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CLASS OF NONVIOLENCE



# Feminism, Peace, and Power

By Mary Roodkowsky

**“Who then will do it? The men are all fighting, and some women, too.”**

*Betty Williams, Nobel Peace laureate, when asked why women created the People’s Peace Movement in Ireland.*

Fighting, vanquishing, attacking, and counterattacking are so-called masculine skills shed of the metaphors of business, sports, and social competition which usually clothe them. War creates heroes, supermen, known by their performance: true men, on whose chests medals and stripes glitter and ribbons flap. Strong men, whose very survival proves brains and brawn. Men in charge of their own lives, and with the power and authority to direct and mold the lives of others.

Victory in war derives from comparative advantage—no stronger or wiser for the battle, perhaps poorer than before—to conqueror is defined by his superior position, his lower losses. The loot consists mainly of positional goods, those which can be held only at the expense of others. Use and control over the opponent’s natural resources and social status—the ability to determine if and how others will share in those resources.

Because it seems that conflict’s only rationale is acquisition of goods or power from another, only those who are enfranchised, or who might hope to be, need involve themselves. No wonder, then, that women neither profit from nor join in wars. The round tables where strategic decisions are made never include women—in fact, women rarely approach them save with memos or coffee for the real decision makers.

While men wage war, women keep

house and also the economy. Their perpetual care of the hearth and of the children maintains a social structure and ensures a home where soldiers may return. Women labor in factories and offices, in seats left vacant by men called to the front.

Women also take on new burdens in wartime. They sacrifice butter to churn out guns in factories, they expand their roles as society’s washers, nurses, and caretakers, to include the extra destruction created by war. Women make and roll bandages, and then use them to bind wounds they never inflicted. At the war’s close they comfort combat-tattered psyches, of both sides. Their wartime jobs—and the newly acquired earning power it brought—are preempted by those to whom they really belong, the boys back from the front.

Thus, wars that are fought for goods and position benefit women little. In fact, rather than acquiring goods or position in war, women often are the goods, the spoils, acquired by war. Rape has been standard operating procedure during armed conflict, from the Trojan War to the Vietnam War. In her book *Against Our Will*, Susan Brownmiller suggests that soldiers’ abuse of women ranks along with looting, burning, and bombing as a means of subduing the enemy. Later, the women become a part of the victor’s booty:

“The body of a raped woman becomes a ceremonial battlefield, a parade ground for the victor’s trooping of the colors. The act that is played out upon her is a message passed between men—vivid proof of victory for one and loss and defeat for the other.”

Some of glory’s light does shine on women, but indirectly and through their

relationships to men, as in so many other areas of life. Army nurses who have bravely cared for wounded men may receive medals, and exceptional female military personnel may also be rewarded for their contributions. But the “glory” comes mostly through their men—the fathers, husbands, sons—“given” to the effort. All women in wartime must sacrifice those men’s presence, as well as their contributions to home and family. Later, the ultimate honor consists in welcoming back the womb’s fruit like the Spartan woman who will only greet her son with his shield, victorious, or on it, dead. Today’s reward consists of a body in a bag, and a yearly appearance in the Memorial Day parade. While triumphant men split the spoils and bask in power, women replace their life’s love and the result of their caring work with a Gold Star banner fluttering in the wind. Only one-half of the men in a battle can win, one side must lose; however, no woman, on either side of the battle line, can ever claim victory or its prerogatives.

### Women Propose Peace

Given their suffering—in themselves, in the destruction of what is most important to them, in the violation of their bodies—and given that women receive little compensation for what they give, it is not surprising that many peace movements and movements for nonviolent change throughout history have been led by women. A history of such involvement might include the imagery of Euripides’ *Lysistrata*, or the way the Pilate’s unnamed wife tried to save Christ; it could also tell of Angelina Grimke’s impassioned pleas that women work for an end to slavery, without bloodshed; it might discuss Mrs. Rosa Parks’ refusal to move to the rear of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, sparking the civil rights movement; it might document the women’s strike for peace during the Vietnam

War years, and describe Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan and the other women in the Irish People’s Peace Movement. It might discuss how the woman’s suffrage movement of the 19th and 20th centuries in America diligently overturned law and social order, without violence. Given the deep state of powerlessness of most women and the extra effort it takes for women to work in the organized realms of government, law, and broad scale organization, this record is even more remarkable.

### Winning Over Others

Nonviolence not only opposes war; it also upholds a way of living where conflict creates rather than destroys. Feminism, too, goes beyond its rejection of arms and battle, to suggest and to practice nondestructive patters of conflict resolution. It is perhaps rooted in women’s socialization, or perhaps due to women’s economic and political powerlessness, or perhaps because of the common female roles. But whatever its source, feminist understandings of conflict can help to clarify and expand nonviolent theory.

One major aspect of Gandhi’s nonviolence embodied a stance of non-injury, or *ahimsa*, to the enemy. Destruction of the opponent merely perpetuates the injustice one tries to overcome. Instead, the goal is to win the opponent over to one’s own side. Gandhi wrote:

*“We must try patiently to convert our opponents. If we wish to evolve the spirit of democracy out of slavery, we must be scrupulously exact in our dealings with opponents. We must concede to our opponents the freedom we claim for ourselves and for which we are fighting.”*

Ahimsa has been very much a part of women’s attitudes, even with respect to the most emotional, basic issues of feminism. For

instance, at the national convention sponsored by the State Department, the most volatile issues included abortion rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and freedom for sexual preference (lesbian rights). All three passed, but not without debate, debate which adhere in various ways to nonviolent principles of respect for the opponent, and of winning over those with whom one disagrees.

Because of socialization from girlhood on, reinforced by the expectations of womanhood, a woman perceives her fate as intimately tied to that of others in a variety of ways—her choices are not always hers alone. A woman has far less decision-making power in the social structures that govern her, whether she lives in the United States, Ireland, Egypt, or India. Likewise, on an individual level, her husband, children, and other family steer her life's course. What happens to these people and to the dominant social structures affect her with a more conclusive impact than they do a man with more autonomy. Economically, for example, when a woman depends on a man for her sustenance, the political or social factors which increase or decrease his status will likely do the same for her—either directly, when he gets a raise, or indirectly, when a slow economy pushes the “least important” elements out of the work force, as after a war or when labor is costly. He may have alternative choices in his job, and hers depend upon his. Women's relationship to men, for better and usually for worse, is a derivative one. For women as a group this has led to a greater cognizance of the interrelatedness of all humans, with each other and with the earth. Women's relationships to other women likewise recognize such interrelatedness, but on a far more egalitarian basis. Contrary to stereotypes of calculating, competitive women, documentation of women in developing nations

and histories of women in Western civilization demonstrate norms of cooperation, caring, and nurture among women.

For example, female midwives through the Middle Ages often expertly delivered children at minimal cost. When two male doctors introduced the forceps, many midwives scorned them—for their expense, and for the fact that they foresaw an era when less compassionate, more technological childbirth would become the norm. Women in many developing nations sustain informal exchanges of goods and services among themselves, swapping household foods and childcare on a cooperative, nonprofit basis. In contemporary society, wherever neighborhoods still exist and women's communities live despite pressures of urbanization, such bartering still occurs, despite the counterpressures of consumerism.

An adherent of nonviolence cannot injure another, because their fates intertwine. How, then, can women make a policy of winning their need and more by destroying or subjugating the adversary, when so much of their own well-being so clearly depends on the welfare of the adversary?

Not only are women's fates combined with those of their community, but women's roles in society are constructed with a notion of responsibility to others and to the physical world—such accountability intrinsically leads to nonviolence.

Women bear the brunt of their own actions more directly than do men. Men's work is supported by others—by those lower on the social ladder, by secretaries, and subordinates in the workplace, by women at home. A woman's work, however, receives no such subsidy. She takes final responsibility for the children's and the men's lifestyles and daily physical and material needs, as well as for her own, since

there is no one further down the ladder to whom she can shunt the blame or the chores. Cooking dinner, washing laundry, feeding the baby, are all tasks created by the needs of many but only met by the work of one woman. Such “women’s work” is not the whole of the females’ responsibilities. The world over, women perform not only such womanly chores, but other “male” work as well. In Africa, 80 percent of the farmers are women; in the United States, 48 percent of women work or need work outside the home. Dual workloads complicate women’s accountability and burden. A woman doctor in a remote Himalayan mountain area comments that women in her district “work three times as hard as men,” for they must do all the things men do, and then care for the family.

Without someone down the line to blame, the unpleasant, ugly fallout of violent action might deter more women from participating in it. The desecration of the earth in strip-mining, for example, is encouraged and financed not by those displaced by or living near the site, but by corporations in cities. Nuclear power irresponsibly manufactures energy, allowing others—future generations—to grapple with the radioactive waste it creates. No one thoroughly socialized in female responsibilities could ever dream such a system.

Nonviolent action asserts the value and necessity of acting in support of the truth (the Satyagraha of Gandhi), that doing for self means also doing for others. The U.S. peace group, Mobilization for Survival, made four demands in 1977, the first three were all injunctions against violence: zero nuclear weapons, ban nuclear power, and stop the arms race; the fourth demand was the advocacy for the justice central to nonviolent action: fund human needs.

The psychology of women supports

this policy of non-injury. A woman judges her own worth, and others judge her, in terms of how well she serves others. Rather than basing her worth on the domination of others or on comparative strength, the normative criteria have been sacrifice and service.

Such advocacy is in many ways the *raison d’être* of the traditional female role. Psychoanalyst Jean Baker Miller states:

*“In our culture serving others is for losers, it is low-level stuff. Yet serving others is a basic principle around which women’s lives are organized; it is far from such for men. In fact, there are psychoanalytic data to suggest that men’s lives are psychologically organized against such a principle, that there is a potent dynamic at work forcing men away from such a goal.”*

When conflict produces an either/or, have/have-not situation, a woman is apt to opt for the subordinate role. The ideal of serving is so firmly implanted in the consciousness, in letting the other win—tennis, and argument, or a job—that not to do so is unfeminine, and therefore attacks the core of the woman’s worth. Women’s spirituality is beautifully described by the French mystic, Simone Weil, who states that love is merely attention to the other’s needs.

However, in doing such service, we can make another kind of connection between feminism on the one hand, and nonviolence on the other. This ideal of living-for-others not only has avoided overt violence aimed at others by women, its reverse side is the exploitation of that service by men, to hurt women and women’s extreme internalization of that ideal and negation of their own needs.

Because nonviolence promotes action for justice, nothing can be less passive than its “truth-force.” For their own sake women need to emphasize this active side far more than the avoidance of violence to others.

Many ethics, nonviolent codes included, speak largely to the male psyche, to its aggressive, competitive, against-others nature. Applying ethical principles of self-denial and service to the already self-sacrificing woman can sometimes overwhelm her into increased living-for-others to the point where any living-for-self seems invalid. Jean Baker Miller writes that the unilateral assignment of women to a service role is the source of overwhelming problems for men and women alike, denying to the former (men), their justly due community responsibility, to the latter (women), a necessary and realistic understanding of self-worth.

Gandhi sometimes glorified suffering for the cause of truth. But he, and other non-violent activists, also stressed the need for noncooperation with the forces of evil. Angelina Grimke urged her Christian sisters to throw away their submissive behavior in order to work to end slavery. Peace activist Dorothy Day illegally asserted herself against nuclear armaments and for the United Farm Workers' union struggle. Women can apply this principle of noncooperation to their oppression, and to those who hurt them. Nonviolence never assents to the demands of the oppressors, even though it may cause anger or resentment. It strips the oppressors of authority to which they are not entitled, at the same time ascertaining that all enjoy what they rightfully own.

Feminist and nonviolent activist Barbara Deming connects feminism with nonviolent cooperation in application of ahimsa to both the other and the self: "We act out respect for ourselves by refusing to cooperate with those who oppress or exploit us. And as their power never resides in their single selves, always depends upon the cooperation of others—by refusing that cooperation...refusing

our labor, our wits, our money, or blood upon their battlefields, our deference, we take their power away from them."

Our actions bear upon ourselves as well as on others. Injuring others means injuring ourselves—our capacity to love, to care, to create, and to learn. And this dynamic works in reverse: to respect ourselves will mean to respect others, to expect them to respect, learn, and create in return. Feminism has set in motion a process by which women—in caring, nonviolent ways—are learning to respect themselves, value their own work, and to evoke, expect, and demand that respect from others. In this way, another dichotomy—that between oppressor and oppressed, powerful and powerless—dissolves.

For women, such noncooperation with the degradation of sexism and the self-hatred it brings is non-violent to others and to self. Doubtless, non-cooperation with sexist structures—refusal to make coffee, criticism of policies made by men with high-ego involvement in their work, insisting on equal wages; or going to school—will be threatening to men, who will then accuse women of being angry and even violent. Affirmative action in the U.S.A., for example, is really such noncooperation with the male WASP workworld. Yet, if women are not to continue to judge themselves with violence, noncooperation is essential.

### **Using Power Creatively**

At their cores, both feminism and nonviolence perceive power differently from male-centered ideology and are alien to the reality principle that directs our world and which encourages violent struggles for position. Power, as the dominant ideology understands it, cannot coexist with love or caring—it is an imposition over others, rather than a force to help us compose, or create, together.

Those who know that only one side can be victorious in war can well understand the corollary of this truism: that any concept of a loving or interdependent ethic must mean a relinquishing of social and positional goods and therefore, powerlessness. Power so conceptualized cannot be used for the general good of the society—only for the aggrandizement of an individual or state—hence, a state of war. Feminist philosopher Mary Daly suggests that this split degrades humanity: “Power split off from love makes an obscenity out of what we call love, forcing us unwillingly to destroy ourselves and each other.”

Feminists and advocates of nonviolence live by the contrary force, the power of love, which compels us to ahimsa. Learning to use our human energies as a loving force in the process of empowerment—a process which enables us to act critically and creatively to end injustice, not accept it. Empowerment comes both from the community—in the consciousness-raising group or the affinity group—and from the individual’s new reconceptualizing of his/her own loving capabilities.

For poet and feminist Adrienne Rich, motherhood dissolves many dichotomies between power and powerlessness. While a mother has ultimate power over, responsibility for, and control over her baby since the baby depends on the mother for all sustenance and warmth, the baby also controls the mother—her psyche and her body, as in the flow of milk from her breasts. Rich writes of the sense of confused power and powerlessness, of being taken over in the one hand and of touching new physical and psychic potentialities in the other, a heightened sensibility which can be exhilarating, bewildering, and exhausting. For Rich, motherhood dramatizes the interactions of “exclusive” opposites, impresses upon us,

for example, that “love and anger can exist concurrently.”

The women’s health care movement generally, and feminist attitudes toward both specifically, understand the concurrence of power and powerlessness and use it as a principle of developing nonviolent attitudes toward the body. The women’s health care movement seeks to change the physical alienation affecting women, replacing a variety of attitudes that deny the body’s goodness and fear of its function. Rather than labeling menstruation “the curse,” women are learning to accept and celebrate their cyclical rhythms. Instead of birth control pills which, although “sure,” chemically dominate and sometimes injure the body, women are turning to methods that are perhaps more limited but far safer.

The movement toward home births and toward “childbirth without violence” integrates many principles of nonviolence in the relationships involved in childbirth. Modern technological obstetrics sterilizes, shaves, and generally obfuscates the nature of childbirth, dehumanizing the most profound of human experiences. Mothers become passive observers, while their bodies become objects. Babies likewise are objectified, not considered to be people affected by their environment. The goal of such obstetrics is, of course, total control through the domination of the doctor. The entire birth experience is subject to manipulation, not only its labor and its pain, but also its passion, creativity, and satisfaction. Home births have developed an alternative to this, where midwife, mother, child, father, and others all participate and cooperate with natural forces. The benefits of such non-injury to mother and child alike include physically healthy birth without drugs, less birth trauma for the baby, early development of emotional

ties between mother, father, and baby. Beyond these, new attitudes toward birth signify the development of supportive and less destructive attitudes toward our bodies, and to the natural environment generally.

### **Feminism and Nonviolence as Creativity**

New thinking by women shedding old oppressive roles, yet retaining the real joys of womanness, can become one of the most creative political forces society has ever known. Women, like all oppressed groups, have had to know well, and bargain with, the structures which hurt them. Feminism has helped to evoke new social understandings based on women's experience and sisterhood. Many of these are implicitly grounded in nonviolence. Sisterhood implies democracy, for the needs and points of view are all-important in community. Women's responsibility provides a rationale for self-reliance and an end to exploitation.

Perhaps, as men take on new roles which encourage human values, nonviolence will seem more realistic to them too. Those who care for children and who understand their value as derived from caring will be less willing to kill. Environmental accountability will be encouraged when men take more responsibility for their day-to-day actions, and deal more closely with the consequences. Competition may lose some of its importance to those with other priorities.

Life is not a zero-sum game, where some must win at the others' expense. Violence and sexism in their many forms destroy our bonds with each other and our standing on the earth. They are ideologies which deny the ways in which we need each other and our natural order, and attempt to do what cannot be done—discard human needs and emotions and the natural workings of the earth.

# Rape is All Too Thinkable for Quite the Normal Sort of Man

By Neal King and Martha McCaughey

Men have trouble discussing rape. Some men rape, say some men, imagining that members of a subspecies abuse women in this culture. But let's be honest and tell it like it is: Normal men rape.

We are not being metaphorical or loose with our terms: we mean this the way it sounds. The vast majority of men who rape are quite ordinary.

If this sounds absurd, let's review some facts.

Rape is the bodily penetration of an unconsenting person. Men need to be reminded what this means. It is not listening when your partner says "no;" it's getting your date drunk to get sex from her; it's taking advantage of an unconscious woman at a party; it's using your economic or political power to intimidate a coworker into sex. These forms of rape are far more common than the stereotypical scene of a stranger jumping out from the bushes and attacking a woman.

Nearly half of all American women have had at least one man try, successfully or not, to rape them. And many women have been attacked a number of times. The men who did this must be normal; there are not enough "abnormal" men in this society to accomplish abuse on that scale.

When a rape is grotesquely violent, or when its perpetrated on the wife of another man or on a very young girl, many men get upset to the point of proclaiming their desire to kill the rapist. But people have grown so accustomed to the sexual coercion of women that most rapes go unnoticed, especially by the men who

commit them.

Most rapists are not strangers or even strange; they are their victims' friends, acquaintances, co-workers, neighbors, dates, lovers, husbands, brothers, fathers. They are the everyday, run-of-the-mill normal men in the lives of normal women.

Male readers may be getting defensive at this point, thinking, "I'm not one of them!" and they might not be. But the fact is, most men do not know what rape is. To these men, forcing a woman who is not willing is part of the game, perfectly normal, and, for many, especially satisfying. These men may acknowledge that using physical force is rape, but prevailing over a woman through trickery, blackmail, or other means is simply sex. This implies that men don't want to know - that rape may be part of their normal sexual encounters. Normal men rape because they engage in normal sex - normal sex often being coercive and abusive to women.

Though these women feel injured and demeaned in such encounters, they are not surprised to feel that they have been raped. Men don't define the experience as rape, and men are oblivious to the pain they've inflicted. Many a man who forces his date to have sex will call her up the next day and ask her out again. Normal men can be that out of touch with women's feelings.

So often women hear men refer to rape as if it were some kind of compliment, "You're so attractive that I have to have you," or "She's too ugly to get raped," or, "You look so good, I can't control myself." The notion that rape can be normal is evident in the inevitable questions

about what a woman was wearing at the time: “Dressed like that, what did she expect?”

If men respected women as peers, they would see the fixation on women’s body parts as a fetish, the fascination with adolescent women as pedophilia, and the desire for female passivity as necrophilia. They would also see the sexual coercion of women for what it is – rape.

In this culture, sadly, a man can be normal in believing that sex is what women are for. But that is not what women are for.

If sex is not consensual, it is rape, and men must start learning the difference by looking at it from women’s perspectives.

The man who can truthfully say that he has never forced or tricked a women into sex may dismiss all of this - “It’s not my concern.” It is. All men must work to create a culture where sexual aggression is unthinkable for normal men. Men have to examine their own relationships with women and talk to other men about rape. The man who says that rape is a women’s issue is part of the problem. The wall of silence that men have put up against this “normal” violence must come down. Normal men rape, and normal men, together, have the responsibility to stop it.

From Los Angeles Times, August 13, 1989

# Narrowing the Battlefield

By Carol Ascher

The attitude of nonviolence stems from a reverence and respect for life. It is the commandment: “Thou shalt not kill,” understood in its widest meaning: physical and psychic harm, short of death, are included in the assumption that in this bountiful world there can be sufficient space, time, and resources for each of us to get what we need without violently taking from others. There is an appealing optimism in this attitude, and I believe also the truth. Its complications arise, of course, when there are vast differences in the power to procure or command resources, and when violence is declared the order of the day. At times like this, when editorial writers congratulate their readers for getting over the “Vietnam Syndrome,” as if a reluctance to kill people and destroy another country were a disease, nonviolence can seem like a sweet pipedream.

The irony of the nonviolent attitude, of course, is that it only has a living meaning in exactly those moments when an individual or group has the power to kill or destroy, or when a person’s or group’s safety is threatened.

When we talk about women and men in relation to nonviolence, I think we are talking about an urgent and ultimate good for both. But because of real differences in strength and power created by both nature and society, the nonviolent attitude has had a quite different meaning for women than for men. Most obviously, for men in our society, nonviolence means relinquishing physical and mechanical powers to which they usually have had easy access, and probably even learned to believe they have a right; it means deciding not to go to war, to carry weapons, or to hit their wives. For women, on the other hand, a nonviolent

world immediately conjures images of walking in safety and ease on the street, feeling unafraid to argue heatedly with a lover, not worrying about the loss of husbands and sons in war. If women must give up anything to accept a nonviolent world, it seems to me, it is their age-old standards for judging “manliness” in men. At the risk of bifurcating the world too sharply, I suspect that when you ask a man to picture a gun he most often imagines himself holding it; while to a woman, the gun in the picture is pointed at her or at someone she loves.

The problem for women who want to take a nonviolent stance in this still extremely violent world is, in fact, rather like the problem for men who decide to become pacifists while on the battlefield. They must invent tactics, strategies, and states of mind which take them out of real-world and internalized victimization. Insofar as it is possible to get off the battlefield, they must do so. But men can shoot their guns into the air, volunteer to drive an ambulance, or go AWOL. Women in their homes and in the cities of today have a more difficult time discovering the demarcations of the battlefield. What are the equivalents for women of shooting a gun into the air? I myself am not always sure.

It will come as a surprise that for thousands of years, without being pacifists, women have largely taken a defensive position towards violence. Whether they believed violence was right or wrong, they knew that they could get killed; and having children under their wing, they stayed out of the line of fire. In primitive societies, women cultivate the soil while the men hunt or make war. There is no value system which judges the men’s activities

as pejorative; on the contrary, they are most often accorded a higher status exactly because of their closeness to death. It is the connection between men's higher status and their activities as hunters and warriors that made Simone de Beauvoir write in *The Second Sex* that, "If blood were but a nourishing fluid, it would be valued no higher than milk. For it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal; that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills." Although I think we are deeply embedded in nature exactly because of both our violence and the oppression of women which our consciousness could enable us to overcome, I believe that the two phenomena are linked.

In our urbanized industrial society, beyond the very real dangers which women rationally try to avoid, an elaborate culture has developed through which women indicate their inferiority to men at the same time as showing their "sensitivity" to violence. The hands over the eyes during the murder scene at the movies, squeamish shrieks in the face of bugs that must be removed or killed, an avoidance of certain kinds of articles on the front page of the newspaper or stories on the evening news — these are the images that rush to my mind. But again, these sensitivities do not reflect more than the dullest adherence to the commandment against killing; and I doubt that the connection is more than rarely even made. Instead, all this acting out is largely ritualized drama, a kind of pageant play affirming men's important role as gun bearers, bug squashers, and decision-makers on those front page issues of destruction and violence. The women will wash and clean up and bear whatever life and death bring them.

Of course, the men have their reciprocal

role: they not only risk their lives to "defend" the homeland (experiencing "life" and friendship at its peak while out alone with their buddies), but with due chivalry they protect their women from knowing the grisly and glorious truths about the violent atrocities they may have committed away from home.

A wave of American feminism arose out of the ashes of the anti-draft and anti-war movements of the 1960s. Women, gathering political skills at the same time as a new understanding of their second place in the violent world of men, began to strike out on their own. During the 1970s, as a result of the women's movement, a change occurred in this country in women's relationship to violence. In large part, women lessened their fear of it, but they themselves at times also became more involved in it. Early on there was the anger that men had controlled the streets too long with their threats of mugging and rape, and the cry that women had to reclaim the right to walk about freely at night. I recall vigilante squads of women who, for a time, tried to ensure other women's safety in the dark hours. One friend of mine joined a women's group which organized regular rifle practice so that women could become at ease with the control side of a gun. I myself took karate lessons - a chance to learn the limits of my own physical power and to lose my feminine fear of violence, I thought - until after three months its militaristic elements repelled me too much to continue. For the first time, too, there were publicized cases of women who defended themselves against rape with guns and knives. Joanne Little became a legend when, herself already a prisoner, she killed a guard who had tried to rape her, using his own weapon. Women have become sensitive to the cultural violence against them, and some began to picket in front of theaters

which showed images of sexual violence against women. I attended uncomfortable meetings where women admitted to being battered wives and asked other women for help. And there was the drive by women to join the military, and the resulting machinations for and against the Equal Rights Amendment and the revival of the draft.

On the other side, although it sometimes seems less publicized, has been an active feminist-pacifist movement. Feminists with a nonviolent perspective have been at the core of anti-nuclear organizing, and their sensitivity to the preciousness of life has made them turn up at the forefront of a variety of ecological issues from Love Canal to uranium mining on Native American territories. The idea of nonviolence has been extended from the relationship between people to the ties between human beings and our delicate earth. A significant number of feminists-pacifists have also chosen to live in rural areas, in women's communities, without men. They have said, in effect, it is too hard to live one's private life ethically and comfortably on the battlefield.

Strangely, there is one area of battle and conflict that women carry with them even unto the furthest rural reaches. Within feminist-pacifists circles, the issue of abortion has been upsetting and unresolved. Most feminists without a nonviolence perspective, perhaps wisely, argue in public for women's right to control their own bodies, including their reproductive systems, and reserve their sadness and moral concern about the fate of a fetus for quiet discussions, behind closed doors. But feminist-pacifists have made a commitment to sanctify life, and so some feel they cannot simply argue the expedience of first winning a right for women that they may then pronounce unethical to use. There have been angry and

hurtful interchanges among these women, but more recently also open discussion, including an enormously interesting transcribed discussion among several feminist-pacifists in the August 1, 1980 issue of WIN, the War Resisters League magazine.

I believe a nonviolent approach to the universe is more urgent than ever before. But I also believe that both the "violent" as well as the nonviolent aspects of the women's movement over the past decade have been largely to the good. Both sides, each in its way, have worked to narrow the gap and so have an effect on the violent world of men. I suspect that there are fewer women now than 10 years ago who worship men's capacity for violence from afar, while denigrating their own life-giving activities — however much noise Phyllis Schafly, Maribel Morgan, and the men who finance them may be making. Also, psychologically, many women may need to move from seeing themselves as passive victims of violence through a phase of anger and violence before they can become nonviolent activists. From this perspective, even women entering the military may have some good results.

The problem is: do we have time, given our capacity for destruction, for women to get this experience, and can it be gotten without creating its own added waves of violence?

I said before that I hold to the connection between the sharp bifurcation of genders, with its concomitant oppression of women, and the violence and destruction we experience throughout the world. In her book *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, one of the great theoretical contributions of this wave of the women's movement, Dorothy Dinnerstein has elaborately argued how female-dominated child-rearing guarantees "male insistence upon, and female compliance with, a double-standard of

sexual behavior,” including male aggression and violence and “certain forms of antagonism — rampant in men, and largely shared by women as well — against women.” Turning away from their mothers, who they must not be like, men also run from their own softness and nurturance, their “fleshy mortality,” the memory of infancy when they experienced both boundless and helpless passion. With their infantile longing neither satisfied nor transcended, war and conquest are the “amoral greed of infancy turned loose on the world; and the death and destruction which they create is the fear of both which they must deny in themselves. Arguing the urgency for men to share in child-rearing with women, Dinnerstein writes, “They cannot be our brothers until we stop being their mothers: until, that is, we stop carrying the main responsibility - and taking the main blame — for their early introduction to the human condition.” Of course, as she adds, what also stops true solidarity among women is that women share men’s anti-female feelings.

If Dinnerstein is right, as I believe she is, then a nonviolent world must be worked toward at home, in a differently structured family, as well as on the street and in the recruitment center. The battlefield that must be narrowed includes those widely differing roles deemed appropriate for men and women. This is an enormously difficult task: when one talks to people about murder, most will have to concede that it is wrong; but there still are many who see nothing amiss with one-half the world, women, taking full responsibility for bringing to adulthood each new generation of human beings. Yet the enormity of the task is matched by the risks on the other side, as men continue to develop technology that can not only wipe

out an entire hemisphere of our planet but also make life impossible for countless future generations.

*From Confrontation, Winter, 1991, Long Island  
University Library Journal.*

# Patriarchy: A State of War

## By Barbara Hope

Why weren't we prepared for this – the imminence of nuclear holocaust. The final silencing of life. The brutal extinction of the planet. Surely there have been substantial clues throughout history. Male supremacy. Wars. Witch-burning. Male religious myths. Institutionalized greed. The enslavement of half the human race. Centuries of violence.

Why weren't we prepared for this? We have lived with violence for so long. We have lived under the rule of the fathers so long. Violence and patriarchy: mirror images. An ethic of destruction as normative. Diminished love for life, a numbing to real events as the final consequence. We are not even prepared.

Mary Daly, in *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, writes, "The rulers of the patriarchy - males with power - wage an unceasing war against life itself. Since female energy is essentially biophilic, the female spirit/body is the primary target in the perpetual war of aggression against life. Women must understand that the female self is the enemy under fire from the patriarchy." She further writes that "clearly the primary and essential object of aggression is not the opposing military force. The members of the opposing team play the same war games and share the same values. The secret bond that binds the warriors together is the violation of women, acted out physically and constantly replayed on the level of language and shared fantasies."

We needn't look far for evidence to support her theory. Recall the U.S. Army basic training jingle: "This is my rifle (slaps rifle). This is my gun (slaps crotch). One is for killing, the other for fun." The language of war is the language of genocide. Misogynist obscenities

are used to train fighters and intensify feelings of violence. War provides men with a context to act out their hatred of women without the veneer of chivalry or civilization. War is rape.

In the male world of war, toughness is the most highly-prized virtue. Some even speak of the "hairy chest syndrome." The man who recommends violence does not endanger his reputation for wisdom, but a man who suggests negotiation becomes known as soft, as willing to settle for less. To be repelled by mass murder is to be irresponsible. It is to refuse the phallic celebration. It is to be feminine, to be a dove. It means walking out of the club of bureaucratic machismo. To be a specialist in the new violence is to be on the frontier. It is no accident that patriarchy related history as the history of war; that is precisely their history. In remembering their battles, the fathers recall the deep experience of their own violent proclivities and relive the ecstatic euphoria of those ultimate moments of male bonding.

The history of war speaks volumes about national will in a patriarchal culture. Wars are nothing short of organized killing presided over by men deemed as the best. The fact is - they are. They have absorbed, in the most complete way, the violent character of their own ethos. These are the men who design missiles and technologies as extensions of themselves. These men are ready to annihilate whole societies. These are the men honored as heroes with steel minds, resolute wills, insatiable drives for excellence, capable of planning demonic acts in a detached non-emotional way. These are the dead men, the hollow men, capable of nothing but violence.

It is significant that, after the accident

at Three Mile Island, women were more concerned about the danger than men; women felt they were being lied to about the real-life effects of nuclear technology. Women were resistant to the repeated declaration of the male decision makers that everything was under control, that there was nothing to be alarmed about, that nuclear engineers could solve any difficulties. Women felt the lies. Women know and feel the lies that maintain nuclear technology because we have been lied to. We are the victims of patriarchal lies. We know the deceit that grounds patriarchal colonization of women. We know, feel and intuit the deep truth that falsehoods, deceptions and lies form the very character of male rule. Women are the first victims of the patriarchal state of war.

**Violence to our bodies:** A woman is raped every three minutes. A woman is battered every eighteen seconds. Women are physically threatened by a frightening social climate structured in male might. Women are depicted in pornography as objects to be beaten, whipped, chained and conquered. The myth prevails that women like it.

**Violence to our hearts:** The positing of male comradeship as the model of human relationships. The systematic separation of women from one another. The degradation of women's culture. The erasure of women's history. The sanctifying of the heterosexual norm with its rigid understanding of the giving and receiving of affection.

**Violence to our spirit:** The dismemberment of the goddess and the enthronement of the male god. The ripping of women away from a life in tune with natural patterns of rhythm and flow in the universe. The ongoing patriarchal work of rendering women unconscious to ourselves.

**Violence to our work:** The

exploitation and devaluation of women's labor. The regulation of women to supportive, maintenance roles. The deliberate structure of women's economic dependence. Violence to women. Under the patriarchy, women are the enemy. This is a war across time and space, the real history of the ages.

In this extreme situation, confronted by the patriarchy in its multiple institutional forms, what can women do? We can name the enemy: patriarchy. We can break from deadly possession by the fathers. We can move from docility, passivity and silence to liberation, courage and speech. We can name ourselves, cherish ourselves, courageously take up our lives. We can refuse to sell our bodies and we can refuse to sell our minds. We can claim freedom from false loyalties. We can band with other women and ignite the roaring fire of female friendship.

This much we have learned from our living: life begets life. Life for women, life for the earth, the very survival of the planet is found only outside the patriarchy. Beyond their sad and shallow definitions. Beyond their dead and static knowledge. Beyond their amnesia. Beyond their impotence. Beyond their wars. Wars which unmask the fear, insecurity and powerlessness that form the very base of patriarchal rule.

To end the state of war, to halt the momentum toward death, passion for life must flourish. Women are the bearers of life-loving energy. Ours is the task of deepening that passion for life and separating from all that threatens life, all that diminishes life. Becoming who we are as women. Telling/living the truth of our lives. Shifting the weight of the world.

Will such measures put an end to war? What we already know is that centuries of other means have failed. In the name of peace, war is waged, weapons developed, lives lost.

Testimonies are announced. Treaties signed.  
Declarations stated. Pronouncements issued.  
And the battle still goes on. The patriarchy  
remains intact. Women are not free. Nothing  
changes. This time the revolution must go all  
the way. In the words of the poet:

*This is what we are watching: watching the  
Spider rebuild – patiently, the say,  
But we recognize in her  
Impatience - our own –  
The passion to make and make again  
Where such unmakings reigns  
The refusal to be a victim  
We have lived with violence so long.*

*Adrienne Rich, Natural Resources*

Peacework: Twenty years of Nonviolent Social  
Change, edited by Pat Farren,  
American Friends Service Committee, 1991

# An American Shero of 1941

By Colman McCarthy

Washington – For those feeling glutted with Pearl Harbor tales and left cold by them – I’m freezing—the worthier anniversary is on Dec. 8. On that day in 1941, Rep. Jeannette Rankin, brave and defiantly sensible, stood alone in Congress to vote against America’s entry into World War II.

The Montana Republican, 61 at the time and a lifelong pacifist, went to the House floor believing that “you can no more win a war than win an earthquake.” The vote was 338-1.

Miss Rankin was hissed. Colleagues asked her to reconsider and make the vote unanimous. After declining, she left the House floor and avoided assault from power zealots by hiding in a phone booth.

Miss Rankin would later explain her vote: “There can be no compromise with war, it cannot be reformed or controlled; cannot be disciplined into decency or codified into common sense, for war is the slaughter of human beings, temporarily regarded as enemies, on as large a scale as possible.”

Were Jeanette Rankin a member of Congress in modern times, she would have joined the minority who opposed American militarism in Grenada, Libya, Panama, and Iraq, as she did in 1969 when leading a peace march in Washington to protest the Vietnam War.

She would be vocal, too, about current preparations for America’s next war against whoever dares cross it. Miss Rankin’s stand in 1941 had the strength of consistency. On April 6, 1917, she had voted against U.S. involvement in World War I, saying, “We cannot settle disputes by eliminating human beings.”

That was the first vote of the first woman in Congress. For defying the military ethic, A New York Times editorialist saw Miss Rankin as “almost final proof of feminine incapacity for straight reasoning.”

A majority of Montanans apparently agreed. They gave her only one term in 1917 and only one after that 1941 vote. Both times, Miss Rankin found the rejections as bothersome as pebbles in her shoe. She marched ahead, combining her pacifism with the feminism she had championed in her first term when introducing suffrage legislation that would give federal voting rights to women in the 19th amendment.

Between the two wars, Miss Rankin fortified her ideals by a life of study and service. She moved to Georgia, living near Athens in Thoreau-like simplicity in a cabin with no phone, electricity, or running water but plenty of books.

She founded the Georgia Peace Society and taught “peace habits” to local children. For her toil, she received a high honor from the Atlanta post of the American Legion: The old boys called her a Communist.

Neither Jeanette Rankin nor her politics has wafted off into obscurity. On May 1, 1985, 500 Montanans, historians, politicians, and a few pacifists gathered in the rotunda of the Capitol for the unveiling of a bronze likeness of Miss Rankin.

In a speech, Rep. Pat Williams, the Montana Democrat who represents the congresswoman’s old district, offered a memorable line: Miss Rankin “realized and brought us to understand the meaning of the

power and influence of an individual in this democracy carrying out her conscience.”

The following year, some Rankinites in Missoula, the congresswoman’s hometown, organized to form the Jeanette Rankin Peace Resource Center. In five years, it has become nationally known for carrying on the kind of educational, social justice, and conflict resolution programs that Miss Rankin believed in. At a ceremony last April, the center reminded the citizens of Missoula County what it cost them to live in militaristic America: \$344,284 a day – the Pentagon’s share of the local federal tax haul.

The event prompted the chairman of the economics department at the University of Montana to state the most obvious political reality of our day: Military spending is the “crushing burden that has substantially decreased our ability to take care of our basic needs.” Pure Rankin, pure truth.

Internationally, knowledge of this American hero grows. The Japanese have been reading the 1989 book *A Single Dissenting Voice: The Life of Jeanette Rankin*. Its author, Yunosuke Ohkura of the Tokyo Broadcasting Co., was in Washington in May 1973 and read the obituary of Miss Rankin who died at 93. He was astonished to read of her stand in 1941.

“We are a nation of unity,” Yunosuke Ohkura, now a professor at Tokyo University, told Montanan magazine last year. “I’ve never heard of a single dissenting vote in Japanese life. But in the United States, even after this powerful attack, there was a person against the war. I was amazed.”

Professor Ohkura’s book, soon to be translated into English, will join two other biographies of Miss Rankin. More are needed—as are more of her kind in Congress when war hysteria next arises.

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