

Margaret
Cuninggim
Women's Center

New voices from the West Indies: Women writing women's lives

When yuh succumb to certain tings in silence yuh build up the power of di oppressor to exploit a next person. Me starts boots meself fi talk up.

Margaret Kent Bass, assistant professor of English

Critic David Williams notes that in the "West Indian literary consciousness, indeed, the idea of the Author, and more particularly the idea of the author of an autobiography, continue to be associated largely with the male imagination, despite the presence of novels by women that employ the autobiographical mode...." In other words, men write *true* stories about *real* lives; women write fictions about their lives. I would suggest that "novels" like Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* are also autobiographies, and that West Indian women are simply forcing us to change, among other things, our notions about what autobiography is.

The autobiographical act, the writing of one's own life story is, for the West Indian woman, an act of self liberation. West Indian women are recreating themselves in their own images, becoming the subjects of their own discourse, and breaking the silence that has made them what Erna Brodber calls "accomplices in their own oppression."

What do West Indian women want us to know about them? One of Jamaica's "lionheart gals" from the Sistren Theater Collective says that women want to tell people about how they suffer and about "how men treat us bad." Women want to talk about the physical and mental abuse that they

have often received from fathers, companions, and employers. They want to talk about the devastating effect that their collective silence has had upon their lives, and how the articulation and sharing of a common condition of suffering has encouraged a sisterhood among them that

crosses the very rigid class lines that often exist in West Indian culture. West Indian women want to talk about their relationships to their islands; about how the island and the lives of women are intertwined in ways which are foreign to those of us who live in this part of America. Essential to their development as women, West Indian women, is an awareness of the history, the life story of the island upon which they live. This personal identification with the island stems from the African notion that we must know our ancestors before we can know ourselves, and that the earth, the piece of ground upon which we were born, is woman and mother to us all.

But colonialism has done to the islands what the patriarchal society has done to woman: it has abused their natural resources, wiped out their history, refused to grant them autonomy and independence. So West Indian women protest against the colonial presence in their lives and in their countries. For example, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* pities the little English girl in her class because her "ancestors had been the masters, while ours had been the slaves. She had such a lot more to be ashamed of, and by being with us everyday she was always being reminded."

Annie later remembers disliking Christopher Columbus and delighting to find that he was once "fettered in chains" and sent back to Spain. Annie takes great pleasure in defacing Columbus' picture in her textbook and feels no remorse when her teacher accuses her of blasphemy.

There is a most powerful social protest in the autobiographies written by West Indian women, but the protest

lies within
(continued
page 2)



West Indian women (continued from page one)

the mere telling of the story and in the acknowledgement that I exist, my life matters. West Indian women move in their own stories from object to subject, from invisibility to visibility. Each autobiography is a personal declaration of independence from the bonds of patriarchy and imperialism. Women are triumphant in their discovery of themselves and rejoice in the new existences that they have created for themselves. It is for these reasons that I offer kudos to Jamaica Kincaid, Erna Brodber, Paule Marshall, and all of the courageous autobiographers, these Lionheart Gals. And as they say in Jamaica, Respect due everytime! ■

Harvard to offer conference on campus men and women. A two-day conference, Women and Men on Campus: Inequality and Its Remedies, will be held at Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts on March 7-8, 1991. Registration is \$195 and is due by February 25.

For more information contact Women and Men on Campus, 339 C Gutman Library, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Girl's self-esteem (continued from page 4)

"This survey makes it impossible to say that what happens to girls is simply a matter of hormones," said Carol Gilligan, an adviser on the development of questions asked in the survey. "If that was it, then the loss of self-esteem would happen to all girls and at roughly the same time.

"This work raises all kinds of issues about cultural contributions," she added, "and it raises questions about the role of the schools, both in the drop of self-esteem and in the potential for intervention."

from *The New York Times*,
January 9, 1991

In crime, too, some gender-related inequities.

By one measure, at least, violent crime seems to be declining. But as in so many other things, the trend appears to be benefitting men more than women.

According to a new study by the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics, about 2.5 million women a year are robbed, raped, or assaulted, and about a quarter of such crimes are committed by family members or men they have dated.

The study, based on interviews with about 50,000 households a year, found that violent crime, reported and unreported, against people over twelve years old had declined from 1973 to 1987, but that most of the decline had been in crimes against men, which dropped about twenty percent.

"The trend is that the men's rates are coming down closer to the women's," said Caroline Wolfe Harlow, who wrote the report. "But the main lesson is that violent crime against women is different than crime against men because it's six times as likely to be committed by their intimates."

Violence against women has become the focus of increasing concern throughout society, with new fears about campus date rape, and law enforcement authorities seeming powerless to stem a pattern of assault and murder.... Feminist groups argue that it is a troubling reflection of how much less political and economic power women have than men.

from *The New York Times*,
January 20, 1991

reality they are living, changing tissue.

Throughout life, our bodies replace old bone tissue with new. During childhood, new tissue forms faster than the old tissue breaks down; therefore the bones of children grow. Around age thirty-five, bone tissue breakdown speeds up and bone loss begins. In time, this bone loss may lead to osteoporosis, which means "porous bones." The bones become less dense, more fragile and weak, so that minor falls can cause fractures. Crush and collapse fractures of the vertebrae are also common and can cause back pain and noticeable decrease in height.

Women are more likely to develop osteoporosis than men because their bones are less dense and their calcium reserves lower. Moreover, women lose calcium during pregnancy and breast feeding and at menopause because of lowered levels of estrogen, the female hormone that helps prevent bone loss.

In fact, until recently, estrogen with calcium was a treatment prescribed for osteoporosis. In the spring of 1990, however, the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported on a new therapy in which Etidronate (pronounced eh-TID-ro-nate) is administered in two week cycles every thirteen weeks to reduce the breakdown of bones. Calcium is taken either in diet or in supplements along with Etidronate and for the remaining eleven weeks of the cycle.

In a study of more than four hundred post-menopausal women, the regimen reversed the gradual loss of bone that characterizes osteoporosis. Women taking the treatment had half the number of spinal fractures of female patients who did not receive the drug. Etidronate altered the bone loss by slowing the natural process of bone removal; the calcium helped build bone mass. No significant adverse affects of the treatment were found. It apparently can increase bone mass more than hormones can and reduce fractures more than an experimental treatment, sodium fluoride. ■

It's your health

Charlotte Frankel

New treatment for osteoporosis

We tend to think of our bones as hard, unchanging structures, but in

Speaking of women . . .

Jeanne Peck, A&S Jr.

Coco Weiss says being a feminist won't stop her from running for political office someday.

"A staunch feminist could not succeed. Any extreme view isn't going to win," said the twenty year-old president of the Women's Political Caucus. "If a woman came out and said, 'I'm a feminist and I'm running for office,' many people would see her as a bra burner.

"But whenever anyone asks me if I'm a feminist, I always say, 'Yes, aren't you?'"

Weiss, a Russian major and Women's Studies minor, plans to go to business school after she graduates from Vanderbilt. "International business appeals to me," she said. "But at the same time — as far as running for office — that is attractive."

The primary goal of the twenty-five member campus-based Women's Political Caucus group is to support other women in their political endeavors, Weiss said.

"If someone says she's going to run for SGA (Student Government Association), we'll support her," she said. "We'll work on other things as broad as tenure for women professors, too."

The group will also try to clear the sexist air which has polluted the environment of so many college campuses, Weiss said.

"It's hard to show where sexism actually occurs," she said. "Some of the fraternity T-shirts are just so degrading to women."

Weiss cited a photo printed in last year's *Commodore* which featured a young woman in a bathing suit lounging on Peabody Lawn.

"Under the picture it says, 'A good book and sunshine are two of the biggest reasons to come out,'" she said. "I mean, 'two of the biggest reasons?' That's just ridiculous."

Weiss said she had never been a victim of sexism at Vanderbilt, but she knows of other women who have.

"If a professor has adopted a sexist attitude, then somebody has to change it," she said. "It's a two-way street. If the student doesn't stand up for herself, how will the professor ever know he is being that way?"

Weiss said women have finally broken into the once-elusive political spectrum.

"Women in public offices are taken as seriously as men -- especially since they've been nominated," she said. "Even at Vanderbilt, if you look at



photo by Lisa Nipp

Coco Weiss, president, campus-based Women's Political Caucus

Interhall and Arts and Science Council, those are primarily made up of women."

"But I think it's obvious that [women's political groups] are not taken as seriously, otherwise more women would be involved in them."

The Women's Political Caucus will sponsor special programs to attract politically-concerned women, Weiss said. Professor Jean Elshtain, Centennial professor of political science, addressed the group earlier this fall.

Vanderbilt's administration needs to be more sympathetic to feminist issues, Weiss said.

"They say they are on this big pull for diversity," she said. "Well, diversity is more than just racial issues. It also has to do with sexist issues." ■

Date/Marital Rape

Husbands who force their wives to engage in sexual intercourse cannot be charged with rape under current Tennessee law. State Senator Steve Cohen, Democrat from Memphis, says the law "hearkens back to a time when wives were considered chattel." He has tried several times to repeal the spousal rape exclusion, even as recently as September 1990. Opponents have argued that such cases cannot be proven and that the state should not legislate what happens in a couple's bedroom.

Tennessee is among fifteen states where marital rape is legal according to Laura X, director of the National

Clearinghouse on Marital and Date Rape, based in Berkeley, California. It is a crime to rape your date but it often is not prosecuted.

Laura X chose her pen name to symbolize the anonymity of women's history and the concept that women are legally owned by their fathers and husbands. Ms. X graduated from the University of California and has spoken extensively throughout the United States since 1979 to affect legislation.

Plans are under way to have Laura X speak sometime towards the end of February on Vanderbilt campus regarding date and marital rape. Call the Women's Center for more information. ■

Gender Studies added to Stanford requirement. Beginning next fall, all students enrolling as undergraduates at Stanford University must meet a gender studies, a non-European culture, and an American cultural diversity graduation requirement. Before the additions, faculty teaching in the required areas found themselves "preaching to the converted" according to Deborah Rhode, former director of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender.

University Women,
University of Wisconsin System,
January 1991

February calendar

Call 322-4843 for further information on the programs listed below.

6 (Wednesday)

Women's Center Advisory Board, 4:10 p.m., Carmichael Towers East, room 208.

11 (Monday)

Book Group will discuss *Postcards From The Edge* by Carrie Fisher. Jody Mattison, facilitator, 5:15 to 6:15 p.m., Godchaux Living Room.

12 (Tuesday)

What's It Like To Be A Woman In Law School? A panel of women law students will discuss law school and law as a career and answer questions from undergraduate women, 4:30 to 6:00 p.m., Law School, room 027.

13 (Wednesday)

Noontime Seminar: Men and Abortion. Katharyn May, associate professor of nursing and chair of the department of Family and Health Systems Nursing, 12:15 to 1:15 p.m., Sarratt 118.

14 (Thursday)

New Employees Brown Bag Lunch. All recently hired Vanderbilt employees are invited. Bring your lunch. Hot and cold drinks will be provided. Noon until 1:00 p.m., Women's Center.

18 (Monday)

Lunchtime Book Review. Gisela Mosig, professor, Molecular Biology, reviews *A Feeling For The Organism* by Barbara McClintock, 12:15 to 1:15 p.m., Sarratt 205.

19 (Tuesday)

Editing Your Own Dissertation. Marty Nord, associate professor, Practice of Management and Technical Communication, OGSMS, will discuss clarifying the main point, writing clear and direct sentences, and developing paragraphs, 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., Owen Graduate School of Management, room 126.

20 (Wednesday)

Women's Health Series. Women With AIDS: Fastest Growing Group. John W. Greene, Director, Student Health, and Robyn M. Minton, Activities Coordinator, AIDS Project, 12:15 to 1:15 p.m., Sarratt 203.

27 (Wednesday)

So You Think You'd Like To Go To Med School? A panel of women medical students will discuss medical school and medicine as a career for women and answer questions, 4:30 to 6:00 p.m., Sarratt 205. ■

News quotes

Tie that binds is lifeboat for males. "Marriage," as the old saying goes, "is not a word but a sentence."

Be that as it may, marriage also may be a lifesaver for middle-aged males.

Research by the University of California at San Francisco shows that men between 45 and 64 who live alone, or with someone other than a spouse, are twice as likely to die within 10 years as men of the same age who live with their wives.

Further, says the study of 7,651 adults, risk factors such as smoking, drinking, obesity and lack of exercise do not alter the numbers, and neither income nor education is a factor.

In presenting the study's findings to the American Public Health Association, Maradee A. Davis, an associate professor of epidemiology, said that women who live without a husband also face increased chance of dying sooner. Nevertheless, Davis added, "Women who had a higher income but who lived with someone other than a spouse were not at a disadvantage for survival."

As for men, even those who lived with somebody other than a spouse, including their children, were no better off than those who lived alone. Said Davis, "The critical factor seems to be the spouse."

from *AARP Bulletin*,
January 1991

Girls' self-esteem is lost on way to adolescence. Girls emerge from adolescence with a poor self-image, relatively low expectations from life and much less confidence in themselves and their abilities than boys, a study made public [in January] has concluded.

Confirming earlier studies that were smaller and more anecdotal, this survey of 3,000 children found that at the age of nine a majority of girls were confident, assertive, and felt positive about themselves. But by the time they reached high school, less than a third felt that way.

More women are playing, but fewer call the shots. From basketball to cross-country, more women than ever are competing in college sports, but fewer are coaching or running athletic programs.

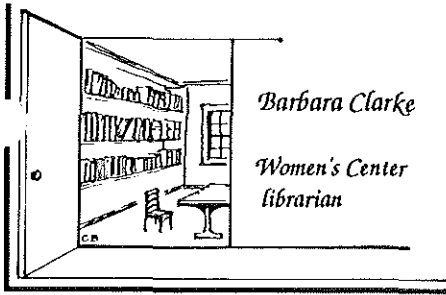
Since 1972, when a federal law was passed requiring colleges receiving government money to provide equitable programs for women, opportunities for female athletes have expanded markedly.

But as women's sports gained more money and prestige, an increasing number of men sought and obtained coaching and administrative jobs previously held by women.

Educators, coaches, and sports administrators said that some of those jobs had gone to men who were often deemed better qualified because they had coached the big-revenue sport of football or had contacts in the network of sports administrators.

In many cases, they said, women who apply must convince college administrators that they can juggle family responsibilities and a demanding job, a burden male applicants never carry.

from *The New York Times*, December 11, 1990



In the library

Audiotapes.

The library has a growing collection of audiotapes, which you may either check out or listen to at the Women's Center.

We have recently acquired tapes of the "Southern Songbirds" series, which is a thirteen-part radio series documenting women's role in country and old-time music. The programs include interviews with the musicians and examples of their recordings. Many of the women are well-known today, while some have not pursued music as a career and have made few recordings. Artists included are Ramona Jones, the Carter Family, Martha Carson, Matokie Slaughter, the Girls of the Golden West, Wilma Lee Cooper, Etta Baker, Patsy Montana, Phyllis Marks, and others.

We tape many of the programs sponsored by the Women's Center, so that those unable to attend a particular program can listen to the tape at a later date. The audiotapes in our collection cover a wide variety of topics, such as child care, feminism, literature, politics, health, suffrage, and higher education.

Videotapes.

The library has a smaller collection of videotapes, which may either be viewed at the Women's Center, or checked out for two weeks. The subjects covered by our videotapes include rape prevention, literature, abortion, sexual harassment, feminism, and affirmative action. Our newest tape is the Masterpiece Theatre presentation of "A Room of One's Own," with Eileen Adkins

giving an excellent portrayal of Virginia Woolf.

New Books.

In the Men's House by Cpt. Carol Barkalow with Andrea Raab is an account of Army life as seen through the eyes of one of the first female graduates of West Point. She was one of the 119 women who entered the Academy in July 1976; this was the first class to accept female cadets. Barkalow describes the positive and the many negative experiences of the young women in that first class, and the sexual harassment, the misogyny, and the extreme discipline they encountered. She also discusses the ways in which the situation for female cadets has improved since that time.

The writer also describes her life in the Army after graduation: her three stressful years in Germany, and her experiences as a captain back in the U.S. The book concludes with an informative chapter entitled: "A Chronology of American Army Women in the Twentieth Century."

Another recent acquisition is *The Lecherous Professor: Sexual Harassment on Campus*, second edition, by Billie Wright Dziech and Linda Weiner. In 1984 the first edition attracted much attention from the media, and this may have contributed to some positive changes in the academic climate.

Sexual harassment is related to sexism, and the writers describe many cases of sexual harassment of female students by male faculty members. As the most commonly reported form of harassment on college campuses, this is the type on which the book concentrates.

Sexual harassment is not a minor problem. It has caused many women to drop courses, to change majors, or even to change colleges or drop out of school. It can change women's lives and affect their career plans, as well as their perceptions of themselves and of men and sex.

Dziech and Weiner give useful advice not only for college students, but also for their parents, for faculty members, and administrators. Included are the sexual harassment

policies of two universities, the American Council on Education's Statement on Sexual Harassment, and a sample survey developed by the University of Illinois. ■

The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves, edited by Evelyn C. White, is an empowering, landmark anthology. The forty pieces in this collection offer a broad spectrum of writings on black women's health. The writers featured in this book are among the most well respected women in the country: Faye Wattleton, Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Byllye Avery, Marian Wright Edelman, Barbara Smith, Jewelle Gomez, and many others.

The Black Women's Health Book is a direct response to an alarming health crisis in the African-American community. The stories in this book cover: the National Black Women's Health Project in Atlanta, black midwifery, black women and AIDS, the politics of health care for black women, black teen pregnancy, black women and obesity, cancer, and more.

To order a copy, contact Seal Press, 3131 Western Avenue, Suite 410, Seattle, WA 98121-1028. Enclose \$14.95 plus \$2 for shipping and handling.

Call for nominations: Women's Center Advisory Board

The Women's Center Advisory Board is seeking interested persons to serve as at-large members beginning in the fall of 1991 for a two-year term. (At-large members may serve for two consecutive two-year terms.) Undergraduate and graduate or professional students, faculty members, staff, and administrators serve on the board. Interested women and men should apply.

Send personal applications and/or nominations to Jan Rosemergy, chair, nominating committee, Box 40, George Peabody College. ■

Announcements et cetera

Eighth Annual National Graduate Women's Studies Conference will be held March 8-10, 1991, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Inquiries to: Graduate Women's Studies Conference, Women's Studies Program, 234 W. Engineering, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1092.

Women's History Month, Athena Award. The National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) will join several other women's organizations including CABLE, the Tennessee and the Nashville Women's Political Caucus, BPW, and LAW, in celebrating Women's History Month in March. Each group will nominate one businesswoman from the Nashville area for the Athena Award, which honors the recipient's high level of excellence in business and the community.

The Award Ceremony at the Parthenon will be on March 16th from 6:00 until 8:00 p.m. Registration fee of \$10 includes admission to the ceremony and the art exhibit as well as hors d'oeuvres. Anyone may attend, but only those who have preregistered will be admitted.

Registration checks payable to NAWBO can be sent to Susan Haisley, Assistant Vice President,

First American Bank, First American Center, NA 1115, Nashville, TN 37237-1115. Deadline is March 3.

Share life - donate blood. Women are special people, and the Red Cross needs them. Female donors typically have more plasma volume than males, yet women comprise only about half of those presently giving blood in middle Tennessee.

A donation of one pint may sustain more than one life, since blood by-products are used to benefit those who suffer from anemia, leukemia, shock, and hemophilia.

Currently the Red Cross is coming to Vanderbilt on Thursdays from 12:30 to 5:00 p.m., Langford Auditorium. For more information call the Red Cross on Charlotte Avenue at 327-1931.

Support the Lady Commodores.

February Nashville area games:

- 3 Louisiana State University, 2:00 p.m., Memorial Gym
- 6 Middle TN State University, 7:30 p.m., Murphy Athletic Center, Murfreesboro
- 14 David Lipscomb University, 7:00 p.m., McQuiddy Gym
- 24 University of Mississippi, 2:00 p.m., Memorial Gym

Campaign for Progressive Toys and Games. Are you tired of being GI-Joed and Ninja-Turtled to death? Are Barbie and Ken's wardrobes threatening to exceed your own? If so, join the Campaign for Progressive Toys and Games. This project of the Cumberland Center for Justice and Peace welcomes your thoughts and ideas about their effort. A complete brochure is on file at the Women's Center or you can write P.O. Box 857, Sewanee, Tennessee 37375, or call (615) 598-5369, 598-5748.



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For
Men
Only

*"Life is too large to hang
out a sign: 'For Men
Only.'"*

Barbara Jordan,
former U.S. representative

Women's VU

Editor: Judith Tefft Helfer

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