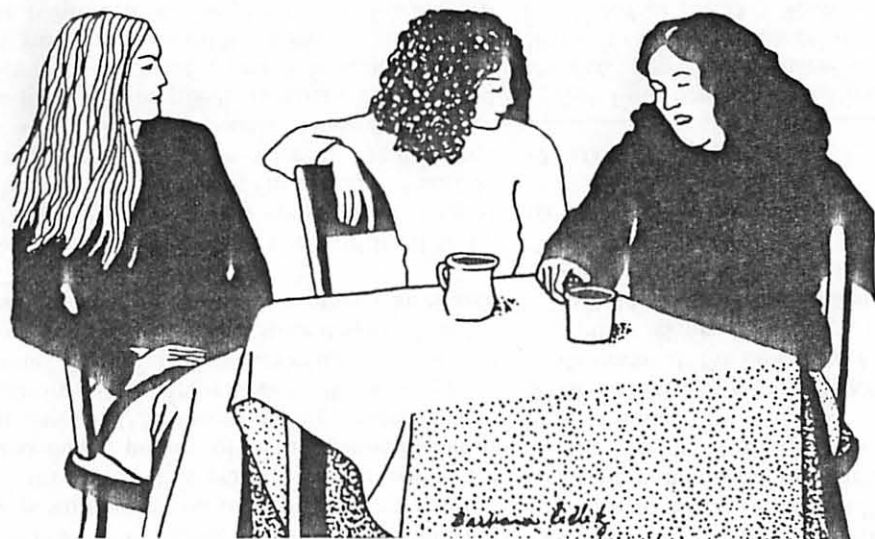




Organizing Strategies

In many respects, "Organizing to Stop Violence Against Women" was a delightful contrast to the other conference workshops. The audience got its first hint that they would not be passive note-takers when Susan Schechter and Barbara Hart, the Coordinators, arranged chairs in a circle and asked each woman present to introduce herself. The group was diverse, and shelter and anti-rape workers slightly out-numbered law students. But the most distinguishing feature of the workshop was the strong feminist analysis in the presentation, an analysis which was less apparent in some of the other workshops. The audience was composed of both long-time activists and women who seemed to have had less exposure to feminist political theory in the anti-rape and anti-battering movements.

The workshop was a condensed exercise in organizing a campaign for a specific event. The example used for the exercise was a lobbying effort for a marriage license tax to raise funds for shelters and a plan for responding to right-wing opposition to shelters as being "passels of lesbians." Susan ably led the group through the organizing steps (developing the political content of the issue; designing a plan of action; anticipating problems and responding to attacks) and gave a crash course in feminist theory in the process.

The ambitiousness of the presentation was its major drawback; the exercise needed a much longer

time period than the two hours allotted. One sensed that many members of the group had specific ideas for organizing on various issues, and there was not time during the workshops to share strategies and exchange stories of success and failure. Nor was there an opportunity to question or debate the assumptions behind some of the comments offered by the women present (such as the shelter's responsibility to reunite families or provide counseling to batterers). But both the large turnout for this workshop and the fact the workshop seemed to end far too soon attest to the need for more time for organizing workshops at the next national conference.

Next year's conference will be held in Washington, DC in April, 1983. A Steering Committee is now working on plans for the workshops to be included in the conference. We expect that once again, the subjects of violence against women and children will be well-represented in the workshops. If you have ideas or suggestions for panel topics or speakers, the conference co-ordinators would like to hear from you. Write: 14th National Conference on Women and the Law, Antioch University Law School, Meyer House, Room 302, Washington, DC 20009.

Jean Noonan and Diane Conner are Aegis staff members and are also attorneys for the Federal Trade Commission, handling credit discrimination cases.



Rape & Third World Women

by Loretta J. Ross

The 1980's have witnessed a terrifying escalation of violence committed against Third World people. The murder of the Atlanta children and the support of the right-wing junta in El Salvador have created an atmosphere where the brutalization of Third World people is commonplace. In this context, the issue of rape and its effects on Third World communities became one of the leading discussions at the First National Conference on Third World Women and Violence in August, 1980.

For the first time, Third World activists involved in community anti-violence work across the country met at the Rape Crisis Center in Washington, D.C. We began to address sexual assault from the myriad of perspectives we represented. As a starting point, we broadened our definition of who we were. Although most of us work at rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters, a significant number of us work in other community organizations not viewed as "women's" organizations. We focussed this wide range of perspectives on the critical problem of sexual assault and began the important first step of analyzing our collective history. Clearly this conference was a beginning, but it confirmed that we must

form strategies to confront this issue, develop functional programs, and enlist community support and participation in our efforts. This article will synthesize the conference proceedings which examined the history of rape and its impact on Third World Women in America. It will also discuss the historical involvement of Third World activists in addressing sexual and racial oppression within national liberation struggles and the women's movement.

The conference defined "Third World" as those nations struggling to break the shackles of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Principally, this includes Asia, Africa, the Pacific, South and Central America, as well as Native American, African, Hispanic and Asian people under domestic colonialism in America. While Third World was originally a phrase coined to describe a state of economic dependency and lack of technological advancement, these same characteristics of underdevelopment tragically describe the condition of African, Asian, Hispanic and Native American women worldwide, and particularly in America, the heart of imperialism. By collectively naming ourselves Third World, we begin to break down the barriers of nationalism, racism and



Rapes of black women by police are not infrequent either. "Even at the strongest time of the civil rights movement in Birmingham, 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."¹⁰

THE MEANING OF HISTORY

The specific role rape plays in the subordination of black women is perceived by Gerda Lerner as one aspect of the colonial oppression of blacks:

"The practice of raping the women of a defeated enemy is worldwide and is found in every culture. The occurrence of this practice during many race riots and during periods of terror against Blacks at various times in U.S. history merely affirms the colonial nature of the oppression of Black people in the United States. It is the ultimate expression of contempt for a defeated foe, since it symbolizes his helplessness more fully than any other conceivable act...."

The historical record does not lend itself to interpretations explaining such events as the isolated acts of criminal individuals. The absence of punishment of white and Black men for the same offense simply underscores the double standard of justice for the ruler and the ruled. It must be understood that 'individual acts of criminal behavior' on the part of white men toward Black women arise out of and are reinforced by the prevalent cultural racist myths."¹¹

Angela Davis explains how colonial oppression of blacks is implied with every act of rape of a black woman by a white man:

"... rape is not one-dimensional and homogeneous — but one feature that does remain constant is the overt and flagrant treatment of women, through rape, as property. Particular rape cases will then express different modes in which women are handled as property."

Thus when a white man rapes a black woman, the underlying meaning of this crime remains inaccessible if one is blind to the historical dimensions of the act.... And, "For black women, rape perpetrated by white men, like the social stereotype of black men as rapists, must be classed among the brutal paraphernalia of racism...."¹²

FOOTNOTES

The following resources contain much more information on this subject:

3. A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., "Virginia Led the Way in Legal Oppression." *Washington Post*. May 21, 1978.
4. Socialist Women's Caucus of Louisville, "The Racist Use of Rape and the Rape Charge." July, 1975. P.O. Box 11416, Louisville, KY 40211.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. Elsie Scott, "Rape and Racism: the Case of the Southern Black Defendant." United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, 297 Park Ave. South, Rm. 23, New York, NY 10010. Newsletter.
8. Gerda Lerner, editor, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*. New York: Vintage Books, (1973) p. 163. (An especially useful book for gaining a historical perspective.)
9. Angela Davis, "The Dialectics of Rape." *Ms.*, June, 1975. p. 74.
10. "The Racist Use of Rape and the Rape Charge"
11. Lerner, p. 172.
12. Davis, "Dialectics of Rape."

Deb Friedman has been a member of FAAR and the D.C. Rape Crisis Center for the past six years. Deb is a founding member of FAAR and served on the Board of the D.C. Rape Crisis Center for four years.

Black and Third World women have developed their own perspectives and priorities in the anti-rape movement. In the next article, originally published in the *FAAR Newsletter*, May/June 1977, I. Nkenge Toure reports on a conference on "Special Populations" held in April of 1977, by the National Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape, and addresses some of those ideas. This article is followed by an interview with Ms. Toure and Michele Plate, which appeared in the November/December 1976 issue of the *FAAR Newsletter*. The interviewers were Jackie MacMillan and Sue Lenaerts.

BLACK FOCUS

by I. Nkenge Toure

The knowledge that the National Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape is holding a series of working conferences on issues pertaining to sexual assault is spreading rather rapidly among that segment of the larger community involved in rape from the service, treatment or research end. However, with fewer Black and/or Third World women involved in activities related to rape, that part of the community is obviously going to be more isolated or less likely to have access to information concerning this conference series. For purposes of bridging this gap, information will be shared here on the outcome of the Black focus group from the Northeast regional Special Populations conference — Blacks being one of the "special populations" groups identified.

Several important points should be recognized to place this information into perspective:

1. Blacks have just recently (in the last two years, approximately) become involved in rape organizing through the vehicle of rape crisis centers and hot-lines, as well as hospitals, community mental health centers, and social services; and, at this point in time our numbers are relatively low by comparison to others involved in this activity.

2. There is no accurate research available on Blacks in relationship to rape.

3. No research has been done for the most part by Blacks that would provide a realistic, rational and proper perspective with which to view this phenomenon in the Black community. Existing research, if it can be so called, has been conceived on the basis of racism, sexual stereotypes, dogmatism, a compiled wealth of assumptions, and is characteristic of that element in research which operates beyond the realm of ethics.

Workshops of the Black focus group included:

Societal Biases and Assumptions
Prevention
Treatment
Special Ethical Concerns
Future Directions

Racism was evident as one of the causes of the problem of rape as it affects Blacks. This was discussed during the Biases and Assumptions Workshop which dealt with myths. Some of the myths identified were:

- Blacks were inherently more active sexually;
- Sexual assault exists primarily within the confines of the Black community, especially that portion defined as the Ghetto;
- Black women are strong under stress and therefore are not affected by being raped;
- Blacks are accustomed to violence in their daily lives, so rape is not considered too serious an offense by Black women.

Obviously, confronting a rape is no less difficult for the Black woman. We are faced with the usual "victim at fault" attitude perpetuated against the majority of rape victims in addition to having to contend with the institutionalized racism that is inherent in the American way of life.

Prevention was a major concern in the Black focus group. Reporting as a means of prevention was explored, the proposed rationale being that if more



a slave auction—culver pictures

a maximum sentence of no more than 20 years, depending on the state. Nowhere in the law was the rape of a black woman considered a crime.⁴

The rape of slave women by whites was in fact a common occurrence. In addition to having no protection from the sexual whim of any white man, many black women were forced to comply with ongoing sexual relations with the white owner. Although some black women received slightly better treatment than many of the other slaves for providing sexual services to the white owner, it is clear that their relationships were rarely consensual. Refusals were not treated lightly.

In addition to having total sexual rights to slave women, white slave owners used black women to breed a constant supply of slave children. In some states in particular, slave breeding was a profitable trade. The use of slave women as "breeders" and as concubines was in total disregard of relationships between black men and women. That a slave woman he used sexually had a husband was of little concern to the master. Thus were blacks forced to bear sexual as well as racial transgressions against them as people.

After slavery ended, sexual and physical terror were used as the means of keeping blacks in their place. In their pamphlet entitled, "The Racist Use of Rape and the Rape Charge," the Socialist Women's Caucus of Louisville describe the end of Reconstruction:

"After the Civil War, there was a brief period of Reconstruction. The freed slaves won the right to vote and own land, and they joined with poor whites to set up new governments in the Old Confederacy. This brief experiment in democracy was overthrown literally by force and violence; the Ku Klux Klan and other such groups began a reign of terror that lasted for decades... This was the period when the Jim Crow laws were enacted—making it a crime for Black and white to come together in any way, even for a game of checkers in some places."⁵

The systematic terrorization of black communities by the Klan frequently included the rape of black women. A common practice by the Klan during an attack on a black community was to rape the women, and burn peoples' homes and churches. Rapes served to terrorize the entire community in the same way as lynchings. Blacks were powerless

to oppose either one. A number of men were in fact lynched for attempting to defend women from their attackers.

By viciously attacking black communities (raping women and lynching both women and men), the Klan and those whose racial prejudice they helped stir up beat the newly freed black men and women into submission. This ensured the continued superior status of whites and furthered the division between whites and blacks.

"The most effective tool for this division was the cry of rape. An atmosphere was created in which every Black man was pictured to the white community — poor and rich — as a savage potential rapist, who must be kept under control...."⁶

Playing on racial fears and sexual stereotypes, the Klan was able to convince whites that all black men wanted to rape white women. Charging a number of black men with rapes of white women, the Klan gained approval among many whites for their terrorist activities.

"In the 76 years between the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and World War II, approximately 3,000 Blacks were lynched by mobs and 20% of the victims had been charged with rape."⁷

Despite the fact that for every five lynchings, only one involved an alleged rape, the rape scare was used by whites to justify the use of mob justice against black men and women. The accusation of rape was made by white men who often pressured women into supporting their charge. In many cases, the mere suggestion by a white man that a black man had had sexual relations with a white woman was enough provocation for a lynching.

The use of the rape charge to control black men and the vulnerability of black women to rapes by white men remained in force even after the Klan's power had greatly diminished by the end of the 1920's. After slavery ended, and after passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, discriminatory slave codes were eliminated, but the new rape laws called for discretionary death sentences for rape convictions. This operated as a means of allowing the courts to sentence mainly black men to death for rape.

Rapes of black women, although illegal, continued to be ignored by the law. The general attitude toward black women who had sexual relations with

white men presupposed that black women, because of their reputed great interest in and capacity for sexual activity, could not literally be raped. Today's myth of the promiscuity of black women evolved from this early assumption of black women's complicity in "illicit" sexual relations with white men. According to Gerda Lerner, editor of the book, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*:

"By assuming a different level of sexuality for all Blacks than that of whites and mythifying their greater sexual potency, the black woman could be made to personify sexual freedom and abandon. A myth was created that all black women were eager for sexual exploits, voluntarily 'loose' in their morals and, therefore, deserved none of the consideration and respect granted to white women. Every black woman was, by definition, a slut according to this racist mythology; therefore, to assault her and exploit her sexually was not reprehensible and carried with it none of the normal communal sanctions against such behavior. A wide range of practices reinforced this myth: the laws against intermarriage; the denial of the title 'Miss' or 'Mrs.' to any black woman; the taboos against respectable social mixing of the races; the refusal to let black women customers try on clothing in stores before making a purchase; the assigning of single toilet facilities to both sexes of Blacks; the different legal sanctions against rape, abuse of minors and other sex crimes when committed against white or black women."⁸

"[T]he rape of black women is directly related to the discriminatory charge of rape against black men. The same sexual stereotyping that enabled black women to be exploited caused black men to be feared."

Angela Davis, in "The Dialectics of Rape" (*Ms.*, June, 1975), points out:

"If rape was, in effect, institutionalized during slavery, essentially the same institutionalized form of rape is present today in such vestiges of slavery as domestic work. How many black women working in the homes of white people have not had to confront the 'man of the house' as an actual or potential rapist?"⁹

extended family in times of crisis. Yet, because of the strong taboos that surround sexuality in Hispanic culture, she may feel this source is not available to her.

Furthermore, for many Hispanas it is not only shame or humiliation that prevents their seeking assistance, but also a fear of deportation. The feared deportation may come in the form of immediate arrest by law enforcement officials or in the form of reprisal by the rapist as, for example, in a job situation.

The Hispanic rape victim often finds herself in a situation where discussing a rape may jeopardize not only her self esteem but her residency status, job and familial relations. Small wonder she prefers to remain silent.

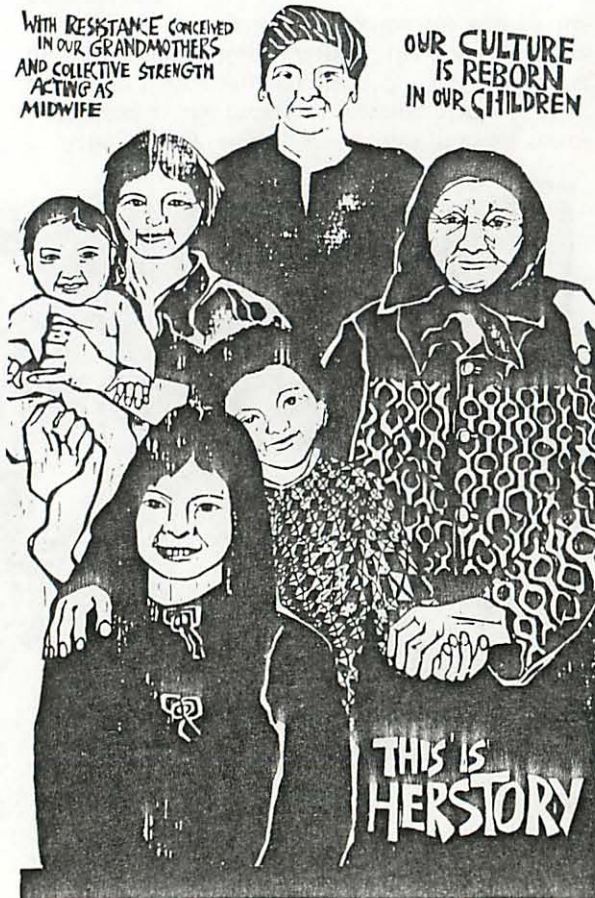
Throughout history not only Hispanas but all women have been the objects of sexual and economic exploitation. In our present society, record companies, cigarette manufacturers and the liquor industry heavily exploit female sexuality in widespread advertising campaigns. Our legal system is clearly structured to maintain women in a position subservient to men. Economic control of the society is firmly in masculine hands. We live in a society that heaps rewards to the winner, particularly for economic success, with little attention paid to the means of achieving that victory. This exploitation constitutes a form of institutional violence against women that is tolerated, especially when it is profitable, thus implicitly condoning violence against women on an individual level in the form of rape.

Thus rape is the enraged expression of a violent society. It is an act consciously perpetrated against another human being for the sole purpose of degrading and dehumanizing another. Nevertheless, the social biases that deny the violent nature of rape are well engrained in the Hispanic community and all of Western culture.

When an Hispana becomes a victim of this violence in the form of a rape she reacts to the anguish of the experience in her own way. Her reactions are consistent with her cultural heritage and her own personal belief system. But the form a victim's reaction embodies is only a vehicle for expressing a universal reality: rape is a horrible and devastating act. Its effects are felt equally by all who are victims.

When this article was written, the authors were associated with the East Los Angeles Rape Hotline. Chris Garcia was a member of the Board of Directors, Connie Desisto Guerra and Irene Mendez were Hotline founders and counselor/trainers, and Marian Mercado was a counselor.

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The unique historical roots of black women's oppression in this country, particularly regarding sexual violence, are analyzed in the following excerpts from an article written by Deb Friedman and published in the July/August 1978 issue of *FAAR* and *NCN News*.

Rape, Racism- and Reality

by Deb Friedman

Dealing with the relationship between racism and rape has not been a significant part of the feminist analysis on rape. Primarily, feminist organizers have addressed racism through exposure of myths concerning interracial rape and through programs designed to do outreach to Black, Hispanic, Chicano, Indian or Asian women. These have often come about in response to pressure, or as an outgrowth of our desire to meet the needs of all, not just some women. They are not the result of a unified analytical position on racism and rape.

We recognize that rape and racism are part of the same oppressive structure, and that they are mutually supportive. This recognition leads us to conclude that perspectives on racism must become part of our analysis of rape. This article was written to begin drawing together a comprehensive analysis of rape that coordinates anti-rape with anti-racism perspectives. It is focused on authors who have been critical of the anti-rape movement for failing to include perspectives on racism in our views of rape, because they express some of the concerns that we feel need to be addressed.

The particular experience of black people in this country inextricably links racism with the act of rape. The discriminatory prosecution of black men for the crime of rape and the gross lack of sanctions against the rape of black women (by white men particularly), constitutes the reality through which black men and women view rape.

Any view of rape is limited if it fails to incorporate a perspective on racism — first, because of the

particular *history* of the relationship between racism and rape in this country and second, because any view of rape must account for the fact that rape affects women of different races (classes, ethnic groups, etc.) in different ways.

Perspectives on rape relevant to black women can't be separated from the experience of racism. This includes racism toward black men, as well as women.

Beginning with Anne Braden ("Open Letter to Southern White Women," 1972), a number of authors have expressed concern about the racist potential of the anti-rape movement in ignoring the particular experience of black men and women with rape. Braden focuses specifically on the racist application of rape laws against black men and exhorts white women to examine how they have been used by white men to help keep black men in their place. Braden bases her arguments on the history of racism and rape in this country. History does not show rape laws to have been adopted to protect women. What history does show is how rape and laws against it, were used by white men to oppress black people.

HISTORY OF RACISM AND RAPE

Innumerable efforts were made during slavery to degrade the dignity of black people. According to A. Leon Higginbotham Jr. in an article in the *Washington Post*, degradation of slaves was incorporated into the legal codes of the southern colonies in order to institutionalize the distinction between white indentured servants — those who received their freedom after a certain number of years — and black slaves.

Sexual double standards were also codified so that the offspring of a white man and a slave woman could not by law be recognized as free. Neither white men nor white women were permitted to marry blacks. The law also created strict penalties for a white woman who gave birth to the child of a black man; however, there was no law against a white man having sexual relations with a black woman and it was not a crime if a black woman bore a white man's child.³

Rape laws were designed to maintain the property rights of white men and to control blacks. The law made rape a capital offense only for a black man found guilty of raping a white woman. A white man who raped a white woman could receive