7 ~ Woman Suffrage at the Turn of the Century: The Rising Influence of Racism

> One morning (Susan B. Anthony) had engagements in the city which would prevent her from using the stenographer whom she had engaged. She remarked at the breakfast table that I could use the stenographer to help me with my correspondence, since she had to be away all the morning and that she would tell her when she went upstairs to come in and let me dictate some letters to her.
>
> When I went upstairs to my room, I waited for her to come in; when she did not do so, I concluded she didn't find it convenient, and went on writing my letters in longhand. When Miss Anthony returned she came to my room and found me busily engaged. "You didn't care to use my secretary, I suppose. I told her to come to your room when you came upstairs. Didn't she come?" I said no. She said no more, but turned and went into her office. Within ten minutes she was back again in my room. The door being open, she walked in and said, "Well, she's gone." And I said, "Who?" She said, "The stenographer." I said, "Gone where?" "Why," she said, "I went into the office and said to her, 'You didn't tell Miss Wells what I said about writing some letters for her?" The girl said, "No, I didn't." "Well, why not?" Then the girl said, "It is all right for you, Miss Anthony, to treat Negroes as equals, but I refuse to take dictation from a colored woman." "Indeed!" said Miss Anthony. "Then," she said, "you needn't take any more dictation from me.

> Miss Wells is my guest and any insult to her is an insult to me. So if that is the way you feel about it, you needn't stay any longer."[1]

This interchange between Susan B. Anthony and Ida B. Wells, who later founded the first Black women's suffrage club, occurred during those ". . . precious days in which I [Wells] sat at the feet of this pioneer and veteran in the work of women's suffrage."[2] Wells' admiration for Anthony's individual stance against racism was undeniable and her respect for the suffragist's contributions to the women's rights campaign was profound. But she unhesitatingly criticized her white sister for failing to make her personal fight against racism a public issue of the suffrage movement.

Susan B. Anthony was never lacking in praises for Frederick Douglass, consistently reminding people that he was the first man to publicly advocate the enfranchisement of women. She considered him a lifetime honorary member of her suffrage organization. Yet, as Anthony explained to Wells, she pushed Douglass aside for the sake of recruiting white Southern women into the movement for woman suffrage.

> In our conventions . . . he was the honored guest who sat on our platform and spoke at our gatherings. But when the . . . Suffrage Association went to Atlanta, Georgia, knowing the feeling of the South with regard to Negro participation on equality with whites, I myself asked Mr. Douglass not to come. I did not want to subject him to humiliation, and *I did not want anything to get in the way of bringing the southern white women into our suffrage association.* [my emphasis][3]

In this particular conversation with Ida B. Wells, Anthony went on to explain that she had also refused to support the efforts of several Black women who wanted to form a branch of the suffrage association. She did not want to awaken the anti-Black hostility

of her white Southern members, who might withdraw from the organization if Black women were admitted.

> "And you think I was wrong in so doing?" she asked. I answered uncompromisingly yes, for I felt that although she may have made gains for suffrage, she had also confirmed white women in their attitude of segregation.[4]

This conversation between Ida B. Wells and Susan B. Anthony took place in 1894. Anthony's self-avowed capitulation to racism "on the ground of expediency"[5] characterized her public stance on this issue until she resigned in 1900 from the presidency of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. When Wells admonished Anthony for legitimizing the Southern white women's commitment to segregation, the underlying question was far more consequential than Anthony's individual attitude. Racism was objectively on the rise during this period and the rights and lives of Black people were at stake. By 1894 the disfranchisement of Black people in the South, the legal system of segregation and the reign of lynch law were already well established. More than at any other time since the Civil War, this was an era demanding consistent and principled protests against racism. The increasingly influential "expediency" argument proposed by Anthony and her colleagues was a feeble justification for the suffragists' indifference to the pressing requirements of the times.

In 1888 Mississippi enacted a series of statutes legalizing racial segregation, and by 1890 that state had ratified a new constitution which robbed Black people of the vote.[6] Following Mississippi's example, other Southern states framed new constitutions which guaranteed the disfranchisement of Black men. South Carolina's constitution was adopted in 1898, followed by North Carolina and Alabama in 1901 and Virginia, Georgia and Oaklahoma in 1902, 1908 and 1918, respectively.[7]

Ida B. Wells' uncompromising criticism of Susan B. Anthony's public indifference toward racism was certainly justified by the prevailing social conditions, but something far deeper than historical evidence was involved. Just two years before the two women's debate on suffrage and racism, Wells had suffered a traumatic firsthand encounter with racist mob violence. The three victims of Memphis' first lynching since the riots of 1866 were personal friends of hers. The horrible incident itself inspired Wells to investigate and expose the accelerating pattern of mob murders throughout the Southern states. Traveling in England in 1893, seeking support for her crusade against lynching, she vigorously decried the silence with which hundreds and thousands of mob murders had been received.

> In the past ten years over a thousand black men and women and children have met this violent death at the hands of a white mob. And the rest of America has remained silent. . . . The pulpit and press of our country remains silent on these continued outrages and the voice of my race thus tortured and outraged is stifled or ignored wherever it is lifted in America in a demand for justice.[8]

Given the uncamouflaged violence visited upon Black people during the 1890s, how could white suffragists argue in good faith that "for the sake of expediency" they should "stoop to conquer on this color question"?[9] The ostensibly "neutral" stance assumed by the leadership of the NAWSA with respect to the "color question" actually encouraged the proliferation of undisguised racist ideas within the ranks of the suffrage campaign. At the Association's 1895 convention, appropriately held in Atlanta, Georgia, one of the most prominent figures in the campaign for the vote ". . . urged the South to adopt woman suffrage as one solution to the negro problem."[10] This "negro problem" could be simply solved, so Henry Blackwell proclaimed, by attaching a literacy qualification to the right to vote.

> In the development of our complex political society, we have today two great bodies of illiterate citizens: in the North, people of foreign birth; in the South, people of the African race and a considerable portion of the white population. Against foreigners and Negroes, as such, we would not discriminate. But in every state save one, there are more educated white women than all the illiterate voters, white and black, native and foreign.[11]

Ironically, this argument, designed to persuade white Southerners that woman suffrage held great advantages for white supremacy, was initially proposed by Henry Blackwell when he announced his support for the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Already in 1867 he had addressed an appeal to "the legislatures of the Southern States" urging them to take note of the fact that female enfranchisement could potentially eliminate the Black population's impending political power.

> Consider the result from the Southern standpoint. Your 4,000,000 of Southern white women will counterbalance your 4,000,000 of negro men and women, and thus the political supremacy of your white race will remain unchanged.[12]

This renowned abolitionist assured the Southern politicians at that time that woman suffrage could reconcile the North and the South. "Capital and population would flow, like the Mississippi, toward the Gulf"—and, as for Black people, they "would gravitate, by the law of nature toward the tropics."[13]

> The very element which has destroyed slavery would side with the victorious South, and "out of the nettle danger you would pluck the flower safety."[14]

Blackwell and his wife, Lucy Stone, assisted Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony during their 1867 Kansas campaign. That Stanton and Anthony welcomed at this time the support of a notorious Democrat, whose program was "woman first, the negro last," was an indication that they implicitly assented to Blackwell's racist logic. Moreover, they uncritically described, in their *History of Woman Suffrage,* the Kansas politicians' fear of Black suffrage.

> The men of Kansas in their speeches would say, ". . . if negro suffrage passes, we will be flooded with ignorant, impoverished blacks from every State of the Union. If woman suffrage passes, we invite to our borders people of character and position, of wealth and education. . . . Who can hesitate to decide, when the question lies between educated women and ignorant negroes?"[15]

However racist these early postures of the women's movement may seem, it was not until the last decade of the nineteenth century that the woman suffrage campaign began to definitively accept the fatal embrace of white supremacy. The two factions: Stanton-Anthony and Blackwell-Stone—which had split on the issue of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments—were reunited in 1890. In 1892 Elizabeth Cady Stanton had grown disillusioned about the ballot's potential power to liberate women and ceded the presidency of the National American Woman Suffrage Association to her colleague Susan B. Anthony. During the second year of Anthony's term the NAWSA passed a resolution which was a variation of Blackwell's racist and class-biased argument of more than a century earlier.

> *Resolved.* That without expressing any opinion on the proper qualifications for voting, we call attention to the significant facts that in every State there are more women who can read and write than the whole number of illiterate male voters; more white women who can read and write than all negro voters; more American women

> who can read and write than all foreign voters; so that the enfranchisement of such women would settle the vexed question of rule by illiteracy, whether of home-grown or foreign-born production.[16]

This resolution cavalierly dismissed the rights of Black and immigrant *women* along with the rights of their male relations. Moreover, it pointed to a fundamental betrayal of democracy that could no longer be justified by the old expediency argument. Implied in the logic of this resolution was an attack on the working class as a whole and a willingness—whether conscious or not—to make common cause with the new monopoly capitalists whose indiscriminate search for profits knew no human bounds.

In passing the 1893 resolution, the suffragists might as well have announced that if they, as white women of the middle classes and bourgeoisie, were given the power of the vote, they would rapidly subdue the three main elements of the U.S. working class: Black people, immigrants and the uneducated native white workers. It was these three groups of people whose labor was exploited and whose lives were sacrificed by the Morgans, Rockefellers, Mellons, Vanderbilts—by the new class of monopoly capitalists who were ruthlessly establishing their industrial empires. They controlled the immigrant workers in the North as well as the former slaves and poor white laborers who were operating the new railroad, mining and steel industries in the South.

Terror and violence compelled Black workers in the South to accept slavelike wages and working conditions that were frequently worse than slavery. This was the logic behind the rising waves of lynchings and the pattern of legal disfranchisement in the South. In 1893—the year of that fatal NAWSA resolution—the Supreme Court reversed the Civil Rights Act of 1875. With this decision, Jim Crow and lynch law—a new mode of racist enslavement—received judicial sanction. Indeed, three years later the *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* decision announced the "separate but

equal" doctrine, which consolidated the South's new system of racial segregation.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was a critical moment in the development of modern racism—its major institutional supports as well as its attendant ideological justifications. This was also the period of imperialist expansion into the Philippines, Hawaii, Cuba and Puerto Rico. The same forces that sought to subjugate the peoples of these countries were responsible for the worsening plight of Black people and the entire U.S. working class. Racism nourished those imperialist ventures and was likewise conditioned by imperialism's strategies and apologetics.

On November 12, 1898, the *New York Herald* ran stories about the U.S. presence in Cuba, the "race riot" in Phoenix, South Carolina, and the massacre of Black people in Wilmington, North Carolina. The Wilmington Massacre was the most murderous of an entire series of organized mob attacks on Black people during that period. According to a Black minister at that time, Wilmington was "Cuba's kindergarten of ethics and good government,"[17] as it was also proof of the profound hypocrisy of U.S. foreign policy in the Philippines.

In 1899 the suffragists were quick to furnish evidence of their consistent loyalty to the avaricious monopoly capitalists. As the dictates of racism and chauvinism had shaped the NAWSA's policy toward the domestic working class, they accepted without question the new feats of U.S. Imperialism. At their convention that year Anna Garlin Spencer delivered an address entitled "Duty to the Women of Our New Possessions."[18] *Our new possessions?* During the discussion Susan B. Anthony did not attempt to conceal her anger—but, as it turned out, she was not angry about the seizures themselves. She had been

> . . . overflowing with wrath ever since the proposal was made to engraft our half-barbaric form of government on Hawaii and our other new possessions.[19]

Anthony consequently advanced the demand with all the force of her wrath "... that the ballot be given to the women of our new possessions upon the same terms as to the men."[20] As if women in Hawaii and Puerto Rico should demand the right to be victimized by U.S. Imperialism on an equal basis with their men.

During this 1899 convention of the NAWSA a revealing contradiction emerged. While the suffragists invoked their "duty to the women of our possessions," a Black woman's appeal for a resolution against Jim Crow went entirely unheeded. The Black suffragist—Lottie Wilson Jackson—was admitted to the convention because the host state was Michigan, one of the few chapters welcoming Black women into the suffrage association. During her train trip to the convention Lottie Jackson had suffered the indignities of the railroads' segregationist policies. Her resolution was very simple: "That colored women ought not to be compelled to ride in smoking cars, and that suitable accommodations should be provided for them."[21]

As the convention's presiding officer, Susan B. Anthony brought the discussion on the Black woman's resolution to a close. Her comments assured the overwhelming defeat of the resolution:

> We women are a helpless disfranchised class. Our hands are tied. While we are in this condition, it is not for us to go passing resolutions against railroad corporations or anybody else.[22]

The meaning of this incident was far deeper than the issue of whether or not to send an official letter protesting a railroad company's racist policies. In refusing to defend their Black sister, the NAWSA symbolically abandoned the entire Black people at the moment of their most intense suffering since emancipation. This gesture definitively established the suffrage association as a potentially reactionary political force which would cater to the demands of white supremacy.

The NAWSA's evasion of the issue of racism posed by Lottie Jackson's resolution would indeed encourage the expression of anti-Black prejudices within the organization. Objectively, an open invitation had been extended to Southern women who were not about to relinquish their commitment to white supremacy. At best, this noncommittal posture on the struggle for Black equality constituted an acquiescence to racism, and at worst, it was a deliberate incentive, on the part of an influential mass organization, for the violence and devastation spawned by the white supremacist forces of the times.

Susan B. Anthony should not, of course, be held personally responsible for the suffrage movement's racist errors. But she was the movement's most outstanding leader at the turn of the century—and her presumably "neutral" public posture toward the fight for Black equality did indeed bolster the influence of racism within the NAWSA. Had Anthony seriously reflected on the findings of her friend Ida B. Wells, she might have realized that a noncommittal stand on racism implied that lynchings and mass murders by the thousands could be considered a neutral issue. By 1899 Wells had completed an enormous amount of research on lynchings and had published her tragically astounding results. Over the previous ten years, between one and two hundred officially recorded lynchings had occurred on an annual basis.[23] In 1898 Wells created something of a public stir by directly demanding that President McKinley order federal intervention in the lynching case of a South Carolina postmaster.[24]

In 1899, when Susan B. Anthony urged the defeat of the anti-Jim Crow resolution, Black people massively denounced President McKinley's encouragement of white supremacy. The Massachusetts branch of the Colored National League charged that McKinley had been apologetically silent during the reign of terror in Phoenix, South Carolina, and that he failed to inter-

vene when Black people were massacred in Wilmington, North Carolina. During his trip South, they told McKinley,

> . . . you preached patience, industry, moderation to your long-suffering black fellow citizens, and patriotism, jingoism and imperialism to your white ones.[25]

While McKinley was in Georgia, a mob broke into a prison, seized five Black men and

> . . . almost in your hearing, before your eyes . . . they were atrociously murdered. Did you speak? Did you open your lips to express horror of the awful crime . . . which outbarbarized barbarism and stained through and through with indelible infamy before the world your country's justice, honor and humanity.[26]

And not a presidential word was uttered about one of the period's most notorious lynchings—the burning that year of Sam Hose in Georgia.

> (He) was taken one quiet Sunday morning from his captors and burned to death with indescribable and hellish cruelty in the presence of cheering thousands of the so-called best people of Georgia —men, women and children, who had gone forth on a Christian Sabbath to the burning of a human being as to a country festival and holiday of innocent enjoyment and amusement.[27]

Countless historical documents confirm the atmosphere of racist aggression as well as the powerful challenges emanating from Black people during the year 1899. An especially symbolic document is the call issued by the National Afro-American Council urging Black people to observe June 2 as a day of fasting and prayer. Published in the *New York Tribune,* this proclamation denounced the unjustified and indiscriminate arrests which leave

men and women easy prey for mobs of "ignorant, vicious, whisky-besotted men" who "torture, hang, shoot, butcher, dismember and burn."[28]

It was thus not even a question of reading the handwriting on the wall. The reign of terror had already descended upon Black people. How could Susan B. Anthony claim to believe in human rights and political equality and at the same time counsel the members of her organization to remain silent on the issue of racism? Bourgeois ideology—and particularly its racist ingredients —must really possess the power of dissolving real images of terror into obscurity and insignificance, and of fading horrible cries of suffering human beings into barely audible murmurings and then silence.

When the new century rolled around, a serious ideological marriage had linked racism and sexism in a new way. White supremacy and male supremacy, which had always had an easy courtship, openly embraced and consolidated the affair. During the first years of the twentieth century the influence of racist ideas was stronger than ever. The intellectual climate—even in progressive circles—seemed to be fatally infected with irrational notions about the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. This escalated promotion of racist propaganda was accompanied by a similarly accelerated promotion of ideas implying female inferiority. If people of color—at home and abroad—were portrayed as incompetent barbarians, women—white women, that is—were more rigorously depicted as mother-figures, whose fundamental raison d'être was the nurturing of the male of the species. White women were learning that as mothers, they bore a very special responsibility in the struggle to safeguard white supremacy. After all, they were the "mothers of the race." Although the term *race* allegedly referred to the "human race," in practice—especially as the eugenics movement grew in popularity—little distinction was made between "the race" and "the Anglo-Saxon race."

As racism developed more durable roots within white women's organizations, so too did the sexist cult of motherhood creep into the very movement whose announced aim was the elimination of male supremacy. The coupling of sexism and racism was mutually strengthening. Having opened its doors to the prevailing racist ideology more widely than ever before, the suffrage movement had opted for an obstacle course which placed its own goal of woman suffrage in continuous jeopardy. The 1901 convention of the NAWSA was the first in many years at which Susan B. Anthony was not the presiding officer. Having retired the preceding year, she was nonetheless in attendance and was introduced by the new president, Carrie Chapman Catt, to deliver the welcoming message. Anthony's remarks reflected the influence of the rejuvenated eugenics campaign. While women, she argued, had been corrupted in the past by "man's appetites and passions,"[29] it was time for them to fulfill their purpose of becoming saviors of "the Race."[30] It would be through women's

> . . . intelligent emancipation that (the race) shall be purified . . . It is through woman (that) the race is to be redeemed. For this reason I ask for her immediate and unconditional emancipation from all political, industrial and religious subjection.[31]

The main address, delivered by Carrie Chapman Catt, pointed to three "great obstacles" to woman suffrage: militarism, prostitution and

> . . . the inertia in the growth of democracy which has come as a reaction following the aggressive movements that with possibly ill advised haste enfranchised the foreigner, the negro and the indian. Perilous conditions seeming to follow from the introduction into the body politic vast numbers of irresponsible citizens, have made the nation timid.[32]

By 1903 the NAWSA witnessed such an outburst of racist argumentation that it appeared that the upholders of white supremacy were determined to seize control over the organization. Significantly, the 1903 convention was held in the Southern city of New Orleans. It was hardly a coincidence that the racist arguments heard by the delegates were complemented by numerous defenses of the motherhood cult. If Edward Merrick, son of the Louisana Supreme Court Chief Justice, spoke about "the crime of enfranchising 'a horde of ignorant negro men,' "[33] Mary Chase, a delegate from New Hampshire, claimed that women should be enfranchised "as the natural guardians and protectors of the home."[34]

At the 1903 convention it was Belle Kearney from Mississippi whose remarks most blatantly confirmed the dangerous alliance between racism and sexism. Bluntly referring to the Southern Black population as the "4,500,000 ex-slaves, illiterate and semi-barbarous,"[35] she histrionically evoked their enfranchisement as a "death-weight," under which the South had struggled "for nearly forty years, bravely and magnanimously."[36] However inadequate Booker T. Washington's theory of vocational education for Black people may have been in reality, Kearney insisted that Tuskegee and similar schools were ". . . only fitting (the negro) for power, and when the black man becomes necessary to a community by reason of his skill and acquired wealth,"[37] something of a race war will result.

> [T]he poor white man, embittered by his poverty and humiliated by his inferiority, finds no place for himself and his children, then will come the grapple between the races.[38]

Of course, no such struggle between white workers and Black workers was inevitable. The apologists of the new monopoly capitalist class were, however, determined to provoke these rac-

ist divisions. Around the same time that Kearney spoke before the New Orleans convention, an identical alarm was issued to the U.S. Senate. On February 24, 1903, Senator Ben Tillman from South Carolina warned that the colleges and schools for Black people in the South would lead inexorably to racial conflict. Designed to equip "these people" who, in his eyes, were "the nearest to the missing link with the monkey" to "compete with their white neighbors," these schools would

> . . . create an antagonism between the poorer classes of our citizens and these people upon whose level they are in the labor market.[39]

Moreover,

> There has been no contribution to elevate the white people in the South, to aid and assist the Anglo-Saxon Americans, the men who are descended from the people who fought with Marion and Dumter. They are allowed to struggle in poverty and in ignorance and to do everything they can to get along, and they see Northern people pouring in thousands and thousands to help build up an African domination.[40]

Contrary to Kearney's and Tillman's logic, racial conflict did not emerge spontaneously, but rather was consciously planned by the representatives of the economically ascendant class. They needed to impede working-class unity so as to facilitate their own exploitative designs. The forthcoming "race riots"—Atlanta; Brownsville, Texas; Springfield, Ohio—like the 1898 massacres in Wilmington and Phoenix, South Carolina, were orchestrated precisely in order to heighten the tensions and antagonism within the multiracial working class.

Belle Kearney informed her sisters at the New Orleans convention that she had discovered a sure way of containing the racial antagonisms within manageable limits. She claimed she knew exactly how to prevent the otherwise inevitable race war.

> To avoid this unspeakable culmination, the enfranchisement of women will have to be effected, and an educational and property qualification for the ballot be made to apply . . .
>
> The enfranchisement of women would insure immediate and durable white supremacy, honestly attained; for, upon unquestionable authority, it is stated that "in every Southern State but one, there are more educated women than all the illiterate voters, white and black, native and foreign, combined."[41]

The utterly horrifying tone of Kearney's address should not conceal the fact that she invoked theories which had become quite familiar within the woman suffrage movement. The statistical argument and the call for a literacy requirement had been heard many times before by delegates to previous NAWSA conventions. In proposing a property qualification for the vote, Kearney reflected the anti-working-class ideas which had unfortunately gained a stronghold in the suffrage movement.

There was an ironical twist to the words Belle Kearney delivered to the convened membership of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. For years and years, leading suffragists had justified the Association's indifference to the cause of racial equality by invoking the catch-all argument of *expediency*. Now woman suffrage was represented as the most expedient means to achieve racial supremacy. The NAWSA had unwittingly caught itself in its own trap—in the trap of expediency which was supposed to catch the vote. Once the pattern of capitulation to racism had taken hold—and especially at that historical juncture when the new and ruthless monopolist expan-

sion required more intense forms of racism—it was inevitable that the suffragists would eventually be hurt by its backfire.

The delegate from Mississippi confidently declared:

> Some day the North will be compelled to look to the South for redemption . . . on account of the purity of its Anglo-Saxon blood, the simplicity of its social and economic structure . . . and the maintenance of the sanctity of its faith, which has been kept inviolate.[42]

Not an ounce of sisterly solidarity could be detected here, and there was not a word about the defeat of male supremacy or about women eventually coming into their own. It was not women's rights or women's political equality but, rather, the reigning racial superiority of white people which had to be preserved at all cost.

> Just as surely as the North will be forced to turn to the South for the nation's salvation, just so surely will the South be compelled to look to its Anglo-Saxon women as the medium through which to retain the supremacy of the white race over the African. . . .[43]

"Thank God the black man was freed!" she exclaimed with deliberately racist arrogance.

> I wish for him all possible happiness and all possible progress, but not in encroachments upon the holy of holies of the Anglo-Saxon race . . .[44]

8 Black Women and the Club Movement

The General Federation of Women's Clubs could have celebrated its tenth birthday in 1900 by taking a stand against racism within its ranks. Unfortunately, its stance was unequivocally pro-racist: the convention's credentials committee decided to exclude the Black delegate sent by Boston's Women's Era Club. Among the scores of clubs represented in the Federation, the one club deemed inadmissible carried a mark of distinction which could be claimed by no more than two of the white women's groups. If Sorosis and the New England Women's Club were pioneer organizations among white clubwomen, the Women's Era Club, then five years old, was the fruit of Black women's first organizing efforts within the club movement. Its representative, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, was known in white club circles in Boston as a "cultured" woman. She was the wife of a Harvard graduate, who became the first Black judge in the state of Massachusetts. As the credentials committee informed her, she would be welcomed in the convention as a delegate from the white club to which she also belonged. In this case, of course, she would have been the necessary exception proving the rule of racial segregation within the GFWC. But since Ruffin insisted on representing the Black women's club (which, incidentally, had already received a certificate of GFWC membership), she was refused entrance into the convention hall. Moreover, ". . . to enforce this ruling an attempt was made to snatch from her breast the badge which had been handed her . . ."[1]

Shortly after the "Ruffin incident," the Federation's newsletter carried a fictitious story designed to frighten those white women who had protested the racism manifested within their organization. According to Ida B. Wells' account, the article was entitled "The Rushing in of Fools"[2] and it described the pitfalls of integrated club life in a certain unnamed city. The president of the unidentified club had invited a Black woman, whom she had befriended, to become a member of her group. But alas, the white woman's daughter fell in love and married the Black woman's son, who, like his mother, was so light-complexioned as to be hardly recognizable as Black. Yet, the article confided, he had that "invisible drop" of black blood, and when the young white wife gave birth to a "jet black baby . . . the shock was so great that (she) turned her face to the wall and died."[3] While any Black person would realize that the story was contrived, the newspapers picked it up and widely disseminated the message that integrated women's clubs would result in the defilement of white womanhood.

The first national convention called by Black women had taken place five years after the 1890 founding meeting of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Black women's organizational experiences could be traced back to the pre-Civil War era, and like their white sisters, they had participated in literary societies and benevolent organizations. Their main efforts during that period were associated with the anti-slavery cause. Unlike white women, however, who had also flocked into the abolitionist campaign, Black women had been motivated less by considerations of charity or by general moral principles than by the palpable demands of their people's survival. The 1890s were the most difficult years for Black people since the abolition of slavery, and women naturally felt obligated to join their people's resistance struggle. It was in response to the unchecked wave of lynchings and the indiscriminate sexual abuse of Black women that the first Black women's club was organized.

According to the accepted interpretations, the origins of the white women's General Federation go back to the immediate postwar period, when the exclusion of women from the New York Press Club resulted in the organization of a women's club in 1868.[4] After the founding of Sorosis in New York, Boston women established the New England Women's Clubs. Thus the trend was set for such a proliferation of clubs in the two leading cities of the Northeast that by 1890 a national federation could be founded.[5] In the brief span of two years, the General Federation of Women's Clubs had acquired 190 affiliates and over 20,000 members.[6] One student of feminist history explains in this way the seemingly magnetic attraction these clubs held for white women:

> Subjectively, clubs met the need of middle class, middle aged women for leisure activities outside of, but related to, their traditional sphere. There were, it soon became clear, literally millions of women whose lives were not filled up by domestic and religious pursuits. Poorly educated for the most part, unwilling or unable to secure paid employment, they found in club life a solution to their personal dilemma.[7]

Black women, North and South, worked outside their homes to a far greater extent than their white counterparts. In 1890, of the four million women in the labor force, almost one million were Black.[8] Not nearly as many Black women were confronted with the domestic void which plagued their white middle-class sisters. Even so, the leadership of the Black club movement did not come from the masses of working women. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, for example, was the wife of a Massachusetts judge. What set such women apart from the white club leaders was their consciousness of the need to challenge racism. Indeed, their own familiarity with the routine racism of U.S. society linked them far more intimately to their working-class sisters than did the

experience of sexism for white women of the middle classes.

Prior to the emergence of the club movement, the first large meeting independently organized by Black women was prompted by the racist assaults on the newspaperwoman Ida B. Wells. After her newspaper offices in Memphis were destroyed by a mob of racists who opposed her anti-lynching work, Wells decided to take up permanent residence in New York. As she relates in her autobiography, two women were deeply moved upon reading her articles in the *New York Age* about the lynching of three of her friends and the destruction of her paper.

> . . . (T)wo colored women remarked on my revelations during a visit with each other and said they thought that the women of New York and Brooklyn should do something to show appreciation of my work and to protest the treatment which I had received.[9]

Victoria Matthews and Maritcha Lyons initiated a series of meetings among the women they knew, and eventually a committee of 250 women was charged with "stir(ring) up sentiment throughout the two cities."[10] Within several months they had organized an immense meeting, which took place in October, 1892, at New York's Lyric Hall. At that rally, Ida B. Wells made a moving presentation on lynching.

> The hall was crowded . . . The leading colored women of Boston and Philadelphia had been invited to join in this demonstration, and they came, a brilliant array. Mrs. Gertrude Mossell of Philadelphia, Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of Boston, Mrs. Sarah Garnett, widow of one of our great men, a teacher in the public schools of New York City, Dr. Susan McKinner of Brooklyn, the leading woman physician of our race, were all there on the platform, a solid array behind a lonely, homesick girl who was an exile because she had tried to defend the manhood of her race.[11]

Ida B. Wells received a good sum of money toward the establishment of another newspaper and—a sign of the relative affluence of the campaign's leaders—a gold brooch in the shape of a pen.[12]

In the aftermath of this inspiring rally, the women who had organized it created permanent organizations in Brooklyn and New York, which they called the Women's Loyal Union. According to Ida B. Wells, these were the first clubs created and exclusively led by Black women. "(I)t was the real beginning of the club movement among the colored women in this country."[13] Boston's Women's Era Club—subsequently banned by the GFWC —was an outgrowth of a meeting called by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin on the occasion of Ida B. Wells' visit to Boston.[14] Similar meetings addressed by Wells led to permanent clubs in New Bedford, Providence and Newport, and later in New Haven.[15] In 1893 an anti-lynching speech delivered by Wells in Washington occasioned one of the first public appearances of Mary Church Terrell, who later became the founding president of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs.[16]

Ida B. Wells was much more than a drawing card for Black women who were recruited into the club movement. She was also an active organizer, initiating and serving as president of the first Black women's club in Chicago. After her first anti-lynching tour abroad, she assisted Frederick Douglass in organizing a protest against the 1893 World's Fair. Due to her efforts, a women's committee was organized to raise money for the publication of a brochure to be distributed at the fair entitled "The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World's Columbian Exposition."[17] In the aftermath of the Chicago World's Fair, Wells persuaded the women to create a permanent club as Black women in the northeastern cities had done.[18]

Some of the women recruited by Wells came from Chicago's most affluent Black families. Mrs. John Jones, for example, was the wife of "the wealthiest colored man in Chicago at that

time."[19] It should be noted, however, that this successful businessman had formerly worked on the Underground Railroad and had led the movement to repeal Illinois' Black Laws. Aside from the women representing the incipient "Black Bourgeoisie" and "the most prominent women in church and secret society,"[20] there were "school teachers and housewives and high-school girls"[21] among the almost three hundred members of the Chicago Women's Club. In one of their earliest activist endeavors, they raised funds to prosecute a policeman who had killed a Black man. The Black clubwomen in Chicago were manifestly committed to the struggle for Black Liberation.

The pioneering Women's Era Club in Boston continued the strenuous defense of Black people, which Ida B. Wells had urged at their first meeting. When the National Conference of the Unitarian Church refused to pass an anti-lynching resolution, New Era members issued a strong protest in an open letter to one of the leading women of the church.

> We, the members of the Women's Era Club, believe we speak for the colored women of America. . . . As colored women we have suffered and do suffer too much to be blind to the suffering of others, but naturally we are more keenly alive to our own suffering than to others. We therefore feel that we should be false to ourselves, to our opportunities and to our race should we keep silent in a case like this.
>
> We have endured much and we believe with patience; we have seen our world broken down, our men made fugitives and wanderers or their youth and strength spent in bondage. We ourselves are daily hindered and oppressed in the race of life; we know that every opportunity for advancement, for peace and happiness will be denied us; . . . Christian men and women absolutely refuse . . . to open their churches to us; . . . our children . . . are considered legitimate prey for insult; . . . our young girls can at any time be thrust into foul and filthy cars, and, no matter their needs, be refused food and shelter.[22]

After referring to the educational and cultural deprivation suffered by Black women, the protest letter called for a massive outcry against lynching.

> . . . (I)n the interest of justice, for the good name of our country, we solemnly raise our voice against the horrible crimes of lynch law. . . . And we call upon Christians everywhere to do the same or be branded as sympathizers with the murderers.[23]

When the First National Conference of Colored Women convened in Boston in 1895, the Black clubwomen were not simply emulating their white counterparts, who had federated the club movement five years earlier. They had come together to decide upon a strategy of resistance to the current propagandistic assaults on Black women and the continued reign of lynch law. Responding to an attack on Ida B. Wells by the pro-lynching president of the Missouri Press Association, the conference delegates protested that "insult to Negro womanhood"[24] and sent out ". . . to the country a unanimous endorsement of the course (Wells) had pursued in (her) agitation against lynching."[25]

Fannie Barrier Williams, whom white women in Chicago had excluded from their club, summed up the difference between the white club movement and the club movement among her people. Black women, she said, had come to realize that

> . . . progress includes a great deal more than what is generally meant by the terms culture, education and contact.
>
> The club movement among colored women reaches into the sub-condition of the entire race. . . . (T)he club movement is only one of the many means for the social uplift of a race . . .
>
> The club movement is well purposed. . . . It is not a fad . . . It is rather the force of a new intelligence against the old ignorance. The struggle of an enlightened conscience against the whole brood of social miseries, born out of the stress and pain of a hated past.[26]

While the Black women's club movement was emphatically committed to the struggle for Black Liberation, its middle-class leaders were sometimes unfortunately elitist in their attitudes toward the masses of their people. Fannie Barrier Williams, for example, envisioned the clubwomen as "the new intelligence, the enlightened conscience"[27] of the race.

> Among white women, clubs mean the forward movement of the best women in the interest of the best womanhood. Among colored women the club is the effort of the few competent in behalf of the many incompetent.[28]

Prior to the definitive establishment of a national Black women's club organization, there was apparently some unfortunate competition among leading clubwomen. Based on the 1895 Boston conference called by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, the National Federation of Afro-American Women was founded the same year, electing Margaret Murray Washington as its president.[29] It brought together over thirty clubs, which were active in twelve states. In 1896 the National League of Colored Women was founded in Washington, D.C., with Mary Church Terrell as its president. The competing organizations soon merged, however, forming the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, which elected Terrell to its highest office. Over the next several years Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells would express a mutual hostility within the national Black club movement. In her autobiography, Wells claims that Terrell was personally responsible for her exclusion from the 1899 convention of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs that was held in Chicago.[30] According to Wells, Terrell's fears about her own re-election as president caused her to exclude the former newspaperwoman and to minimize, during the convention, the struggle against lynching which her rival had come to personify.[31]

Mary Church Terrell was the daughter of a slave who had received, after the emancipation, a considerable inheritance from his slavemaster father. Because of her family's wealth, she enjoyed unique educational opportunities. After four years at Oberlin College, Terrell became the third Black woman college graduate in the country[32]—and she went on to study at several institutions of higher learning abroad. A high school teacher and later a university professor, Mary Church Terrell became the first Black woman appointed to the Board of Education in the District of Columbia. Had she sought personal wealth and fulfillment through a political or academic career, she would undoubtedly have succeeded. But her concern for the collective liberation of her people led her to devote her entire adult life to the struggle for Black liberation. More than anyone else, Mary Church Terrell was the driving force that molded the Black women's club movement into a powerful political group. While Ida B. Wells was one of Terrell's severest critics, she acknowledged the importance of her role in the club movement. As she pointed out, "Mrs. Terrell was by all odds the best educated woman among us . . ."[33]

Like Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells was born into a family of ex-slaves. When an epidemic of yellow fever claimed the lives of her parents, Wells was still a teenager, with five younger sisters and brothers to support. She embarked upon a teaching career as a direct response to this enormous burden. But her personal hardships were not so overwhelming as to prevent her from pursuing a path of anti-racist activism. At the young age of twenty-two, she challenged the racial discrimination she suffered as a railroad traveler by filing suit against the railroad in court. Ten years later Ida B. Wells was publishing her own newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee, and after three of her friends were murdered by a racist mob, turned the paper into a powerful weapon against lynching. Forced into exile when the racists threatened her life and destroyed her newspaper offices, Wells launched her astound-

ingly effective crusade against lynching. Calling upon Black and white alike to massively oppose the reign of lynch law, she traveled from city to city and town to town all over the United States. Her tours abroad encouraged Europeans to organize solidarity campaigns against the lynching of Black people in the United States. Two decades later, at the age of fifty-seven, Ida B. Wells rushed to the scene of the East Saint Louis Riot. When she was sixty-three years old she conducted an investigation into a mob attack by racists in Arkansas. And on the eve of her death she was as militant as ever, leading a Black women's demonstration against the segregationist policies of a major Chicago hotel.

In her protracted crusade against lynching, Ida B. Wells had become an expert at agitation-confrontation tactics. But few could equal Mary Church Terrell as an advocate of Black Liberation through the written and spoken word. She sought freedom for her people through logic and persuasion. An eloquent writer, a powerful orator and a master at the art of debate, Terrell waged persistent and principled defenses of Black equality and woman suffrage, as well as the rights of working people. Like Ida B. Wells, she was active up to the year of her death—at the age of ninety. In one of her last defiant gestures against racism, she marched in a Washington, D.C., picket line when she was eighty-nine years old.

Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell were unquestionably the two outstanding Black women of their era. Their personal feud, which spanned several decades, was a tragic thread within the history of the Black women's club movement. While their separate accomplishments were monumental, their united efforts could have really moved mountains for their sisters and for their people as a whole.

9 Working Women, Black Women and the History of the Suffrage Movement

In January, 1868, when Susan B. Anthony published the first issue of *Revolution*, working women, whose ranks in the labor force had recently expanded, had begun to defend their rights conspicuously. During the Civil War more white women than ever before had gone to work outside their homes. In 1870, while 70 percent of women workers were domestics, one-fourth of all non-farm workers in general were female.[1] Within the garment industry, they had already become the majority. At this time the labor movement was a rapidly expanding economic force, comprising no less than thirty nationally organized unions.[2]

Inside the labor movement, however, the influence of male supremacy was so powerful that only the Cigarmakers and Printers had opened their doors to women. But some women workers had attempted to organize themselves. During the Civil War and in its immediate aftermath, the sewing women constituted the largest group of women working outside their homes. When they began to organize, the spirit of unionization spread from New York to Boston and Philadelphia and to all the major cities where the garment industry flourished. When the National Labor Union was founded in 1866, its delegates were compelled to acknowledge the sewing women's efforts. At the initiative of

William Sylvis, the convention resolved to support not only the "daughters of toil in the land"[3]—as the sewing women were called—but the general unionization of women and their full equality with respect to wages.[4] When the National Labor Union reconvened in 1868, electing Sylvis as their president, the presence of several women among the delegates, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, compelled the convention to pass stronger resolutions and generally treat the cause of working women's rights with greater seriousness than before.

Women were welcomed at the 1869 founding convention of the National Colored Labor Union. As the Black workers explained in one resolution, they did not want to commit "the mistakes heretofore made by our white fellow citizens in omitting women."[5] This Black labor organization, created because of the exclusionary policies of white labor groups, proved by its practice to be more seriously committed to working women's rights than its white counterpart and predecessor. While the NLU had simply passed resolutions supporting women's equality, the NCLU actually elected a woman—Mary S. Carey[6]—to serve on the organization's policymaking executive committee. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton did not record any acknowledgment of the Black labor organization's anti-sexist accomplishments. They were probably too absorbed in the suffrage battle to take note of that important development.

In the first issue of Anthony's *Revolution,* the newspaper financed by the racist Democrat George Francis Train, the overall message was that women should seek the ballot. Once the reality of woman suffrage was established, so the paper seemed to say, it would be the millennium for women—and the final triumph of morality for the nation as a whole.

> We shall show that the ballot will secure for woman equal place and equal wages in the world of work; that it will open to her the schools, colleges, professions and all the opportunities and advantages of life; that in her hand it will be a moral power to stay the tide of crime and misery on every side.[7]

Though its vision was often too narrowly focused on the ballot, *Revolution* played an important role in the struggles of working women during the two years it was published. The demand for the eight-hour day was repeatedly raised within the pages of the paper, as was the anti-sexist slogan "equal pay for equal work." From 1868 to 1870 working women—especially in New York—could rely upon *Revolution* to publicize their grievances as well as their strikes, their strategies and their goals.

Anthony's involvement in women's labor struggles of the postwar period was not restricted to journalistic solidarity. During the first year of her paper's publication she and Stanton used the *Revolution*'s offices to organize printers into the Working Women's Association. Shortly thereafter the National Typographers became the second union to admit women, and in the *Revolution*'s offices, the Women's Typographical Union, Local #1, was established.[8] Thanks to Susan B. Anthony's initiative, a second Working Women's Association was later organized among the sewing women.

Although Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and their colleagues on the paper made important contributions to the cause of working women, they never really accepted the principle of trade unionism. As they had been previously unwilling to concede that Black Liberation might claim momentary priority over their own interests as white women, they did not fully embrace the fundamental principles of unity and class solidarity, without which the labor movement would remain powerless. In the eyes of the suffragists, "woman" was the ultimate test—if the cause of woman could be furthered, it was not wrong for women to function as scabs when male workers in their trade were on

strike. Susan B. Anthony was excluded from the 1869 convention of the National Labor Union because she had urged women printers to go to work as scabs.[9] In defending herself at this convention, Anthony proclaimed that

> . . . men have great wrongs in the world between the existence of labor and capital, but these wrongs as compared to the wrongs of women, in whose faces the doors of the trades and vocations are slammed shut, are not as a grain of sand on the sea shore.[10]

Anthony's and Stanton's postures during this episode were astonishingly similar to the suffragists' anti-Black position within the Equal Rights Association. As Anthony and Stanton attacked Black men when they realized that the ex-slaves might receive the vote before white women, so they lashed out in a parallel fashion against the men of the working class. Stanton insisted that the exclusion from the NLU proved ". . . what the *Revolution* has said again and again, that the worst enemies of Woman Suffrage will ever be the laboring classes of men."[11]

"Woman" was the test, but not every woman seemed to qualify. Black women, of course, were virtually invisible within the protracted campaign for woman suffrage. As for white working-class women, the suffrage leaders were probably impressed at first by the organizing efforts and militancy of their working-class sisters. But as it turned out, the working women themselves did not enthusiastically embrace the cause of woman suffrage. Although Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton persuaded several female labor leaders to protest the disfranchisement of women, the masses of working women were far too concerned about their immediate problems—wages, hours, working conditions—to fight for a cause that seemed terribly abstract. According to Anthony,

> The great distinctive advantage possessed by the workingmen of this republic is that the son of the humblest citizen, black or white, has equal chances with the son of the richest in the land.[12]

Susan B. Anthony would never have made such a statement if she had familiarized herself with the realities of working-class families. As working women knew all too well, their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons who exercised the right to vote continued to be miserably exploited by their wealthy employers. Political equality did not open the door to economic equality.

"Woman Wants Bread, Not the Ballot"[13] was the title of a speech Susan B. Anthony frequently delivered as she sought to recruit more working women into the fight for suffrage. As the title indicates, she was critical of the working women's tendency to focus on their immediate needs. But they naturally sought tangible solutions to their immediate economic problems. And they were seldom moved by the suffragists' promise that the vote would permit them to become equal to their men—their exploited, suffering men. Even the members of the Working Women's Association, organized by Anthony in the offices of her newspaper, elected to refrain from fighting for suffrage. "Mrs. Stanton was anxious to have a workingwomen's suffrage association," explained the first vice-president of the Working Women's Association.

> It was left to a vote, and ruled out. The society at one time comprised over one hundred working women, but, as there was nothing practical done to ameliorate their condition, they gradually withdrew.[14]

Early in her career as a women's rights leader, Susan B. Anthony concluded that the ballot contained the real secret of women's emancipation, and that sexism itself was far more op-

pressive than class inequality and racism. In Anthony's eyes, "(T)he most odious oligarchy ever established on the face of the globe"[15] was the rule of men over women.

> An oligarchy of wealth, where the rich govern the poor; an oligarchy of learning, where the educated govern the ignorant; or even an oligarchy of race, where the Saxon rules the African, might be endured; but this oligarchy of sex which makes father, brothers, husband, sons, the oligarchs over the mother and sisters, the wife and daughters of every household; which ordains all men sovereigns, all women subjects—carries discord and rebellion into every home of the nation.[16]

Anthony's staunchly feminist position was also a staunch reflection of bourgeois ideology. And it was probably because of the ideology's blinding powers that she failed to realize that working-class women and Black women alike were fundamentally linked to their men by the class exploitation and racist oppression which did not discriminate between the sexes. While their men's sexist behavior definitely needed to be challenged, the real enemy—their common enemy—was the boss, the capitalist, or whoever was responsible for the miserable wages and unbearable working conditions and for racist and sexist discrimination on the job.

Working women did not raise the banner of suffrage en masse until the early twentieth century, when their own struggles forged special reasons for demanding the right to vote. When women struck the New York garment industry in the renowned "Uprising of the 20,000" during the winter of 1909–1910, the ballot began to acquire a special relevance to working women's struggles. As women labor leaders began to argue, working women could use the vote to demand better wages and improved conditions on the job. Woman suffrage could serve as a powerful weapon of class struggle. After the tragic fire at the New York Triangle Shirtwaist Company claimed the lives of 146 women, the need for legislation

prohibiting the hazardous conditions of women's work became dramatically obvious. In other words, working women needed the ballot in order to guarantee their very survival.

The Women's Trade Union League urged the creation of Wage Earners' Suffrage Leagues. A leading member of the New York Suffrage League, Leonora O'Reilly, developed a powerful working-class defense of women's right to vote. Aiming her argument at the anti-suffrage politicians, she also questioned the legitimacy of the prevailing cult of motherhood.

> You may tell us that our place is in the home. There are 8,000,000 of us in these United States who must go out of it to earn our daily bread and we come to tell you that while we are working in the mills, the mines, the factories and the mercantile houses we have not the protection that we should have. You have been making laws for us and the laws you have made have not been good for us. Year after year working women have gone to the Legislature in every state and have tried to tell the story of their need . . .[17]

Now, so Leonora O'Reilly and her working-class sisters proclaimed, they were going to fight for the ballot—and indeed they would use it as a weapon to remove all those legislators from office whose loyalties were with big business. Working-class women demanded the right to suffrage as an arm to assist them in the ongoing class struggle. This new perspective within the campaign for woman suffrage bore witness to the rising influence of the socialist movement. Indeed, women socialists brought a new energy into the suffrage movement and defended the vision of struggle born of the experiences of their working-class sisters.

Of the eight million women in the labor force during the first decade of the twentieth century, more than two million were

Black. As women who suffered the combined disabilities of sex, class and race, they possessed a powerful argument for the right to vote. But racism ran so deep within the woman suffrage movement that the doors were never really opened to Black women. The exclusionary policies of the NAWSA did not entirely deter Black women from raising the demand for the vote. Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell and Mary McCleod Bethune were among the most well-known Black suffragists.

Margaret Murray Washington, who was a leading figure of the National Association of Colored Women, confessed that ". . . personally, woman suffrage has never kept me awake at night . . ."[18] This casual indifference may well have been a reaction to the racist stance of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, for Washington also argued that

> (c)olored women, quite as much as colored men, realize that if there is ever to be equal justice and fair play in the protection in the courts everywhere for all races, then there must be an equal chance for women as well as men to express their preference through their votes.[19]

As Washington points out, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs established a Suffrage Department to impart to its members knowledge about governmental affairs, ". . . so that women may be prepared to handle the vote intelligently and wisely . . ."[20] The entire Black women's club movement was imbued with the spirit of woman suffrage—and despite the rejection they received from the NAWSA, they continued to defend women's right to vote. When the Black Northeastern Federation of Clubs applied for membership in the NAWSA as late as 1919—just one year before victory—the leadership's response was a repeat of Susan B. Anthony's rejection of Black women suffragists a quarter century earlier. Informing the Federation that its application could not be considered, the NAWSA leader explained that

> . . . if the news is flashed throughout the Southern States at this most critical moment that the National American Association has just admitted an organization of 6,000 colored women, the enemies can cease from further effort—the defeat of the amendment will be assured.[21]

Still, Black women supported the battle for suffrage until the very end.

Unlike their white sisters, Black women suffragists enjoyed the support of many of their men. Just as a Black man—Frederick Douglass—had been the most outstanding male advocate of women's equality during the nineteenth century, so W. E. B. DuBois emerged as the leading male advocate of woman suffrage in the twentieth century. In a satirical article on the 1913 suffrage parade in Washington, DuBois described the white men who hurled jeers as well as physical blows—and over one hundred people were injured—as the upholders of "the glorious traditions of Anglo-Saxon manhood."[22]

> Wasn't it glorious? Does it not make you burn with shame to be a mere black man when such mighty deeds are done by the Leaders of Civilization? Does it not make you "ashamed of your race"? Does it not make you "want to be white."[23]

Concluding the article on a serious note, DuBois quotes one of the white women marchers, who said that Black men had been unanimously respectful. Of the thousands watching the parade, ". . . not one of them was boisterous or rude . . . The difference between them and those insolent, bold white men was remarkable."[24]

This parade, whose most sympathetic male spectators were Black, was rigidly segregated by its white women organizers. They even instructed Ida B. Wells to leave the Illinois contingent and to march with the segregated Black group—in deference to the white women from the South.

> The request was made publicly during the rehearsal of the Illinois contingent, and while Mrs. Barnett (Ida Wells) glanced about the room, looking for support, the ladies debated the question of principle versus expediency, most of them evidently feeling that they must not prejudice Southerners against suffrage.[25]

Ida B. Wells was not one to follow racist instructions, however, and, at parade time, she slipped into the Illinois section.

As a male advocate of woman suffrage, W. E. B. DuBois was peerless among Black and white men alike. His militancy, his eloquence and the principled character of his numerous appeals caused many of his contemporaries to view him as the most outstanding male defender of women's political equality of his time. DuBois' appeals were impressive not only for their lucidity and persuasiveness, but also for their relative lack of male-supremacist undertones. In his speeches and writings, he welcomed the expanding leadership roles played by Black women, who ". . . are moving quietly but forcibly toward the intellectual leadership of the race."[26] While some men would have interpreted this rising power of women as a definite cause for alarm, W. E. B. DuBois argued that, on the contrary, this situation created a special urgency for extending the ballot to Black women. "The enfranchisement of these women will not be a mere doubling of our vote and voice in the nation," but will lead to a "stronger and more normal political life."[27]

In 1915 an article entitled "Votes for Women: A Symposium by Leading Thinkers in Colored America" was published by DuBois in *The Crisis*.[28] It was the transcript of a forum, whose participants included judges, ministers, university professors, elected officials, church leaders and educators. Charles W. Chesnutt, Reverend Francis J. Grimke, Benjamin Brawley and the Honorable Robert H. Terrell were some of the many male advocates of woman suffrage who spoke during this symposium. The women included Mary Church Terrell, Anna Jones and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin.

The vast majority of the women who participated in the forum on woman suffrage were affiliated with the National Association of Colored Women. In their statements, there were surprisingly few invocations of the popular argument among white suffragists that women's "special nature," their domesticity and their innate morality gave them a special claim to the vote. There was one glaring exception, however. Nannie H. Burroughs—educator and church leader—carried the womanly morality thesis so far as to imply the absolute superiority of Black women over their men. Women needed the vote, Burroughs insisted, because their men had "bartered and sold" this valuable weapon.

> The Negro woman . . . needs the ballot to get back, by the wise *use* of it, what the Negro man has lost by the *misuse* of it. She needs it to ransom her race. . . . A comparison with the men of her race, in moral issues, is odious. She carries the burdens of the Church, and of the school and bears a great deal more than her economic share in the home.[29]

Of the dozen or so women participants, Burroughs alone assumed a position which rested on the convoluted argument that women were morally superior (implying, of course, that they were inferior to men in most other respects). Mary Church Terrell spoke on "Woman Suffrage and the Fifteenth Amendment," Anna Jones on "Woman Suffrage and Social Reform" and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin described her own historical experiences in the woman suffrage campaign. Others focused their remarks on working women, education, children and club life. In concluding her remarks on "Women and Colored Women," Mary Talbert summed up the admiration for Black women expressed throughout the symposium.

> By her peculiar position, the colored woman has gained clear powers of observation and judgment—exactly the sort of powers which are today peculiarly necessary to the building of an ideal country.[30]

Black women had been more than willing to contribute those "clear powers of observation and judgement" toward the creation of a multi-racial movement for women's political rights. But at every turn, they were betrayed, spurned and rejected by the leaders of the lily-white woman suffrage movement. For suffragists and clubwomen alike, Black women were simply expendable entities when it came time to woo Southern support with a white complexion. As for the woman suffrage campaign, it appears that all those concessions to Southern women made very little difference in the end. When the votes on the Nineteenth Amendment were tallied, the Southern states were still lined up in the opposition camp—and, in fact, almost managed to defeat the amendment.

After the long-awaited victory of woman suffrage, Black women in the South were violently prevented from exercising their newly acquired right. The eruption of Ku Klux Klan violence in places like Orange County, Florida, brought injury and death to Black women and their children. In other places, they were more peacefully prohibited from exercising their new right. In Americus, Georgia, for instance,

> . . . more than 250 colored women went to the polls to vote but were turned down or their ballots refused to be taken by the election manager . . .[31]

In the ranks of the movement which had so fervently fought for the enfranchisement of women, there was hardly a cry of protest to be heard.

10 ~ Communist Women

In 1848, the year Karl Marx and Frederick Engels published their *Communist Manifesto,* Europe was the scene of countless revolutionary uprisings. One of the participants in the Revolution of 1848—an artillery officer, and close co-worker of Marx and Engels, named Joseph Weydemeyer—immigrated to the United States and founded the first Marxist organization in the country's history.[1] When Weydemeyer established the Proletarian League in 1852, no women appear to have been associated with the group. If indeed there were any women involved, they have long since faded into historical anonymity. Over the next few decades women continued to be active in their own labor associations, in the anti-slavery movement and in the developing campaign for their own rights. But, to all intents and purposes, they appear to have been absent from the ranks of the Marxist socialist movement. Like the Proletarian League, the Workingmen's National Association and the Communist Club were utterly dominated by men. Even the Socialist Labor party was also predominantly male.[2]

By the time the Socialist party was founded in 1900, the composition of the socialist movement had begun to change. As the general demand for women's equality grew stronger, women were increasingly attracted to the struggle for social change. They began to assert their right to participate in this new challenge to the oppressive structures of their society. From 1900 on, to a greater or lesser extent, the Marxist Left would feel the influence of its female adherents.

As the main champion of Marxism for almost two decades, the Socialist party supported the battle for women's equality. For many years, in fact, it was the only political party to advocate woman suffrage.[3] Thanks to such socialist women as Pauline Newman and Rose Schneiderman, a working-class suffrage movement was forged, breaking the decade-long stronghold of middle-class women on the mass campaign for the vote.[4] By 1908 the Socialist party had created a national women's commission. On March 8 of that year women Socialists active on New York's Lower East Side organized a mass demonstration in support of equal suffrage, whose anniversary continues to be observed all over the world as International Women's Day.[5] When the Communist party was founded in 1919 (actually, two Communist parties, which later united, were established), former Socialist party women were among its earliest leaders and activists: "Mother" Ella Reeve Bloor, Anita Whitney, Margaret Prevey, Kate Sadler Greenhalgh, Rose Pastor Stokes and Jeanette Pearl were all Communists who had been associated with the left wing of the Socialist party.[6]

Although the International Workers of the World was not a political party—and, in fact, opposed the organization of political parties—it was the second major influence on the formation of the Communist party. The IWW, popularly known as the "Wobblies," was founded in June of 1905. Defining itself as an industrial union, the IWW proclaimed that there could never be a harmonious relationship between the capitalist class and the workers it employed. The Wobblies' ultimate goal was socialism, and their strategy was unrelenting class struggle. When "Big Bill" Haywood convened that first meeting, two of the leading labor organizers who sat on the platform were women—"Mother" Mary Jones and Lucy Parsons.

While both the Socialist party and the IWW admitted women to their ranks and encouraged them to become leaders and agitators, only the IWW embraced a complementary policy of forthright struggle against racism. Under the leadership of Daniel DeLeon, the Socialist party did not acknowledge the unique oppression of Black people. Although the majority of Black people were agricultural workers—sharecroppers, tenant farmers and farm laborers—the Socialists argued that only the proletarians were relevant to their movement. Even the outstanding leader Eugene Debs argued that Black people required no overall defense of their rights to be equal and free as a group. Since the Socialists' overriding concern was the struggle between capital and labor, so Debs maintained, "we have nothing special to offer the Negro."[7] As for the International Workers of the World, their main goal was to organize the wage-earning class and to develop revolutionary, socialist class consciousness. Unlike the Socialist party, however, the IWW focused explicit attention on the special problems of Black people. According to Mary White Ovington,

> (t)here are two organizations in this country that have shown they do care about full rights for the Negro. The first is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. . . . The second organization that attacks Negro segregation is the Industrial Workers of the World. . . . The IWW has stood with the Negro.[8]

Helen Holman was a Black Socialist, a leading spokesperson in the campaign to defend her imprisoned party leader, Kate Richards O'Hare. As a Black woman, however, Helen Holman was a rarity within the ranks of the Socialist party. Prior to World War II, the numbers of Black women working in industry were negligible. As a consequence, they were all but ignored by Socialist party recruiters. The Socialists' posture of negligence vis-à-vis Black women was one of the unfortunate legacies the Communist party would have to overcome.

According to the Communist leader and historian, William Z. Foster, "during the early 1920's, the Party . . . was neglectful of the particular demands of Negro women in industry."[9] Over the next decade, however, Communists came to recognize the centrality of racism in U.S. society. They developed a serious theory of Black Liberation and forged a consistent activist record in the overall struggle against racism.

LUCY PARSONS

Lucy Parsons remains one of those few Black women whose name has occasionally appeared in the chronicles of the U.S. labor movement. Almost universally, however, she is simplistically identified as the "devoted wife" of the Haymarket martyr Albert Parsons. To be sure, Lucy Parsons was one of her husband's most militant defenders, but she was far more than a faithful wife and angry widow who wanted to defend and avenge her husband. As Carolyn Asbaugh's recent biography[10] confirms, her journalistic and agitational defense of the working class as a whole spanned a period of more than sixty years. Lucy Parsons' involvement in labor struggles began almost a decade before the Haymarket Massacre and continued for another fifty-five years afterward. Her political development ranged from her youthful advocacy of anarchism to her membership in the Communist party during her mature years.

Born in 1853, Lucy Parsons became active in the Socialist Labor party as early as 1877. Over the years to come, this anarchist organization's newspaper, the *Socialist,* would publish her articles and poems, and Parsons would also become an active organizer for the Chicago Working Women's Union.[11] Following the police-instigated riot on May 1, 1886, in Chicago's Haymarket Square, her husband was one of the eight radical labor

leaders arrested by the authorities. Lucy Parsons immediately initiated a militant campaign to free the Haymarket Defendants. As she traveled throughout the country, she became known as a prominent labor leader and a leading advocate of anarchism. Her reputation caused her to become an all-too-frequent target of repression. In Columbus, Ohio, for example, the mayor banned a speech she was scheduled to deliver during the month of March—and her refusal to respect this banning order led the police to throw her in jail.[12] In city after city,

> (h)alls were closed to her at the last moment, detectives stood in every corner of the meeting halls, police kept her under constant surveillance.[13]

Even as her husband was being executed, Lucy Parsons and her two children were arrested by Chicago police, one of whom made the comment: "(t)hat woman is more to be feared than a thousand rioters."[14]

Although she was Black—a fact miscegenation laws often caused her to conceal—and although she was a woman, Lucy Parsons argued that racism and sexism were overshadowed by the capitalists' overall exploitation of the working class. Since they were victims of capitalist exploitation, said Parsons, Black people and women, no less than white people and men, should devote all their energies to the class struggle. In her eyes, Black people and women did not suffer special forms of oppression and there was no real need for mass movements to oppose racism and sexism explicitly. Sex and race, according to Lucy Parsons' theory, were facts of existence manipulated by employers who sought to justify their greater exploitation of women and people of color. If Black people suffered the brutality of lynch law, it was because their poverty as a group made them the most vulnerable workers of all. "Are there any so stupid," Parsons asked in 1886, "as to believe

these outrages have been . . . heaped upon the Negro because he is black?"[15]

> Not at all. It is because he is *poor.* It is because he is dependent. Because he is poorer as a class than his white wage-slave brother of the North.[16]

Lucy Parsons and "Mother" Mary Jones were the first two women to join the radical labor organization known as the International Workers of the World. Highly respected in the labor movement, both were invited to sit in the presidium alongside Eugene Debs and Big Bill Haywood during the 1905 founding convention of the IWW. In the speech Lucy Parsons delivered to the convention delegates, she revealed her special sensitivity to the oppression of working women who, in her view, were manipulated by the capitalists as they sought to reduce the wages of the entire working class.

> We, the women of this country, have no ballot even if we wished to use it . . . but we have our labor. . . . Wherever wages are to be reduced, the capitalist class uses women to reduce them.[17]

Moreover, during this era when the plight of prostitutes was virtually ignored, Parsons told the IWW convention that she also spoke for "my sisters whom I can see in the night when I go out in Chicago."[18]

During the 1920s Lucy Parsons began to associate herself with the struggles of the young Communist party. One of the many people who was deeply impressed by the 1917 workers' revolution in Russia, she became confident that eventually the working class could triumph in the United States of America. When Communists and other progressive forces founded the International Labor Defense in 1925, Parsons became an active worker for the new group. She fought for the freedom of Tom Mooney in California, for the Scottsboro Nine in Alabama and for the young Black Communist Angelo Herndon, whom Georgia authorities had imprisoned.[19] It was in 1939, according to her biographer's research, that Lucy Parsons formally joined the Communist party.[20] When she died in 1942, a tribute in the *Daily Worker* described her as

> . . . a link between the labor movement of the present and the great historic events of the 1880's . . .
>
> She was one of America's truly great women, fearless, and devoted to the working class.[21]

ELLA REEVE BLOOR

Born in 1862, the remarkable labor organizer and agitator for women's rights, Black equality, peace and socialism, who was popularly known as "Mother" Bloor, became a member of the Socialist party soon after it was founded. She went on to become a Socialist leader and a living legend for the working class across the country. Hitchhiking from one end of the United States to the other, she became the heart and soul of untold numbers of strikes. Streetcar operators in Philadelphia heard her first strike speeches. In other parts of the country, miners, textile workers and sharecroppers were among the workers who benefited from her astounding oratorical talents and her powerful skills as an organizer. At the age of sixty-two Mother Bloor was still thumbing rides from one state to another.[22]

When she was seventy-eight Mother Bloor published the story of her life as a labor organizer, from her pre-Socialist days through the period of her Communist party membership. As a Socialist, her working-class consciousness did not include an explicit awareness of Black people's special oppression. As a Communist, however, Mother Bloor fought numerous manifestations of racism

and urged others to follow her example. In 1929, for example, when the International Labor Defense held its convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,

> (w)e had engaged rooms for all the delegates in the Monogahala Hotel. When we arrived late at night with twenty-five Negro delegates, the manager of the hotel said that while they could stay there that night, they must all get out immediately the next morning.
>
> Next morning, we voted that the whole convention should adjourn to the hotel in an orderly fashion. We marched to the hotel carrying banners emphasizing "no discrimination." We filed into the lobby, which by that time was filled with newspapermen, policemen, and curious crowds . . .[23]

During the early 1930s Mother Bloor addressed a meeting in Loup City, Nebraska, in support of women who had struck against their poultry-farm employers. The strike assembly was violently assaulted by a racist mob opposed to the presence of Black people at the meeting. When the police arrived, Mother Bloor was arrested, together with a Black woman and her husband. The Black woman, Mrs. Floyd Booth, was a leading member of the local Anti-War Committee and her husband was an activist in the town's Unemployed Council. When the local farmers raised sufficient bail money to obtain Mother Bloor's release, she refused their aid, insisting that she would not leave until the Booths could accompany her.[24]

> I felt I could not accept the bail and leave the two Negro comrades in jail, in an atmosphere so dangerously charged with bitter hate of Negroes.[25]

During this period Mother Bloor organized a U.S. delegation to attend an International Women's Conference in Paris. Four of the women included in the delegation were Black:

> Capitola Tasker, Alabama sharecropper, tall and graceful, the life of the whole delegation; Lulia Jackson, elected by the Pennsylvania miners; a woman who represented the mothers of the Scottsboro Boys; and Mabel Byrd, a brilliant young honor graduate of the University of Washington, who had had a position with the International Labor Office in Geneva.[26]

At the 1934 Paris conference, Capitola Tasker was one of three U.S. women elected to serve as a member of the assembly's executive committee—along with Mother Bloor and the woman representing the Socialist party. Mabel Byrd, the Black college graduate, was elected as one of the conference secretaries.[27]

Lulia Jackson, the Black representative of Pennsylvania miners, emerged as one of the Paris Women's Conference's leading personalities. In her persuasive response to the pacifist faction attending the gathering, she argued that support for the war against fascism was the sole means of guaranteeing a meaningful peace. During the course of the women's deliberations, a committed pacifist had complained:

> I think there is too much about fighting in that (anti-war) manifesto. It says fight against war, fight for peace—fight, fight, fight . . . We are women, we are mothers—we don't want to fight. We know that even when our children are bad, we are nice to them, and we win them by love, not by fighting them.[28]

Lulia Jackson's counterargument was forthright and lucid:

> Ladies, it has just been said that we must not fight, that we must be gentle and kind to our enemies, to those who are for war. I can't agree with that. Everyone knows the cause of war—it is capitalism. We can't just give those bad capitalists their supper and put them to bed the way we do with our children. We must fight them.[29]

As Mother Bloor relates in her autobiography, "everyone laughed, and applauded, even the pacifist,"[30] and the anti-war manifesto was consequently approved by the entire body.

When the conference was addressed by Capitola Tasker—the Black sharecropper from Alabama—they heard her compare the current European fascism with the racist terror suffered by Black people in the United States. Having vividly described the Southern and mob murders, she acquainted the Paris delegates with the violent repression aimed at sharecroppers who were attempting to organize in Alabama. Her own opposition to fascism ran deep, so Capitola Tasker explained, for she herself had already been victimized by its terrible ravages. She concluded her speech with the "sharecroppers' song," which she adapted to fit the occasion:

> Like a tree that's standing by the water,
> We shall not be moved—
> We're against war and fascism
> We shall not be moved.[31]

As the U.S. delegation returned home by boat, Mother Bloor recorded Capitola Tasker's moving testimony about her Paris experiences:

> "Mother, when I get back to Alabama and go out to that cotton patch back of our little old shack, I'll stand there thinking to myself, 'Capitola, did you really go over there to Paris and see all those wonderful women and hear all those great talks, or was it just a dream that you were over there?' And if it turns out that it really wasn't a dream, why Mother, I'm just going to broadcast all over Alabama all that I've learned over here, and tell them how women from all over the world are fighting to stop the kind of terror we have in the South, and to stop war."[32]

As Mother Bloor and her Communist party comrades concluded, the working class cannot assume its historical role as a revolutionary force if workers do not struggle relentlessly against the social poison of racism. The long list of stunning accomplishments associated with the name of Ella Reeve Bloor reveals that this white Communist woman was a deeply principled ally of the Black Liberation movement.

ANITA WHITNEY

When Anita Whitney was born in 1867 to a wealthy San Francisco family, no one would have suspected that she would eventually be the chairperson of the California Communist party. Perhaps she was destined to become a political activist, for as a fresh graduate of Wellesley—the prestigious New England women's college—she did volunteer charity and settlement-house work and soon became an active champion of woman suffrage. Upon her return to California, Anita Whitney joined the Equal Suffrage League and was elected president in time to see her state become the sixth in the nation to extend the vote to women.[33]

In 1914 Anita Whitney joined the Socialist party. Despite her party's posture of relative indifference toward Black people's struggles, she readily supported anti-racist causes. When the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded, Whitney enthusiastically agreed to serve as a member of its executive committee.[34] Having identified with the positions of left-wing members of the Socialist party, she joined those who established the Communist Labor party in 1919.[35] Shortly thereafter, this group merged with the Communist Party, U.S.A.

Nineteen-nineteen was the year of the infamous anti-Communist raids initiated by Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Anita

was destined to become one of the many victims of the Palmer raids. She was informed that a speech she was scheduled to deliver before clubwomen associated with the Oakland Center of the California Civic League had been banned by the authorities. But despite the official prohibition, she spoke on November 28, 1919, about "The Negro Problem In the United States."[36] Her remarks were sharply focused on the issue of lynching.

> Since 1890, when our statistics have their beginning, there have occurred in these United States 3,228 lynchings, 2,500 of colored men and 50 of colored women. I would that I could leave the subject with these bare facts recording numbers, but I feel that we must face all the barbarity of the situation in order to do our part in blotting this disgrace from our country's record.[37]

She went on to pose a question to the audience of white clubwomen: Did they know that "a colored man once said that if he owned Hell and Texas, he would prefer to rent out Texas and live in Hell . . ."?[38] His reasoning, she explained in a serious vein, was based on the fact that Texas could claim the third largest number of racist mob murders committed throughout the Southern states. (Only Georgia and Mississippi could boast of more.)

In 1919 it was still something of a rarity for a white person to appeal to others of her race to stand up against the scourge of lynching. The generalized racist propaganda, and the repeated evocation of the mythical Black rapist in particular, had resulted in the desired division and alienation. Even in progressive circles, white people were often hesitant to speak out against lynchings, since they were justified as unfortunate reactions to Black sexual attacks against white womanhood in the South. Anita Whitney was one of those white people whose vision remained clear despite the power of the prevailing racist propaganda. And she was willing to risk the consequences of her anti-racist stance. Although it was

clear that she would be arrested, she chose to speak about lynching to the white Oakland clubwomen. Sure enough, she was taken into custody at the conclusion of her speech and charged by the authorities with criminal syndicalism. Whitney was later convicted and sentenced to San Quentin Prison, where she spent several weeks before her release on appeal bond. It was not until 1927 that Anita Whitney was pardoned by the governor of California.[39]

As a twentieth-century white woman, Anita Whitney was indeed a pioneer in the struggle against racism. Together with her Black comrades, she and others like her would forge the Communist party's strategy for working-class emancipation. In this strategy, the fight for Black Liberation would be a central ingredient. In 1936 Anita Whitney became the state chairperson of the Communist party of California, and was elected soon thereafter to serve on the party's National Committee.

> Once she was asked, "Anita, how do you regard the Communist Party? What has it come to mean to you?"
>
> "Why," she smiled incredulously, a bit taken aback by such an amazing question. "Why . . . it has given purpose to my life. The Communist Party is the hope of the World."[40]

ELIZABETH GURLEY FLYNN

When Elizabeth Gurley Flynn died in 1964 at the age of seventy-four, she had been active in Socialist and Communist causes for almost sixty years. Raised by parents who were members of the Socialist party, she discovered, at an early age, her own affinity with the Socialists' challenge to the capitalist class. The young Elizabeth was not yet sixteen when she delivered her first public lecture in defense of socialism. Based on her readings of

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* and August Bebel's *Women and Socialism,* she delivered a speech in 1906, at the Harlem Socialist Club, entitled "What Socialism Will Do for Women."[41] Although her somewhat "male-supremacist" father had been reluctant to allow Elizabeth to speak in public, the enthusiastic reception in Harlem caused him to change his mind. Accompanying her father, she became familiar with street speaking, which was a typical radical tactic of the period. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn experienced her first arrest soon thereafter—charged with "speaking without a permit," she was carted off to jail with her father.[42]

By the time Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was sixteen, her career as an agitator for the rights of the working class had been launched. Her first task was the defense of Big Bill Haywood, whose frame-up on criminal charges had been instigated by the copper trusts. During her westward travels on behalf of Haywood, she joined the IWW's struggles in Montana and Washington.[43] After two years as a Socialist party member, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn became a leading IWW organizer. She resigned from the Socialist party, "convinced that it was sterile and sectarian compared with this grass-roots movement that was sweeping the country."[44]

With an abundance of strike experiences behind her, including numerous clashes with the police, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn headed for Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912 when the textile workers went out on strike. The grievances of the Lawrence workers were simple and compelling. In the words of Mary Heaton Vorse,

> Wages in Lawrence were so low that thirty-five percent of the people made under seven dollars a week. Less than a fifth got more than twelve dollars a week. They were divided by nationality. They spoke over forty languages and dialects, but they were united by meager living and the fact that their children died. For every five children under one year of age, one died. . . . Only a few other towns in America had higher death rates. These were all mill towns.[45]

Of all the speakers addressing the strike meeting, said Vorse, who was covering these events for *Harper's Weekly,* Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was the workers' most powerful inspiration. It was her words which encouraged them to perservere.

> When Elizabeth Gurley Flynn spoke, the excitement of the crowd became a visible thing. She stood there, young, with her Irish blue eyes, her face magnolia white and her cloud of black hair, the picture of a youthful revolutionary girl leader. She stirred them, lifted them up in her appeal for solidarity. . . . It was as though a spurt of flame had gone through this audience, something stirring and powerful, a feeling which had made the liberation of people possible.[46]

As a traveling strike agitator for the IWW, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn sometimes worked alongside the well-known Native American Indian leader, Frank Little. In 1916, for example, they both represented the Wobblies during the Mesabi iron range strike in Minnesota. It was barely a year later when Elizabeth learned that Frank Little had been lynched in Butte, Montana. He had been attacked by a mob after making agitational speeches to the miners on strike in the area.

> . . . (S)ix masked men came to the hotel at night, broke down the door, dragged Frank from his bed, took him to a railroad trestle on the outskirts of town and there hanged him.[47]

A month following Frank Little's death, a federal indictment charged that 168 people had conspired with him "to hinder the execution of certain laws of the United States . . ."[48] Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was the only woman among the accused, and Ben

Fletcher, a Philadelphia longshoreman and leader of the IWW, was the only Black person named in the indictment.[49]

Judging from Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's autobiographical reflections, she was aware, from the very beginning of her political career, of the special oppression suffered by Black people. Her consciousness of the importance of anti-racist struggles was doubtlessly intensified by her involvement in the IWW. The Wobblies publicly proclaimed that

> (t)here is only *one* labor organization in the United States that admits the colored worker on a footing of absolute equality with the white—the Industrial Workers of the World. . . . In the IWW the colored worker, man or woman, is on an equal footing with every other worker.[50]

But the IWW was a syndicalist organization concentrating on industrial workers, who—thanks to racist discrimination—were still overwhelmingly white. The tiny minority of Black industrial workers included practically no women, who remained absolutely banned from industrial occupations. Indeed, most Black workers, male and female alike, still worked in agriculture or domestic service. As a result, only a fraction of the Black population could be reached through an industrial union—unless the union strenuously fought for Black people's admission into industry.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn became active in the Communist party in 1937[51] and emerged soon afterward as one of the organization's major leaders. Working on an intimate basis with such Black Communists as Benjamin Davis and Claudia Jones, she developed a new understanding of the central role of Black Liberation within the overall battle for the emancipation of the working class. In 1948 Flynn published an article in *Political Affairs,* the party's theoretical journal, on the meaning of International Women's Day. As she argued in this article,

> (t)he right to work, to training, upgrading, and equal seniority; safeguards for health and safety; adequate child care facilities—these remain the urgent demands of organized workingwomen, and are needed by all who toil, especially Negro women . . .[52]

Criticizing the inequality between women war veterans and men war veterans, she reminded her readers that Black women veterans suffered to an even greater degree than their white sisters. Indeed, Black women were generally caught in a threefold bond of oppression.

> Every inequality and disability inflicted on American white women is aggravated a thousandfold among Negro women, who are triply exploited—as Negroes, as workers, and as women.[53]

This same "triple jeopardy" analysis, incidentally, was later proposed by Black women who sought to influence the early stages of the contemporary Women's Liberation movement.

While Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's first autobiography, *I Speak My Own Piece* (or *The Rebel Girl*), provides fascinating glimpses into her experiences as an IWW agitator, her second book, *The Alderson Story* (or *My Life as a Political Prisoner*), reveals a new political maturity and a more profound consciousness of racism. During the McCarthy Era assault on the Communist party, Flynn was arrested in New York, along with three other women, and charged with "teaching and advocating the violent overthrow of the government."[54] The other women were Marian Bachrach, Betty Gannet and Claudia Jones, a Black woman from Trinidad who had immigrated to the United States as a young girl. In June, 1951, the four Communist women were taken by the police to the New York Women's House of Detention. The "one pleasant episode" which "lighted up our stay here" involved the birthday party which Elizabeth, Betty and Claudia organized for one of the

prisoners. "Discouraged and lonely," a nineteen-year-old Black woman had "happened to mention that the next day would be her birthday."[55] The three women managed to obtain a cake from the commissary.

> We made candles of tissue paper for the cake, covered the table as nicely as possible with paper napkins, and sang "Happy Birthday." We made speeches to her and she cried with surprise and happiness. The next day we received a note from her as follows: (exact spelling)
>
> Dear Claudia, Betty and Elizabeth. I am very glad for what you did for me for my birthday. I really don't know how to thank you. . . . Yesterday was one of the best years of my life. I think even thou you all are Communist people that you are the best people I have ever met. The reason I put Communists in this letter is because some people don't like Communists for the simple reason they think Communist people is against the American people but I don't think so. I think that you are some of the nicest people I ever met in my hol 19 teen years of living and I will never forget you all no matter where I be. . . . I hope you all will get out of this trouble and never have to come back to a place like this.[56]

After the three women's Smith Act trial (Marian Bachrach's health problems led to the severance of her case), they were convicted and sentenced to serve time in the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson, Virginia. Shortly before they arrived, the prison had been placed under court order to desegregate its facilities. Another Smith Act victim—Dorothy Rose Blumenberg from Baltimore—had already served a portion of her three-year sentence as one of the first white prisoners to be housed with Black women. "We felt both amused and flattered that Communists were called upon to help integrate prison houses."[57] Yet, as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn pointed out, the legal desegregation of the prison's cottages did not have the result of ending racial

discrimination. The Black women continued to be assigned to the hardest jobs—"on the farm, in the cannery, in maintenance and at the piggery until it was abolished."[58]

As a leader of the Communist party, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn had developed a deep commitment to the Black Liberation struggle and had come to realize that Black people's resistance is not always consciously political. She observed that among the prisoners in Alderson,

> (t)here was greater solidarity among Negro women, undoubtedly a result of life outside, especially in the South. It seemed to me that they were of better character, by and large, stronger and more dependable, with less inclination to tattle or be a stool pigeon, than the white inmates.[59]

She made friends more easily among the Black women in prison than she did among the white inmates. "Frankly, I trusted the Negro women more than I did the whites. They were more controlled, less hysterical, less spoiled, more mature."[60] And the Black women, in turn, were more receptive to Elizabeth. Perhaps they sensed in this white woman Communist an instinctive kinship in struggle.

CLAUDIA JONES

Born in Trinidad when it was still the British West Indies, Claudia Jones immigrated to the United States with her parents when she was still quite young. She later became one of the countless Black people throughout the country who joined the movement to free the Scottsboro Nine. It was through her work in the Scottsboro Defense Committee that she became acquainted with members of the Communist party, whose organiza-

tion she enthusiastically joined.[61] As a young woman in her twenties, Claudia Jones assumed responsibility for the party's Women's Commission and became a leader and symbol of struggle for Communist women throughout the country.

Among the many articles Claudia Jones published in the journal *Political Affairs,* one of the most outstanding was the June 1949 piece entitled "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women."[62] Her vision of Black women in this essay was meant to refute the usual male-supremacist stereotypes regarding the nature of women's role. Black women's leadership, as Jones pointed out, had always been indispensable to their people's fight for freedom. Seldom mentioned in the orthodox histories, for example, was the fact that "the sharecroppers' strikes of the 1930's were sparked by Negro women."[63] Moreover,

> Negro women played a magnificent part in the pre-CIO days in strikes and other struggles, both as workers and as wives of workers, to win recognition of the principle of industrial unionism, in such industries as auto, packing, steel, etc. More recently, the militancy of Negro women unionists is shown in the strike of the packing-house workers, and even more so in the tobacco workers' strike, in which such leaders as Moranda Smith and Velma Hopkins emerged as outstanding trade unionists.[64]

Claudia Jones chided progressives—and especially trade unionists—for failing to acknowledge Black domestic workers' efforts to organize themselves. Because the majority of Black women workers were still employed in domestic service, she argued, the paternalistic attitudes toward maids influenced the prevailing social definition of Black women as a group:

> The continued relegation of Negro women to domestic work has helped to perpetuate and intensify chauvinism directed against all Negro Women.[65]

Jones was not afraid to remind her own white friends and comrades that "(t)oo many progressives, and even some Communists, are still guilty of exploiting Negro domestic workers."[66] And they are sometimes guilty of ". . . participating in the vilification of 'maids' when speaking to their bourgeois neighbors and their own families."[67] Claudia Jones was very much a Communist—a dedicated Communist who believed that socialism held the only promise of liberation for Black women, for Black people as a whole and indeed for the multi-racial working class. Thus, her criticism was motivated by the constructive desire to urge her white co-workers and comrades to purge themselves of racist and sexist attitudes. As for the party itself,

> in our . . . clubs, we must conduct an intense discussion of the role of Negro women, so as to equip our Party membership with a clear understanding for undertaking the necessary struggles in the shops and communities.[68]

As many Black women had argued before her, Claudia Jones claimed that white women in the progressive movement—and especially white women Communists—bore a special responsibility toward Black women.

> The very economic relationship of Negro women to white women, which perpetuates "madam-maid" relationships, feeds chauvinist attitudes and makes it incumbent on white women progressives, and especially Communists, to fight consciously against all manifestations of white chauvinism, open and subtle.[69]

When Claudia Jones' Smith Act conviction led to her imprisonment in Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women, she discovered a veritable microcosm of the racist society she already knew so well. Although the prison was under court order to desegregate

its facilities, Claudia was assigned to a "colored cottage," which isolated her from her two white comrades, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Betty Gannet. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn especially suffered from this separation, for she and Claudia Jones were close friends as well as comrades. When Claudia was released from prison in October of 1955—ten months after the Communist women had arrived at Alderson—Elizabeth was happy for her friend yet aware of the pain she would suffer in Claudia's absence.

> My window faced the roadway, and I was able to see her leave. She turned to wave—tall, slender, beautiful, dressed in golden brown, and then she was gone. This was the hardest day I spent in prison. I felt so alone.[70]

On the day Claudia Jones left Alderson, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn wrote a poem entitled "Farewell to Claudia":

> Nearer and nearer drew this day, dear comrade,
> When I from you must sadly part,
> Day after day, a dark foreboding sorrow,
> Crept through my anxious heart.
>
> No more to see you striding down the pathway,
> No more to see your smiling eyes and radiant face.
> No more to hear your gay and pealing laughter,
> No more encircled by your love, in this sad place.
>
> How I will miss you, words will fail to utter,
> I am alone, my thoughts unshared, these weary days,
> I feel bereft and empty, on this gray and dreary morning,
> Facing my lonely future, hemmed in by prison ways.
>
> Sometimes I feel you've never been in Alderson,
> So full of life, so detached from here you seem.

> So proud of walk, of talk, of work, of being,
> Your presence here is like a fading fevered dream.
>
> Yet as the sun shines now, through fog and darkness,
> I feel a sudden joy that you are gone,
> That once again you walk the streets of Harlem,
> That today for you at least is Freedom's dawn.
>
> I will be strong in our common faith, dear comrade,
> I will be self-sufficient, to our ideals firm and true,
> I will be strong to keep my mind and soul outside a prison,
> Encouraged and inspired by ever loving memories of you.[71]

Soon after Claudia Jones was released from Alderson, the pressures of McCarthyism resulted in her deportation to England. She continued her political work for a while, editing a journal called the *West Indian Gazette.* But her failing health continued to deteriorate and she soon fell ill with a disease which claimed her life.

11 Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist

Some of the most flagrant symptoms of social deterioration are acknowledged as serious problems only when they have assumed such epidemic proportions that they appear to defy solution. Rape is a case in point. In the United States today, it is one of the fastest-growing violent crimes.[1] After ages of silence, suffering and misplaced guilt, sexual assault is explosively emerging as one of the telling dysfunctions of present-day capitalist society. The rising public concern about rape in the United States has inspired countless numbers of women to divulge their past encounters with actual or would-be assailants. As a result, an awesome fact has come to light: appallingly few women can claim that they have not been victims, at one time in their lives, of either attempted or accomplished sexual attacks.

In the United States and other capitalist countries, rape laws as a rule were framed originally for the protection of men of the upper classes, whose daughters and wives might be assaulted. What happens to working-class women has usually been of little concern to the courts; as a result, remarkably few white men have been prosecuted for the sexual violence they have inflicted on these women. While the rapists have seldom been brought to justice, the rape charge has been indiscriminately aimed at Black men, the guilty and innocent alike. Thus, of the 455 men executed between 1930 and 1967 on the basis of rape convictions, 405 of them were Black.[2]

In the history of the United States, the fraudulent rape charge stands out as one of the most formidable artifices invented by racism. The myth of the Black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications. If Black women have been conspicuously absent from the ranks of the contemporary anti-rape movement, it may be due, in part, to that movement's indifferent posture toward the frame-up rape charge as an incitement to racist aggression. Too many innocents have been offered sacrificially to gas chambers and lifer's cells for Black women to join those who often seek relief from policemen and judges. Moreover, as rape victims themselves, they have found little if any sympathy from these men in uniforms and robes. And stories about police assaults on Black women—rape victims sometimes suffering a second rape—are heard too frequently to be dismissed as aberrations. "Even at the strongest time of the civil rights movement in Birmingham," for example,

> young activists often stated that nothing could protect Black women from being raped by Birmingham police. As recently as December, 1974, in Chicago, a 17-year old Black woman reported that she was gang-raped by 10 policemen. Some of the men were suspended, but ultimately the whole thing was swept under the rug.[3]

During the early stages of the contemporary anti-rape movement, few feminist theorists seriously analyzed the special circumstances surrounding the Black woman as rape victim. The historical knot binding Black women—systematically abused and violated by white men—to Black men—maimed and murdered because of the racist manipulation of the rape charge—has just begun to be acknowledged to any significant extent. Whenever Black women have challenged rape, they usually and simultane-

ously expose the use of the frame-up rape charge as a deadly racist weapon against their men. As one extremely perceptive writer put it:

> The myth of the black rapist of white women is the twin of the myth of the bad black woman—both designed to apologize for and facilitate the continued exploitation of black men and women. Black women perceived this connection very clearly and were early in the forefront of the fight against lynching.[4]

Gerda Lerner, the author of this passage, is one of the few white women writing on the subject of rape during the early 1970s who examined in depth the combined effect of racism and sexism on Black women. The case of Joann Little,[5] tried during the summer of 1975, illustrated Lerner's point. Brought to trial on murder charges, the young Black woman was accused of killing a white guard in a North Carolina jail where she was the only woman inmate. When Joann Little took the stand, she told how the guard had raped her in her cell and how she had killed him in self-defense with the ice pick he had used to threaten her. Throughout the country, her cause was passionately supported by individuals and organizations in the Black community and within the young women's movement, and her acquittal was hailed as an important victory made possible by this mass campaign. In the immediate aftermath of her acquittal, Ms. Little issued several moving appeals on behalf of a Black man named Delbert Tibbs, who awaited execution in Florida because he had been falsely convicted of raping a white woman.

Many Black women answered Joann Little's appeal to support the cause of Delbert Tibbs. But few white women—and certainly few organized groups within the anti-rape movement—followed her suggestion that they agitate for the freedom of this Black man who had been blatantly victimized by Southern racism. Not even

when Little's Chief Counsel Jerry Paul announced his decision to represent Delbert Tibbs did many white women dare to stand up in his defense. By 1978, however, when all charges against Tibbs were dismissed, white anti-rape activists had increasingly begun to align themselves with his cause. Their initial reluctance, however, was one of those historical episodes confirming many Black women's suspicions that the anti-rape movement was largely oblivious to their special concerns.

That Black women have not joined the anti-rape movement en masse does not, therefore, mean that they oppose anti-rape measures in general. Before the end of the nineteenth century pioneering Black clubwomen conducted one of the very first organized public protests against sexual abuse. Their eighty-year-old tradition of organized struggle against rape reflects the extensive and exaggerated ways Black women have suffered the threat of sexual violence. One of racism's salient historical features has always been the assumption that white men—especially those who wield economic power—possess an incontestable right of access to Black women's bodies.

Slavery relied as much on routine sexual abuse as it relied on the whip and the lash. Excessive sex urges, whether they existed among individual white men or not, had nothing to do with this virtual institutionalization of rape. Sexual coercion was, rather, an essential dimension of the social relations between slavemaster and slave. In other words, the right claimed by slaveowners and their agents over the bodies of female slaves was a direct expression of their presumed property rights over Black people as a whole. The license to rape emanated from and facilitated the ruthless economic domination that was the gruesome hallmark of slavery.[6]

The pattern of institutionalized sexual abuse of Black women became so powerful that it managed to survive the abolition of slavery. Group rape, perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan and other

terrorist organizations of the post-Civil War period, became an uncamouflaged political weapon in the drive to thwart the movement for Black equality. During the Memphis Riot of 1866, for example, the violence of the mob murders was brutally complemented by the concerted sexual attacks on Black women. In the riot's aftermath, numerous Black women testified before a Congressional committee about the savage mob rapes they had suffered.[7] This testimony regarding similar events during the Meridian, Mississippi, Riot of 1871 was given by a Black woman named Ellen Parton:

> I reside in Meridian; have resided here nine years; occupation, washing and ironing and scouring; Wednesday night was the last night they came to my house; by "they" I mean bodies or companies of men; they came on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday; on Monday night they said they came to do us no harm; on Tuesday night they said they came for the arms; I told them there was none, and they said they would take my word for it; on Wednesday night they came and broke open the wardrobe and trunks, and committed rape upon me; there were eight of them in the house; I do not know how many there were outside. . . .[8]

Of course, the sexual abuse of Black women has not always manifested itself in such open and public violence. There has been a daily drama of racism enacted in the countless anonymous encounters between Black women and their white abusers—men convinced that their acts were only natural. Such assaults have been ideologically sanctioned by politicians, scholars and journalists, and by literary artists who have often portrayed Black women as promiscuous and immoral. Even the outstanding writer Gertrude Stein described one of her Black women characters as possessing ". . . the simple, promiscuous unmorality of the black people."[9] The imposition of this attitude on white men of the

working class was a triumphant moment in the development of racist ideology.

Racism has always drawn strength from its ability to encourage sexual coercion. While Black women and their sisters of color have been the main targets of these racist-inspired attacks, white women have suffered as well. For once white men were persuaded that they could commit sexual assaults against Black women with impunity, their conduct toward women of their own race could not have remained unmarred. Racism has always served as a provocation to rape, and white women in the United States have necessarily suffered the ricochet fire of these attacks. This is one of the many ways in which racism nourishes sexism, causing white women to be indirectly victimized by the special oppression aimed at their sisters of color.

The experience of the Vietnam War furnished a further example of the extent to which racism could function as a provocation to rape. Because it was drummed into the heads of U.S. soldiers that they were fighting an inferior race, they could be taught that raping Vietnamese women was a necessary military duty. They could even be instructed to "search" the women with their penises.[10] It was the unwritten policy of the U.S. Military Command to systematically encourage rape, since it was an extremely effective weapon of mass terrorism. Where are the thousands upon thousands of Vietnam veterans who witnessed and participated in these horrors? To what extent did those brutal experiences affect their attitudes toward women in general? While it would be quite erroneous to single out Vietnam veterans as the main perpetrators of sexual crimes, there can be little doubt that the horrendous repercussions of the Vietnam experience are still being felt by all women in the United States today.

It is a painful irony that some anti-rape theorists, who ignore the part played by racism in instigating rape, do not hesitate to argue that men of color are especially prone to commit sexual

violence against women. In her very impressive study of rape, Susan Brownmiller claims that Black men's historical oppression has placed many of the "legitimate" expressions of male supremacy beyond their reach. They must resort, as a result, to acts of open sexual violence. In her portrayal of "ghetto inhabitants," Brownmiller insists that

> (c)orporate executive dining rooms and climbs up Mount Everest are not usually accessible to those who form the subculture of violence. Access to a female body—through force—is within their ken.[11]

When Brownmiller's book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* was published, it was effusively praised in some circles. *Time* magazine, which selected her as one of its women of the year in 1976, described the book as ". . .the most rigorous and provocative piece of scholarship that has yet emerged from the feminist movement."[12] In other circles, however, the book has been severely criticized for its part in the resuscitation of the old racist myth of the Black rapist.

It cannot be denied that Brownmiller's book is a pioneering scholarly contribution to the contemporary literature on rape. Yet many of her arguments are unfortunately pervaded with racist ideas. Characteristic of that perspective is her reinterpretation of the 1953 lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till. After this young boy had whistled at a white woman in Mississippi, his maimed body was found at the bottom of the Tallahatchie River. "Till's action," said Brownmiller, "was more than a kid's brash prank."[13]

> Emmett Till was going to show his black buddies that he, and by inference, *they* could get a white woman and Carolyn Bryant was the nearest convenient object. In concrete terms, the accessibility of *all* white women was on review. . . . And what of the wolf whistle, Till's 'gesture of adolescent bravado?' . . . The whistle was no small tweet of hubba-hubba or melodious approval for a well-turned ankle. . . . It was a deliberate insult just short of physical assault, a last reminder to Carolyn Bryant that this black boy, Till, had in mind to possess her.[14]

While Brownmiller deplores the sadistic punishment inflicted on Emmett Till, the Black youth emerges, nonetheless, as a guilty sexist—almost as guilty as his white racist murderers. After all, she argues, both Till and his murderers were exclusively concerned about their rights of possession over women.

Unfortunately, Brownmiller is not the only contemporary writer on rape who has suffered the influence of racist ideology. According to Jean MacKellar, in her book *Rape: The Bait and the Trap,*

> Blacks raised in the hard life of the ghetto learn that they can get what they want only by seizing it. Violence is the rule in the game for survival. Women are fair prey: to obtain a woman one subdues her.[15]

MacKellar has been so completely mesmerized by racist propaganda that she makes the unabashed claim that 90 percent of all reported rapes in the United States are committed by Black men.[16] Inasmuch as the FBI's corresponding figure is 47 percent,[17] it is difficult to believe that MacKellar's statement is not an intentional provocation.

Most recent studies on rape in the United States have acknowledged the disparity between the actual incidence of sexual assaults and those which are reported to the police. According to Susan Brownmiller, for example, reported rapes range anywhere from one in five to one in twenty.[18] A study published by the New York

Radical Feminists concluded that reported rapes run as low as five percent.[19] In much of the contemporary literature on rape, there is nevertheless a tendency to equate the "police blotter rapist" with the "typical rapist." If this pattern persists, it will be practically impossible to uncover the real social causes of rape.

Diana Russell's *Politics of Rape* unfortunately reinforces the current notion that the typical rapist is a man of color—or, if he is white, a poor or working-class man. Subtitled *The Victims' Perspective,* her book is based on a series of interviews with rape victims in the San Francisco Bay Area. Of the twenty-two cases she describes, twelve—i.e., more than half—involve women who have been raped by Black, Chicano or Native American Indian men. It is revealing that only 26 percent of the original ninety-five interviews she conducted involved men of color.[20] If this dubious process of selection is not enough to evoke deep suspicions of racism, consider the advice she offers to white women:

> . . . (I)f some black men see rape of white women as an act of revenge or as a justifiable expression of hostility toward whites, I think it is equally realistic for white women to be less trusting of black men than many of them are.[21]

Brownmiller, MacKellar and Russell are assuredly more subtle than earlier ideologues of racism. But their conclusions tragically beg comparison with the ideas of such scholarly apologists of racism as Winfield Collins, who published in 1918 a book entitled *The Truth About Lynching and the Negro in the South* (In Which the Author Pleads that the South Be Made Safe for the White Race):

> Two of the Negro's most prominent characteristics are the utter lack of chastity and complete ignorance of veracity. The Negro's sexual laxity, considered so immoral or even criminal in the white man's civilization, may have been all but a virtue in the habitat of his origin. There, nature developed in him intense sexual passions to offset his high death rate.[22]

Collins resorts to pseudo-biological arguments, while Brownmiller, Russell and MacKellar invoke environmental explanations, but in the final analysis they all assert that Black men are motivated in especially powerful ways to commit sexual violence against women.

One of the earliest theoretical works associated with the contemporary feminist movement that dealt with the subject of rape and race was Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case For Feminist Revolution.* Racism in general, so Firestone claims, is actually an extension of sexism. Invoking the biblical notion that ". . . the races are no more than the various parents and siblings of the Family of Man,"[23] she develops a construct defining the white man as father, the white woman as wife and mother, and Black people as the children. Transposing Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex into racial terms, Firestone implies that Black men harbor an uncontrollable desire for sexual relations with white women. They want to kill the father and sleep with the mother.[24] Moreover, in order to "be a man," the Black man must

> . . . untie himself from his bond with the white female, relating to her if at all only in a degrading way. In addition, due to his virulent hatred and jealousy of her Possessor, the white man, he may lust after her as a thing to be conquered in order to revenge himself on the white man.[25]

Like Brownmiller, MacKellar and Russell, Firestone succumbs to the old racist sophistry of blaming the victim. Whether innocently or consciously, their pronouncements have facilitated the

resurrection of the timeworn myth of the Black rapist. Their historical myopia further prevents them from comprehending that the portrayal of Black men as rapists reinforces racism's open invitation to white men to avail themselves sexually of Black women's bodies. The fictional image of the Black man as rapist has always strengthened its inseparable companion: the image of the Black woman as chronically promiscuous. For once the notion is accepted that Black men harbor irresistible and animal-like sexual urges, the entire race is invested with bestiality. If Black men have their eyes on white women as sexual objects, then Black women must certainly welcome the sexual attentions of white men. Viewed as "loose women" and whores, Black women's cries of rape would necessarily lack legitimacy.

During the 1920s a well-known Southern politician declared that there was no such thing as a "virtuous colored girl" over the age of fourteen.[26] As it turns out, this white man had two families —one by his white wife and another by a Black woman. Walter White, an outstanding anti-lynching leader and Executive Secretary of the NAACP, rightfully accused this man of ". . . explaining and excusing his own moral derelictions by emphasizing the 'immorality' of women of the 'inferior race.' "[27]

A contemporary Black writer, Calvin Hernton, unfortunately succumbs to similar falsehood about Black women. In the study *Sex and Racism,* he insists that ". . . the Negro woman during slavery began to develop a depreciatory concept of herself, not only as a female but as a human being as well."[28] According to Hernton's analysis, "(A)fter experiencing the ceaseless sexual immorality of the white South,"

> . . . the Negro woman became "promiscuous and loose," and could be "had for the taking." Indeed, she came to look upon herself as the South viewed and treated her, for she had no other morality by which to shape her womanhood.[29]

Hernton's analysis never penetrates the ideological veil which has resulted in the minimizing of the sexual outrages constantly committed against Black women. He falls into the trap of blaming the victim for the savage punishment she was historically forced to endure.

Throughout the history of this country, Black women have manifested a collective consciousness of their sexual victimization. They have also understood that they could not adequately resist the sexual abuses they suffered without simultaneously attacking the fraudulent rape charge as a pretext for lynching. The reliance on rape as an instrument of white-supremacist terror predates by several centuries the institution of lynching. During slavery, the lynching of Black people did not occur extensively—for the simple reason that slaveowners were reluctant to destroy their valuable property. Flogging, yes, but lynching, no. Together with flogging, rape was a terribly efficient method of keeping Black women and men alike in check. It was a routine arm of repression.

Lynchings did occur before the Civil War—but they were aimed more often at white abolitionists, who had no cash value on the market. According to William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator,* over three hundred white people were lynched over the two decades following 1836.[30] The incidence of lynchings climbed as the anti-slavery campaign gained in power and influence.

> As the slaveholders saw the fight going against them, despite their desperate struggle to check these forces, they more and more resorted to the rope and the faggot.[31]

As Walter White concludes, ". . . the lyncher entered upon the scene as a stalwart defender of the slaveowners' profits."[32]

With the emancipation of the slaves, Black people no longer

possessed a market value for the former slaveholders, and "... the lynching industry was revolutionized."[33] When Ida B. Wells researched her first pamphlet against lynching, published in 1895 under the title *A Red Record,* she calculated that over ten thousand lynchings had taken place between 1865 and 1895.

> Not all nor nearly all of the murders done by white men during the past thirty years have come to light, but the statistics as gathered and preserved by white men, and which have not been questioned, show that during these years more than ten thousand Negroes have been killed in cold blood, without the formality of judicial trial and legal execution. And yet, as evidence of the absolute impunity with which the white man dares to kill a Negro, the same record shows that during all these years, and for all these murders, only three white men have been tried, convicted and executed. As no white man has been lynched for the murder of colored people, these three executions are the only instances of the death penalty being visited upon white men for murdering Negroes.[34]

In connection with these lynchings and their countless barbarities, the myth of the Black rapist was conjured up. It could only acquire its terrible powers pf persuasion within the irrational world of racist ideology. However irrational the myth may be, it was not a spontaneous aberration. On the contrary, the myth of the Black rapist was a distinctly political invention. As Frederick Douglass points out, Black men were not indiscriminately labeled as rapists during slavery. Throughout the entire Civil War, in fact, not a single Black man was publicly accused of raping a white woman.[35] If Black men possessed an animalistic urge to rape, argued Douglass, this alleged rape instinct would have certainly been activated when white women were left unprotected by their men who were fighting in the Confederate Army.

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, the menacing specter of the Black rapist had not yet appeared on the historical

scene. But lynchings, reserved during slavery for the white abolitionists, were proving to be a valuable political weapon. Before lynching could be consolidated as a popularly accepted institution, however, its savagery and its horrors had to be convincingly justified. These were the circumstances which spawned the myth of the Black rapist—for the rape charge turned out to be the most powerful of several attempts to justify the lynching of Black people. The institution of lynching, in turn, complemented by the continued rape of Black women, became an essential ingredient of the postwar strategy of racist terror. In this way the brutal exploitation of Black labor was guaranteed, and after the betrayal of Reconstruction, the political domination of the Black people as a whole was assured.

During the first great wave of lynchings, propaganda urging the defense of white womanhood from Black men's irrepressible rape instincts was conspicuous for its absence. As Frederick Douglass observed, the lawless killings of Black people were most often described as a preventive measure to deter the Black masses from rising up in revolt.[36] At that time the political function of mob murders was uncamouflaged. Lynching was undisguised counterinsurgency, a guarantee that Black people would not be able to achieve their goals of citizenship and economic equality. "During this time," Douglass pointed out,

> ... the justification for the murder of Negroes was said to be Negro conspiracies, Negro insurrections, Negro schemes to murder all the white people, Negro plots to burn the town and to commit violence generally . . . but never a word was said or whispered about Negro outrages upon white women and children.[37]

Later, when it became evident that these conspiracies, plots and insurrections were fabrications that never materialized, the popular justification for lynching was modified. During the period following 1872, the years of the rise of such vigilante groups as

the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camellia, a new pretext was concocted. Lynchings were represented as a necessary measure to prevent Black supremacy over white people—in other words, to reaffirm white supremacy.[38]

After the betrayal of Reconstruction and the accompanying disfranchisement of Black people, the specter of Black political supremacy as a pretext for lynching became outmoded. Still, as the postwar economic structure took shape, solidifying the superexploitation of Black labor, the number of lynchings continued to rise. This was the historical juncture when the cry of rape emerged as the major justification for lynching. Frederick Douglass' explanation of the political motives underlying the creation of the mythical Black rapist is a brilliant analysis of the way ideology transforms to meet new historical conditions.

> The times have changed and the Negro's accusers have found it necessary to change with them. They have been compelled to invent a new charge to suit the times. The old charges are no longer valid. Upon them the good opinion of the North and of mankind cannot be secured. Honest men no longer believe that there is any ground to apprehend Negro supremacy. Times and events have swept away these old refuges of lies. They were once powerful. They did their work in their day and did it with terrible energy and effect, but they are now cast aside as useless. The lie has lost its ability to deceive. The altered circumstances have made necessary a sterner, stronger and more effective justification of Southern barbarism, and hence we have, according to my theory, to look into the face of a more shocking and blasting charge than either Negro supremacy or Negro insurrection.[39]

This more shocking and blasting charge, of course, was rape. Lynching was now explained and rationalized as a method to avenge Black men's assaults on white Southern womanhood. As

one apologist for lynching insisted, it was necessary to find ". . . a way of meeting the extraordinary condition with extraordinary means—hence lynching in order to hold in check the Negro in the South."[40]

Although the majority of lynchings did not even involve the accusation of sexual assault, the racist cry of rape became a popular explanation which was far more effective than either of the two previous attempts to justify mob attacks on Black people. In a society where male supremacy was all-pervasive, men who were motivated by their duty to defend their women could be excused of any excesses they might commit. That their motive was sublime was ample justification for the resulting barbarities. As Senator Ben Tillman of South Carolina told his Washington colleagues at the beginning of this century,

> (w)hen stern and sad-faced white men put to death a creature in human form who has deflowered a white woman, they have avenged the greatest wrong, the blackest crime . . .[41]

Such crimes, he said, caused civilized men to ". . . revert to the original savage type whose impulses under such circumstances have always been to 'kill, kill, kill.' "[42]

The repercussions of this new myth were enormous. Not only was opposition to individual lynchings stifled—for who would dare to defend a rapist?—white support for the cause of Black equality in general began to wane. By the end of the nineteenth century the largest mass organization of white women—the Women's Christian Temperance Union—was headed by a woman who publicly vilified Black men for their alleged attacks on white women. What is more, Frances Willard went so far as to characterize Black men as especially prone to alcoholism, which in turn exacerbated their instinctual urge to rape.

> The grogshop is the Negro's center of power. Better whisky and more of it is the rallying cry of great, dark-faced mobs. The colored race multiplies like the locusts of Egypt. The grogshop is its center of power. The safety of women, of childhood, the home, is menaced in a thousand localities at this moment, so that men dare not go beyond the sight of their own roof-tree.[43]

The characterization of Black men as rapists wrought incredible confusion within the ranks of progressive movements. Both Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells point out in their respective analyses of lynching that as soon as the propagandistic cry of rape became a legitimate excuse for lynching, former white proponents of Black equality became increasingly afraid to associate themselves with Black people's struggle for liberation. They either remained silent or, like Frances Willard, they spoke out aggressively against the sexual crimes indiscriminately attributed to Black men. Douglass described the catastrophic impact of the fabricated rape charge on the movement for Black equality in general:

> It has cooled (the Negro's) friends; it has heated his enemies and arrested at home and abroad, in some measure, the generous efforts that good men were wont to make for his improvement and elevation. It has deceived his friends at the North and many good friends at the South, for nearly all of them, in some measure, have accepted this charge against the Negro as true.[44]

What was the reality behind this terribly powerful myth of the Black rapist? To be sure, there were some examples of Black men raping white women. But the number of actual rapes which occurred was minutely disproportionate to the allegations implied by the myth. As already indicated, during the entire Civil War, there was not a single reported case of a white woman suffering

rape at the hands of a slave. While virtually all the Southern white men were on the battlefront, never once was the cry of rape raised. Frederick Douglass argues that the leveling of the rape charge against Black men as a whole was not credible for the simple reason that it implied a radical and instantaneous change in the mental and moral character of Black people.

> History does not present an example of a transformation in the character of any class of men so extreme, so unnatural and so complete as is implied in this charge. The change is too great and the period for it too brief.[45]

Even the real circumstances of most lynchings contradicted the myth of the Black rapist. The majority of mob murders did not even involve the charge of rape. Although the cry of rape was invoked as the popular justification for lynching in general, most lynchings took place for other reasons. In a study published in 1931 by the Southern Commission on the Study of Lynching, it was revealed that between 1889 and 1929 only one-sixth of the mob victims were actually accused of rape: 37.7 percent were charged with murder, 5.8 percent with felonious assault, 7.1 percent of theft, 1.8 percent of insulting a white person and 24.2 percent were accused of miscellaneous charges—the majority of which were astoundingly trivial. According to the Commission's figures, 16.7 percent of lynch victims were accused of rape and 6.7 percent of attempted rape.[46]

Although their arguments were disputed by the facts, most apologists for lynching claimed that only white men's obligation to defend their women could motivate them to commit such savage attacks on Black men. In 1904 Thomas Nelson Page, writing in the *North American Review,* placed the entire burden of lynching on the shoulders of Black men and their unchecked propensity toward sexual crimes.

> The crime of lynching is not likely to cease until the crime of ravishing and murdering women and children is less frequent than it has been of late. And this crime, which is well-nigh wholly confined to the negro race, will not greatly diminish until the negroes themselves take it in hand and stamp it out.[47]

And white men in the South, said Ben Tillman in the U.S. Senate, would ". . . not submit to (the Negro's) gratifying his lust on our wives and daughters without lynching him."[48] In 1892, when Senator Tillman was governor of South Carolina, he had declared, on the spot where eight Black men had been hanged, that he would personally lead a lynch mob against any Black man who dared to rape a white woman. During his term as governor, he turned over a Black man to a white mob even though the lynch victim had been publicly absolved by the white woman who had cried rape.[49]

The colonization of the Southern economy by capitalists from the North gave lynching its most vigorous impulse. If Black people, by means of terror and violence, could remain the most brutally exploited group within the swelling ranks of the working class, the capitalists could enjoy a double advantage. Extra profits would result from the superexploitation of Black labor, and white workers' hostilities toward their employers would be defused. White workers who assented to lynching necessarily assumed a posture of racial solidarity with the white men who were really their oppressors. This was a critical moment in the popularization of racist ideology.

If Black people had simply accepted a status of economic and political inferiority, the mob murders would probably have subsided. But because vast numbers of ex-slaves refused to discard their dreams of progress, more than ten thousand lynchings occurred during the three decades following the war.[50] Whoever challenged the racial hierarchy was marked a potential victim of

the mob. The endless roster of the dead came to include every sort of insurgent—from the owners of successful Black businesses and workers pressing for higher wages to those who refused to be called "boy" and the defiant women who resisted white men's sexual abuses. Yet public opinion had been captured, and it was taken for granted that lynching was a just response to the barbarous sexual crimes against white womanhood. And an important question remained unasked: What about the numerous women who were lynched—and sometimes raped before they were killed by the mob. Ida B. Wells refers to

> . . . the horrible case of the woman in San Antonio, Texas, who had been boxed up in a barrel with nails driven through the sides and rolled down a hill until she was dead.[51]

The *Chicago Defender* published this article on December 18, 1915, under the heading "Rape, Lynch Negro Mother":

> Columbus, Miss., Dec. 17—Thursday a week ago Cordella Stevenson was found early in the morning hanging to the limb of a tree, without any clothing, dead . . . She was hung there from the night before by a bloodthirsty mob who had gone to her home, snatched her from slumber, and dragged her through the streets without any resistance. They carried her to a far-off spot, did their dirt and then strung her up.[52]

Given the central role played by the fictional Black rapist in the shaping of post-slavery racism, it is, at best, irresponsible theorizing to represent Black men as the most frequent authors of sexual violence. At worst, it is an aggression against Black people as a whole, for the mythical rapist implies the mythical whore. Perceiving the rape charge as an attack against the entire Black community, Black women were quick to assume the leadership of the anti-lynching movement. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was the mov-

ing force behind a crusade against lynching which was destined to span many decades. In 1892 three acquaintances of this Black newspaperwoman were lynched in Memphis, Tennessee. They were murdered by a racist mob because the store they opened in a Black neighborhood was successfully competing with a white-owned store. Ida B. Wells hastened to speak out against this lynching in the pages of her newspaper, *The Free Speech.* During her trip to New York three months later, the offices of her paper were burned to the ground. Threatened with lynching herself, she decided to remain in the East and to ". . . tell the world for the first time the true story of Negro lynchings, which were becoming more numerous and horrible."[53]

Wells' articles in the *New York Age* motivated Black women to organize a support campaign on her behalf, which eventually led to the establishment of Black women's clubs.[54] As a result of her pioneering efforts, Black women throughout the country became active in the anti-lynching crusade. Ida B. Wells herself traveled from city to city, issuing appeals to ministers, professionals and workers alike to speak out against the outrages of lynch law. During her trips abroad, an important solidarity movement was organized in Britain, which had a marked impact on U.S. public opinion. The extent of her success was such that she incurred the wrath of the *New York Times.* This vicious editorial was published after Wells' 1904 trip to England:

> "Immediately following the day of Miss Wells' return to the United States, a Negro man assaulted a white woman in New York City 'for the purposes of lust and plunder.' . . . The circumstances of his fiendish crime may serve to convince the mulatress missionary that the promulgation in New York just now of her theory of Negro outrages is, to say the least, inopportune."[55]

Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, was another outstanding Black woman leader who was devoted to the fight against lynching. In 1904 she answered Thomas Nelson Page's virulent article on "The Lynching of Negroes—Its Cause and Prevention." In the *North American Review,* where Page's article had appeared, she published an essay entitled "Lynching From a Negro's Point of View." With compelling logic, Terrell systematically refuted Page's justification of lynching as an understandable response to alleged sexual assaults on white women.[56]

Thirty years after Ida B. Wells had initiated the anti-lynching campaign, an organization called the Anti-Lynching Crusaders was founded. Established in 1922 under the auspices of the NAACP and headed by Mary Talbert, its purpose was to create an integrated women's movement against lynching.

> What will Mary B. Talbert do next? What next will the colored American women do under her leadership? An organization has been effected by colored women to get ONE MILLION WOMEN of all kinds and colors united by December, 1922 against lynching.
>
> Look out, Mr. Lyncher!
>
> This class of women generally get what they go after.[57]

This was not the first time Black women had reached out to their white sisters. They were struggling in the tradition of such historical giants as Sojourner Truth and Frances E. W. Harper. Ida B. Wells had personally appealed to white women, as had her contemporary, Mary Church Terrell. And Black clubwomen had collectively attempted to persuade the white women's club movement to direct some of their energies toward the anti-lynching campaign.

White women did not respond to these appeals en masse until

the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching was founded in 1930 under the leadership of Jessie Daniel Ames.[58] The Association set out to repudiate the claim that lynching was necessary for the protection of Southern womanhood:

> The program of the Southern women has been directed to exposing the falsity of the claim that lynching is necessary to their protection and to emphasize the real danger of lynching to all the values of home and religion.[59]

The small group of women, who attended the Atlanta meeting where the Association was formed, discussed the role of white women in the lynchings of the recent period. Women were usually present at the mob gatherings, they pointed out, and in some instances, were active members of the lynch mobs. Moreover, those white women who permitted their children to witness the murders of Black people were indoctrinating them into the racist ways of the South. Walter White's study of lynching, published the year before the women's meeting, argued that one of the worst consequences of these mob murders was the warping of Southern white children's minds. When White traveled to Florida to investigate a lynching, a little girl of nine or ten told him about ". . . the fun we had burning the niggers."[60]

Jessie Daniel Ames and her co-founders of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching resolved in 1930 to recruit the masses of Southern white women into the campaign to defeat the racist mobs bent on killing Black people. Eventually they obtained over forty thousand signatures to the Association's pledge:

> We declare lynching is an indefensible crime, destructive of all principles of government, hateful and hostile to every ideal of religion and humanity, debasing and degrading to every person involved. . . . (P)ublic opinion has accepted too easily the claim of lynchers and mobsters that they were acting solely in defense of womanhood. In light of facts we dare no longer to permit this claim to pass unchallenged, nor allow those bent upon personal revenge and savagery to commit acts of violence and lawlessness in the name of women. We solemnly pledge ourselves to create a new public opinion in the South, which will not condone, for any reason whatever, acts of mobs or lynchers. We will teach our children at home, at school and at church a new interpretation of law and religion; we will assist all officials to uphold their oath of office; and finally, we will join with every minister, editor, school teacher and patriotic citizen in a program of education to eradicate lynchings and mobs forever from our land.[61]

These courageous white women encountered opposition, hostility and even physical threats on their lives. Their contributions were invaluable within the overall anti-lynching crusade. Without their relentless petition drives, their letter campaigns and their meetings and demonstrations, the tide of lynching would not have been reversed so swiftly. Yet the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching was a movement that was forty years late in coming. For four decades or more, Black women had been leading the anti-lynching campaign, and for just about as long, they had appealed to their white sisters to join them. One of the major weaknesses of Susan Brownmiller's study on rape is its absolute disregard of Black women's pioneering efforts in the anti-lynching movement. While Brownmiller rightfully praises Jessie Daniel Ames and the Association of Southern Women, she makes not so much as a passing mention of Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell or Mary Talbert and the Anti-Lynching Crusaders.

While the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching was a belated response to their Black sisters' appeals,

these women's far-reaching achievements dramatically illustrate white women's special place in the struggle against racism. When Mary Talbert and her Anti-Lynching Crusaders reached out to white women, they felt that white women could more readily identify with the Black cause by virtue of their own oppression as women. Besides, lynching itself, as a terrifying tool of racism, also served to strengthen male dominance.

> Economic dependence, contacts with none save "polite, refined, womanly" pursuits, mental activities in no other field than home life—all these man-imposed restrictions have borne more heavily upon women in the South and have been maintained more rigidly, than in any other part of the country.[62]

Throughout the anti-lynching crusade, the critics of the racist manipulation of the rape charge did not intend to excuse those individual Black men who actually committed the crime of sexual assault. As early as 1894 Frederick Douglass warned that his pronouncements against the myth of the Black rapist were not to be misconstrued as a defense of rape itself.

> I do not pretend that Negroes are saints and angels. I do not deny that they are capable of committing the crime imputed to them, but utterly deny that they are any more addicted to the commission of that crime than is true of any other variety of the human family. . . . I am not a defender of any man guilty of this atrocious crime, but a defender of the coloured people as a class.[63]

The resurgence of racism during the mid-1970s has been accompanied by a resurrection of the myth of the Black rapist. Unfortunately, this myth has sometimes been legitimized by white women associated with the battle against rape. Consider,

for example, Susan Brownmiller's concluding passage of the chapter of her book entitled "A Question of Race":

> Today the incidence of actual rape combined with the looming spectre of the rapist in the mind's eye, and in particular the mythified spectre of the black man as rapist to which the black man in the name of his manhood now contributes, must be understood as a control mechanism against the freedom, mobility and aspirations of all women, white and black. The crossroads of racism and sexism had to be a violent meeting place. There is no use pretending it doesn't exist.[64]

Brownmiller's provocative distortion of such historical cases as the Scottsboro Nine, Willie McGee and Emmett Till are designed to dissipate any sympathy for Black men who are victims of fraudulent rape charges. As for Emmett Till, she clearly invites us to infer that if this fourteen-year-old boy had not been shot in the head and dumped into the Tallahatchie River after he whistled at one white woman, he would probably have succeeded in raping another white woman.

Brownmiller attempts to persuade her readers that the absurd and purposely sensational words of Eldridge Cleaver—who called rape an "insurrectionary act" against "white society"—are representative. It seems as if she wants to intentionally conjure up in her readers' imaginations armies of Black men, their penises erect, charging full speed ahead toward the most conveniently placed white women. In the ranks of this army are the ghost of Emmett Till, the rapist Eldridge Cleaver and Imamu Baraka, who once wrote, "Come up, black dada nihilismus. Rape the white girls. Rape their fathers. Cut the mothers' throats." But Brownmiller goes further. Not only does she include men like Calvin Hernton—whose book is unequivocally sexist—but also, among others, George Jackson, who never attempted to justify rape. Eldridge Cleaver's ideas, she argues,

their daily assaults on the labor and dignity of working people.

The existence of widespread sexual harassment on the job has never been much of a secret. It is precisely on the job, indeed, that women—especially when they are not unionized—are most vulnerable. Having already established their economic domination over their female subordinates, employers, managers and foremen may attempt to assert this authority in sexual terms. That working-class women are more intensely exploited than their men adds to their vulnerability to sexual abuse, while sexual coercion simultaneously reinforces their vulnerability to economic exploitation.

Working-class men, whatever their color, can be motivated to rape by the belief that their maleness accords them the privilege to dominate women. Yet since they do not possess the social or economic authority—unless it is a white man raping a woman of color—guaranteeing them immunity from prosecution, the incentive is not nearly as powerful as it is for the men of the capitalist class. When working-class men accept the invitation to rape extended by the ideology of male supremacy, they are accepting a bribe, an illusory compensation for their powerlessness.

The class structure of capitalism encourages men who wield power in the economic and political realm to become routine agents of sexual exploitation. The present rape epidemic occurs at a time when the capitalist class is furiously reasserting its authority in face of global and internal challenges. Both racism and sexism, central to its domestic strategy of increased economic exploitation, are receiving unprecedented encouragement. It is not a mere coincidence that as the incidence of rape has arisen, the position of women workers has visibly worsened. So severe are women's economic losses that their wages in relationship to men are lower than they were a decade ago. The proliferation of sexual violence is the brutal face of a generalized intensification of the sexism which necessarily accompanies this economic assault.

Following a pattern established by racism, the attack on women mirrors the deteriorating situation of workers of color and the rising influence of racism in the judicial system, the educational institutions and in the government's posture of studied neglect toward Black people and other people of color. The most dramatic sign of the dangerous resurgence of racism is the new visibility of the Ku Klux Klan and the related epidemic of violent assaults on Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and Native Americans. The present rape epidemic bears an extraordinary likeness to this violence kindled by racism.

Given the complexity of the social context of rape today, any attempt to treat it as an isolated phenomenon is bound to founder. An effective strategy against rape must aim for more than the eradication of rape—or even of sexism—alone. The struggle against racism must be an ongoing theme of the anti-rape movement, which must not only defend women of color, but the many victims of the racist manipulation of the rape charge as well. The crisis dimensions of sexual violence constitute one of the facets of a deep and ongoing crisis of capitalism. As the violent face of sexism, the threat of rape will continue to exist as long as the overall oppression of women remains an essential crutch for capitalism. The anti-rape movement and its important current activities—ranging from emotional and legal aid to self-defense and educational campaigns—must be situated in a strategic context which envisages the ultimate defeat of monopoly capitalism.

12 Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights

When nineteenth-century feminists raised the demand for "voluntary motherhood," the campaign for birth control was born. Its proponents were called radicals and they were subjected to the same mockery as had befallen the initial advocates of woman suffrage. "Voluntary motherhood" was considered audacious, outrageous and outlandish by those who insisted that wives had no right to refuse to satisfy their husbands' sexual urges. Eventually, of course, the right to birth control, like women's right to vote, would be more or less taken for granted by U.S. public opinion. Yet in 1970, a full century later, the call for legal and easily accessible abortions was no less controversial than the issue of "voluntary motherhood" which had originally launched the birth control movement in the United States.

Birth control—individual choice, safe contraceptive methods, as well as abortions when necessary—is a fundamental prerequisite for the emancipation of women. Since the right of birth control is obviously advantageous to women of all classes and races, it would appear that even vastly dissimilar women's groups would have attempted to unite around this issue. In reality, however, the birth control movement has seldom succeeded in uniting women of different social backgrounds, and rarely have the movement's leaders popularized the genuine concerns of working-class women. Moreover, arguments advanced by birth control advocates have sometimes been based on blatantly racist premises. The progressive potential of birth control remains indisputable. But in actuality, the historical record of this movement leaves

much to be desired in the realm of challenges to racism and class exploitation.

The most important victory of the contemporary birth control movement was won during the early 1970s when abortions were at last declared legal. Having emerged during the infancy of the new Women's Liberation movement, the struggle to legalize abortions incorporated all the enthusiasm and the militancy of the young movement. By January, 1973, the abortion rights campaign had reached a triumphant culmination. In *Roe* v. *Wade* (410 U.S.) and *Doe* v. *Bolton* (410 U.S.), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a woman's right to personal privacy implied her right to decide whether or not to have an abortion.

The ranks of the abortion rights campaign did not include substantial numbers of women of color. Given the racial composition of the larger Women's Liberation movement, this was not at all surprising. When questions were raised about the absence of racially oppressed women in both the larger movement and in the abortion rights campaign, two explanations were commonly proposed in the discussions and literature of the period: women of color were overburdened by their people's fight against racism; and/or they had not yet become conscious of the centrality of sexism. But the real meaning of the almost lily-white complexion of the abortion rights campaign was not to be found in an ostensibly myopic or underdeveloped consciousness among women of color. The truth lay buried in the ideological underpinnings of the birth control movement itself.

The failure of the abortion rights campaign to conduct a historical self-evaluation led to a dangerously superficial appraisal of Black people's suspicious attitudes toward birth control in general. Granted, when some Black people unhesitatingly equated birth control with genocide, it did appear to be an exaggerated—even paranoiac—reaction. Yet white abortion rights activists missed a profound message, for underlying these cries of genocide were important clues about the history of the birth control move-

ment. This movement, for example, had been known to advocate involuntary sterilization—a racist form of mass "birth control." If ever women would enjoy the right to plan their pregnancies, legal and easily accessible birth control measures and abortions would have to be complemented by an end to sterilization abuse.

As for the abortion rights campaign itself, how could women of color fail to grasp its urgency? They were far more familiar than their white sisters with the murderously clumsy scalpels of inept abortionists seeking profit in illegality. In New York, for instance, during the several years preceding the decriminalization of abortions in that state, some 80 percent of the deaths caused by illegal abortions involved Black and Puerto Rican women.[1] Immediately afterward, women of color received close to half of all the legal abortions. If the abortion rights campaign of the early 1970s needed to be reminded that women of color wanted desperately to escape the back-room quack abortionists, they should have also realized that these same women were not about to express pro-abortion sentiments. They were in favor of *abortion rights,* which did not mean that they were proponents of abortion. When Black and Latina women resort to abortions in such large numbers, the stories they tell are not so much about their desire to be free of their pregnancy, but rather about the miserable social conditions which dissuade them from bringing new lives into the world.

Black women have been aborting themselves since the earliest days of slavery. Many slave women refused to bring children into a world of interminable forced labor, where chains and floggings and sexual abuse for women were the everyday conditions of life. A doctor practicing in Georgia around the middle of the last century noticed that abortions and miscarriages were far more common among his slave patients than among the white women he treated. According to the physician, either Black women worked too hard or

> . . . as the planters believe, the blacks are possessed of a secret by which they destroy the fetus at an early stage of gestation . . . All country practitioners are aware of the frequent complaints of planters (about the) . . . unnatural tendency in the African female to destroy her offspring.[2]

Expressing shock that ". . . whole families of women fail to have any children,"[3] this doctor never considered how "unnatural" it was to raise children under the slave system. The previously mentioned episode of Margaret Garner, a fugitive slave who killed her own daughter and attempted suicide herself when she was captured by slavecatchers, is a case in point.

> She rejoiced that the girl was dead—"now she would never know what a woman suffers as a slave"—and pleaded to be tried for murder. "I will go singing to the gallows rather than be returned to slavery!"[4]

Why were self-imposed abortions and reluctant acts of infanticide such common occurrences during slavery? Not because Black women had discovered solutions to their predicament, but rather because they were desperate. Abortions and infanticides were acts of desperation, motivated not by the biological birth process but by the oppressive conditions of slavery. Most of these women, no doubt, would have expressed their deepest resentment had someone hailed their abortions as a stepping stone toward freedom.

During the early abortion rights campaign it was too frequently assumed that legal abortions provided a viable alternative to the myriad problems posed by poverty. As if having fewer children could create more jobs, higher wages, better schools, etc., etc. This assumption reflected the tendency to blur the distinction between *abortion rights* and the general advocacy of *abortions.* The campaign often failed to provide a voice for women who wanted the *right* to legal abortions while deploring the social

conditions that prohibited them from bearing more children.

The renewed offensive against abortion rights that erupted during the latter half of the 1970s has made it absolutely necessary to focus more sharply on the needs of poor and racially oppressed women. By 1977 the passage of the Hyde Amendment in Congress had mandated the withdrawal of federal funding for abortions, causing many state legislatures to follow suit. Black, Puerto Rican, Chicana and Native American Indian women, together with their impoverished white sisters, were thus effectively divested of the right to legal abortions. Since surgical sterilizations, funded by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, remained free on demand, more and more poor women have been forced to opt for permanent infertility. What is urgently required is a broad campaign to defend the reproductive rights of all women—and especially those women whose economic circumstances often compel them to relinquish the right to reproduction itself.

Women's desire to control their reproductive system is probably as old as human history itself. As early as 1844 the *United States Practical Receipt Book* contained, among its many recipes for food, household chemicals and medicines, "receipts" for "birth preventive lotions." To make "Hannay's Preventive Lotion," for example,

> [t]ake pearlash, 1 part; water, 6 parts. Mix and filter. Keep it in closed bottles, and use it, with or without soap, immediately after connexion.[5]

For "Abernethy's Preventive Lotion,"

> [t]ake bichloride of mercury, 25 parts; milk of almonds, 400 parts; alcohol, 100 parts; rosewater, 1000 parts. Immerse the glands in a little of the mixture. . . . Infallible, if used in proper time.[6]

While women have probably always dreamed of infallible methods of birth control, it was not until the issue of women's rights in general became the focus of an organized movement that reproductive rights could emerge as a legitimate demand. In an essay entitled "Marriage," written during the 1850s, Sarah Grimke argued for a ". . . right on the part of woman to decide *when* she shall become a mother, how often and under what circumstances."[7] Alluding to one physician's humorous observation, Grimke agreed that if wives and husbands alternatively gave birth to their children, ". . . no family would ever have more than three, the husband bearing one and the wife two."[8] But, as she insists, ". . . the *right* to decide this matter has been almost wholly denied to woman."[9]

Sarah Grimke advocated women's right to sexual abstinence. Around the same time the well-known "emancipated marriage" of Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell took place. These abolitionists and women's rights activists were married in a ceremony that protested women's traditional relinquishment of their rights to their persons, names and property. In agreeing that as husband, he had no right to the "custody of the wife's person,"[10] Henry Blackwell promised that he would not attempt to impose the dictates of his sexual desires upon his wife.

The notion that women could refuse to submit to their husbands' sexual demands eventually became the central idea of the call for "voluntary motherhood." By the 1870s, when the woman suffrage movement had reached its peak, feminists were publicly advocating voluntary motherhood. In a speech delivered in 1873, Victoria Woodhull claimed that

> (t)he wife who submits to sexual intercourse against her wishes or desires, virtually commits suicide; while the husband who compels it, commits murder, and ought just as much to be punished for it, as though he strangled her to death for refusing him.[11]

Woodhull, of course, was quite notorious as a proponent of "free love." Her defense of a woman's right to abstain from sexual intercourse within marriage as a means of controlling her pregnancies was associated with Woodhull's overall attack on the institution of marriage.

It was not a coincidence that women's consciousness of their reproductive rights was born within the organized movement for women's political equality. Indeed, if women remained forever burdened by incessant childbirths and frequent miscarriages, they would hardly be able to exercise the political rights they might win. Moreover, women's new dreams of pursuing careers and other paths of self-development outside marriage and motherhood could only be realized if they could limit and plan their pregnancies. In this sense, the slogan "voluntary motherhood" contained a new and genuinely progressive vision of womanhood. At the same time, however, this vision was rigidly bound to the lifestyle enjoyed by the middle classes and the bourgeoisie. The aspirations underlying the demand for "voluntary motherhood" did not reflect the conditions of working-class women, engaged as they were in a far more fundamental fight for economic survival. Since this first call for birth control was associated with goals which could only be achieved by women possessing material wealth, vast numbers of poor and working-class women would find it rather difficult to identify with the embryonic birth control movement.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century the white birth rate in the United States suffered a significant decline. Since no contraceptive innovations had been publicly introduced, the drop in the birth rate implied that women were substantially curtailing their sexual activity. By 1890 the typical native-born white woman was bearing no more than four children.[12] Since U.S. society was becoming increasingly urban, this new birth pattern should not have been a surprise. While farm life demanded large

families, they became dysfunctional within the context of city life. Yet this phenomenon was publicly interpreted in a racist and anti-working-class fashion by the ideologues of rising monopoly capitalism. Since native-born white women were bearing fewer children, the specter of "race suicide" was raised in official circles.

In 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt concluded his Lincoln Day Dinner speech with the proclamation that "race purity must be maintained."[13] By 1906 he blatantly equated the falling birth rate among native-born whites with the impending threat of "race suicide." In his State of the Union message that year Roosevelt admonished the well-born white women who engaged in "willful sterility—the one sin for which the penalty is national death, race suicide."[14] These comments were made during a period of accelerating racist ideology and of great waves of race riots and lynchings on the domestic scene. Moreover, President Roosevelt himself was attempting to muster support for the U.S. seizure of the Philippines, the country's most recent imperialist venture.

How did the birth control movement respond to Roosevelt's accusation that their cause was promoting race suicide? The President's propagandistic ploy was a failure, according to a leading historian of the birth control movement, for, ironically, it led to greater support for its advocates. Yet, as Linda Gordon maintains, this controversy ". . . also brought to the forefront those issues that most separated feminists from the working class and the poor."[15]

> This happened in two ways. First, the feminists were increasingly emphasizing birth control as a route to careers and higher education—goals out of reach of the poor with or without birth control. In the context of the whole feminist movement, the race-suicide episode was an additional factor identifying feminism almost exclusively with the aspirations of the more privileged women of the society. Second, the pro-birth control feminists began to popularize the idea that poor people had a moral obligation to restrict the size

> of their families, because large families create a drain on the taxes and charity expenditures of the wealthy and because poor children were less likely to be "superior."[16]

The acceptance of the race-suicide thesis, to a greater or lesser extent, by women such as Julia Ward Howe and Ida Husted Harper reflected the suffrage movement's capitulation to the racist posture of Southern women. If the suffragists acquiesced to arguments invoking the extension of the ballot to women as the saving grace of white supremacy, then birth control advocates either acquiesced to or supported the new arguments invoking birth control as a means of preventing the proliferation of the "lower classes" and as an antidote to race suicide. Race suicide could be prevented by the introduction of birth control among Black people, immigrants and the poor in general. In this way, the prosperous whites of solid Yankee stock could maintain their superior numbers within the population. Thus class-bias and racism crept into the birth control movement when it was still in its infancy. More and more, it was assumed within birth control circles that poor women, Black and immigrant alike, had a "moral obligation to restrict the size of their families."[17] What was demanded as a "right" for the privileged came to be interpreted as a "duty" for the poor.

When Margaret Sanger embarked upon her lifelong crusade for birth control—a term she coined and popularized—it appeared as though the racist and anti-working-class overtones of the previous period might possibly be overcome. For Margaret Higgens Sanger came from a working-class background herself and was well acquainted with the devastating pressures of poverty. When her mother died, at the age of forty-eight, she had borne no less than eleven children. Sanger's later memories of her own family's troubles would confirm her belief that working-class

women had a special need for the right to plan and space their pregnancies autonomously. Her affiliation, as an adult, with the Socialist movement was a further cause for hope that the birth control campaign would move in a more progressive direction.

When Margaret Sanger joined the Socialist party in 1912, she assumed the responsibility of recruiting women from New York's working women's clubs into the party.[18] *The Call*—the party's paper—carried her articles on the women's page. She wrote a series entitled "What Every Mother Should Know," another called "What Every Girl Should Know," and she did on-the-spot coverage of strikes involving women. Sanger's familiarity with New York's working-class districts was a result of her numerous visits as a trained nurse to the poor sections of the city. During these visits, she points out in her autobiography, she met countless numbers of women who desperately desired knowledge about birth control.

According to Sanger's autobiographical reflections, one of the many visits she made as a nurse to New York's Lower East Side convinced her to undertake a personal crusade for birth control. Answering one of her routine calls, she discovered that twenty-eight-year-old Sadie Sachs had attempted to abort herself. Once the crisis had passed, the young woman asked the attending physician to give her advice on birth prevention. As Sanger relates the story, the doctor recommended that she ". . . tell (her husband) Jake to sleep on the roof."[19]

> I glanced quickly to Mrs. Sachs. Even through my sudden tears I could see stamped on her face an expression of absolute despair. We simply looked at each other, saying no word until the door had closed behind the doctor. Then she lifted her thin, blue-veined hands and clasped them beseechingly. "He can't understand. He's only a man. But you do, don't you? Please tell me the secret, and I'll never breathe it to a soul. Please!"[20]

Three months later Sadie Sachs died from another self-induced abortion. That night, Margaret Sanger says, she vowed to devote all her energy toward the acquisition and dissemination of contraceptive measures.

> I went to bed, knowing that no matter what it might cost, I was finished with palliatives and superficial cures; I resolved to seek out the root of evil, to do something to change the destiny of mothers whose miseries were as vast as the sky.[21]

During the first phase of Sanger's birth control crusade, she maintained her affiliation with the Socialist party—and the campaign itself was closely associated with the rising militancy of the working class. Her staunch supporters included Eugene Debs, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Emma Goldman, who respectively represented the Socialist party, the International Workers of the World and the anarchist movement. Margaret Sanger, in turn, expressed the anti-capitalist commitment of her own movement within the pages of its journal, *Woman Rebel,* which was "dedicated to the interests of working women."[22] Personally, she continued to march on picket lines with striking workers and publicly condemned the outrageous assaults on striking workers. In 1914, for example, when the National Guard massacred scores of Chicano miners in Ludlow, Colorado, Sanger joined the labor movement in exposing John D. Rockefeller's role in this attack.[23]

Unfortunately, the alliance between the birth control campaign and the radical labor movement did not enjoy a long life. While Socialists and other working-class activists continued to support the demand for birth control, it did not occupy a central place in their overall strategy. And Sanger herself began to underestimate the centrality of capitalist exploitation in her analysis of poverty, arguing that too many children caused workers to fall into their miserable predicament. Moreover, ". . . women were

inadvertently perpetuating the exploitation of the working class," she believed, "by continually flooding the labor market with new workers."[24] Ironically, Sanger may have been encouraged to adopt this position by the neo-Malthusian ideas embraced in some socialist circles. Such outstanding figures of the European socialist movement as Anatole France and Rosa Luxemburg had proposed a "birth strike" to prevent the continued flow of labor into the capitalist market.[25]

When Margaret Sanger severed her ties with the Socialist party for the purpose of building an independent birth control campaign, she and her followers became more susceptible than ever before to the anti-Black and anti-immigrant propaganda of the times. Like their predecessors, who had been deceived by the "race suicide" propaganda, the advocates of birth control began to embrace the prevailing racist ideology. The fatal influence of the eugenics movement would soon destroy the progressive potential of the birth control campaign.

During the first decades of the twentieth century the rising popularity of the eugenics movement was hardly a fortuitous development. Eugenic ideas were perfectly suited to the ideological needs of the young monopoly capitalists. Imperialist incursions in Latin America and in the Pacific needed to be justified, as did the intensified exploitation of Black workers in the South and immigrant workers in the North and West. The pseudoscientific racial theories associated with the eugenics campaign furnished dramatic apologies for the conduct of the young monopolies. As a result, this movement won the unhesitating support of such leading capitalists as the Carnegies, the Harrimans and the Kelloggs.[26]

By 1919 the eugenic influence on the birth control movement was unmistakably clear. In an article published by Margaret Sanger in the American Birth Control League's journal, she defined "the chief issue of birth control" as "more children from

the fit, less from the unfit."[27] Around this time the ABCL heartily welcomed the author of *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy* into its inner sanctum.[28] Lothrop Stoddard, Harvard professor and theoretician of the eugenics movement, was offered a seat on the board of directors. In the pages of the ABCL's journal, articles by Guy Irving Birch, director of the American Eugenics Society, began to appear. Birch advocated birth control as a weapon to

> . . . prevent the American people from being replaced by alien or Negro stock, whether it be by immigration or by overly high birth rates among others in this country.[29]

By 1932 the Eugenics Society could boast that at least twenty-six states had passed compulsory sterilization laws and that thousands of "unfit" persons had already been surgically prevented from reproducing.[30] Margaret Sanger offered her public approval of this development. "Morons, mental defectives, epileptics, illiterates, paupers, unemployables, criminals, prostitutes and dope fiends" ought to be surgically sterilized, she argued in a radio talk.[31] She did not wish to be so intransigent as to leave them with no choice in the matter; if they wished, she said, they should be able to choose a lifelong segregated existence in labor camps.

Within the American Birth Control League, the call for birth control among Black people acquired the same racist edge as the call for compulsory sterilization. In 1939 its successor, the Birth Control Federation of America, planned a "Negro Project." In the Federation's words,

> (t)he mass of Negroes, particularly in the South, still breed carelessly and disastrously, with the result that the increase among Negroes, even more than among whites, is from that portion of the population least fit, and least able to rear children properly.[32]

Calling for the recruitment of Black ministers to lead local birth control committees, the Federation's proposal suggested that Black people should be rendered as vulnerable as possible to their birth control propaganda. "We do not want word to get out," wrote Margaret Sanger in a letter to a colleague,

> . . . that we want to exterminate the Negro population and the minister is the man who can straighten out that idea if it ever occurs to any of their more rebellious members.[33]

This episode in the birth control movement confirmed the ideological victory of the racism associated with eugenic ideas. It had been robbed of its progressive potential, advocating for people of color not the individual right to *birth control,* but rather the racist strategy of *population control.* The birth control campaign would be called upon to serve in an essential capacity in the execution of the U.S. government's imperialist and racist population policy.

The abortion rights activists of the early 1970s should have examined the history of their movement. Had they done so, they might have understood why so many of their Black sisters adopted a posture of suspicion toward their cause. They might have understood how important it was to undo the racist deeds of their predecessors, who had advocated birth control as well as compulsory sterilization as a means of eliminating the "unfit" sectors of the population. Consequently, the young white feminists might have been more receptive to the suggestion that their campaign for abortion rights include a vigorous condemnation of sterilization abuse, which had become more widespread than ever.

It was not until the media decided that the casual sterilization of two Black girls in Montgomery, Alabama, was a scandal worth reporting that the Pandora's box of sterilization abuse was finally flung open. But by the time the case of the Relf sisters broke, it

was practically too late to influence the politics of the abortion rights movement. It was the summer of 1973 and the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortions had already been announced in January. Nevertheless, the urgent need for mass opposition to sterilization abuse became tragically clear. The facts surrounding the Relf sisters' story were horrifyingly simple. Minnie Lee, who was twelve years old, and Mary Alice, who was fourteen, had been unsuspectingly carted into an operating room, where surgeons irrevocably robbed them of their capacity to bear children.[34] The surgery had been ordered by the HEW-funded Montgomery Community Action Committee after it was discovered that Depo-Provera, a drug previously administered to the girls as a birth prevention measure, caused cancer in test animals.[35]

After the Southern Poverty Law Center filed suit on behalf of the Relf sisters, the girls' mother revealed that she had unknowingly "consented" to the operation, having been deceived by the social workers who handled her daughters' case. They had asked Mrs. Relf, who was unable to read, to put her "X" on a document, the contents of which were not described to her. She assumed, she said, that it authorized the continued Depo-Provera injections. As she subsequently learned, she had authorized the surgical sterilization of her daughters.[36]

In the aftermath of the publicity exposing the Relf sisters' case, similar episodes were brought to light. In Montgomery alone, eleven girls, also in their teens, had been similarly sterilized. HEW-funded birth control clinics in other states, as it turned out, had also subjected young girls to sterilization abuse. Moreover, individual women came forth with equally outrageous stories. Nial Ruth Cox, for example, filed suit against the state of North Carolina. At the age of eighteen—eight years before the suit—officials had threatened to discontinue her family's welfare payments if she refused to submit to surgical sterilization.[37] Before

she assented to the operation, she was assured that her infertility would be temporary.[38]

Nial Ruth Cox's lawsuit was aimed at a state which had diligently practiced the theory of eugenics. Under the auspicies of the Eugenics Commission of North Carolina, so it was learned, 7,686 sterilizations had been carried out since 1933. Although the operations were justified as measures to prevent the reproduction of "mentally deficient persons," about 5,000 of the sterilized persons had been Black.[39] According to Brenda Feigen Fasteau, the ACLU attorney representing Nial Ruth Cox, North Carolina's recent record was not much better.

> As far as I can determine, the statistics reveal that since 1964, approximately 65% of the women sterilized in North Carolina were Black and approximately 35% were white.[40]

As the flurry of publicity exposing sterilization abuse revealed, the neighboring state of South Carolina had been the site of further atrocities. Eighteen women from Aiken, South Carolina, charged that they had been sterilized by a Dr. Clovis Pierce during the early 1970s. The sole obstetrician in that small town, Pierce had consistently sterilized Medicaid recipients with two or more children. According to a nurse in his office, Dr. Pierce insisted that pregnant welfare women "will have to submit (sic!) to voluntary sterilization" if they wanted him to deliver their babies.[41] While he was ". . . tired of people running around and having babies and paying for them with my taxes,"[42] Dr. Pierce received some $60,000 in taxpayers' money for the sterilizations he performed. During his trial he was supported by the South Carolina Medical Association, whose members declared that doctors ". . . have a moral and legal right to insist on sterilization permission before accepting a patient, if it is done on the initial visit."[43]

Revelations of sterilization abuse during that time exposed the

complicity of the federal government. At first the Department of Health, Education and Welfare claimed that approximately 16,000 women and 8,000 men had been sterilized in 1972 under the auspices of federal programs.[44] Later, however, these figures underwent a drastic revision. Carl Shultz, director of HEW's Population Affairs Office, estimated that between 100,000 and 200,000 sterilizations had actually been funded that year by the federal government.[45] During Hitler's Germany, incidentally, 250,000 sterilizations were carried out under the Nazis' Hereditary Health Law.[46] Is it possible that the record of the Nazis, throughout the years of their reign, may have been almost equaled by U.S. government-funded sterilizations in the space of a single year?

Given the historical genocide inflicted on the native population of the United States, one would assume that Native American Indians would be exempted from the government's sterilization campaign. But according to Dr. Connie Uri's testimony in a Senate committee hearing, by 1976 some 24 percent of all Indian women of childbearing age had been sterilized.[47] "Our blood lines are being stopped," the Choctaw physician told the Senate committee, "Our unborn will not be born . . . This is genocidal to our people."[48] According to Dr. Uri, the Indian Health Services Hospital in Claremore, Oklahoma, had been sterilizing one out of every four women giving birth in that federal facility.[49]

Native American Indians are special targets of government propaganda on sterilization. In one of the HEW pamphlets aimed at Indian people, there is a sketch of a family with *ten children* and *one horse* and another sketch of a family with *one child* and *ten horses.* The drawings are supposed to imply that more children mean more poverty and fewer children mean wealth. As if the ten horses owned by the one-child family had been magically conjured up by birth control and sterilization surgery.

The domestic population policy of the U.S. government has an undeniably racist edge. Native American, Chicana, Puerto Rican and Black women continue to be sterilized in disproportionate numbers. According to a National Fertility Study conducted in 1970 by Princeton University's Office of Population Control, 20 percent of all married Black women have been permanently sterilized.[50] Approximately the same percentage of Chicana women had been rendered surgically infertile.[51] Moreover, 43 percent of the women sterilized through federally subsidized programs were Black.[52]

The astonishing number of Puerto Rican women who have been sterilized reflects a special government policy that can be traced back to 1939. In that year President Roosevelt's Interdepartmental Committee on Puerto Rico issued a statement attributing the island's economic problems to the phenomenon of overpopulation.[53] This committee proposed that efforts be undertaken to reduce the birth rate to no more than the level of the death rate.[54] Soon afterward an experimental sterilization campaign was undertaken in Puerto Rico. Although the Catholic Church initially opposed this experiment and forced the cessation of the program in 1946, it was converted during the early 1950s to the teachings and practice of population control.[55] In this period over 150 birth control clinics were opened, resulting in a 20 percent decline in population growth by the mid-1960s.[56] By the 1970s over 35 percent of all Puerto Rican women of childbearing age had been surgically sterilized.[57] According to Bonnie Mass, a serious critic of the U.S. government's population policy,

> . . . if purely mathematical projections are to be taken seriously, if the present rate of sterilization of 19,000 monthly were to continue, then the island's population of workers and peasants could be extinguished within the next 10 or 20 years . . . (establishing)

> for the first time in world history a systematic use of population control capable of eliminating an entire generation of people.[58]

During the 1970s the devastating implications of the Puerto Rican experiment began to emerge with unmistakable clarity. In Puerto Rico the presence of corporations in the highly automated metallurgical and pharmaceutical industries had exacerbated the problem of unemployment. The prospect of an ever-larger army of unemployed workers was one of the main incentives for the mass sterilization program. Inside the United States today, enormous numbers of people of color—and especially racially oppressed youth—have become part of a pool of permanently unemployed workers. It is hardly coincidental, considering the Puerto Rican example, that the increasing incidence of sterilization has kept pace with the high rates of unemployment. As growing numbers of white people suffer the brutal consequences of unemployment, they can also expect to become targets of the official sterilization propaganda.

The prevalence of sterilization abuse during the latter 1970s may be greater than ever before. Although the Department of Health, Education and Welfare issued guidelines in 1974, which were ostensibly designed to prevent involuntary sterilizations, the situation has nonetheless deteriorated. When the American Civil Liberties Union's Reproductive Freedom Project conducted a survey of teaching hospitals in 1975, they discovered that 40 percent of those institutions were not even aware of the regulations issued by HEW.[59] Only 30 percent of the hospitals examined by the ACLU were even attempting to comply with the guidelines.[60]

The 1977 Hyde Amendment has added yet another dimension to coercive sterilization practices. As a result of this law passed by Congress, federal funds for abortions were eliminated in all cases but those involving rape and the risk of death or severe illness.