

The Young Lords were a Puerto Rican youth group that, like the Black Panthers with whom they were often allied, provided community services such as free breakfasts for children in local churches, as well as protesting racism and raising consciousness about colonialism. Despite an occasional emphasis on weapons and a generally macho stance, again like the Black Panthers, the Young Lords' largely male leadership was forced by women in the organization to publish a strong feminist "Position Paper." In 1973 women from the Young Lords joined with women from black power groups to form the Third World Women's Alliance (see chapter 2), thus demonstrating their growing identification as part of a "Third World," including oppressed peoples of color within the U.S. as well as in underdeveloped nations.

Position Paper on Women

YOUNG LORDS PARTY

Puerto Rican, Black, and other Third World (colonized) woman are becoming more aware of their oppression in the past and today. They are suffering three different types of oppression under capitalism. First, they are oppressed as Puerto Ricans or Blacks. Second, they are oppressed as women. Third, they are oppressed by their own men.

In the past women were oppressed by several institutions, one of which was marriage. In Latin America and Puerto Rico, the man had a wife and another woman, called *la corteja*. This condition still exists today. The wife was there to be a homemaker, to have children and to maintain the family name and honor. She had to be sure to be a virgin and remain pure for the rest of their life, meaning she could never experience sexual pleasure. The wife had to have children in order to enhance the man's concept of virility and his position within the Puerto Rican society. *La corteja* became his sexual instrument. The man could have set her up in another household, paid her rent, bought her food, and paid her bills. He could have children with this woman. Both women had to be loyal to the men. Both sets of children grew up very confused and insecure.

Women have always been expected to be wives and mothers only. They are respected by the rest of the community for being good cooks, good housewives, good mothers, but never for being intelligent, strong, educated or militant. In the past, women were not educated, only the sons got an education and mothers were respected for the number of sons they had, not daughters. Daughters were worthless and the only thing they could do was marry early to get away from home. At home the role of the daughter was to be a nursemaid for the other children and kitchen help for her mother.

The daughter was guarded like a hawk by her father, brothers and uncles to keep her a virgin. In Latin America the people used *dueñas* or old lady watchdogs to guard the purity of the daughters. The husband must be sure that his new wife has never been touched by another man because that would ruin the "merchandise." When he marries her, her purpose is to have sons and keep his home but not to be a sexual partner.

Sex was a subject that was never discussed, and women were brainwashed into believing that the sex act was dirty

and immoral, and its only function was for the making of children.

Puerto Rican and Black men are looked upon as rough, athletic and sexual, but not as intellectuals. Puerto Rican women are not expected to know anything except about the home, kitchen and bedroom. All that they are expected to do is look pretty and add a little humor. The Puerto Rican man sees himself as superior to his women, and his superiority, he feels, gives him license to do many things—curse, drink, use drugs, beat women and run around with many women. As a matter of fact these things are considered natural for a man to do and he must do them to be considered a man. A woman who curses, drinks and runs around with a lot of men is considered dirty scum, crazy, and a whore.

Today, Puerto Rican men are involved in a political movement. Yet the majority of their women are home taking care of the children. The Puerto Rican sister that involves herself is considered aggressive, castrating, hard and unwomanly, viewed by the brothers as sexually accessible because, what is she doing outside of the home? The Puerto Rican man tries to limit the woman's role because he feels the double standard is threatened, insecure without it as a crutch.

Machismo has always been a very basic part of Latin American and Puerto Rican culture. Machismo is male chauvinism and more. He can do whatever he wants because his woman is an object with certain already defined roles—wife, mother and good woman.

Machismo means physical abuse, punishment and torture. A Puerto Rican man will beat his woman to keep her in place and show her who's boss. Most Puerto Rican men do not beat women publicly because in the eyes of other men that is a weak thing to do. So they usually wait until they're home. All the anger and violence of centuries of oppression which should be directed against the oppressor is directed at the Puerto Rican woman. The aggression is also directed at daughters. The daughters hear their fathers saying "the only way a woman is going to do anything or listen is by hitting her." The father applies this to the daughter, beating her so that she can learn respect. The daughters

grow up with messed up attitudes about their role as women and about manhood. They grow to expect that men will always beat them.

Sexual fascists are very sick people. Their illness is caused in part by this system which mouths puritanical attitudes and laws and yet exploits the human body for profit.

Sexual fascism is tied closely to the double standard and machismo. It means that a man or a woman thinks of the opposite sex solely as sexual objects to be used for sexual gratification and then discarded. A sexual fascist does not consider people's feelings; all they see everywhere is a pussy or a dick. They will use any rap, especially political, to get sex.

Third World sisters are caught up in a complex situation. On one hand, we feel that genocide is being committed against our people. We know that Puerto Ricans will not be around on the face of the earth very long if Puerto Rican women are sterilized at the rate they are being sterilized now. The practice of sterilization in Puerto Rico goes back to the 1930s when doctors pushed it as the only means of contraception. In 1947-48, 7% of the women were sterilized; between 1953 and 1954, 4 out of every 25; and by 1956 the number had increased to about 1 out of 3 women. In many cases our sisters are told that their tubes are going to be "tied" but are never told that the "tying" is really "cutting" and that the tubes can never be "untied."

Part of this genocide is also the use of birth control pills which were tested for 15 years on Puerto Rican sisters before being sold on the market in the U.S. Even now many doctors feel that these pills cause cancer and death from blood clotting.

Abortions in hospitals that are butcher shops are little better than the illegal abortions our women used to get. The first abortion death in NYC under the new abortion law was Carmen Rodriguez, a Puerto Rican sister who died in Lincoln Hospital. Her abortion was legal but the conditions in the hospital were deadly.

On the other hand, we believe that abortions should be legal if they are community controlled, if they are safe, if our people are educated about the risks and if doctors do

not sterilize our sisters while performing abortions. We realize that under capitalism our sisters and brothers cannot support large families and the more children we have

the harder it is to support them. We say: change the system so that women can freely be allowed to have as many children as they want without suffering any consequences.