

# INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST VIOLENCE TO WOMEN

◊ November 25, 1989 ◊

## CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S PROTESTS AGAINST VIOLENCE INTENSIFY AS THEY TAKE TO THE STREETS

Persons all over the world will mark the 25th of November, 1989 as an International Day for focus on Violence Against Women and how to overcome it. Over the years newspapers and other publications have carried stories which demonstrate conclusively that violence against women is an on-going thing that has shown no tendency to abate.

We present in this issue excerpts of news stories demonstrating violence against women which has taken several different forms.

There has been a call from Women for Caribbean Liberation (WCL) for special attention, by women's groups in the region, to the occasion. The WCL has an intimate and direct reason for demanding a strong anti-violence campaign by Caribbean women. The organisation's first Coordinator, Arah Hector, was brutally murdered on May 28th, 1989.

It is obvious that far from decreasing, violence against women, as reported, has increased. It is alleged that domestic violence cuts across class lines, and that the battering of women is far more widespread than obvious. More rapists are being brought to court; and the murder of women as a follow up to their rape is certainly not a rarity.

In the last few years women have been taking to the streets to demonstrate their anger against the violence perpetrated against them. An ex-student of the Girls' High School in St Vincent and the Grenadines, Yolande Weekes, was brutally murdered in January 1985. Then, in September of the same year a GHS student was raped and killed in an equally brutal display of cruelty.

This had the SVG female community so incensed that, largely spearheaded by the Headmistress of the High School and the National Council of Women, about three thousand women registered their anger in a march and rally in December 1985. The women were supported by hundreds of secondary school students, a Girl Guide detachment and representatives of other girls' groups. Several men also joined in the demonstration.

Barbadian women showed their disgust over the continuing sexual attacks on women

in June 1986. Over four hundred of them took to the streets of Bridgetown venting their feelings regarding rape.

The most recent incident of this type of protest took place in Castries, St Lucia. The demonstration stemmed from the murder of a woman by a man whom she had reported for attempts to molest her daughter. The woman was Mary Ratcliffe. The organisers were shocked and disconcerted when three thousand women marched with them when they had expected that they would have received the support of about three hundred. The situation could easily have got out of hand, such was the reaction! The fact that there were no automatic arrangements for the protection of the marchers speaks for itself. That incident occurred in August 1989 and it was followed by numerous requests for protest marches to be organised in villages in St Lucia.

The increase of women's anger against the violence being perpetuated against their sex is the sign of an awakening consciousness by women of the fact that unless they themselves do something, the violence will never stop.

Women must start by checking domestic violence in their homes and move on through protest to attack rape and murder.

• Nora Peacocke  
Editor

Women bear the main responsibility for looking after the everyday needs of children and the old. They have to find a way out. Since there are so few jobs for them, and their pay is low, they try to get men to help them. If they do not do everything the man wants, he often gets violent.

Wha fe do, me chile. De  
pickney dem haffe eat. An now  
an again me haffe sen something  
fe me mother for she caan help  
herself again. An de price a  
tings jus a go up everyday.

A Son-Son black an  
blue yu eye so?



This too is sexual abuse, because it takes advantage of the weakness of the woman. When the woman resists, as she sometimes does, it may end in murder.

Special  
Issue

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## About Our Special Issue

The proposal that November 25 each year be declared as an International Day of Protest Against Violence Against Women was made in July 1981 at the Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Feminists, in memory of the Mirabel sisters of the Dominican Republic who died on November 25, 1960 at the hands of the Trujillo Regime.

This day has been commemorated in a variety of ways in the region, focussing attention on the increasing incidence of violence against women. This year WAND has focussed on this issue by producing this special edition which highlights acts of violence against women not only in region but internationally and gives some analyses of the causes.

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ME

I am ME!

A person called to be

By my Creator (in His image)

A person with unique potential and free will.

But the world, Patriarchal Society,

Will not let me be myself.

I am (instead) defined

Mother, Whore,

A fatal dichotomy!

A body to be used for the benefit of patriarchs

To produce the next generation;

To boost the egos of men;

To fill their needs for love or lust or rage.

Pleasure-giver, baby-maker, easy prey.

And between these poles, where am I?

Where is the person? ME!

Where are the opportunities to be myself?

To shape the person I was called to be?

When priest and pimp define my purpose

What say have I?

I am object:

To be used, abused, controlled,

Protected, enshrined...

Anything but allowed to be

ME!

Peggy Antrobus

# YOU'RE NOT TO BLAME

by Joy Springer

No criminal can destroy you. This is one of the most important things for the survivor of a rape attack to remember.

It is also important that the survivor remembers that she has done nothing, the rape was not her fault and most of all, her situation could have been worse - she could have been killed.

These points were stressed by a team of panellists recently participating in a discussion on rape sponsored by the student body of the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill.

Psychologist Dr. Victor Forde spoke of the physical and emotional trauma which affected victims of rape and stressed the need for treatment not only immediately after the rape but for a considerable time afterwards.

He noted that in the aftermath of being raped, a woman might find her entire lifestyle disrupted. *Some women may feel the need to draw away from friends and family. They will change their phone numbers, their jobs, move away from familiar surroundings.*

Women expressed their trauma differently, he said. While some women might be tearful, others became hysterical and others seemed apparently calm. While some women expressed their anger, fear and anxiety, others tended to appear very controlled and kept their feelings hidden.

Other responses included a fear of death and of physical injury or mutilation. *Many victims are terrified of being alone, especially if the rape occurred in the home. They may experience a loss of self-worth, may feel isolated or estranged from friends and family.*

If the rapist was known to the victim, the loss of trust would be more severe and might prove to be a serious obstacle to future interpersonal relations, the psychologist said.

Dr. Forde also spoke of the guilt and shame which some victims felt because many members of the

Barbadian society still viewed rape as a sexual crime and therefore often believed that the rape victim had in some way provoked the rape either through seductive clothing or behaviour. Anger was not a major initial reaction by women affected in this way, he said, since they believed that they were responsible for what happened to them.

Dr. Forde said that almost all victims of rape reported symptoms such as difficulty in falling asleep, waking up in an acute state of anxiety, nightmares, decrease in appetite and subsequent weight loss. Some people also suffered from stomach pains, often felt nauseated and suffered sexual dysfunction.

The psychologist said it was important for rape victims to have a realistic understanding of what had happened to them.

*After a month or two, some victims may appear readjusted, may resume work and have a decrease in nightmares but this is pseudo-adjustment and more problems may follow if their reaction is based on the denial or suppression of the event.*

He said that victims had to face up to what had happened and resolve their feelings of loss of self-worth and anger towards the rapist. *They must incorporate the incident as part of their life experience. If a good resolution is not accomplished, the victim will continue to experience phobias, anxiety, et cetera, as a result.*

Cheva Thompson of the Crisis Centre spoke of the service which her organisation offers to rape victims.

The Crisis Centre operates a hotline service for victims of rape and other kinds of sexual and physical abuse.

She said the 18 counsellors who service the hotline were not in any way judgemental but set about finding out whether the victim was safe, if she had been in contact with the Police and whether she wanted to be put in contact with or accompanied to any of

the people who could help her, for example, the Police, the doctor, the psychologist, the psychiatrist, the welfare services.

She noted that rape was a life threatening situation for which no rape victim was responsible. And she stressed that rape must be seen as an act of violence...*there's nothing sexual about it.*

She advised about ways to keep safe - being in lighted areas at night, not accepting rides from strangers, being with people who can be trusted, having someone who you can talk to.

Date rape was an increasing danger, she said, and advised women to make sure they always knew what they were drinking, what they were smoking...*If you don't feel right about something, then it is not right. You need to know the person you are with. If you feel at all uneasy, back off.*

Police public relations officer Assistant Superintendent John Sealy also had sound advice for the students. Do not take short cuts when leaving campus, especially through wooded areas. Walk in groups or accompanied by men. Beware of limers on campus, all of whom may not be of reputable character.

He said that the Police were often blamed for the laws and sentencing in relation to rape but he made it clear that the Police were responsible for investigation, the courts for sentencing and the legislature for making law.

He said that it was now mandatory for police women to be involved in the counselling and care of rape victims and assured that sexual abuse was one of the crimes which the Force treated with the utmost importance.

He said that continuous training of police officers should hopefully lessen complaints from women reporting rape of unsympathetic treatment by the Police.

\* From: *Barbados Advocate*, February 15, 1989

# AVOIDING RAPE - AN OPINION

by Dawn Morgan

One of the attitudes that the rape victim encounters is the insistence of a great percentage of the population that she invited the attack.

These people picture the rape victim as a curvaceous, seductively clad, heavily made-up, flirtatious, promiscuous, young woman, who walks alone at all hours and never locks her windows and doors.

True, such a person may be raped. An uncurvaceous, unseductively-clad, unmade-up grandmother who never goes out at night, is just as likely to be a victim.

There are ways in which you can lessen your chances of being raped.

You can avoid being on the streets alone at lonely times; refuse rides; lock windows and doors securely; make sure you meet strangers in public places; don't let on that you live alone. Better still, live with a large dog. Keep the dog indoors at night, you want him/her to protect you, not the garden.

These, and similar precautions, can make you a less likely target. However, none of the above will successfully screen out the rapist who is a friend or acquaintance. In many cases, (some studies indicate a majority), the attacker is someone who knows the victim, and watches and waits for his opportunity.

He may be a serviceman, a deliveryman, a neighbour, one of your brother's or husband's friends, and estranged or ex-husband or an ex-boyfriend. He may even be a relative. It is in such cases that is usually suggested that the women *led the poor man on*.

## SHOULD YOU FIGHT?

This is a question that women often debate: should you go limp, offer no resistance, and hope for the best - or should you fight? The decision is yours, and has to be based on the situation. If people are nearby, you might try yelling FIRE!

If the attacker is unarmed and you are fairly sure you can get away, or if you are trained in some form of hand-to-hand combat, you might consider fighting? But is it wise to fight a strong, aggressive, well-armed man in a lonely area? Bear in mind that if you do not fight, it will probably go against your case in a court of law.

If you decide not to fight, tell your attacker NO! Point out to him that he is raping you, and not having sex with your permission.

If you cannot honestly say that you verbally or physically objected to being raped; you will be most likely told that *you gave your consent*, even if such consent was given at the point of a knife.

If you do feel confident that you can overcome your attacker, don't play games. If you make a half-hearted attempt and only slightly hurt him, you will probably just succeed in making him angrier and you may be hurt even more. If you cannot deliver the type of blow that will stun him for enough time for you to escape - you might be better off not fighting.

Unless you are a black-belt, and armed, or trained in self-defence don't try to fight fair. This is no time to be ladylike. It is a survival situation. Fight forcefully, immediately and use all your strength and power.

Make noise, hurt him, incapacitate him, then get away! Marking him may help in later identification.

I think that realistic self-defence, classes (of short duration) should be made available to girls and women. By *realistic* I mean delaying with possible situations by acting out roles of victim and attacker, rather than by abstract techniques.

Such classes usually train women to forget about slapping or struggling - the heel of the hand is used against the nose, a rigid single finger is jabbed into vulnerable spots on the face.

Stomping, kicking, and scraping in the groin, shin, knee, or instep areas

are also included. You are held as *victim* in a possible real-life position and taught how to get out of the grip of attacker.

Of course, even if you are so trained, you may think the better of fighting an armed attacker.

However, at least training will give you some idea of your strength and your chances, if any, of overcoming an attacker.

## TALK THEM OUT OF IT

Some women have overcome their attackers by non-violent means. They quite literally talk them out of it. Usually they tell the man that he is too nice a person to do this, that he could certainly get willing sexual partners. Sometimes they say they are menstruating, are pregnant, or have some disease such as herpes, gonorrhoea, or syphilis.

We all hope that we will never be a rape victim. Yet, we must try to be prepared for the possibility. Perhaps we need to have a rape-crisis group in the community who will organise lectures, and discussions to teach us more about rape, and lend a sympathetic ear to rape victims? Perhaps we also need more policewomen (and men) specially trained to collect and preserve evidence and take information from the rape victims. Go placidly...

From: Pelican, July 8, 1983

IN COURT THE WOMAN IS MADE TO FEEL THAT SHE IS ON TRIAL, NOT THE ACCUSED



# WHY THIS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

by Nan Peacocke

KINGSTOWN, St Vincent, (CWES)--  
*Every breath you take  
Every move you make  
Every smile you fake  
I'll be watching you.*

These words from a song by the popular rock group, The Police would suggest that women can depend on the protection afforded by our men from assault by other men - or so we like to believe.

But, there are the times when our own men strike out against us in anger, in frustration, in hate; perhaps because of economic hardship, or because we spoiled them or beat them as children, or because they did not have strong, male models. Regardless of the environment, the manifestations of violence in all societies are widespread.

In the last few years, particularly brutal acts of violence against children and women are becoming an item of growing public awareness.

Are these aberrant acts by deranged personalities? Or do they appear deranged because these acts are so extremely violent as to jolt our recognition of abuses which underline social relations?

According to a study of rape cases in the United States, *the literature on violence against women does not suggest that rapists are insane.*

In patterns in forcible rape - Prof. M. Amir's study of 646 rape cases in the U.S. - *Studies indicate that rapists do not constitute a unique or psychopathological type; nor are they as a group invariably more disturbed than the control groups with which they compared.*

How far has the brutality of Caribbean history insinuated itself into the way we think and behave?

In *The Shadow of The Whip: A Comment on Male-Female Relations in the Caribbean*, Merle Hodge noted that *tensions underlying relations between races, classes and the sexes often erupt between individuals as verbal and physical violence.*

In common place behaviour, too, other forms of abuse are evident, for example, when a housewife hands her

gardener a drink of water in a tin although she has a cabinet full of glasses; when a child is cajoled with false promises and terrorised with threats of police brutality by his own parent; when a young man justifies the mutilation of a woman by her machete-wielding former boyfriend on the grounds that *if he let her get away with it, all women go feel that they could behave like that.*

In the latter case, the woman lost one eye and the sight of the other was *seriously impaired*. One arm had to be amputated and the use of the other is severely restricted owing to deep cuts on the hand which destroyed essential nerves... *she suffers chronic headaches and her speech is slurred.* The *Vincentian* (May 27, 1977).

If we were not highly tolerant of abusive forms of behaviour, why would a policeman feel no compunction about using his truncheon on the shoulders and head of a man he had apprehended, beating him almost senseless in front of a crowd of school children?

Acts of violence against women are often seen to exist in the *private realm* of sexuality.

The very mention of rape in a public arena - for example, in jokes and songs - dislocates it from the realm of fears and whispers exposing women to ridicule. A woman may react to this dislocation by cringing embarrassment or its kin, self-denigrating ribaldry.

Yet, in the abstract, no one approves of violence. The violence inherent in many acts between people of unequal power is often justified or excused. Rape, wife beating and sexual harassment are all forms of violence masquerading sometimes in our ideology as some other things - say as *what women really want.*

Even incest, socially disapproved and deeply hidden has been justified by some men, who maintain they possess the responsibility and privilege of sexually initiating their step-daughters.

How is the issue of violence against women understood? Is it a social

problem which will eventually be eradicated by laws, harsher penalties or more sympathetic policies provided for women's protection by Government?

Or is it also true that violence is part of a complex framework of values through which we perpetuate the relations of gender in our society?

Vaguely comprehended by reasonable people as shameful, brutal and unjust, violence is believed to emerge mysteriously *somewhere in society* disgorging its poison on the powerless heads of women.

What could case it, reasonable people wonder?

Could it be the innate brutality of human nature, or the male asserting his physical superiority, or the manufacture and marketing of sex?

Recently, in St Vincent, people were talking about a young woman, who, on her way home from work in the early evening, had been attacked and tied up on the branches of a tree. Apart from the unmistakable symbolism of this tale, what struck home was the particular circumstances in which I heard it.

It was related to me and to a man, in his late twenties, by a woman, a co-worker of about the same age. When she had given the details, the man responded, *If a woman did that to me, I would hold her and beat her 'till she dead.* We, too, were outraged. *A woman can't do that to man boy, you are crazy,* said my sister.

You could say the man's response was clever, because he shifted any implication of guilt upon his sex by turning the tables in an aggressive defence. Her retort spoke volumes, when, irritated by his malevolence, she reminded him that we do not believe that women have the ability or the inclination to commit such acts.

But there is more. The young man revealed an aspect of the truth that should be considered. Though women will decline his *solution* to the violence directed against us, he was pointing to a very real conflict.

He was saying, *If I were humiliated and harmed by an individual from the other sex, I would not accept my*

subjugation, and by extension the subjugation of my sex. I would confront and therefore prevent such treatment.

Is there a lesson in this reaction for women?

There may be conflict between men and women about violence itself but a man can say such things because, as a man he belongs to the gender that may resort to coercive forms of sexuality and violence in order to subjugate women.

Furthermore, even if it were possible, is it in women's interests to take up violence as a response? What would become of us all, if women took up behaving like such men?

But, is it true to say that it is not in women's interests to challenge this brutality?

Do we as women believe that in these circumstances, women are natural victims or that there are no demands to be voiced autonomously from that concept of the general good which ignores certain needs common to women?

As one writer has pointed out: *Relations between men and women are social relations. They are not immutable and fixed.*

It is difficult for women to act cohesively for change. Women's problems and aspirations often conflict with the class society and gender-roles we have reproduced and maintain with men.

What is more, women assist men by supporting the ideological structures which keep us believing in women's powerlessness. So, even though women's different interests - like our experiences - are stitched into the social fabric by a thousand different threads - class, race, age, education, etc. - there are common threads stitching together issues which form a common basis for solidarity.

These include the unfair sexual division of labour, the disproportionate responsibility for child-care, institutionalised discrimination, lack of political power or self-determination in sexuality and reproduction and threat of male violence.

• From: *Barbados Advocate*, May 19, 1985

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## WOMEN'S POWER: Females Protest Discrimination, Violence

Women here are expected to pressure Government to hasten the process of making land available for the establishment of a crisis centre for victims of domestic violence. And they are also calling for a more positive Police approach to cases of violence against women in our society.

These were some of the wishes and resolutions arising out of an afternoon of protest against domestic violence.

Hundreds of St Lucian women raised their voices in solidarity and protest, sang, marched, prayed and gave testimony denouncing domestic violence and the abuse of women in our society. The activities were designed to drive home the message that women are no less human beings in society than men and that our women don't deserve being treated like objects of abuse and battery.

The first official voice to sound-off in condemnation of domestic violence was that of women's rights activist Mrs Ione Erlinger-Forde, who had been in the forefront of organisation.

### BLATANT

Erlinger-Forde raised the curtains on the afternoon's events with what she observed and highlighted as a few of the glaring relations which relegate women to second-class citizenship in this country.

In outlining those relations, Erlinger-Forde felt convinced that blatant facts of discrimination are revealed by the obvious absence of women at top-level decision making positions in St Lucia, as well as the fact that there are no women who are part of the elected representatives of our Government.

She stated quite clearly: *I do not blame the men in our society. The manifold world of wife, mother, educator, cook, and bottle-washer, baby-sitter and wage earner...very often has no value when 'The Master' says - I am the salary earner in this house, what I say goes.*

*Why do so many of us accept this, she challenged. Is it because of the fact*

*that women are humble to men that we must be blackmailed into subservience?*

Erlinger-Forde reminded women that they have alternatives of education, independence, self-supporting home industries and hundreds of ways and means at their disposal.

Catholic Priest, Fr. Raymond Laurent in his sermon told the women: *The march will not give you rights. The rights have to come from yourselves. For if the rights do not come from within you, you will be marching in vain. So respect yourselves, know who you are first of all, know your dignity, accept that dignity, know the indispensable role that you have in our society.*

The highpoint of the Minister's message was the expressed feeling that the case of Mary Ratcliffe was probably the most crucial and animalistic event ever to emerge (in St Lucia).

### AWAKENING

*The murder of 32 year old lover, mother of four and partner, must be regarded as a most wretched act - and one which is painful. The act came as a result of Mary's new awakening and her courage, to make known to the authorities, the situation of abuse which her child was faced with.*

The Minister therefore described Mary Ratcliffe as a symbol of justice, courage, and a sacrificial lamb against domestic violence.

The march was not free of skeptics and hecklers along the route, but the faithful pressed on to a half hour mass rally and candle light session on Columbus Square. This was the grand climax, but at the end of it all an exhausted Mrs Ione Erlinger-Forde had this to say: This is not the end. We've only just begun...There is a lot more work we have to do. We are going to press forward for our crisis centre - we need it and we need more support for our women's organisations and groups.

• From: *The Voice*, August 23, 1989

## CASE STUDIES

### A RAPE VICTIM

In 1982 he came to my house to fix the fridge. A good friend of mine had recommended him. When I admitted him to the house his hands were dirty as though he had been fixing a car. He asked to wash his hands. I went to get him a towel and I was grabbed from behind. He locked his hand around my neck. He threw me on the bed and tied my feet. I fought him and begged him not to do this to me. I managed to kick him in his groin and got away but he caught me by the door. He kicked me all around the room. I screamed but nobody heard, it was during the day. I went into an asthmatic attack, I could not get my oxygen mask. I could not breathe, I was dying and still he raped me. The pain was unbelievable. I had never experienced pain like that before.

He threatened me not to talk, he said he would come back if I told anybody. I was crying I called my friend and she came right over and took me to a doctor. None of the doctors wanted to take a rape case. We went to the hospital but too many people were there and I went back home. I called my doctor and she told me to come early in the morning.

The examination showed lacerations of the cervix and that I was bleeding internally. From then on I never had a normal period. Periods gave me hell. I had to go to the hospital and they put me on sossigon. A gynaecologist found that the uterus was badly retroverted and the uterus was removed.

I could not face the thing...I refused to go back to the house. I had nightmares - a friend helped me with the police. The police knows him he has several cases already but because of who he is they cannot do anything. He raped guests of his guest house. The man is sick, I hear he walks around his house naked. I told a friend about it and she told me he was her boyfriend once and he raped her on a date.

As a result I am not comfortable with me. If I am anywhere and a man begins to get aggressive I get a terror. If a man invites me out alone I will not go. I saw him at Crop Over and I stiffened. *How can people get pleasure out of people screaming and crying?*

The funny thing is I was not wearing lipstick that morning, my hair was in curlers and I was wearing a dress. It is nonsense to talk about the way women dress. That has nothing to do with it.

I have a phobia - I know I have to deal with it.

### A RAPIST

David is a medium built, relatively handsome man who is currently serving a twelve year sentence at Her Majesty's Prison for two counts of rape committed against females 22, and 23 years of age. He has already served a ten year sentence for three rape offences committed in 1974. He was eighteen years at the time of his first conviction.

His record indicates that he has also been charged with theft, housebreaking and robbery with intent. All of these cases were committed against females.

At the time of the first conviction he was living with his mother, four sisters and two brothers. At the second conviction he was living alone.

He claims that the acts were not planned, if they were the police could never catch him. He saw the two victims walking along the road (Waterford and St Philip) and *something rushed to my head*. This something was due to an "evil spirit" an evilness in man. He did not know his victims.

He does not think that he *hurts anyone* in an act of rape. He thinks rape is a bad thing because of the imprisonment involved. He will make a definite change when he is released because fellow inmates tell him *that a handsome fellow like me who can get girls should not be doing that*.

He thinks that his mother is somewhat responsible for his behaviour because she allowed him too many privileges. She allowed him to go where he wanted and to do what he liked. His mother made no demands on him financially but constantly begged him to keep out of trouble. He is now 30 years old and has to serve 10 more years of his sentence.

by Merle Jordan

From: *Physical Violence Against Women 1977 - 1985*

### SOME WOMEN DON'T REPORT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

because:

THE POLICE ARE INSENSITIVE





## **Women and Development Unit**

**School of Continuing Education**

**University of the West Indies**

**Pinelands, St. Michael**

**Barbados, West Indies**