

The Right to Choose

This column is not a debate forum on the issue but rather an opportunity to put forth a feminist analysis of this often very emotional issue. I have called this column "A Woman's Right to Choose," not because women today have the right to choose, to control their bodies and reproductive functions, but because that must be the minimum basic demand of any feminist. The abortion issue clearly demonstrates both our strategy and goal. It is a form of strategy since it helps women to get the right to choose and makes it possible for them to exercise that right. It is an aspect of our goal in that it gives to women (and men in the process) the right to choose the direction their lives should take and to give them genuine power over the things that touch their lives directly.

Today abortion is legal or liberalized in a number of states. In New York a woman can get an abortion up to 24 weeks. While the liberalization of laws helps some women they often discriminate against many more. Abortion today is for the sisters who can afford to pay the high fees and have the mobility to travel to states where abortion is legal. It is the very same women who are most victimized by the capitalist-sexist system in so many other ways (job discrimination, legal discrimination, low salaries, etc.) who have the least ability to get safe, inexpensive, legal abortions if they so choose.

New York state provides an example of this in the period before the laws were liberalized. It was found there that those who suffered most from the laws were poor women, often black and brown, who only access to abortion was through the backstreet butcher. In fact, before the law was changed, eighty percent of the women who died from abortions were black or brown (Sisterhood is Powerful, p. 559). Furthermore, poor women are often put into a double bind by a system which may choose to limit their desired offspring by forcible sterilization. Many women in black communities have not supported abortion demands because they have been the victims of forced sterilization.

The horror stories about these sterilizations are legion. Some states force mothers on welfare to be sterilized after a certain number of children. Other women have had their tubes tied, after giving birth to a child, in a public clinic without their knowledge or consent. Many members of the black community (especially men) argue that black political demands can only be gained through the support of large numbers of black citizens and that therefore abortion demands do not gain their support. Poor women and women of color with their political grievances cannot be overlooked in a feminist demand for abortion repeal. This is a reason that the only minimal acceptable program a feminist can work for is the demand for: free safe abortions on demand, no forced sterilization, no genocide of poor people and people of color, and free and adequate contraception for all those who desire it, regardless of age. No single part of this is sufficient in itself -- all are closely related to the others.

Truth is relative to point of view, with appropriate truths arriving for appropriate times. Present events no longer appear to be caused or moved by past events, but rather they appear to be the earlier and later steps of the same event.

The film "Women in Limbo", written and produced by women, is scheduled for the Joy Theatre downtown during mid-to-end of January. It is a story about three wives of American prisoners of war of servicemen missing in action. Joan Silver wrote the story and collaborated with James Bridges on the screenplay. Linda Gettlieb produced it and Dorothy Spencer edited, while Anita Kerr composed and conducted the musical score.

Previews, however, reveal a mediocre script and commercial performances by three newcomers to film; Kate Jackson, Kathleen Nolan and Katherine Justice. "Women in Limbo" apparently fails to explore any new attitudes or alternatives to the tattered subjects of fidelity, marriage, and the war itself.

But congratulations are due Anita Kerr; she is reportedly the first woman to have created and conducted the musical score of a major motion picture in the U.S.



In the culture from which I am bred, nature is called Mother Nature and God is quite exclusively Male. I am likened to the earthy aspects of human nature and my brother is likened to Humanity. The ideas and attitudes towards God which permeate and perpetuate our standing outside of Nature are those ideas of a god who made the earth. The world is conceived of as an artifact, created by plan and therefore possessed of purpose and explanation. Christianity and the mad-dog machine which followed its heels into every continent in which it took root, reflected a psychology of man in which he is identified with a conscious intelligence and will standing apart from Nature to Control it.

Men, their rights and nothing more, Women, their rights and nothing less!

Friends, let us stop talking about sisterhood and make SISTERHOOD A FACT.

Signmond, this is what we want.

Our hope is that our sons and our daughters might grow as trees or blades of grass, their vision ever clear and warm as pure light, moving in circles of energy and adaptive colors which flash like a dance of rippling wind, their roots ever nurtured by the soil. Always a part, never apart, traveling through infinity.

We do not desire to rule over men, but to rule over ourselves.

We climbed the twisted...rocky road...
Me...an' my new hubby...Joad...
Pointin' t'wards a crummy shed...
An' spittin' terbaccy juice...he said.

Behint that shed's m' likker still...
Our one room house is on the hill...
The kitchen sink is workin' swell...
But you'll draw the water from the well.

You'll feed the chickens...chop the wood...
You'll do the cookin'...an' ya'll do it good...
An' when ya git yer housework done...
Ya c'n run my still...like it should be run.

I picked a rock from off the road...
An' slugged my dear...sweet...hubby...Joad...
Now he's buried on the hill...
Overlookin' the likker still.

I got a 'nother hubby now...
I also got a Jersey cow...
I draw the water from the well
An' like as not...I set a pump...

I feed the chickens...an' chop the wood...
I do the cookin'...an' I do it good...
An' when I git my housework done...
I run MY still...like it should be run.

by Helen Hunt de Leuw
Eureka Springs, Ark.

OF COURSE YOU'RE LIBERATED!
YOU HAVE A JOB. WE'RE
LIVING TOGETHER. YOU PAY
YOUR OWN SHARE. NOW,
WOULD YOU PLEASE FIX US
SOME DINNER?

