

As a working woman and a revolutionary activist in the struggle for self determination for Black people, I am honored to have been invited to speak with you at this commemoration of International Working Women's Day. In preparing for this moment, I was overcome by the memory of a quiet storm of a woman who erupted a mighty hurricane in this country twenty five years ago.

I guess the thing that strikes me the most, is the fact that this slightly elderly black woman, had worked all her life as a laborer and was this day returning from work, feet aching, tired, weary and basically fed up with saying yes to injustice. I can't help but feel great surges of emotion when I consider the results of that one moment in the black working woman's mind - that minute when four centuries of fatigue and humiliation fused with the quiet determination of the symbol of resistance in the person of Ms. Rosa Parks.

When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat that day, she sounded a cadence for the black resistance movement in this country. When Ms. Parks disrupted the bus service in Montgomery Alabama, the percentage of blacks in prisons across the country was less than half that of the caucasian population. Since that day in 1954, the percentage ratio has drastically changed. In places like New York, for instance where blacks represent from 13-20% of the total population. They now represent 75-80% of the prison population. We are not a nation of people who are inately criminal. Oh no! We are instead - a people who love justice. So much so, that in the pursuit of that justice, we have been defined as criminals or people with criminal intent and carted off to jail or in some cases shot down like prowling wolves. This is why Ambassador Andrew Young feels compelled to cite America as a nation with hundreds maybe thousands of political prisoners. I agree with Mr. Young. I agree because I am familiar with the case of JoAnn Chesimard, a black woman who has gone thru six trials in the state of New York and one in New Jersey. After seven trials and six years, Ms. Chesimard has not been found guilty of one violent act, although she was charged with heinous crimes including kidnap and murders. The state of New Jersey which claims credit for her only conviction does not charge that she herself killed anyone - They admit that she herself was shot while her arms were raised in the air - She nevertheless serves a life plus 35 year sentence in Clinton Prison in the State of New Jersey. Joann Chesimard like thousands of other blacks in the 60's and 70's was an activist involved ina national struggle against United States human rights violations, both here and abroad. She is a political prisoner and should be either immediately released or recognized by this country as a political legitimate prisoner and treated according to international laws governing political prisoners.

In North Carolina a few years ago, another black woman struck a blow at the violations of internationally recognized human rights. This time from a county jail cell we, all of us across america, were struck by the strength of a slight young womOn who refused to be raped by her jailer. We were all struck by that great feeling of outrage that caused Joann Little to strike out and kill the would be invader of her body. And each of us, who is a woman, wished that we could have struck the death blow to Clarence Algood. We still owe it to our own integrity to fight for Joann Little's release. Because we need to salvage the

mirage of human rights that Joann Little sought to protest! We need to sound an uncompromising cry for victory over those who seek to invade our bodies.

Finally, we would like to salute the millions of working women in this country who are forced by this government onto welfare rolls because they are mothers. Women who cannot afford to pay childcare costs, because they are so prohibitive that they can only be afforded by families that are middle income. These women struggle daily against odds which are stifling and yet they can be found in each community in this country organizing small welfare rights groups, or tenants rights groups or black associations or police brutality watchgroups. These women are tireless workers whose thirst for a better life is quenched only when they themselves are involved in the fight to make a better world. And because everyday of my life, I work with these women, I know that they are the lifeblood of our mighty resistance struggle. Because I am one these women, I feel the agony of their pain and the frustration of their quest to be an integral part of the army which ultimately will be victorious over human rights violations here and abroad.

May I end by quoting the words of a South Afrikan prisoner when asked why he testified in defense of another prisoner when he knew it would mean further punishment of himself Andi Soyike - he replied - I am no longer afraid.

Thank You,

Afeni Shakur