

**PANTHER
SISTERS
ON
WOMEN'S
LIBERATION**

September 1969



Including 1994 Black Panther Newspaper Perspective:

ON SCYTHIAN DIALECTIC STRUCTURE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

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Dedicated to the memory of SAUNDRA HOLMES,
Panther revolutionary and companion of Geronimo
ji Jaga (Pratt), assassinated on November 4, 1971.
Saundra was the ... NEW URBAN GUERRILLA.

Panther X



SAUNDRA HOLMES

ON THE QUESTION OF SEXISM
WITHIN
THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

by
Safiya Bukhari-Alston

The May 5, 1993 *N.Y. Times* Op-Ed page exchange between former Black Panther Party member -- Elaine Brown and *Color Purple* author Alice Walker about former Black Panther Party member - David Hilliard's book *This Side of Glory* where Alice Walker criticized the Black Panther Party's male leadership as sexist makes glaringly obvious that it's necessary to put the issue of sexism in the Black Panther Party in its correct perspective. Alice Walker, in what is hyped to be an attack on sexism within the Black Panther Party, seems to spend more time attacking what she presumes to be the sexuality of the male leadership, i.e. her allusions to homoeroticism. While Alice plays with the question of what she presumes to be the sexuality of the male leadership, I will attempt to address the issue of sexism. By anybody's definition these are not interchangeable words.

The error everyone seems to be making, supporters and detractors of the Black Panther Party alike, is separating the Party from its time and roots and looking at it in a vacuum. Quite clearly, the Black Panther Party came out of the Black community and its experiences. The membership of the Black Panther Party was recruited from the ghettos of the inner cities. The Party itself was founded in Oakland, California in the spring of 1966 by two Black men who came straight out of the ghetto and met on the campus of Merritt College. It was founded as a response to the rampant episodes of police brutality against the Black community committed by the notorious Oakland Police Department.

Bobby Seale and Huey Newton envisioned the Party (for Self Defense) as just that, a community based organization who sought to defend the community against police brutality and set an example of revolutionary activism. In defining the work of the Party they looked to other struggles around the world and to Mao Tse Tung's *Red Book* "Quotations of Chairman Mao" for direction. The Eight Points of Attention and

Three Main Rules of Discipline were lifted directly from this book. One of the **Eight Points** was *Do Not Take Liberties With Women*. This was a monumental step forward in addressing the issue of the treatment of women. The simple fact that the issue was placed in/on the books was a step forward, now we had to make it a part of our everyday lives, the everyday lives of the lumpen who were the majority element of the Black Panther Party.

On October 28, 1967, only one year after the founding of the Black Panther Party, Huey Newton was incarcerated following an incident where a police officer had been killed and Huey was wounded. This, along with the march on the California state capitol at Sacramento with guns, catapulted the Black Panther Party into national prominence.

The ideology of the Black Panther Party developed out of the struggle of people of Afrikan descent in the United States for freedom, a struggle which began on the slave

ships and continues today. This struggle is seen through the prism of Marxist-Leninism and scientific socialism. It was an attempt to overcome the romanticism and idealism which was characteristic of Black organizations at the time and replace it with a pragmatic analysis that allowed for "social practice" being "the criteria for truth". Nonetheless, it had it's own unique analysis of which class was the vanguard of the struggle for Black liberation.

The Party believed that the only group that was capable of moving the struggle forward was the lumpenproletariat (lumpens) -- i.e. the brother and sister "off the block" (the last hired and first fired), the hustler, welfare mother, etc. The Party felt that they were at the bottom rung of the totem pole and had nothing to lose. It was this element that the Black Panther Party recruited from the ghetto and tried to politicize.

How does this relate to the issue of sexism within the Black Panther Party and the movement in general? In order to understand the issue of sexism in the Party it is necessary to review the historical

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experience of Black people in this country, as well as the climate in which the Black Panther Party came into being. We took those facts and set them within the historical framework of the Black experience.

What then was/is the Black experience in this country?

We were brought over in the same condition, packed like sardines in the bowels of the slave ships. We were herded like cattle to the slave auctions and sold to the highest bidder to be used for workhorses, studs, breeders and household help. We were defined by our capabilities as breeders, studs or slave laborers. The women were further categorized by how pleasing they were to the eyes of the slavemasters. The destruction of our culture which started with the stealing of our language, religion, children was completed when we begin to measure our own worth by how many women the Black man could "please" at a time and how many children we could have.

Since they had been stripped of their manhood in every way but in the ability to 'please' women and make babies, the sexual act soon became the measure by which

the Black man measured his manhood. The Black women worked right along side the Black man in the field, and she worked in the master's house. The Black man could not defend or protect his family, while in most cases the Black woman was the one who defended or protected the family from the slavemaster's wrath by any means necessary.

Having been deprived of our Africanism we began to take on the persona of our slavemasters on the one hand and fill the void of our lost culture with the slave culture that was foist upon us. It is this that is the root of the sexism that is plaguing our communities today. Unlike the sexism that is characteristic of the white community though, the sexism of the Black community has its basis in racism and self-hate. The division in the Black community between the Black male and Black female did not just come about on its own. It was carefully thought out and cultivated. After the end of chattel slavery Black men, on the most part, couldn't get jobs. The Black woman had to be the breadwinner as well as homemaker. This, in conjunction with the already

festering sore of having to stand by and watch while the woman was raped and made to bear the master's children and then wet nurse the children of the white women, was too much for the Black man to handle psychologically and resulted in the Black man casting the blame for his situation at the feet of the Black woman. As time went on this love/hate/anger triangle begin to manifest itself in the sexism that is present today in the Black community.

Which brings us back to 1966 and the founding of the Black Panther Party. Nothing had changed, in terms of the quality of life in the Black community and racism in this country. We were still slaves in every way except we were no longer bound and shackled. We still didn't have a culture. Our Africanism and sense of identity were gone and had been replaced by western civilization, we were busy trying to be like the rest of the people in America. We had taken on the persona of sexist america, but only with a Black hue. It was into this that the Black Panther Party was founded, declaring that we were revolutionaries and a revolutionary had no gender.

This is not to say that there was nothing wrong with the way Black women were treated in the community and the Party. But we should not simply decry the role of women in the Black Panther Party, we should analyze the development of the situation and make the necessary moves to correct it. As I said earlier, the members of the Black Panther Party were recruited from the community. Whatever was going on in the community and society as a whole was reflective in the interaction of the members of the Black Panther Party. The simple fact that the Black Panther Party had the courage to address the question in the first place was a monumental step forward. In a time when the other nationalist organizations were defining the role of the women as barefoot and pregnant and in the kitchen, women in the Black Panther Party were working right along side the men, being assigned sections to organize just like the men, receiving the same training as the men. Further, the decision as to what a person did within the ranks of the Black Panther Party was determined not by gender, but by ability.

In its brief history (1966-1973)¹ of seven years women had been involved on every level in the Black Panther Party. There were women, like Audrea Jones, who founded the Boston Chapter of the Black Panther Party, women like Brenda Hyson, who was the OD (Officer of the Day) in the Brooklyn Chapter of the Black Panther Party, women like Peaches, who fought side by side with Geronimo Pratt in the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party, Kathleen Cleaver who was in the Central Committee, and Sister Rivera who was one of the motivaters behind the office in Mt. Vernon, NY. By the same token there were problems with men who brought their sexist attitudes into the organization. Men who refused to take direction (orders) from women, and we had a framework established to deal with that but because of liberalism and cowardice, as well as fear, a lot of times the framework was not utilized.

On the other hand, some women sought to circumvent the principled method of work and utilize their femininity as a way to achieve rank and statue within the Party.

They also utilized their sexuality to get out of work and certain responsibility. This unprincipled behavior within the Party (just as on the streets) undermined the work of other sisters who struggled to deal principley. Thus, there were three evils that had to be struggled with, male chauvinism, female passivity and ultra femininity (the 'I'm only a female' syndrome).

The advent of the Women's Liberation Movement during the late 60's sought to equate what was happening with white women in this society to the plight of Black women. The white women were seeking to change their role in society vis-a-vis the home and the work place and to be seen as more than just a mother and homemaker. They wanted to be afforded right to the work place or whatever role they sought to play in society. But our situation was different, we had been working outside of the home and supporting our families. We had been shouldering the awesome responsibilities of waging a struggle against racist oppression and economic exploitation since we had been brought to these shores on the slave ships. Our struggle was not a

struggle to be liberated so we could move into the work place, but a struggle to be recognized as human beings.

Sexism or the degeneration of the relationship between the Black man and woman to antagonism and brutality is a byproduct of this history. While I am clearly against the way this history plays out in our community, I am not a feminist. I am a revolutionary. I am a scientific socialist. I believe that we have to struggle on all fronts against those attitudes that threaten to destroy us as a people.

It is extremely important that we remember that even though the Black Panther Party had a built in process to deal with male chauvinism within it's ranks, the members of the Party were products of the society in which they lived. We struggled against these tendencies whenever possible, but they were reinforced by the society in which we lived.

In order to create a new society we have to create a new being. If we simply change the color of the oppressor we have not moved forward. It is easy to decry the

sexism of the leadership of the Black Panther Party from afar, without having struggled along with them. While the Party was dealing with the issue of politically educating its ranks it was also feeding hungry children, establishing liberation schools, organizing tenants, welfare mothers and establishing free health clinics. Simultaneously, the Black Panther Party was under attack from the local, state and federal government. Offices of the Black Panther Party from California to Louisiana, from Texas to Michigan, all across the country were under physical attack and Panthers were being killed and imprisoned. We were not just theorizing about struggle, we were involved in constant struggle on all levels.

Finally, I would like to remind you of two things. The first is, we must remember that everybody that is Black is not involved in the Black Liberation Struggle and therefore, their critique of the struggle or elements of the struggle is not done with the motivation of curing the sickness to save the patient. They seize opportunities like the one involving Elaine Brown and David Hilliard's

books to vent their personal beliefs and agendas. Alice Walker's suggestion that the male leadership of the Party fear of their perceived homosexual love for each other, whether they had been lovers or not, accounted for their macho sexist attitudes toward women, raises the tantalizing question of whether this may be an example of people coloring the facts with their own leanings.

The second thing is that while the primary struggle that the Black community faces is one against racist oppression and economic exploitation, we must still deal with the problem of male chauvinism and sexism as well as domestic violence in our communities. These problems are not just problems that exist in the Black community, but in the whole of society. The problem for us is that we are having to deal with them simultaneously with the primary struggle. The Black Panther Party put into place a mechanism for dealing with this - starting with political education and ending with bringing the responsible parties up on charges for disciplinary purposes. Mao Tse Tung said, "[S]He who is not afraid of death by a thousand cuts, lives to unhorse the emperor".

It is with this thought in mind that we use the weapon of criticism and self-criticism to correct the way we deal with each other. It is through study and practice that we strengthen our own self-esteem and therefore gain the courage to challenge chauvinist and sexist attitudes that we encounter as we struggle. And finally, it is through our social practice that we set the example to our community and advance the struggle. We must remember that the Black Panther Party may not have completed the task, but we did put the question on the floor.

It is extremely crucial that, as we struggle against our primary enemy, we remember that ours is a collective struggle, a struggle for human rights for all of our people, men and women, and as long as one of us is oppressed none of us is free.

1. The Black Panther Party split in 1971. From that time until 1976 there existed an East Coast and West Coast Black Panther Party but, for purposes of this writing, the Black Panther Party was destroyed in 1971.

PANTHER
SISTERS
ON
WOMEN'S
LIBERATION



FALLEN COMRADE
CINDY SMALLWOOD
Died: February 7, 1973

*"We all know a gentle woman
with a smile like sunshine
a voice like springtime rain;*

A young woman who loved her people, Cindy Smallwood was only 17 years old when she joined the Black Panther Party. She worked tirelessly, devotedly, first at the Intercommunal Youth Institute and later with the Distribution staff for this newspaper, spreading joy wherever she went.

On February 4, 1973, on her way back to Oakland after driving some comrades home from a late night's work, Cindy crashed into a highway embankment. Thrown from the van and critically injured, Cindy was pronounced dead three days later. She died helping others, struggling to end the oppressive conditions of our lives.

*"we know a woman who worked
and gave her life for our people."*

(from a poem by Ericka Huggins)

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE



—Daily World

AFENI SHAKUR



Judi Douglas



PANTHER SISTERS IN CHAINS: Three women are led, chained, into court in Los Angeles for their arraignment on charges stemming from the five hour police shooting attack on Panther headquarters Monday.

PANTHER

SISTERS



CONNIE MATTHEWS



Deborah Johnson

PANTHER SISTERS ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Editor's Note: The following is an intensive interview with six Black Panther Party women about some of the issues raised by the women's liberation movement and their own experience with women's lib inside the Black Panther Party. The interview was conducted internally by the Panther Headquarters office and circulated as a four-page press leaflet. The reader should note that a large space between paragraphs below means that a different "sister" is speaking.

Interview

QUESTION: How has the position of women within the Black Panther Party changed? How have the women in the Party dealt with male chauvinism within the Party?

PANTHER WOMEN: I've only been in the Party about ten months and when I got in the Party the thing about Pantherettes was squashed, we sort of grew out of it. Then there's Ericka Huggins. The Brothers had to look on Ericka with a new light because she had been thru a lot of things that some Brothers hadn't even been thru. The sisters looked up to her and we all saw what we had to do. The sisters have to pick up guns just like brothers. There are a lot of things the sisters can do to change society.

We realize we have a role to play and we're tired of sitting home and being misused and unless we stand up, male chauvinism will still show itself and be something that's just passed over. Unless we speak against it and teach the brothers what's correct and point out what's wrong, then it'll still be here.

There used to be a difference in the roles (of men and women) in the party because sisters were relegated to certain duties. This was due to the backwardness and lack of political perspective on the part of both sisters and brothers. Like sisters would just naturally do the office-type jobs, the clerical-type jobs. They were the ones that

handled the mailing list. You know all those things that go into details. They were naturally given to the sisters and because of this, because the sisters accepted it so willingly, because they had been doing this before, this is the type of responsibilities they've had before, it was very easy for male chauvinism to continue on. The only examples we had of sisters taking responsibility were probably in Kathleen (Cleaver) or one or two people who exercised responsibility in other areas of Party work.

We've recognized in the past 4 or 5 months that sisters have to take a more responsible role. They have to extend their responsibility and it shouldn't be just to detail work, to things women normally do. This, I think, has been manifested in the fact that a lot of sisters have been writing more articles, they're attending more to the political aspects of the Party, they're speaking out in public more and we've even done outreach work in the community, extensive outreach work in that we've taken the initiative to start our own schools--both brothers and sisters now work in the liberation schools. It's been proven that positions aren't relegated to sex, it depends on your political awareness.

I can remember that when I came into the Party over a year ago, at that time David Hilliard was National Headquarters Captain, and there was another sister in the Party who was the National Captain for women and even though most of the people related to David Hilliard as being National HQ Captain, most of the women related to this other sister for directives because she was the National Captain for women. Under her were sergeants and lieutenants who were all sisters and in their ranks were other sisters. There was almost a separation between the brothers and the sisters.

REORGANIZATION

When that was abolished, when there were no longer any separate positions for sisters and brothers, when we all had to relate to the brothers or sisters who were in the specific positions, there wasn't just a reaction on the part of certain brothers cause they didn't like having to relate to certain sisters, who were in leadership positions. There was also a reaction on the part of some sisters, who because they had to relate to some brothers, because they did not have ranks above certain brothers, they wanted to quit

the Party. So it wasn't just a matter of brothers being male chauvinistic in not wanting to relate to sisters as leaders over them--but it was also the sisters, because of conditioning wanted to continue to submit to other sisters, rather than to leaders of the party per se, regardless of sex.

And I can see since the time I joined the Party that the Party has undergone radical change in the direction of women leadership and emancipation of women. Even though Ericka Huggins provides us with a very good example, it's not so much Ericka and the realization that Ericka poses a striking example. It's the fact that the political consciousness and the political level of members of the Party have risen very much since I joined the Party and because of the fact that we're moving toward a proletarian revolution and because we have come to realize that male chauvinism and all its manifestations are bourgeois and that's one of the things we're fighting against. We realize that in a proletarian revolution, the emancipation of women is primary. We realize that the success of the revolution depends upon the women. For this reason, we know that it's necessary that the women must be emancipated.

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

QUESTION: Could you explain what you mean when you say that the success of the revolution depends on the emancipation of women?

PANTHER WOMEN: It's because of the fact that women are the other half. A revolution cannot be successful simply with the efforts of the men, because a woman plays such an integral role in society even though she is relegated to smaller, seemingly insignificant positions.

I think conditions outside the Party have forced us to realize that we have to get rid of male chauvinism. As Panthers, we cannot separate ourselves and divide ourselves and work as Pantherettes, and on the other hand have brothers work as Panthers and expect to present a United Front against Fascism or against the enemy or against outside forces. There has to be unity within the Party. We can't be divided on the basis of sex and we can't be divided on the basis of principles or anything.

Ericka became a good example because the pigs



Kathleen Cleaver



realized she was a revolutionary. Maybe we didn't realize that, in the sense that we thought about it all the time or brought her up as an example of a strong woman. But, I think the pigs realize that and this outside condition has forced us to realize that we can't operate as two halves, separate, apart from each other--we have to be unified.

VIETNAMESE WOMEN LEAD

QUESTION: You once said that the Vietnamese women were your example. Could you explain more concretely what that means in terms of the struggle of women in the United States?

PANTHER WOMEN: We feel that the example given us by the Vietnamese women is a prime example of the role women can play in the revolution. The Vietnamese women are out there fighting with their brothers, fighting against American imperialism, with its advanced technology. They can shoot. They're out there with their babies on their backs, as the case may be, and they're participating in the revolution wholeheartedly just as the Vietnamese men are participating in the revolution, in the national liberation struggle. The success of their national liberation struggle is just as much dependent upon the women continuing the struggle as it is dependent on the Vietnamese men. So there we see in Vietnam where the struggle today is the sharpest in terms of struggling against U.S. imperialism, the women in fact play the role of the other half--not the weaker half, not the stronger half, but the other half of the Vietnamese men. We hold them up as our example and we hope that the revolutionary women in the U.S. can follow that example and live up to the goal that they have set.

Right now the issue of male chauvinism is rather sharp and kind of out of place. We're starting to talk about it and everybody is sensitive about it--but once women find their place in terms of their roles as revolutionaries and use the example of the Vietnamese women, then I don't think it will be such a sharp issue. I think we'll begin to function and make it very natural for a woman to behave as a revolutionary and not as a subordinate or as a submissive half.

SPECIAL ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN

QUESTION: Black women are considered to be the most

oppressed group in the U.S., as blacks and as women. That special oppression gives them a special, even vanguard role. Do you want to talk about that a little?

PANTHER WOMEN: I think, historically, even at this time, even for women in the Party, to say we want full share and full responsibility is kind of difficult and kind of touchy because of our society. Our men have been sort of castrated, you know. The responsibilities that they rightfully should have had before, were taken away from them--to take away their manhood. We've had to fight all this before. Our men are constantly thinking or saying that maybe if we assume a heavier role, a more responsible role, that this, in turn, will sort of take away their responsibility and it's such a touchy thing, that we have to be very sure that the roles are evenly divided.

It shouldn't have to be one certain role for a man and one certain role for a woman--we're all gonna participate in the struggle and whatever we can do best, we do it, whether it's at a higher level or not. This is very touchy and presents some problems in combatting a specific thing like male chauvinism, because some brothers still have this fear of women dominating the whole political scene. It may not be voice that often, but I think it's a very real fear, and we're going to have to be sensitive enough to recognize it. We're going to have to be sensitive enough to say that we're going to take more of a share of the political arena, but, at the same time, we're going to have to keep these things in mind.

I think it's important that within the context of that struggle that black men understand that their manhood is not dependent on keeping their black women subordinate to them because this is what bourgeois ideology has been trying to put into the black man and that's part of the special oppression of black women. Black women as generally a part of the poor people of the U.S., the working class, are more oppressed, as being black, they're super-oppressed, and as being women they are sexually oppressed by men in general and by black men also.

So, in this context we see that black women are especially oppressed in this country and it's very important that black man's manhood is not dependent upon the subordination of black women, but rather his manhood is, in fact, dependent on his revolutionary relationship. A relationship is more fruitful when, in fact, the woman is the other half and not

the weaker half. They (the men) get more out of the relationship, just as the women.

UNITY IN STRUGGLE

QUESTION: What are your ideas on the strategy for women's liberation in terms of separate women's organization, the priority of women's liberation in relation to other issues like imperialism and racism?

PANTHER WOMEN: I think it's important that the separate women's liberation groups not all be lumped into one category. Their effectiveness and their value is dependent upon to what extent their work is furthering revolutionary goals in this country. I think that there are all different kinds of organizations in existence now. There are some people who talk about the contradictions among men and women as one of the major contradictions in capitalist society and therefore they take that contradiction (and even if they don't talk about it, some of them put it into practice) and develop it into an antagonistic contradiction, when actually it is a contradiction among the people. It's not a contradiction between enemies.

An example of this is at the UFAF (United Front Against Fascism) Conference where occasions arose from time to time where women would want to have a caucus and a man would come around and they would get very uptight that a man was there and were practically ready to jump on him, just because he happened to be listening around. I think that's an example of how the women's struggle is taken out of perspective--it is separated from class struggle in this country, it's separated from national liberation struggles and it's given its own category of women against men. Sometimes people say, "It's within a revolutionary context," but in practice, if all their rhetoric and all their practice is anti-men, it is not a revolutionary program and, as a matter of fact, it hinders the revolutionary forces.

The contradiction between men and women is a contradiction that has to be worked out within the revolutionary forces. It is not at all comparable to the class contradictions. It's the class struggle that takes priority. To the extent that women's organizations don't address themselves to the class struggle or to national liberation struggles they are not really furthering the women's liberation movement, because in order for women to be truly emancipated in this country there's going to have to be a socialist revolution. And there's going to have to be ideological struggle for

decades and probably for centuries before male chauvinism is overcome. If women don't understand this, they're not going to truly be able to overcome their special oppression.

Roberta is correct and even those women's organizations who do address themselves to the struggles that are at hand, the strategy of having autonomous women's liberation organizations is incorrect because, as Roberta says, it seems as if those organizations look upon women's liberation as a priority when in actuality the struggle towards socialist revolution is a priority. Women can only become emancipated, not through their own efforts as a particular group, but through their participation on an equal plane in the existing organizations which are comprised of men and women who are struggling for the same cause. It's not a separate struggle and women's liberation does not take priority, but in fact is part and parcel of the overall struggle.

FEMALE CHAUVINISM

Any organization that's being formed for women's liberation, like Rosemary said, has got to take into consideration that they can't operate separately and by themselves. They must also understand the definition of chauvinism. Chauvinism isn't just relegated to the male. Chauvinism is an undying or unreasoning or irrational love for one's sex and if a women's liberation organization gets uptight because a man comes around, that's unreasoning and irrational. It's not being realistic and looking at things as a whole in terms of a man too functioning as a revolutionary and a woman functioning as a revolutionary. If they're not careful, they will go to an extreme and they will become female chauvinists. They will have an undying love for their sex and totally negate revolutionary struggle.

Unfortunately, if we don't be careful, I think that the women's liberation struggle can be coopted by opportunists. It can become just like a style or a fad and the whole revolutionary struggle will be set back because of this. This is one reason why the revolutionary practitioners, because of the repression we're suffering, can't take time out to go off by ourselves to solve some of our backwardness. This would be just another dividing tactic as far as I can see.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN PRACTICE

I think it's important to recognize the dangers that separate women's groups face immediately, just because they're women's groups and there's a good chance that they're going to get off base in terms of what the primary struggle is. However, I think we have to be very careful in terms of condemning forms that are used in the movement. I think that there is room for special organizing of women. There are positive things that these kinds of groups can do: for example, canneries, special plants where there's primarily women, electronics and this sort of thing in terms of working class organizing, in terms of organizing cooperative nurseries to liberate the energies of women.

But, they are always facing certain dangers in terms of turning in on themselves. In terms of becoming a very petit bourgeois little clique where they just talk about how they have to take care of the kids all the time or become a gripe session. So, I think, while we as Panthers, while we integrate the struggle of the brothers and sisters within the Party, we still will see how these separate women's liberation groups do thru their practice. And that's where our judgment of them will come in.

We have a phrase that says that the only culture worth keeping is a revolutionary culture. Now, our culture dictates that we become revolutionaries. Irregardless of what the brothers say, like Rosemary says, we should function in a position that furthers revolution and revolutionary culture. The women's liberation groups that are separating away from the men (I think Roberta said there is some room for them, and we can't vacillate on whether there is or not, we have to judge them on their practice) should take into consideration that we're here to liberate the people and like we said, it's a socialist liberation struggle and we can't operate as halves.

If women's liberation is going to exist, it should exist with the goal in mind to channel the energies they liberate into a united liberation of the men and women together--not as a bourgeois cult, because this has happened many times. They've become extremist organizations of female superiority and have totally forgotten about the people's struggles and oppressed people and have themselves become oppressors.

I think conditions outside the Party have forced us to realize that we have to get rid of male chauvinism. As Panthers, we cannot separate ourselves and divide ourselves and work as ...

Pantherettes, and on the other hand have brothers work as Panthers and expect a United Front... There has to be unity within the Party. We can't be divided on the basis of sex and we can't be divided on the basis of principles or anything..



PANTHER PROGRAMS

QUESTION: Do the Panthers have any specific programs directed at women in the community to get them involved in the struggle?

PANTHER WOMEN: The Black Panther Party does not have any program that is specifically addressed to women, per se. There is, on the National Committees to Combat Fascism, a committee on the national steering committee of women. But the primary function of this committee is to channel those women who are proponents of women's liberation into areas of work integrated into the liberation movement.

Even though the Panther Party doesn't have a women's program per se, (I don't know whether we will in the future or not) I think we realize that the best effort is thru practice and that our liberation is gonna come thru the realization on the part of the brothers that they can't practice male chauvinism, but even more important, it comes from a conscious effort on the part of the sisters to educate themselves and not to accept menial positions or relegate themselves to, submissive positions. The brothers can be non-chauvinistic as much as they want, but unless the sisters realize that they have to accept an equal position or act as a revolutionary, then this isn't going to do any good. So I think the best criterion for that is practice.

In addition to that--simply because of the fact that we are members of the Black Panther Party and are therefore in the vanguard, does not necessarily mean that we can deem ourselves champions of women's liberation. We believe that male chauvinism must be stomped out, because we have come to realize that it is bourgeois. Bourgeois ideas are those which are perpetuated upon us by the bourgeois class and is something we're fighting against. But because we've come to realize all these things just recently, we're very new at it. So that whether or not we will become champions of women's liberation, whether or not we'll be able to provide the example to lead other organizations towards women's liberation will come thru our practice.

WOMEN'S CAUCUSES

QUESTION: What do you think about all women's caucuses inside the organization? Some people say that within movement organizations there's male chauvinism and women must deal with it from a position of power, so they should organize their own caucuses. They also say there's a parallel between women's liberation and black liberation and just like black people had to get themselves together without whites first, so women have to get themselves together without men. Movement organizations have always been dominated by men, the way civil rights organizations used to be dominated by white people.

PANTHER WOMEN: I don't know, that sounds illogical to me because you can't solve the problem apart from the problem. You can't be liberated from male chauvinism if you don't even deal with it--if you run away from it. And I think forming any separate organization with that in mind is negating or contradicting what you're setting out to do. I think any type of inside organization that deals with women's liberation should take into consideration that women's liberation is important, but what is primary is the People's liberation. If they want a women's club, those have existed for centuries--they should form that, instead of calling themselves revolutionaries.

QUESTION: One of the arguments that's been made is that the movement has failed to attract a lot of women because of the intimidation that's found in a lot of political organizations. We fail to attract the other half because men dominate. Women have to get together to talk about their special problems in order to involve more women in the struggle.

PANTHER WOMEN: I think our judgment of caucuses, just like independent groups, is going to have to depend on whether or not they forward the revolutionary movement in the end. I mean if their purpose for caucusing among themselves is to make a more efficient organization and if they, in fact, are able to do that thru their practice, then Right On. But if they fall into a trap of just getting by themselves and just complaining about the situation and are unable to put forth a positive program, then that form is not viable. Again their practice is going to have to tell whether or not they further the revolutionary organization PERIOD.

ROLE FOR ADVANCED WOMEN

Also for a person to use the argument that the struggle does not ATTRACT women to the organization, I think, is coming from a subjective point of view. Because if they understand that it's not a women's or a man's struggle, it's not an attraction for a man or a woman, but we're here for the liberation of oppressed people, regardless of whether male chauvinism exists, the women would still come into the Party or movement because they agree or are willing to support the revolutionary principles that exist. If they find male chauvinism, they should be willing to fight it on the basis of principle and unity. And to say, "they're not attracted to it" --there's no advertisement for getting rid of oppression. It's an attraction based on principles, not based on some subjective wishes or wants. So I say that women who say that they don't want to come into the struggle because they're not ATTRACTED to the struggle aren't really interested in the first place.

QUESTION: No, they say the movement doesn't deal with their special oppression.

PANTHER WOMEN: Well, that may be true, but still, if you're interested in the struggle of oppressed people, you can come into an organization and bring that question in yourself, instead of staying away from it. You can fight on the basis of unity within an organization, not on the basis of "Well, they're not dealing with the women's question and they're not dealing with the special oppression of women, so therefore I'm not going to participate." They're still being subjective.

Well, I think that's one place where women who are already advanced are going to have to take a strong stand. The fact is because of objective conditions in this society, women are more backwards, because of their positions in their home, or in school, even working women who are more exposed to what's happening in the world, are still relegated at home and to the family jobs, to the children, etc., etc., and their perspective in terms of the world is more limited. So it's very important that women who are more advanced, who already understand revolutionary principles, go to them and explain it to them and struggle with them. We have to

recognize that women are backwards politically and we have to struggle with them. And that can be a special role that revolutionary women can play.

(Collected from Black Panther Party Hdqtrs., Oakland, Sept. 17, 1969.)