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AFENI SHAKUR



Judi Douglas



PANTHER SISTERS IN CHAINS: Three women are led, chained, into court in Los Angeles for their arraignment on charges stemming from the five hour police shooting attack on Panther headquarters Monday.

PANTHER

SISTERS



CONNIE MATTHEWS



Deborah Johnson

## PANTHER SISTERS ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Editor's Note: The following is an intensive interview with six Black Panther Party women about some of the issues raised by the women's liberation movement and their own experience with women's lib inside the Black Panther Party. The interview was conducted internally by the Panther Headquarters office and circulated as a four-page press leaflet. The reader should note that a large space between paragraphs below means that a different "sister" is speaking.

### Interview

**QUESTION:** How has the position of women within the Black Panther Party changed? How have the women in the Party dealt with male chauvinism within the Party?

**PANTHER WOMEN:** I've only been in the Party about ten months and when I got in the Party the thing about Pantherettes was squashed, we sort of grew out of it. Then there's Ericka Huggins. The Brothers had to look on Ericka with a new light because she had been thru a lot of things that some Brothers hadn't even been thru. The sisters looked up to her and we all saw what we had to do. The sisters have to pick up guns just like brothers. There are a lot of things the sisters can do to change society.

We realize we have a role to play and we're tired of sitting home and being misused and unless we stand up, male chauvinism will still show itself and be something that's just passed over. Unless we speak against it and teach the brothers what's correct and point out what's wrong, then it'll still be here.

There used to be a difference in the roles (of men and women) in the party because sisters were relegated to certain duties. This was due to the backwardness and lack of political perspective on the part of both sisters and brothers. Like sisters would just naturally do the office-type jobs, the clerical-type jobs. They were the ones that

handled the mailing list. You know all those things that go into details. They were naturally given to the sisters and because of this, because the sisters accepted it so willingly, because they had been doing this before, this is the type of responsibilities they've had before, it was very easy for male chauvinism to continue on. The only examples we had of sisters taking responsibility were probably in Kathleen (Cleaver) or one or two people who exercised responsibility in other areas of Party work.

We've recognized in the past 4 or 5 months that sisters have to take a more responsible role. They have to extend their responsibility and it shouldn't be just to detail work, to things women normally do. This, I think, has been manifested in the fact that a lot of sisters have been writing more articles, they're attending more to the political aspects of the Party, they're speaking out in public more and we've even done outreach work in the community, extensive outreach work in that we've taken the initiative to start our own schools--both brothers and sisters now work in the liberation schools. It's been proven that positions aren't relegated to sex, it depends on your political awareness.

I can remember that when I came into the Party over a year ago, at that time David Hilliard was National Headquarters Captain, and there was another sister in the Party who was the National Captain for women and even though most of the people related to David Hilliard as being National HQ Captain, most of the women related to this other sister for directives because she was the National Captain for women. Under her were sergeants and lieutenants who were all sisters and in their ranks were other sisters. There was almost a separation between the brothers and the sisters.

#### REORGANIZATION

When that was abolished, when there were no longer any separate positions for sisters and brothers, when we all had to relate to the brothers or sisters who were in the specific positions, there wasn't just a reaction on the part of certain brothers cause they didn't like having to relate to certain sisters, who were in leadership positions. There was also a reaction on the part of some sisters, who because they had to relate to some brothers, because they did not have ranks above certain brothers, they wanted to quit

the Party. So it wasn't just a matter of brothers being male chauvinistic in not wanting to relate to sisters as leaders over them--but it was also the sisters, because of conditioning wanted to continue to submit to other sisters, rather than to leaders of the party per se, regardless of sex.

And I can see since the time I joined the Party that the Party has undergone radical change in the direction of women leadership and emancipation of women. Even though Ericka Huggins provides us with a very good example, it's not so much Ericka and the realization that Ericka poses a striking example. It's the fact that the political consciousness and the political level of members of the Party have risen very much since I joined the Party and because of the fact that we're moving toward a proletarian revolution and because we have come to realize that male chauvinism and all its manifestations are bourgeois and that's one of the things we're fighting against. We realize that in a proletarian revolution, the emancipation of women is primary. We realize that the success of the revolution depends upon the women. For this reason, we know that it's necessary that the women must be emancipated.

## IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

**QUESTION:** Could you explain what you mean when you say that the success of the revolution depends on the emancipation of women?

**PANTHER WOMEN:** It's because of the fact that women are the other half. A revolution cannot be successful simply with the efforts of the men, because a woman plays such an integral role in society even though she is relegated to smaller, seemingly insignificant positions.

I think conditions outside the Party have forced us to realize that we have to get rid of male chauvinism. As Panthers, we cannot separate ourselves and divide ourselves and work as Pantherettes, and on the other hand have brothers work as Panthers and expect to present a United Front against Fascism or against the enemy or against outside forces. There has to be unity within the Party. We can't be divided on the basis of sex and we can't be divided on the basis of principles or anything.

Ericka became a good example because the pigs



Kathleen Cleaver



realized she was a revolutionary. Maybe we didn't realize that, in the sense that we thought about it all the time or brought her up as an example of a strong woman. But, I think the pigs realize that and this outside condition has forced us to realize that we can't operate as two halves, separate, apart from each other--we have to be unified.

## **VIETNAMESE WOMEN LEAD**

**QUESTION:** You once said that the Vietnamese women were your example. Could you explain more concretely what that means in terms of the struggle of women in the United States?

**PANTHER WOMEN:** We feel that the example given us by the Vietnamese women is a prime example of the role women can play in the revolution. The Vietnamese women are out there fighting with their brothers, fighting against American imperialism, with its advanced technology. They can shoot. They're out there with their babies on their backs, as the case may be, and they're participating in the revolution wholeheartedly just as the Vietnamese men are participating in the revolution, in the national liberation struggle. The success of their national liberation struggle is just as much dependent upon the women continuing the struggle as it is dependent on the Vietnamese men. So there we see in Vietnam where the struggle today is the sharpest in terms of struggling against U.S. imperialism, the women in fact play the role of the other half--not the weaker half, not the stronger half, but the other half of the Vietnamese men. We hold them up as our example and we hope that the revolutionary women in the U.S. can follow that example and live up to the goal that they have set.

Right now the issue of male chauvinism is rather sharp and kind of out of place. We're starting to talk about it and everybody is sensitive about it--but once women find their place in terms of their roles as revolutionaries and use the example of the Vietnamese women, then I don't think it will be such a sharp issue. I think we'll begin to function and make it very natural for a woman to behave as a revolutionary and not as a subordinate or as a submissive half.

## **SPECIAL ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN**

**QUESTION:** Black women are considered to be the most