



BLACK EMPOWERMENT

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BLACK SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

One of the seeming ironies of the struggle for women's rights is the fact that black Americans, both men and women, have often shied away from giving their fullest possible support.

Historically blacks have played important, and sometimes crucial, roles in the women's rights movement. Phyllis Wheatley, the black poet and author, who became the second woman published author in America, was a firm and often lonely advocate for freedom of opportunity for all people, including women. Sojourner Truth was one of America's most heroic roving prophets. When women's voices were raised feebly for women's dignity in the mid-nineteenth century, her voice was always heard with uniquely and superbly telling effect. Whenever this legendary figure—whose name will become increasingly known as our racial patterns in American history change—spoke at early rallies for women's rights, men who opposed

women's rights trembled and they and their arguments were put to scorn.

There is no more illustrious male champion of women's rights in American history than Frederick Douglass. Douglass's life was devoted to human freedom. In his own personal life, he rose from a slave to a place of distinction in the U.S. diplomatic corps. Abraham Lincoln's widow esteemed him so highly that, after her husband's death, she presented Douglass with one of the late president's favorite canes, noting that Mr. Lincoln would have wanted Douglass to have something deeply personal which had belonged to him.

Douglass is credited with persuading women to demand, in their national deliberations, full equality including the suffrage for the first time in American history. He was a true prophet, believing that prophets must be ahead of the popular clamor and in leading thought and action rather than in

following thought and action was there, alone, so he believed, a true prophecy.

What, then, of the role of blacks in the struggle for women's rights today? Must they abandon the movement which owes to them an incalculable debt which, in many ways, can never be repaid? Why do blacks look with mixed feelings today on the struggle for women's rights? In replying directly to this last question, we may respond to issues underlying the other two.

1. Blacks tend to resist and to resent the myth that women are a minority. Women are a majority in our country's population. If women are classed as a minority, then it is perfectly true that many job opportunities due on the basis of equity for black males will be earmarked for white women. Blacks, then, should commit their fullest weight to the Equal Rights Amendment

and work to see that women have themselves de-classified as a minority.

2. Blacks tend to resent the myth that white women are poor. The majority of this nation's corporate wealth is owned by women. This stems chiefly from the fact that their husbands die younger and leave their estates to widows.

If a white woman wanted a simple and workable quick strategy for freedom for themselves and for all true minorities, they would only need to concentrate on getting a few leaders of white women's large-scale corporate wealth to organize. They could *require*—not just present a "demand"—that equitable opportunity be afforded women and those who are minorities forthwith. Otherwise, the white male corporate managers of white women's corporate wealth would be fired instantly.

Cruel? No. Simply reasonable, just and effective strategy to set right what have been ancient wrongs which

are long "past due" in terms of being righted.

3. Blacks recognize that there is a danger in the myth of the necessity of a "second breadwinner" in the vast majority of white homes.

We must grant that many white homes need greater resources. It would still be both fair and preeminently necessary to make known the fact that the vast majority of "second breadwinners" in separate white American homes simply perpetuate America's wanton waste and greed regarding the world's resour-

ces. We use, as a nation, five times our fair share of the earth's food and fuel. Is not the inherited wisdom of our culture correct when it says: "The earth is the Lord's (or the Creator's) and all the fulness of it"?

Black Americans must not be found wanting when it comes to fully supporting the Equal Rights Amendment. Still the crucial issues which the crucial issues which minorities deserve to be understood and dealt with.

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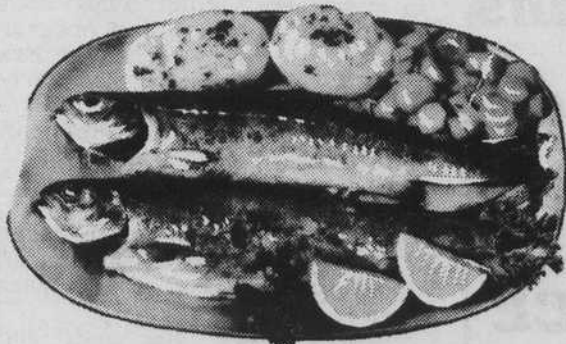
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