

Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment is essential if the goals of the women's movement are to be attained, just as the achievement of women's rights in our society is essential to the achievement of racial justice.

That is true for two reasons. First, if the notion of any human inequality is sanctioned and institutionalized, then other human inequities are predictable and inevitable. Put simply, all human inequality based on factors such as race, sex, religion, and national origin is wrong; one cannot rail against one and ignore or condone the other.

The second reason is the simple fact that 50 percent of all minorities are women and, therefore, in double jeopardy. Were we able suddenly to eliminate all factors which contribute to racial inequality and subordination in this nation, minority women would still face the prospect of restricted choices by virtue of their sex...

It is often said that the women's movement is irrelevant to black women. Yet I ask you--are equal employment opportunity and equal pay for equal work irrelevant? How about adequate child care? Equality in the granting of credit to women? Eliminating sex and race stereotyping in our children's textbooks and the public media? An adequate system of income maintenance which permits people to live with human dignity? I cannot conceive of a negative response to any of these issues; and they are all issues which the women's movement is addressing...

We black women know that we suffer from the effects of both racism and sexism. Public opinion polls, such as the Harris and Virginia Slims polls, reveal that black women support the goals of the women's movement to a greater extent than white women do. While this would seem to invalidate the myth that black women are firmly opposed to the women's rights movement, it does not explain our lack of involvement in that movement. What is it, then, that is preventing our active participation in a movement designed to achieve equal rights for all women? What is hanging us up? Let me identify for you some possible hang-ups, all of which are based to some extent on misconceptions and mythologies about the women's movement and about black women.

HANG-UP NUMBER ONE is the notion that we must somehow divide our loyalties and our identities--that we should be blacks first and women second. I find from my experience that I cannot separate my identity that way. Even King Solomon could not split that baby in half and solve the problem. And this is true for all of us. Clearly, we are both black and female--indivisibly.

HANG-UP NUMBER TWO has its roots in the idea that black women have always been "liberated," and therefore do not need to be involved in a movement to liberate women. There are two sources for this misconception. First, many of us have believed the media-produced stereotype of the women's movement as a middle-class white woman's struggle to escape from housework and child rearing, to get out of her home and into the job market. Why do we accept this stereotype when we know that the media succeeded in convincing many whites that blacks were, above all; dynamite-toting militants, rapists, dope addicts, and welfare cheaters?

But, some of us, nonetheless, buy the stereotype of the women's movement and accept a false definition of "liberation" which we then apply to ourselves. Are we saying that liberation means getting up at six in the morning, fixing breakfast for a husband and children, sending those children off to school, working all day at a low-paying, unrewarding job, and returning home in the evening to shop, cook, clean, do laundry, and ironing? Is this liberation? Not for us--and not for the women who are committed to the movement for women's equality and who are struggling for the rights of all women to make free choices about their lives and who are also working for our country's laws, policies, and tax structures to recognize that work in the home and child rearing are meaningful, valuable endeavors.

So let us not claim to be "liberated," because we know that we are far from being liberated and equal--either as blacks or as women. In looking at the media's treatment

of the women's movement, then let us remember what Pauli Murray has said: "While violence has been the ultimate weapon of resistance to racial desegregation, its psychic counter-part, ridicule, has been used to resist sex equality."

HANG-UP NUMBER THREE is one about which much has already been said. I refer to the notion that the black woman's place is behind her man--pushing him into manhood and power. I'm sure that we are all familiar with this argument. But 32 percent--nearly 1/3--of all black families are headed by women. Where are the men for these sisters to stand behind and push?

We Deltas do not believe our men are lacking in manhood. We work and walk with them side by side. It is an insult to black men to say that black women must be behind them pushing them into their manhood.

HANG-UP NUMBER FOUR tells us that the women's movement is not only a white women's movement, but that it is racist. Just as there are sexists in the black community and in the civil rights movement, it is true there are varying degrees of racist feeling in the women's movement.

But attacking and running away will not eliminate racism in the women's movement or, for that matter, sexism in the black liberation movements in which some black men believe that the role of black women is to cook grits for the revolution. We must build our participation on the positive realities of coalition and mutual support for shared goals and we have some good examples. The coalition between the National Organization for Women and the Urban League brought about the boycott of General Mills because of their discrimination based on both race and sex. And the suit against AT&T was supported by feminists and achieved gains for all women and minority men in regard to equal employment opportunity. Leaders in the women's movement have been among the strongest and most effective supporters of the recently

passed minimum wage bill. Without the coalition established to lobby for this legislation, and without the commitment of feminist organizations, extension of the minimum wage to domestic workers--most of whom are black and 98 percent of whom are women--could not have been achieved.

And speaking of the domestic worker, we must recognize and deal with the relationship between the black domestic worker and the white "lady of the house." The attitude and experience of many black domestic workers is expressed in Countee Cullen's poem "For a Lady I Know."

*She even thinks that up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor black cherubs rise at seven
To do celestial chores.*

That little poem and one other hang-up which I will get to later, get to the guts of the black woman's ambivalence about the women's rights movement.

Racist attitudes do exist. But increasingly, large numbers of white women in the women's movement are talking about all women, including their minority sisters. We therefore need to recognize that not all white women are "Miss Ann." In fact, according to Edith Sloan, Executive Director of the National Committee on Household Employment, women's rights organizations have been among the strongest supporters of NCHE. For example, the Ms. Foundation made a sizable donation to support NCHE's National Conference of Household Workers in 1972. And, in all 35 communities in which NCHE has affiliates, substantial aid and support have come from consumer groups, traditional women's groups, such as Church Women United and the YWCA, as well as from feminist organizations, such as NOW, Women's Equity Action League, and the National Women's Political Caucus. In fact, NCHE was founded 9 years ago by such groups as Churchwomen United and the YWCA.

To change the negative aspects of the women's movement, to make it more responsive to our needs as black women, we must get serious about our participation in feminist organizations and activities.

We do ourselves a disservice when we complain loudly that minority women are not involved

in positions of leadership in feminist organizations--unless we are willing to get involved, to work within the organizations to the point at which we can become leaders and officers. To effect change within an organization, that is precisely where we need to be--within. It is illogical to complain that black women are underrepresented and then refuse to belong, while blaming white women for our lack of participation and leadership. We must decide that the goals of the women's movement are our goals and that OUR PARTICIPATION IS NECESSARY. If we, as black women, are to have any say in the ordering of priorities, the tactics for change, the philosophy and attitude of feminist organizations, we'd better get in there and work for ourselves and our sisters.

Racism and sexism must be jointly confronted. But this is not a new thought. It is imbedded in the historical roots of feminism. Most of the women who fought for woman suffrage in the 19th and early 20th centuries started out in the antislavery movement--struggling for abolition. Yet in the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, these active abolitionists were refused admittance to meetings and were forced to sit quietly in the balcony. Why? Because they were women. This reinforced their growing awareness that the battle for the abolition of slavery could never be won without a battle for the abolition of women's slavery. Thus began the first wave of the feminist movement in this country.

This bit of history is known to every Delta. Because we have had taught to us, had preached to us, had read to us over and over and over again the incident about our Founders, who joined other women in the march down Pennsylvania Avenue in 1913 in a demonstration for women's suffrage.

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Next, let's deal with one final HANG-UP, NUMBER FIVE which has to do with "intimate" relationships--dating, marrying, etcetera--between black men and white women.

I wonder how much of our negative response to the women's movement is a result of our hostility towards white women who are in-

involved with black men. And how do we deal with the opposite situation?

To some black women this compounds the rejection they experience in the total life style and struggle. Some black women think of the violence of rejection as the harshest violence of all:

--you cannot see it
--you cannot touch it
--you cannot describe it
--but you perceive it
--and you know that it is there
--it is non-verbal
--but you get the message
--and it diminishes the soul and saps the spirit
but somehow you manage to hang loose and keep on going.

But is this, or are any of these HANG-UPS, really valid reasons for us to stay out of the women's movement? I say No! It should be obvious by now that what I'm talking about is a new role for black women in both the civil rights and women's rights movements. I suggest to you that the black woman can be a bridge between the two movements, that we can take the lead in addressing the dual oppression of racism and sexism. We can begin to develop what Geraldine Rickman, a black psychologist, calls "linkages" between these two vital arms of the human liberation movement.

Our first step is to begin to support--loudly and clearly--the black women who have begun to link the movements, and who have often endured criticism and hostility for their actions...

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