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WOMEN, RACE AND CLASS

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THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY: STANDARD FOR A NEW WOMANHOOD

In the slave system, Black women and men were regarded as labor units, and were equal in the oppression they suffered as laborers, field workers. But Black women (unlike the men) also were subjected to sexual coercion (rape), an expression of the slaveholder's economic mastery (domination) of the the overseer's political control (repression) over slave women, its goal being to extinguish slave womens' will to resist. This is similar to institutionalized rape as a weapon of mass political terrorism in Vietnam.

Slaveowning industrialists exploited the labor of Black men and women alike, in textile, hemp and tobacco factories; in construction of roads, railroads, levees and canals; as lumberjacks and in iron foundries and coal mines. However, slave women also were used as substitute beasts of burden to pull trams in Southern mines. This was similar to the use of white women's labor in England, as described by Marx in CAPITAL. The capitalists' rationale for this was that women slaves were more profitable than free workers and male slaves, as they "cost less to capitalize and to maintain than prime males."

Domestic labor in the slave quarters was shared equally between women and men. The division of domestic labor between the sexes was neither rigid nor hierarchical. Men gardened and hunted; women kept house, cooked, etc. But the division of labor was not so rigid that the tasks were not interchanged; women also gardened and hunted, and men took care of the house as well.

For slave men, the slave system discouraged male supremacy. Because both women and men were subject to the slavemaster's absolute authority, promotion of male supremacy among slaves might have prompted a dangerous rupture in the chain of command. Hence, the ideology of sexism (the ideology of femininity created in the process of industrialization) and of male supremacy (the justification of men being providers) robbed many white women of the experience of performing productive labor--but did not apply to the slaves.

People assume that the slavemaster's refusal to acknowledge fatherhood among slaves resulted directly in a matriarchal family structure. But history discloses that the bonds of love, the cultural norms governing family relations, and the desire to stay together as a family unit survived the onslaught of slavery.

Slave women understood that whenever their men were degraded, so, too, were the women. Thus, the women defended their brothers in slavery.

Slave women were at least as fierce as slave men in their resistance to the oppression of slavery.

In sum, slave women left a legacy of hard work, perseverance and self-reliance, of tenacity, resistance and insistence on sexual equality, in short, a legacy giving rise to standards for a new womanhood.

#### THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT AND THE BIRTH OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In the 19th Century were found the following conditions. First, the ideological consequence of industrial capitalism was the shaping of a more rigorous notion of female inferiority: the development of the cults of motherhood and of true womanhood, and the notion that "women's place is in the home" (home labor having become unproductive and less prestigious). Second, the class contradiction between labor and capitalist classes began to develop, dividing white women into distinct classes. Of course, Black women had occupied a distinct class as slaves. But at this stage, some white women began working in factories and, to a lesser degree, as domestics. [The New England textile mills employed 38,927 women and 18,539 men. Ch.3, n. 25] As the industrial capitalist class began to develop, other white women became part of a rising bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.

In the early 1830's, unrest began to foment in several class sectors of the population, and eventually converged. Slave revolts were on the rise (e.g., Nat Turner's rebellion). Also, textile mills in the North were the targets of strikes and "turn-outs." At the same time, white petty bourgeois women began to fight for the right to education and to careers outside the home. In their struggles, white women--working class and petty bourgeois alike--invoked the concept of slavery in articulating their own oppression. White women became attracted to the abolitionist movement. The petty bourgeois women, who had leisure time, became the active organizers in the abolitionist movement. White working class women lacked the leisure time that would allow them to participate as actively as the petty bourgeois and bourgeois women; however, the working class women contributed money from their meager wages and organized bazaars. Hence, the most visible women in the anti-slavery campaign were petty bourgeois and bourgeois, engaging in an implicit protest against their oppressive roles at home.

There was a dialectical relationship between the causes of

anti-slavery and women's rights. Women's rights were necessary in women's struggle against slavery; denial of women's rights as women prevented women from fighting for emancipation of the slaves, and thereby, white women identified with the social

oppression experienced by slaves. On the other hand, women never would achieve their own freedom independent of Black people achieving their freedom. "Until the Negro gets his rights, we shall never have ours." [Angelina Grimke] This dialectical relationship exposes the ideological snare of insisting that one struggle is absolutely more important than the other.

#### CLASS AND RACE IN THE EARLY WOMEN'S RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

The Seneca Falls Declaration (1848) articulated the consciousness of white petty bourgeois women of their own rights. The Declaration ignored the conditions of Black women and of white working class women. Frederick Douglass was the only Black person to attend the Seneca Falls conference. The abolitionist movement's failure to promote a broad anti-racist consciousness carried over into the women's rights movement.

Years before Seneca Falls, women workers emerged in the leadership of labor militancy in the U.S. (e.g., the "Lowell Female Labor Reform Association"). By 1848, the content of the white working class was undergoing a transformation. Most women who had joined the industrial workforce before then had been from Yankee land-owning families. By 1848, these women had left the workforce, replaced by immi-grants--women and men--who owned no property and had nothing to rely on but their labor power.

The first National Convention on Women's Rights was held in 1850. Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech exposed the class bias and racism of the women's movement, reminding the women's rights activists that all women are not white and petty bourgeois or bourgeois.

With the onset of the Civil War, women's rights leaders agreed to redirect their focus to defending the Union cause.

#### RACISM IN THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

The Civil War was a war for Northern capitalists to get economic control over the entire nation. It did not constitute support for the liberation of Black people.

After the Civil War, Black men were enfranchised as a tactic to ensure the political hegemony of the Republican party in the South. This period featured intense social upheaval, through which Black people were subject to terrorism and violence. Thus, Frederick Douglass urged that the cause of Black men's suffrage was more urgent than women's suffrage. Although Frederick Douglass may have been somewhat naive to place so much emphasis on the vote, it nevertheless was understood as an EMERGENCY measure. In contrast, the women's rights leaders viewed the vote as an end in itself. Moreover, giving Black men the vote con-

tributed to the progress achieved during the decade of Radical Reconstruction. Women suffragists registered strong negative reaction to the enfranchisement of Black men, naively believing that the government had obliged itself to grant women the right to vote in exchange for their war-time assistance in the Union cause. At this juncture, women suffragists forged unprincipled alliances with racists who opportunistically supported the cause of women's suffrage.

#### WOMAN SUFFRAGE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY: THE RISING INFLUENCE OF RACISM

During the 1890's, Southern Blacks became disenfranchised and were subject to terrorist attacks in the form of lynching and rape, to name only the most common examples. This period gave rise to the development of modern racism, its major institutional supports and ideological justification. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed the Civil Rights Act of 1875. Jim Crow laws and lynching laws came into effect. The court case, Plessy v. Ferguson, established the "separate but equal" doctrine. Racism also played an important role in imperialist expansion during this era, in the Philippines, Hawaii, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

The suffragists increasingly became a reactionary force during this period. They consciously ignored the issue of racism. They advocated women's suffrage as justified because of (petty bourgeois) women's superiority over Blacks, immigrants and illiterate whites. They uncritically accepted U.S. imperialist aggression. The suffragists justified their actions because of "expediency," that is, their perceived need to avoid alienating Southern white (racist) support of their cause. By taking this position, the suffragists implicitly attacked the working class

and demonstrated their willingness to make common cause with the new monopoly capitalists. The internal basis for this reactionary conduct was bourgeois ideology, particularly racism, which blinded them to the reality of the developments under rising capitalism.

The suffragists' racist alignment turned into its opposite. At first, they justified their racist position on the grounds of expediency in furthering the cause of women's enfranchisement. However, women's suffrage became the expedient means to achieve white supremacy, and their class bias resulted in the suffragist program supporting the cult of motherhood and true womanhood (the ideology of sexism).

#### WORKING WOMEN, BLACK WOMEN, AND THE HISTORY OF THE SUFFRAGIST MOVEMENT

During the Civil War, more white women than ever before worked outside the home. In 1870, 1/4 of all non-farm workers were white women; white women constituted a majority of the garment workers; and 70% of all white women workers were domestics. The labor movement was male supremacist and racist.

The predominantly petty bourgeois suffragist movement held that women's issues were principal--the social oppression of women was considered more important than class inequality and racism. This reflects the blinding effect of bourgeois ideology. The result of this class stand was the building of unprincipled alliances against Black people and the working class. For example, suffragists urged women to work as scabs.

Working class women were concerned more about wages and working conditions than about the right to vote. Their material experience demonstrated to them that political equality did not bring about economic/class equality. This they observed in the experience of male co-workers who could vote but who were still exploited as a class.

It was not until after 1910, when women struck the garment industry, that working class women conceptualized that they could use the vote to demand better wages and working conditions. This conceptualization is attributable to the rising influence of the socialist movement. It is not surprising that working class women, unlike the petty bourgeois women in the suffragist movement, challenged the cult of motherhood and of true womanhood.

Black women, although excluded from the white women's suffragist movement, sought the vote for women and also challenged the cults of motherhood and of true womanhood. Black men, too, supported the cause of women's suffrage. This support was demonstrated during a suffragist parade in Washington, at which the marchers were jeered by white men but treated respectfully by the Black male onlookers.

In the end, the white suffragist movement's concessions made to woo Southern support was not only internally destructive, but also useless. The Southern states voted their unanimous opposition to granting women the right to vote, nearly defeating the amendment. In an ironic historical note, Black women were denied the opportunity to exercise the right granted all women to vote, and white women suffragists took no action to ensure that the legal right would be granted to women of all races.

#### THE MEANING OF EMANCIPATION ACCORDING TO BLACK WOMEN

The 1890 census revealed the following:

- ~2.7 million Black women over the age of 10 living in U.S.
- ~of these, more than 1 million were wage workers
- ~of the 1 million Black women wage workers:
  - 38.7% worked in agriculture
  - 30.8% worked in domestic service
  - 15.6% worked in laundry service
  - 2.8% worked in manufacturing

After emancipation, the convict lease system emerged as the vicious new form of servitude for ex-slaves. Black women and men were arrested pretextually and, as convicts, were leased out as laborers. This gave rise to a compelling economic interest in increasing the prison population in the Southern states. Since the lessors had no proprietary interest in this form of human property, which was leased rather than owned outright, there were no limits to the cruelty unleashed against this labor force.

A major portion of ex-slave women and men, and a large number of white immigrant women, obtained work as domestic servants. In 32 of the 48 states, domestic service was the dominant occupation of Black men and women. In Pennsylvania, 60% of all Black workers and 91% of all Black women workers were employed in dom-

estic service. RACISM AND SEXISM FREQUENTLY CONVERGE. The conditions (i.e., wages and working conditions) of white immigrant women working as domestics always were fixed by the racist criteria used to set wages and conditions of Black women domestics. Domestic service, not surprisingly, has been the least fulfilling labor and the most difficult sector to unionize.

The 1940 census revealed that, of all employed Black women, 54% were domestic workers, and 10.4% worked in non-domestic service occupations. World War II's demands for women's participation in production offered Black women the opportunity to work in industry. During that period, Black women more than doubled their numbers in industry. But in 1960, of all Black women workers, at least 1/3 were domestic workers and 1/5 non-domestic service workers.

The historical reluctance of white women (including feminists) to acknowledge the struggles of domestic workers often is a veiled justification of their own exploitation of their maids.

#### EDUCATION AND LIBERATION: BLACK WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

"Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave." Slaves were forced to seek education subversively. White women became involved in the struggle for the education of slaves and of the children of freed slaves. After emancipation, there was a "frenzy for schools" among the ex-slaves, according to Frederick

Douglass. Half of those who came to the South to help set up schools for emancipated slaves were white women. Black and white women worked together in this process. Always, Black people linked the knowledge attained through education with the struggle of their people.

#### BLACK WOMEN AND THE CLUB MOVEMENT

At the turn of the Century, clubs were formed by petty bourgeois white middle-aged women seeking leisure time activities. Black women, on the other hand, primarily worked outside the home, and had little time for leisure, not to mention clubs. In 1890, 1/4 of all working women were Black women. However, a number of the few affluent, well-educated, non-working Black women formed clubs. Unlike white women's clubs, those of Black women existed to challenge racism, and were formed especially in response to the lynchings and sexual abuse by whites. Although the leadership of the Black women's clubs was sometimes elitist, it nevertheless was progressive. Racism pervaded the white women's clubs, which refused to integrate the federation of white

women's clubs in 1900.

#### COMMUNIST WOMEN

In the early 1900's, the Socialist Party forged a working class suffragist movement. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was the only working class organization in the early days of the labor movement to struggle in practice against both male and white supremacy, sexism and racism.

#### RAPE, RACISM AND THE MYTH OF THE BLACK RAPIST

In the U.S. and other capitalist countries, rape laws originally were framed to protect men of the upper classes, whose daughters and wives might be assaulted. Courts have always been less concerned about women of color and working class women, and few of these women's rapes have been prosecuted. Black women never have been taken seriously as rape victims. In addition, the charge of rape has been aimed indiscriminately at Black men, regardless of guilt or innocence. Of the 455 men executed between 1930 and 1967 on the basis of rape convictions, 405 were Black.

Black women as rape victims.

Slavery relied upon the routine sexual abuse of slave women. This had nothing to do with white men's sexual urges. Rather, sexual coercion was an essential dimension of the social relations between slavemaster and slave. The right claimed by slaveowners over the women slaves' bodies 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 of slavery." Also, rape by the slaves' overseers was a tool of political repression.

After the abolition of slavery, sexual abuse of Black women became a political weapon of terrorist repression in the drive to thwart the movement for Black equality. White men have been encouraged, through the ideology of racism and male supremacy, to believe that Black women are promiscuous and immoral. This myth has been advanced by politicians, scholars, journalists, and literary artists. The imposition of this attitude on white working class men was a triumphant moment in the development of racist ideology. This ideological veil has resulted in minimizing the sexual outrages committed against Black women.

"RACISM HAS ALWAYS SERVED AS A PROVOCATION TO RAPE, AND WHITE WOMEN IN THE U.S. NECESSARILY HAVE SUFFERED THE RICOCHET FIRE OF THESE ATTACKS." In this way, racism nourishes sexism, causing white women to be victimized indirectly by the special oppression of their sisters of color. An example of this process may be found in the Vietnam War, during which the U.S. systematically encouraged rape as a weapon of mass terrorism, justified by the attitude that the Vietnamese were an inferior race. U.S. soldiers were taught to search Vietnamese women with their penises; and stories of sexual outrages perpetrated by U.S. soldiers against Vietnamese women have been documented in investigations on war crimes. Yet, the soldiers have returned home, and although it certainly cannot be said that all veterans are rapists, it also cannot be denied that those who internalized the justification of the rape of Vietnamese women must have been affected in their attitudes toward women in general. Hence, racism and sexism again converge.

Black men as victims of the myth of the Black rapist.

The mythical Black rapist implies the mythical Black whore. Hence, the myth of the Black rapist of white women is the twin of the myth of the bad Black woman--both myths designed to apologize for and facilitate the continued exploitation of Black women and men. 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 myth of the Black rapist was a political invention to justify ideologically the lynching of Black men. Lynching did not occur much during slavery, because slaveowners were reluctant to destroy their human property. Before the Civil War, the main victims of lynching were white abolitionists (such as John Brown), who had no market value and who threatened the slaveholders' property rights in slaves and the profits derived therefrom. After the Civil War, ex-slaves were lynched with impunity--more than 10,000 lynched between 1865 and 1875. Lynching (along with the rape of Black women) served as a valuable weapon of political repression to deter Black revolt. Several attempts to justify lynching were ineffective. At first, lynching was un-

disguised as counterinsurgency against potential Black revolts. After 1872, with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacists attempted to justify lynching as a measure to prevent Black supremacy over whites. After the betrayal of Reconstruction, lynching continued to increase, as it served to consolidate the super-exploitation of Black labor. It was in this latter era, when there was no longer a basis to apprehend Black supremacy, that "the lie lost its ability to deceive." IDEOLOGY TRANSFORMS TO MEET NEW HISTORICAL CONDITIONS: A new charge had to be inven-

ted, and this charge was rape.

Reality belies the myth of the Black rapist. The real circumstances underlying most lynchings contradicted the myth of the Black rapist. Between 1889 and 1929, only 1/6 of the lynching victims were accused of rape:

- 37.3% charged with murder
- 5.8% charged with felonious assault
- 7.1% charged with theft
- 1.8% charged with insulting a white person
- 24.2% miscellaneous charges
- 16.7% charged with rape
- 6.7% charged with attempted rape

Moreover, during the Civil War (when Southern white men had gone off to fight), not one Black man was publicly accused of raping a white woman. The actual underlying motive of lynching was counterinsurgency against Black people who resisted oppression, such as owners of successful Black businesses, workers seeking higher wages, Black men who refused to be called "boy," and defiant Black women who resisted white men's sexual abuse.

In a society of pervasive male supremacy, men motivated by a duty to defend (white) women were excused of any excesses they might commit. Hence, the dual effect of the rape charge as the justification of lynching was to undercut the broad-based support of the Black struggle for equality (no one wanted to defend a rapist) and to fuel racist attacks against Black people.

The colonization of the Southern economy by Northern capitalists gave lynching its most vigorous impulse. Lynching served to enhance the superexploitation of Black workers. The white supremacist ideology justifying lynching, as well as the lynching itself, forged racial solidarity between white workers and their capitalist oppressors.

It was Black women who spearheaded an international anti-lynching campaign. It began with Ida B. Wells in 1892. In 1922, Black women formed the Anti-Lynching Crusaders. That organization tried to get white women to support the campaign, but white women did not respond en masse until 1930, at which time they formed the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL). Although this was a belated response to Black women's appeals, the ASWPL's impact in stemming the tide of lynchings demonstrates white women's special place in the struggle against

racism and white supremacy. The relationship between women and the oppressed races is a dialectical one. Due to their own experience of oppression, white women can identify with the Black

struggle; and, because lynching, as a tool of white supremacy and racism, strengthened male dominance in general, white women's struggle against lynching was also a struggle against their own oppression.

Anti-lynching forces never have excused those individual Black men who actually committed rape. Frederick Douglass said: "I am not a defender of any man guilty of this atrocious crime, but a defender of the coloured people as a class."

Rape in the U.S. today is one of the fastest-growing violent crimes. Just as the basis of the license to rape Black women during slavery was the slaveholders' economic domination, so the class structure of capitalism also harbors the incentive to rape. Sexual harassment on the job is a significant example. Working class women are exploited more intensely than working class men. This adds to their vulnerability to sexual abuse. Sexual coercion reinforces their vulnerability to economic exploitation. Working class men of all races can be motivated to rape by the bourgeois ideological belief that their maleness accords them the privilege to dominate women (although working class men, unlike men of the capitalist class, are not immune from prosecution for rape). When working class men accept the invitation to rape extended by the ideology of male supremacy, they accept a bribe, an illusory compensation for their powerlessness.

The present rape epidemic occurs at a time when the capitalist class is furiously reasserting its authority in the 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 mid-1970's found a resurgence of racism, and a correlative resurgence of the myth of the Black rapist, a myth sometimes legitimized by white women engaged in the political battle against rape. These women, among others, have perpetuated the myth by their tendency to identify rapists as only those who are charged with rape. By equating the "police blotter rapist" with the "typical rapist," the myth of the Black rapist is perpetuated. In reality, estimates are that only 5% of all the rapes actually committed are reported. If we fail to look beyond the reported rapes and to penetrate the phenomena of rape in all its forms and contexts, then the real social causes of rape will not be determined.

In carrying forward a principled and effective struggle against rape, white women must: (1) alert other white women

about the urgency of combining a fierce challenge to racism with the necessary battle against male supremacy and sexism; (2) seek to expose the unreported rapes, many of which undoubtedly involve Black women (and working class women) as the victims of white rapists--this will help to dispell the myth that the reported rapist (the Black man) is the typical rapist. The struggle against racism must be the ongoing theme of the anti-rape movement: (1) defending women of color as legitimate victims of rape; and (2) defending the Black male victims of the racist manipulation of the rape charge. The anti-rape movement must be situated in the strategic context of seeking the ultimate defeat of monopoly capitalism.

#### RACISM, BIRTH CONTROL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Birth control--individual choice, safe contraceptive methods, and abortions when needed--is a fundamental prerequisite for the emancipation of women.

Black women's suspicion of birth control arises from their experience of sterilization abuse. Women of color have been disproportionately the victims of illegal abortions. Black women have favored abortion rights, though not necessarily abortions. During slavery, abortion and infanticide were acts of desperation, arising out of a refusal to bring children into such a brutal existence.

In the last half of the 19th Century, white abolitionist women and women's rights activists advocated women's right to "voluntary motherhood"--by the right to refuse to submit to their husbands' sexual demands. Although voluntary motherhood was a progressive vision of womanhood, it reflected the petty bourgeois and bourgeois lifestyle--associated, as it was, with the goals of career development and other self development outside marriage--only available to affluent women. This vision of womanhood did not reflect the conditions of working class women, who were engaged in the struggle for economic survival.

The end of the 19th Century saw a significant decline in the white birth rate. By 1890, native born white women bore, on the average, no more than 4 children. In this period of accelerating racist ideology and of race riots and lynchings, the declining white birth rate gave rise to the ideological fear of "race suicide." The result was that class bias and racism crept into the birth control movement. While birth control was demanded as a right for the privileged, it was imposed as a "duty" on poor women, Black and immigrant alike. The years 1900-1920 saw the rise of the eugenics movement (per Malthus), which supported the proposition that the "fit" should procreate and the "unfit" should not.

The abusive and genocidal use of sterilization was justified by the eugenics movement combined with the ideology of racism. People of color did not have the individual right to

birth control, but rather were subject to the racist strategy of population control. A compelling example is the abuse of sterilization in Puerto Rico. In 1939, President Roosevelt officially attributed Puerto Rico's economic problems to "overpopulation." Out of this justification emerged a massive sterilization program on the island. In each month were performed 19,000 sterilizations, resulting in a 20% decline in Puerto Rico's population growth by the mid-1960's. By 1970, more than 35% of all Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age had been sterilized. THE PROSPECT OF AN INCREASING NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED WORKERS IN PUERTO RICO WAS ONE OF THE MAIN INCENTIVES OF MASSIVE STERILIZATION. Native American Indian women also have been the targets of sterilization abuse. By 1976, 24% of all Indian women of child-bearing age had been sterilized. Of course, sterilization abuse also has been perpetrated against Black women as well. Since 1964, 65% of the women sterilized in North Carolina were Black.

Although a major victory of the struggle for birth control and reproductive rights was the legalization of abortion (Roe v. Wade), poor women subsequently have been deprived of access to abortion. In 1977, the Hyde Amendment prohibited the use of federal funds for abortions, unless required to save the mother's life or in the case of pregnancy resulting from rape. This new law effectively removed abortion from the access of poor women. Ironically, sterilizations continue to be federally funded and free to poor women, on demand. In fact, in 1972 alone, the federal government funded 100,000 to 200,000 sterilizations. [Hitler's Germany performed 250,000 sterilizations during the course of his entire reign.] The unavailability of abortions and the material encouragement of sterilization of poor women and women of color reflects a dialectic: while women of color are urged to become permanently infertile, affluent white women are urged, by the same forces, to procreate.

#### THE APPROACHING OBSOLESCENCE OF HOUSEWORK: A WORKING CLASS PERSPECTIVE

The average housewife does 3,000 to 4,000 hours per year of housework, not including child care. Although increasing numbers of men now assist with housework, many still view it as "helping" the woman with "her" work. Housework is neither stimulating, creative, nor productive. Davis contends that housework is technologically primitive (and need not be, in light of our current technologically advanced production forces), and that the structural separation of the public economy of capitalism and the private economy of the home is reinforced by the primitiveness of household labor. In Lenin's words:

...[P]etty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies

and degrades [the woman], chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labor in barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery.

Davis sees the solution in the industrialization and socialization of housework. This is an objective social need, but Davis contends that the capitalist economy is structurally hostile to the industrialization of housework, because it will not be profitable.

In pre-capitalist social systems, domestic labor has been essential to the economy overall, and women have enjoyed a correspondingly important social status. But in advanced capitalist societies, the service-oriented domestic labor of housewives (who seldom can produce tangible evidence of their work) diminishes the social status of women in general. According to bourgeois ideology, the housewife is simply her husband's lifelong servant.

During the Colonial era in the U.S., almost everything the family used or ate was produced at home under the direction of women. For 2 centuries, women were full-fledged workers within the home-based economy. This left them with little time for the tasks within the realm of today's housework (hence, they necessarily maintained low standards of household cleanliness). The economic importance of women's domestic functions was complemented by their visible roles outside the home, in which they managed businesses and performed various skilled jobs.

After the American Revolution, industry began to develop. Women were, in fact, the first industrial workers in the U.S., as they went to work in the textile mills of the Northeast. With the advance of industrialization, economic production shifted from home to factory, eroding the importance of women's domestic work. Consolidation of industrial capitalism led to a great split between the new economic sphere and the old home economy. The feature of this era was generalized revaluation of production. Specifically, home-manufactured goods were valuable for their USE VALUE (because they fulfilled basic family needs), while the value of factory-produced goods resided in their EXCHANGE VALUE (their ability to fulfill the capitalists' demand for profit). This revaluation of economic production revealed--beyond the physical separation of home and factory--the structural separation between the domestic home economy and the profit-oriented economy of capitalism. Since housework did not generate profit, domestic labor became defined as an inferior form of labor compared with capitalist wage labor. The ideological byproduct was the "housewife"--an image contradicted in reality by working class women (slaves and immigrant workers).

According to the 19th Century ideology which emerged from the transformation of production, the model of womanhood was the housewife and mother, embodied in the "cult of true womanhood" and the "cult of motherhood." This rendered working class women to be treated as alien visitors within the masculine world of the public economy. Considered to be outside their "natural" sphere, working class women were not to be treated as full-fledged wage workers. Hence, sexism emerged as a source of super-profits for capitalists.

For Black women, housework has never been the central focus of their lives, because in slavery and as "free" women, they have worked outside the home. Thus, Black women largely escaped the psychological damage which industrial capitalism has inflicted upon white housewives, who have internalized the virtues of feminine weakness and wifely submissiveness. Black women hardly could strive for weakness, as they had to become strong for their families to survive. Unlike white housewives, who learned to lean on their husbands for economic security, Black wives/mothers rarely have the time and energy to become experts at domesticity.

Davis believes that the contradiction between housework and socialized wage labor lies in the socialization and industrialization of housework. She contends that the absence of public discussion about socializing and industrializing housework reveals the blinding powers of bourgeois ideology. Child care should be socialized. Meal preparation should be socialized. Housework should be industrialized. All of these services should be readily available to working class people.

The Wages for Housework Movement demands that housework be paid, based upon the assumption that housewives produce a commodity (laborers) as important and as valuable as the commodities produced in social production. Certainly, women's procreative, child-rearing and housekeeping functions enable their family members to work. But this does not render the housewife a secret worker within the capitalist production process. The Wages for Housework analysis is flawed, because housework is not an integral component of capitalist production. Housework is instead a PRECONDITION to production, occurring outside the process of socialized production. Accordingly, the capitalist is not concerned about the way labor power is produced and sustained, but rather only about its availability and its ability to generate profit.

In South Africa, the social architects of Apartheid have determined that Black labor yields higher profits when domestic life is all but entirely discarded. South African capitalism

defines Black men as labor units, and Black women and children as superfluous appendages. Accordingly, unemployed Black women are banned from white areas and often from the cities where their husbands live and work. Domestic life for Blacks is considered to be unprofitable and a threat, because it might establish a stable Black population in the cities as a base for resistance to Apartheid. Thus, a large number of Black women (both married and single) must live in sex-segregated hostels, in which family members are not allowed to visit each other. In light of this condition, only 28.2% of the Black women of South Africa have opted for marriage. In sum, this demonstrates that domestic life is not an essential element of wage labor under capitalism.

In the U.S., women of color (especially Black women) have been paid wages for housework for decades, yet have not been liberated in the least by the wages. The statistics show that Black

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women substantially have been stuck in the position of domestic servants for decades, beginning with slavery:

- 1910: -more than 1/2 of all Black women worked outside the home  
-of these women, 1/3 were domestics
- 1920: -more than 1/2 of all Black working women worked as domestics
- 1930: -3/5 of all Black working women worked as domestics
- WWII: -substantial number of Black women employed in industry
- 1960: -1/3 of all Black working women worked as domestics
- 1970: -with the increase in clerical jobs, the proportion of Black women domestics declined
- 1980: -13% of all Black working women worked as domestics.

More than 50 years of organizing efforts aimed at domestic workers tried to redefine their work by rejecting the role of surrogate housewife. They adopted the occupational title of "household technician" and organized the union called "Household Technicians of America." Despite their organizing efforts, in 1976, the average full time household technician earned \$2,732, while 2/3 of all household technicians earned less than \$2,000 in that year.

The demand for wages for housework also may be refuted by the materialism of welfare women who do not work outside their homes. Nevertheless, welfare women rarely demand wages for housework. Rather, they seek decent jobs and affordable public child care.

In contrast, the Wages for Housework movement discourages women from seeking jobs outside the home. But it is by participation in socialized production that women develop working class consciousness and unity with their working class brothers and sisters, as a basis to challenge the capitalists at the point of production. The Wages for Housework movement fails to address the profound discontent of contemporary housewives. Psychological liberation will not be achieved by paying wages for housework.

To address correctly the contradictions arising from women's role in the home, Davis advances the following demands:

1. Abolition of housework as the private responsibility of individual women (a strategic goal

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of women's liberation);

2. Socialization of housework, including meal preparation and child care;
3. Jobs on an equal basis with men; and
4. Universal and subsidized child care.

The above demands in total presuppose an end to capitalism's profit motive control over the economy.

A critical view of Davis' analysis of housework reveals that she fails to account for the material developments in U.S. housework--specifically, technological developments reducing labor intensity and the recent trend of entrepreneurs establishing housework enterprises that service petty bourgeois working people. Moreover, Davis does not disclose that under socialism in the U.S.S.R., women are singularly responsible for maintaining home and family. Although the Soviet state makes it a priority to support women in discharging their domestic responsibilities (e.g., liberal maternity leave benefits, free child care provided at the workplace, and regular breaks from work for nursing infants), the division of labor in the Soviet family still makes the woman responsible for (in Lenin's words) "petty housework."

(A SUPPLEMENT)

8/16/86

## DOMESTIC WORK

Our principal focus will be on housework. Housework intersects with racism, sexism, male chauvinism, white chauvinism, and economic exploitation.

Housework has been historically, and still is, a domestic industry. Isolating the economic exploitation and slave wages or compensation embodied in the domestic industry, we see racism and sexism playing the leading role in defining the characteristics of white and Black families. Domestic workers strengthen the concept and practice of private property and reinforce sexism. On the other hand, conditioned by racism, domestic workers strengthen the social need for socialized child care. Domestic workers of necessity redefine methods of doing their own housework. Housework is not a source of value in strengthening private private property and the family, but rather doing their own housework is a function of orderliness and sanitation. The ideology of sexism plays an insignificant role in the life of the domestic worker.

Studies have shown that 9 of 10 domestic workers have mothers who were domestic workers themselves. Like another trade, domestic skills are passed on to daughters. There is nothing wrong with being a domestic worker. What is wrong is the fact that the labor is not dignified, as say, in the case of nurses or secretaries. The principal reason being that the domestic industry is still conditioned by the attributes of slavery. Overshadowed by white ideologies of sexism and racism as practiced by white women, domestic workers must modify their practices to reflect sexism and racism. Upper and middle class white women have an vested interest in capitalist ideologies. Given that these classes of women are affluent, why do they practice economic super-exploitation? The practices of economic super-exploitation and personal humiliation will continue until the domestic industry is fully unionized.

## WORKING CLASS

On the whole, capitalism has industrialized household work. Manual labor in food preparation and cooking and post-cooking is made very easy. But, on the other hand, while instruments and machines have made housework easier, household labor is intensified in conditions of certain forms of motion and of sexism in general. Industrialization and commercialization of housework, therefore, tends to strengthen sexism.