man responded that his employer intended to hire several Black women into second-level managerial jobs. That level employs probably about three hundred people now, fifty-five of whom are white women and fifteen of whom are Black men. There are *no* Black women presently at this level. The presence or even the probable presence of Black women as competitors has this man running scared. His reaction frightens me. "You've come a long way, baby."

The Black women that have it made, the "two-fers" that crowd white men, white women and Black men out of jobs, represent a nonexistent

myth, but a myth that has stirred the anger of white men, the patronization of white women and the resentment of Black men. The Black woman "two-fer," who "has it made," can't have it made. Even in comparable positions to others, isolation and stereotypes, doubly present, are battles for her to tackle. The myth of "got it made" has been as successfully foisted on us as the myth of tragic mulatto was in literature.

"Got it made" is not the only myth. On one hand, we are all welfare mothers; on the other hand, we have tremendous access to the job market. On one hand, we represent a good number of the pregnant teenagers who "cause" long-term social problems; on the other hand, we are young career women eager to do the single motherhood thing—superwomen who manage both child and career. On one hand, we supposedly emasculate our men—our bitterness and domineering strength scares them away from us—but this is with the erroneous "fact" that there are ten Black women for every Black man. We are lonely victims who will make any compromise to get, to keep a man; we are bitches who do not understand compromise. We are indulging mothers who spoil our sons beyond belief and then launch them into the world to find women like us, nonexistent. We are the women who find these men intolerable, who seek sensitive men who understand our needs.

We are Black women, dichotomies who beg to move beyond the myths and contradictions; to discuss, to search, to grow. But we are the grist for the special issue of magazines, for the *Heresies*, the *Off Our Backs*, the *Sojourner*, the *Conditions*—topics to be touched and viewed, like precious jewels, and to be discarded after the annual inspection takes place. We, Black women, must define our image, not have it foisted on us. We must create our truths, not have truth explained to us. We must understand our relationship to the superstructure, not have the structures compete for our loyalties, not have the structures reinforce and continue the dichotomies that we have participated in far too long. The superstructure has allowed the coexistence of racism and sexism to isolate us from our dual worlds, but it is our duty to assess those relationships. We have allowed our men to be as



harsh as our oppressors in foisting myths on us. We have allowed women to attempt to manipulate our concern about sexism in our communities to the extent that white feminists have fabricated a "war" between Black people. The bottom line is that we, Black women, must deal. We must deal with the myths, the dichotomies, the images and the contradictions, the mystique of Black women, a mystique that we participate in rather than influence. We must come to understand ourselves.

### *Black Women—A Statistical Summary*

Have we, "two-fers," "got it made"? Income-wise, no. As might be expected, the median income of Black women (\$3,273 per person over 14 years in 1975, according to the Survey of Income and Education) trails behind that of white men (\$9,235), Black men (\$5,765) and white women (\$3,482).<sup>1</sup> In the unemployment area, Black women fare most poorly, as well. The aggregate unemployment rate in 1977 for the experienced labor force was 6.1%. The unemployment rates for the respective demographic groups were: 5.0% for white men, 6.3% for white women, 10.5% for Black men and 11.6% for Black women.<sup>2</sup> So where do these notions come from? Is there some paranoid statistician out there fabricating them? Even when we look at subsets of the population, there is no statistical evidence to support the assertion that Black women have it made, vis-à-vis other demographic groups. If we take median earnings instead of median income, or full-time, full-year workers, to standardize for differences in work effort by demographic groups, we still find Black women on the bottom. Black women earn \$7,825 per year, compared with white women's earnings of \$8,285, Black men's earnings of \$10,496 and white male earnings of \$14,071.<sup>3</sup> These, again, are median earnings for a full-time, full-year work effort. Given the fact that many women work less than full-time, full-year, the earnings disparity is larger.

There is one instance where the earnings of Black women are not at the bottom of the median earnings spectrum, and that is for college-educated (with four or more years of college) Black women over 25 years old. Here Black women have median earnings of \$10,248 compared with white women's earnings of \$8,287. Black males earn \$13,527 and white males earn \$16,893.<sup>4</sup> Phyllis Wallace, in a forthcoming manuscript, explains some reasons for the larger higher earnings of Black women in this educational category:

There is some evidence in the National Longitudinal Survey that interrupted work histories of white women may account for much of the gap in the incomes of black and white professional women. These data show that older professionals have a higher average labor force participa-

tion rate than white women, and as the hourly rate of pay increases with the average labor force participation rate, the ratio of black women's earnings to white women's earnings is probably higher than it would be if only women with similar average labor force participation rate were compared.<sup>5</sup>

Occupationally, also, Black women do worse than other groups in the labor market. Although the proportion of Black females in professional occupations exceeds the proportion of Black males (14.6% of all white males are professionals, compared with 15.7% of white females, 9% of Black males and 13% of Black females in 1977), Black as well as white female professionals are concentrated in sexually stratified occupations.<sup>6</sup> Over one-third of all professional Black women are in the category of "teachers, except college," an occupation that has a historically large female concentration. Another concentration of Black women appears in the employment category "other health professionals." There is, again, stratification by sex in this occupational category which includes nurses, dieticians and similar jobs.

While women have experienced some advancement in managerial occupations, again, Black women are worse off. Less than 3% of the Black women in the labor market hold managerial and administrative jobs. (White males lead the managerial ranks—about a sixth of them hold managerial jobs; Black males and white females hold proportionately equal positions—about 6% of them hold such jobs.) Both Black and white women have made gains in nontraditional jobs in recent years—both groups now hold more crafts and operative jobs. Black women have also advanced in the clerical occupations, and their percentage in these positions is now proportional to their percentage in the population. But Black women tend to be crowded into the lowest skilled of their new occupations, compared with white women in the labor market. For example, the Survey of Income and Education sampled 10,347 women who were secretaries, typists and stenographers. Of them, 606 or about 6% were Black women. But in the most skilled secretarial jobs (legal and medical secretaries), Black women were only 2.4% of the 539 women sampled.<sup>7</sup>

The Civil Rights Act, its amendments and the affirmative action focus that evolved from the legislation have improved the occupational status of Black women, Black men and white women in the labor market. But parity has not nearly been achieved. In the "best," most white-dominated occupations, few minorities and women have made inroads, and Black women still are at the bottom of the ladder. And while the so-called parity between Black and white women has been widely publicized, a close view at private household employees illustrates the distance between Black and white women in the





labor market.

In 1976, over one-third of those working as private household workers (an occupation dominated by women) were Black. But while one in three Black women held a private household job in 1960, less than one in six held such a job in 1970; by 1976, the number was less than one in eight. The decline in the number of Black women in private household jobs accompanied an overall decline in the number of workers in this occupation. For one presidential task force in the sixties (The President's Commission on the Status of Women),<sup>8</sup> the concern was not the number of Black women still trapped in this secondary occupation, but the declining availability of domestic workers for those who wished to hire them. While considerable funds have been spent to "upgrade" private household work and to "attract" more women to the occupation, there are inherent contradictions in those positions. As a researcher who has studied private household work points out:

Throughout the years...there have been two contrasting and implicitly conflicting themes: (1) improving private household service for the benefit of middle and upper class (and more recently lower class) women, and (2) helping private household workers improve their own situation. The two goals could theoretically be synonymous, but not so easily in practice. To begin with, one of the best ways to help private household workers as individuals would be to help them escape such employment.<sup>9</sup>

There are many other numbers that describe the position of Black women in the labor market, and Black women in the world. A source of growing emotional concern to so many women is the numerical imbalance between men and women. Ten to one, say some reports; five to one, say others. If that isn't enough, those of us who are casual empiricists report that three of four or five women that we know personally actually spent the evening alone. The ratio of Black women to men does not approach ten to one. In 1975, there were 9.3 million Black women over 14, and 7.8 million Black men. The ratio, then, is six to five, and even though this means there are an excess million and a half Black women, it does not conjure up images of Black women standing in line to see the lone Black male. In Washington, D.C., where the ratio is reportedly worse, there are about 200,000 Black women over 14, and 173,000 Black men. This is actually slightly *better* than the six-to-five national ratio (people not in husband-wife families, such as singles not in families). There are four women for every three single men, so these numbers are somewhat less favorable, but again, the ten-to, five-to, or even two-to-one figures are all wrong. College-educated Black women often indicate that the situation is different for them, but that, too, is also untrue according to the numbers. There are three-quarters of a million Black people who graduated from college: 411,000 of these are women, the remainder are men. Again, a ratio of six to five. Further, these men have a better chance



of earning \$25,000 or more per year. Of the Black men with a college education, 78,000, or one in four, earned \$25,000 plus per year, compared with 14,000, or about one in thirty of the Black women!<sup>10</sup>

### *A Personal View*

What do all the numbers mean? I look at them, often, in the course of my work, and marvel that the myths and misconceptions persist despite the existence of hard statistical facts. I look at the numbers, the images, and look at myself, for what it all means to me. I am a Black female economist, writer and poet. I chose to enter a field that is predominantly white male. A 1975 look at doctoral scientists and engineers in the United States identified 133 Black people as Ph.D. economists. These Black economists are 1.2% of the total number of Ph.D. economists in 1975.<sup>11</sup> Six of the 133 were women, making Black women less than one-tenth of 1% of the total number of all economists, and less than 1% of all women economists. I chose this field knowing what the statistics looked like, choosing the isolation of a white male field because of my research interests and my long-term career goals.

I didn't choose certain aspects of my life. I could not have predicted the resentment of my Black male colleagues, nor the intensity of sexism and racism that I have faced. I chose to work (as most Black women do), and I chose a professional job as my mother and grandmother had done (although they had more typical jobs: teacher/social worker). It was not clear what was in store for me until I became a junior practitioner in my profession. I interviewed a young woman who expressed my feelings exactly: "I thought education was a means to an end, but I find for Black women that there is no end."

"Racism and sexism?" asks the non-Black, or nonfemale, reader. "But she hasn't given us any examples." And that, I find, is a major trap that the superstructure lays for Black women who experience racism and sexism. When I was a junior economist at the Council of Economic Advisors, several incidents that I felt were racist and sexist took place. A colleague, a white male from Yale, felt that I took everything "personally," and that I shouldn't let "one incident with only one person" get me down. But when racism and sexism are discussed in more general terms, those who have not experienced them feel that descriptions may be exaggerated and paranoid.

The notion of uniqueness is another trap that the superstructure lays for Black women, fragmented and isolated, one or two to an office or organization. Colleagues allude to problems that they've had with other Black women, or other Black people, but imply that *you* are different. The affability that makes up racist and sexist attitudes is truly baffling in the beginning. Many

women question *themselves* rather than the structure because of the conflicting vibes that they get at work.

Still too vague? In writing this, I thought so, too, and talked to three or four friends. They are similarly situated in positions where they are the singular professional Black women in their work environment. All of them had similar thoughts, all of them wanted to talk about it, but not one of them wanted me to mention her name.

But what happens? Well, outside of the run-of-the-mill racism and sexism (the comments, the statements like "Are you a secretary?", "Will you pour coffee?", "I've never met a Black woman economist before"), there is the more subtle sexism and racism. A group of female graduate students at MIT were shocked to find that all of us were taking Valium, all on the prescription of the same physician, who had decided that graduate school was too "trying" for women. When I attempted to write a joint paper with two male colleagues, there was some conflict, but nothing that I considered insurmountable. A month later, I learned that they had met without me on a couple of occasions, and had an alternate outline, in case I "cared" not to participate. In daily discussions on economics and labor markets, I have to listen to assertions that young Blacks do not want to work and prefer crime, that Black women do better in the labor market than Black men do, that all working women are looking for husbands, and so on. These assertions are made as if I were an invisible woman, since no response is anticipated. And the choices are to take people on or to ignore them. Sometimes it's just easier to let things pass, particularly when you understand that no matter how many times some people are told that "he or she" is preferred to "he," or that adult women are not to be referred to as "girls" or "young ladies," they will do it again.

Another trap is the illusion of belonging. Although apprehensive at first, one often lets the guard down with time and becomes, at least superficially, "one of the crowd." That's until there is a need to remind you that you are, indeed, Black, female and last. In one job situation, I felt especially close to others after a demanding report was produced on time, and when we had a cocktail party to celebrate. But the warmth and closeness were shattered when I overheard a "nigger" joke and came to work the next day to deal with the same negative comments, the same jockeying for position, that were there pre-report. When my effort was needed, I was one of the crowd, but when the crunch was off, I was, again, just a Black woman.

In another situation, when the tension, the racism and sexism, had gotten nearly intolerable, when two or three major incidents occurred in a very short period of time, I shared my frustrations with a Black male colleague, who was not uninvolved. His response: "You have to under-



stand that racism and sexism are facts of life." My reply: "What I don't understand is why you feel you can do it to me." After this encounter, I noted, facetiously, that if I wanted to remind myself of my proper place, then I should write lines every morning. "I am a Black woman. I come after everybody else in status." Then, perhaps, by the time I got to work I would be sufficiently docile to interact without conflict with my colleagues.

As long as there are so few Black women isolated in certain employment areas, the rude awakening that I experienced in my first non-academic job is likely to be duplicated. It was disillusioning to learn that at the end of a rigorous and emotionally draining course of study, there were the same thinly disguised rigors and emotional traps, with higher stakes. But the other side of the coin is the tribute that I want to pay, daily, to older Black women, trailblazers, who made it possible for new entrants to even enter. In economics, my friend and mentor, Dr. Phyllis A. Wallace (Ph.D., Yale, 1948), has provided invaluable advice to me. Whenever I am shocked by unfairness, I realize that what happens to me looks petty in comparison to the massive discrimination that she faced.

I've termed my experiences "rude awakenings." Perhaps the sharpest jolt was the realization



tion that Black men are not necessarily my allies. In fact, more than half of the work-related conflicts that I've had have been with Black men. I've felt the brunt of their oppressive attitudes, their sexism, their resentment, their unrestrained competitive impulses. Whereas once, professionally, I felt that the presence of other Black people meant I had a friend, now I am wary. And even when we are friends, I've learned to "cover my back."

It is extremely unpopular, now, to accuse Black men of sexism. In the wake of *Black Macho*, Black men are asking how they can oppress when they face the same discriminatory battles that Black women face. They can oppress with their attitudes, and while that may not be as devastating as the material oppression that white males (and females, often) practice, it is equally hurtful. I understand that Black males have a smaller domain than that of white males; while white males can dominate everyone, Black men just have us to kick around. But my understanding and patience are wearing thin.

I am amazed, frightened, by the number of Black women who deny that sexism is an issue in the Black community. Do they think that by asserting that sexism does not exist it will go

away? Or do they think that if they make an issue of sexism, they will turn off Black men, and wither, lonely, having earned the title "bitch"? Sexism in the Black community is an issue too long avoided by Black folks. It needs to be discussed, though, by Black people, and I am more impatient with white women who would use Black male sexism to forge fragile feminist alliances between us than I am with the Black male behavior that makes the notion of these alliances often tempting.

"A terribly critical view of everyone," I think as I proof this. There is, however, a positive side. I love my work. I find it challenging. My colleagues are not always a pain. Sometimes I am heartened by the fact that they may be learning from my vocal criticism of them. I imagine that Black women who have jobs that pay less, Black women who can't find work, Black women who must struggle with more basic questions, must find my view of my space small and distant. And it is clear to me that there are options other than my present one that I would find less appealing. But none of my positive vibes detracts from the total white male hegemony of the superstructure, and from the fact that there is no space, no comfort, in that structure for women and for Blacks. The fact that white women and Black men have more in common with the superstructure than Black women do also makes it clear how isolated we are.

Sometimes a sense of humor is the most important weapon to fight sexism with. Otherwise it can become boring, and the fight can be as oppressive as the behavior that mandates it. When people ask me about women's roles at the Rockefeller Foundation, I explain to them that the perception of women's and men's roles at the foundation is best typified by the differences in the bathrooms. The men's room is this mahogany-lined number, with drawers for storage, a closet, a shower and a three-foot-long mirror over the sinks. The ladies' room is your basic blue formica with toilet stalls, sinks, a couple of mirrors, nothing more. If people are willing, I'll take them on tours of the men's room so they can see the difference for themselves. If mean men are around, I'll ask them to stand guard, and explain why my visitors need to see the men's room. And while it's kind of a joke, it makes a point.

But sense of humor or no, the isolation that I feel, that I know other women feel, that we talk about, can only be overcome as Black women create vehicles to come in contact with each other and to define the forces that shape our lives.

We must also, as Black women, define the parameters from which we want to be viewed and studied. In the economics profession, for example, Black women are seldom seen as a group worthy of separate study. Either we are



tacked onto the end of a paper about Blacks or viewed as a special case in a work about women. A forthcoming publication, *Black Women in the Labor Force* by Phyllis Wallace, takes a focused look at Black women, but it seems to be a first.

### Conclusion

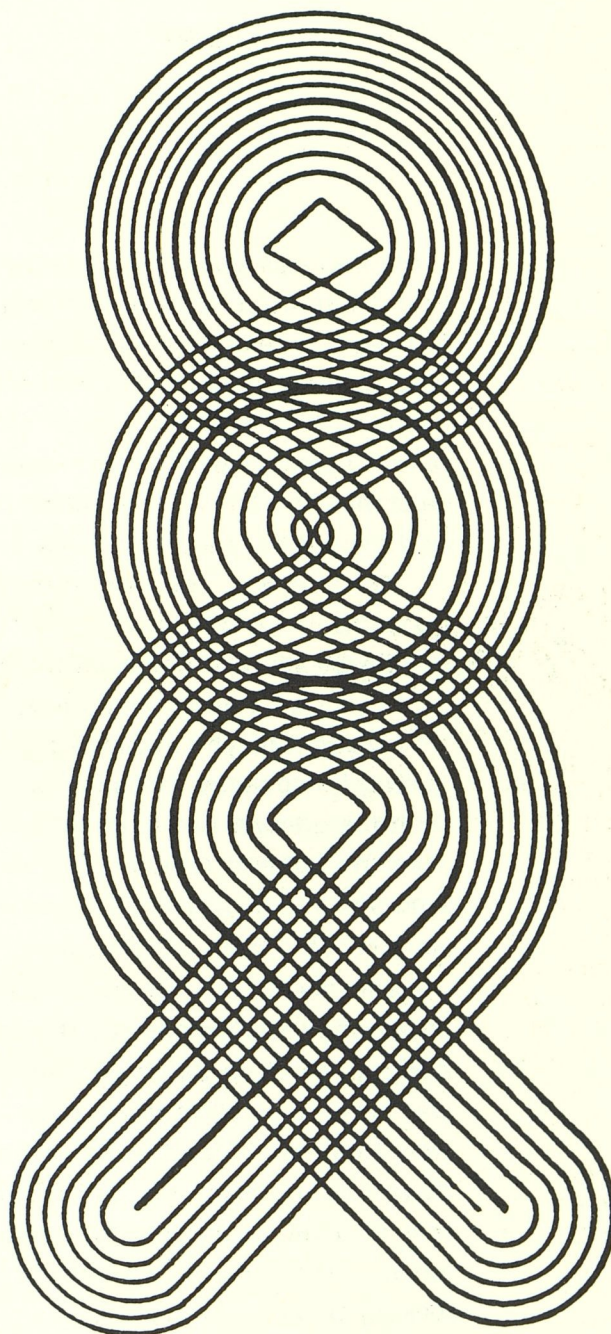
How to conclude a rambling view of Black women? On a high note? A low? Maybe like a mystery book with alternative ending sentences—and the reader can pick her own or read them all.

1. When Barbara Walters interviewed Richard Pryor on May 29 she asked him if he saw everything in terms of race, and he responded in the affirmative. As a Black woman I see everything in terms of race and sex, and I find this vision necessary. The view is sometimes clouded, sometimes discouraging, but the alternative views seem myopic, flawed, so I relish my special vision.

2. Dr. Chester Pierce, a Black psychiatrist at Harvard, noted that if a Black person could go 48 hours without being reminded of his or her Blackness, then there would be no such thing as racism. What would that be like, Black woman, to go 48 hours without being reminded of race or sex?

3. One of the most challenging things for Black women isolated in the superstructure is the next step. After entry, what about advancement? What about our roles with respect to each other, with respect to other Black people, to family, to children, and to so many other things? Will exposure to a selfish corrupt world shape us as selfish and corrupt, or will we grow, spill over, make our environment more human? Where will we be in ten years? Twenty? Fifty?

1. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Consumer Income—Money, Income and Poverty Status of Families and Persons in the United States, and the South Region, by Divisions and States*, Series P-60 No. 112 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978).
2. *Employment and Training Report of the President* (1978).
3. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Consumer Income*.
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5. Phyllis A. Wallace, *Black Women in the Labor Force* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, in press).
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8. David Chapin, "Upward Mobility for Private Household Workers" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1974).
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## Canvas with an Unpainted Part

Li-Lan

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My crib was pushed up against the door of the tiny, dark bedroom of the East Tenth Street studio. I remember the sensation of being jerked back and forth—an unrelenting earthquake—while standing in my crib as my mother tried to keep my father out of the room. I remember his banging on the door. I remember the sounds—shrill shouts, angry yells, crying—but none of the words. I remember my own trembling at the force of emotions I couldn't understand. The feeling, the room, the memory is so vividly etched in my mind as though it were a drama I saw only yesterday.

"But how can you remember that, Li-Lan? You were only 18 months old..."

"Maybe you told me about it?"

"No, never. I never would have told you about that."

"I thought maybe I confused it with a dream?"

"No, it happened, Li-Lan. I can't tell you how painful it was. The most difficult thing I ever had to do in my life was to leave your father..."

As my father's illness got worse he became unreasonable, suspicious and even violent. Mistrust grew unmercifully within him. Demons plagued him. He brooded. He cried. But we had to leave.

I remembered my fear and I remembered chilling fights, but I couldn't understand why we suddenly left the studio on East Tenth Street, and why I only saw my father on Sundays from then on. My mother hid it from me but she was nervous on all of those Sunday visits when I went to see him alone. How would he react? Would I do something to make him angry? Would he break down? But it meant a lot for him to see me—his only child—and he acted the role of a father as best he could. He, miraculously, held himself together, alone, in his own private world, all of those years. When I was older and saw him looking small in an oversize coat, lugging home shopping bags bursting with Chinese food, I marveled at his self-sufficiency.







My mother left with me. We moved to the back of a long, narrow, floor-through apartment on West Fourteenth Street. The two long, narrow windows opened on to a narrow courtyard facing a high brick wall which blocked air and light from reaching our room. I had tormenting daydreams of being trapped in that dead-end labyrinth, of running into that impenetrable brown brick wall.

I remember standing in my crib nights watching my mother in a corner, on the other side of the long dim room, sitting hunched over a table under one small light. She seemed to be motionless but she was painting roses. Roses, roses, roses, an endless stream of painted roses. In order to support the two of us she had to work day and night. In the days she worked in a factory painting roses on heart-shaped porcelain boxes and at night, paid by the piece, she painted roses on as many lids as she could carry home.

And so I started school. At eight in the mornings my mother would drop me off at Church of All Nations nursery school, and at six in the evenings pick me up as she returned home from the factory. I was two.

I vaguely remember feeling abandoned, being frightened of the children. I clearly remember them sitting me on a chair in front of the class and shooting me with rifles while laughing hilariously; I remember them chasing me down long, dark, mysterious, winding corridors, and down steep, cavernous stairwells. The recurrent nightmare was as real to me as the long days at school. Once I ran away from school and I remember my mother's frantic worry turning to anger when I was discovered late at night crouching down in the bottom of a telephone booth where I had hidden for hours. I don't remember it but I am told that I refused to talk at school—they thought I couldn't. They told my mother I was mute.





# And Black Women Made Music

Eleanor Smith

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When one examines the literature written about the Afrikan American experience, there is a great void surrounding the role of Black women. In most literature references are made to the Black man, Black people or the Black race. The use of such nouns completely masculinizes the Black experience and the contributions of Black women are lost in the generalization. I intend to briefly survey the role Black women have played in the development of Black music specifically and music in general.

When Afrikan women were snatched from their homeland and brutally shipped to the Western hemisphere, they had Afrikan customs, attitudes, and an Afrikan culture. These women had a musical tradition centuries old and one in which there was music for almost every activity—birth, death, marriage, war and religious ceremonies. Afrikan women did not generally play instruments but did the singing and dancing, and as observers they participated by clapping or tapping their feet.<sup>1</sup> The exception to this occurred in ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death, and in some Afrikan countries women played various types of Afrikan pianos. The Amazons, women soldiers, chanted war songs using a single cymbal and full drum, and performed mystery dances and songs.<sup>2</sup>

Afrikan women were creators and performers of traditional Afrikan music. They used their musical talents to combine vocal and instrumental sounds in a unique way to create melodies, harmony and rhythm which expressed every realm of their Afrikan experience. However, after arriving in this country, they were not allowed to speak their language, worship or follow any of their customs and cultural traditions. The first generation of Afrikan women were not removed from the memory of home and so were able to participate in those Afrikan traditions familiar to them when not under the watchful eye of their captors. It was not until several generations of Afrikan women were born in the colonies that the slave experience in America influenced the Afrikan to create an Afrikan American music. The role Afrikan music played in the development of Black American music is apparent in its con-

trapuntal rhythm, melodic patterns and singing technique in which the leader sings a theme and the chorus answers. Improvisation played an important role in Afrikan music and is a significant part of Black American music.

There are few written records to document the development of a musical tradition during slavery. We know from sale or hire listings of slaves in newspapers, court records, journals, and diaries of the planters that slaves had musical abilities.<sup>3</sup> Such listings often mentioned the talents and skills of the slave woman as a means of identification. A notice might read that a particular run-away slave girl could be recognized by her beautiful singing voice or musical talents. It was not until after 1840 that any attempt was made to collect the songs of Black women, and earlier letters or articles describing the music were not preserved.<sup>4</sup>

Mrs. Natalie Curtis Burlin, a collector of Black music for the Hampton Institute, noted the words and music of slave women while they nursed the children of the slave holder or stood over the wash tubs.<sup>5</sup> Singing accompanied all types of work, inspiring the work being done, and the labor was essential to the song. The songs the women sang were relevant to the work being done on the sugar, rice and cotton plantations and in slave quarters.<sup>6</sup>

Look-a yonder! Hot boilin' sun comin' over,  
Look-a look-a yonder, Hot boilin' sun, comin'  
over,  
An' he ain't goin' down An' he ain't goin'  
down.<sup>7</sup>

Such a song might be sung by a Black woman as she worked under the heat of the noon-day sun in the cotton field. Often she responded to her conditions through calls or cries. They were individual expressions or vocalizations of some emotion and were usually a musical response to suffering. Later in the cities these cries became calls to draw attention to the fruits and vegetables for sale.<sup>8</sup>

Sweet oranges,  
Sweeter than the honey in the comb,  
Sweet oranges.<sup>9</sup>



The musical experience of Black women during the slave period can be seen in the way in which their musical abilities were used in religious services. The singing traditions of the Black church were promoted by Black women because they made up a large portion of the church congregation. The spiritual, which represents great variety and contrast, reflects the response to the slave experience, and as Christianity became an accepted expression of the religious experience of Black women a movement away from Afrika can be heard in the music.<sup>10</sup> In early religious music crossing the river Jordan and going to heaven referred to going back to Afrika.

"Oh, wasn't dat a Wide Ribber"  
Oh, de Ribber of Jordan is deep and wide,  
One mo' ribber to cross.<sup>11</sup>

As the Afrikan women accepted the foreign religion of their oppressors, references to Jordan and heaven no longer expressed the desire to return to Afrika. Instead, heaven became "the Promised Land" in the sky which would be the reward at death.

Gonna shout trouble over  
When I get home  
Gonna shout trouble over  
When I get home.<sup>12</sup>

Although the religion was borrowed, the religious music was original. Even when psalms, hymns and congregational singing patterned from white sources were sung, they were presented in the tradition of Black music. For example, "Climb Jacob's Ladder" which comes from a white Christian hymnal was changed when Black women sang it to "Climin' Jacob's Ladda."<sup>13</sup> The rhythm and harmonies were basically Afrikan. Passages from the Bible were often used in the religious services but they were Afrikan American in form.

"Happy Morning"  
Weep no more, Marta,  
Weep no more Mary,  
Jesus rise from de dead,  
Happy morning. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Even when Black women became involved in a purely European religious tradition, they maintained a connection to their traditional music. Thus it is no surprise that when the Convent of the Holy Family, the first convent for Black women in the United States, was established the nuns were known for their moving musical services.<sup>15</sup>

These same Afrikan traditions were used in the songs and dances of special holidays, celebrations and gatherings. The secular songs were about anything and everything and the mood was as varied.

"Had to get up this mornin' "  
Had to get up this mornin' soon, [3 times]  
Soon, had to get up this mornin' soon  
Woke up this morning; in such big haste,  
I didn't have time to wash my face.<sup>16</sup>

Often these songs were accompanied by the singer clapping her hands and stamping her feet.<sup>17</sup> Lucy Terry and Senegambi were responsible for holding gatherings and known for their storytelling and singing. Lucy Terry or Lucy Bijah, as she called herself, made her home a gathering place for such activities.<sup>18</sup>

The slave experience limited the musical activities of many Black women. Although many free Black women participated in the same musical experiences as slave women, they were able to stretch beyond these bounds. In 1854 Alice Hawthorn wrote songs in which she used the guitar for accompaniment.<sup>19</sup> Young Black women were expected to exhibit skills in piano playing and singing and often participated as soloists in the evening cultural activities held in the Black community. Most of these Blacks were middle-class and imitated the music that whites favored.<sup>20</sup> Even when some Black women performed music acceptable to whites, they were discriminated against. Obviously, it was not their talent and ability but the color of their skin that determined whether they were successful.

Numerous Black women did not seek approval from whites but used their talent toward liberating Black people. The stage for these women during slavery was found at the anti-slavery meeting, where music was used to make the gatherings more fiery. Sojourner Truth, an ex-slave, was an abolitionist speaker and used original songs of a religious nature to add to her testimonies. The Underground Railroad, which was a network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape, was an important aspect of the abolitionist movement and songs were an integral part of its program. Many times songs were used to plot the escape, relay plans and alert the slaves that a conductor was in the area. Harriet Tubman, contributor to the liberation of Black people in many ways, was a leading conductor and always used a special song to disclose her presence. The words to one such song were:

Dark and thorny is de pathway  
Where de pilgrim makes his way;  
But beyond dis vale of sorrow  
Lie de fields of endless days.<sup>21</sup>

These words indicated Harriet Tubman was in the area, and although the journey would be rough preparation for leaving, should be made.<sup>22</sup> Other such alert songs were "Steal Away to Jesus," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,"



"I Hear from Heaven Today," and "Oh, Sinner, You'd Better Get Ready."

In spite of the perimeters that slavery placed upon the experiences of Black women, there was versatility in their music. Although religious music constituted the largest portion of ante-bellum music there were work songs, dance and play songs, field and street cries, satirical songs, and call and response songs. The themes of these varying styles usually represented the oppression suffered at the hands of whites and the determination to overcome.

After the Civil War ended and formal slavery was abolished, the versatility of the music of Black women continued. They sang "Before I'd Be a Slave" and "No More Auction Block." The shouts, hollers, yells and spirituals took on a new form: the blues. Black women sang about the new freedom, new occupations, current events and ways of the city. In Charles Keil's book *Urban Blues*, he states that most early or "classic" blues singers were women. Ma Rainey (Gertrude Malissa Nix Pridgett Rainey) was the earliest of the professional blues singers and was called "Mother of the Blues." She was accompanied by a combo, the Serenaders, which was led by a woman pianist, Love Austin.<sup>23</sup> Bessie Smith, who is considered the most famous blues singer, was a protégé of Ma Rainey and was discovered by a recording director while traveling with tent shows and carnivals. She became known as the "Empress of the Blues." Others who followed in this tradition were Ida Cox, Trixie Smith, Sippie Wallace, Chippie Hill, Clara Smith and Sarah Martin.<sup>24</sup>

I don't want you to be no slave,  
I don't want you to work all day,  
I don't want you to be true,  
I just want to make love to you.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1920's white recording companies realized the potential money market in blues and Mamie Smith made the first commercial recording of a blues record by a Black woman. She recorded such songs as "Crazy Blues," "You Can't Keep a Good Man Down," and "That Thing Called Love." The white recording agents capitalized on this resource and during this period Black recording singers were all female. One Black record company, the Black Swan Phonograph Company, was also able to utilize this new business opportunity and it had its first big hit from blues singer Ethel Waters. This spurt of interest in blues sung by Black women lasted until the end of the decade.

The blues evolved as an expression of the new Black experience, and the content of the

spiritual changed to reflect the new status and different circumstances. For example, the railroad became significant in the lives of Blacks and a number of spirituals referred to getting "on board the Gospel train" and "wheels rumbling through the land."<sup>26</sup> For 200 years spirituals were sung without too much concern for their origin or preservation. It was the Fisk Jubilee Singers who first sang spirituals in concerts and spread their fame. Five of the ten singers were women and included Jennie Jackson, Maggie Porter, Minnie Tate, Mable Tate and Ella Shappard, the pianist. These women

along with the other members were able to acquire enough funds to build Memorial Hall and Livingston Hall at Fisk University.<sup>27</sup>

It was during the early 20th century that Black organizations realized the importance of the spiritual, and Black women played a major role in forming groups to perform spirituals as part of our heritage. "The Nalle Jubilee Singers" established by Mary Nalle of Washington, D.C. and "Folk Song Singers" organized by Harriet Gibbs Marshall played significant roles in promoting the spiritual.<sup>28</sup> When E. Azalia Hackley retired from the concert stage, she planned and directed "Folk Song Festivals" which reached large groups of people, helping to draw attention to the spiritual.<sup>29</sup>

The spiritual expressed the beauty and power of religion and Black women sang about the pearly gates, golden streets, white robes, jeweled crowns and everlasting happiness.<sup>30</sup>

Gwine to pray an' never stop,  
My soul's been anchored in de Lord.  
Until I reach de mountain top,  
My soul's been anchored in de Lord.<sup>31</sup>

They also admonished those who chose the alternative to a life with God.

O! Satan's got a slippery ol' shoe  
And if you don't mind he will slip it on you.  
O! Satan's like a snake in the grass  
Waitin' to kite you as you pass.<sup>32</sup>

When Black people migrated to the cities, the spiritual did not meet the needs of the urban setting and gospel music was created. "Gospel music became the sacred counterpart of the city blues, sung in the same improvisatory tradition with piano, guitar, or...ensemble accompaniment."<sup>33</sup> As with the blues, white recording industries discovered the economic value of gospel music and by the 1940's Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Clare Ware and Mahalia Jackson made gospel music a best seller.<sup>34</sup> On the one hand the words tell of crushed hopes, deep sorrow and a dull, everyday misery, and on the other



the words advocate a trusting faith in the future.

Times I'm sad and I feel alone  
Times I'm weary and long for home  
Times my heart aches and I'm in distress  
Times I'm burdened and so oppressed...  
Then I hear a small soft voice  
I hear God.<sup>35</sup>

Gospel, spiritual, blues, work songs and the European form culminated in a special form of music: jazz. Mary Lou Williams, jazz pianist, composer and arranger, played with orchestras

The musical forms such as jazz, blues, gospel and spirituals, which are traditionally associated with Black people, were not the only areas in which Black women gained fame. As early as 1851 a Black woman, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, who was born a slave and adopted by a Quaker, gained fame when she made a debut as a soprano before the Buffalo Musical Association. After her debut she toured the Northern states and England but the anti-Black attitude of America offered her little support even though she sang European music. When Euro-Americans would not support her, she re-



Betty Carter. Photo credit: Sharon C. Farmer.

and was a leader in producing the rhythms of jazz. She was active in the jazz religious movement and composed a jazz hymn titled "Black Christ of the Andes." Black female singers such as Ella Fitzgerald, Adelaide Hall, Billie Holiday, Helen Humes and Maxine Sullivant distinguished themselves as singers of this new sound. Although Bessie Smith was primarily known for her blues she also sang jazz, as did other blues singers.

tired and opened a voice studio in Philadelphia.<sup>36</sup>

Undoubtedly one of the most acclaimed singers of this early period was the talented coloratura soprano Marie Selika (Mrs. Sampson Williams). In both the United States and Europe she received praise for her marvelous voice and artistic ability. She often insisted that her husband, who possessed less talent than she, appear with her and this caused her to lose



concert opportunities. After the death of her husband she became a voice teacher at Martin-Smith School of Music in Harlem.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, not all Black women in music were singers. Rachel Washington, a pianist and organist, received a diploma from the New England Conservatory in Boston and was active as a music teacher and choir director as well as recitalist.<sup>38</sup> Nellie Brown (Mitchell) organized a juvenile operetta company in Boston, their first performance taking place in 1876. Estella Pinckney and E. Azalia Hackely were interpreters of classical music, and worked to increase the Black audience of such music.

Black organizations were also formed to promote an appreciation for the European form among Blacks. In New York Daisy Tapley and Minnie Brown, both sopranos, conducted a number of concerts called "The Educational Series." Their main objective was to present leading Black musicians in recitals.<sup>39</sup> Mrs. Andrew F. Hilyer helped organize a choral group called the Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Society of Washington, D.C. to perform the works of the Black composer of the same name.<sup>40</sup> These organizations provided opportunities for Black soloists in oratorio and cantata singing.

Sissieretta Jones, a soprano, was praised for her appearance in a Jubilee Spectacle and Cakewalk at Madison Square Garden in New York. Undoubtedly, some of her enthusiastic notices were due to her resemblance to the Italian singer, Adelina Patti. Sissieretta was often referred to as "Black Patti," and appeared at the White House and at private musicals. After giving several successful recitals at the Academy of Music, she was approached to sing the African roles in *Aida* and *L'Africaine* at the Metropolitan Opera. However, white America was not ready to accept a Black at the Met no matter how talented or how close her resemblance to an Italian singer.<sup>41</sup>

Other talented performers of European music were Hazel Harrison and Flora Baton. Hazel Harrison appeared with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and toured in the United States distinguishing herself as a pianist. In the later years of her life she taught at Howard University as well as performing on the concert stage. Flora Baton, who was lesser known, toured the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Africa singing ballads.<sup>42</sup>

Concert artist Marian Anderson became the world's leading concert contralto and the best known Black singer in the history of music. Other Black female concert artists were Dorothy Mayner, a soprano, who after retiring from concert tours founded the Harlem School of Arts; Lillian Evanti, the first American Black to sing operatic roles in Europe; Caterine Jarboro, the first Black woman to perform with a

major opera company in the United States; and Abbie Mitchell, a leading actress in the Lafayette Players Stock Company in New York. George Gershwin was so impressed with Abbie Mitchell's voice that he wrote the role of Bess in *Porgy and Bess* especially for her.<sup>43</sup>

However, Black women did not only excel as vocal soloists on the concert stage, but also as instrumentalists. Helen Hagan, a pianist, graduated from Yale University School of Music and played her original "Concerto in C Minor" with the New Haven Symphony as part of her graduation exercise. Hazel Harrison, a pianist, studied in Europe and later gave concerts throughout the South, and in Chicago, Boston and New York.

Eva Jessey made a substantial contribution in the area of the professional chorus. At the age of 12 she organized her first group, a girls' quartet, and during her career she won international distinction as director of a professional choral group. She received commissions for organizing ensembles and quartets to sing advertisements on radio programs. In 1935 Eva Jessey was selected by George Gershwin to serve as choral director for the first production of *Porgy and Bess*, and she later became permanently associated with Thomson and Gershwin.

After World War I opportunities opened up for Black composers and many were able to have their compositions performed as well as published. Although many of the Black composers used the European form, Black folk music was a real part of the style. Florence B. Price was the first woman to win recognition as a composer. In 1925 she won the Wanamaker Award for her composition "Symphony in E Minor." Among her other works are "Symphonic Tone Poem," "Concert Overture on Negro Spirituals," "Little Negro Dances" for chorus and orchestra, "Negro Folksongs in Counterpoint" for string quartet, a number of solo concertos, organ works and chamber music.<sup>44</sup> In 1932 she played one of her piano concertos with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Julia Perry studied voice, piano and composition. She organized and conducted a series of concerts for the United States Information Service while studying in Europe. Her list of compositions included "Stabat Mater" for solo voice and string, "Episode" for orchestra, and many others. Margaret Bonds, pianist and composer, created such works as "Spiritual Suite for Piano," "Mass in D Minor," "Three Dream Portraits," "The Ballad of the Brown King" and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."<sup>45</sup> As can be seen by the titles of some compositions, Black women sometimes combined Black themes and the European form in producing their original work.



As these Black women strove to make their contribution to the classical field as composers, other Black women were taking advantage of the new opportunities opened to them in the field of opera. Mary Caldwell Dawson led the way by organizing the National Negro Opera Company which presented *Aida* in Chicago and *La Traviata* at Madison Square Garden in New York. For many talented Blacks the National Opera Company provided stage experience in the orchestra pit, on the stage and back stage. The Karamu Theater in Cleveland also provided opportunities for Black performers. Zelma George gained national attention in the title roles of the Karamu productions *The Medium*, *The Consul* and *Threepenny Opera*.<sup>46</sup>

The New York City Opera Company was the first major opera company to employ Black singers and Camilla Williams, who sang in *Madam Butterfly*, was one of the first Black

women to sing in the company. Others who sang with the New York City Opera Company were Veronica Tyler, Margaret Tynes and Marian Anderson, who was the first Black to sing at the Metropolitan Opera. Ms. Anderson's debut at the Met was followed by singers Martina Arroyo, Grace Bumbry, Gloria Davy, Gwendolyn Killebrew, Leontyne Price, Shirley Verrett and Felicia Weathers. Other Black women appeared in opera companies in Europe. This tradition had been established when the opera companies would not allow Black women to appear in operatic roles in the United States. Such women as Annabella Bernard, Kathleen Crawford, Ellabelle Davis, Charlotte Holloman, Rea Jackson, Ella Lee, Leonora Lafayette, Vera Little and Olive Moorefield followed this tradition. Leontyne Price became the first Black woman to star in an opera on television and was given the honor



Ellabelle Davis. 1907-1960. Made her debut in 1942 as a concert soprano and performed *Aida* in Mexico City. Toured Europe and became famous for her Art songs in German and French. Her triumph was in *Aida* at La Scala in 1949. Photo credit: Marcus Beechman.



of opening the new home of the Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center with an opera, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, written specially for her.<sup>47</sup>

Black women also struggled to participate in the few places opened to Blacks in the leading symphony orchestras. In the 1960's Ann Hobson was a harpist in the Cleveland Orchestra, Patricia Prattis, a pianist in the Pittsburgh Symphony and Elaine Jones Kaufman, a timpanist, in the Stokowski American Symphony. Armenta Adams, Natalie Hinderas, Sylvia Alden Lee and Frances Walker gained recognition as outstanding concert pianists with Frances Cole being the only harpsichordist.<sup>48</sup>

Many of these talented Black women can attribute their success to the music educators who trained them. These teachers not only trained the young talented Black children but also educated the public. Dorothy Maynor in New York and Elma Lewis in Boston had schools which were known for training the young. Nova Holt, a music critic and the only Black member of the New York Music Critic's Circle, was founder of the National Association of Negro Musicians. She also did concert programming on the radio. Alice Trent John contributed to educating the public by adding to the literature written about Black music.<sup>49</sup>

As the 21st century approaches, classical composer Undine S. Moore and D. Antoinette Handy, a flutist, continue the tradition established by their predecessors. Ms. Moore, a native of Virginia, received one of the first Juilliard Piano Scholarships awarded to a Black woman. For many years she has served as professor of music theory and composition at Virginia State College and is known for published compositions for mixed voices. Flutist D. Antoinette Handy was born in New Orleans and is teaching at Virginia State College. She graduated with honors from the New England Conservatory and Northwestern University, and holds a diploma from the Paris National Conservatory. She studied with noted flute teachers George Laurent, Emil Eck and Gaston Crunelle and has played with the Chicago Civic Orchestra, Interantional Orchestra of Paris, Symphony of the New World, Richmond Symphony, and at Radio City Music Hall. At the urging of Ms. Handy, Undine Moore composed the Afro-American Suite for flute, cello and piano.

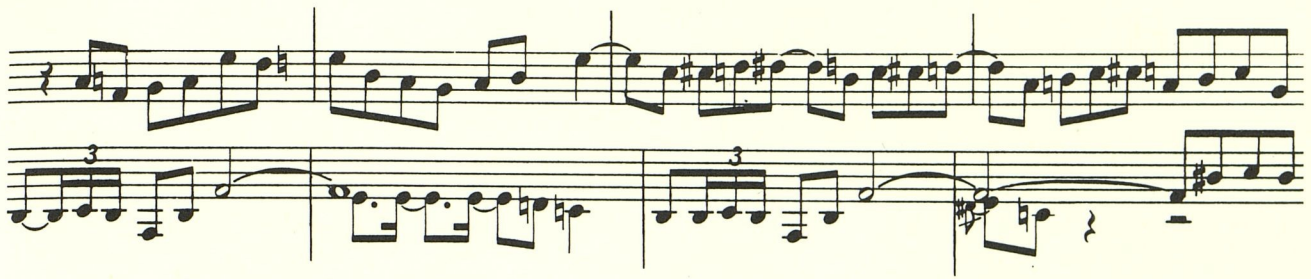
In the field of jazz, blues and gospel such performers as Aretha Franklin, Nancy Wilson, Clara Ward and pianist, composer and singer Roberta Flack are maintaining the tradition which so many Black women of the past established. They are creatively expressing the social and spiritual life of Black women specifically and Black people in general.

It is apparent from this survey that Black women have played a significant role in the de-

velopment and growth of the early work songs, spirituals, calls and cries and the later forms which derived from these such as blues, jazz and gospel. They participated in opera and symphonies as well as starting music schools and organizations, and writing about Black music. Afrikan American women have been recognized as skilled performers, composers and critics. Through their effort the world is more aware of and familiar with Black music.

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23. *Ibid.*, p. 398.
24. Jones, p. 89.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
27. Southern, p. 249.
28. Hare, p. 55.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
31. Johnson, p. 37.
32. Work, p. 23.
33. Southern, p. 402.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 404.
35. "I Hear God" is written and arranged by Roberta Martin and has a copyright date 1962 by Roberta Martin, 1308 E. 47th Street, Chicago, Illinois.
36. Southern, p. 111.
37. Hare, pp. 222-224.
38. Southern, p. 255.
39. Hare, p. 243.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
41. Southern, p. 305.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 426-427.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 449.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 472-474.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 500-501.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 501-502.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 503-505.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 507.





## Music Is My Lover (for Ntozake Shange)

Music is my lover, is my smooth dancing partner. Thursday night disco spring rhythm colors vermillion hue. Music is my soul on a dollar forty-five spin. Is my truth of living and my style of conversation. Is silver jewels and jade rings. Is silk on my legs and smoke in my head. Music's even in my dreams where I float on blue clouds. Gato Barbieri sax in erotic mesh with Willie Figueroa's jitter-buggin legs. Feet moving Willie Colon style, Eddie Palmieri style, hijo del santo style. Y canta sabor libre singing rapping rhapsodies in rainbows tropic colored afro cuban rican chicano y chino rhythm.

Music holds my hands and caresses my face in tender syncopated breaths. Music kisses my feet. Don't have to wait for salvation, or the liberation of my mind. Music's all the time. Doesn't beat me when I'm blue, or kick me when I'm down. Doesn't make me wish to be somebody else.

Music is my beat. Is my salsa con dulce. My guaguanco y bolero suave. Is my mambo, bomba, plena y danza. Is merenge mashed potato well-seasoned, twisted into magic movement. Is my soul train thru ghetto land and motown rock come knockin dewdrops on my door. Is the ocean flowing thru my body. Thru my spine. Shaking my bones loose, pulling my muscles, cracking my joints. Music is my barometer of hot and cold. My newspaper of current events. Is violin strung pianos returning to forever blow my eardrums out into the galaxy, where lotus blooms. Is weed growing wild in gold gutters of my black and brown hills. Is my eyes in the dark. The earth under my feet. Is my ice cream and buttered corn.

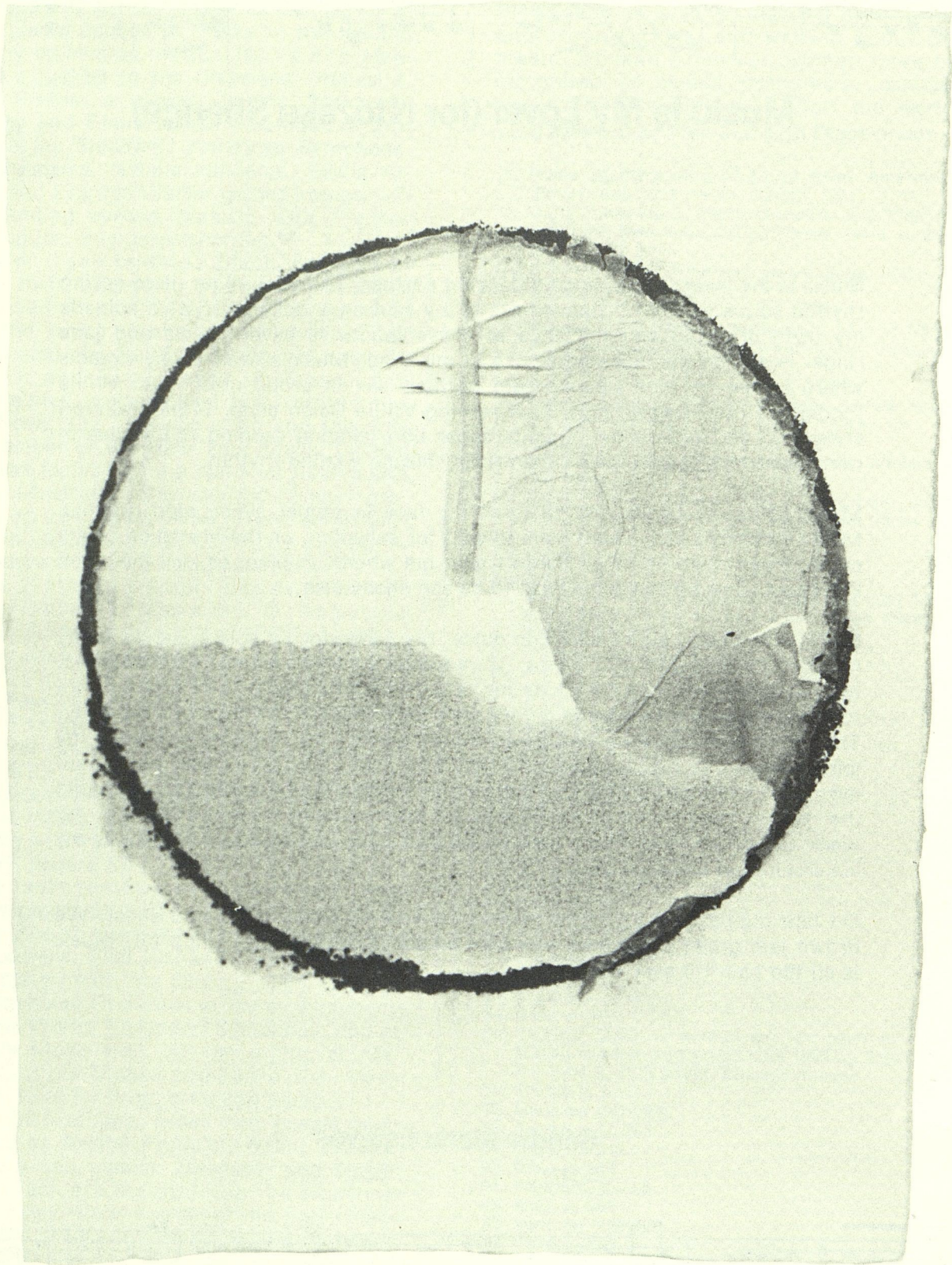
On late nights we have conversations. We drink smoke blow and shoot. We drown jam groan and clown. We beat smack slap Bang play jump hit. Music is all the pain I'll ever need.

**Sandra Maria Esteves**

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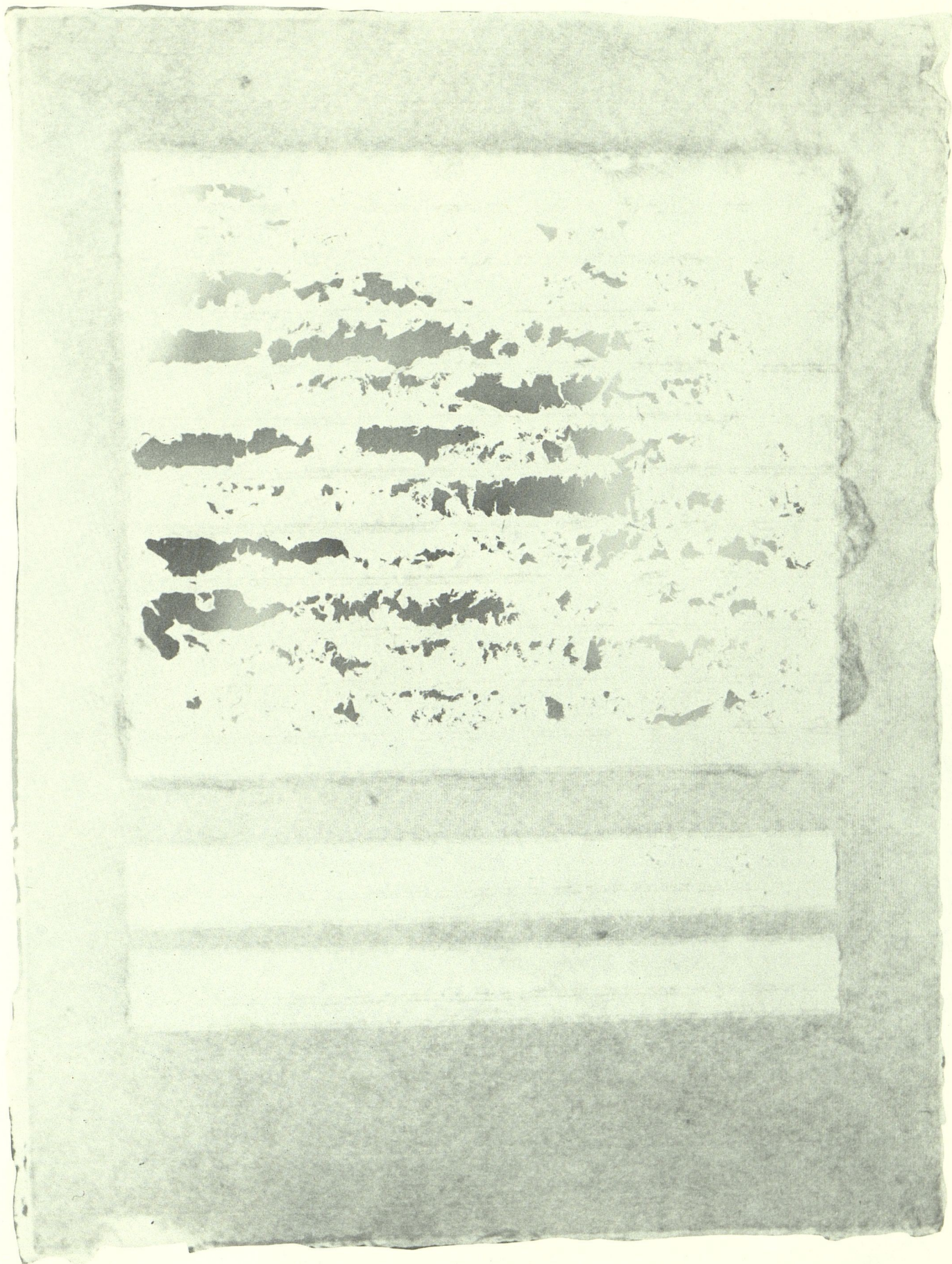






Emmi Whitehorse. Sand painting.

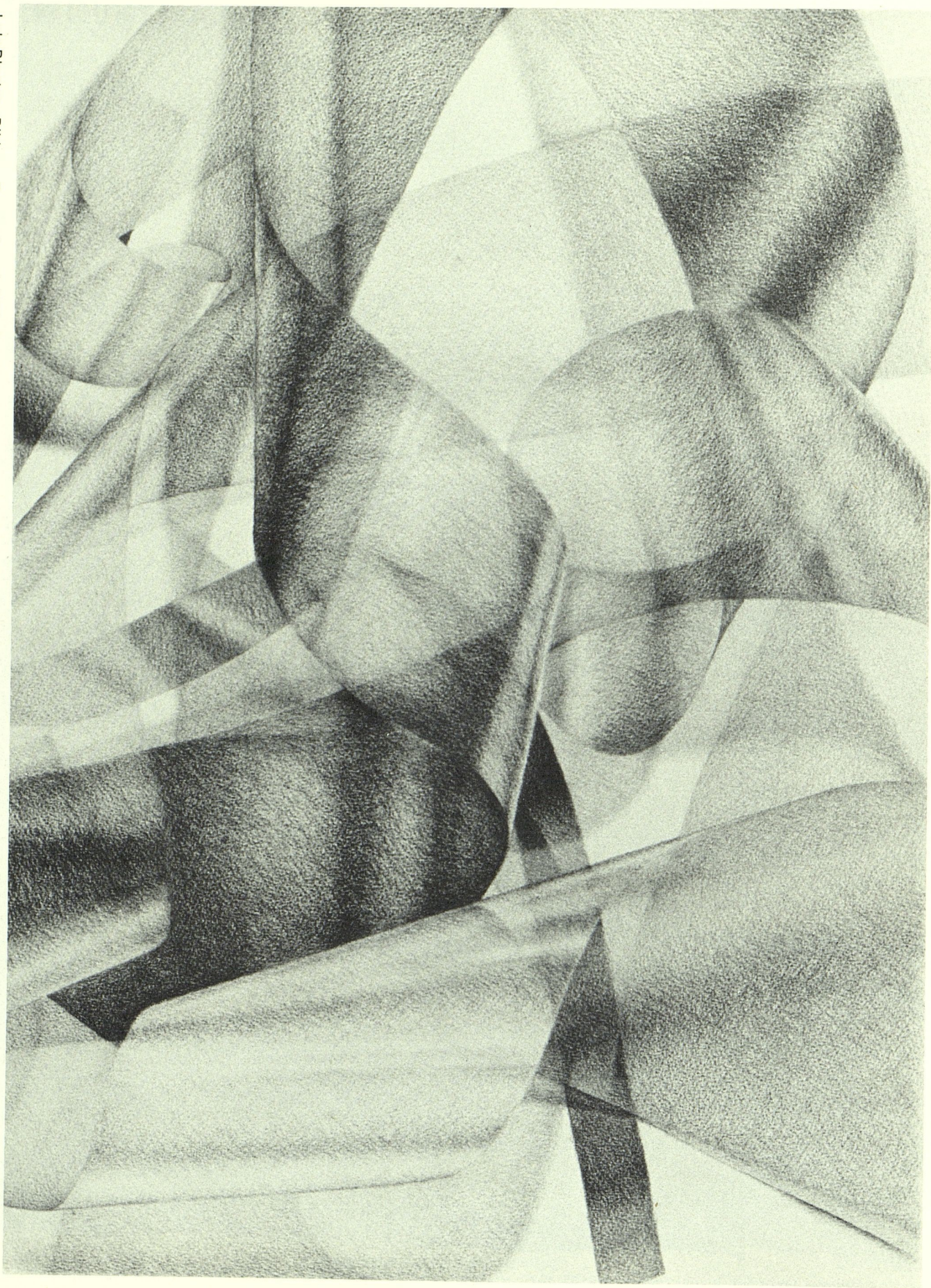




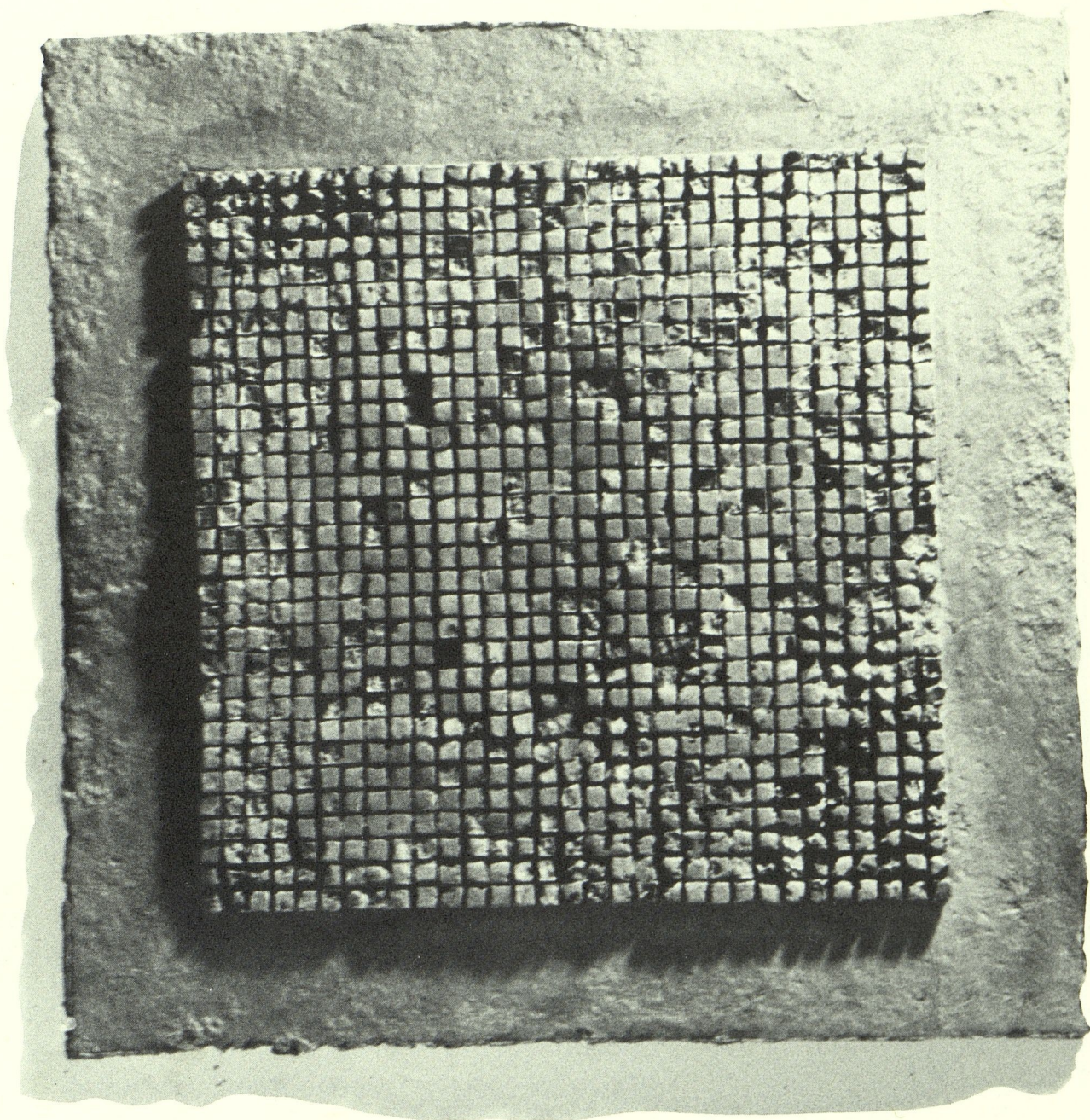
Virginia Jaramillo. *Visual Theorems* #170. 1979. Handmade translucent paper, 18" x 24". Photo credit: Ken Showell.



Lula Blocton. *Ribbons Remembered*. 1978. Colored pencils, 18" x 23".

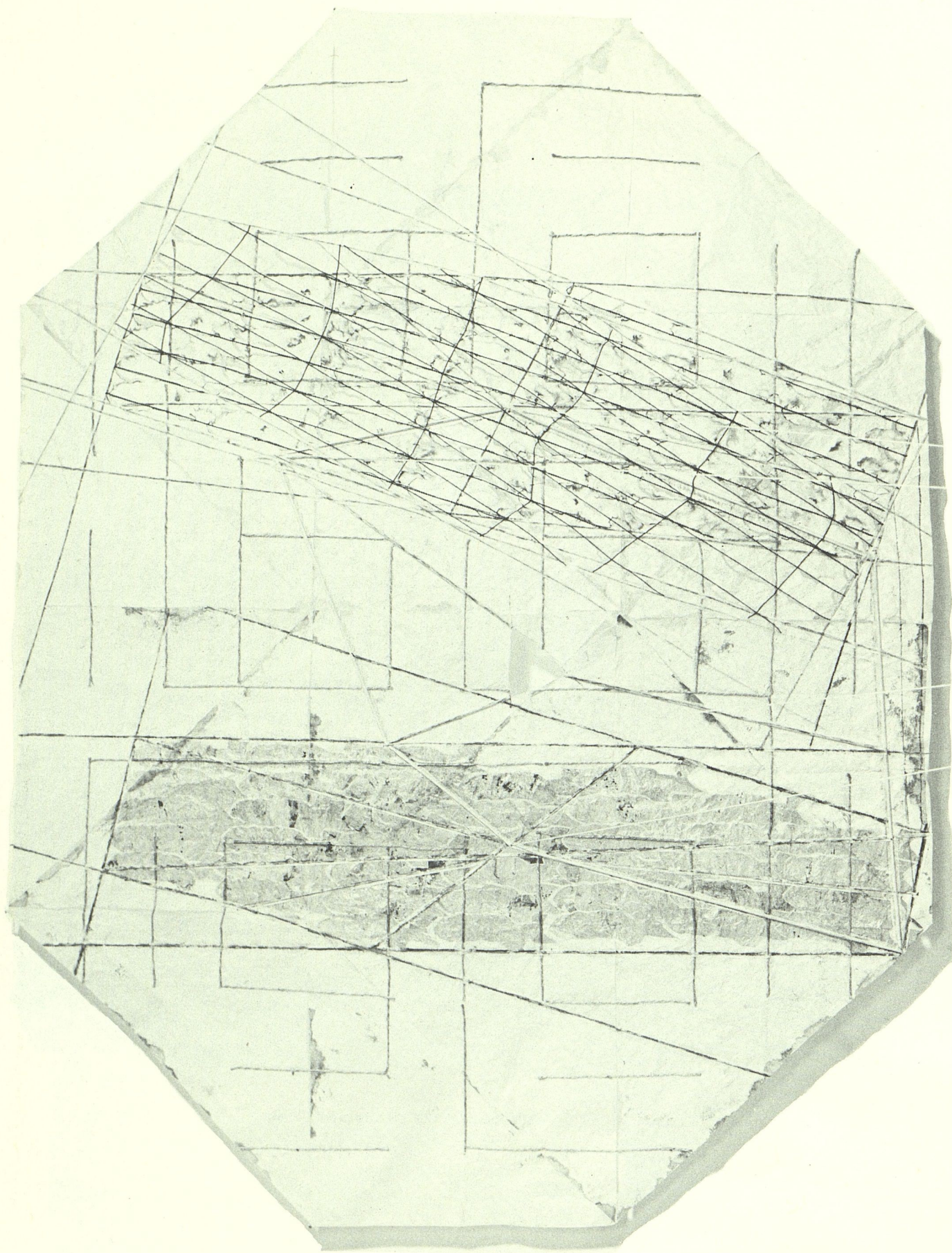






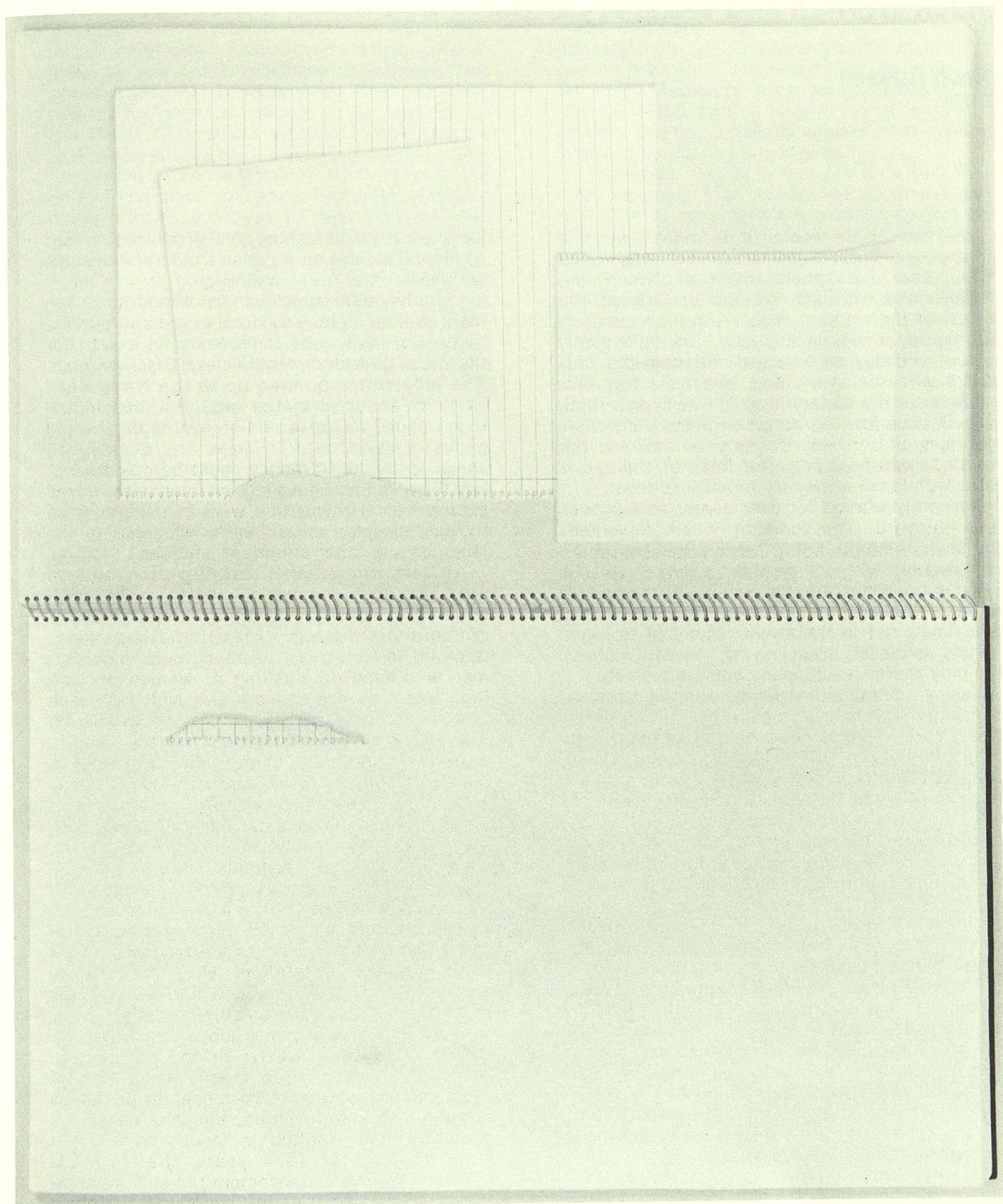
Zarina. *Wall*. 1979. Cast paper, 24" x 24". Photo credit: Ram.





Ann Page. *Deflect*—(M/H/L/Mi/T). 1979. Mixed media, 4'5" x 6'6".





Li-Lan. Notebook. 1974. Oil on canvas, 50" x 60".



# Black Women and Work: My Experiences

Dawn Russell

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The poor Black woman is in many ways the most aware Black woman. We are unequipped to succeed in a society which is divided into classes, and in which we are considered the lowest of the working class. Knocking about in our world of low-paying jobs, unemployment, racism and sexism, we are the invisible outsiders who see everything. We have few illusions about the society in which we live; I think we will have few regrets when this society dies. Yet many of our experiences show how we, the invisible, can be a powerful force of change; it is no wonder that they try to hold us down.

I recently worked for over a year as a burner in a shipyard. The company where I worked, the Seatrain Shipbuilding Corporation, continues to function without women burners. Recent layoffs have put all the women burners and most of the women welders, pipefitters and machinists out in the street. Many of us have had to settle for lower-paying jobs or welfare, the only routes traditionally open to women.

Seatrain Shipbuilding Corporation is a private company which rents space in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. This large industrial complex was originally the property of the U.S. Navy. Slowly abandoned since World War II, the Yard was a huge rotting white elephant for many years. No good use was made of the Yard until the late sixties, when the struggle of the poor against the system was at a high point. People from the surrounding neighborhoods got jobs, initially cleaning up the Yard. This was part of the attempt to pacify Black people, as various poverty programs and college education programs became available for a brief time.

But what about the Black woman? We were a vital part of the struggles, despite hostility from certain males in the revolutionary hierarchy of the sixties. Under the guise of "nationalism," Black women were supposed to step back and practice "traditional African Culture," which usually involved wearing long dresses, having many children and taking a supportive role in the struggle.

Stokely Carmichael was wrong, if he really did say that the only position for women in the movement was "prone." For it was a time of intense, liberating activity for us. The invisible

were on the front lines. We organized in our communities and on jobs, and our relationships with each other grew in strength.

Confidence in ourselves, sisterhood and even more will to fight was our reward for our activity. Not many jobs came our way, except for the more educated middle-class Black woman. The jobs which opened up at the Navy Yard were for the men of the area. Various industries opened factories and shipyards on the old docks; these "wild" Blacks could be hired cheap, and a lot of money could be made keeping them quiet. Thousands of men were hired for the jobs at wages that were considered high by poor people; women were relegated to the factories and other minimum-pay jobs.

At first, there were training programs to teach the men the trades necessary for shipbuilding—primarily shipfitting, welding, burning and pipefitting. Unskilled Black men, doomed to living on the margins of society, men who lived off hustling or women on welfare, had a chance to work at a skill for which they could get legally paid. The men who worked there in the early days, in fact, used to wear their hard hats home daily, a symbol in their communities of the status derived from a skilled and well-paying job. This pride became a part of our feelings about our jobs also; when we women were finally accepted in the trades, we at first wore our hard hats home proudly.

Contrary to the hopes of the management, however, the novelty of the job was not enough to keep the men happy. People began to realize that they were expected to do dangerous work with no safety precautions, were expected to work out of the trades, and had to wait for years for upgradings within their crafts. Angry workers began to organize job actions. The result of these were massive firings, the organization of a company-run union, the pitting of West Indians who were so-called illegal aliens against Black Americans, and eventually, a shutdown that resulted in layoffs that lasted from six months to a year. The ruthless behavior of the management is still remembered; the union remains weak and unrepresentative.

The first women to appear at Seatrain in the



mid-seventies were few indeed and had little impact. Primarily welders, with a few shipfitters, these women were not "feminists" in the intellectual sense in which the word is used by the institutionalized movement, but rather traditional Black women. Real feminism has always been one aspect of our tradition in the West. The Black woman in the United States has always been a working woman, since the arrival of Africans to the plantations of the South. The more well-to-do European woman's place might have been in the home, but the men whose slaveships brought our ancestors to this world had no such plans for Black people. Field slaves, house slaves, all had one reason for being: work. National oppression and the Black person's virtual confinement to the lower classes have resulted in the familiar picture of the Black woman, usually a worker and often the head of the family.

The older women who worked at Seatrain were in some cases following family tradition: one woman had worked as a welder in World War II and had a sister who was a crane operator in the South. This woman and the few others there at the time worked in the shops, which were considered the least hazardous areas. They usually did less dangerous work, and were accepted as "oddities" in an accessory role.

Meanwhile, changes in the outside world continued to affect the trades. More women began to force their way into the male-dominat-

ed world. They were products of our time, as well as of tradition; women who assaulted the macho mystique. We needed work and had no patience with this nonsense about "men only" and all that shit. We heard that Seatrain and the other shipyards were being pressured by federal stipulations to employ a quota of women. The gates opened slightly, and a whole bunch of us pushed our way in.

I remember applying for a job on a cold February morning. Men were lined up at the gate to the Yard, their collars turned up against the cold, stamping their feet impatiently and watching the indifferent guards who held the gates closed against them. Another woman and I had appointments and were let right in. A few men stared with hostility at this "privileged treatment" and I felt uncomfortable and almost guilty. We were interviewed by a man who was a friend of a friend; we women have our own grapevine. We had our qualifications checked, and were then given the "standard discouraging speech for women" by the same young man, who was tall and light-skinned and had a very manicured Afro. We later found that this speech was also inflicted on the few other women hired that month.

We were told that we would be hired as shipfitters and were then escorted to the Seatrain compound for processing. I don't remember details of the next few days, just an endless round of processing, talking to men who had the authority to give us jobs, clutching papers



(Culver Pictures)



and hurrying back and forth between buildings on one of the coldest days of the year. Amused men in hard hats watched as we picked our way between cranes, pieces of metal and other shipyard clutter as we scurried around. Everywhere men wanted to talk. Some wanted to rap, some wanted to encourage us and some wanted to warn us about what we were getting into. Many seemed to think it was a big joke.

And somewhere on our journey, we two were persuaded to become burners instead of shipfitters. This we found out was a part of a plan to divide the women among various trades, to keep us separate from each other. We were actually part of an experiment in women as shipyard workers that was set up with the hypothesis that we would fail. The management hoped that the men would be their accomplices in this plan. They were wrong, for a few of the men were actually helpful, and most just got used to us.

We did have many problems adjusting, for most men initially rejected the women, in particular the shipfitters. Shipfitters must work in gangs, and directly with partners. A new shipfitter must be assigned to a more experienced partner in order to learn the trade. At the time that we were employed, there were three women shipfitters and one woman burner (me) assigned to work outside of the shops in the dock area. The supervisor admitted that we had been put outside in the coldest month of the year in order to discourage us. Most of the men refused to work with the women, knowing that it would mean being closely watched by the management. Most felt that they would end up doing all the work and carrying all the equipment with female partners. After all, everyone knows that a woman brings trouble into a man's world, right?

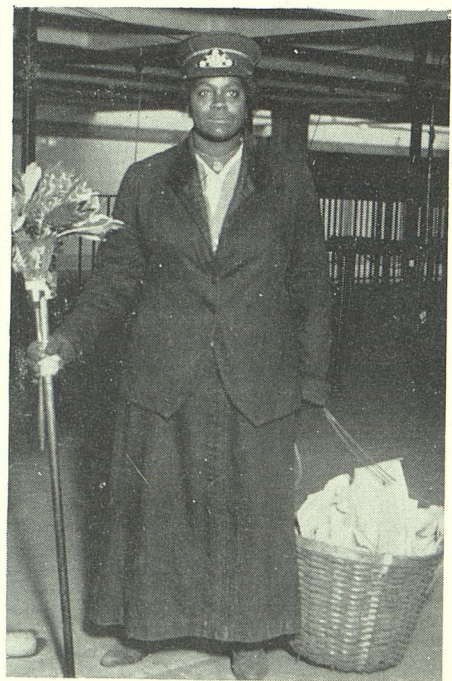
Fortunately for the women shipfitters, however, one man was willing to take them all on as his partners, teaching them the basics of the trade. This group became the focus of a lot of attention, with frequent complaints from upper-management people that one woman was always talking, that we distracted the men, and so on. The Brother who worked with the women put up with much harassment and teasing. He was nicknamed "pimpfitter" and snide remarks were made about his relationship to the women. We women, in turn, learned our trades quickly and under pressure, pulled our own weight, and eventually the gossip and remarks died down.

I know that in the gang I worked with I was eventually treated with great respect as a worker and expected to do my own job without help or advice unless I asked for it. I hung out with the rest of the gang and found that my opinion was valued in rap sessions, especially about women, politics, or sex. (Men are usually very ignorant about the last two.)

We women got together at lunchtime and spent a lot of time together both on and off the job. We became involved in the union and were known for struggling against the union bureaucracy, against sell-out contracts, and in favor of more job security for women.

In our day-to-day relationships with each other, however, we still had many problems. We were guilty of looking at ourselves with the eyes of society at large. In this society, and more grossly on that kind of job, women were divided into categories. They were the cheap whores, available to anybody, the "get overs," the opportunists who were out to get what they could from men (on that job, this meant playing up to supervisors in order to avoid working), the good girls (who wouldn't work there anyway), and the butches. This last category included all those who could not be fitted into the other categories and wanted to hold a "man's job" anyway. These ideas affected us so much that we often played this game ourselves. In discussions in our locker room in the early days on the job, a great deal of time was spent criticizing some women for being whores or supervisors' pets; and there was much speculation among the more conservative about who was a lesbian and who was whose lover.

But we changed, and grew. Our constant discussions, our support of each other, our relying on each other for advice, comfort, as well as criticism and discipline, formed a bond between us that grew as time passed. We shared lunches, equipment, views. Our experiences affected the way we looked at ourselves as workers, women, fighters. And how we changed! Women with stereotyped views of the woman's role, who hid behind ultra-femininity



(Culver Pictures)



in order to deal with the job, were able to look at themselves more realistically and be proud of what they saw. One woman, who was white and rather intellectual, was able to overcome her feelings of being an outcast, and to stop intellectualizing everything. We Black women, in turn, had to deal with feelings of hostility toward white women. There developed, in this situation, a core of people who really cared about each other.

I have tried to explain our life together on the job, for although the effects might last forever, the job did not. The tide has turned and further crises in the capitalist system have resulted in massive unemployment; reactionary cutbacks have affected the forward push of women workers in trades and industry. Layoffs started at Seatrain in March 1978, when the burning department was drastically cut back, leaving all three women burners out of work. After searching for jobs in our trades, we were forced to look for other means of support. One woman ended up working in a bar, and the other two in low-paying jobs in the garment industry, where women workers, in factories and offices, are given the most demeaning work and treated disrespectfully. The other women were laid off almost a year later, and the last hired suffered their usual fate: once more at Seatrain women are a thing of the past.

I was able to get a job in an office since I had some background in "paperwork." I ended up in a clerical job that pays about two-thirds of my former salary. My new job took me into the "World of Fashion" with a famous brand-name company that sells high-priced jeans and sportsclothes. I was employed as a file girl, expected to file, and to be a girl.

One of the first things that struck me, in fact, when I began working in this men's business of dressing women, was the fact that women were all addressed as girls and expected to like it. It was a strange contrast—leaving the world of industry, of workers who struggled for their rights, to work in an industry that based itself on the myth of woman, the doll to be adorned. People spent most of their time discussing ways to persuade women to be silly, to starve themselves thin to look like some man's sadistic dream, to buy expensive clothes that had to be replaced constantly. Important matters are discussed among the owners and upper-management personnel, who are all men. The few women with any authority are all white and look like models themselves.

It was very difficult to make contact with any of the women there. Most discussion centered around clothes, hair and Studio 54. Class was a very important issue here. On this job, there was a definite hierarchy in the office. The lower-echelon office workers were not expected to fraternize with the upper echelon. Most office workers were extremely concerned about

upward mobility. This is a direct result of education and cultural values in our society. Office workers are generally "better educated" than people in trades or factories. This means that they are actually more indoctrinated into the system, and view themselves individualistically, at the expense of the group. This is the American Way, to strive for success at the expense of others. It is accepted as natural that life is a competition and only a few will win. In this atmosphere it is difficult to organize around common interests.

The women in my office fall into sexist roles. Only women who are considered attractive are hired. The Blacks in the company are concentrated in the warehouse, where they are responsible for loading and unloading, and are usually referred to as "the boys." A few Third World women do office work; a Black woman cleans up the place.

During the short time that I have been employed here, the company has expanded greatly, causing an increase in office staff at the lowest levels. This has meant an increase in the number of women hired to do the office drudgery. With the expansion of the company, salaries for us women at this level have gone down. This has had one good benefit, as there is now a small group of women who rely on each other for support and agree on small defiances of the management. The development of strong working-class and feminist tendencies is very slow. Women office workers are subjected to subtle racism and sexism that is a part of everyday office life and harder to deal with than overt racism and sexism. They are less confident in their womanhood than the women in trades because they are looked down on by their bosses, by other women with more prestige in the office and sometimes by their husbands. Office workers are not put in situations where they can challenge themselves the way we were forced to in the trades.

It remains for women to force themselves to be heard, not to settle for invisibility. It is important for women to continue in the trades and industry, to make their presence felt in the working class. Women working in offices are fighting against impossible odds, but they are fighting for recognition. Women who struggle for women's rights and who force open formerly closed doors are a source of inspiration. We know that we hold up half of the fucking sky; now we're going to make everyone else notice it.

*Note:* Seatrain Shipbuilding Corporation closed in the spring of 1979. All the workers were laid off. It is becoming increasingly difficult for women to enter the trades in the New York area.





PHOTO BY W.P.  
IN KENTUCKY

(Culver Pictures)

## Seamstress on Line

If he sends 560 pieces in there, he wants 560 back. That's what he told 'em the other day. See, Somebody was stealing a whole bundle of pieces for ladies' slacks. They put the bundle in the trash and he found it. Boy, was he mad! He said, "You're all a bunch of thieves in here." He said, "I expect you to steal one or two with the intention of wearing them, but when you steal a whole bundle you intend to sell them. And I'd better not find out who it is!"

The fella who was putting out the trash said it felt kinda heavy so he took it to the boss and asked, "You throwin' this out?" That's how he found out. I don't know who did it. It happened up front but now he looks in everybody's bag before we leave at night. Nobody says anything about it, either. I don't care if he looks in mine, though, because I know I ain't done it. I can't wear no size 12. If I were gonna steal something I'd steal something for *me*.

**Katherine Odoms**

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# Maria

## Barbara Sheen

© 1979

Maria rodriguez had long legs, long for a mexican woman. her skin was brown, soft as a chamois cloth. she oiled it every morning, every night, rubbing herself gently up and down, all over with the dark thick oil. she lived alone on the beach in a small hut in the baja. she built the hut 14 years before weaving reeds and straw like a mother bird; 6 mangy dogs slept in front of the hut growling at visitors. their bones protruded from their skin rippling down their chests. she kept them and fed them and even let them into the hut when it rained but they were not her children or her friends, just animals that she traded services with. she was a prostitute. her customers were fishermen, california fishermen who came to the baja pulling big boats behind new trailers hoping to catch marlin and bass and have a little fun. they were married men with a wife and 3 children in a ranch house in san diego. maria didn't like the gringos. they were phonies, but they paid well to have her. she liked their money. sometimes she emptied their fat wallets while they slept in her bed. she didn't speak english. it made life easier. this way they couldn't make unreasonable demands on her or ask for her emotions. she liked living alone, running her business. the men were like the dogs; she used them and they used her. it was a fair exchange.

Mornings she would wake early, when the sun crept into the hut kissing her body with its brightness. she'd dress in the flowered bikini, clean the house and wander onto the beach. mornings were the best times to swim before the tourists came filling the beach with their whiteness. she'd watch them, laughing at their chicken legs, eyeing the yellow-haired babies with pacifiers stuck into their round little mouths. she'd walk watching the shoreline, searching for crabs that she boiled in a great black pot. crabs and rice were her main meals. sometimes the gringos took her to la paz to eat in a restaurant. she didn't mind although the city was big and dirty. the men could find more sophisticated girls there. girls who catered to their perversities. maria didn't. she was clean. she fished off a rock in front of her house, the dogs licking at her feet. noon the local boy

came by with 2 bottles of rum. a shot of rum was a service she provided the customer, that and a healthy body. she'd tell them right away that she wasn't carrying any social disease. this was important to the gringos. they had wives to go home to. maria knew her market. she was a good saleswoman.

Once, months ago, she had 2 gringos at once, two great blond men whose whiteness covered her the way snow covers the mountains. it wasn't bad. they were nervous, really wanting each other and using her as an excuse. they didn't stay long. they paid her 50 dollars, good american money. with 50 u.s. dollars tucked deep into her mattress maria felt like an important woman, important and intelligent, not like her mother, not at all. her mother was also a prostitute, working the same beach where maria lived. she was a young country woman without strength, who loved the gringos for less money than she deserved, always underrating herself, never making a just bargain, giving more than she took. her mother was named estela chavira rodriguez, of good peasant family, the daughter of a farmer, whose wife died before estela was old enough to know what a mother was. her father was too weak to raise the child alone. he became the town drunk beating his daughter night after night until she came to expect it. finally he followed his wife to the graveyard when estela was 13 years old. estela found la paz and the streets and eventually the peace of the beach and the gringos.

Maria had a picture of her mother at 18, fresh and young, an exotic orchid growing in the white sand. she was holding hands with a soft anglo man, round as a meatball. honcho, maria would hiss at the picture, gringo, a man with an orange-haired wife and freckled children in the hills of los angeles. he came with his trailer and his boat to seek adventure as they all do in the black summer heat of mexico. she was 3 years old then, tottering at her mother's side, holding to wide umbrella hips for security. she had watched her mother with men, all the men for all the years, then this man, who her mother had once, twice, the third time she didn't take his money; estela was in



love with a respectable american doctor who used her for a toy, a cute little latin barbie doll. stationed in korea years before, he left a fat little baby behind to live with the indignity of being no one. the doctor was named bob. she could remember her mother brushing her dark hair in front of the mirror, humming, grabbing at her child and asking maria le gusta el doctor bob?, laughing and smiling. in response she rubbed her face against her mother's chest as she had seen so many men do, as was her instinct to do.

Dr. bob's boat was big and long, a plastic surgeon's boat. it had 2 sleeping cabins and a cute kitchen that his wife did in red gingham. 4 stuffed marlins hung proudly over his bed. maria remembered. even now, 22 years later, she remembered. the fourth time, her mother had gone on to the boat taking the baby along, putting her to sleep on the cabin floor. she drank tequila with the doctor, laughing and kissing, dreaming of keeping this luxury. the doctor tied her mother to the bed. maria watched, feet and hands. estela was laughing, breathing hard. he undressed her, pulling at her yellow dress, pushing at it with the clumsiness of a 15-year-old virgin until he took his fishing knife and tore the dress into pieces, pulling it off of estela strip by strip. maria watched as he dropped his pants, his blue and red hawaiian shirt flopping around his full stomach. mounting estela he forced himself into her yielding body. estela writhed, immobile, tied. maria watched. when the doctor was finished his eyes gleamed. he pressed his mouth to the soft dark spot in her mother's thighs and sucked. maria watched. then he carefully lifted maria, the 3-year-old baby, and tied her to the bed next to her mother. the mother screamed, no doctor, no, rolling her head. his eyes shone. he stuffed his boxer shorts wet with sweat into estela's mouth to silence her. he pressed his mouth between the child's thighs and sucked hard. maria felt the bite of his yellow teeth and cried mama, mama, knowing as an animal knows, that she was being violated. the mother pulled with her body her eyes steaming but the ropes only became tighter. maria stared at the doctor, into flaming blue eyes. u could not trust blue eyes, like the sky they changed. slowly the doctor forced his bright pink penis into her baby mouth. maria sucked the way she sucked her mother and the doctor laughed watching her. finished he left the baby, returning to the mother. he drank freely from a new bottle of tequila, his head spinning off his body. pig, he whispered. mexican pig, sticking his tongue into the mother's ear, swirling it round and round until he could deafen her, then biting roughly at her nipples

wanting to bite them off like pits and spit them onto the waxed floor. mexican trash. white whore. estela tossed her body. her stomach forced itself upward like a giant football. her eyes steamed. how much do u think u r worth spanish slut, how much? his eyes twinkled in the dark cabin. how much? how much? this much? forcing his fist deep into her stomach, or this? into her chest, laughing softly. u people u damned ugly people, u r monkeys. u try to think u r the same as us. u wanted me to love u. u tramp. u who i would never permit to lick the mud off my wife's shoes. come here gypsy. he jerked at her mother's chin holding it tight. estela forced it back. maria heard the crunch of the jaw breaking. dr. bob wants to kiss u whore. he kissed her mother's lips, then raised his fishing knife and drew an x across estela's velvet cheek, chuckling, whore. slowly he licked at the blood with his doctor tongue, spitting it out in a gush on her stomach. trollop, biting at her nipples again, playing with them with his fishing knife, cutting at them, peeling them like an orange, whore. u r the biggest fish i've ever had to skin. first i will fuck u. the good doctor will fuck u. slowly he mounted the mother. maria watched the tears roll quietly down estela's face, pounding his fat body like a beached whale against estela's firmness. finished he rolled off laying on top of the child almost smothering her. laughing he stood up. he drank thickly from the tequila bottle muttering through fattened lips. this is whore whiskey. my wife, my jean, serves me martinis with stuffed olives. what do u know about martinis whore? all u know is this. he smashed the bottle on the bedpost. the liquid poured onto the woman's chest. need a bath pig? he laughed. quickly he lapped it up with a pimply tongue, moving the bottle along the body making a jagged red line, laughing all the time. maria watched. or is this whiskey too good for u, mexican, too good for u and pancho villa and all ur other 2 bit heroes? what about this? maybe this is more fitting? he drew his knife. how would u like this? maria watched her mother close her eyes. her face stiffened into hard muscle. her skin turned white as the doctor plunged his knife between her legs, up and down, up and down, as maria had seen so many do so many times to her mother with their fingers. the bed dripped red. the doctor lay down on top of her mother smiling. had enough whore? had enough?

Maria slept tied to the bed next to the doctor. in the morning she watched as he cleaned the room, quietly as if he was used to it. then he untied the child and carried the mother's body onto the deck dropping it silently into the sea, taking the child's hand and waving it, say bye, bye mommy. bye, bye. he



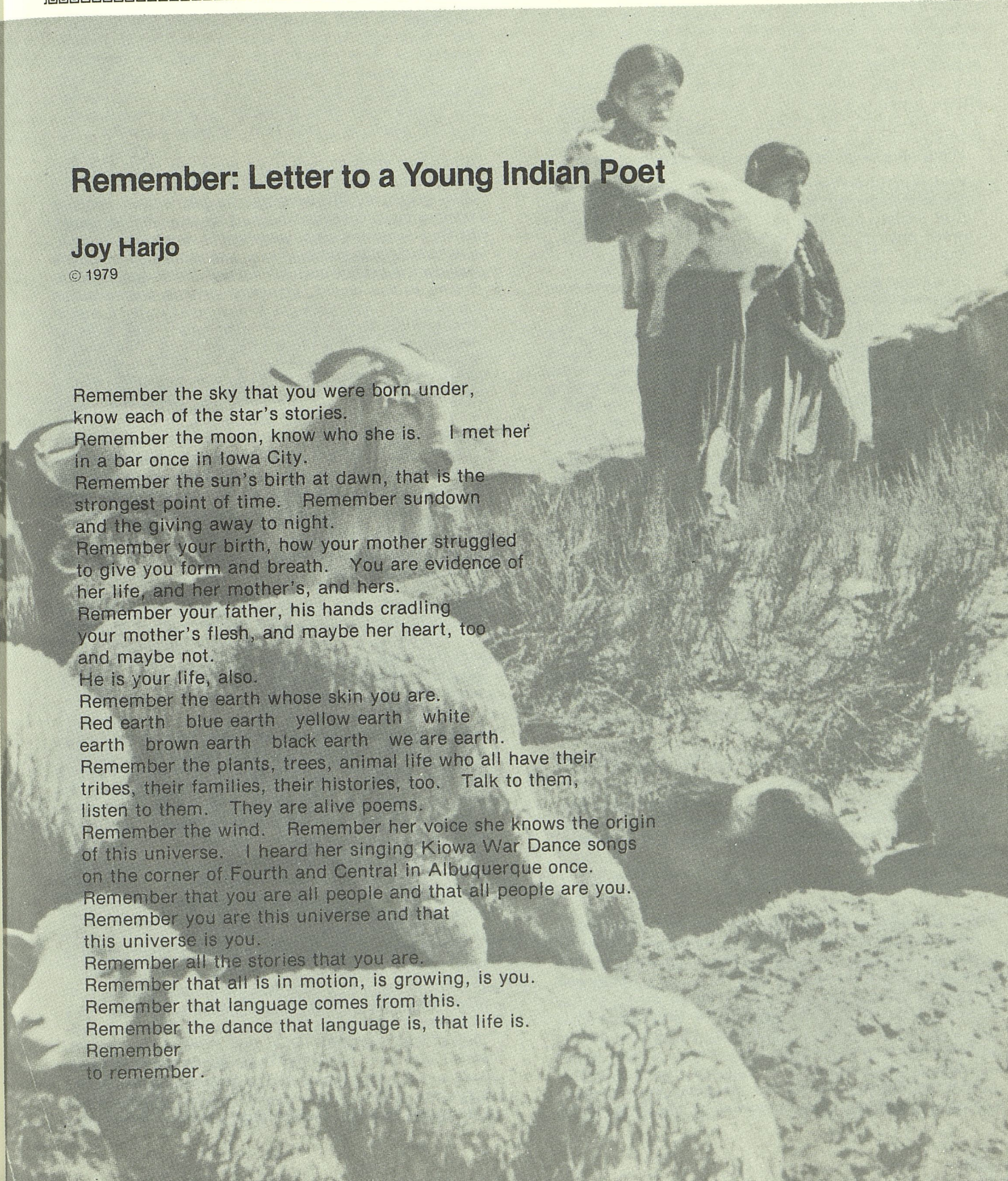
left the child on the beach, then went home to his wife and his big house in the hills of los angeles where the rich people lived. another prostitute, another whore who worked the beach, teresa leticia garcia, took her in,

watched her grow to womanhood. gently she taught her about life. until she was a grown woman ready to look after herself. maria had seen and remembered. she looked after herself quite well, not like her mother at all.

## Remember: Letter to a Young Indian Poet

Joy Harjo

© 1979



Remember the sky that you were born under,  
know each of the star's stories.  
Remember the moon, know who she is. I met her  
in a bar once in Iowa City.  
Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the  
strongest point of time. Remember sundown  
and the giving away to night.  
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled  
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of  
her life, and her mother's, and hers.  
Remember your father, his hands cradling  
your mother's flesh, and maybe her heart, too  
and maybe not.  
He is your life, also.  
Remember the earth whose skin you are.  
Red earth blue earth yellow earth white  
earth brown earth black earth we are earth.  
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their  
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them,  
listen to them. They are alive poems.  
Remember the wind. Remember her voice she knows the origin  
of this universe. I heard her singing Kiowa War Dance songs  
on the corner of Fourth and Central in Albuquerque once.  
Remember that you are all people and that all people are you.  
Remember you are this universe and that  
this universe is you.  
Remember all the stories that you are.  
Remember that all is in motion, is growing, is you.  
Remember that language comes from this.  
Remember the dance that language is, that life is.  
Remember  
to remember.



## Power Exchange 3: Suni Paz

Valerie Harris

© 1979

*What do you do here at the Ethical Culture Society?*

We're just borrowing the building. My work is with the Encampment for Citizenship. The Ethical Culture Society provides us with offices and a space to meet with the kids in the Encampment once a month.

*When did you begin working with the Encampment program?*

I was appointed Project Director last summer. The kids are in residence for four weeks during the summer and we continue working with them throughout the year. The work is different during the summer because I have to organize the entire camp—food, beds, everything. Last summer it was held at Manhattan College, and the kids lived there. We organize it in a way that avoids cliques—we pair a Jewish kid with a Black, Hispanic with a Greek, group all different kinds together so they'll have to deal with each other. They live together and participate in different workshops that simulate aspects of society like urban crises, education, money and ethics; we view society through poetry and songs; and we go on trips to different communities and organizations. They get to see for themselves how other people live and some of the problems other people have. Also, everyone has to do some volunteer work once a week. Last time we took them to the Bronx—you know that part of the Bronx that looks like a bombarded area? Our kids worked in a program where they helped fix ceilings, clear lots, paint walls, all kinds of things.

*Where do you get these kids from? How are they selected?*

At first the principals of the various schools suggested students who they thought should participate. Now the kids themselves, with a coordinator, select the new kids.

*Are these usually problem kids?*

Oh, we have all kinds. They usually choose kids who have leadership potential. Now, leadership potential can be positive or negative. When there's trouble people look to these particular kids, and sometimes they're the center of trouble. Wise guys, sometimes. Some of the kids come to the Encampment as if they were coming to a resort, you know, to the Bahamas or somewhere. We have to then make them understand that this is not just a summer vacation but a place where we have to work very hard on dealing with ourselves in the first place,

and then with others...In working with the Encampment I feel I can use all the things I've learned throughout my life because the job is not divorced from what I'm really about. The only inconsistency is that I realize that you cannot integrate people. The word "integration" is a forcible term. In a way we are integrated because we are all kinds of people living in the world, although with a tremendous conflict of interests. It's very difficult. I never thought I'd be working in a program that tries to make integration a more organic thing. I've always been against the melting pot concept. You see where the contradiction comes in?—we're all living together whether we like it or not, oppressed more and more by economic problems, in a very competitive society which will become even more competitive as things get tougher economically. So I feel good in working toward helping these young people to live together and understand the problems they face. They have to do that or they'll end up knifing each other to death.

*How did you come to head the program? What were your qualifications?*

Just by chance. I'd gone to an agency and told them my background and about a month later they called me and asked if I'd be interested in doing this. I've worked with kids for a long time; I have a lot of teaching experience. I'd developed programs for high schools and elementary schools in California. I'd created social studies programs that would convey the cultures of various countries through songs, because music is my thing. My programs were very successful because I was doing this when the Brown Berets were active in Los Angeles, the whole society was in turmoil. And I arrived on that scene by chance, too. I'd come because I wanted to sing and I had a huge repertoire, and it sounded nice to sing to kids, so I said okay, lots of fun and make some bucks. But it seemed that these kids were waiting for me, like dry earth waiting for the rain to fall. The Indian kids would come to me with things they'd made and they'd say, "I like very much that song about Indians and I want to give this to you because my father's a Cherokee." They'd show me things of their background that made me realize that I was getting into territory that wasn't all fun; it was a very serious thing. That's what happens when you have a conscience, which is a very annoying bug. So I said to myself, wait a minute, I have to know more about these Chicanos, I don't know anything about these Black kids in the schools, I really didn't know. I was just a



foreigner, newly arrived in the country. I spoke very bad English, also, so, first things first, I studied English. Then Mexican culture and anthropology. Then Black history, from the beginning. I attended the lectures of the Brown Berets, the Black Berets, all the berets in town. I felt so ignorant and I realized that I couldn't go on like that. At school the kids were teaching me a lot of things and I was changed as a result of that. That's what so fantastic about working with kids. Since I've been at the Encampment I've learned more than in five years of teaching in college. Working with high school kids is a different reality. And this city, New York, is very tough.

*Why'd you come to the East Coast?*

Well, family things, and there were some opportunities. The programs had ended in California so I decided to try my luck here. But as soon as I arrived here I realized I was in another country. The contradictions within society here are so sharp, to such an enormous degree.

*And especially here. Your office is located in a neighborhood where all the differences are very apparent. I know someone who lives here on Central Park West but I never come around here because I get very angry. I start choking on my own racism. That's not a comfortable feeling.*

The contradictions are ferocious. You can't escape them. We're right here in the bellybutton of it all.

*So after you arrived here how did you get involved?*

I continued studying. I enjoy studying and it also keeps me in contact with young people whose ideas are continuously changing, and changing me. I feel the volts all around me. At first I didn't work too much but I volunteered myself to different organizations. I sang in Central Park and after that things started rolling again. People started calling me, this time the Puerto Rican groups. So, I had to study again—I didn't know anything about the history of Puerto Ricans. To tell you the truth I didn't even know where Puerto Rico was located. That's a problem with lots of Latin Americans like me; we become very localistic and have no feeling for what is going on in other Latin American countries. But I went to the major organization, called at that time the Movimiento Independentista Puertorriqueno, but later called Partido Socialista Puertorriqueno, and I became less ignorant through my association with them. I invented a course that would teach the history and culture of Puerto Rico and a few other Latin American countries through song. While teaching at Livingston College I got my master's degree and after that I came to the Encampment.

*Who contacted you to perform at the abortion rights rally at Judson Memorial Church last January?*

The women who organized it had seen me perform at several women's festivals. Also, they'd heard about my recording, "Between Sisters."

*When was this album recorded?*

I did it sometime last year. I'd designed a course on the Latin American woman, mostly through a desire to learn more about myself. I read a lot of socio-

logical studies, mostly by Latin Americans but some by North Americans too, on Latin American women. As a result I became aware of the effect upon me of the way I was brought up, the environment, the values, and where all these things came from. I began to understand where a lot of the conflicts I've had in my life came from. A veil was lifted and I began seeing things, like the impact of education and Catholicism, because, as you know, Argentina is a very Catholic country. It's like you're always carrying these heavy weights with you that you have to drop eventually. I began writing songs about that, about the search for who I am. You know, I'd always wanted a career but in Argentina it wasn't proper for a girl to enter the University.



Suni Paz. Photo credit: Janet Goldner.

*What kind of career did you want?*

I wanted to study psychology. But that was out of the question. I was told that I couldn't enter the University because there were bad elements there and I couldn't mix with bad elements. I was forced to study things that for me had nothing to do with the real world, with the people, so after a while I just dropped out and learned how to type. I was expected to get married and have children, not a career.

*Your album about the struggles of the Chicanos was publicized much more than "Between Sisters."*

I think it's because people consider problems of women a secondary issue. And I understand that our problems as a people, Latin Americans at home and in New York, are so tremendous that women can't afford to lock themselves up in our own particular problems. But while we are considering the situation as a whole we are entitled to study ourselves, where our heads are at, and where this all comes from. And I think from that revision of our



values and a better understanding of ourselves will come a much better understanding of men, our children, our families as well. If we want to change our society we have to change ourselves in the process. For me everything comes together. I don't separate the women from the rest of society, and I didn't do it in the album, either. The album deals with women living their lives in different ways, but I don't think that's accepted. When they talk to me about my work they always say, "Oh, the children's album is wonderful" and they don't talk about the women's album. I find that kind of strange.

*When we were soliciting manuscripts for this issue we sent notices to lots of Hispanic organizations here in New York. But we've gotten very little response from Puerto Rican women; in fact, there were no Puerto Rican women working on this issue with us. Yet, we've gotten some things from Chicanas all the way from New Mexico and California.*

Chicanas are very active. They've gone through a process of awareness and action that is absolutely astonishing. You know, once I performed at La Pena, which is a very famous place in Berkeley, and a group of Chicanas came from another town in a truck to hear me. One of them told me that she was studying to be a psychiatrist, and that her father was a psychiatrist in Mexico. He used my women's album in his therapy sessions because the women identified with the songs. The songs were helping them to deal with a lot of their personal problems that they'd been unable to face. So, this young psychiatry student requested that I write some songs for older women because there are no songs for them. This particular group had formed their own women's center and were using some of the

therapeutic techniques that the father had implemented in Mexico, again using my songs. This blew my mind because I never imagined that my songs could have such an impact.

*Were your songs non-political before you left Argentina?*

They were decidedly non-political but they were always about people, their lives, and their struggles—the life of the miner, the life of the peasant, the life of the gaucho. Much of our folklore is rooted in the environment—the mountains, the rivers, the trees. But I've always been intrigued by people, so even then my songs were devoted to them.

*What are the words to the song "Woman"?*

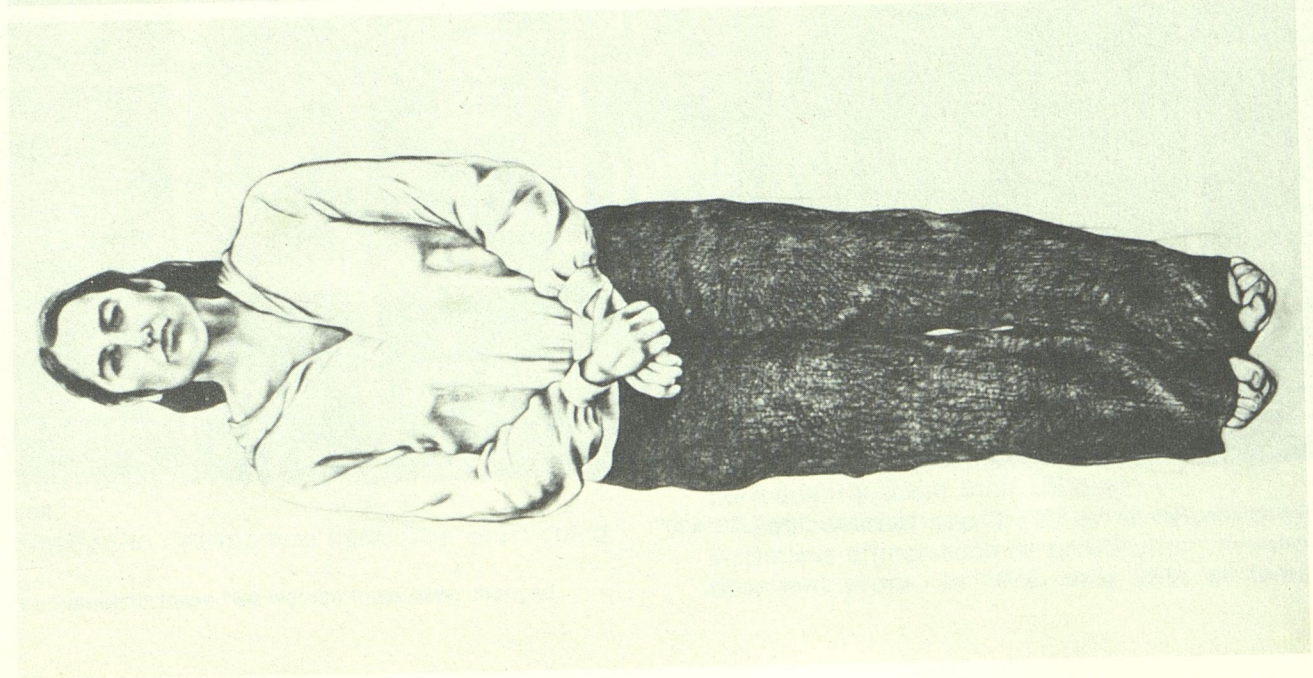
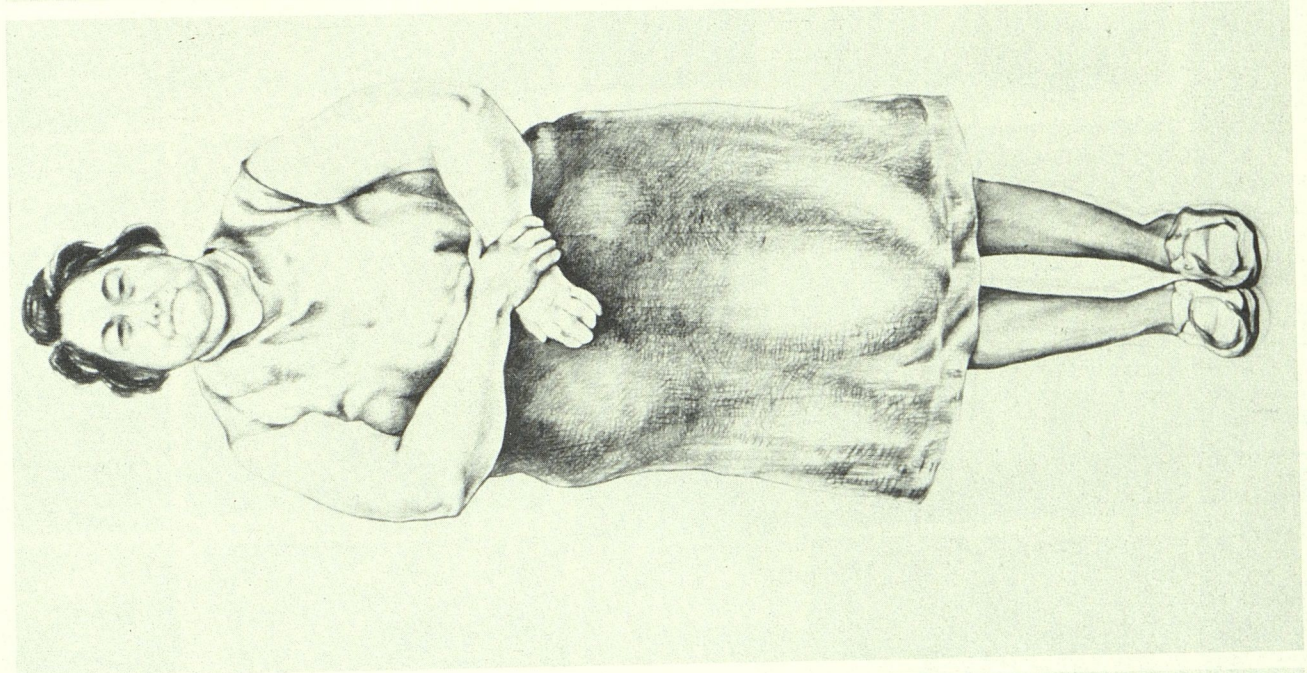
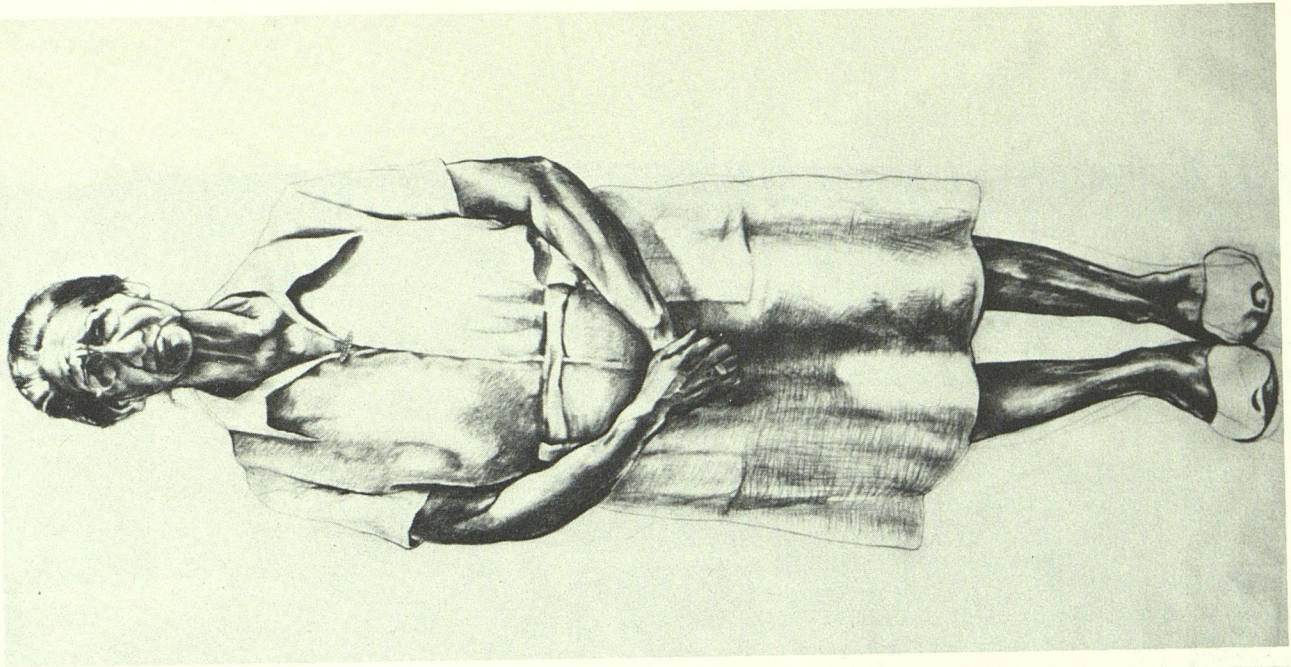
*Woman, daughter of light and darkness,  
of seaweed and stars,  
Consider for a moment the kingdoms awaiting you.  
Dream all the dreams,  
spring from the earth,  
and in search of the future conceive songs,  
crown the palm trees.  
Journey among the moons,  
melt even eternal snowpeaks.  
Woman, guardian of vines,  
sprinkle the calendars,  
break the strongest wills.  
Buzz through the ear drums until they tremble.  
Taste the rare,  
change the legendary ways,  
dress yourself with the dawn.  
Fear nothing!*



Photo by Morris Engel

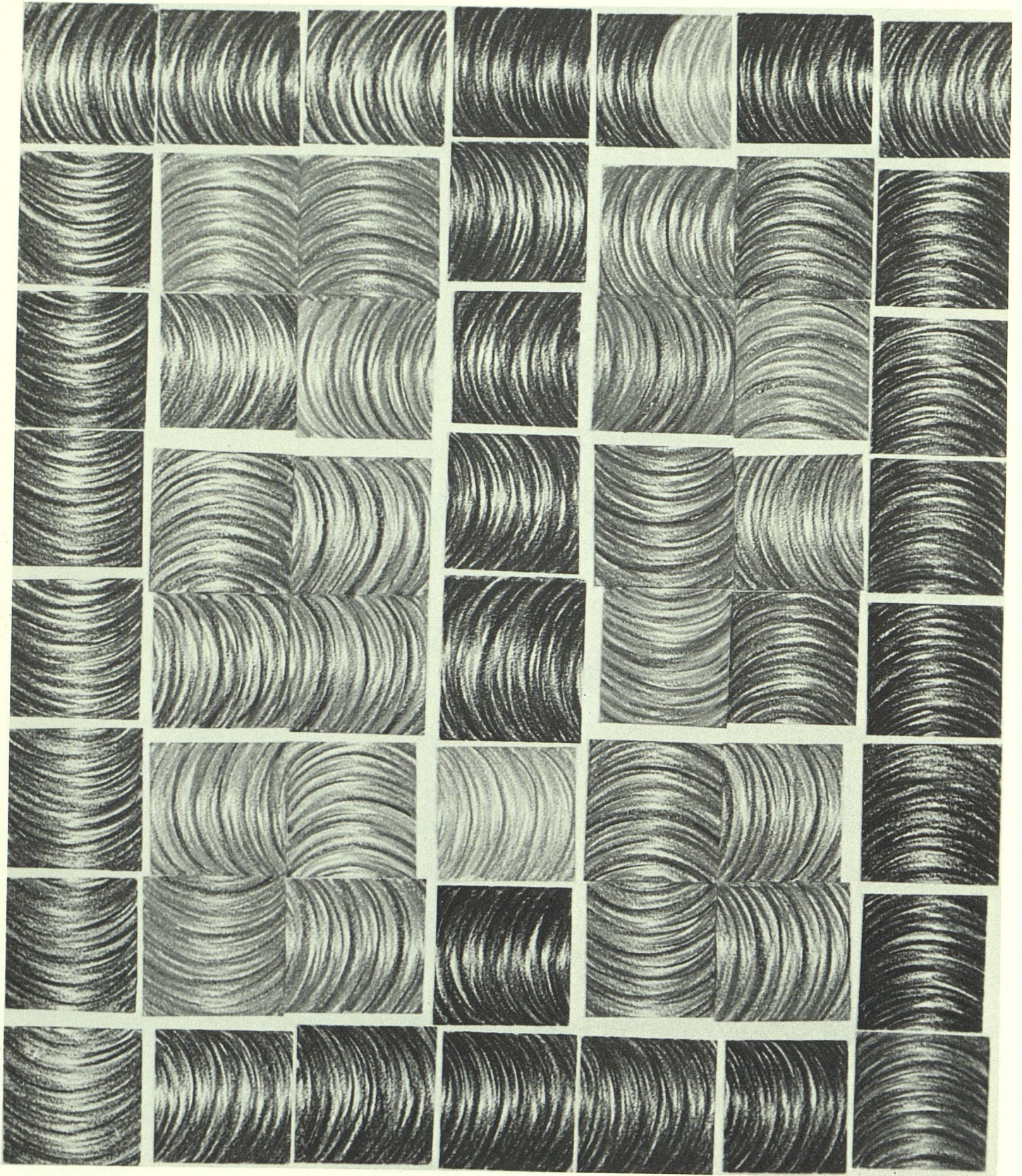
MISS MINERVA BERNARDINO OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, a full delegate, is small, plump, red-haired and vivacious, wears striking hats. She is probably the best known feminist leader of Latin America, was on the original Women's Sub-commission. "In my country," she has said, "we have had civil and political rights since 1940. I believe that now is the psychological moment for women all over the world. The advancement of a country can be measured by the opportunities given to women. When the men delegates from backward countries see women from other nations doing a good job at UN, they will want to see their own women coming here. Since women are more of the population of the world than men, I believe there should be at least one woman delegate in every delegation."





Yolanda M. Lopez. *Three Generations*. Charcoal on paper, 8' x 4' each.





Phyllis Thompson. *Patchwork*. 1977. Crayon/craypas collage, 22" x 30".



# Inmate Mothers and Their Children

Barbara Swartz

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Selma Jones\* is serving up to a three-year sentence at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York for possession of a small quantity of narcotics. She is young, Black and a first offender. She also has two small children. When she went to prison, she asked a friend to care for her son and daughter. Through the Department of Social Services in her home county, the friend was made the children's foster mother. Shortly after Ms. Jones arrived in Bedford Hills, her four-year-old son was found beaten to death. There were human teeth marks covering his body. Her prison caseworker says the foster mother is suspected of the murder. The daughter, who is suffering from a rare blood disease, has been taken from the foster home and placed in an institution. When Ms. Jones is released from prison she will have to go to court to try to regain custody of her child. She may not win.

Deidre Washington\* gave birth to a daughter one year before coming to prison on a one- to four-year sentence for larceny. She had been a junkie and had been shoplifting to support her habit. Before her conviction, she was attending a methadone program and "trying to get herself together." While in this program, she had temporarily committed her child to a foster-care agency because she felt unable to give her proper care. When she was arrested, she told the judge she wanted her child back. She says the judge promised her she could have her daughter upon her release. Six months later, she was served with papers from the foster-care agency instituting a neglect proceeding. They claimed that her rights as a parent should be terminated and that they should be made the guardians of her child. For the next year and a half, Ms. Washington and her prison counselor attempted to maintain contact with the foster-care agency. At all times she indicated to them that she did not want to give up her child. During this period, she was shuttled back and forth to court on five different occasions for the neglect hearing. Each time the hearing was adjourned because the judge was busy with other cases.

Finally the hearing was held. The court ruled

against Ms. Washington and ordered that the child be put up for adoption. Ms. Washington no longer has the right to ever see her daughter again.

These are but two not atypical examples of the plight of prison mothers and their children.

The Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that on any given day there are approximately 15,000 women incarcerated in state, local and federal facilities in the United States. Although this constitutes only about 5% of the total number of people incarcerated in the U.S.,<sup>1</sup> what is of great concern is that the statistics for female arrest have been increasing rapidly. From 1960-73, the number of women under eighteen arrested for serious crimes increased 337.2%.<sup>2</sup> This means that more and more women of childbearing age are encountering the criminal justice system and the impact is being felt on more children's lives. Of the number of women incarcerated, the data indicate that 70% are mothers and that they have on the average two dependent children. Thus there are about 21,000 children in the country whose mothers are in prison.<sup>3</sup>

Nationally, about one half of all incarcerated women are Third World: Black, Hispanic and Chicana.<sup>4</sup> However, in states with large urban areas such as New York, the number of non-white women in prison runs as high as 80%.<sup>5</sup>

White or Black, Chicana or Hispanic, these women share the common denominator of poverty. In 1969, according to U.S. Census Bureau data, 85% of women in prison had an income of less than \$4,000.<sup>6</sup>

Despite a slowly increasing public awareness of the fact that women are in prison, based in part on attempts by the media to draw connections between increasing female arrest and the women's liberation movement, little attention has been focused on inmate mothers and their children.

Yet for women on the inside, perhaps the most painful consequence of their imprisonment is the fact that they are separated, often permanently, from their children.

Most women are arrested for nonviolent, victimless crimes such as prostitution, drunkenness and drugs. In 1972, only 25% of female

\* The names of these two women have been changed.



arrests were for what the FBI calls serious crimes—criminal homicide, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and theft.<sup>7</sup> But the seriousness of the offense has little to do with what happens to the children.

When a woman is arrested and taken to be booked, the police often do not ask her if she has dependent children or who will care for them in her absence. Since 80% of those women with children are unmarried heads of households,<sup>8</sup> the children may end up with inadequate care and supervision during this period unless the mother is given time to make alternative arrangements. This inescapable circumstance may be used against the mother at a later date if a neglect or abandonment proceeding is instituted against her.

In many states a woman will be held overnight in jail before being arraigned. Even if she is eventually released on bail or on her own recognizance until her case is decided, she will have experienced a temporary separation from her children.

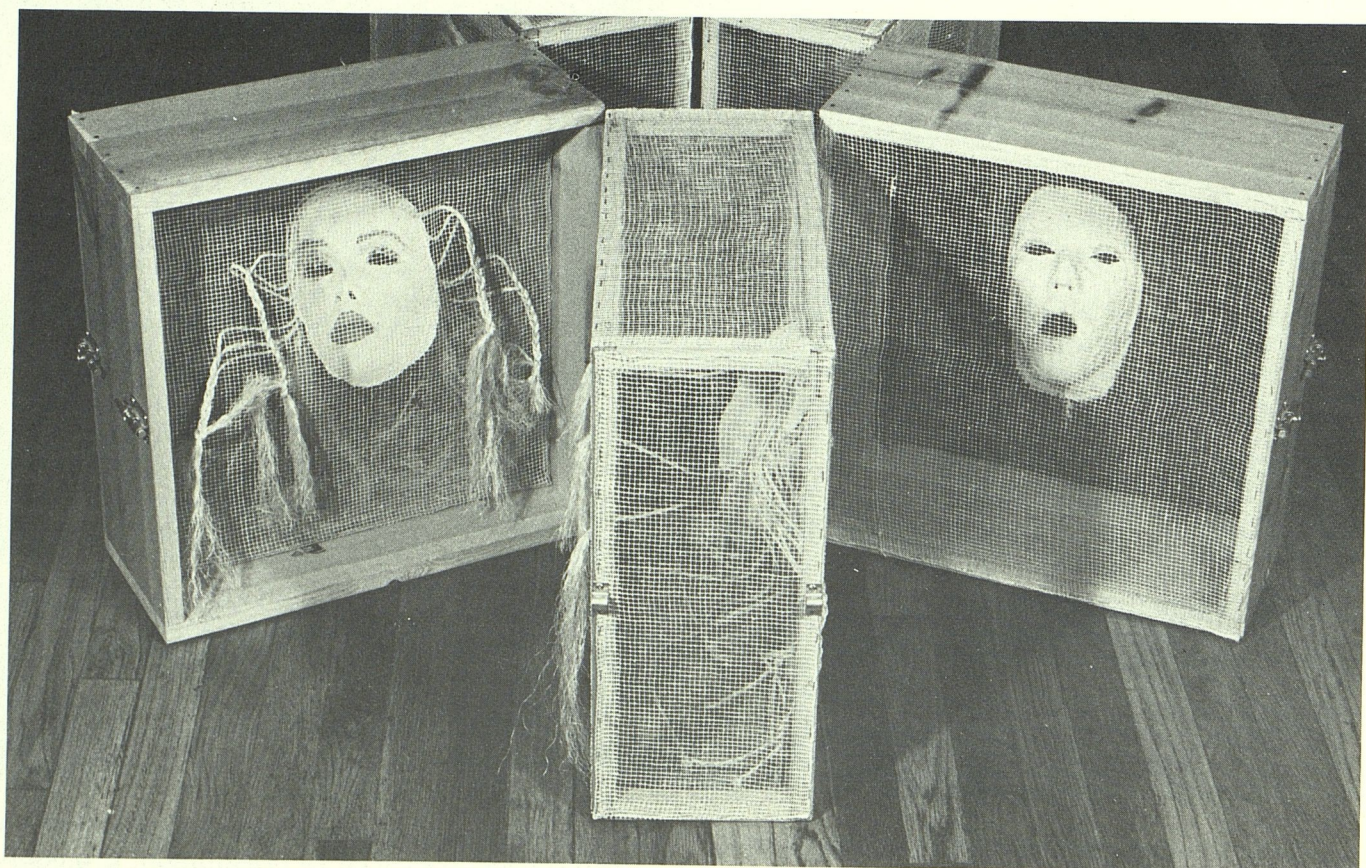
About one half of all women inmates are in county jails rather than state or local facilities. Fifty-five percent of these women are awaiting trial. These are not women who have been convicted of a crime. Mainly they are incarcerated because they are too poor to pay bail. Yet these facilities have made few provisions for the special needs of mothers. Generally the

women are housed in a section of the men's facility which has been converted for their use. In small communities a woman may serve her time virtually in solitary confinement because there are so few other female inmates and since prison policy does not permit mingling with the men.

In most institutions little attention is given to a woman who is pregnant. At best, prenatal care consists of brief medical checkups during the last months of pregnancy. Many women have complained about the inaccessibility of the prison doctor and their difficulties in obtaining information about what is happening to their bodies.

They are given little or no preparation for childbirth. Many times, women are not told until their delivery date if they must have a caesarean, even when this information was known by the medical personnel in advance. They do not have a choice of doctors, hospital or birth procedures to be used. They cannot even decide who is to be present with them during delivery. Women often express a sense of helplessness, frustration and rage about their lack of control over this most profound human experience.

Assata Shakur was pregnant while being held at Rikers Island Correctional Facility in New York during her trial. Because she was considered by some to be a dangerous Black militant,



Maria Lino. *Incarceration* #2. 1974.



she was virtually kept in solitary confinement during her stay. The authorities were so concerned that she might escape when she went to the hospital to deliver her child that she was shackled in the ambulance. Immediately after she gave birth, she was handcuffed and chained to her hospital bed. She was then left alone in her hospital bed and almost hemorrhaged to death. She was not allowed to keep her baby daughter with her when she was returned to jail.

Most institutions do not have nursery facilities for young babies. In those cases, the mother must either set up an informal custodial arrangement with her family or friends, or put the child in foster care or up for adoption. A few state institutions do have nurseries. However, even here, the state regulations require that the babies leave the prison within a specified period of time, generally one year.

Many women do not keep their children even for the period permitted by the statutes. They do not consider the prison environment of the nurseries conducive to the development of healthy children. Mothers cannot sleep in the same room with their babies and can only care for them at specified times. Fathers and other family members cannot visit the nursery. The physical conditions of the nurseries have often been neglected; they may be poorly lit, badly ventilated and in disrepair.

Sometimes institutions, particularly jails where women await sentences or serve misdemeanor sentences of less than one year, do not permit visitation by minor children. Other facilities place restrictive conditions on visits such as putting glass or metal partitions between the inmate and visitor so that there can be no physical contact. Under these conditions, mothers often believe that it would be more detrimental for their children to visit and they make the difficult decision not to see them while they are in prison.

There are few innovative programs geared to helping mothers maintain their connections to their children. The Purdy Treatment Center in Washington, for one, offers extensive counseling for mothers so that they can more effectively handle this involuntary separation. Female inmates at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York have painted and decorated part of the visiting room with Sesame Street characters to make the atmosphere livelier. Usually, however, the mothers receive no help in trying to insure ongoing contact with their families.

Most women will attempt to place their children temporarily with relatives or friends. Even when the children live with a trusted friend, the natural mother may have difficulty seeing them regularly. Very few states have more than one prison for women; eight have none. This

means that the mother is frequently incarcerated a great distance from her home, perhaps even sent to a neighboring state to do her sentence. It is difficult to maintain an ongoing relationship with children when personal contact is at best sporadic. Even when visitation is regular, the mother must relinquish day to day control over her children's lives. During the time she is in prison, she must adjust her relationship with her family to allow another person to exercise primary responsibility.

Although there are generally complex court proceedings required before custody can be permanently terminated, many women in prison are not informed about how they can fight the proceedings and are not provided with attorneys to aid them. Bedford Hills is one of the few institutions that has a program to help incarcerated women protect their legal rights. Funded by New York University Law School, The Women's Prison Project brings a lawyer and law students into the prison on a regular basis to represent the women's cases. When women in prison understand that they have some power over their own lives and that people on the outside will support them, they are often willing to become involved in difficult and lengthy court battles.

Upon release, women may attempt to regain custody. Many states require that they prove themselves fit mothers before their children can be returned. If they are on parole and have an unsympathetic parole officer, it may be difficult to show that they are now capable of caring for their children. Judges, too, may use the fact of their prior imprisonment to prevent them from regaining custody. Children then become the indirect victims of their mother's imprisonment.

Ideally, prisons should be used as a last resort for women with children. Alternative sanctions such as fines, community service, restitution and work assignments must be explored. The fact that a woman is in prison does not necessarily mean that she should forfeit control over her life or that of her children. That is the way America has chosen to treat imprisoned women. There are other alternatives.

Instead of being virtually abandoned and left to fend for herself, an inmate mother can be supported and helped in a variety of ways. Inside the institutions, discussion groups, family counseling and family law classes could be offered so that women could learn their rights and responsibilities. If mothers must temporarily place their children in foster care, the foster parents should live within easy commuting distance of the facility and should be encouraged to bring the children for regular visits. Transportation should be provided. Mothers should receive support services so that they can make difficult decisions about their children's welfare in the least traumatic way.



There are various reasons given for locking people in prisons; they are: to be punished, rehabilitated, deterred or incapacitated. None of these purposes should include breaking people's morale. Yet that is exactly what happens to many inmate mothers.

Mothers often enter prison feeling guilty and extremely concerned about what will happen to their children during their absence. Prison personnel do little to encourage women to be independent and to work these feelings out. Rather, women who are too self-reliant and strong-willed are considered trouble-makers.

Prisons could serve an incredible function of teaching women how to help themselves. Instead they foster and encourage dependency and passivity. Women leave these institutions no better off than when they entered. It is not surprising that they will often repeat some of the same patterns which brought them to prison in the first place.

If women were treated like responsible adults and included in the decision-making process involving their children, they could maintain their self-respect and dignity even inside prison. Then when they returned to the outside world, as most will, they would be better equipped to fully participate as productive members of our society.

## The Impostor

I am a mother  
although I have  
this nightmare  
that one of these days  
someone will ask  
to see my credentials.

I am a mother of two  
although sometimes  
they look at me  
accusingly  
because there are not enough hours  
in my day.

I am a mother  
although for the life of me  
I don't know how to handle  
their fits  
much less mine.

I am a mother  
who still needs mothering  
and sometimes resents her mother  
because she has to mother my father.

I am a fatherless mother  
who has to wear two hats  
but never quite knows when  
to wear which one.

I am a mother  
who doesn't know how she got here  
and sometimes  
thank god it's only sometimes  
wishes she could resign.

**Suzana Cabañas**

© 1979

1. It is estimated that anywhere from 250,000 to 500,000 women are incarcerated on any one day during a year. Michael J. Hindelang, Christopher S. Dunn et al., *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, August 1973).
2. Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice Uniform Crime Report for the United States 1973 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 126.
3. Brenda McGowan and Karen J. Blumenthal, *Why Punish the Children?* (National Council of Crime and Delinquency, 1978).
4. Ibid.
5. Unpublished report on Bedford Hills prison by Private Concerns (1976).
6. McGowan and Blumenthal, Appendix 1.
7. *F.B.I. Uniform Crime Report 1972*.
8. Prison Nursery Study Committee, N.Y. Junior League (1974).





Ana Mendieta. *Siluetas Series*. 1978. Gunpowder and burnt images on earth and grass.



# Concentration Camps in the U.S.A.

Motoko Ikeda-Spiegel

© 1979

On December 7, 1941, Sunday, I came home from a Buddhist church in downtown Los Angeles. My family had already heard the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. From the atmosphere at home I could already feel terrible times to come. Monday morning, going to school, a silence seemed to have crept over the grey cold skies of the city. As we walked along the streets, meeting other Nisei, there seemed to be a burden on our minds. It was a quiet walk to school that morning.

During the current events session, the teacher would sputter the word "Japs" and look directly at me and another Nisei student. Soon the evacuation orders were posted on poles near our homes. When I went to notify my art teacher, Miss Parr, about my having to leave school because of the evacuation, she took one look at me, turned around, and put her head against the wall. She started to cry so hard that I didn't know what to do. I left her there still sobbing. That was the last scene of American public school for me.

The time now was passed at home helping clear the house, selling what we could along

with our neighbors. I still hate the sight of Westchester families' "garage sales."

March 28, 1942 was a most beautiful day in Los Angeles. The skies were blue; few puffy white clouds floated. We piled into a friend's car to be taken to board buses that would take us on the first leg of our journey to an unknown destiny, a trip that was to last years, not just months. It was not until I saw our neighbors waving goodbye, as the car started away from our home, that reality set in. It was all horrible. I don't know how my parents stood it, but I spent the rest of the day crying nonstop. At the point where we assembled for the bus, there were the Quakers offering us juice, coffee, and rolls. The MP's looked so big and ominous, with their bayoneted rifles. At this point all we knew was that we were being sent to the Pomona Fairgrounds. Upon arrival we were given our number—22837.

While my parents were trying to settle us into our one-room living quarters, my sister, brother, and I were given sacks to fill with hay for mattresses. Canvas folding cots were distributed only later. Day in and day out we seemed to spend our time standing in line for meals at mass mess halls, for our turn at the latrines and showers.

One day my little sister, age five, asked, "Is this Japan?" I guess it was because she had often heard my father talking about how some day he would take us to see Japan.

We were "lucky" we did not end up at the Santa Anita Race Track or the Tanforan Race Track. There people were housed in stables that had only been scraped up with no additional floors installed. The stench was terrible and it could get very hot. One person remembers falling asleep on a cot and finding himself on the ground the next morning. The legs of the cot had sunk into the asphalt.

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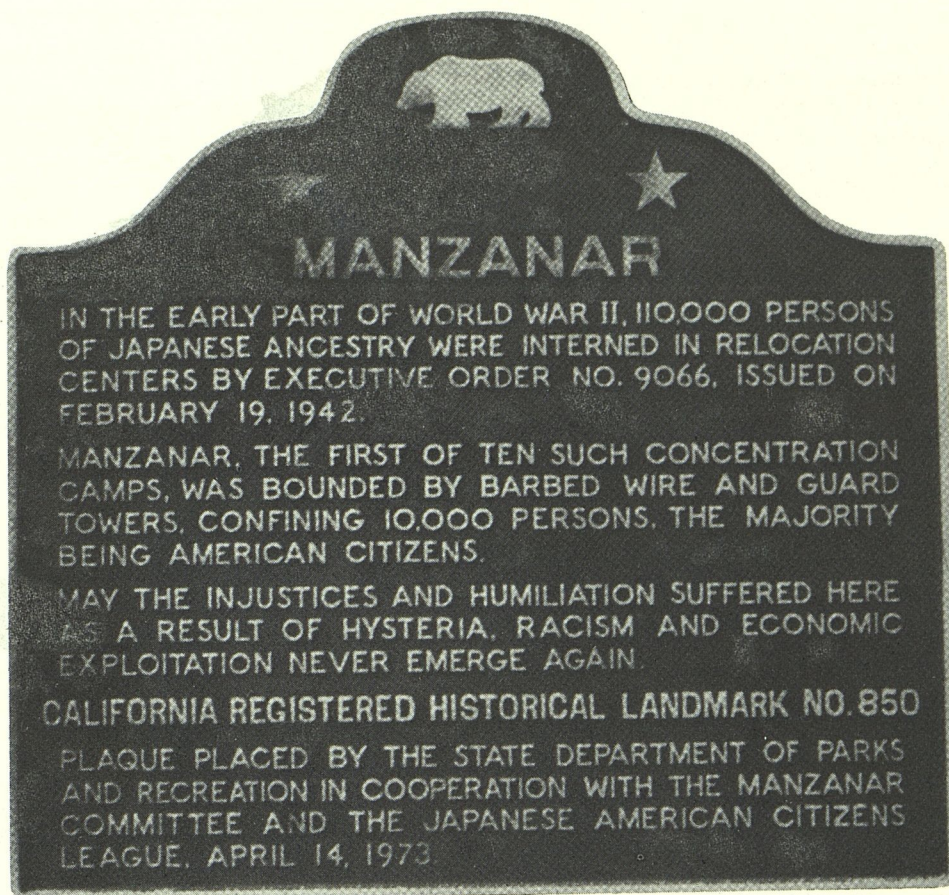
By the fall of 1941 war with Japan had become imminent. For over a year coded messages going in and out of Japan had been intercepted and decoded by Washington cryptanalysts. With all signs of approaching war, and the Hawaiian naval outpost the probable target,

## *Executive Order 9066*

Now, therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War, and Military Commanders whom he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated Commander deems such action necessary or desirable, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion....

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
The White House  
February 19, 1942





highly secret intelligence-gathering was ordered by the President. The special representative of the State Department was one Curtis B. Munson. His mission was "to get a precise picture of the degree of loyalty among residents of Japanese descent on the West Coast and Hawaii."<sup>1</sup>

By November of 1941 this investigation resulted in a 25-page report. And it certified a remarkable, even extraordinary degree of loyalty among this generally suspect *ethnic group*; it concluded that "*there is no Japanese problem*." This report was introduced in the Pearl Harbor hearings of 1946.

At the time both naval intelligence and the FBI opposed the President's decision for evacuation. J. Edgar Hoover believed that the demand for the evacuation was "based primarily upon public political pressure rather than upon factual data"<sup>2</sup> and that the FBI was fully capable of handling the small number of suspects then under surveillance. Naval authorities favored the use of hearing boards and a policy of selective internment.

Earl Warren, then Attorney General, later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, insisted: "When we are dealing with the Caucasian race we have methods that will test the loyalty of them.... But when we deal with the Japanese we are in an entirely different field and we cannot form any opinion that we believe to be

sound."<sup>3</sup> He asserted: "there is more potential danger among the group of Japanese who were born in this country than from the alien Japanese who were born in Japan."<sup>4</sup> Earl Warren urged hasty removal of the Japanese.

Forced removals occurred not only in the United States, but in Alaska, Canada, Mexico, Central America, parts of Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Of the 151 Alaskan Japanese, 50 were seal and whale hunters, half Indian and half Eskimo. Most ended up in camps in Lordsburg, New Mexico. Other families were airlifted temporarily to an assembly center near Seattle, and then eventually moved to a camp in Idaho.

The U.S. government sent messages to South American countries, assuring those interested in the collaboration effort that not only would detention accommodations be provided by the U.S., but also shipping facilities. Over 2,000 deportees of Japanese ancestry were scattered in the mainland camps. All expenses and costs of internment and guarding were to be paid by the U.S.

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In August 1942, we were removed from the Pomona Assembly Center and taken to Wyoming. The train ride was about four days, going through Arizona and New Mexico. The new camp was Heart Mountain Relocation Center,



located between Cody and Laramie, Wyoming. Ten such centers had been set up; they were to be for longer duration. The total population of 110,000 individuals included 1,275 already institutionalized people transferred to the centers; 1,118 citizens and aliens evacuated from Hawaii; 219 voluntary residents; and 5,981 born in camps.<sup>5</sup>

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In the early 1960s my husband, children and I took a motor trip cross-country through Wyoming. Looking for the location of the Heart Mountain camp I remarked often, "What insane person would think of putting human beings in the middle of nowhere?" There was nothing but wide open ranges with sage brushes, hot in the summer with many heavy dust storms, cold in the winter with blizzards bringing the temperature to 30 degrees below. There was no civilization for at least 20 miles in either direction.

Standing there on the spot of the camp 20 years after it happened, looking across the land, I could not believe that I had spent three years there, confined behind barbed-wire fences and sentry towers. I lived in tarpapered barracks, sharing one whole room measuring 20' x 24' with my parents, two sisters and brother. There were times one had to run out in the night in a winter blizzard to go to the latrine. The barracks were grouped in blocks of 12 to 14 around a mess hall and combination latrine and laundry.

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Why did they pick such a godforsaken area to put the Japanese? The sites were chosen by a Thomas D. Campbell, an agricultural engineer and top expert on available private and federally owned farmlands. This with the idea that the Japanese could work at soil improvement, and could turn worthless land into post-war public assets. Campbell also had ideas about using the internees for seasonal work as migratory harvesters in sugar beets, cotton and perishable crops. Using them for land subjugation, soil conservation, irrigation and road building, all self-supporting projects, was less costly than prisons would have been. Campbell told the President that "we can write a new chapter in the care and utilization of aliens and war prisoners."<sup>6</sup>

And so, in the spring and summer of 1942 up sprung 10 barbed-wired communities that housed some 10,000 people per camp. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) set up schools for the children. Internees who were able to get janitorial work received \$16.00 per month. Evacuee doctors received \$19.00 per month.

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#### *Public Law 414 of 1952*

The classification of Japanese as "aliens and ineligible for citizenship" goes back to an interpretation of naturalization laws which held no provisions for persons who were neither Black nor white. Naturalization procedures were established for "free white persons" in the early days of the nation when there were no Asians on the scene. After the Civil War, in 1870, citizenship was extended to Blacks. The American Indians were given the right to citizenship provided they voluntarily left their tribes and took up homesteads. The Chinese were prohibited expressly—as part of the exclusion act of 1882. The slur was not remedied until 1943 when Congress recognized the injustice of discriminating against the Chinese while embracing China as an ally fighting for common cause in World War II.

The racial barriers against the Japanese were not removed until the passage of the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952. This act (Public Law 414) revoked the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924 and allowed for the yearly entry of 185 immigrants from Japan. Spouses and children of American citizens were admitted on a non-quota basis. Only in 1965 did immigration on the same basis as for Europeans come about.

An Army plan called on all male Nisei of draft age to fill out questionnaires which would determine eligibility for work in defense plants as well as military service. Dillon Myer seized on this as an opportunity to expedite WRA's leave clearance procedures and proposed that the questionnaires be presented to everyone, men and women, citizens and aliens, over age 17.

The proposal was adopted, but in its haste, WRA was guilty of two major errors. First, the questionnaires were labeled "Application for Leave of Clearance." Second, questions which had been planned for Nisei men were submitted unchanged to the women and the Issei. The questions were: "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" and "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, to any other foreign government, power or organization?"<sup>7</sup> If one answered both questions "no," one was sent to Tule Lake Segregation Center as a disloyal person.

The Nisei were in two well-known Army troops, the 100th Battalion and the 442nd from Hawaii. Many, especially the Kibei, were involved in intelligence work where their knowledge of the Japanese language was very valuable.





Motoko, third from left, leaving Mess 9-27 during sandstorm. Heart Mountain Relocation Camp, Wyoming. Aug. 1943.

One of the very first to volunteer for the Army from Heart Mountain camp was Ted Fujioka, who had just finished high school in camp. He was also our first casualty.

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Even before the evacuation program was completed, some evacuees were released on temporary permits to work on farms in the intermountain region. Influential people expressed concern for Nisei college students whose education had been disrupted. In October 1942, WRA announced more liberal procedures for leaving the camps, enabling both Nisei and Issei to apply. Evacuees seeking jobs outside the camps had their records checked by the FBI, which also had access to files of other intelligence agencies. If there was a promise of a job, the evacuee was permitted to go out on "permanent leave."

I applied for student's leave after finishing high school in the camp. I had applied and been accepted by a junior college in Connecticut. I left the camp at age 17 with a train ticket to Bridgeport, Connecticut plus \$9 per day for meals and \$20 extra. That was my payment from the government.

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Some 43,000 evacuees resettled in Illinois, Colorado, Utah, Ohio, Idaho, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Minnesota. They found job challenges and opportunities. They had no desire to go back to the West Coast. Others, who were drawn back, faced the danger of violence, terrorists, unexplained fires, beatings, threats. The ghettos they had left were now filled with other minorities, such as Chicanos

and Blacks. Farmers who had left their land in trust to tenants found the land in ruins; it had not been attended to. Families that had stored household goods in the Japanese temples found them ransacked. Now the Japanese farmers found that white business people did not want to deal with them. Yet, despite the hostilities there were still friends, neighbors, teachers, business associates to help them reestablish themselves and pick up their normal lives again. But the Issei was once again faced with a hard uphill climb, and the Issei was now a little older.

#### *Evacuation Claims Act*

President Harry Truman signed the Evacuation Claims Act on July 2, 1948. The Japanese had until January 3, 1950 to file for claims. The total of \$131,949,176 was one-third of the sum the Federal Reserve Bank had estimated they had lost. Of the 23,689 claims filed, 60% were for less than \$2,500 (the "pots and pans" claims for loss of household items); and 73% were under \$5,000.

The largest claim was made by Keisaburo Koda, the "rice king." He had given power of attorney over his land (5,000 acres) to a trusted white attorney friend and others. During his incarceration, they sold everything. Koda claimed \$2,497,500. The settlement was \$362,500. That just covered the 15-year litigation costs. And Koda died before he could collect a cent.

Even after the "relocating," immigrant Japanese were prohibited from owning land or engaging in any business that required a license.



New immigration from Japan was prohibited. Between 1945 and 1946 4,724 persons of Japanese ancestry were deported, including 1,659 repatriated immigrants, 1,949 children accompanying parents, and 1,116 expatriated renunciants.<sup>8</sup>

Bitterness, combined with the pressures during the mass incarceration, coerced 5,766 Japanese-Americans into renouncing their American citizenship, but nearly all filed lawsuits after the war to regain their birthright. The court decisions between 1945 and 1968 restored citizenship to nearly all renunciants, including those expatriated.

American citizens of Japanese ancestry were still prevented from owning houses by restrictive covenants, and were denied employment in most fields. They were further hindered in social mobility by antimiscegenation laws. Dead soldiers were refused burial in hometown cemeteries. California had particularly powerful anti-Japanese blocks. Every issue created a prolonged court battle, a bitter legislative campaign or heated public debate.

A major obstacle to Hawaii's statehood was the fact that one-third of the population was of Japanese ancestry. Mainland whites feared that the Japanese-Americans would control the politics of the islands, and were unwilling to accept the possibility of a Japanese-American being elected to Congress. Today, however, we do have Senator Daniel K. Inouye, elected in 1962.

#### *Miscegenation Law*

State laws prohibiting interracial marriages were not declared unconstitutional until 1967. Maine, Massachusetts and Michigan once had statutes prohibiting racial intermarriage.

Where there were no such laws, judges refused to issue licenses to racially mixed couples. In the state of Washington, county auditors had to determine the "competence" of applicants. New Jersey used "mental tests" to prevent such marriages.

On June 12, 1967 the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that states cannot outlaw interracial marriages and thereby voided Virginia's and 15 other states' statutes.

Chief Justice Earl Warren then said: "We have consistently denied constitutionality of measures which restrict the rights of citizens on account of race. There can be no doubt that restricting the freedom to marry solely because of classification violates the central meaning of the Constitution's equal protection clause."<sup>9</sup>

After the war, and after the camps were closed, my father and mother returned to the West Coast with my brother and sister, then

ages 12 and 9. My older sister and I were on the East Coast in college. But I had no more money left for college and became ill. Because I was legally still a minor, the War Department had to send me to my parents on the West Coast. When I saw my father at that time he looked so different. He had aged rapidly. He was now a beaten old man who had lived through almost insurmountable struggles. At the age of 55, he had to start all over again. He had been stripped of his dignity as a human being; he had not been able to keep his family together because of events beyond his control. My father withered away and died within four years.



Motoko Ikeda. Heart Mountain Relocation Camp, Wyoming. September 1944.

The original Issei are today in their seventies and eighties. They are the vanishing products of another era. They were conforming, hard-working, family-oriented; they clung to old values, customs and goals. The more affluent Issei, who have finally returned to visit Japan after 40 or 50 years, are shocked by the new modern Japan. The old values of politeness, calm and honesty are gone in the jostle of Westernized cities. Nor can they adjust to the more primitive living in the rural areas of



# KEY

## ○ ASSEMBLY CENTERS

Puyallup, Wash.  
 Portland, Ore.  
 Marysville, Calif.  
 Sacramento, Calif.  
 Tanforan, Calif.  
 Stockton, Calif.  
 Turlock, Calif.  
 Merced, Calif.  
 Pinedale, Calif.  
 Salinas, Calif.  
 Fresno, Calif.  
 Tulare, Calif.  
 Santa Anita, Calif.  
 Pomona, Calif.  
 Mayer, Ariz.

## ■ RELOCATION CENTERS

Manzanar, Calif.  
 Tule Lake, Calif.  
 Poston, Ariz.  
 Gila, Ariz.  
 Minidoka, Ida.  
 Heart Mountain, Wyo.  
 Granada, Colo.  
 Topaz, Utah  
 Rohwer, Ark.  
 Jerome, Ark.

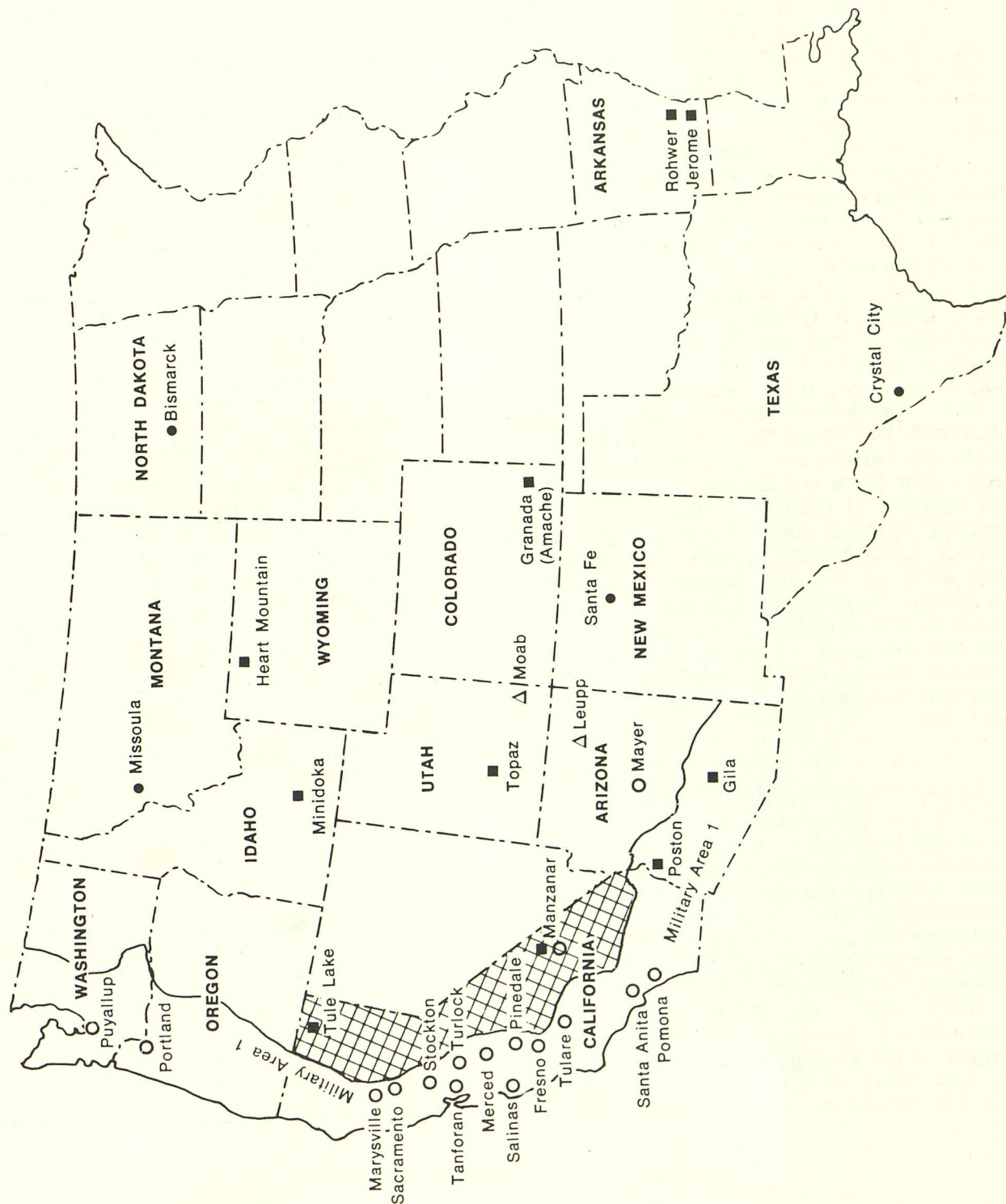
## ● JUSTICE DEPARTMENT INTERMENT CAMPS

Santa Fe, N. Mex.  
 Bismarck, N. Dak.  
 Crystal City, Tex.  
 Missoula, Mont.  
 (See also Appendix 3)

## △ CITIZEN ISOLATION CAMPS

Moab, Utah  
 Leupp, Ariz.

⊠ Military Area 2 or  
 "Free Zone" until March 29, 1942





Japan. On returning to the United States they say that Japan is a nice place to visit but not to live.

\*\*\*\*\*

The new Issei have come to the United States after the legislation of 1954. Some are quota immigrants; others are relatives of citizens; still others emigrated under the refugee relief act of 1956. Unlike the first immigrants, who were homogeneous in terms of age, sex, social class, and residential background, the new Issei are a more heterogeneous group. They are arriving at a time when Japanese-Americans have fewer occupational and residential problems. They bring with them a sense of the new modern Japanese nation which is much closer to the American world, and they have more in common with the American Nisei than the Issei.

An estimated 25,000 Japanese war brides were in the United States by 1960. Some had married Nisei. Others married non-Japanese husbands and were scattered throughout the country, accounting for the wide geographical distribution of Japanese today.

In wartime it was charged that the Japanese were clannish and "unassimilable." Today the consensus is that the Japanese-American's power of assimilation and accommodation is not only phenomenal, it is "rarely equaled."

Today Japanese-Americans have their own churches and temples. Their interests and problems reflect age rather than ethnicity. Every year there are summer picnics in different counties of California—about 10,000 were reported to have attended one at the Elysian Park in Los Angeles. Children scampering all over while dances and skits are performed on an outdoor stage. There is always old Japanese music coming over the speakers. At the end of the day everybody picks up (including the smallest toddler) until there is not one scrap of litter and the park is left clean and tidy for the next year.

\*\*\*\*\*

During the Vietnam war it was a glorious sight to see the endless caravans of cars and buses headed for Washington, D.C. on peace marches. Many times I have remarked that if these were the people of the early '40s the concentration camps could not have happened. Remember Rosa Parks, the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, the rebellious youth Eldridge Cleaver era of the '60s, the large number of youths who refused to be drafted.

At a recent meeting of the Japanese Citizens League, Michi Weglyn ended her discussion on her book *Years of Infamy* by stating her belief that was not the end of concentration camps. I

do hope that she is wrong. The people of the United States today would not allow it to happen ever again.

Our slow, bitter fight toward equality in the United States is like the turtle racing with the hare to get to the goal. We have a hard sturdy shell, travel slowly, sometimes retreating with silence, but our pace is deliberate with perseverance. With the inheritance of the best from the Issei and the Nisei's persistence in finding their rightful place in the American society, the whole future of the Sansei and Asian-Americans should improve. It would be wrong to strip any ethnic group of their ethnicity. We have to believe in ourselves. It is like what the young Sansei youth told Michi Weglyn after reading her book, that it was the first time he ever felt proud to be a Sansei.

#### *"An American Promise"*

In this Bicentennial Year, we are commemorating the anniversary dates of many of the great events in American history. An honest reckoning, however, must include a recognition of our national mistakes as well as our national achievements. Learning from our mistakes is not pleasant, but as a great philosopher once admonished, we must do so if we want to avoid repeating them....

We now know what we should have known then—not only was that evacuation wrong, but Japanese-Americans were and are loyal Americans....

The Executive order that was issued on February 19, 1942, was for the sole purpose of prosecuting the war with the Axis Powers, and ceased to be effective with the end of hostilities. Because there was no formal statement of its termination, however, there is concern among many Japanese-Americans that there may yet be some life in that obsolete document. I think it is appropriate, in this our Bicentennial Year, to remove all doubt on that matter, and to make clear our commitment in the future.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GERALD FORD, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim that all the authority conferred by Executive Order No. 9066 terminated upon the issuance of Proclamation No. 2714, which formally proclaimed the cessation of the hostilities of World War II on December 31, 1946....

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand this nineteenth day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred seventy-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundredth.

GERALD R. FORD



*Issei*: Immigrant Japanese, living in the U.S.  
*Nisei*: Second-generation Japanese, born in the U.S. (children of Issei).  
*Sansei*: Children of Nisei.

## Chronology

- 1856: The first Japanese to settle on the U.S. mainland arrive at Gold Hill, near Sacramento, California.
- 1870: U.S. Congress grants naturalization rights to "free whites" and people of African descent, omitting mention of Asian races.
- 1886: The Japanese government lifts its ban on emigration, allowing its citizens for the first time to make permanent moves to other countries.
- 1911: U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization orders that declarations of intent to file for citizenship can only be received from whites and from people of African descent, thus allowing courts to refuse naturalization to the Japanese.
- 1913: Alien Land Bill prevents Japanese aliens from owning land in California.
- 1924: Congress passes Immigration Act stating that no alien ineligible for citizenship shall be admitted.
- December 7, 1941: Surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.
- February 9, 1942: President Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066, giving the War Department authority to define military areas in the Western states and to exclude from them anyone who might threaten the war effort.
- March 25, 1942: Evacuees begin to arrive at Manzanar camp in Owens Valley, California, the first permanent camp to open.
- August 12, 1942: Evacuation completed; 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry removed from the West Coast to 10 inland camps.
- December 18, 1944: U.S. Supreme Court rules that loyal citizens cannot be held in detention camps against their will.
- August 14, 1945: Japan surrenders.
- November 21, 1945: Manzanar concentration camp officially closes.
- 1952: Congress passes Public Law 414, granting Japanese aliens the right to become naturalized U.S. citizens.

## Footnotes

1. Michi Weglyn, *Years of Infamy*. William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1976, p. 21.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
9. Stuart, I.R., *Interracial Marriage: Expectations and Realities*. New York: Grossman, 1973.

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Growing up Chinese, Hawaiian and Irish . . .  
in WHITE America . . . was **HELL**.



Eyes were **BIG** and Round.



Mine were small and *slanted*



Noses were long and sharp



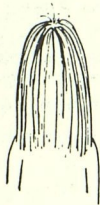
Mine was **FLAT** and **BROAD**.



Lips were *thin*.



Mine were **FAT**.



Hair was straight and fine.



Mine was *wavy* and **COARSE**.

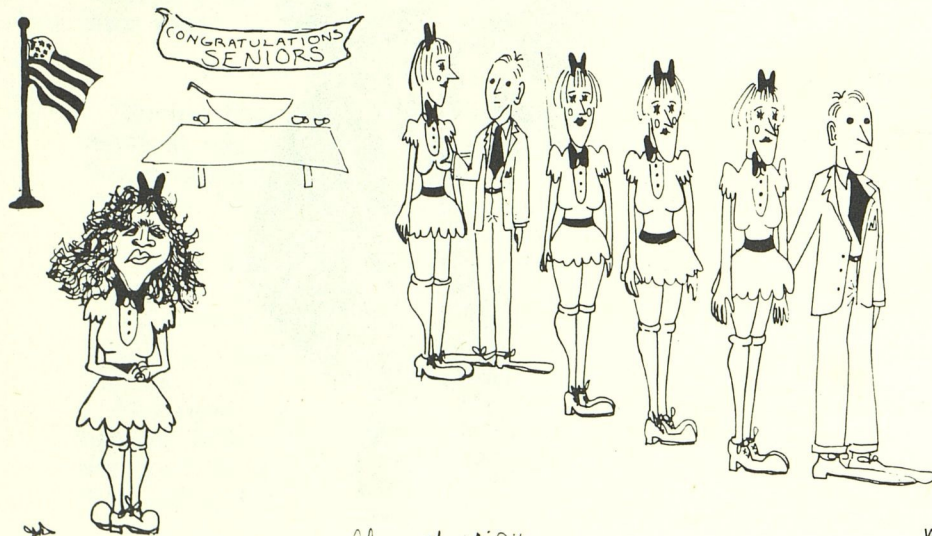


I felt **UGLY**.



Alone.

Katherine '78



Always The Misfit.

The Alien or A Short Story about the Little Girl  
with the Jap Eyes, Hawaiian Pig Nose and Nigger Lips.

Katherine Hall. © 1979



# Black Eyed Blues Connections: From the Inside Out

Michele Russell

© 1979

Black women's lives are a story about being torn up, ground down, turned around, borne backwards, but blossoming and bearing anyhow. It takes us through four hundred years of shackles and hoes, furrows cut by whips and chains, tar, feathers, and fire. Its warp is Ms's cast-off cloth; its woof is cotton rows; its shuttlecock, neck and knuckle-bones. We can log it by the miles Tubman traveled, the battles Ida Wells fought and lost, the tales Hurston told. We can date it in years, in blood, with pictures: black, white, and colored snapshots. It can have the finish of our choice. We feel it, immediate, when home folk stretch beyond kin; when our kind are called by the bar before the bench to prove maternal prowess to the judge who wants our children put away. We add chapters to history when we live each day, wherever, however, whoever we be.

I am at the Downtown YWCA in Detroit. Rooms on the upper floors are used by Wayne County Community College as learning centers. Since we control no land here, temporary classrooms have to do. The occasion to congregate is always the same: we seek our sovereignty (meaning: freedom, self-determination, liberation, development, power, pride as a people—all of that and more). And, as usual, we are convinced that Knowledge is the Key to the Kingdom. This time the subjects fly under the flag of a Black Studies class for women on Community and Identity. This time the process is called continuing education. At 10 am, it is about to begin.

The twenty-two women who appear are all on their way from somewhere to something. This is a breather in their day. They range in age from 19 to 55. They all have been pregnant more than once and have made various decisions about abortion, adoption, monogamy, custody, and sterilization (in fact, everything but abstinence). Some are great-grandmothers. A few have their children along. They are a composite of hundreds of Black women I have known and learned from through fifteen years in, around, and in spite of the Movement. This morning we keep on keeping on, with me in the role of teacher.

We have an hour together. The course is a survey. The first topic of conversation—among

themselves and with me—is what they went through just to make it in the door on time. That in itself becomes a lesson.

We start where they are. We exchange stories of children's clothes ripped or lost, of having to go to school with sons and explain why Che is always late and how he got that funny name anyway, to teachers who shouldn't have to ask and don't really care. They tell of waiting for men to come home from the night shift so they can get the money or car (bread and wheels, dough to roll) for the trip downtown. It can be power failures in the neighborhood, administrative red tape at the college, their own compulsory overtime in the shop. It can be waiting their turn, after others, to eat, or just being tired and needing some sleep. Some of the stories are funny, some sad, some command outrage and praise from the group. It's a familiar and comfortable ritual. It's called testifying.

What is the teacher's job during this? To make the process conscious, the content significant. I want to know how the problems in the stories get resolved, to learn what daily survival wisdom these particular women have. Caring. Not letting it stop at commiseration. I try to help them generalize from the specifics.

I raise issues about who and what they continually have to bump up against on the liferoad they've planned for themselves. We make lists, keeping the scale human. Who are the people that get in the way?

social workers  
small-claims court officers  
husbands

teachers  
cops  
kids on the block

I ask: What forces do they represent? Get as much agreement as possible before moving on. Note there is most argument over "husbands" and "kids on the block." Define a task for next meeting. To sharpen their thinking on husbands and kids, have them make three lists. All the positive and negative things they can think of about men, children, and families. Anticipate in advance that they probably won't have the time



# language spiritual media prisoner sterilization

or will to write out full lists. But they will think about the question and be ready to respond in class.

Stop short of giving advice. Build confidence in their own ability to make it through whatever morass necessary to be there at 10 am the next day. Make showing up for class a triumph in itself—because it is.

Try to make class meeting a daily activity. Every day during the week. Like language, new ways of seeing and thinking must be reinforced, even if only for half an hour. Otherwise the continuity is lost. The perpetual bombardment of other pressures upsets the rhythm of our movement together.

No matter how much time you take with them, or who you all are, learning will advance quickly when you:

*Take One Subject at a Time*—but treat it with interdisciplinary depth and scope.

In a variety of ways, the women in class have been speeding. Literally, they will either be on medication, or suffering from chronic hypertension, or be skittish from some street encounter. Encourage them to slow down. This does not mean drift. We experience too much of that already. Have at least three directions in mind for every class session, but let their mood and uppermost concerns determine your choice. They have come to you for help in getting pulled together. The loose ends of their experience jangle discordantly like bracelets from their arms. You must be able to do with subject matter what they want to do with their lives. Get it under control in ways which thrive on complication.

## Encourage Storytelling

The oldest form of building historical consciousness in community is storytelling. The transfer of knowledge, skill, and value from one generation to the next, the deliberate accumulation of a people's collective memory has particular significance in diaspora culture. Robbed of all other continuities, prohibited free expression, denied a written history for centuries by white America, Black people have been driven to rely on oral recitation for our sense of the past. Today, however, that tradition is under severe attack. Urban migrations, apartment living, mass media dependency, and the breakup of generational units within the family have corroded our ability to renew community through oral forms. History becomes "what's in the books." Authority depends on academic credentials after one's name or the dollar amount of one's paycheck: the distance one has traveled, rather than the roots one has sunk. Significant categories of time are defined by television's 30-second spots or 30-minute features.

Piecing together our identity and community

under these circumstances requires developing each other's powers of memory and concentration. When as a teacher one first asks women in class "Where did you come from?", you will get spontaneous answers ranging from: "my mamma" and "12th Street" to "Texas," "Africa," and "Psych 101." In the first place, they are scattered and don't know what question you are asking. Still, the responses say something about their associational framework. The most important thing about them is their truth. Build on that with the objective of expanding their reference points.

Formalize the process. Begin with bloodlines. Share your own family history and have classmates do the same. Curiosity will provoke diligence and the abstractions of "identity" and "community" will give way before the faces of ancestry.

Historical narrative will be most difficult for the younger members of the class. Their knowledge of what it means to "take the A-train," for example, will in most cases be limited to hearsay or music. They relate to TV. Minimally, you want to get them to a point where they will enjoy evaluating all their contemporaries on *Soul Train* or the three generations of Black women in *The Jeffersons* series in relation to all the family history of Black people over the last 50 years that they have been discovering with their classmates. To start that process, convene the class (as a field trip) to watch *Soul Train* and *The Jeffersons*. Then press for answers to the question they ask all the time, anyway, when watching each other: "Who does *that* one think SHE is?" In this setting, help history to prevail over personality.

Or begin with one photograph from a family album. Have each person bring it in and have a story to tell just about that one picture. Go from there. One eventual outcome of such a project may be to encourage Black women to record these stories in writing, still an intimidating idea. Use a tape recorder to ease the transition.

To help increase their powers of observation and their capacity for identification, have each woman sit in a location of her own choosing for one hour and record what she sees. It can be anywhere: a shopping mall, a beauty shop, a bar, restaurant, park, window. Whatever they feel most natural with. Ride an unfamiliar bus to the end of the line and be alert to the community it attracts. Spend a week riding with domestic workers on suburban express lines. Record the conversations. Help women learn how to use the streets for investigation instead of exhibition. Have them go out in pairs and compare notes, bringing the results back to the group.

## Give Political Value to Daily Life

Take aspects of what they already celebrate and enrich its meaning so they see their spon-

environmental spiritual media prisoner worker



taneous inclinations in a larger way than before. This means they will see themselves with new significance. It also imposes the responsibility of selectivity on the teacher. Embrace that. Apply your own political acumen to the myriad survival mechanisms that colonization and domestication breed into subject peoples. Remind them of the choices they make all the time.

No life-area is too trivial for political analysis. Note that a number of Black women, myself included, have begun choosing long dresses for daily wear. In one class session discussion begins with the remark that we're more "comfortable" in this mode. What does comfort consist of? For me, it means getting past age. For those who are heavy, it means anything that lets you breathe. For working mothers, comfort means "easy to iron." For the budget-conscious: "easy to make." For some of the young women in class, comfort is attached to the hush from brothers they pass on the street. For a Muslim grandmother, this is the garb of cleanliness and modesty. Her daughter, also in the Nation, gets dressed and feels Africa in every fold. The general principle which emerges is that this particular form of cover allows us greater freedom of expression and movement.

Don't stop here. Go from the body to the head. A casual remark about wearing wigs can (and should) develop into a discussion of Frantz Fanon's essay "Algeria Unveiled" in which he analyzes the role of protective coverings, adornment, camouflage, as tactical survival modes for women in the self-defensive stage of a movement.

Help them recall the stages of consciousness they've all experienced in relation to their own hair. When did they start to regard "straightening" or "doing" hair as "processing" it? When did they stop? Why? If some women in the class still change their hair texture, does that mean their minds are processed too? Read Malcolm on the subject. How do they feel about Alelia Walker in this context—the first Black woman in America to become a millionaire by producing and marketing hair straighteners and skin bleaches. Take them as far as memory and material allow. Normally there will be at least three generations of social experience personally represented in community college classes. Try to work with them all.

Go beyond what is represented in class. Recall all the ways, historically, that Black women in America have used physical disguise for political purposes. Begin with Ellen Craft, escaping from a Georgia plantation in 1848 to Boston, passing as a white man, with her husband acting as her servant. Talk about the contradictory impact of miscegenation on our thinking and action. Who do we try to look like now? How? And why? What uniforms do we consciously adopt? Focus on motive as well as image; make intent as important as effect.

## Be Able to Speak in Tongues

Idiom, the medium through which ideas are communicated and organic links of association established (i.e., community) must be in Black women's own tradition.

When Black women "speak," "give a reading" or "sound" a situation, a whole history of using language as a weapon is invoked. Rooted in slave folk wisdom which says: "Don't say no more with your mouth than your back can stand," our vocalizing is directly linked to a willingness to meet hostilities head-on and persevere. Take, for example, the following description of a Black woman "specifying" by Zora Neale Hurston:

Big Sweet came to my notice within the first week that I arrived.... I heard somebody, a woman's voice, 'specifying' up this line of houses from where I lived and asked who it was. "Dat's Big Sweet," my landlady told me. "She got her foot up on somebody. Ain't she specifying?"

She was really giving the particulars. She was giving a reading, a word borrowed from the fortunetellers. She was giving her opponent lurid data and bringing him up to date on his ancestry, his looks, smell, gait, clothes, and his route through Hell in the hereafter. My landlady went outside where nearly everybody else of the four or five hundred people on the 'job' were to listen to the reading. Big Sweet broke the news to him, in one of her mildest bulletins, that his pa was a double humpted camel and his ma was a grass-gut cow, but even so, he tore her wide open in the act of getting born, and so on and so forth. He was a bitch's baby out of a buzzard egg.

My landlady explained to me what was meant by "putting your foot up" on a person. If you are sufficiently armed—enough to stand off a panzer division—and know what to do with your weapons after you get 'em, it is all right to go to the house of your enemy, put one foot up on his steps, rest one elbow on your knee and play in the family. That is another way of saying play the dozens, which also is a way of saying low-rate your enemy's ancestors and him, down to the present moment for reference, and then go into his future as far as your imagination leads you. But if you have no faith in your personal courage and confidence in your arsenal, don't try it. It is a risky pleasure. So then I had a measure of this Big Sweet.

"Hurt who?" Mrs. Bertha snorted at my fears. "Big Sweet? Humph! Tain't a man, woman nor child on this job going to tackle Big Sweet. If God send her a pistol she'll send him a man. She can handle a knife with anybody. She'll join hands and cut a duel. Dat Cracker Quarters Boss wears two pistols round his waist and goes for bad, but he won't break a breath with Big Sweet lessen he got his pistol in his hand. Cause if he start anything with her, he won't never get a chance to draw it. She ain't mean. She don't bother nobody. She just don't stand for no foolishness, dat's all."



Talking bad. Is it still going on? Some classmembers do it all the time. All of us know women who do. Some with a concern for manners find the activity embarrassing. One woman observes that it's getting harder and harder these days to find targets worthy of such invention. Another, bringing the prior comments together, says there's too little audience for the energy it takes. Whatever our particular attitudes, we all recognize in Big Sweet a pistol-packin' mamma, conjure woman, voice of Judgment, and reservoir of ancestral memory—all of which are the bases of a fighting tradition also personified in Harriet Tubman, Marie Leveau, Sojourner Truth, and Ericka Huggins. Discover the continuities in their words, acts, and the deeds done in their name. Emphasize how they transformed personal anger into political weapons, enlarged personal grudges to encompass a people's outrage, got from grief and mourning the strength to live. When words failed, remember how Aunt Jemima's most famous recipe, ground glass plantation pancakes, made the masters choke.

Take the blues. Study it as a coded language of resistance. In response to questions from classmembers about whether Feminism has ever had anything to do with Black women, play Ma Rainey singing "I won't be your dog no more." Remind them of our constant complaints about being treated as "a meal-ticket woman," our frustration at baking powder men losing their risables, and of going hungry for days. Know the ways in which Peaches are Strange Fruit. Introduce them to a Depression Era Bessie Jackson responding humorously, but resolutely, to our options for feeding ourselves when that period's diaspora forced us onto city streets. Two songs, written in 1930 and 1935, document our determination to be treated with the dignity of workers, no matter how we labored. They testify to daily struggles over the conditions of our labor, the urge to control turf and hours. The first is "Tricks Ain't Walkin No More." She says:

Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down  
I cain't make my livin around this town  
Cause Tricks ain't walkin, Tricks ain't walkin  
no more.

I got to make my livin, don't care where I go.

I need some shoes on my feet, clothes on my  
back

That's why I'm walkin these streets all dressed  
in black

But Tricks ain't walkin, Tricks ain't walkin  
no more.

And I see four or five good tricks standin in  
front of my door.

I got a store on the corner, sellin stuff cheap  
I got a market cross the street where I sell  
my meat.

But Tricks ain't walkin, Tricks ain't walkin  
no more.

And if you think I'm lyin, follow me to my  
door.

By 1935, when they got to her door, they found she'd gone into a new business. The address was the same, but the commodity had changed. She sang:

When you come to my house, come down  
behind the jail

I got a sign on my door, Bar-B-Que for Sale  
I'm talkin bout my Bar-B-Que

The *only* thing I sell

And if you want my meat, you can come to my  
house at twelve.

Bring the idiomatic articulation of Black women's feminism up to date by sharing stories of the first time we all *heard* what Aretha was asking us to THINK about, instead of just dancing to it. Let Esther Phillips speak on how she's JUSTIFIED and find out if classmembers feel the same way.

Be able to translate ideological shorthand into terms organic to Black women's popular culture. Let the concept of internationalism be introduced. But approach it from the standpoint of a South African Miriam Makeba, an Alabama-born Big Mama Thornton, and a Caribbean Nina Simone all singing Bob Dylan's "I Shall Be Released." Concentrate the discussion on each woman's roots, her place of natural origin. Reflect on the history behind the special emphasis each woman gives to phrases such as: "every distance is not far," "I remember every face of every man who put me here," "inside these walls." Ask: What kinds of jails are they in? And what happens when we start acting to effect our own release? Devote one class session to a debate over whether it is an antagonistic contradiction for Black women to use Bob Dylan's music as an expressive vehicle. Explore the limits of nationalism in this way.

The whole world is ours to appropriate, not just five states in the South, or one dark Continent. Treat the meaning of this statement through Nina Simone's re-creation of Pirate Jenny. Play the music. Know the history it comes out of and the changes rung: from the Beggar's Opera, through Brecht and Weil's Threepenny rendition, to the Caribbean and Southern situations everywhere that Simone takes as her reference point. Know the political history involved and the international community of the oppressed she exhorts to rise. Particularly notice the cleaning woman's role. Recall the rebellions of the 1960's, when Nina Simone was performing this song. We all lived through the rebellions, but how did we relate to them? At what point did classmembers begin associating Detroit with Algiers, Watts with Lesotho, the Mississippi with the Mekong Delta, Amerika with Germany? When did you?



## Use Everything

Especially, use the physical space of the classroom to illustrate the effects of environment on consciousness. The size and design of the desks in our classroom, for example. They are wooden, with one-sided stationary writing arms attached. The embodiment of a poor school. Small. Unyielding. Thirty years old. Most of the Black women are ample-bodied. When the desks were new and built for twelve-year-old 7th-grade bodies, some classmates may have sat in them for the first time. Now, sitting there for one hour—not to mention trying to concentrate and work—is a contortionist's or stoic's miracle. It feels like getting left back.

With desks as a starting point for thinking about our youth in school, classmates are prompted to recall the mental state such seats encouraged. They cite awkwardness, restlessness, and furtive embarrassment. When they took away our full-top desks with interior compartments, we remember how *exposed* we felt, unable to hide anything: not spitballs, notes, nor scarred knees, prominent between too-short, hand-me-down dresses and scuffed shoes. We remember the belligerence which was all the protection we were allowed.

We talk about all the unnecessary, but deliberate, ways the educational process is made uncomfortable for the poor. Most women in class hate to read aloud. So we relive how they were taught to read, the pain involved in individual, stand-up recitation. The foil one was for a teacher's scapegoating ridicule. The peer pressure to make mistakes. We look back on how good reading came to mean proper elocution to our teachers: particularly elderly Black spinsters who were also in the church.

We remember that one reason many of us stopped going to school was that it became an invasion of privacy. Not like church, which was only once a week, an event you could get up for. School was every day, among strangers, whether you felt like it or not, even if you ran out of clean clothes for the ritual. Showing up was the hardest part. After that, it was just a series of games.

Then, of course, someone inevitably says, "But here we are, back again." Is that a joke on us? Is it still a game? What are we trying to do differently this time around? To answer those questions, have women devise their own criteria for evaluating the educational process they engage in with you.

## Be Concrete

In every way possible, take a materialist approach to the issue of Black women's structural place in America. Focus attention on the building where we be learning our history. Notice who's still scrubbing the floors. In response to classmates who pin their hopes for the future

on "new careers," pose the following questions:

How is a nurse's aide different from a maid? What physical spaces are the majority of us still locked into as Black women who must take jobs in the subsistence and state sectors of the economy? Do we ever get to do more than clean up other people's messes, be we executive secretaries, social workers, police officers, or wives? Within what confines do we live and work?

Reflect on the culture of the stoop, the storefront, the doorway, the housing project, the roominghouse bathroom, the bank-teller's cage, the corner grocery store, the bus, the hotels and motels, school, hospital, and corporate corridors, and waiting rooms everywhere. What constraints do they impose?

If we conclude that most of our lives are spent as social servants, and state dependants, what blend of sex, race, and class consciousness does that produce? To cut quickly to the core of unity in experience, read the words of Johnny Tillmon, founder of NWRO in Watts, 1965:

I'm a woman. I'm a Black woman. I'm a poor woman. I'm a fat woman. I'm a middle-aged woman. And I'm on welfare.

In this country, if you're any one of those things—poor, Black, fat, female, middle-aged, on welfare—you count less as a human being. If you're all of those things, you don't count at all. Except as a statistic.

I am a statistic. I am 45 years old. I have raised six children. I grew up in Arkansas and I worked there for fifteen years in a laundry, making about \$20 or \$30 a week, picking cotton on the side for carfare. I moved to California in 1959 and worked in a laundry there for nearly four years. In 1963, I got too sick to work anymore. My husband and I had split up. Friends helped me to go on welfare.

They didn't call it welfare. They called it AFDC—Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Each month I get \$363 for my kids and me. I pay \$128 a month; \$30 for utilities, which includes gas, electricity, and water; \$120 for food and non-edible household essentials; \$50 for school lunches for the three children in junior and senior high school who are not eligible for reduced-cost meal programs. This leaves \$5 per person a month for everything else—clothing, shoes, recreation, incidental personal expenses and transportation. This check allows \$1 a month for transportation for me but none for my children. That's how we live.

Welfare is all about dependency. It is the most prejudiced institution in this country, even more than marriage, which it tries to imitate.

The truth is that AFDC is like a super-sexist marriage. You trade in a man for *the* man. But you can't divorce him if he treats you bad. He can divorce you, of course, cut you off any time he wants. But in that case, *he* keeps the kids, not you.

*The* man runs everything. In ordinary marriage, sex is supposed to be for your husband. On AFDC, you're not supposed to have any sex



at all. You give up control of your own body. It's a condition of aid. You may even have to agree to get your tubes tied so you can never have more children just to avoid being cut off welfare.

The man, the welfare system, controls your money. He tells you what to buy, what not to buy, where to buy it, and how much things cost. If things—rent, for instance—really cost more than he says they do, it's just too bad for you. You've just got to make your money stretch.

The man can break into your home any time he wants to and poke into your things. You've got no right to protest. You've got no right to privacy. Like I said, welfare's a super-sexist marriage.

Discuss what it means to live like that. What lines of force and power in society does it imply? A significant percentage of Black women have had direct experience with such dependency, either as children or mothers. In discussing "how it happened to them," all become aware of how every woman in class is just one step away from that bottom line. A separation; a work injury; layoffs; a prolonged illness; a child's disability could put them on those rolls. It is a sobering realization, breaking through some of the superior attitudes even Black women have internalized about AFDC recipients.

What other work do we do and how does it shape our thinking? Compare Maggie Holmes, domestic; Alice Washington, shoe factory order-filler; Diane Wilson, process clerk from Studs Terkel's *Working*. Study what women just like those in class say about themselves. Although, as with everything, a whole course could be devoted just to analyzing the content, process, and consciousness of Black women's jobs, be satisfied in this survey to personify history, so it becomes recognizable and immediate, happening to us every day.

### Have a Dream

The conclusion to be drawn from any study of our history in America is that the balance of power is not on our side, while the burden of justice is. This can be an overwhelming insight, particularly in times of economic stagnation, physical deterioration, and organizational confusion. Therefore, it is important to balance any discussion of the material circumstances of Black women's lives with some attention to the realm of their dreams.

In all other areas of life, we can talk about struggle, organization, sabotage, survival, even tactical and strategic victory. However, only in dreams are liberation and judgment at the center of vision. That is where we do all the things that our awareness demands but our situation does not yet permit. In dreams we seek the place in the sun that society denies us. And here, as in

everything, a continuum of consciousness will be represented.

At their most fetishistic, Black women's spiritual dreams are embodied in the culture of numbers, signs, and gambling. In every poor community, holy water, herb, astrology, and dream book shops are for women what poolrooms, pawnshops, and bars are for men. Places to hang in, hoping for a hit. As Etheridge Knight has observed in *Black Voices from Prison*, "It is as common to hear a mother say, 'I gotta get my number in today' with the same concern and sometimes in the same breath as she says 'I gotta feed the baby.'... In some homes the dream book is as familiar and treated with as much reverence as the Bible." In many homes, dream books produce more tangible results.

The most progressive expressions of our dreams, in which mass liberation takes precedence over individual relief, and planning replaces luck, are occasionally articulated in literature. Sarah Wright provides such an example in *This Child's Gonna Live*. In that story of a Black family desperately trying to hold on to each other and their territorial birthright in Depression Maryland, the most fundamental religiosity of poor Black people is re-created, its naturalism released. The landscape is made to hold our suffering and signify our fate. Particularly in the person of Mariah Upshur, the faith of the oppressed which helps us to fight on long after a cause seems lost is complemented by a belief that righteousness can make you invincible. Colloquially speaking, all that's needed is for God to send the sufferers a pretty day. Then children will be cured of worms, the land thieves will be driven from the community, the wind will be calm for the oystermen, the newly planted rye will hold, and a future will be possible in a land of "slowing-up roads" and death. That is, if we're deserving. What does "deserving" mean? Discuss Richard Wright's approach to this subject in *Bright and Morning Star*.

Relate the fundamental hopes and values of Mariah Upshur's dream to other belief systems through which people have been able to attain freedom. The concrete experience of people "moving mountains" is communicated by the story of Dat Sai in the People's Republic of China. The triumph of vision, perseverance, and organization over brute force to regain land is demonstrated in Vietnam and Cuba. Spell out the commonalities in all liberation struggles in this age which vanquish the moneychangers. Find examples in our own history where beginnings have been made of this kind. Make the Work become Flesh, so the new day that's dawning belongs to you and me.

\* \* \* \* \*

As teachers, we should be able to explore all these things and more without resorting to con-

spiritual environment mother healer fighter work



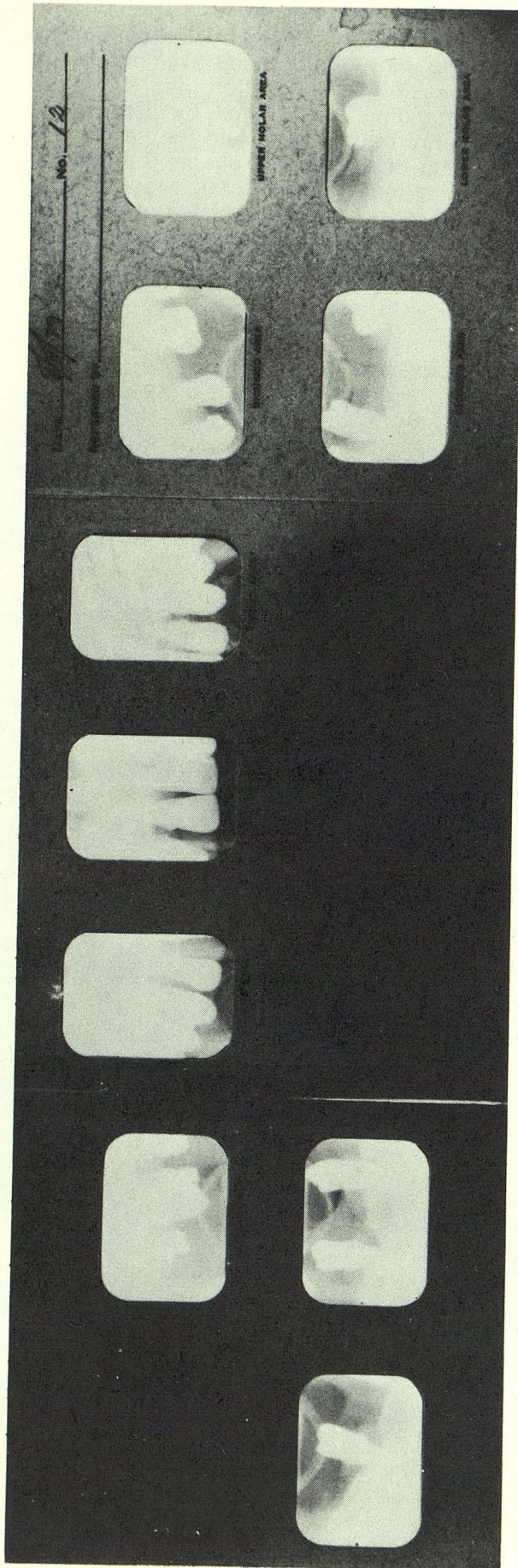
ventional ideological labels. This is the basic, introductory course. Once the experimental base of the class-in-itself is richly felt and understood, theoretical threads can be woven between W.E.B. DuBois, Zora Neale Hurston, and Frantz Fanon. Then bridges can be built connecting the lives of ghettoized women of every color and nationality. In the third series of courses, great individuals can be put in historical perspective;

organized movements can be studied. In the fourth stage, movements themselves may arise. Political possibilities for action then flow from an understanding conditioned by life on the block, but not bound by it. And the beginnings of a class-for-itself may take shape. But the first step, and the most fundamental, should be the goal of the first course: recognizing *ourselves* in history.



Betye Saar. *Four Women in a Storm*. 1979. Mixed media collage on silk hankie, 9" x 8½".





## Visit to the Dentist: Dialectics

"Your teeth reflect your psychic life,"  
says he.

"My teeth reflect my poverty,"  
say I.

My father doesn't have a tooth in his head.  
My mother has one.  
My brother's teeth were pulled  
when he was sixteen;  
The Army gave him dentures  
when he was seventeen and joined.  
My sister had false teeth at twenty-four.  
I've had twenty-three teeth (I counted them)  
since I was thirty.  
Progress no doubt.  
At thirteen I came to the land of opportunity  
I also had my first two teeth pulled.

My psychic life reflects my poverty.  
The X rays of my teeth  
are the pictures of my life.  
There they are:  
Front teeth standing straight  
(more or less)  
Back teeth crouching  
(And some reclining)  
begging to be forgotten.  
Transparent teeth  
with opaque patches  
where the wounds were plastered  
to protect the nerve  
from heat and cold and pain.

From heat and cold and pain.

**Myrtha Chabrán**

© 1979



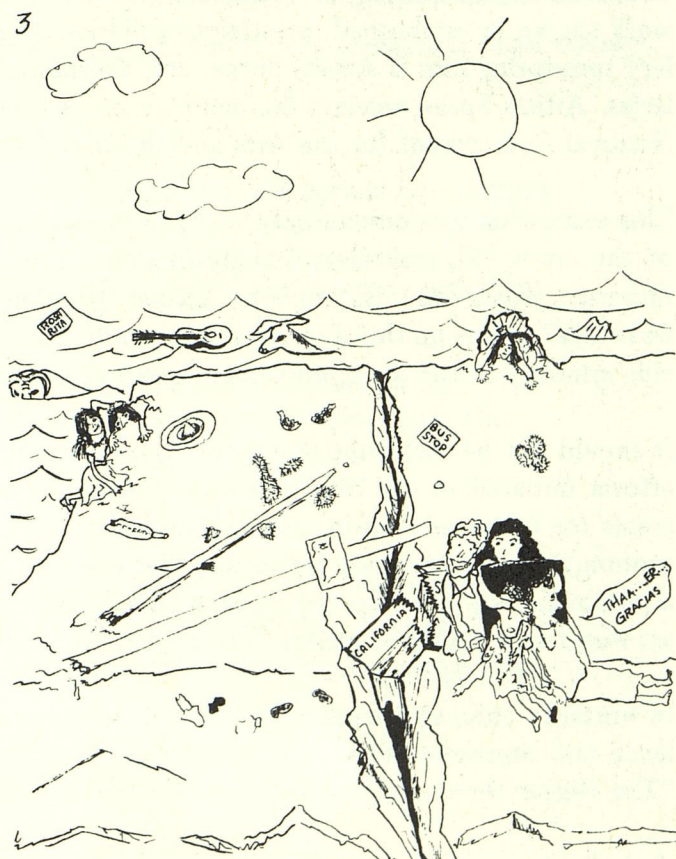


INGREDIENTS: ENRICHED FLOUR, WATER,  
LARD, SALT AND BAKING POWDER.

NET WT. 19 OZ. (1 LB. 3 OZ.) 539 g



Martha Cochrane. 1979.





# ACTION AGAINST RACISM IN THE ARTS

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“Almost at once, the stench of southern jails, cocked guns, dog bites, and the ever present red-screaming cries of “nigger” were around me. The time was not 1962, however, as a child caught between the desegregation of Columbus, Ohio schools; it wasn’t my life’s experience in Georgia, the Carolinas, Mississippi, or Alabama, but it was New York City, 1979, challenging the very existence of myself and other Blacks: challenging my very existence as a human being.”

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The Event: a white male artist exhibits a series of charcoal drawings. The work is abstract, consistent with work shown in established, prestigious galleries. The artist calls his work, “The Nigger Drawings”. The gallery sponsoring him is Artists Space, an “alternative” space designed for young artists who do not have galleries. Artists Space receives the majority of its funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

This exhibition was unique only in its open expression of racism. Racial discrimination pervades the whole of the art world, including publicly funded “alternative” spaces. Even those spaces created especially for minority artists are discriminated against by being drastically underfunded. The exhibition “The Nigger Drawings” points up this discrimination: while this artist gets support for his show the art world fails to provide minority artists the opportunity to express and define themselves.

It should not be surprising that a prestigious art institution sponsors an overt racist gesture at this time. The efforts initiated in the 1960’s to draw Blacks and other minority groups into the “mainstream”—the programs for better education, housing, health services and job training—are now judged inessential. When the economy is slow and jobs are scarce, Black health and well-being become dispensable. This trend has been accompanied by a resurgence of both covert and explicit racism. “The Nigger Drawings” introduces to the art world a new form of racism: brutality chic.

In brutality chic, social pathologies masquerade as new-found virtues. Racism, sexism, poverty, social violence and repression emerge in glamorized form. Brutality chic is the cultural front of today’s backlash. “The Nigger Drawings” not only reflects that backlash but also strengthens it.

As individuals in the arts, it is our responsibility to oppose racism as it confronts and divides us.





Demonstration at Artists Space. April 14, 1979. Photo credit: Donna DeSalvo.

On April 5, 1979, The Emergency Coalition sent a mailgram to Artists Space stating that they would be visiting Artists Space on Saturday, April 14 to see the current exhibition and to hold a Teach-in. When the members of the Emergency Coalition and their supporters arrived on the 14th, they found the doors locked.

Although "The Nigger Drawings" exhibition closed on March 10, protests and counter-protests have continued. Views opposing the protest against racism include the following:

"To the charge of racism, without referring directly to the pictures themselves it would be presumptuous to consider that the artist's titling of his work 'The Nigger Drawings' was an explicitly racist gesture."

--letter from the artist, March 8, 1979



"...at this point, nigger is a broadly used adjective that no longer simply refers to blacks in a pejorative context. Artists refer to the projects gallery at the Whitney as the 'nigger gallery' because it ain't the big time upstairs. People are neutralizing language. These words don't have quite the power they used to--and that seems like a healthy thing."

--Helene Winer, Director, Artists Space,  
quoted in R. Goldstein, "Romance of  
Racism," The Village Voice, April 2,  
1979

"The cry went up 'Racism!'--as if the mere use of a word, and not the context in which it occurs, determines meaning. Angry letters were written, a petition was circulated and signed by a few celebrities.... Is it not ironic that those 'liberals' who in the sixties, when government support of the arts was hotly debated, warned against the danger of censorship, turn out to be precisely those who attempt to use the government agency as an instrument of repression?"

--Craig Owens, Skyline, April 1979

"Douglas Crimp, the managing editor of another small arts publication, October, which considers itself on the left, went so far as to circulate a petition in support of 'Nigger Drawings.' 'It's damaging to think about the political issues and not the work,' he told Seven Days."

--Elizabeth Hess, "Art World Apartheid,"  
Seven Days, May 18, 1979



Ironically, if one takes the counter-protest position further, government agencies have always been used by funded spaces--alternative and non-alternative--as a means of "selecting" out or censoring out work, ideas, etc., that they do not care to endorse, including the work of "minorities." All curatorial decisions may therefore be viewed as aspects of censorship, based on political leanings, expediency, taste, personal preference, etc....

Example: The National Endowment for the Arts funded an Alternative Space Conference in Los Angeles, May 1978. The conference was sponsored by LAICA (Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art). Bob Smith, the organizer, selected the participants, whose expenses were paid by the National Endowment for the Arts. "Minority" or non-white alternative spaces--Black and Hispanic--non-white directors and administrators of "minority" alternative spaces were not invited. By this omission of non-white participation, government funding and government agencies were utilized as means of "censoring out" the ideas, viewpoints, contributions and aspirations of non-white artists and art administrators.

The "curatorial choice" of the Artists Space staff to endorse "The Nigger Drawings" reflected a political decision to echo more overt racism by dressing it up as "neutral in an art context." The endorsement is a reflection of their shared vision, personal taste and preference. One wonders what would have happened if a Black artist had approached Artists Space with this project: An arrangement of white, slightly soiled papers on the gallery floor titled "Poor White Trash."

As the protest continues, it is fascinating to see how panicked and terrified many whites have become when dealing with their own conscious and unconscious racism. Art world figures who were not so uncomfortable when confronted with the demands of feminists, fled and locked their doors, their ears and their minds. It is also curious to see how quickly many white feminists--who had courted Black women for support early in the feminist movement and who indeed employed tactics borrowed from the Civil Rights Movement--fell into line with the other side when they felt that rocking the boat might disturb some of the "crumbs" they had gained. Racism is "too sensitive" an issue for them to deal with. Some feel it's not their problem...a "What Me Worry?" attitude. Some fear that their alignment with the protest would affect their careers. (If a dealer will show women, but not Blacks, what response would that dealer have to a white woman artist dealing with issues of racism?) Others felt that to protest the racism of the Artists Space show would give that artist too much publicity. They preferred to see racism continue and remain silent than to see him receive a review.

The political climate in the United States is becoming increasingly retrogressive. Black artists, all artists, should begin asking hard questions about the art world they support with their work. The Emergency Coalition has formed to address the issues of racism in visual arts funding and exhibitions, as well as in the performing arts. The Coalition is made up of Black and white artists, writers, historians, arts administrators and educators.



# Need

Audre Lorde

© 1979

*Tattle-tale tit  
your tongue will be slit  
and every little boy in town  
shall have a little bit.*

—Children's nursery rhyme

To Patricia Cowan and Bobbie Jean Graham and the 100s of other mangled black women whose nightmare informs my words

This woman is black  
so her blood is shed into silence.  
This woman is black  
so her death falls to earth  
like the dripping of birds  
to be washed away with the silence and the rain.

in the alley behind your apartment  
the neighbors pull down their window shades  
because they don't want to get involved  
and the police call it a crime of passion  
not a crime of hatred  
but you still die  
with a lacerated liver  
and a man's heel imprinted upon your chest.

For a long time after the baby  
I didn't go out at all  
and it got to be really lonely.  
I thought a lot about that.  
Bubba started asking about his father.  
I wanted to connect with the blood  
maybe I'd meet someone  
and we could move on together  
make the dream real.  
An ad in the paper said  
"Black actress needed  
to audition in a play by black playwright."  
I was anxious to get back to work  
and this might be a good place to start  
so on the way home from school with Bubba  
I answered the ad.  
He put a hammer through my head.

Dead black women haunt the black maled streets  
paying the cities' secret and familiar tithe of blood  
burn blood beat blood cut blood  
seven year old child rape victim blood blood  
of a sodomized grandmother blood blood  
on the hands of my brother blood  
and his blood clotting in the teeth of a stranger  
as women we were meant to bleed  
but not this useless blood  
my blood each month a memorial  
to my unspoken sisters falling  
like red drops to the asphalt  
I am not satisfied to bleed  
as a quiet symbol for no one's redemption  
is it our blood that keeps these cities fertile?

If you are hit in the middle of your body  
by a ten-ton truck  
your caved-in chest bears the mark  
in the shape of a tire  
and your ruptured liver, popped  
like a rubber ball.  
If you are knocked down by boulders  
from the top of a poorly graded hill  
your dying is stamped by the rockprint  
on your crushed body  
the impersonal weight of it all  
while your life drips out through your liver  
smashed by mindless stone.  
When your boyfriend methodically beats you  
to death

I do not even know all their names.  
My sisters' deaths are not noteworthy  
not threatening enough to decorate the evening news  
not important enough to be fossilized  
between the right to life pickets  
and the San Francisco riots for gay liberation  
blood blood of my sisters fallen in this bloody war  
with no names  
no medals no exchange of prisoners  
no packages from home no time off for good behavior  
no victories no victors  
only us  
kept afraid to walk out into moonlight  
lest we touch our power  
only us



kept afraid to speak out lest our tongues be slit

for the witches we are—our chests crushed in  
an alley  
by the foot of a brawny acquaintance  
and a ruptured liver bleeding out life onto the stones.

And how many other deaths  
do we live through daily  
pretending  
we are alive?

## II.

What terror embossed my face onto your hatred  
what ancient and unchallenged enemy  
took on my flesh within your eyes  
came armed against you  
with laughter and my hopeful art  
my hair catching the sunlight  
my small son eager to see his mother at work?  
Now my blood stiffens in the cracks  
of your fingers raised to wipe  
a half-smile from your lips.  
In this picture of you  
the face of a white policeman  
bends  
over my bleeding son  
decaying into my brother  
who stalked me with a singing hammer.

And what do you need me for, brother  
to move for you, feel for you, die for you?  
You have a grave need for me  
your eyes are thirsty for vengeance  
that is dressed in the easiest blood  
and I am closest  
your hammer was hungry and powerless  
and livid at its own darkness.  
When you opened my head with your hammer  
did the boogie stop in your brain  
the beat go on  
the terror run out of you like curdled fury  
a half-smile on your lips?  
and did your manhood lay in my skull like a netted  
fish  
or did it drip out like blood  
like impotent fury off the tips of your fingers  
as your sledgehammer clove my bone to let the light  
out  
did you touch it as it flew away?

Borrowed hymns veil a misplaced hatred  
saying you need me you need me you need me  
like a broken drum  
calling me black goddess black hope black strength  
black mother

you touch me  
and I die in the alleys of Boston  
with a stomach stomped through the small of my back  
a hammered-in skull in Detroit  
a ceremonial knife through my grandmother's used  
vagina  
my burned body hacked to convenience in a vacant  
lot  
I lie in midnight blood like a rebel city  
bombed into false submission  
and our enemies still sit in power  
and judgment  
over us.

*I need you.*

Was there no other place  
to plant your hammer  
spend anger rest horror  
no place left to dig for your manhood  
except in my brain?

Do you need me submitting to terror at nightfall  
to chop into bits and stuff warm into plastic bags  
near the neck of the Harlem River  
and they found me there  
swollen with your need  
to rape in my seventh year  
till blood breaks the corners of my child's mouth  
and you explain I was being seductive  
do you need me to print on our children  
the destruction our enemies imprint upon you  
like a Mack truck or an avalanche  
destroying us both  
carrying home their hatred  
you are re-learning my value  
in an enemy coin.

## III.

I am wary of need  
that tastes like destruction.  
Who ever learns to love me from the mouth of my  
enemies  
will walk the edge of my world  
like a phantom in a crimson cloak  
and the dreambooks speak of money  
but my eyes say death.

The simplest part of this poem  
is the truth in each one of us  
to which it is speaking.  
How much of this truth can I bear to see  
and still live  
unblinded?  
How much of this pain  
can I use?

*"We can not live without our lives."*





Native of Chinatown with bound feet. (Culver Pictures)



Native Mexican girl. (Culver Pictures)

"It's hard to be a  
Princess in the  
States when your  
skin is brown"



(Culver Pictures)

*Matoaka als Rebecca daughter to the mighty Prince Powhatan Emperour of Aitanoughkomouck als virginia converted and baptiz'd in the Christian faith, and wife to the wor<sup>th</sup>: M<sup>r</sup>: John Rolfe Compton Holland excud*

POCAHONTAS.

From the engraving in the first edition of John Smith's General History.



# Power Exchange 4: Camille Billops

Valerie Harris

© 1979

*Let's start with your initial ideas for doing The Harlem Book of the Dead. How did you become interested in funeral photographs?*

I don't know. I think it came about through a series of events. I think some of it came when I was in Benares, India. I could see the steps where they burn bodies; everything seemed so honest, so direct. We were in a boat on the Ganges and as a body floated by the boatmen said, "Quick, quick, take a picture," as if that's what we, being Americans, were there to do. After we returned to the States my uncle died. I went to the funeral and I took some photographs. But I didn't realize at the time that I could have taken some photographs of my uncle in the coffin because my family had come from a tradition of photographing the dead. So we sat up there in the church with the preacher and this old contralto singin' these songs that probably made my uncle turn over in the coffin, and the nurse with the white cap and the cheap, pink nylon sweater, standing there wanting people to scream and break up. I thought, compared to India, how absurd this was, how ridiculous, especially the expense. But I did take a picture of the coffin at the graveyard and later I did a series of sculptures called *The Burial of George Harvey* and two other pieces called *The Leichenwagon* and *The Widow* but nothing really happened with them.

*So then did you go look up photographs that Van Der Zee had done?*

No. I was at a friend's place who had some photographs of Mr. Van Der Zee's that had been reprinted. I said I'd like to meet Mr. Van Der Zee. I found his name and number in the phone book and wrote him a note. He called me and said, yes, he'd like to do an interview for the Hatch-Billops Collection. So I did the interview and we sort of became friends. I told him maybe I could get some people together and he could take our portraits for \$50 each and he said okay. So we proceeded to do that. I ran around getting all of his supplies, things people don't use anymore, special weight paper that's not used anymore... I got the stuff, and twelve people who wanted to have their pictures taken, and he took the pictures. He was a real professional. But anyway, that's how I established a relationship with him. We got a little money from the New York State Council to save the things he had in storage, which were piles and piles of photographs. While sorting them out and putting them in archival bags I came across these funeral pictures. I told a friend about

them and he said, "Why don't you get Owen (Dodson) to write some poems to them?" I thought it was a terrific idea so I asked Owen if he could do something like that. Owen said, "Oh yes, child, I know all about death." Then I asked Mr. Van Der Zee and he said he thought it would be quite unique. So that's how we started. Now you have to understand that when I first started with them I was going into an area I had no experience in. I am a visual artist. So I was a little overwhelmed working with Owen and Mr. Van Der Zee, who is a cult figure. I didn't have a name. But I had the idea. So initially I was only going to act as an agent. But a little later a friend of mine found an agent for me.

*So you took your idea to the agent?*

Yeah, because I didn't know how to do it. But that agent didn't work out so I had Owen and Mr. Van Der Zee sign an agreement saying that I would be the agent for a year and if nothing came of it everything would revert back to them. Then as the project progressed and I realized all the work I was doing I said, no, no, no. I am the author. So we rewrote our agreement. I think if I'd known what I know now I would be the sole author and I would do it with Van Der Zee and Owen Dodson. But I couldn't do that then. I was so overwhelmed by their reputations that I felt like they were these two big artists letting me play with them.

*Well, that was your feeling, right? They weren't making you feel that way.*

No. I laid that on myself, every bit of it. I chose the subject, I put it together, and I did all the runnin' around for the book. But we did it according to age, with Mr. Van Der Zee's name first. Anyway, we got the photographs copied and I started making a dummy, juxtaposing the poems with the photographs. I put these little doilies around the pictures—they looked like funereal greeting cards. Through Owen's suggestion, I took the dummy to Toni Morrison at Random House. She was really terrific. She told me that what it needed was some comments by Mr. Van Der Zee on each photo.

*You hadn't done the interview that appears in the book?*

No. So I went back to Mr. Van Der Zee and got him to talk about each photograph. His commentary on the photographs was very interesting; it began to compete with Owen's poems.

*You know, if you hadn't done the interview it would*



have been James Van Der Zee and Owen Dodson, with Camille Billops—who did the work.

Right, and that's the traditional role, isn't it?... Toni thought the revision was better although she had problems with one or two of the poems.

*Did you like the poems?*

Yes, I liked them but it was a little shaky for a while because if you have a potential publisher who has problems with certain elements of your book, then you're ready to say, "Oh yes, I'll get on my knees—left knee or right knee?" But Toni said finally that Random House was interested in Mr. Van Der Zee, but not in the subject matter. So I said no, I didn't want to do a book about him; I wanted to do this book about these photographs. I didn't see Toni again for six months. But I did do this long interview with Mr. Van Der Zee.

*How many hours is that interview?*

About two tapes—three hours. There's a lot of it, and it rambles. Because he rambles.

*I love the interview. I think he's very funny.*

Oh, because that's coherent. Had you read the original transcript you'd see that I'd ask him a question and he'd answer the question three pages later. But you go through this. It's as if he has a tape of the past unreeling in his head. You see, all of his peers are dead. Anyway, I got back to Toni and she told me that they really weren't interested. Then another friend suggested that I take Mr. Van Der Zee's captions away from the pictures because they conflicted with the poems. I did that, which made Owen absolutely ecstatic. So we put the captions in the back of the book with the contact sheet, which really worked. Now we had the interview introducing each section. Finally, I told Mr. Van Der Zee, "Well, I'm really staggering around town with this thing," and he told me to try his old publishers, Morgan and Morgan. I dragged the book up to them, they looked at it and said, "We want to sign a contract." And there I was, so used to being refused; it's so comforting being disappointed all the time because then you don't have to do anything else. So now, I'm gonna get all huffy, right?—I said it must be really good, man, I ain't gonna give it to them. I told them that I still had a few people to see. I talked to my husband who told me to get the contract and everybody'd take a look at it. I talked to a friend who's published a lot of books and he said, "Camille, it's not the greatest contract in the world but it's your first thing. You can hold out but maybe you'll get something and maybe you won't." But I said well what is this myth about people getting thousands and thousands of dollars for their book. My friend said that money ultimately comes out of your royalties, and he thought those days were over anyway. Then I thought, well these publishers are familiar with Mr. Van Der Zee, they love his work and would it not be better to go with publishers who loved the work rather than speculate on other people?

*And also those thousands of dollars haven't even begun for Black women writers—*

You mean they've passed us by?

*We're still working on it.*

Yeah, so we signed this contract. After all, it'd been two years. Owen and Mr. Van Der Zee agreed to let me have first royalties, which would only be repayment of all the money I'd put into the project.

*The book itself is beautiful. Who designed it?*

The publishers. After I'd done my little doily stuff they wouldn't let me do it. Mr. Van Der Zee just loved those doilies but I had to tear all that stuff out.



Camille Billops. Photo credit: Janet Goldner.

*You thought of the title, The Harlem Book of the Dead?*

Yes. Mr. Van Der Zee wanted to call it *Crossing Over* or *The Other Side*. But I insisted on using the present title... After all of this, I heard someone say something about Mr. Van Der Zee's latest book and I said wait a minute—I'm becoming invisible again.

*How did you deal with that?*

I thought, I'm not the hand servant. I'm not promoting a cult figure. We did this as equal artists. I considered myself equal in another way, and certainly, after having done the work, I was not the same person I started out being—you know, on my knees. I was a full, mature artist and I had done a book. It was another piece, like my sculpture, and I demanded to be recognized. When later a woman called from WBAI to ask me for an interview about the book, I said, yes, we can do an interview, but not from the point of view of a cult figure. The book is not about Mr. Van Der Zee—he was a vehicle. So we did the interview as three equal artists, because after all, Owen and Mr. Van Der Zee understood that I'd done the work on this book.



Actually, it wasn't Owen and Mr. Van Der Zee who were negating you. It was the media.

Absolutely.

So who's handling the distribution, Morgan and Morgan?

Yes. The books are in the stores and we're trying to get reviews but it's slow. I've sent copies all over. The night of the book party I was able to raise enough money to buy \$200 worth of books for the Hatch-Billops Collection and now we sell books through mail order. In a red hot week I might send out two books. It takes a lot of calling around and pushing and it's slow. I'd like to get some German and Japanese distribution. Germans and Japanese are quite curious about Black people, provided we don't live next door to them. I think I'm finally getting people to realize that I played a major role in the conception of this book and was not just some woman...

*You know, Camille, I'd proposed to the 8th issue collective that we have a forum on the nature of ambition, and our personal ambitions, because it's something we seldom talk about. We seldom articulate what it is we really want, and why we want it. I understand exactly how you felt about the book and why you couldn't take the feeling that your role in it was being diminished.*

I couldn't. I couldn't take it. Because I wanted the same power. I'd gotten these well-known artists together and I wanted the power from that.

*What power is that?*

The power from publication. It's not a whole lot but it certainly allows you to do other things. If I get in the *New York Times* I know what that means. I'm very tired of being an invisible person. I mean, I'm invisible among Black artists, too, you know this. I've documented a lot of Black artists for the Hatch-Billops Collection, one, because I thought it was an important thing to do, and, two, because it would give me a field, which is good too. And because it's not enough to sit in your studio. I can't approach it like that.

*Neither can I. I ask myself, if I'm a playwright, and I love to write plays, how come I don't just love to write plays? I'm not fooling myself into thinking that I'm just writing them for my own enjoyment.*

Oh, no. How can it go into fruition if you don't see it performed? No matter where it's performed. You've got to have a vehicle for your medium. I'd like to do another book, and I've got some ideas, but I'm also working on my doctorate through an independent study program at the Sorbonne in Paris. I want that doctorate because it will allow me to do other things. I want everything I can have in the world. And I want it before I'm crippled and blind. And I want power. A Black artist asked me what I wanted and I said, "I want what you've got. I want to be in the newspapers, I want the grants,

everything that you have, and maybe more. And I don't necessarily feel romantic or sisterly towards you, either."

*This is a Black man you were talking to?*

Yes. I dealt with that a long time ago. I was privileged to be on the tail end, and I was burdened with sisterhood and humanity, and all these things to keep me on the tail end. But what did it for me was teaching a Women in the Arts course. After going through all the myths I tried to figure out where these myths started. It started with, "After the waters parted"—who was there? Ah, that's the key, who was there.

*Who was there?*

Well, as my father says, it wasn't no split tails. That's how he referred to baby girls—split tails. These concepts exist in the myths of Nigeria, Japan and many other cultures. We're still playing out these old Bible roles. "Whores" are still pretty rampant, although it takes two to tango, and we still have "Jezebels" and all these kind of people, and I've got to be burdened with sisterhood and brotherhood on top of this and everybody's trying to pretend that they're not doing this to me? And they are.

*And how do you propose a woman take power?*

See, if you have some degree of power, they will give you the rest of it. If you have power the media will tell you that overnight. If we have no power then no amount of making ourselves moral or kind or trusting or constantly trying to justify that we're really not heathens will give it to us. White women are beginning to have power. We as Black women do not. We may enjoy some things because we are women but we're still going to catch that racism. If Black women would collectively withdraw from the churches we would have more of an equal say.

*Why?*

Because people always go back to the Bible. Mr. Van Der Zee even said it in the book: Man is the head of everything big on earth. When men get their racism together women had better run for the hills.

*How are you, if you are at all, dealing with the blatant racism inherent to the feminist movement?*

The same way I deal with the racism of this entire society. You have to find some area of expression for yourself because if you're going to admit to personal powerlessness, then you might as well forget it. You don't have to want it all, but take what you can get. Like those women you complain about in that collective, the ones controlling this magazine. Why are they doing this collective? They're doing it as a vehicle to do other things, to get to some of the power. And I understand it. It has nothing to do with sisterhood. Sisterhood is a vehicle that doesn't include me except when it's convenient. So if I get up there and snatch a little something from that table, I'll take some of that, because that's all I'm gonna get anyway. But in the meantime, I'll go over here and do this Hatch-Billops Collection. It gives me another kind of power. And I like that.







*Atoka, Tennessee*

"I reckon I forgot to remember how old I is."

# 17,066 (c.1975)

*Women-1930s*

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PICTURE COLLECTION



#### H4. What best describes the building in which you live?

Fill one circle.

- ☐ A mobile home or trailer
- ☐ A one-family house detached from any other house
- ☐ A one-family house attached to one or more houses
- ☐ Boat, van, tent, etc.
- ☐ An apartment house or building with the following number of living quarters:

#### H12. If you pay rent for your living quarters —

What is the monthly rent?

If rent is not paid by the month, see the instruction guide on how to figure a monthly rent.

- ☐ Less than \$40
- ☐ \$40 to \$49
- ☐ \$50 to \$59
- ☐ \$60 to \$69
- ☐ \$70 to \$79
- ☐ \$80 to \$89
- ☐ \$90 to \$99
- ☐ \$100 to \$109
- ☐ \$110 to \$119
- ☐ \$120 to \$129
- ☐ \$130 to \$139
- ☐ \$140 to \$149
- ☐ \$150 to \$159
- ☐ \$160 to \$169
- ☐ \$170 to \$179
- ☐ \$180 to \$189
- ☐ \$190 to \$199
- ☐ \$200 to \$224
- ☐ \$225 to \$249
- ☐ \$250 to \$274
- ☐ \$275 to \$299
- ☐ \$300 to \$349
- ☐ \$350 to \$399
- ☐ \$400 or more

#### H11. If you live in a one-family house or a condominium unit which you own or are buying —

What is the value of this property, that is, how much do you think this property (house and lot or condominium unit) would sell for if it were for sale?

Do not answer this question if this is —

- ☐ A mobile home or trailer
- ☐ A house on 10 or more acres
- ☐ A house with a commercial establishment or medical office on the property

- ☐ Less than \$5,000
- ☐ \$5,000 to \$9,999
- ☐ \$10,000 to \$14,999
- ☐ \$15,000 to \$17,499
- ☐ \$17,500 to \$19,999
- ☐ \$20,000 to \$22,499
- ☐ \$22,500 to \$24,999
- ☐ \$25,000 to \$27,499
- ☐ \$27,500 to \$29,999
- ☐ \$30,000 to \$32,499
- ☐ \$32,500 to \$34,999
- ☐ \$35,000 to \$37,499
- ☐ \$37,500 to \$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000 to \$44,999
- ☐ \$45,000 to \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$54,999
- ☐ \$55,000 to \$59,999
- ☐ \$60,000 to \$69,999
- ☐ \$70,000 to \$79,999
- ☐ \$80,000 to \$89,999
- ☐ \$90,000 to \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 to \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 to \$199,999
- ☐ \$200,000 or more

# Census

b. Is any part of the property used as a commercial establishment or medical office?

☐ No

☐ Yes

H9. Is this apartment (house) part of a condominium or cooperative building?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, a condominium building
- ☐ Yes, a cooperatively-owned building

☐ No

H2. Did you list anyone in Question 1 who is away from home now — for example, on a vacation or in a hospital?

- ☐ Yes — On page 4 give name(s) and reason person is away.
- ☐ No

Fill one circle.

2. How is this person related to the person in column 1?

Fill one circle.

If "Other relative" of person in column 1, give exact relationship, such as mother-in-law, niece, grandson, etc.

If relative of person in column 1:

- ☐ Husband/wife
- ☐ Son/daughter
- ☐ Brother/sister
- ☐ Father/mother
- ☐ Other relative

If not related to person in column 1:

- ☐ Roomer, boarder
- ☐ Partner, roommate
- ☐ Paid employee
- ☐ Other nonrelative

7. Is this person of Spanish/Hispanic origin or descent?

Fill one circle.

- ☐ No, not Spanish/Hispanic
- ☐ Yes, Mexican, Mexican-Amer., Chicano
- ☐ Yes, Cuban
- ☐ Yes, Puerto Rican
- ☐ Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic

6. Marital status

- ☐ Now married
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Never married

Fill one circle.

5. Age, and month and year of birth

a. Print age at last birthday.

b. Print month and fill one circle.

c. Print year in the spaces, and fill one circle below each number.

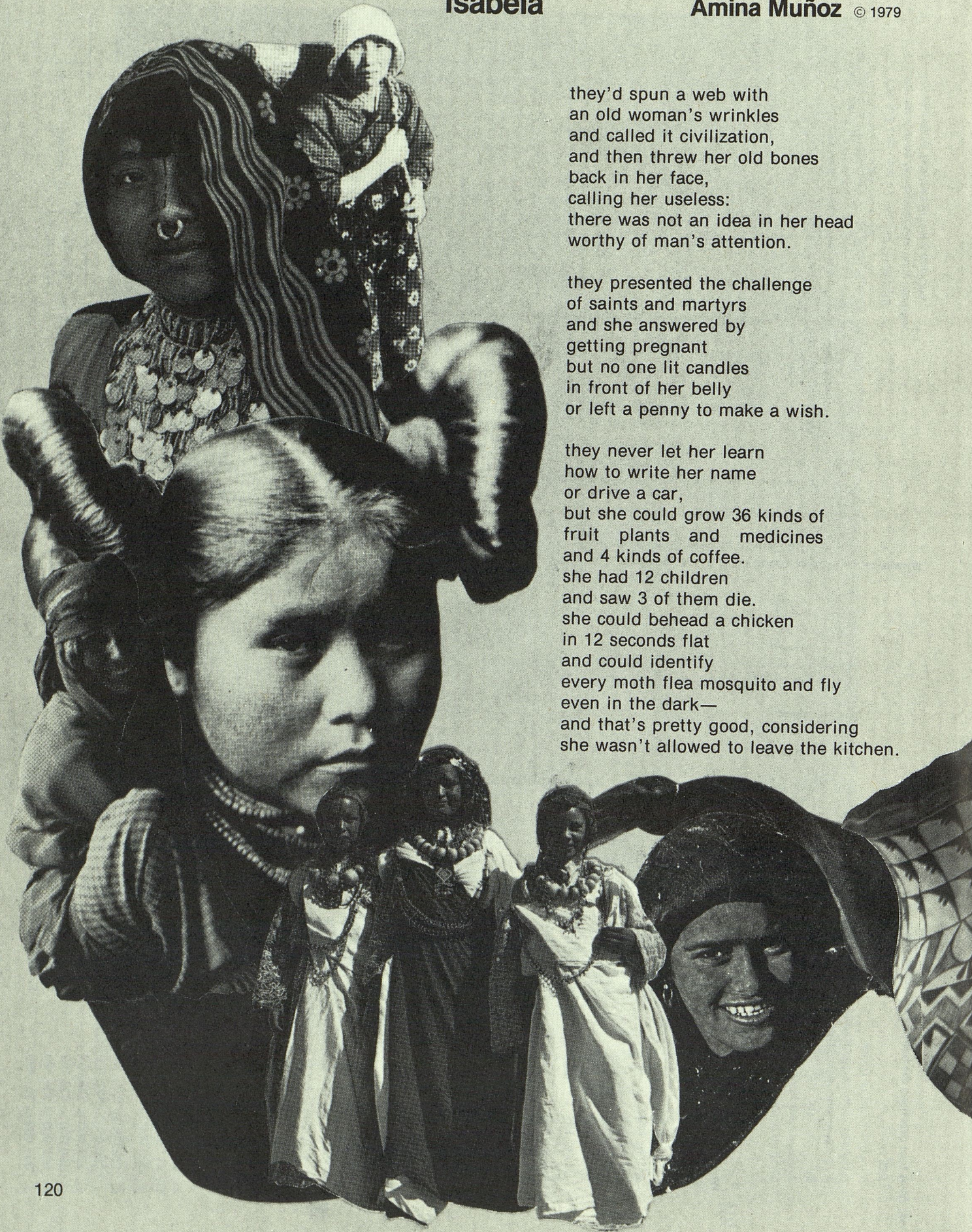
a. Age at last birthday

1 8 0 1 0 1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

b. Month of birth

- ☐ Jan.—Mar.
- ☐ Apr.—June
- ☐ July—Sept.
- ☐ Oct.—Dec.





they'd spun a web with  
an old woman's wrinkles  
and called it civilization,  
and then threw her old bones  
back in her face,  
calling her useless:  
there was not an idea in her head  
worthy of man's attention.

they presented the challenge  
of saints and martyrs  
and she answered by  
getting pregnant  
but no one lit candles  
in front of her belly  
or left a penny to make a wish.

they never let her learn  
how to write her name  
or drive a car,  
but she could grow 36 kinds of  
fruit plants and medicines  
and 4 kinds of coffee.  
she had 12 children  
and saw 3 of them die.  
she could behead a chicken  
in 12 seconds flat  
and could identify  
every moth flea mosquito and fly  
even in the dark—  
and that's pretty good, considering  
she wasn't allowed to leave the kitchen.





Virginia Jaramillo. *Collage*. 1979.



## Notes on Contributors

Diana Bellesi is a poet from Argentina. She has spent years traveling and talking to workers all across the Americas. She lives on an island on an Argentinian river.

Lula Mae Blocton is a painter currently living and working in New York City.

Vivian Browne, an artist living in New York City, is Assistant Professor at Rutgers University.

Beverly Buchanan is an artist who is presently represented by Kornblee Gallery. She is now working on an 18-ton concrete outdoor sculpture at the Museum of Arts and Sciences, Macon, Georgia.

Suzana Cabañas, a poet, lives and works in New York. She is completing a major in Puerto Rican studies at Hunter College.

Myrtha Chabrá is a writer presently working on a novel and an autobiography. She teaches Spanish at the Regional College of the Inter-American University in Guayama, Puerto Rico. She recently spent \$1000 on dentists and periodontists in an effort to save her few teeth.

Michelle Cliff is a Jamaican poet who currently lives in Montague, Mass. Her work has recently appeared in various publications.

Martha Cochrane is presently working on a book of drawings. She is also attending graduate school and writing essays. She lives in Georgia.

Jayne Cortez was born in Arizona and grew up in the Watts community of Los Angeles. She is author of four books of poetry. "So Many Feathers" is reprinted from *Mouth On Paper* (1977).

Sandra Maria Esteves is a literary, graphics, and performing artist. She works in her community in the South Bronx as project coordinator of "People's Foundation," which gives free cultural workshops.

Yvonne A. Flowers, a Black lesbian feminist from New York City, is an educator, therapist, writer and activist.

Magdalena Suarez Frimkess is an artist who lives and works in Venice, Cal.

Katherine Ekau Amoy Hall is Chinese, Hawaiian and Irish. She spent the last 10 years developing cartoons based on her experiences in white America. She is a full-time community organizer and activist.

Joy Harjo is a writer who lives in Sante Fe, New Mexico. She is of the Creek tribe of Oklahoma, and teaches creative writing at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

Valerie Harris is a playwright, journalist and a member of the Third World Newsreel collective.

Virginia Jaramillo is an artist. Originally from California, she now lives and works in New York City. She is in the final stage of a two-year work entitled *Psyche and Techne*, a 28-foot painting.

Li-Lan is an artist whose work has been shown in many exhibitions throughout the United States and foreign countries. She currently lives and works in East Hampton, N.Y.

Maria Lino is an artist who was born in Havana, Cuba. She recently had a one-person show at Cayman Gallery and is presently working on a three-part series called *Naufragio*. She lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Yolanda M. Lopez is a Chicana artist living and working in San Diego, Cal.

Audre Lorde is a NYC Black lesbian feminist poet whose latest book is *The Black Unicorn*. The poem "NEED" is a dramatic reading for three women's voices, based on recent murders in Black communities.

Julianne Malveaux is an economist/writer who lives in New York City. She is a Ph.D. candidate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and is presently a Visiting Research Fellow at the Rockefeller Foundation.

Rosemary Mealy is a poet and essayist. Her essays and reviews have appeared in various publications. She works on the staff of the Third World Coalition, A.F.S.C., and lives in Philadelphia, Pa.

Cuban-born Ana Mendieta is a feminist artist currently working with nature for her upcoming exhibit at A.I.R. Gallery in New York City in November 1979. She is planning to exhibit in 1980 at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Havana, Cuba.

Amina Muñoz is a Puerto Rican New Yorker whose interests include running, women's music, eating pizza, and not taking life seriously.

Naeemah is a Third World lesbian feminist mother of three sons, multi-media artist and writer. She holds a B.A. in Communication Arts.

Katherine Odoms is a seamstress in Philadelphia, Pa., and has worked in the garment industry for many years.

Ann Page (Setsuko Ann Takayoshi Page) is a third-generation Japanese-American. She took the name Ann Page as it was the brand name for the A&P where her mother did her weekly shopping. A photographer, she feels that her Japanese roots are now surfacing in



her work. She lives on the West Coast with her husband and daughter.

Howardena Pindell is an artist and a former member of A.I.R. Gallery in New York City.

Adrian Piper is an artist and Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan.

Gloria C. Rayl is an artist, writer and poet who lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Dawn Russell lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., and works where and when she can.

Michele Russell is a political activist and writer who lives and works in Detroit.

Betye Saar is an artist working in collage and assemblages who lives in Hollywood, Cal.

Barbara Sheen is a writer who lives in New Mexico. Her stories have appeared in numerous publications. She is also the author of bilingual workbooks for children.

Eleanor Smith is an Associate Professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Cincinnati. She is currently doing research on the historical relationship of Black and white women.

Jaune Quick-To-See Smith is an artist living and teaching in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Motoko Ikeda-Spiegel, artist and photographer of the Ainu people of Japan, was born in San Francisco and is currently living in New York.

Erlene Stetson is a Black feminist who co-edits a Third World Women's newsletter. She is Assistant Professor of American Literature at Indiana University.

Barbara Swartz, is Director of the Women's Prison Project, Bedford Hills, N.Y. and Associate Professor of Clinical Law at New York University Law School. She is presently on leave as a Fulbright Scholar and is studying the prison system in Denmark.

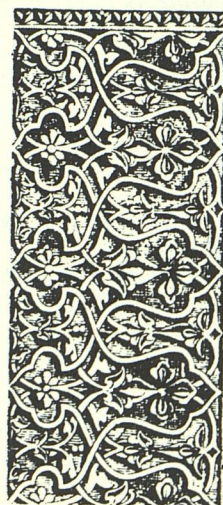
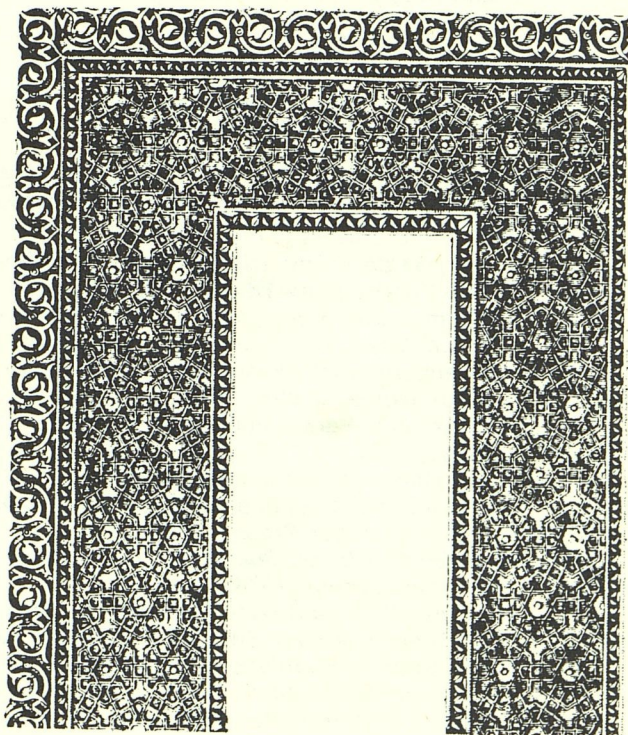
Phyllis Thompson is an artist presently teaching and working in Chicago.

Gloria Jaramillo Trout is a visual artist from the San Francisco Bay area. She is presently working at the Mexican Museum in San Francisco, where she is putting together a Chicano Art Registry.

Marcella Trujillo is a writer who teaches in the Chicano Studies Department at the University of Minnesota.

Emmi Whitehorse is an artist living in New Mexico.

Zarina is an artist from India now living in New York City. She is a feminist committed to the rights of the Third World.





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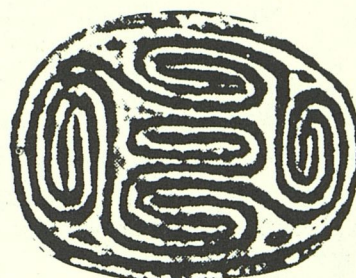
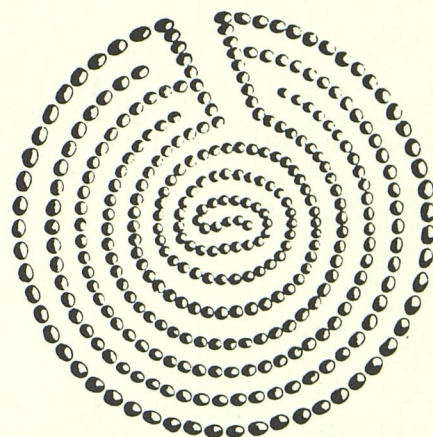
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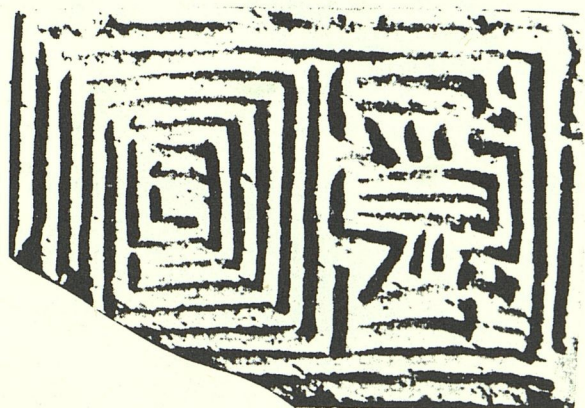
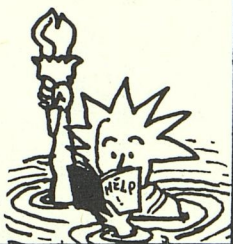
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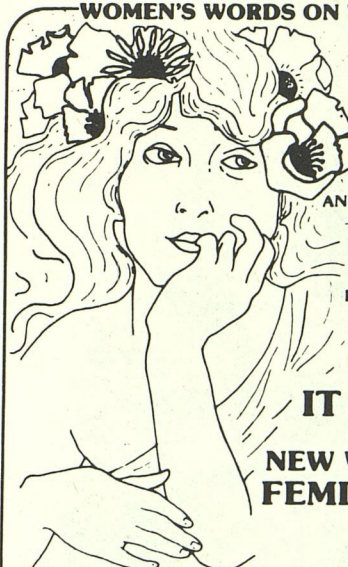
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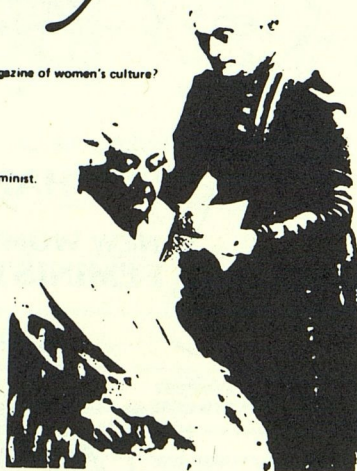
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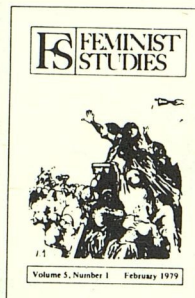
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