Readers' Speakout

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Dear Editors:

The article in the Summer 1980 *Women's Studies Newsletter* (vol. 8, no. 3), "Building Coalitions between Women's Studies and Black Studies: What Are the Realities?," by Ann Cathey Carver, is to my mind excellent. The understanding by this professor of the very real social realities that make for problems between Women's Studies and Black Studies — and between Black and white women — reflects a tremendous sensitivity which has obviously grown out of extended acquaintance with the Black experience. As a Black woman, concerned with both racism and sexism in the society, I think such perceptive analysis is invaluable. I hope that this piece will be read and understood by many, many others. On such a basis, it is possible to develop strong coalitions, stronger interrelationships and trust, and more intimate one-to-one relationships between faculty and students of both programs and between Black and white women.

In this context, one central observation by Carver is worth reemphasizing: her indication that the survival (italics mine) of Black women and men "depends primarily on overcoming the obstacles imposed by institutionalized attitudes, rules, and behaviors based on race." Survival (with one's spirit intact) still represents the major problem which Black people in the collective sense — including Black women, who have always played a critical role in just such a regard — find themselves forced to face. The experiential gap between Black and white women in this respect may even now make it hard for white women to recognize that "terror" is an instrument historically utilized to keep Black people contained in this society. Thus, as we see about us a rise in terroristic groups (the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, and others psychologically beset), the threat to the stability of the society at large is a very serious one. At the same time ultrarightist attitudes toward women reflecting a morbid mysticism in regard to questions of abortion and changes in the political, economic, and social status of women (as would be symbolically indicated by acceptance of the ERA) illustrate the manner in which questions of sex and race historically go hand and hand in this land — a critical difference being, however, that the physical survival of white women and their families is rarely threatened, whatever the psychological toll exacted.

Perhaps the most important point is that women realize that care must be taken in any instance of prevailing majority views to make certain that the majority do not trample upon the history, the judgment, and the insight of those among the minority long engaged in struggle (admittedly not always without ugliness gaining a foothold). Carver's comprehensive piece spells out so very many principles and guidelines through which the building of coalitions and the sharing of strategies may be pursued. Not all women can articulate these as well as she, but all, it seems to me — or nearly all — should be able to recognize a valuable contribution to understanding when it is made.

Such a contribution she has certainly made. I am currently working on this topic in expanded form to reflect a broader analysis of our culture through the twin institutions of racism and sexism. I am therefore personally grateful to Carver for illustrating in her own person and perspective the insight of which women, it seems to me, should be consistently capable.

Sincerely,

Jewell Handy Gresham
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To members of the NWSA:

Since we'll be talking about racism at the 1981 Convention, here are a couple of labels I'd like you all to think about:

(1) Third World Women: As an (East) Indian feminist, I resent this term. I refuse to accept the idea that white Caucasian women are First World and that the "red" ones are Second World. Who are you — sisters, as you call yourselves — to put the rest of the world's female population on the bottom rung?

(2) Women of Color: This one's a laugh. Is "white" not a color? Likewise, are not many Hispanics and Orientals white in color? The differentiation between Caucasian and Woman of Color does not hold either — many women of the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East are Caucasian.

Perhaps the best term for non-WASPs is Minority Women — at least it sounds unprejudiced. I identified with some of Leila Ahmed's problems of facelessness at the 1980 Convention *Women's Studies Newsletter* 8:3 (Summer 1980), but I also understand that it is up to us — the minor minorities, so to speak — to speak up for ourselves.

So here's an Indian Hindu woman writing to you all, claiming sisterhood, not as Third World or colored, but as a feminist and a woman.

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To Quarterly Readers:

Faculty women at Portland State University, Oregon State College of Education, Oregon State University, and the University of Oregon have filed a class action suit seeking redress for discrimination in salary, promotion, tenure, and other opportunities at the institutions of the Oregon State System of Higher Education.

The lawsuit grew, in part, out of discussions held on several campuses over the past several years. Preliminary data collected at three of the institutions supported the idea that a pattern of discrimination by sex exists throughout the state system. Hence, on May 1, 1980, Penk, Spencer, et al., filed suit. After some delay, the state system provided necessary documents, and in February 1981 the motion to certify the class was filed in Federal Court in Portland.

A committee composed of the lead plaintiffs, consultants, and supporters — Faculty Women for Equity — has been formed and has the support of the American
Anthropologist Sondra Hale has a new two-year appointment as Director of Women’s Studies at California State University—Long Beach. She has been awarded one-quarter release time for the development of a grant to mainstream women’s studies throughout the curriculum.

Gloria Bowles, Director of Women’s Studies at the University of California—Berkeley, last year received a grant from the Quill Foundation to offer a course on Vocational Issues for Women’s Studies Majors.

Myra Dinnerstein, Director of Women’s Studies at the University of Arizona, was recently awarded a $275,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to mainstream women’s studies into introductory courses. Since 1975, Dinnerstein has raised almost one million dollars in grant monies from private and public agencies for the Women’s Studies Program and the Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROW).

SIROW has received a $72,574 grant from the Elementary and Secondary Education Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities for the establishment of an Extended Teacher Institute for Women’s Studies in Literature. During the summers of 1981 and 1982, the Institute will introduce 60 secondary teachers of English within the SIROW four-state area (Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado) to the new research on women authors and images of women in literature and, in particular, to multicultural material by and about women of the Southwest. The program, to be conducted at the University of Arizona, is directed by Sidonie Smith, Associate Professor of English at the University of Arizona, and Mary Lynn Hamilton, Coordinator of Arizona’s Institute for Equality in Education and a teacher at Cholla High School.

At the University of South Florida in Tampa, Judith Ochshorn, Director of Women’s Studies, has begun formal procedures to institute an autonomous B.A. program. Ochshorn is planning both for a regular women’s studies degree and for one with a specialty in human services. She has strong administrative support within the College and must work to gain faculty support, as well as to gather the necessary documentation and write a strong proposal.

At the Claremont Colleges, a consortium of six private institutions in Southern California, approximately 35 faculty members have been participating in a Faculty Development Seminar in Women’s Studies, as part of a three-semester plan to study together about “Women and Achievement.” They have focused on the ways in which women develop autonomy, creativity, and excellence. First, they studied the character of the traditional women’s culture in which most women have been brought up — and the ways in which women’s experiences help or hinder the development of full powers. Then, through the discussion of selected texts in literature and biography, the group began to discuss the lives of achieving women. Finally, this semester, they are attempting to ask: where do we go from here? How do we apply what we seem to be learning to the process of teaching our students? Professor Emerita Jean Walton, Director of Women’s Studies for the Consortium, has been coordinating the Seminar.

The Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) has received a grant of $175,000 from the Lilly Foundation toward launching the first two years of a national Summer Institute in Women’s Studies. In 1981, the Institute, entitled “Toward a Feminist Transformation of the Curriculum,” will be held on the campus of the University of Michigan from July 12 to August 1. For further information, write to Beth Reed, GLCA, 220 Collingwood, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

At the University of Kansas, where an autonomous B.A. degree-granting Women’s Studies Program has been in operation since 1976, no appointments were made directly in women’s studies until 1980. Beginning last fall, Ann Schofield was hired half-time in women’s studies, half-time in history.

At Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, a 36-hour interdepartmental minor in women’s studies, designed to offer students a comprehensive program for the investigation of women’s experience in the Western world, is currently under consideration by the Ball State Undergraduate Educational Policies Council.

Finally, an international note: Jenrose Felmley, Washington, D.C., librarian, is the first person to be awarded a Fulbright Scholarship in Women’s Studies. She is currently at Waikato University in New Zealand, working with the collection of women-related materials there.

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Association of University Professors, the Oregon Federation of Teachers, and the Oregon State Employees’ Association.

If what is happening in Oregon is typical, a small group of women has already put in untold volunteer hours analyzing a mass of data—and the struggle has just begun. Money is urgently needed to pay for computer runs of salaries and other necessary expenses.

As the letters from SUNY-Stony Brook and Cornell make clear (Women’s Studies Newsletter 8:4 [Fall/Winter 1980]), plaintiffs and their groups need support—both moral and financial—to supplement their own courageous and costly efforts.

Perhaps we, the Quarterly readership, can celebrate our new status by contributing at least token sums to the various groups who have solicited our help. If so, please add the Oregon group, Faculty Women for Equity, to the list and send contributions: c/o Hilda Young, Student Affairs, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403.

Thank you,

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