

society hasn't dealt with some of its deepest problems and opens discussion of why that is so. (In one sense, it is a radicalizing question that can take people beyond legalistic solutions into areas of personal and institutional change.) The second objective reason we'd like to see discussion begin is that we've learned a great deal in the movement and perhaps this is one area where a determined attempt to apply ideas we've learned there can produce some new alternatives.

"WE STARTED FROM DIFFERENT ENDS OF THE SPECTRUM"

by Cynthia Washington

In 1963, Cynthia Washington, an engineering student at George Washington University, became a member of SNCC. Within a year she was director of a freedom project in Mississippi, registering voters, organizing in the community, and holding mass meetings. She went on to head the Atlanta Center for Black Art. She was a Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies and editor of its newsletter, The Link, when the following excerpt from a letter to Southern Exposure about her experiences in the civil rights and women's movements was published in the winter of 1977. She is now a Colleague at the Public Resource Center in Washington, D.C.

During the fall of 1964, I had a conversation with Casey Hayden about the role of women in SNCC. She complained that all the women got to do was type, that their role was limited to office work no matter where they were. What she said didn't make any particular sense to me because, at the time, I had my own project in Bolivar County, Miss. A number of other black women also directed their own projects. What Casey and other white women seemed to want was an opportunity to prove they could do something other than office work. I assumed that if they could do something else, they'd probably be doing that.

I remember driving back to Mississippi in my truck, thinking how crazy they were. I couldn't understand what they wanted. As far as I could see, being a project director wasn't much fun. I didn't realize then that having my own project made a lot of difference in how I was perceived and treated. And I did not see what I was doing as exceptional. The community women I worked with on projects were respected and admired for their strength and endurance. They worked hard in the cotton fields, or white folks' houses, raised and supported their children, yet still found the time and energy to be involved in struggle for their people. They were typical rather than unusual.

Certain differences result from the way in which black women grow up. We have been raised to function independently. The notion of *retiring* to housewifery someday is not even a reasonable fantasy. Therefore whether you want to or not, it is necessary to learn to do all of the things required to survive. It seemed to many of us, on the other hand, that white women were demanding a chance to be independent while we needed help and assistance which was not always forthcoming. We definitely started from opposite ends of the spectrum. . . .

I remember discussions with various women about our treatment as one of the boys and its impact on us as women. We did the same work as men—organizing around voter registration and community issues in rural areas—usually *with* men. But when we finally got back to some town where we could relax and go out, the men went out with other women. Our skills and abilities were recognized and respected, but that seemed to place us in some category other than female. Some years later, I was told by a male SNCC worker that some of the project women had made him feel superfluous. I wish he had told me that at the time because the differences in the way women were treated certainly did add to the tension between black and white women.

At a district meeting in Mississippi, I heard Stokely's comment that the only position of women in SNCC was prone—with the exception of women who either dressed or looked like men. I was standing next to Muriel Tillinghast, another project director, and we were not pleased. But our relative autonomy as project directors seemed to deny or override his statement. We were proof that what he said wasn't true—or so we thought. In fact, I'm certain that our single-minded focus on the issues of racial discrimination and the black struggle for equality blinded us to other issues. . . .

In the late 1960s, some black women were "producing children for the black nation," while others began to see themselves as oppressed by black men. For many, black women were the most oppressed group in American society, the victims of racism, chauvinism and class discrimination. Chauvinism was often seen as the result of forces acting upon all black people, and struggle between black men and women as an effective way to keep us from working together for our common liberation. On the other hand, my son by this time was three years old; I was divorced, and the thought that anyone would want to have a child to support by themselves seemed like a mean joke. If women were becoming pregnant to counter the charge that they took "manhood" away, then the position of black women, even in movement circles, seemed to have deteriorated. To me, it was not a matter of whether male/female oppression existed but one of priorities. I thought it more important to deal with the folks and the system which oppressed both black women and black men. . . .

The white people I talked with often assumed the basic necessities. That gave them the luxury of debating ideology and many things I felt would not change the position of black women. Abortion, which white women were fighting for, did not seem an important issue for black women. Women who already had children might need abortion in the future, but in the present they needed a means to support children other than welfare, a system of child care, decent homes and medical attention, opportunities for meaningful employment and continuing education. Again, we found ourselves in different circumstances with no program or tactic to begin building sisterhood.

Over the last two years, I find myself becoming more involved with women in Washington, discussing the impact of race, class, and culture on us all and concrete ways women can help each other survive. I also find that the same black women I knew and respected during the 1960s are in the process of re-forming a network. Most of us have now spent the greater part of our adult lives as single women involved in movement activities. We have been married, divorced, some have children; we have gone from town to town, job to job, talking to each other. The problems of womanhood have had an increasing impact on us, and the directions of our own, of my own, involvement in the women's movement are still unfolding.

LIBERATION OF WOMEN

(New Left Notes, July 10, 1967)

The following analysis of women's role came out of the Women's Liberation workshop; as such it cannot be changed and is therefore not open to debate.

What is open to this body is the acceptance or refusal of programs designed to (1) free women to participate in other meaningful activities and (2) relieve our brothers of the burden of male chauvinism.

Analysis: In the world today there are three main divisions among people: those of the capitalist world, the Socialist world, and the Third World. The crisis of our time is the transformation from capitalism to socialism. The role of the Third World in this transformation is revolutionary, but an integral part of their fight is the necessity of their own independence.

As we analyze the position of women in capitalist society and especially in the United States we find that women are in a colonial relationship to men and we recognize ourselves as part of the Third World. Although we realize that our sisters in the Socialist world have problems with male supremacy, we feel that an analysis of their position would