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# ruby bayou

Issue I, November 1994...

*Welcome to the first issue of Ruby Bayou. This student publication is sponsored by Womyn's Action Coalition, and funded by mandatory student fees. It is an open forum for campus-wide expression, be it poetry, artwork, satire, fiction, commentary, fact, etc. The views presented do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, the sponsoring organization, or the Student Association. Responses and submissions should be directed to C.U. Box 85 or vaxed to WACSG. Submissions will not be returned, and minor editorial liberties may be taken.*

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# From The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy

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## **Facts on FACE:**

>>FACE is the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act. This act criminalizes the use of force to intentionally injure, intimidate, or interfere with a person seeking or providing reproductive health services. Since its enactment in May, federal courts have dismissed challenges to this anti-violence law in Arizona, California, Florida, Virginia, and Louisiana. Similar lawsuits are pending in Washington, D.C., North Carolina, and Virginia.

>>On October 5, a Federal jury in Pensacola, Florida convicted Paul Hill on 3 counts of violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE) and one count of federal fire arms charges. Hill is accused of murdering John Britton and his escort James Barrett, and wounding escort June Barrett, at the Pensacola Ladies Center on July 29. For the deaths of Dr. Britton and Mr. Barrett, Hill could serve a life sentence; the conviction for wounding June Barrett carries a maximum 10 yr. prison term.

## **Also In the news:**

>>On Oct. 9, two women's health clinics in CA - the Feminist Women's Health Center in Redding and Chico Planned Parenthood -- were damaged by arson. Both clinics were set ablaze in the early morning after the exteriors of the building were doused with gasoline. The Redding clinic, which was the site of four such attacks in five years, suffered limited damages of approximately \$10,000...while the Chico Planned Parenthood sustained nearly \$100,000 worth of damages. Two days later, the offices of Dr. James Armstrong in Kalispell, Montana, were fire-bombed, causing an estimated \$75,000 in damage. Dr. Armstrong is the third abortion provider in Montana whose facility has been burned since 1992...The arson is the latest in a long series of personal and legal attacks that Dr. Armstrong has endured in the last several years: death threats, pickets at his church, and a break-in robbery at his home.

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As I was walking down the stairs of the student union today, I was struck by an appalling irony. Among the crowds and bustle of the lunchtime crews headed for the cafeteria, there was a woman handing out flyers. She was strategically positioned at the bottom of the stairs so all would be forced to confront her and the flyers. I happened to be in back of a group of sorority pledges, who completely ignored the woman with the flyers in their haste to greet a potential sister. "I'll take one," I said to the woman with the hand-outs, and began to read.

The title of the flyer I took is called The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The members of Amnesty International were passing them out to illustrate the fact that these rights are denied to multitudes of people daily, and to remind us just how precious and important these rights are to our existence. As I ingested the contents of the flyer, I became upset and then enraged at the women in front of me. The beginning of Article 1 of the declaration mentioned above states: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Although the last word does not utilize gender-neutral language, the point is clear.

Do we, as Americans, need to be force fed our rights because we've taken them for granted day-in and day-out? Is it up to Amnesty International to

make us aware of others who struggle for things we don't even acknowledge as important? Is it not our responsibility as students, as Americans, as human beings, to be conscious of oppression and try to halt it? Or is Rwanda and El Salvador, or even our own college community, too far away and removed to confront on our own? Obviously, we need a wake-up call. And the sorority pledges in front of me carried my thoughts to a rude awakening. Their presence seemed to contradict everything stated in the first lines of Article 1. They, willingly, give up their right to be free and equal citizens of their community, and they sure as hell suspend their dignity during the process of pledging. The reason and conscience they are endowed with, and able to express under the protection of the U.S. Constitutional Amendments, regresses when pledging, to acting towards one another in the spirit of fright and conformity. Furthermore, their efforts to be a part of this "sisterhood" group entails filling their heads with loads of useless information (i.e.: names, addresses, social security numbers, etc.) during pledging, instead of information that is meaningful and productive.

There is something wrong. Are we here to learn or to oppress each other?

If you go to the Amnesty International bulletin board, you will find oppression. We should not, through the Greek system, emulate a police state, equipped with living in constant fear and in-your-face

confrontations evident in the greeting process. We have enough things to do, papers to write, tests to take, plays to produce, work to finish, and oppression to battle as students - why induce useless extra worry and stress? Why create an atmosphere opposite of the supposed American "land of the free"? Why, why, why?

I am aware of the several passionate answers to these questions, and I realize that under the right to free expression, one is entitled to do or say whatever they want. Yet, when someone utilizes their freedom of speech/expression and creates an environment that hinders my speech/expression, there is a conflict. I, as a SUNY Geneseo student, feel silenced, frustrated, disgusted, and appalled at the pledging processes alive on this campus. I am constantly aware of the self-induced oppression present on campus for the four to six weeks it takes place, which ultimately initiates those participating into a world of "Save the Bear" nights at the I.B. and "Incest is Best" T-shirts. I feel as if my efforts to eradicate stereotypes and strive for equality as a student, as a human being, are completely destroyed by the Greek organizations. Consequently, the systematic support to the IGC by the college not only perpetuates this backwards behavior, but reinforces its legitimacy.

Although this disturbs me, I feel that sororities and fraternities have a right to exist on an equal level with any other organization the college

recognizes, for the freedom to express is important. Yet, I wish that the drive which motivates at least 20% of the student body to pledge, was geared towards something more substantial than unity through Greek letters on a sweatshirt and silly rituals.

Furthermore, I believe that their methods for induction should be revamped in order to provide a healthy, non-oppressive environment for themselves as well as for those who choose a non-Greek lifestyle. Maybe if a change occurs, my stomach will not turn every time I look into the eye of a pledgee and see absolute fear and intimidation. It should not be this way.

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blood of ancestors  
blood of mothers  
blood of youth  
spilled carelessly  
for the sake of sacred myths  
blood of generations  
staining the hands of  
the ignorant and powerful  
blood of the earth  
dripping through  
wounds of technology

blood on our hands  
conspirators in oppression  
blood on our feet  
imprints in history  
we pour into the bayou  
we emerge from the bayou  
we bleed ruby rivers

# **Cultural Diversity: Theory vs. Application**

BY WILLIAM TAYLOR

During my tenure here as a student at SUNY Geneseo, I have noticed the undercurrent of misunderstanding that has swept away many people. Swept them away from supporting organizations such as BSU, KASA, WAC, and many others that provide their members (as well as those of us conscious enough to be open minded) with an oasis of knowledge and experience.

The misunderstanding has come in the form of this question, "If we are all Americans, why the need to distinguish ourselves as 'African-American', 'Asian-American', and other labels that divide us from becoming American?" This question is one I have heard many times. People have even tried to rehash the old "Melting Pot" analogy. The basic statement is: "Why can't we just all get along as Americans?"

Well, I prefer to use the "Salad Bowl" analogy, in that we should not melt different cultures down, thus losing their identity, but rather celebrate and accept those differences as what makes this society so great. I'd like to take the analogy a step farther though. You see, in order for all the different parts of the salad to

come together without hostility, negativity, and even violence, each individual component; the lettuce, tomato, carrots, peppers, etc., must have a positive sense of "self". Each must understand and give value to its own traits and history.

If you are going to make a salad, and a tomato thinks it is really a carrot, you have a problem! A tomato must feel good about what it means to be a tomato, before you can ask it to join with the other components of the salad. Remember the last good salad you had? The reason why it was so tasty was due to the whole complement of flavors that each unique item willingly contributed!

Now how does this relate back to us here in the human paradigm? One way to create stronger individuals who are capable of integrating with people from other cultures, is through the educational process of cultural awareness. If you know your (ACCURATE) history, and feel that the people of your race made tremendous contributions to civilization, chances are you will have strong self-esteem and self-confidence. These two

# **Cultural Diversity: Theory vs. Application**

ingredients are fundamental to any effort of personal success.

This is the problem with asking minorities to "just be American". What does that mean exactly? Does it mean that I should sell to a foreign land and oppress the indigenous people upon my arrival? Does it mean that I should oppress women, and hang "Jim Crow" signs on water fountains? These are all part of the "American" experience, are they not? How are we to pick and choose what aspects of "American" to become?

Groups such as BSU, KASA, and others provide students here with a well needed balance from the bombardment of Eurocentric ideology they receive in most of their classes. In order to better understand themselves and their

relationship to other races, it is important for members of these groups to work together in this process.

These groups must not be looked at as a divisive tool, but rather a supplemental one that provides people with a foundation. A foundation that enables people to empower themselves, and have the confidence to achieve the highest aspirations.

Therefore, it would be much more constructive to change the focus of our attention and efforts, away from attempts to "Americanize" people; to learning as much as possible about the accurate histories and facts of ALL cultures. Share them. Celebrate them. But most of all...Understand them! In so doing, we can redefine what "American" means.

I Wish

I often wish  
I could write  
him a love poem.  
But I often wonder  
how do you express in  
words what your heart can  
barely feel...

Before Now

I CAN'T TALK HERE, THEY  
MIGHT FIND OUT...

I CAN'T TELL THEM WHAT  
I KNOW, THEY MIGHT CHANGE  
THEIR MINDS...

I AM NOT FREE HERE, TO DO WHAT  
I LIKE...I DON'T WANT THEM  
TO PAY THE PRICE.  
NOT TRUTH, NOT LIES  
NotNot  
CAGED within...

A TRAP OF MY OWN  
MAKING, CAUGHT IN  
A WEB.

Untitled

I am so tired of this fight  
so weary I can feel my bones  
turning to dust. The words  
are floating within my head  
but my fingers are tired too.  
I want to crawl into a hole  
filled with Mother earth, and  
bury all the tender parts of  
me away forever.

NEGLECTING YOU

Within silence there  
is much to be heard.  
But I WAS NOT LISTENING  
NOT HEARING THE POUNDING  
ON MY SILENT CAGE  
door... UNTIL YOU  
spoke...AND I FOUND  
THE COURAGE TO USE MY  
VOICE AGAIN...SO NOW  
WE HAVE COME full  
circle, ONCE AGAIN  
I CAN ENJOY THE SILENCE.

*A collection of poems by Aisha Bonner*

# Mindfuck: The Hidden Side of Sexual Violence

by Becky Mehring

A few weeks ago, the Clothesline Project brought the issues of sexual discrimination and sexual violence into people's minds and made us all aware that these are serious issues. The Clothesline Project also made me aware of how narrowly we define sexual abuse. A close friend of mine wanted to put my name on the clothesline, but there wasn't really an appropriate category. The closest category was for victims of rape and sexual violence. I have not been raped, nor have I been a victim of overt sexual violence. I say overt sexual violence because there seems to be two categories of sexual violence: the physical form of sexual abuse, which is generally accepted as the definition of sexual violence; and the covert or emotional aspect of sexual violence.

This latter form of sexual violence is rarely recognized for what it is, and for this reason covert sexual violence is all the more harmful. Victims of such subtle forms of abuse have a more difficult time defining, accepting, and overcoming the abuse.

I previously mentioned that I have not been raped. However, my counselor believes otherwise. Did he hurt you? Yes. Did you want to do that? No. Did you feel good about it? No. I felt like a whore, if that. That's rape - even if the offender is (or was) your boyfriend. What makes such situations difficult to define as sexual abuse is that they are not physically violent and they are followed by showerings of affection from the abuser. This is mindfuck: the most subtle and potentially most harmful form of abuse a person can endure.

Mindfuck, like all forms of abuse, is a power-control issue. The abuser enjoys the control he has over a woman whose self-esteem is so low that she would do nearly anything to secure approval. The victim can be manipulated by anything from childlike begging to temporary abandonment. In the former situation, the victim is made to feel needed; in the latter situation, she is reminded of how disposable she is, and who really needs who.

The question always arises: Why doesn't she leave? She stays because she believes she is loved and needed,

and because the abuser has latched on to her low self-esteem in order to make her a sort of puppet. The victim is made to feel unworthy without the abuser and she is subtly directed in her activities, from who her friends are to what she does after classes.

The beauty of mindfuck is that it can't be easily pinpointed. If he had hit me, then I would know he was abusive, but he didn't. He just left me feeling degraded, disgusted, and unsure. Unsure because even now, I think that it is all in my mind. I did agree to "wearing something sexy" in the middle of winter when jeans and a sweater would have been better. I did put on those damn fishnets only to have them torn up and torn off me - and to be torn up and torn apart myself. That was the beauty (for him) of mindfuck: he made me think that I wanted to do these things, and he convinced me that I enjoyed them. I enjoyed them so he would love me. What a twisted perception of love. How was I to know? Nobody had ever loved me. For me, as for many victims of both overt and covert sexual abuse, intimacy is manifested in sexuality.

Thus my strong belief in the need to expand our understanding of sexual abuse to include the covert emotional manipulations which leave women with a feeling that they just can't put their finger on. Mindfuck is sexual abuse; and it is the worst form of sexual violence a woman can endure, since she may never recognize it as such. I may spend the rest of my life waking up from nightmares, convinced that it is all in my head. When people tell me what a "nice guy" he is, and that he could never hurt anyone or anything, I will be sure that it was all in my head.

Yes, it was all in my head. But it hurt me, and I suffer from it. That makes it REAL.

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*"Whoever controls the diameter of your education, controls the circumference of your activity."*

*Carter G. Woodson*

## IN HONOR of A ONE-NIGHT STAND

This could be SEX

With ABOUT AS MUCH MEANING AS ANCIENT TEXT

All scribbled up AND broken

HARD TO DECIPHER

Is THAT WHAT YOU WANT?

WHAT YOU DESIRE?

OR HOW ABOUT A MEETING OF physical minds

IN A dark ROOM

With closed blinds....

## Homosexual Angst Released

If Maria sang "There's a place for us"

Then why can't this motel seem to find space for us?

Oh well, I guess it's back to the car

holding you close but really it's far

Because they can't accept us without an

as long...

As long as what?

A ten foot pole?

A heat seeking missile?

A HOT, OPEN hole?

Oh I see, he's standing too close, too close to me

We're offending your good Christian ideals

about what life is supposed to be

My eyes look up from scanning the floor

I grab her and scream

"You ain't in Kansas no more!"

- POETRY by GREG Campbell

# FEMINISM 101

The women's movement or feminism apparently disconcerts many people. Some students feel threatened by it, others wonder why there is a need for it anymore, and for some, feminism probably still manages to conjure up images of bra-burning radicals. Distracted by all the images and associations that have attached themselves to the movement, some have neglected to find out what it stands for and why it exists.

Feminism exists because there are fundamental differences in the way men and women can live their lives in present society. Patriarchy is the ideology under which society functions. It is an enforced belief in male dominance and control. Sexism is the system that holds patriarchy in place. The most overt way that sexism is used is through gender roles. These gender roles are actions and behaviors deemed "appropriate" for males and females; they are created and enforced by societal institutions. These institutions include family, religion, education, the economy, law, and media. Gender roles and sexism go hand-in-hand in upholding the ideology of patriarchy. The major weapons of sexism are economics, violence, and homophobia.

## ECONOMICS

Economic sexism serves to uphold male dominance and control primarily through what is called the family wage. This is the idea that men should make more money than women because a husband should be able to support his family through his wages alone. This economic policy has been institutionalized to the extent that today, when most families simply cannot afford to survive on one income, men still make more money than women. The family wage upholds the gender roles that women should be dependent on men, that men should have control over every aspect of women's lives, and that men are worth more than women and should be compensated as such.

The economic realities of sexism are myriad and easy to identify. For example, in 1992, a woman could expect to earn 66 cents for every dollar of a man's pay. The value of women's work is clearly less than that of men's. Another staggering statistic: in 1985, women did 75% of the work, got 10% of the pay, and owned 1% of the property worldwide. The economic conditions for women are such that they cannot easily afford to be independent; they are financially unable. Thus we see the effectiveness of economics in upholding gender roles and sexism.

## VIOLENCE

Violence is used as a weapon of sexism by supporting the idea that women are the property of men. Violence is the physical manifestation of men's power over women. Because women are not valued as highly as men, and because historically they have been treated as lesser beings and as property, there is a cultural idea that men have a right to control women. If you own something, you should be able to do whatever

you want with it. Women are taught early on that stepping out of line, or in other words, violating the given gender roles will lead to physical punishment.

The threat of dominance is not only physical, but includes mental, verbal, and sexual control as well. Women in the United States are battered every 15 seconds; this is the greatest single cause of injury to women in the U.S., more than by car accidents, rapes, and muggings combined. Rape and incest are acts of violence, not of sex. In the U.S., it is estimated that a woman is raped every 1.3 minutes. Worldwide we hear too often of thousands more women who are raped daily as an act of war. Raping a country's women is seen as a destruction of property. It is not the women themselves who are valuable, it is the fact that one country destroys the property of another.

## **HOMOPHOBIA**

Finally, homophobia is the third major weapon of sexism. Homophobia is the irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex. Similar to sexism, but more focused toward homophobia, is the ideology of heterosexism. This is the assumption that the world is and must be heterosexual, and the display of heterosexual power and privilege as the norm. These concepts uphold sexism by reinforcing the gender roles for men and women, and punishing those who reject them. When people do not follow the roles assigned to them as men and women, those in power often feel threatened, and therefore need to dominate.

Lesbians are rejecting their role as women who are dependent on and the property of men. Similarly, gay men are rejecting their role as men who can dominate and own women in personal relationships; their rejection of this power threatens the validity of heterosexual men's power over women. However, this does not necessarily mean that sexuality determines ideology; rather one can be sexist and homophobic despite sexual orientation. On the societal level, homophobia is used to reinforce heteropatriarchal gender roles.

We come to the end of the first lesson in Feminism 101. Feminism is not about an irrational hatred of men or an unfounded attack on reasonable traditions. Rather, it is based on an analysis of the power structures and systems of control that operate within our society to create and uphold an inequality in the value, experience, and opportunity of its people. Sexism is not always upheld by consciously motivated actions; rather it is through an unquestioning adherence to culturally accepted norms (which are based on the assumption of male superiority) that women's lives are limited. Feminism is radical only in that it rejects a long-standing tradition of abuse and injustice. Understanding the theoretical basis for these injustices is the first step in changing them.



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