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General

WOMEN'S MOVEMENT / HISTORY & EARLY STRIKINGS OF THE SECOND WAVE  
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT / PEACE

## BARNARD WOMEN'S LIBERATION POSITION PAPER

- Ellen Nasper

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The involvement of Barnard Women's Liberation in the strike evidenced our concern that Barnard students support and work for the three national demands of the strike, and that they do this as the student body of Barnard. We felt it important that Barnard women act together politically and assume responsibility for their political actions. Previously, and especially during the 1968 strike, Barnard students who agreed with the political demands at hand went across the street to Columbia to work. This meant, in essence, that those women provided the same kind of labor to keep political activities going that women provide in any context - they typed, cooked, cleaned, lent moral support to the men, and kept quiet (or were ignored) during policy-making discussions. In other words, their significance as political and intellectual members of society was largely overlooked. As members of Women's Liberation we felt most urgently the necessity for Barnard Women to take a decisive role in the strike, because we feel that women must always assume responsibility and work independantly on all issues that concern them. Women must take themselves and their ideas seriously in all situations, and especially in political ones.

It is obvious by now to most of us that the war in Southeast Asia is both brutal and inhuman, and furthermore that Americans are able to tolerate the brutality of this war in large part because they are able to dehumanize the people being killed. Asian peoples have known racism before in this country (in World War II concentration camps were established for Japanese-Americans while German-Americans were free to hold pro-Nazi rallies in Madison Square Garden). Although the motive of the Indochinese War is not racism, the fact of racism permits the war to be conducted in the overtly brutal fashion of Song My.

The same racism is apparent in the general public's response to the deaths, and to the lives, of Black people in America. Twenty-eight Black Panthers have been killed in the past four years, with little outcry even, as in the cases of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, when those deaths were obviously murder for the purpose of political repression. Bobby Seale was chained, shackled and gagged because he attempted to serve as his own defense during a political trial. Most recently, the whole country erupted when four white students were murdered for participating in a peaceful protest at Kent State, while, when one short week later six Black people were murdered in Augusta, Georgia (and again some were innocent bystanders), the country remained virtually silent.

What is more insidious and more brutal for Blacks is that they daily face a society that finds it acceptable and unquestionable to place them in

ghettoes, to deny them adequate employment and food, to respond to them as less than full human beings. This racism is easily ignored by the larger society because, if it touches it at all, it only serves the larger society's interests (by tempering the economy, providing easily accessible and readily dismissable cheap labor, etc. ). It is because the Black Panther Party so directly challenges the system that oppresses Black people that it is so necessary for that system to repress the Panthers.

It is more difficult for most people to see that women as well are dehumanized and exploited by this society, but it is an undeniable fact of life for most women. Women are constantly bombarded with advertising propaganda that insinuates that their only form of self-expression and fulfillment is in purchasing, cleaning, and being sexy. Myths about women's intellectual inferiority are similar in quality to such myths about Blacks. Women are considered closer to nature, more in tune with emotions, etc., but in fact the outcome of these myths is that women are relegated to the non-intellectual, service roles in our society. We call this dehumanization of women sexism. Sexism and racism go hand in hand to provide cheap labor and unquestioning subservience to those who benefit from them. Thus we might expect that once women were able to unite as determinedly against their own oppression and demand the restructuring of society to provide for women's total realization of their potential as human beings, that movement would be summarily suppressed as well.

Barnard and Columbia Women's Liberation released the following statement early in the strike. It reflected our understanding of the way in which the dehumanization of women, Asians and Blacks, and other non-white peoples are related and dependent on one another;

" Women's Liberation is a demand for the recognition of Women's full humanity. As such, it cannot be indifferent to war, mankind's supreme expression of inhumanity. Women's Liberation is a demand that women no longer be treated as objects. As such, it cannot be indifferent to another people's being treated as objects.

Beyond such general considerations are more specific reasons why we cannot, as women, ignore America's involvement in Southeast Asia.

A State which defines its power and influence in military terms is a state hostile to women, except as women conceive and nurture its cannon fodder and are able to "man" homefront

positions while, and usually only while, the men are away fighting. It is sometimes claimed that women make social and economic gains during wartime as a reward for their contributions to national defense. This is a spurious analysis. Some of us move into occupations and university places vacated by men. After the war we are once again pushed out of these positions and relegated to the home and to the glorified function of motherhood. This is exploitation, not progress. Although we are not drafted into the army, we are intimately involved in and damaged by this and all wars. War brutalizes all people and, within the context of this society, we are seeing reinforced sex role stereotypes of masculine aggressiveness and feminine submissiveness, concepts which we seek to eradicate. The "masculinity" of combat, the canard which tells the male that he is not a real "man" until he has the "guts" to kill another man is a pre-eminently fatal definition. As long as men value physical force and violence as a primary solution, women will be treated as unequals. We reject the image of ourselves as defenseless. WE WILL NOT HAVE THIS WAR FOUGHT IN THE NAME OF AMERICAN WOMENHOOD! For women who lose husbands, sons, lovers, brothers, the talk of gains rings especially hollow.

Out of a feeling of sisterhood with the women of Southeast Asia we must protest against this war. Women are being killed, maimed, raped and widowed in a war in which the neat distinctions between combatant and civilian do not hold, in which, indeed, women themselves appear as combatants. In this war against civilians, herbicides and defoliants used by the U. S. Government are known to cause miscarriages and the birth of deformed infants, thus extending this war against civilians to a war against all human life, now and for generations to come. An army of occupation almost invariably means prostitution, rape and degradation for the women of the country occupied. The racist aspects of exploitative sex in this war add a further dimension to the repugnance we must feel at American involvement in Asia. As Women, as Americans, and as human beings we must demand an immediate end to this war."

Recognizing how important these issues are, we felt it impossible to tolerate business as usual and ignore the issues raised by the three national demands. Understanding as well that we had a responsibility to take action as a community, we advocated a general strike for Barnard College in order that students, staff, faculty and administration might be free to take action to change the course of history in our country. We felt it especially important that Barnard, a major women's College, be

involved as an institution in the national wide strike against the war, against racism, against political repression. Finally, as members of Women's Liberation, we felt it significant, that because of the strike, Barnard women acted politically, vigorously and en masse, for the first time. Sisterhood became the unifying and fundamental principle of the Barnard Strike Coalition enabling women, despite diverse political philosophies and factional differences, to take a united stand on the issues that affect us all.

Ellen Nasper, Barnard '71

Lynda Horhota, Barnard '72