

THE INCOMPATIBLE  
MENAGE À TROIS:  
MARXISM, FEMINISM,  
AND RACISM

---

*Gloria Joseph*

*Gloria Joseph is a Black revolutionary spirited feminist of West Indian parents, and views the world from a Black perspective with a socialist base. She is currently professor at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts in the School of Social Science. She has traveled in China, Cuba, India, and Africa compiling photographic essays and slide shows along the way. Her most recent publication is a book dealing with Conflicts in Feminist Perspectives: Black and White.*

Hartmann's essay speaks of an "unhappy marriage between marxism and feminism" but makes no mention in the title, and does not acknowledge in the essay, the incestuous child of patriarchy and capitalism. That child, now a full grown adult, is named racism. Thus, a more appropriate title of an article that attempts to create a theory that transcends marxism and feminism would be "The Incompatible Menage à Trois: Marxism, Feminism, and Racism." The women that Hartmann is speaking about, a specific but unlabelled and apparently middle class group of feminists, can believe that they are ready to embark upon a path to a more progressive union. To pay the price of this belief is to deny the reality of being Black in America. The dimension of racism is so critical to the lives of Black folks that it must be addressed specifically, regardless of the purposes or basis of the relations that exist among diverse social groupings. Unfortunately, our society has done such an excellent job of institutionalizing racism that the internecine result has been the creation of two separate societies: one white, one Black. As a consequence, when situations occur that call for coalition, solidarity, or alliance, racism serves as a wedge which prevents groups from the strategic, systematic, and protracted cooperation which is needed for the attainment of common goals. So while Hartmann's essay represents an attempt to transcend the limitations and shortcomings of both marxist analysis and feminist analysis, I lament the absence of an analysis of the Black woman and her role as member of the wedding.\*

In my response I shall focus on racism as a dimension that must be directly confronted before beginning to theorize about a compatible marriage between marxism and feminism. The reason for my original lamentation stems from the fact that I expect progressive minded writers to give adequate and appropriate recognition and credence to Blacks. When writers commit acts of omission by ignoring or neglecting Black women, I resolve once again to try to get the public to understand that Blacks must be

---

I wish to extend my acknowledgments to Helen and Scott Laurence of St. Croix, Virgin Islands for their rigorous critiquing throughout the development of my paper and to Jerry Surette of Cortland, N.Y. for his nimble, linguistic inputs.

\*See author's note on page 106.

legitimized in their own right. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that the acts of omission prevent the public from being exposed to and informed of the reasons behind the sexual and racial inequalities which explain why interracial conflicts and problems persist.

Accordingly, my comments will focus on why racism must be addressed specifically and consistently as an integral part of any theory of feminism and marxism. In her introduction, Hartmann is well justified in taking issue with marxist analysis as sex-blind and with feminist analysis as blind to history and insufficiently materialistic. I would extend the criticism as follows: the categories of marxism are sex-blind *and* race-blind. Feminist analysis is blind to history and insufficiently materialistic. Both marxist and feminist analysis thus do a gross injustice to Black women whose historical experiences of slavery have left them with a most peculiar legacy of scars. The material conditions of the lives of the masses of Black women play a critical and influential role in directing and determining their attitudes toward feminism. These attitudes are decidedly unfavorable and unsympathetic. Hartmann also says that "only specifically feminist analysis reveals the systematic character of relations between men and women." I feel she is speaking of white men and women so I would qualify her statement by adding that "only a specific Black feminist analysis would reveal the character of relations between Black men and Black women." A specifically Black feminist approach is called for because the psychological dynamics that function among Black men and Black women in the context of existing economic conditions, are qualitatively and culturally different from those of whites.

It is not surprising that the tri-partite marxist analysis of the woman question (historical, materialist, class) typically excludes consideration of the role of Black women. While Hartmann states that the woman question has never been the feminist question, it is equally true that the feminist question has never truly embraced Black women. Black exclusion from the woman question was lucidly publicized by Sojourner Truth in 1851 in her famous and eloquent speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls in which she repeatedly asked her audience "... and ain't I a woman?"

Assuming that the feminist question is directed at the causes of sexual inequality between women and men, and of male domi-

nance over women, it is important to note that sexual inequality between Black men and women has very different historical and cultural beginnings than the sexual inequality between white men and women. Consequently the present inequality is of a different nature and thereby calls for different strategies for change. Black women's participation in the labor force also has a very different history than white women's. The slave experience for Blacks in the United States made an ironic contribution to male-female equality. Laboring in the fields or in the homes, men and women were equally dehumanized and brutalized. Men and women together, toiling every day in the rain or sun, from "can't see to can't see" (early morning to late at night), shared equally the trials, tribulations, and torture. Moses Granby, an exslave, wrote illuminatingly about the slave experience. His accounts testify to the fact that atrocities were heaped upon Black women with equal ferocity and frequency as they were dealt to the men. For example, Granby on treatment of mothers with infants: "... women who had sucking children suffered much from their breasts becoming full of milk, the infants being left at home; they therefore could not keep up with the other hands. I have seen the overseer beat them with raw hide so that the blood and milk flew mingled from their breasts." And on treatment of pregnant slave women: "She is compelled to lie down over a hole made to receive her corpulency, and is flogged with the whip, or beat with the paddle, which has holes in it; at every stroke comes a blister."<sup>1</sup> The point being made here is that the dehumanization process for both male and female slaves was equally *brutal*. The specific physical manner of brutalization was, in many instances, different due to biological differences: men could be castrated (penis castration) and women could have their babies beat out of their bellies. But the "equalizer" was the brutality.

The rape of Black women and the lynching and castration of Black men are equally heinous in their nature. Today, the Black man carries scars from his slave experience as much as the Black woman carries her scars. We use no measuring stick for the oppression suffered by Blacks.

The documented history of Black women and men in the area of labor thus reveals that the peculiar institution of slavery played a curious role in bringing about equality among Black men and women as opposed to the inequality that was fostered among white

women and men. Angela Davis summed it:

... to extract the greatest possible surplus from the labor of the slaves—the Black woman had to be released from the chains of the myth of femininity. In the words of W.E.B. DuBois, "...our women in black had freedom contemptuously thrust upon them." In order to function as slave, the black woman had to be annulled as woman; that is, as woman in her historical stance of wardship under the entire male hierarchy. The sheer force of things rendered her equal to her man.<sup>2</sup>

There did, however, exist for Black women, more than for Black men or white women, a place where she could exercise a modicum of autonomy and that was in the domestic life of the slave quarters. It is true that the slave woman in her quarters, like the Black woman of today in her modern project, tenement building or suburban home, worked outside the home and was also responsible for "keeping her home." During slavery this position was influenced and encouraged largely by the white male patriarchy and in part by certain African traditions. Again, ironically, this situation presented the slave woman with a chance to exercise a degree of autonomy unfettered by white male dominance.

Circumstance contributed to the autonomous position maintained by the Black woman in her "household domain." Being a homemaker in the slave quarter was a cultural experience that was imposed upon the slaves. In spite of the wretched accommodations available in the quarter, Black women were able to be expressive, creative, and in their autonomy, were better able to continue the practice of African customs and habits.

In a discussion of marxism and the woman question, to speak of women, all women categorically, is to perpetuate white supremacy—white female supremacy—because it is white women to whom the comments are addressed and to whom the comments are most appropriate. As we have seen, marxist analysis focuses on the class question and shortchanges the woman question. To discuss women categorically is to commit a similar, parallel error whereby the reality of the operation of race relations within the woman question is denied. History clearly shows how and why Black women and white women today suffer from gender inequality. Writers must recognize, however, the Black women in American society have at least as much in common with Black men as with white women. The shared oppression of Blacks serves as the great

equalizer, and racial oppression wears a crown emblazoned with the words, "I am the great Equalizer!"

Hartmann's review and critique of radical feminist views and writings on patriarchy neatly encapsulates several obvious shortcomings and spotlights several instances of shortsightedness. Hartmann devotes the remainder of the section to considerations and suggestions that should be included in the development of a definition of patriarchy. Given the obvious shortcomings of the radical feminist position acknowledged by Hartmann, I feel that it would have been wiser to utilize a wholistic approach to patriarchy, using the radical feminist position as one referent source rather than trying to develop a definition by building upon a position with an inherent weakness.

Radical feminist definitions and writings on patriarchy are to be lauded for their efforts to force society to acknowledge the personal side of political ideologies and "isms," and for illuminating the concrete effects felt in the psychological and social dimensions of personal experience; and further, for showing how the debilitating effects of patriarchy shape the material conditions of individual lives.

The radical feminist emphasis on the personal as political and the use of "patriarchy" needs shoring up, and Hartmann does some of this. To refer to patriarchy as radical feminists do, as a social system characterized by male domination over women is far too general and simplified. It offers very little instructive or new information. The radical feminists do a grave injustice to the concept of the personal as political by locating it within the context of their belief that the original and basic class division is between the sexes, and that the motive force of history is the striving of men for power and domination over women. It's like placing a gem in quicksand; i.e., the value of the personal as political can be absorbed and thereby become meaningless if its surroundings are so ill-defined, insubstantial and without foundation.

Hartmann attempts to raise critical issues and questions around the radical feminist position, but she is guilty of committing an error parallel to the one she criticizes. Hartmann's definition of patriarchy as "... a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enable them in turn to dominate women..." (Hartmann, p. 14), is also too general and simplified.

For example, she gives little consideration to those whose biological color has been used to categorize them in the lowest strata regardless of sex, income, or ownership.

Hartmann is aware of the stultifying effects and destructive consequences of being blind to history, yet she remains blind to the historical role of the Black experience in the U.S. and the effects it has had on both Black and white attitudes.

In my comments, I shall emphasize those factors that must be considered in the definition of patriarchy if it is to be relevant to society today, and in particular, to the lives and souls of Black people.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE IS BLACKNESS

The radical feminists are credited with the documentation of the slogan, "the personal is political." In reading their arguments—their justifiable and astute arguments—my response was again a lamentation. For decades Blacks have been crying the same tune. They have cried out in Black English, in scholarly documents, in rebellions, in popular songs, in TV documentaries, and in marches and sit-ins. Black discontent, Blacks argued, "is not the neurotic lament of the maladjusted, but a response to a social structure in which Blacks are systematically dominated, exploited and oppressed." "*The personal is political*" is not, as Eli Zaretsky would have it, a plea for subjectivity, for feeling better: it is a demand to recognize white male power and Black subordination as a social and political reality (Hartmann, p. 13, paraphrased).

Blacks have been exhorting this lament for decades to little or no avail. It has been given little credibility or legitimacy. Blacks have been given advice and programs, characterized by the "bootstrap" philosophy, and tokenism. However, when feminists made the claim that the personal is political, and depicted their subordinate position in the social order, it became a significant part of the women's movement and the rallying point for crucial strategic moves designed to bring about changes in the power structure. When feminists recognize that the personal is political for women, while ignoring its similar application for Blacks, they assume a self-centered and self-righteous position. More importantly, applying the personal is political to Blacks would mean the inclusion of males as well as females, and this is extremely problematic for radical feminists. Nonetheless, it is a fact that must be dealt with if

Black women are to be involved in the feminist movement. In addition, the word "white" would have to be inserted in front of "males" throughout the discussion of patriarchy for the use of the phrase to be acceptable to the majority of Blacks.

Radical feminists use patriarchy to refer to a social system characterized by male domination over women. And who can argue that in western society such is not the case? But Third World people have a documented history that contradicts the "since the beginning of humankind male supremacy" doctrine. Eleanor Leacock speaks to this point:

The fact is glossed over that in much of the pre-colonial world, women related to each other and to men in public and autonomous ways as they carried out the social and economic responsibilities. Female sodalities of various kinds figured importantly in many third world social structures before principles of male dominance within families were taught by missionaries, defined by legal statutes, and institutionalized through the economic relations of colonialism.

Ethnohistorical and ethnographic data are also documenting the public functions of women's organizations and their lineage roles in Africa. The distinction generally made between a male "public" sphere and a female "domestic" sphere distorts the very nature of the "preindustrial, precapitalist, and precolonial world," where "power, authority, and influence within the 'domestic sphere' was *de facto* power, authority and influence at certain levels within the 'public sphere.'" In West African societies, the "public sphere" was not conceptualized as masculine. The impressive political demonstrations of Ibo women some half century ago have been well documented.<sup>3</sup>

When Third World women today struggle against their own oppression, they also struggle against oppression in general. They are more concerned with strategies for change than with theories about the origin of the basic division of dominance and submission. This is not to say that they are not concerned or familiar with their past. The material conditions of their present lives coupled with a heightened political awareness supplies a constant motivational energy for change. If they were to diligently pursue the origin of male-female relationships, chances are that the stereotypical views of female dependency as a universal norm would be seriously challenged. Thus, "as data about women around the

world accumulate, passing statements about them as subordinate housewives and mothers, commonplace in anthropological writing, are being replaced by analyses of their decision-making roles in different types of society."<sup>4</sup>

What I found most objectionable in Hartmann's definition of patriarchy was her categorical lumping together of *all* men in U.S. society into one group—Black, white, Chicano, Native American, Puerto Rican—reinforcing the purely biological distinction. She does say that patriarchal hierarchy places men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups in different places within the hierarchy. But Hartmann leaves it at that. She goes on to say that men are united in their shared dominance over women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that dominance; that all men are bought off by being able to control at least some women; and they are dependent on one another to maintain their control over women. Historically, Black men were definitely not afforded supremacy over any females. To quote from Angela Davis' article on the Black woman:

Excepting the woman's role as caretaker of the household, male supremacist structures could not become deeply embedded in the internal workings of the slave system. Though the ruling class was male and rabidly chauvinistic, the slave system could not confer upon the Black man the appearance of a privileged position vis-a-vis the Black woman. The man-slave could not be the unquestioned superior within the "family" or community, for there was no such thing as the "family provided" among slaves. The attainment of slavery's intrinsic goals was contingent upon the fullest and most brutal utilization of the productive capacities of every man, woman and child. They all had to "provide" for the master. The Black woman was totally integrated into the productive force.<sup>5</sup>

During slavery the Black male was disallowed a superior position in relation to the Black female and there is really no question about Black men having control over white women. During this period Black women were the victims of the most vicious, atrocious, defiling and dehumanizing rapist behavior committed on American soil. Black men on the other hand were projected as rapists shortly after the Civil War to provide the racist white mentalities with a justification for lynching. Ida B. Wells did a magnificent job (in her article "Lynching and Rape: an Exchange of Views") of documenting crimes and proving with devastating accuracy that the "ir-rationale" for the savage practice of lynching was rarely the

charge brought against the intended victim.<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, no white man has in the history of the U.S. ever been executed for raping a Black woman. At present, there is basically very little change in the interracial power relationships among the sexes. White men continue to dominate, exploit, and oppress all women in social, economic, sexual, and political areas. Black men have "learned" to dominate, exploit, and oppress Black women in an ersatz manner which is nonetheless genuinely degrading and oppressive to the Black woman.

It may sound rhetorical to make the blanket statement that white men dominate all women, and that Black men have "learned" to dominate Black women. But the exceptions to these cases that make the rule carry very little weight as change agents in the general order of male dominance. The societal structures dictate this dominance to a large extent. However, Black men in actuality never had and still have no power over white women; it is more accurate to say that all white women have ultimate power over Black men—penis power included. This statement requires elaboration and qualification: I would raise the question—in what area(s) do Black men have power over white women? Black men have no real economic power. Blacks own 1.2% of business equity; 1.2% of farm equity; and 0.1% of stock equity in the U.S.A. U.S. business receipts in 1977 amounted to \$2 trillion. Minority business accounted for 1.5% of this total. Political power is tied to economic power so Black male political clout suffers the same anemia as Black economic power. On the interpersonal level, a vagrant, thieving white woman can be vindicated, even lionized by crying "rape" or "assault" if the accused is Black. When Black males are in personal relationships with white women, it is very possible that the male dominates her and uses her money and body. In the final analysis, however, the white woman has the ultimate power because the judicial system is racist, the executive system is racist, and the legislative system is racist. If she wants "out" the system is on her side, and that's what I mean by ultimate power. Even the Black pimp with white women in his stable is ultimately controlled by the white males of the organized crime power elite. It will be argued that Black males have penis power over women. While the Black male may dominate, abuse, and oppress the white woman, when the deal goes down, she holds the trump card. The majority of those unions are temporary and the

power that the Black male assumes is more ego power than anything else (although Black male misogyny reinforces male supremacy in general). Capitalism and patriarchy simply do not offer to share with Black males the seat of power in their regal solidarity.

Towards the end of the section on patriarchy Hartmann states that it might be most accurate, for example, to refer to our society not simply as "capitalistic" but as "patriarchal capitalistic white supremacist." But instead of using this as the main building block of her discussion, she glosses over the racial dimension and lumps it in a category with class, nationality, marital status, age, and sexual orientation.

Hartmann's concluding definition of patriarchy mentions a solidarity among men which enables them in turn to dominate women. I venture to say that there is more solidarity between white males and females than between white males and Black males. A nationwide questionnaire asking Black and white males their attitudes on interracial dating, marriage, neighborhoods and schools, showed that white preference for Black interracial dating, etc., remains a preference on the part of whites alone. The slight increase in interracial marriage in the past few years notwithstanding, the fact remains that whites bond together more on the basis of their whiteness than on their biological sex. The recent busing incident in Boston, as a case in point, showed white adults pitted against Black children; not white men against Black children or white men against all females—it was Black vs. White. And Black females will readily inform you that in a crunch, particularly in public places, it is the Black man far more readily than the white woman who will come to the defense and aid of a Black woman. Some lesbian radical feminists are proving to be an exception. They alone as a group of women will more readily offer aid or come to the defense of a Black woman. With this exception, then, Black women have to depend on their Black men for support, aid, and interest when facing a crisis or daily difficulties.

But it is also true that Black males have a much greater solidarity among themselves than they do with Black women. In defining patriarchy, Black males must be separated out from white males. In discussing solidarity among all males the problems of racism have to be articulated and approaches and strategies for solving them generated.<sup>7</sup>

Hartmann argues that "patriarchy as a system of relations among men and between men and women exists in capitalism and

that in capitalist societies a healthy and strong partnership exists between patriarchy and capital" (Hartmann, p. 19). I agree that this partnership is healthy in terms of its success in perpetuating and strengthening the existing inequities and exploitation that goes on in our society. It is healthy and strong in maintaining racism, sexism, and classism. Hartmann continues her argument by explaining the partnership on the basis of the capitalist mode of production and the abuse of women's labor. Within the framework of this partnership both Black males and females are grossly exploited along with white women. But Black females are on the very bottom rung of the occupational status ladder. What Hartmann and other white feminists fail to realize is that while white men have set up the situation such that women and Blacks are exploited and in competition with one another over a few token jobs and privileges (like union admission and keys to the executive bathrooms), it has been white women themselves who have actually carried out the "divide and conquer" strategy. Whether white women have held the major seats of power in the United States or not, the fact remains that, with white males they have participated in and benefited from a social system based on the subjugation of people of color.

The location of white women in America as the *benefactors* of racism has enabled them to ignore their whiteness. The location of Black women in American society as the *objects* of racism, has precluded the possibility that they might have their womanness as their sole identity. White women must realize that as womanness circumscribes their whiteness, (they are not white males), so their whiteness circumscribes their womanness. White feminists must come to terms with the circumscribing nature of their whiteness.<sup>8</sup>

The role of white males in the partnership of patriarchy and capital has to be discussed in relationship to the laborers, consumers, the exploited who are the providers for the beneficiaries of patriarchy and capital. These providers are predominantly women, both Black and white, and Black males. It is incumbent upon white feminists to: (1) recognize their implication in the partnership, as benefactors and tools; (2) address the unique problems of Black women in the labor force; (3) distinguish between the role of white men and Black men in the partnership of capital and patriarchy. In this context, Blacks are placed in an extremely powerless

and precarious position, and one which is vulnerable to white male domination—since money talks.

### THE BLACK DIFFERENTIAL

Hartmann raises many strategic questions surrounding the move towards a more progressive union between marxism and feminism. The exclusion of the race question is a serious omission and the inclusion of it further complicates an already problematic affair. But such is the nature of dealing with serious and complex theoretical problems. I raise the following point on the racial issue: if one can claim that marxism is incomplete without a consideration of feminism, it is certainly true that neither is complete without a consideration of racial relations. Of course one could argue that every relationship is unique and race relations have no patent on uniqueness; that no general theories are adequate, and from this point of view, most theories are too general. However, there is ample evidence to indicate that relations between races have a long and important history which is not reducible to relations between the sexes or classes. An analysis of racism thus should be undertaken prior to, or at least in conjunction with, the discussion of marxist feminist relations, thus facilitating a better understanding of how to integrate race into a theory of marxism-feminism.

The marxist might argue that both sexism and racism are due to an established set of classes with a proletariat engaged in producing surplus capital for the dominant classes. As the extensive brutality of women by men does not appear to be reducible to the economic factors involved, so the virulent suppression of one race by another does not appear reducible to purely economic considerations. This appears reasonable. But more than appearance of validity is required. Both empirical evidence and deeper theoretical analysis is needed. Hartmann states that sexual differences are more basic than those based on "capital," and I agree with her. But I will claim that racial differences and antagonisms are *no longer* basically due to economic exploitation.

Marxist theory did not and could not account for a role that advanced technology would play with its resulting effects on modes of production, social relations, and new social classes (e.g., nouveau riche, superstars, mafia, drug lords, etc.). Certain dimensions of marxist theory that applied to the marxist world view in the

mid-1800s are no longer applicable in the 1970s. In a parallel fashion, economic considerations are no longer the basis for racial discrimination and exploitation. Racial prejudices have become so ingrained in white U.S. society that a typical racist anti-Black mentality has developed, with emotion and ignorance ruling over intellect. Education, professional jobs, and housing are three areas where empirical evidence proves that economics is no longer the prime motivator for Black exclusion and exploitation. The very fact that we had to have affirmative action plans in educational arenas speaks for itself in indicating the depth of racial biases. School systems "prefer" to lose government funding rather than comply with desegregation laws. Professional football teams would rather go with a losing white quarterback than with a winning Black one. The fact that winning teams make money cannot compete with the powerful aversion against having a Black "director" of the team. Black school teachers and administrators are the first to be dismissed when a cut-back in staffing is required. This occurs particularly in the south where the schools are predominantly Black. In many cases white teachers and administrators who remain receive higher pay than those dismissed. Realtors falsely claim that property devalues when Blacks move into a predominantly white neighborhood. Realtors systematically keep Blacks out of certain areas regardless of the Black family's income.

The claim is made, for example in banks' and offices, that too many Blacks in official or administrative positions will drive away white customers and clients, and therefore for economic reasons too many Blacks cannot be hired. Where this phenomenon occurs (whites avoiding places with "too many" Blacks) the white citizens have been carefully conditioned and programmed.

Hartmann concludes her essay by saying that the struggle to establish socialism must be a struggle in which groups with different interests form an alliance; and that women should not trust men to "liberate" them "after the revolution," in part because there is no reason to think that they would know how, and in part because there is no necessity for them to do so; in fact, their immediate self-interest lies in the continued oppression of women. Black women have to be considered as one of those groups with special interests. Just as women cannot trust men to "liberate" them, Black women cannot trust white women to "liberate" them during or "after the revolution," in part because there is little

reason to think that they would know how; and in part because white women's immediate self-interest lies in continued racial oppression. To date feminists have not concretely demonstrated the potential or capacity to become involved in fighting racism on an equal footing with sexism. Adrienne Rich's recent article on feminism and racism is an exemplary one on this topic.<sup>9</sup> She reiterates much that has been voiced by Black female writers, but the acclaim given to her article shows again that it takes whiteness to give even Blackness credibility. White feminists have to learn to deal adequately with the fact that by virtue of their whiteness they are oppressors as well as oppressed persons. "It is a mystical belief in 'womanhood' that suggests that 'woman' is the most natural and the most basic of all human groupings and can therefore transcend the race divisions of our society."<sup>10</sup> This is no more likely than the belief that marxist ideology can transcend sexism.

A strong viable feminist movement must give full consideration to both Black and white women. As such there is a real and obvious need for research dealing with Black feminist theory and analysis. Acknowledgement should be given to those few Black women active in these tasks. Several of these women are: Barbara and Beverly Smith of the Combahee River Collective who have made valuable contributions to Black feminist literature; Audre Lorde whose poetry is often well grounded in a Black feminist analysis; and Carroll Oliver whose pioneering work in the development of a revolutionary Black feminist theory is admirable.<sup>11</sup>

Black feminists have a crucial role to play in the present movement. They must include themselves from their own organized base. "The historiography about the women's movement has been distorted to depict Black women as indifferent or hostile to the feminist movement. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn asserts that Black women were concerned about the same issues that white women campaigned against—slavery, liquor, and sex discrimination—but for the most part they were discouraged by white women from participating fully in the women's movement. Prejudice and discrimination were elements that affected the daily lives of most Blacks during the 19th and 20th centuries."<sup>12</sup>

In order for the current movement to avoid the mistakes of the past, it is incumbent upon Black and white feminists to discover the vulnerabilities of U.S. capitalism and imperialism both of which embody male supremacy and white supremacy. Common strategies must be decided upon and clarified and then the two



groups must utilize their various tactics in moving towards their common goals. The fight against white supremacy and male domination over women is directly linked to the worldwide struggles for national liberation. Protracted struggle must take place on an international level. As Black and white feminists combine forces in the struggle against male supremacy and white supremacy, they must be willing to communicate and follow a format consisting of dialogue (with the purpose of mutual education), practice, more dialogue, and more practice—moving slowly but inexorably towards advanced levels of understanding and respect for one another's differences. The similarities among women are easier to understand and should be used as building blocks towards understanding and respect for racial and class differences. The possibility of an alliance between Black and white women can only be realized if white women understand the nature of their oppression within the context of the oppression of Blacks. At that point we will be able to speak of "The Happy Divorce of Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Racism," and the impending marriage of Black revolutionary socialism and socialist feminism.

Author's note: Throughout my response I have referred to Black women rather than Third World women or other specific minorities. This is due to the respect that I hold for their different historical and cultural backgrounds. I am fully cognizant of the fact that in most cases what is applicable to Black women would also be applicable to other minority women in the U.S. However, I do not think that I could speak for all minority women when there are such significant differences among us.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Granby, Moses, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Granby: Late a Slave in the United States of America* (Boston, 1844), p. 18.
2. Davis, Angela, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Black Scholar*, Volume 3, no. 4 (December 1971).
3. Leacock, Eleanor, "The Study of Women: Ideological Issues," unpublished, 1978.
4. Eleanor Leacock in Reiter, Rayna, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975); Schlegel, *Sexual Stratification: A Cross-Cultural View* (New York: Columbia University Press).
5. Davis, Angela, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
6. Wells, Ida B., "Lynching and Rape: an Exchange of Views," San Jose State University, occasional papers series no. 25, 1977.
7. The strategies for solving problems generated by racism would involve massive propaganda campaigns, enforcement of civil rights laws already on the books, and greater economic equality. A la Cuba, institutional racism can be practically eliminated.
8. Armstrong, Pat, SUNY conference paper, 1972.
9. Rich, Adrienne, "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism and Gynophobia," *Chrysalis* #7, 1979.
10. Armstrong, Pat, "Racism and Feminism: Division among the Oppressed," unpublished paper, 1972.
11. I consider Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Black Super Woman* more dysfunctional than enlightening. Her publication, fraught with confusion and distortions, presents an ahistorical child's eye view of the Black movement. For the white media to laud this book so highly and refer to it as a major turning point in the study of male-female relations among Black people, is suspect, and an insult to the intellect of Black people.
12. Harley, Sharon, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1970), p. xx.