



Women in Libraries

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Racism is a Feminist Issue

A feminist movement cannot be limited to one group of women in one part of the world. There is no room for exclusivity in the fight against oppression of every kind. The Feminist Task Force plans to work to achieve solidarity with other groups in the fight against racism, based on the idea that all discrimination has the same roots, the same goals, and, very often, the same victims. The FTF will commit one of our meetings at every national conference to discuss problems and plan action. To begin discussion, we print the following two papers here. These papers present the views of other groups and individuals, and though we may not share all aspects of these views, these papers will doubtless

stimulate discussion and broaden our awareness.

The Collective for Socialist and Feminist Alternatives, the Madison branch of Solidarity, is a group of feminists, socialists and anti-racists concerned "with the material reality of everyday life." They believe that popular struggle is the only way to create fundamental changes in human social relations. Reprinted from a leaflet circulated this year, the following statement is their contribution to the process of creating a movement for social transformation that, they believe, will eliminate sex, race, and class oppression.

Feminism: Not for Women Only

It is time to bring feminism to the forefront of American politics. In recent years the New Right has built a political movement around just those personal issues that are the core of feminism. The modest liberal gains of the civil rights and women's movements, such as affirmative action, are under attack. Reagan's judges actively seek to end women's right to abortion. The poor face increasing cutbacks, people of color face increasing racist violence, gays and lesbians face increasing discrimination and harassment, and workers face increasing concessions. At

this juncture, when gender, race, and class relations are being contested, feminists committed to human liberation must act. And we must act against all these oppressions—sex, race, and class—because they are interconnected.

Feminism and Social Transformation

Feminism is about more than equal rights for women within society as it now exists. Equality has little meaning

in a world structured by hierarchies of race and class. Since all men are not equal, which one would we want to be equal to: an unemployed Black autoworker? the president of General Motors? a migrant Chicano farmworker? Setting equality as a goal tends to reinforce the white



middle- and upper-class male as norm and dismisses the importance of race and class in determining people's position in society.

Feminism rests on the fact that all women are oppressed. Within race and class, opportunity, education, social recognition, and material rewards are allotted along gender lines. Liberating all women requires dismantling the social relations of race and class. Feminists must also be anti-racist and socialists.

At the same time, dismantling the social relations of race and class requires liberating all women. Women's subordination is integral to race and class oppression. White supremacy depends on the perpetuation of distinct races. It necessitates controlling the sexuality of white and Black women. This makes the struggle for women's sexual autonomy fundamental to the struggle against racism. Working for women's sexual autonomy without also working against racism is self-defeating. Similarly, women's lack of sexual autonomy creates the sexual division of labor that shapes class society and generates much of its profits. Anti-racists and socialists must also be feminists.

The Personal is Political

Fundamental social change begins at home. Changing the world and changing relations between men and women are inseparable. When the New Right predicts that women's liberation will spell the downfall of civilization as we know

it, they are acknowledging the interdependence of oppressions.

The subordination of women within the family is at the core of the oppressive culture the Right wants to defend and export. When the Right defends women's sexual subordination and economic dependence, they are also defending their own race, gender, and class privilege. This is apparent in the groups they target as enemies.

They target men of color, whose threat they often sexualize. George Bush exploited racist sexual stereotypes to his advantage in his recent presidential campaign when he zeroed in on the single case of Willie Horton. Horton was a Black prison inmate in Massachusetts who raped a white woman while he was on furlough. Bush inferred that Dukakis condoned a prisoner release program that systematically unleashed Black rapists on white society.

They target feminists who demand an end to wage discrimination—a goal that will cut into corporate profits at the same time it permits women to live independent of men.

They target lesbians who present an alternative to the male-headed nuclear family and whose sexual activities are separate from reproduction.

They target feminists who provide reproductive services to minors without parental consent.

They target the welfare state that usurps men's authority as provider and is apt to further undercut their power through desegregation, affirmative action, and redistribution policies.

In short, they are protecting the interlocking systems of male dominance, heterosexism, racism, and capitalism. Feminism's demand that all forms of family must be recognized and supported—gay as well as straight, extended as well as nuclear—sends shock waves through every system of oppression.

It is important to recall that the central insight of feminism is that the personal is political. The supposedly mundane activities of an allegedly private life—doing dishes, selecting toys, having sex, changing diapers, socializing children—matter. They are the raw material of social structure. They are direct connections between who does necessary but unpaid work and who does what kinds of paid work. Write large, women's responsibility for housework shapes our sex-segregated labor force. The tradition that women's domestic productive and reproductive labor goes unpaid generates female poverty. The assumption that women are available on demand for men's sexual pleasure creates our rape culture. At its most blatant, the physical and sexual violation of women of all ages is an expression of male dominance and a way to control women.

Family, in its many forms, is the basic generator of the social relations that produce inequality. It is the primary mechanism of socialization and economic survival. For all its value as a strategy of survival and resistance, especially

for the working class and the poor, family is also a center of conflict. It is a set of power relations built around women's lack of sexual autonomy and reproductive freedom.

Families are held together by emotional and economic bonds and buttressed by the State. Consequently, women's movements for sexual autonomy and reproductive freedom, for emotional integrity and economic independence are a critique of male dominance as well as a challenge to the State.

The State ensures women's dependence and simultaneously perpetuates race and class oppression in many ways.

The legal system recognizes only married heterosexual relationships as legitimate.

The State labels certain children as illegitimate, certain mothers unfit.

The State has sterilized a large proportion of Native American and Puerto Rican women without their consent.

The State fosters women's dependence on men through tolerance of wage discrimination and through tariff and trade policies that encourage corporations to evade the demands of organized American women workers by sending work to exploited women in the Third World.

The State regulates women's reproduction in race- and class-specific ways. The state applies the Hyde Amendment, which makes abortion a class privilege, then fails to provide basic nutrition, health, or child care to the resulting children who need it most. Foreign aid funds for population control programs have been made contingent upon the administering agencies' pledge to deny abortion services to Third World women. With the Webster decision, the Supreme Court empowered Missouri to deny abortions to women dependent on public hospitals.

The way the State connects the struggle for women's wombs to other issues is also apparent in recent efforts to prosecute pregnant and postpartum women who are victims of drug abuse for such crimes as "passing an illegal substance to a minor" or "negligent homicide." In these perverse appeals to family values and maternal responsibility, the State labels a mother the criminal while feigning concern with child abuse and drug abuse. With this accusation the State diverts attention from the fact that the real criminal is not the mother but the State that creates the market for drugs as part of its foreign policy and that abuses children by withdrawing social services. If the State were truly concerned with chemical abuse of fetuses, it would target the producers of pollution, nuclear radiation, pesticides and herbicides that threaten all potential life. If it were truly concerned with the well-being of every newborn, it would eliminate poverty. The State is scapegoating a few women—and all those charged have been poor and Black—for its own child neglect and drug abuse.

Family is both the most private and the most regulated of institutions. Its dynamics implant models of equality or inequality, cooperation or competition, violence or non-

violence in people's consciousness, forging personalities that, in turn, shape society. Family politics must be at the center of movements for social change.

Women's Movement

Some would say that feminism has already lost out to the New Right's "pro-family" crusade. There is talk of "post-feminism." This is untrue. Feminism is a response to the centuries-old and pervasive reality of male dominance. It is also a response to the more immediate global economic crisis that has upset gender norms and intensified gender conflict. Male dominance and economic crisis persist. Feminism will continue, New Right or no New Right. At this juncture, when gender, race, and class relations are being contested and renegotiated, it is our responsibility as feminists committed to struggles for self-determination to see that the actual politics of feminism are as transformative as its potential.

The contention that the women's movement is a thing of the past raises important questions. First, what does women's movement look like? Eulogies to feminism say more about the mourners' assumptions of what a movement is than they do about historical reality. The death of feminism is in the racism, heterosexism, and classism of



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the beholders who think a movement is either a white liberal campaign for equality or a collective assault on the barricades. They misunderstand feminism. Because women's oppression originates in the family and in relations with men, personal and institutional, and because that reality cuts across class and race, women's oppression is unique and varied, and so are women's movements.

There is not a women's movement. There never was. There is a radical feminism, lesbian feminism, Black feminism, liberal feminism, and so on. We agree with Bell Hooks that feminism is the movement against sexist oppression. (See *bibliography this issue—Ed.*) One in need only look around to see this struggle being waged everywhere.

There is women's movement in the struggles against sexual



violence of all kinds—rape, homophobia, incest, and neglect of AIDS patients—and in the consciousness of every woman who has come to understand that there is such a thing as marital rape.

There is women's movement whenever women affirm control over their own sexuality, demanding the right to determine when, how, and with whom they will be sexually active.

There is women's movement in the struggles of female heads of households for a living wage. Women's movement is alive in welfare mothers' campaigns and in every effort women make to get an education, to form a union, to secure equal pay. It is alive in the Chicana cannery workers' strike in Watsonville, California, and in Latin

American women's struggles to reclaim communal land expropriated for cash crops.

In the face of racism and imperialism, there is women's movement in the politicization of Native American women who are resisting forced sterilization as well as economic exploitation. Chicanas are standing up to their brothers who accuse them of being "Vendidas" (sell-outs) for injecting women's issues with the struggle against racism. There is women's movement within national liberation struggles: in Nicaragua, where women's organizations are an important part of the infrastructure of the revolution, and in South Africa, where anti-apartheid activists like Mamphela Ramphele insist that women's liberation be integral to the struggle to overthrow race and class oppression.

Women's movement resonates in the language that names our oppression: sexual harassment, parenting, comparable worth, displaced homemaker, battered woman.

Women's movement is dividing and multiplying in thousands of women's studies classrooms and in vibrant women's literature.

There is women's movement among the handful of women who are now professionals trying to keep their feminist principles intact in the demimonde of women's caucuses within men's corporations, law firms, academic departments, and political parties.

There is women's movement in the peace, anti-nuclear, and environmental campaigns.

Women's movement is wherever women fight for a society in which the right to choose to have children is truly free and pro-life: a society in which there is food, housing, health care, education, love enough for all children.

Women's movement is evident even in the younger generation's sense of entitlement to nontraditional work, birth control, professional career, athletic facilities, and equal pay. As young women's response to the Supreme Court's Webster ruling indicates, outrage replaces complacency when rights are denied.

Feminism: the Solution to Oppression

The view that the women's movement is over raises another essential point: feminism is different than it was twenty years ago. Feminist agendas, organizations, and accomplishments have changed. For example, when women's liberationists in our community of Madison, Wisconsin, established one of the first rape crisis centers in the country, they set out to reeducate the community, empower women, claim public space, and challenge male authorities. They organized a speakers' bureau to enlighten the public, school children, and city officials about sexual assault. They formed non-hierarchical groups for counseling and consciousness-raising, and they empowered women

to recognize, name, and report rape. They advocated for rape survivors in police stations, hospital emergency rooms, and court chambers, challenging the punitive legal, medical and judicial process women faced for reporting sexual violence. Radical women also formed a Women's Transit Authority that offered free rides, enabling women to take back every night.

They insisted on women's right to name the problem and to be free of it. They accomplished a great deal. They raised community awareness about rape in families and on the streets; they influenced changes in the law; they served countless women; and they secured public funding.

Their very success shifted the emphasis from social change to social service. The overwhelming demand for services exposed the dimensions of the crisis, but it also absorbed the time and energy required for self-criticism: What are we trying to do? Whom are we aiming to serve? What are the results of the way we are going about it? If we set out to end rape, is it enough if every assault survivor gets support? Is it enough to provide safe rides when what we need is safe streets? The pressures and contradictions of an enormous case load, of negotiating for state funds, and of working in the belly of the beast tended to take their toll on a radical critique.

The solution is not to give up on feminist organizations and entrust our future to other agents of change. We must work in coalition with other movements, and we must not abandon autonomous feminist institutions. We must actively support them by keeping up the pressure for radical social change.

Women will continue to organize around the material realities of our own lives. We will struggle for personal safety, for racial equality, for food, for sexual autonomy, for economic independence, for child care, for the social and environmental conditions that make giving birth a life-affirming choice—in a word, for self-determination. Women must be empowered to effect our own emancipation.

In addition, we must support feminist institutions because they can serve as examples of the attention to democratic process that we must take into any future society that we expect to liberate us all. They foster the experiments in self-organization and empowering styles of interaction that prefigure an egalitarian society.

We need a social movement that will sustain all women's efforts at self-determination and promote the transformative potential of feminism. Toward the end, we call for united efforts to liberate women and restructure society. We must struggle toward creating

- a world in which all people enjoy sexual autonomy.

All people must have the right to choose their sexual partners. All family structures must have equal claim on housing, health insurance, and other basic human needs.

- a world free of sexual violence.

We must end the objectification and commoditization of women. We must end rape, sexual harassment, economic and legal discrimination, which reinforce compulsory heterosexuality and the idea that the oppression of any people is acceptable.

- a world in which all people enjoy reproductive self-determination.

Every woman must be able to exercise her right to have a child if she wants to. We must end forced sterilization. We must provide all women with access to safe, legal birth control, abortion, and reproductive technology.

- a world in which the choice to bear children is truly free.

The choice to bear children can be free only when basic resources of food, health care, and housing are justly distributed. We must eliminate the threat of environmental disaster and nuclear annihilation that encumber reproductive decisions.

- a world in which there is economic justice.

Work must serve people, rather than people serving profit. A twenty-five hour work week should pay a living wage and ensure adequate social security. Divisions of labor based on race and sex must be eliminated so that everyone has access to job training and opportunity. Workplaces must be made free of hazards and harassment and be flexible to people's needs.

- a world in which childcare is a social responsibility.

Every child must have high quality care that nurtures both individual potential and collective responsibility. The socially necessary work of rearing the next generation must be recognized and compensated as important.

- a world in which children and adults have rights.

Every person has a right to be safe from mental, emotional, physical, and sexual violence. Every person has a right to be valued regardless of sex, race, age, class, ability, sexual preference, weight or shape. Every child has the right to a multicultural education that analyzed the domestic, national and international relations of sex, race, and class that structure our world.

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Racism and its Relationship to Feminism in the United States

by Abby Maestas, 1989

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and English, "La voz de la gente," on KRCL radio station in Salt Lake City. During the past year, she has presented versions of the following paper as speeches to the Utah chapter of the National Organization for Women and other organizations.

If we define feminism as: the equality of all things for all people, it is easy to see how racism and feminism are related. If ever there is a segment of a society which is victimized by the traditions and culture of the larger societal structure, there cannot be equality.

of exercising our rights until all women are able to do so.

"The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women, as well as white, economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement." — Barbara Smith, *Frontiers*, Vol. V, No. 1 (1980).



White Privilege

"White privilege" is automatically granted to those who are not of a visible minority group. It is the automatic granting of rights by virtue of appearance.

History has identified blatant examples of white privilege in this country, like restrictions placed on Black Americans in public transportation seating, retail service privileges, and eating establishments reserved for "whites only." Our country has eased its conscience by passing laws to eliminate this type of behavior. What must be addressed by feminists today is the covert evidence of "white privilege."

If feminism is defined as: the equality of all things for all WOMEN, it is imperative to remind ourselves of the oppressed women among us who, because of our present societal standards, have become an oppressed minority within the oppressed majority of women.

Some examples are:

It is vital to the existence of feminists, feminism and the women's movement, to look within ourselves to ensure that we ask from a society no more than what we have been able to deliver ourselves. It is ironic and unrealistic to demand equality for ourselves until privileged women no longer oppress other women. We often advocate for the elimination of poverty and violence against women. We speak out for the rights of children and the rights of choice. Each of these and other issues of injustice are part of a greater struggle. It is impossible to achieve success with these issues without addressing how racism affects women of color, and women who are not of color, who have found ways of manipulating the available "white" systems to meet survival needs, must view racism as the true issue at hand. We will never reach the goals of equality and the privileges

1. Visible minority women unable to receive direct eye contact from non-minority women.
2. Visible minority women contending with a lack of respect from non-minority women due to immediate assumptions, e.g. "needs financial assistance," "does not speak English well," "is uneducated," or "has no political involvement."
3. Visible minority women are perceived to want to discuss their minority status with non-minority women.
4. Visible minority women are perceived to be more sexually promiscuous than non-minority women.

Racism as it Relates to Sexism

To understand the relationship of racism to feminism, it is necessary to understand the basis of racism. Simply put,

racism is a prejudice with the power to act. In other words, if your neighbor does not like you because you are a woman, your neighbor would be prejudiced. This prejudice has evolved from information your neighbor received through life either by being taught that women are inferior, evil, unintelligent, etc., or by perceived negative experiences with women. By whatever means, your neighbor does not like you and feels a negative prejudice toward you. By the same token, if your neighbor has power over some aspect of your life, as an employer would over your livelihood, and the neighbor uses that power to act on this prejudice, the neighbor is a sexist.

PREJUDICE + POWER = SEXISM

Using the same analogy, if your neighbor is prejudiced against you because you are Asian, Hispanic, Black or American Indian, has power over some aspect of your life, and uses that power to act on this prejudice, the neighbor is a racist.

PREJUDICE + POWER = RACISM

It is important to remember that each of us has been the minority at one time or another. We have each heard the stories of our ancestors' trials and tribulations in this country. We each have felt the sting of prejudice and hatred in our lives. The key word in racism is "visible." The visible minority is identified at a glance. It is not necessary to hear a voice which may identify a language difference, nor is it necessary to hear an opinion of religious or political beliefs. The visible minority need only be seen to become an object of racism. The danger of racism and sexism is the immediate identification of a victim which does not allow time for prevention nor the act of survival through speech or action.

The Victims of Racism

Racism displays itself in several forms. Racism may be either covert or overt. It may be confrontational or evasive. It may be blatant or secretive. In any case, racism is the destruction of humanism. Both victim and perpetrator are dehumanized. Racism is an illness, a disease which festers until we can no longer stand the pain nor the stench and we strike out to relieve ourselves of our misery. Racism is ugly. Racism is popular.

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism is the prejudice combined with the power to act in an institutional setting. Many times institutional racism exists because those in power positions have not addressed traditional ways of operations.

Some examples of institutional racism, some blatant and some more subtle, are here adapted from "Examples of Institutional Racism," from the papers of the Girl Scouts of the USA, 1984:

1. Location of facilities and meeting places – in white, middle-class, often suburban areas which make them inaccessible to minorities and economically oppressed constituents.
2. Traditional daytime meeting times which exclude working women and mothers of young children, and meeting days which exclude members of some religious groups. This follows the white Christian volunteer ethic.
3. Exclusion of minorities through non-communication of important events, meetings, or activities traditionally



reserved for "whites only." This exclusion can be the result of holding communication until the last possible moment, overlooking minority participation in planning, or failing to target communication to minorities through media services used by minority populations.

4. Tokenism, or playing the game of "numbers," i.e., involving only one minority person and feeling that this token is sufficient, or using a minority person as "window-dressing" "up front" who neither holds a powerful position nor participates in decision-making.
5. Requiring "super-minority" performance from minority leadership while less qualified whites are placed in superior positions (both paid and volunteer). This also includes placing an "overload" of jobs and responsibilities on one or two minorities who happen to be part of the membership, expecting the minority member to represent the group at unreasonable numbers of events.
6. Job rot or rut positions for minority employees and volunteers which cause them to remain in lower classified, less rewarding, more laborious jobs with no advancement.
7. The obvious exclusion of qualified minority involvement in management positions, power and decision-making positions, and the top executive posts. This includes requiring qualifications which are unreasonable or unreachable for minorities, e.g., height, education, experience, community participation and recognition.
8. The unwritten insistence that minorities (to be successful) must follow the whites' model, standards, and rules, excluding the possibility of incorporating racial/ethnic

qualities into the total for a stronger diversity and blend.

9. The basic assumption that one minority can speak for the race, disregarding individuality. In some instances, attempting to "treat 'em all alike" when more than one minority person is involved.



10. Language, habits, procedures that continue to subjugate minorities, for example: "let's all sit Indian-style," "too many chiefs not enough Indians," "no way José," "I Jewed him down," or referring to Sunday as the Sabbath.

11. Traditional practices—organizational structure, forms and information required, patterns of membership or volunteerism, activities, songs, value-laden programs, meeting places.

12. Attitudes—superior/inferior; we/they/"doing for"; minority=poor; minority=special project.

13. Requiring many years of membership as a criterion for special recognitions opportunities, job positions, and the like.

14. Fees for activities with no financial aid support available to individuals or groups.

15. Failing to introduce traditions, songs, and other basics to minority membership in alternate delivery systems. It is difficult to participate in activities if one does not know the rules of the game.

The Solution to Racism

Just as there is no simple definition of racism, there is no easy solution to racism. The best defense any individual or organization can have is awareness. It is the responsibility of each of us to inform ourselves, to become sensitive and to share experiences which will lead to a better understanding of each other.

Understanding and combating racism from a feminist perspective is imperative if the goal of true feminism is to be achieved.

"I have thought of myself as a feminist first, but my ethnicity cannot be separated from my feminism."—Mitsuye Yamada, *This Bridge Called My Back*, ed. Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981.

♠

Towards Understanding Women's Experience of Racism and Sexism: a Reading List

This list emphasizes materials on the experience and thought of American women, but a sampling of materials of international scope is included.

Part 1: Racism and sexism in contemporary discourse

Allen, Paula Gunn. *The sacred hoop: recovering the feminine in American Indian traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

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Davis, Angela Y. *Women, race & class*. New York: Random House, 1981.

Eckardt, A. Roy. *Black-woman-Jew: three wars for human liberation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

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Giddings, Paula. *When and where I enter: the impact of black women on race and sex in America*. New York: Morrow, 1984.

Gómez, Alma, Cherrie Moraga and Mariana Romo-Carmona, eds. *Cuentos: stories by Latinas*. New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983.

Gordon, Vivian V. *Black women, feminism and black liberation: which way?* Chicago: Third World Press, 1985.

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—, ed. *That's what she said: contemporary poetry and fiction by Native American women*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

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Hawks, Joanne W. and Sheila L. Skemp. *Sex, race and the role of women in the South*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983.

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Heresies: a feminist publication on art and politics. Issue 15 (1982). Issue on "Racism is the issue."

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—, "Reflections on race and sex." *Zeta Magazine*, July/August 1989.

—, *Talking back: thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston: South End Press, 1989.

Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, eds. *All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave: black women's studies*. Old Westbury, N. Y.: Feminist Press, 1982.

Huston, Perdita. *Third world women speak out: interviews in six countries on change, development, and basic needs*. New York: Praeger, 1979.

Lewis, Diane K. "A response to inequality: black women, racism, and sexism." *Signs*, 3 (Winter 1977): 339-361.

Lindsay, Beverly, ed. *Comparative perspectives of third world women: the impact of race, sex, and class*. New York: Praeger, 1980.

Lorde, Audré. *Sister outsider: essays and speeches*. Trumansburg, N. Y.: Crossing Press, 1984.

Marable, Manning. *How capitalism underdeveloped black America: problems in race, political economy and society*. Boston: South End Press, 1983.

Martin, Molly, ed. *Hard-hatted women: stories of struggle and success in the trades*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1988.

Mies, Maria, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Claudia von Werlhof. *Women: the last colony*. London: Zed Books, 1988.

Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This bridge called my back: writings by radical women of color*. Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1981.

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— . *Women brave in the face of danger: photographs of and writings by Latin and North American women*. Trumansburg, N. Y.: Crossing Press, 1985.

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