

Break ALL the Chains!

**Bob Avakian on the Emancipation of Women
and the Communist Revolution**

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[Editor's Note: Many of these selections are excerpted from longer works. For the complete work or ordering information on the book or film from which a selection is drawn, go to www.revcom.us.]

Selections from *Basics from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian* (2011)

1:10

Look at all these beautiful children who are female in the world. And in addition to all the other outrages which I have referred to, in terms of children throughout the slums and shantytowns of the Third World, in addition to all the horrors that will be heaped on them—the actual living in garbage and human waste in the hundreds of millions as their fate, laid out before them, yes, even before they are born—there is, on top of this, for those children who are born female, the horror of everything that this will bring simply because they are female in a world of male domination. And this is true not only in the Third World. In "modern" countries like the U.S. as well, the statistics barely capture it: the millions who will be raped; the millions more who will be routinely demeaned, deceived, degraded, and all too often brutalized by those who are supposed to be their most intimate lovers; the way in which so many women will be shamed, hounded and harassed if they seek to exercise reproductive rights through abortion, or even birth control; the many who will be forced into prostitution and pornography; and all those who—if they do not have that particular fate, and even if they achieve some success in this "new world" where supposedly there are no barriers for women—will be surrounded on every side, and insulted at every moment, by a society and a culture which degrades women, on the streets, in the schools and workplaces, in the home, on a daily basis and in countless ways.

*Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution—Part III:
"The New Synthesis and the Woman Question: The Emancipation
of Women and the Communist Revolution – Further Leaps and
Radical Ruptures," Revolution #194, March 7, 2010*

2:25

This brings up one very important factor in all this: the positive side of unresolved contradictions under socialism—the bringing to the fore of driving forces for revolutionary transformation in the socialist stage—forces on the cutting edge of contradictions that are coming to the fore as decisive questions in terms of whether society will be moved forward or dragged backward. A very important aspect of all this is the woman question, the struggle for the complete emancipation of women. This will be a decisive question giving rise to crucial struggle throughout the socialist period.

Along with this are other divisions and inequalities left over from the old society....Unleashing all these forces [related to these unresolved contradictions in socialist society] to speak out, rally forces, raise criticism, and rise in rebellion can be risky and messy. But such mass upheaval is no less essential under socialism than it is under capitalism. And certainly this is not something communists should fear!

"The End of a Stage – The Beginning of a New Stage" (1990)

2:30

This takes us back to the very important point from "The End of a Stage—The Beginning of a New Stage" about unresolved contradictions under socialism. What is said there is another way of expressing the understanding that the struggle for the complete emancipation of women will be a crucial part of "the final revolution." In other words, it will be a crucial component in propelling and driving forward not only the revolutionary struggle to overthrow the rule of capitalism-imperialism but to continue the revolution, within the new, socialist society itself, in order to advance on the road toward the final aim of communism. The point is that, among the unresolved contradictions which will remain in socialist society, and which can be a driving force propelling that revolution forward, the continuing ways in which the emancipation of women will need to be fought for and fought through will be one of the most decisive aspects and expressions of that.

*Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution – Part III:
"The New Synthesis and the Woman Question: The Emancipation
of Women and the Communist Revolution – Further Leaps and
Radical Ruptures," Revolution #197, April 4, 2010*

From "Three Alternative Worlds" supplement in *BAsics*

Marx and Engels said in the Communist Manifesto that the communist revolution represents a radical rupture with traditional property relations and with traditional ideas. And the one is not possible without the other. They are mutually reinforcing, one way or the other.

If you have a society in which the fundamental role of women is to be breeders of children, how can you have a society in which there is equality between men and women? You cannot. And if you don't attack and uproot the traditions, the morals, and so on, that reinforce that role, how can you transform the relations between men and women and abolish the deep-seated inequalities that are bound up with the whole division of society into oppressors and oppressed, exploiters and exploited? You cannot.

*"Three Alternative Worlds"
Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy (2005)*

3:22

You cannot break all the chains, except one. You cannot say you want to be free of exploitation and oppression, except you want to keep the oppression of women by men. You can't say you want to liberate humanity yet keep one half of the people enslaved to the other half. The oppression of women is completely bound up with the division of society into masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited, and the ending of all such conditions is impossible without the complete liberation of women. All this is why women have a tremendous role to play not only in making revolution but in making sure there is all-the-way revolution. The fury of women can and must be fully unleashed as a mighty force for proletarian revolution.

Revolution #84, April 8, 2007

5:18

In many ways, and particularly for men, the woman question and whether you seek to completely abolish or to preserve the existing property and social relations and corresponding ideology that enslave women (or maybe "just a little bit" of them) is a touchstone question *among the oppressed themselves*. It is a dividing line between "wanting in" and really "wanting out": between fighting to end all oppression and exploitation—and the very division of society into classes—and seeking in the final analysis to get your part in this.

Revolution #158, March 8, 2009
(quote originally published 1984)

Selections from *BA Speaks: REVOLUTION–Nothing Less! Bob Avakian Live* (film of a talk given in 2012)

[Editor's Note: The following selections are transcribed from *BA Speaks: REVOLUTION–NOTHING LESS! Bob Avakian Live* (film of a talk given in 2012). In preparing this for publication, some minor editing has been done, while the essential content and character of the original talk by BA has been retained.]

"More Postcards of the Hanging–The Horrors Perpetrated Against Women Under This System" [from Disk 1 of DVD]

At the same time, millions of women and girls are enslaved in prostitution and in the degradation of the ever more vicious and violent pornography—many forced into this as well, not only out of economic hardship, but literal brutality.

A number of years ago I gave a talk called *Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution*, and in that I spoke to the fact that a comrade in our party had pointed out to me in relation to an earlier talk I gave, *Revolution: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About*, that there was a very real and vivid parallel between the situation of women, particularly in pornography and prostitution, and the phenomenon that I described in beginning that talk, "Revolution."

I began that talk with descriptions of the postcards of the hanging. Now, think about this: Literally, in this country, up until the 1950s and into the early 1960s, in many of our lifetimes, Black people were being repeatedly lynched. But that's not all. Usually this took place in the South, and many times when these Black men, in particular, would be lynched, it would be done in a carnival atmosphere. People would be notified in advance that this was going to happen. People—whole families, including little children— would come to picnic at the site of the lynching. And when the Black man's body was lynched, mutilated and burned, pieces of the mutilated body would be handed out to some in the crowd as trophies. This is the fucking history of this country, and I know it's hard to hear, but we need to face the reality of what the history of this country, and how it's been built, actually is. And then, photographs would be taken of the burned, mutilated and lynched bodies of these Black men, and postcards would be made and they would be sold around the country.

And this comrade pointed out—and I spoke to this in *Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution*—that what goes on, particularly in the increasingly violent and vicious pornography, is very much along the same lines as the postcards of the hanging: the titillation of men through the physical torture and degradation of women, which is becoming more and more the norm and more and more mainstream in pornography. We should all think about the fact that one of the most popular forms of pornography, as it's being more and more mainstreamed, is rape pornography, depicting literally the woman being raped.

And this comrade also pointed out—and I think it's very important to think about—

that you can do in this society today to women what you could not do to any other group without a huge outcry. I mean, think about what's depicted in pornography, even so-called soft-core, let alone hard-core, vicious and violent pornography. Imagine, if someone made a film depicting Black people in grotesque caricature with gigantic teeth and a big smile eating watermelons and dancing around saying, "Yessuh Massa, Yessuh Massa." Can you imagine that you could have that done without a huge outcry? No! And that's very right. It should not be able to be done without a huge outcry. Or imagine if you literally showed lynchings and depicted them as a source of titillation. But yet you can do what I've been describing in pornography, and not only is there not a huge outcry, but it's being more and more mainstreamed. And, by the way, it's multi-billion dollar business, it's not just some sleazy old men in San Fernando Valley who are turning this out. This involves big banks and financial institutions. It involves big hotel chains, involved in multi-billion dollar business.

And it's becoming more—as I said, more and more mainstream. Even in the television programs, which are not pornographic themselves literally, how often do you hear, when talking about guys, "Oh, let's watch some porn." It's part of—it's just integrated into the stories—it's just perfectly natural. And then think about the content that I've been just touching on and can't really give full life to. I mean, it's just so disgusting, so outrageous. Think about this content that's being mainstreamed.

And along with this, women are subjected to continual assaults on their right to abortion and even birth control. Don't let these people tell you, these so-called right-to-lifers, that the issue is the killing of innocent babies. The issue is the control over women, exercised by forcing them to be mothers, whether or not they want to be at that time. Now, to have children, to raise children, can be a really beautiful experience if that's what you want to do and if you feel in a position to do it in the way that you feel it should be done. But to have it **forced** on you is virtual enslavement. Not to even have the choice as to whether you will do that. And here's the key to how you know—or one key to how you know—this is not about killing of innocent babies: Try to find one of these rabid anti-abortion groups that is also not opposed to birth control. You'll have a very hard time. They're all opposed to birth control, because the issue is not the killing of innocent babies, it's the control and subordination of women who are regarded as getting all out of hand these days in this society, which is another reason why we have, or a contributing factor to why we have, this vicious pornography. So the goal of these attacks on abortion and, yes, on birth control, the right to them, is to deny women the ability to determine something as basic as when or if they will have children and raise children, or be part of raising them—forcing motherhood on them, once again, and enslaving them in that way.

Along with all this, millions of women and girls, millions every year in this country alone, are raped, assaulted, battered and abused, often by those who claim to be their intimate lovers, while the half of humanity that is female is everywhere treated as less than fully human. Once again, I think about the experience of Black people and slavery. You know what was one of the main terms that slave owners used to describe the slaves? "Talking tools." Because this is how they regarded them, and this is how they were treated. They were put on the auction block to be sold, and their physical attributes were

examined: their teeth; if they were women, their reproductive potential; their body shapes; their ability to work hard; their musculature. All this was examined in the most degrading way.

And you think of the same thing with women today, reduced to objects to be used by men, treated as brood animals to turn out babies and as unthinking flesh to be consumed and plundered, with their bodies and body parts used to sell products, pimped out and beaten into submission, plundered to portray and promote sex as conquest and domination by men instead of shared pleasure based on mutual affection and equality. All of this degrades and demeans not only the women who are directly subjected to the most extreme forms of this, but all women everywhere. **What kind of system is this**, and why should anyone accept that **this** is the best possible way the world could be?!

And those whose sexual orientation is different from, and seen as posing a threat to the dominant gender and sex relations—lesbians and gays, bisexual and transgendered people, or those who are simply unsure about their sexuality and questioning it at a given time—are harassed, bullied, often bullied to the point of committing suicide, brutalized and even murdered. And despite certain changes in law and government policy, the reality of LGBT people being discriminated against, insulted and even assaulted continues as a marked feature of the culture and society, bound up with deep-seated structural relations of this whole system, closely connected to the patriarchy and male supremacy that oppress women.

"The Subjugation of Women and the Division of Society Into Masters and Slaves, Exploiters and Exploited" [from Disk 1 of DVD]

Early human societies were not societies of gigantic empires and civilizations with masters and slaves, and so on and so forth. They were small groupings of people, starting out in Africa and then eventually spreading to other parts of the world, who lived largely by gathering and hunting—mainly by gathering. Despite all the alpha male mythology about the great hunter and so on, especially in the early days hunting was a very uncertain enterprise. Often you didn't get anything—or, if you were lucky, you found the remains of an animal that another animal had killed and you took that back and distributed it among the people in your community. And every once in a while you really got on top of things and maybe you got a few animals and you brought those back. But, mainly, the livelihood of the people was done by the gathering of what was at hand in the area over which people ranged, the fruits and nuts and other things people could eat. It was more of a very simple hand-to-mouth existence, more or less.

And there was a certain division of labor within this. The men, yes, were the ones who mainly went out and did the hunting, and the women did more of the gathering, because they had to stay more in the area where the people were living at the time. Why? Well, if you think about it for a second, the answer will suggest itself. Obviously, the women are the ones who bore and who mainly had responsibility for raising the children, especially in their early years. Think about it. There was no birth control—certainly no consistent birth control, no family planning in that sense—no formula, all these kind of things, so babies came when they came and they had to be nursed for a couple of years. So naturally it fell to the women to do that; and, as a result, this division of labor developed where they stayed more around the home and did the gathering.

But it's important to emphasize: this was not an oppressive division. The communities were more or less marked by equality—I say more or less, it wasn't a perfect equality, but women as well as men took part in the decision-making. Marriages and sexual relations were very relaxed, formed by mutual consent more or less, and either partner could break up (if there were a pair, could break it up) or people didn't pair in the way we're familiar with. They might have had several partners, each of them, that they were paired with. So all the things that we're familiar with and are told are just the natural order of things—"god decreed that the family is one man and one woman; Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve"—all that stuff is just a function of how society has developed since these early communities.

So this early division was not oppressive, but it was a division. And through, once again, a lot of accident and necessity, trial and error, in some parts of the world, particularly in Eurasia—the part that's Europe and the Middle East, more or less—for a variety of reasons, out of need and out of innovation, people instead of just gathering started settling down and farming. And sometimes they failed at it. But where they succeeded, they were able to produce a lot more food than they needed at a given time, after a certain period of experimenting with this. They could put aside a surplus for the

future. They didn't just live literally hand to mouth. And they also domesticated animals. You can read about this in Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*.

They domesticated animals. They began to develop another division of labor, where on the basis of there being a surplus of farming—because when you're farming, you just don't take what's there, you transform the soil and you can make it richer, and it can produce more than what you would need at a given time—so on that basis, you could have some people who didn't have to farm and they would work on developing implements and tools to increase the farming and the other activity of the people and get an even bigger yield and more surplus. And the domestication of animals went along with this where the animals were available and could be domesticated, particularly in this Eurasian area. They were also harnessed to till the soil, which made it even more rich, fertile and productive.

But along with this, as this took hold in various places, it broke down the old communal society and ways of doing things and the old relations more or less of communal equality. Now let me make clear here: I do not believe, and I don't think there's a scientific basis to say, that even if you could show that in the earliest communal societies there were all kinds of relations of exploitation and oppression, that would somehow prove that it wouldn't be possible to move beyond this in the period in which we exist now, because this is a very different world; and it doesn't prove there's some inherent unchangeable and unchanging human nature that makes people selfish and want to oppress and exploit other people. But by and large these early communities were not marked by the oppression and exploitation and divisions that we're all familiar with, except when they encountered other community groups that were alien to them and often they didn't know how to resolve things or fit each other in, and so there were conflicts, including violent conflicts between these groups sometimes.

It's interesting, if you look at the early societies that are still more or less here, that have been perpetuated down to the present, you will find that if you inquire how do the people in those societies or communities or tribes or peoples refer to themselves, very often they don't use this or that name that you might think they'd use. They just refer to themselves in what translates into English as—"the people." And this is very common in all parts of the world. So what happens when you, the people, meet the other, the people, and you can't figure out who's the real people and how to relate. Well, you might get violent—you have different mythology, different history, so you might have violent conflicts. Not always, but there were at times.

But as this farming and the division of labor and the domestication of animals and the development of surplus took hold, it began to break down these communal societies. You got the emergence of private property, private ownership of parcels of land, private ownership of the domesticated animals, private ownership of the tools that were being developed. And along with this, you got an oppressive division emerging between the sexes, or the genders, because with this division of labor that it carried over from very early days, the women were still the ones mainly responsible for the bearing and rearing of children, so it more and more fell to the men to be the ones organizing the farming and related activity, and they, on this basis, appropriated the means of production—the

land, the raw materials that might be under the land, the farm animals that had been domesticated, the tools—as their private property. And as they did that over time, they wanted to be able to pass this private property to their heirs, in particular their male heirs. So then they became concerned to control the activity of women and, in particular, the sexual activity of women, because you wanted to be sure that the male heirs that you were passing it on to were your own, and not somebody else's.

Now, I have to say, they had a problem—they did have a problem here because, while the women were tightly controlled and not allowed to sleep with anybody else, the men went around and did it anyway, so then you got a problem. Well, if the men are sleeping with people other than their wives, how do you know whose children are really whose? So they just instituted—again trial and error, not somebody sat down and wrote out a piece of paper, but trial and error—they simply instituted that whoever the woman's children were, those were the children of her husband. But still the husband wanted to have a better chance of knowing they were really his own children he's passing these things on to, so he was concerned and men got together to enforce the control over the sexuality and other activity of women—and this has been carried forward from that time through different forms of society which have been divided into oppressors and oppressed, exploiters and exploited, masters and slaves.

And that brings up the next point: that once you started having this way of life, as opposed to the old communal way, then instead of when you had encounters with other people from other tribes or groups or whatever—instead of just killing them if there were a violent conflict—it made a certain amount of sense economically to take them as slaves, because now you could put them to work in agriculture and other forms of activity that would help create even more surplus, more surplus than you would have to spend maintaining this. So women were one of the first groups enslaved in this way, but also people involved in conflicts among the different groups.

And so down through a whole period of thousands of years since this time, we've had the evolution of the kind of societies we've had, marked by the division into exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed, masters and slaves.

"The Oppression of Women: Bound Up With This System...A Driving Force for Revolution" [from Disk 1 of DVD]

Earlier I spoke to the fact that the division of society into masters and slaves, into different classes, developed together with the oppression of women. These were very tightly bound together in their historical development and have remained so throughout the course of history since that time, through different kinds of societies. And today we can see the ways in which the oppression of women—not just in a particular country, but on a world scale—continues to feed the functioning of this capitalist-imperialist system. Not only, as I pointed out, is it highly profitable, in the billions and billions of dollars, to oppress women in sex trafficking, prostitution and pornography, but also the backward conditions that are maintained and enforced by the functioning and the military power of the imperialist countries throughout the Third World lead to a situation where many women are outcast and desperate and highly vulnerable to being exploited in this vast network of sweatshops that is at the foundation of imperialist capital in the world today.

I think of the phenomenon of people standing in line for the latest gadget from Apple, and I have to say it makes me mad. I say to myself: **What the fuck** is the matter with you people?! You can stand in line overnight for the latest gadget from Apple, but you can't stand up to oppose wars and torture and mass incarceration and the degradation of women. What the hell is the matter with you people?

Now, to be clear, those people standing in line are not the enemy. But what is represented by Apple—and not just Apple unto itself but the whole system and the network of exploitation that Apple is a part of, and enmeshed in—is what needs to be swept aside. I mean, when you're at the end of the food chain in a country like this, living parasitically—even if you're not in the ruling class—living parasitically off of people all over the world, once again sometimes all this can be hidden from you. You do not see the blood and the bones, the worn down fingers and other body parts of particularly women who are working in the plants in places like China, making the components that go into the Apple products and all these other things, under horrific conditions. You do not see the people in Bangladesh making many of the clothes that you are wearing. And when you leave here and go home tonight, look in your closet and see how many of your clothes you can find are not made in the Third World—and you can be sure if they are made in places like Bangladesh, Haiti, Pakistan or whatever, that they're made through a lot of child labor and, in any case, extreme conditions of sweatshop exploitation.

But the products don't come with this stamped on them. You don't pick up an iPhone, press a button, and the blood of the women who made it comes gushing out. But it's there, even though you can't see it. And imperialism feasts on this. Don't let them fool you with their talk about micro-loans: Let's have some micro-loans for poor women in the Third World so they can set up a business and exploit other women and then, in their large numbers, fail anyway. This is not what the imperialist system is doing. This is a tiny countercurrent to the massive exploitation of these very kinds of women, on which this system rests.

And look at this country. Not only is there the great value to imperialist capital of

super-exploitation of women in the Third World, but in this country it's a fact that the social relations that oppress women are critical for holding together this whole oppressive system which has historically evolved with male domination a key foundation of the whole system, a foundation stone built into its whole structure. Think about the family and how people live and reproduce in this society. Everything in this society is based on commodity production and exchange. You don't have little groups of people all making overwhelmingly the things they need and then using them themselves. There are vast networks of exploitation in this country, but increasingly in other parts of the world, producing all these things; and then you have to get some means, by working in some way or other, to have the basis, to have the commodity money, to go buy these things. That's the way the economy works, and all of it gets funneled through what these reactionaries are always reminding us is the basic unit and cell of this society, the family. And the whole family has evolved historically with women being subordinate to men, and having as one part of that the prime responsibility for the domestic aspect of things, including the rearing of children and things like just doing the every day work of the house.

There have been some changes in this society—more women in the professions, more women going to college, more women working in a lot of ways—and all this has put tremendous strains on these oppressive relations, but it hasn't broken them because this system cannot do without these relations. And so you have this tremendous potential eruption where the changes in the economy are straining against the limitations of the oppression of women and other exploitative and oppressive relations, but the system cannot do without them.

You know, as one illustration of this, I was reading an article in the *New York Times* about a phenomenon in the South where some of these men who once had fairly good paying industrial jobs—once again the phenomenon, the companies closed down, moved the factories away, the men are out of work, the women are going out and getting the jobs in service and whatever that are available to them that they can get, but the men are largely sitting on their couches, drinking their beer and moping. And one of the authors of the article asked one of these men: Well, why don't you go out and get one of these jobs that these women are doing? He said: No, I can't do that; it's not man's work, I just wouldn't feel like a man if I had a job like that.

This captures a lot about the contradictions of this system and how this has intensified. And, in reading this, I was thinking about what Engels wrote in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in talking about the Roman Empire—Engels, who along with Marx, founded the communist movement. He's talking about agriculture in the declining period of the Roman Empire that had been based on slave plantations called *latifundia*. But, as the Roman Empire went into decline, the plantations, the slave plantations, the *latifundia*, became less and less profitable. And so they broke down, and people had to go back into small-scale farming. But all of the former slave owners, or almost all of them, wouldn't go back and do actual farm work, even though the plantations were no longer profitable, because they considered it beneath their dignity to do that kind of work. And, Engels pointed out, this contributed to the decline and weakening of Rome and made it more and more vulnerable to the

barbarians that were increasingly at the gate and battering at the gate.

And I was thinking about these men saying, I can't do that, it's not man's work, it doesn't make me feel like a man—how this represents the changes this system has brought about straining against the oppressive relations. And I was thinking about how, in parallel to Rome, this could also contribute to the further declining and weakening of this oppressive system, and make it more vulnerable to the barbarians, namely us. [laughter and applause]

The oppression of women, and all the horrors bound up with it, **can** be ended, and something radically different and emancipating brought into being. Now, let's be honest. To many, especially many women, this may not seem possible and, frankly, may seem hard to believe. But that is not only because of the way things are now and the way so many men act so much of the time, but, more fundamentally, because the way things are now sets a certain framework and tone for people's thinking, because the possibility of radical change cannot be seen to the degree that our vision and our sense of reality, and of possibility, is still confined within, conditioned by and filtered through the dominating relations that are at the foundation of this whole system, and the traditions, values, ways of being and of thinking that constantly pour forth from and serve to perpetuate this system that we are forced to live under. In this way **they get us twice**: their system embodies and enforces all this horrific oppression **and** it has people believing that this cannot be done away with.

But the truth, which they try every way to keep people from seeing, is that we **can** be rid of this horrific oppression. But we can't do this by accepting the terms of this system or any part of its oppression. We can't do it half-stepping and halfway. That is why *Basics 3:22* makes it very clear:

"You cannot break all the chains, except one. You cannot say you want to be free of exploitation and oppression, except you want to keep the oppression of women by men. You can't say you want to liberate humanity yet keep one half of the people enslaved to the other half. The oppression of women is completely bound up with the division of society into masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited, and the ending of all such conditions is impossible without the complete liberation of women. All this is why women have a tremendous role to play not only in making revolution but in making sure there is all-the-way revolution. The fury of women can and must be fully unleashed as a mighty force for proletarian revolution."

And, as this statement is also emphasizing, the fight against the oppression of women and for all-the-way revolution is not just **their** fight. It is a fight that must be fully and vigorously taken up by men as well, by everyone who really wants to see an end to this system and all the horrors it means for the masses of humanity, everyone who wants to see an end to the long night in which humanity has been divided into masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited, who wants to see a dawning of a new day for humanity. The only people who should fear and not join in with this unleashed fury of women are those who have a real stake in this system and want to keep it going, with everything it does to people.

"Rebelling Against 'Guy Culture,' Fighting to End All Oppression" [from Disk 3 of DVD]

[An excerpt from "**Resisting the Brainwash—A Radical Revolt Against a Revolting Culture**"]

Look at what gets promoted in the music industry—what gets supported and promoted, in hip-hop, for example: misogyny—crude, demeaning and degrading of women; openly promoting the idea of getting yours on the back, or through the blood, of other people, get rich or die trying, I gotta get mine no matter what I gotta do; and often all wrapped up with religious obscurantism and crosses and references to nonsense in a poisonous package. And what do we hear, what's the excuse, when people are confronted with this: Oh, I'm, I'm just...I'm just keeping it real; I'm just telling it the way it really is down here.

Keeping it real, my ass. You are helping to keep it going the way it is.

And then there's Beyonce Knowles—or, as I think she should be called, Beyonce Don't Knowles Shit. [laughter] You know, after Osama Bin Laden was killed, she picked up this song from this old country clown, Lee Greenwood—"God Bless the USA": [sarcastically singing in country style] "I'm proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free" [laughter]—and she put out her version of this song on the heels of the assassination of Osama Bin Laden. Come on!

What we see here is these bourgeois strata seeking their interests in a way tied in with the horrors of this system, and fuck the masses of people suffering terrible oppression under this system.

Instead of this, all this garbage, we need more **Fight the Power**. Instead of the promotion of getting in on the oppression, we need the promotion of fighting to put an end to it. Think about what's going on in the popular culture, particularly in hip-hop: the promotion of pimping; the brutal treatment of women, tricked and forced into this, and maintaining it through the most disgusting violence, even turning it into adjectives—"pimp-a-licious," and all the rest.

Think about it, the effect this has on the youth coming up and on the culture and the people broadly. Because a big part of all this is what we could call "guy culture." It's a culture of the degrading domination of women and of wanton violence, a kind of pornography of violence with an American chauvinist and male chauvinist thrust to it.

Think about some of these video games where the point is you go out and you kill America's enemies—that's the point of the video game, as identified by the army and the ruling class as a whole. Or the video games where a lot of youth are trained and conditioned to think while they're playing the game—they think they're just going along, using their thumbs and their fingers—they're using their brains, though, their brains are being influenced. You have video games not only to go out and kill America's enemies, you have video games where the high point is, you get to hunt down and kill a woman

who's portrayed as a whore. How does this condition young people, boys in particular, to think about women and the relations between genders?

Think about one of the main institutions and sites of male bonding in this society, along with pornography—the strip club. That's where you go to hang out with and bond with other young guys, or other older guys, participating in and being titillated by the degradation of women forced to do this. What kind of thinking and conditioning is going on here in terms of how people who are being socialized in this way are being influenced to think about women and whether they're human beings, and about relations and what sex should be about? Look, let's face it: sex, if it's done right among people who really care about each other, and on the basis of equality and what they each want, let's face it—it's one of the greatest pleasures human beings can have. Okay? [laughter and applause] But not when it's done by one part degrading the other part. And this is what people are being socialized to think of as the norm and as the object, the goal.

And then we have the phrase, "man up." Think about this. What is the logic of this phrase—what is the meaning of "man up?" It means you stand up and be strong and don't be a coward and don't back down from your responsibilities or from danger—and these are presented as attributes, qualities of **men**. Now, by logic, who does **not** have these qualities? [laughter] Who are these qualities not of? Obviously, women. Think, if you went out there and said: "Look, quit being so weak: 'Woman up!'" [laughter] It wouldn't make any sense in the dominant culture. It could make a lot of sense in reality, [laughter through these comments] but it wouldn't make any sense in the dominant culture.

Once again, people are being conditioned, that to stand up for principle, to stand up for right, to not be afraid or shrink in the face of danger or sacrifice, or taking responsibility, are qualities of men, that men should exercise. And it becomes so perverse that, not only do you hear women being influenced to use this phrase, but you see it being promoted in the culture that, if a woman wants to have these qualities, then somehow she has to try to "man up."

I think of the movie "GI Jane" with Demi Moore. This is a movie portraying the great advance for the cause of the liberation of women being a woman who can make it in the tough confines and environs of the U.S. military, become part of the machinery of oppressing and slaughtering human beings all over the world. And the story line of this movie is Demi Moore plays this woman who has to fight through every attempt of her drill instructor in basic training and the rest to drive her out of the military. And, one after another, she passes these tests. She finds it hard and she needs to get support and advice, but she perseveres, and finally it comes down to the crowning scene, so to speak, where once again the drill instructor is being extra hard on her, partly it seems to drive her out but maybe to make her actually rise up to the challenge. And in this scene he's just driving her and driving her and driving her, test after test, and he keeps saying to her: You wanna quit? You wanna quit? You wanna quit? And finally she turns and says: No, fuck you, SUCK MY DICK! Which, of course, she does not have. [laughter] But what is the point? The point is that, in order to be really tough and worthy, you have to "man up," even if you're a woman.

Or what about the phrase that's out there so much, too: being made into somebody's bitch. That's the lowliest thing you could be, a woman, and in particular a woman who's portrayed as being somewhat hysterical and frenzied, like a dog in heat. Being made into somebody's bitch, that's the lowest thing. And you see it even translated into all kinds of ways. For example, you go out on a basketball court, somebody takes a shot, it doesn't go right in, it bounces on the rim, it's rolling around, and they'll say: "Get in there, bitch!" Now, think about it. Why are they saying, "Get in there, bitch?" Because the basketball is acting like a recalcitrant woman—is not doing what it's supposed to do according to the dictates of this man—it's supposed to get in the basket, and it's rolling around instead and it might fall out. "Get in there, bitch!" How is that conditioning people to think, even without their being fully conscious of it? Imagine if some white guy went out on the court, started playing basketball, took a shot and it's rolling around the rim, and he said: "Get in there, nigger!" Well, this is the same thing. And once again you can get away with this in this culture now. It's acceptable, it's conditioning people.

And along with this, women under this system are conditioned, even girls from an early age, to internalize and to go along with so much of this—or to accept that this is the way things are and that nothing better can be expected from men, so try to "own" it, market yourself and get the most you can out of this, while remaining in what is, in fact, an oppressed and degraded position.

Now, all this is not hard-wired in people—it's not hard-wired in guys any more than in the young women. It's ways that guys are conditioned by the dominant institutions and media and culture to think and act, reflecting the basic oppressive relations of this system and serving the interests of its ruling class.

So developing a radical revolt against this revolting culture in many different forms and on many different levels is a very important part of, and can make a very important contribution to, fighting the power, and transforming the people, for revolution. Even if much of this culture that becomes part of this radical revolt is not all-the-way revolutionary and doesn't completely express the communist point of view, it can still make a big contribution by raising disgust at the putrid culture that dominates, by inspiring and provoking people to think differently and think critically, to question what they would otherwise accept, to ponder why the world is the way it is, to dream about and argue about the possibility of a radically different world, to come alive with righteous outrage and the joy of calling out and rebelling against what should **not** be tolerated. And this contribution will be all the greater if people who **do** have a communist understanding bring forward a vibrant culture that expresses that, and inspires people toward that, while relating in a good way to the many and diverse expressions of a culture of radical revolt against this truly revolting culture.

"Can This System Do Away With, or Do Without, The Oppression of Women?—A Fundamental Question, a Scientific Approach to the Answer"

(from previously unpublished correspondence, 2014)

Through which mode of production will any social problem be addressed?

That is the most fundamental question that must be asked, in regard to changes in society. And the answer to that question will be decisive in determining what must be done to bring about the changes that are understood to be necessary and desirable. Why? Because the mode of production—the basic economic relations and the basic dynamics of the economic system—is the decisive factor in determining what the character of a society, and its dominant social relations, politics, and ideology, will be.

To apply this to the particular question of whether this capitalist-imperialist system can do away with, or do without, the oppression of women, it is necessary to pose, and answer, some essential questions that need to be addressed in determining this, including:

How, under this system and given its fundamental relations and dynamics, would the role of women in childbirth and the rearing of children, the character and role of the family, and the system of commodity production and exchange that characterizes capitalism—how would all this, and the many direct and indirect expressions and manifestations of this in the superstructure of politics and ideology, be radically transformed in a way that would lead to abolishing the oppression of women?

How would the putrid social relations and culture that dominate in this society—which oppress and degrade women in a thousand ways, including the most vicious and violent—be actually transformed, within the confines of this system, in a way that would contribute to doing away with all the oppression and degradation of women?

How would all this be achieved, not only within a particular country, such as the U.S.—and not just for a section of people, particularly the more well-off and privileged—but for human society as a whole, on a global scale, especially given the highly globalized nature of this system, and its fundamental relations and dynamics?

There is much that has already been brought to light which demonstrates how the oppression of women has been historically, and today remains, completely and integrally bound up with the division of society into masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited. At the same time, there is further analysis and synthesis that needs to be done—in regard to the situation of women in the world and how this relates today to the fundamental relations and dynamics of the dominant system in the world, capitalism-imperialism. But this needs to be taken up with a thoroughly and consistently scientific method and approach. And I am firmly convinced that such a scientific analysis and synthesis—including with regard to the basic questions that have been posed here—will reinforce, and further deepen, the fundamental understanding that it is

impossible to achieve the emancipation of women under this system, and that this emancipation can only be fully and finally achieved through, and as a key part of, the revolutionary advance to communism throughout the world.

If someone wishes to argue that it could be possible to do away with the oppression of women under this capitalist-imperialist system, then let them make that argument, but that argument must include an answer to the kinds of essential questions I have posed here.

"The New Synthesis and the Woman Question: The Emancipation of Women and the Communist Revolution—Further Leaps and Radical Ruptures"

Part III of *Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution* (2009)

[Editor's Note: The footnote numbering of this selection preserves the original numbering as it appears in Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution. For that reason the first footnote in this selection begins with footnote 11.]

Here again, I want to emphasize the point with which I began this talk as a whole: Much of this I am still working on and grappling with myself, and much of what follows will be more in the nature of a scaffolding than a fully elaborated discussion. So while what follows will include points of basic orientation and analysis, which I feel are important to be firmly taking hold of and acting on, to a significant degree the purpose and aim here is to offer some food for thought and sense of direction, while at the same time promoting, and provoking, further wrangling with these decisive questions.

The question of the status—the oppression and the struggle for the liberation—of women is objectively coming to the forefront in today's world and posing itself ever more profoundly and acutely. This fact is being recognized and spoken to by a number of people representing very different class viewpoints, but who remain within the framework of a world of imperialist domination, class division, ruthless exploitation and oppressive social divisions and relations. We see this, for example, in the book which I referred to earlier by Michelle Goldberg (*The Means of Reproduction*) as well as in a major article in the *New York Times Magazine* and a new book by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (see "The Women's Crusade," in the *New York Times Magazine*, August 23, 2009, an essay adapted from the book by Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

Here is a point worth reflecting on, which has been raised by another leading comrade in our party: This focus on the status of women, particularly in the Third World, is being raised by these various bourgeois-democratic forces, both out of a genuine belief that this is an outrage which must be addressed—while approaching this entirely from within the framework of bourgeois and imperialist-dominated relations—and out of a sense that this is one key way to go after, undermine and eventually defeat radical Islam. In other words, an aspect of this is how it is part of a strategic approach on behalf of one historically "outmoded"—imperialist ruling strata—in opposition to another historically "outmoded"—reactionary Islamic fundamentalism.

So in this context, as well as in the larger, world-historic context of the communist revolution, there is a profound and pressing need for those representing the emancipatory goals of the communist revolution, with its final aim of the abolition of all class divisions and all relations of exploitation and oppression, to make further leaps and ruptures in our understanding of and approach to the woman question, in theory and in practice—in the realm of ideological and political line, and mobilizing mass struggle based on that line—in accordance with the pivotal and decisive role this

question objectively occupies, not only in terms of ending the millennia of subjugation and degradation of half of humanity, but also the way in which this is integrally and indispensably bound up with the emancipation of humanity as a whole and the advance to a whole new era in human history with the achievement of communism throughout the world.

In this light and from this perspective, I want to offer some thinking on key aspects of how this challenge is presenting itself and on the necessary work and struggle to achieve the leaps and ruptures that are objectively and indeed urgently called for.

The Oppression of Women and the "Two Outmodeds"

To begin with, the oppression of women is a decisive dimension of what Marx referred to as the enslaving subordination of people to the division of labor, which has been a phenomenon ever since class divisions—and, along with them, the oppression of women—emerged in human society, and which must be overcome in order to advance to communism.

Now, as far back as *Red Papers 3*,¹¹ published by the Revolutionary Union (the forerunner of our party) about 40 years ago now, this point—how the oppression of women is a decisive dimension of the enslaving division of labor in society—was made. But *Red Papers 3*, and our thinking at that time overall, was not only undeveloped in general and specifically on the woman question, but it was also significantly influenced by economism (and by related trends which also ultimately amounted to seeking reforms within the existing system and ran counter to a truly revolutionary communism), and this had its effects, as I will discuss through the course of the remaining part of this talk.

In today's world, with regard to the woman question we see again the relevance of the "two historically outmodeds." In *A Declaration: For Women's Liberation and the Emancipation of All Humanity*, published by our party earlier this year (2009), the following is cited:

What we see in contention here with Jihad on the one hand and McWorld/McCrusade on the other hand, are historically outmoded strata among colonized and oppressed humanity up against historically outmoded ruling strata of the imperialist system. These two reactionary poles reinforce each other, even while opposing each other. If you side with either of these "outmodeds," you end up strengthening both.¹²

¹¹ *The Red Papers 3, Women Fight for Liberation*, was published in 1970 by the Bay Area Revolutionary Union. It is currently out of print.

¹² Here the Declaration is quoting a statement that originally appeared in Bob Avakian's talk "Why We're in the Situation We're In Today... And What to Do About It: A Thoroughly Rotten System and the Need for Revolution." This talk is available online at revcom.us as part of the "7 Talks."

That *Declaration* immediately goes on to emphasize the point that:

Between these two "outmodeds" it is the imperialist ruling classes, and that of the U.S. in particular, which have, by far, done the most harm to humanity and pose the greatest threats. In fact, imperialist domination itself in the Middle East, Indonesia, and elsewhere—along with the massive disruption and dislocation that this domination causes, and the corruption, venality and vicious repression characteristic of the local governments that are dependent on and serve imperialism—gives great fuel to the fire of Islamic fundamentalism as a response to all this, although a reactionary one.

This brings into relief the way in which the other "outmoded"—that is, medieval forms of the oppression of women by Islamic fundamentalists and others in parts of the Third World—is being utilized by those who, at least objectively, side with the imperialist "outmoded" and attempt to prettify—and in some aspects even to promote—the "modern" forms of the oppression of women that are more common in the imperialist countries, and to divert attention and struggle around the oppression of women into a framework that reinforces the imperialist system, which is in reality the main and most fundamental force perpetuating oppression, including of the most horrific kinds, in all parts of the world.

This puts into the appropriate perspective the role being played, at least objectively, by people like Goldberg and Kristof and WuDunn, with the analysis they are propagating, and the programs they are promoting, as supposed answers to the oppression of women. Even if we allow that they are genuinely outraged by many manifestations of this oppression, they are still leading everything back into the very framework of the system which is fundamentally the cause of all this.

The following, also from *A Declaration: For Women's Liberation and the Emancipation of All Humanity*, powerfully refutes the attempt to portray the imperialist "outmoded"—or, more specifically, the "modern" and "liberal" variations of this "outmoded"—as the standard bearer of the liberation of women:

In sum: "Modern" capitalist society—or in reality the global system of capitalist imperialism—has inherited the oppression of women from past societies out of which capitalism has emerged, and while changing some of the forms in which this takes place, it has not eliminated, and cannot eliminate, this oppression; it has incorporated pre-capitalist forms of this oppression, in various parts of the world, particularly the Third World, into its overall, worldwide system of exploitation and oppression, and it perpetuates all this through the fundamental relations, the ongoing process of accumulation and the overall functioning of this capitalist-imperialist system itself. (emphasis in original)

The burkha and the thong—hideous embodiments of the degradation of women

To cite another important passage from this *Declaration*:

While they may appear very different, the burkha enforced by fanatical Islamic fundamentalism, on the one hand, and the "thong," widely advertised and promoted as "sexy underwear" for women, in "modern" capitalist society, on the other hand, are both hideous symbols and embodiments of the degradation of women. The fundamental thing they have in common is that they are both manifestations of a world marked by horrendous forms of oppression, both "traditional" and "modern"—a world dominated overall by capitalist imperialism—a world that needs to be turned upside down and radically transformed.

Now, in addition to the obvious and egregious manifestations of the oppression of women, not only in the Third World, but also in the U.S. itself—the widespread rape and brutality and degradation that are part of the social relations and the prevailing culture which are promoted in this society and all over the world—it is important to focus on some particular aspects of how the woman question is actually posed in the U.S. today, while situating this in the context of significant changes that have taken place over a few decades.

As we know, women have entered in very large numbers into the work force in the U.S. in this period. In fact, recently it has been pointed out that, if present trends continue, it will very soon be the case that women will actually outnumber men in the work force in the U.S., which is obviously a very significant development. This is a result of changes in the economy (the U.S. economy, in the context of the overall world economy) which have both made possible and necessary this drawing of women into employment in large numbers; and this also plays a part in "stabilizing" U.S. society through the development and furthering of a certain middle class standard of living and "lifestyle" which is only possible to maintain, for significant numbers of people in the U.S. today, through women as well as men working. This involves a very great change from the era of the *Mad Men* on TV, for example (the early 1960s), where the women were in the home and one man working in a middle class position was able to supply this kind of standard of living and lifestyle for the family as a whole. But changes that have taken place have resulted in a situation where it is only possible to maintain this status and this standard of living and lifestyle through the women working as well as the men. This is a very significant development.

And, of course, this did not happen automatically as a result of developments and changes in the economy, but also occurred as a result of concessions wrung and changes brought about through the whole upsurge of the '60s and, in particular, the movement for women's liberation which developed through the 1960s and into the 1970s. These two factors together—changes in the economy and struggle brought forth through the movement of the 1960s, and in particular the women's liberation movement—have led to significant changes in the status of women in many different dimensions, including in the sphere of work, even while women continue to be discriminated against systematically in work, including in pay and opportunities for advancement and so

on—the "glass ceiling" still exists.¹³

But, as we emphasized, even while there is a need, on the part of the ruling class, to promote and foster a significant "middle class" as a force of stability and, in very important ways, of conservatism, there is also a pressing need of this system to maintain traditional relations—particularly as these are concentrated in the patriarchal family and the position and role of women in society overall. And, in this situation, the changes to which I have referred here are clashing sharply against the extremely aggressive attempts of the Christian Fascists and other openly reactionary forces to more firmly assert and enforce tradition's chains, particularly as applied to women—to openly, overtly chain women in a subordinate and oppressed condition, relying heavily on biblical tradition as the ideological basis for this (as is discussed, for example, in *Away With All Gods!*).

What I pointed out, speaking over 20 years ago now to the situation in the U.S., remains profoundly true and of pivotal importance in terms of the fundamental direction of society and, indeed, the world overall. I wrote then: "The whole question of the position and role of women in society is more and more acutely posing itself in today's extreme circumstances." This was in the context, back in the 1980s, where there was in reality a growing danger of world war—those are the particular extreme circumstances that were being referred to in this statement—but today there are different particular extreme circumstances and real crisis that exists, and this statement, concerning the acute terms in which the position and role of women is posing itself, continues to have profound meaning now. As that statement goes on to emphasize:

It is not conceivable that all this will find any resolution other than in the most radical terms.... The question yet to be determined is: will it be a radical reactionary or a radical revolutionary resolution, will it mean the reinforcing of the chains of enslavement or the shattering of the most decisive links in those chains and the opening up of the possibility of realizing the complete elimination of all forms of such enslavement?

¹³ While, to a significant degree, the dramatic rise in female employment in the U.S. in the last several decades has involved women in the professions and families of "middle class status," broadly defined, there has also been a marked increase in the number of working class and poor women who are employed outside the home—and all this has been accompanied by a major influx of immigrant women working in low-wage jobs, as well as those trapped in illicit enterprises, such as prostitution. *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, edited with an introduction by Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (Holt Paperbacks, 2002), examines the phenomenon of the feminization of migrant labor, "legal" and "illegal," on a global scale in the last few decades—especially that involving the typical pattern of migration from poor to rich countries—and shines a light on important aspects of how this serves to perpetuate the imperialist system and the "lifestyles" of those in more privileged positions within the imperialist citadels, such as the U.S., a parasitism which, to no small degree, requires the hardships and often brutal exploitation—including outright slavery, particularly in the case of many trapped in the "sex industry"—endured by millions and millions of these women migrant workers.

Crucial Experience of the 1960s and '70s

In light of the situation and the stakes, it is very important to critically review the historical experience and views of the revolutionary and communist movements on this question, and to grasp more firmly the need for yet a further radical leap and rupture. There is definitely a need for further investigation, study, analysis and synthesis in regard to all this, but the following speaks to some important aspects of this and can, in part at least, help provide a framework and guidelines for that further investigation, study, analysis and synthesis.

I want to begin by touching briefly on the movement of the 1960s and into the 1970s, and its legacy and aftermath.

Even as there were different trends ideologically and politically among the more radical forces in that period, these radical forces increasingly gained the initiative within the movements and struggles and the overall upheaval of those days. They were going up against, and seeking in various ways to pose radical alternatives to, the dominant forces in the world, in particular U.S. imperialism. But also, at least objectively and to no small degree consciously, they were rebelling against the revisionist parties and forces which were not only stodgy and conservative, in some general and abstract sense, but had themselves become defenders and advocates of the existing oppressive order, seeking at most some kind of adjustments or realignments within that order.

The women's movement coming out of the 1960s, and specifically the contributions as well as some shortcomings both in what it brought forward and how that was responded to by the broader movement, as well as the broader society, is the next point I want to speak to.

Extremely important questions were being raised and grappled with, particularly by the more radical forces within the women's movement that emerged out of the 1960s and into the 1970s, even though this was not on the basis of, and in some significant ways was objectively in opposition to, a consistently scientific approach. But economist influences and related tendencies within the new communist movement that emerged in that period, including the RU and then the RCP, worked against the correct scientific assimilation and synthesis of very important things that were being raised by the women's movement. Valuable insights and important elements of a more advanced understanding were squandered by the communist movement at that time, as a result of economist and other erroneous influences.

So this emphasizes the importance of a more dialectical as well as materialist approach to what came out of that women's movement, even if we can say, as objectively we should, that this movement was largely characterized by a petit bourgeois orientation, not only, or even essentially, in terms of the class position of most of the women who took part in it, but more fundamentally in terms of its outlook and orientation. Nonetheless, on the part of that women's movement, and particularly its more radical sections, extremely important questions were being grappled with, and criticisms were being raised of the communist movement and its approach to the woman question at

that time which had some validity and which should have been embraced in an overall sense and sifted through and synthesized in a way that they were not.

All this needed then, and definitely needs now, to be approached with the understanding that the status of women and the struggle for the emancipation of women will continue to have a tremendously important role, not only in the struggle for revolution but also in the transition toward communism once a new socialist society has been brought into being. Twenty years ago now, in "The End of a Stage—The Beginning of a New Stage" (*Revolution* magazine #60, Fall 1990), I grappled with the question of unresolved contradictions under socialism and how this can be a propelling and driving force to continue the socialist revolution toward the goal of communism and to combat and defeat revisionist influences and forces which would turn the revolution back. As spoken to earlier, unevenness and contradiction hold the basis and potential for change. The unresolved contradictions under socialism and their potential to be a driving and propelling force for continuing the revolution is another expression of this role of unevenness, in terms of its posing the potential for radical transformation. Among the most important of those unresolved contradictions which were spoken to in "End/Beginning" was precisely the aspects of the oppression of women that would persist in socialist society and the importance of the struggle for the complete liberation of women not only in its own right but as a driving force for continuing the revolution overall in socialist society.

The Visceral and the Theoretical

In this context, and in regard to the opportunities that were lost, or squandered, on the part of the communist movement to learn from and to correctly, scientifically assimilate many crucial things that were being raised by the women's movement at that time, there is a dimension that I want to touch on here, which might be captured in the formulation: the relation between the visceral and the theoretical. In the 1960s and into the '70s, there was, as a very vibrant, vital and crucial part—not just a legitimate part but a very vibrant, vital and crucial part—of the women's movement, the bursting forth of visceral feelings of outrage, of pent-up outrage over decades (and, in a larger sense, centuries and millennia) of the oppression of women. At times, this came forward in ways that were not thoroughly scientific, although it must be stressed that there has been, on the part of many forces within the women's liberation movement, serious work done and struggle waged in the theoretical sphere, with the aim of making scientific analysis of the oppression of women and the road to their liberation. Even where that fell short, there were important theoretical contributions that were made and important theoretical questions that were focused on and wrangled over, including by way of criticism of some of the stereotypical thinking and economist influences within the communist movement.

But the dynamic synergy between the visceral and theoretical, and the correct understanding and handling of this dialectical relation, is very important in regard to the oppression and the liberation of women, as it is in general in the development of the revolutionary struggle toward a whole new world. Just as in other dimensions of this, it is impossible to conceive of a correct understanding and the waging of the necessary struggle without the element of visceral hatred for the oppression, and without the

correct approach to—the correct scientific assimilation and synthesis of—what is brought forward through the visceral expression of outrage at this oppression.

To put it another way, as is true with every important aspect of the revolutionary movement, it will be impossible to proceed on the right basis, with the right foundation, in struggling to uproot the oppression of women with only a theoretical understanding, though that is important and should in no way be underestimated. It is also indispensable to proceed, in a real sense, from a visceral feeling of all that it means to be female in this world. Our party's *Declaration* on the woman question speaks to this very powerfully, particularly in its opening sections, and it is worth reviewing that and continually returning to it, to regroup ourselves in both the sweep of this and also the acuity of it, and the outrage of it.

There are the very egregious things that stand out in terms of the oppression of women in more "medieval" forms, particularly in the Third World, which people like Goldberg and Kristof and WuDunn are able to point to (and let us allow that they do speak to this out of a sense of genuine outrage). There is the whole phenomenon of "honor killings," where members of her own family will murder a woman, or young girl, if she "dishonors" the patriarchal family by being involved in sex outside of "approved" (and often arranged) marriage, even if this is a result of being raped! There is the whole way in which, in countries where the Islamic religion is dominant, a girl at a certain age suddenly is shrouded in a hejab or in a veil or a chador or a burkha, with everything that this concentrates in terms of the subordination of women. There are the wife burnings or widow burnings in a country like India. The selling of women on the international sex market in the millions and millions. The outright brutality at the hands of husbands (recalling the old saying in China, which expresses a viewpoint, and relations, that are deeply entrenched in societies throughout the world: "a woman married is like a pony bought, I'll ride her and whip her as I please"). The ongoing practice of female genital mutilation to which literally millions of girls are subjected every year—cutting out the clitoris, which deprives women of sexual satisfaction, and/or sewing shut the vagina to ensure "chastity" until marriage. The generalized acceptability of marital rape. The killing of girls at birth—which has re-emerged in China, for example, as a result of the reversal of the revolution and the restoration of capitalism, and the patriarchy and male domination which is an integral part of this—as well as the misuse and abuse of the right to abortion to carry out the abortion of specifically female fetuses, because females are deemed to be less valuable than males.

At the same time, while all this is very widespread in countries throughout the Third World, in the so-called "modern" imperialist countries there are no less egregious ways in which women are demeaned and degraded, and yes brutalized through sexual and other violence on a massive scale.

In the "Revolution" talk (*Revolution: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About*), there is a section where it is said: Look at all these beautiful children out here—speaking specifically of the children in the inner cities of the U.S.—and the point is made that these children's fate is sealed, a life of oppression and degradation is set out for them, even before they are born, and soon the smiles and laughter and the carefree

play that you can see among these children when they are very young will be turned into horror upon horror. All this is very true and very important, and again a visceral feeling about this, combined with a scientific theoretical understanding of its basis and of the basis for overthrowing and eliminating it, is indispensable for what we're all about.

But it's also very important to focus on the question: What does it mean to be born female in this world? Look at all these beautiful children who are female in the world. And in addition to all the other outrages which I have referred to, in terms of children throughout the slums and shantytowns of the Third World, in addition to all the horrors that will be heaped on them—the actual living in garbage and human waste in the hundreds of millions as their fate, laid out before them, yes, even before they are born—there is, on top of this, for those children who are born female, the horror of everything that this will bring simply because they are female in a world of male domination. And this is true not only in the Third World. In "modern" countries like the U.S. as well, the statistics barely capture it: the millions who will be raped; the millions more who will be routinely demeaned, deceived, degraded, and all too often brutalized by those who are supposed to be their most intimate lovers; the way in which so many women will be shamed, hounded and harassed if they seek to exercise reproductive rights through abortion, or even birth control; the many who will be forced into prostitution and pornography; and all those who—if they do not have that particular fate, and even if they achieve some success in this "new world" where supposedly there are no barriers for women—will be surrounded on every side, and insulted at every moment, by a society and a culture which degrades women, on the streets, in the schools and workplaces, in the home, on a daily basis and in countless ways.

How long does it take before the carefree play of female children—yes, in countries like the U.S.—gets turned into cutting themselves, in response to an unbearable feeling of worthlessness and despair, and often as a result of abuse; or starving themselves in an attempt to conform to the dominant and incessantly propagated notions of female beauty, with which their worth as a human being is equated and to which it is reduced? How long does it take before many girls who show intellectual curiosity and the spark of wanting to know about the world, and of learning about the world, learn instead to stifle that, to "play dumb" and stop speaking up, because it becomes all too clear to them that boys and men feel "threatened" by strong, competent and intelligent women? Or girls who, once having been actively involved in the joy of playing sports, give that up in order to be perceived as more "feminine." Girls in general who, whatever else may happen in their lives, will be insulted and assaulted by pornography and other degradation of women, soft core and hard core, from mainstream advertising to the most extreme and grotesque and perverse. Who will learn to accommodate themselves in various ways—or will be encouraged, and in many ways coerced, into accommodating themselves—to the oppressive relations that prevail and predominate in society, particularly as regards women; or, on the other hand, will be encouraged and will learn to become hardened and cynical, to treat everyone and everything, including themselves and their own bodies, as commodities, and will be further degraded and debased in the process; will learn to lower their sights and not to dream and think of fully taking part in every sphere of society nor dare to rise up and change society, including in the way that it treats women? All this too, is laid out for female children, including in countries like the U.S.,

even before they are born.

We could go on and on and on, detailing the further dimensions of this. Learning every day, and having to be mindful every day, of going through the world constantly seeking to guard against being assaulted, physically and/or sexually, all the way down to the smallest details of how you walk down the street, or enter and leave a building, whether or not and how you get on an elevator—having to carry these burdens every day through your life. Having normal and natural bodily and sexual functions—when girls' breasts develop or they begin to menstruate and go through other hormonal and physical changes—having all that portrayed in a thousand ways as an object of others' gratification and/or as something that's unclean and shameful (that's not just an old biblical injunction, it still has force and exerts its influence and force in ways that devalue and demean the human beings, the half of humanity, who are oppressed in this way).

As our party's *Declaration* very rightly insists, in the world today and where humanity now stands, all of this should, and could, be swept from the earth—and the fact that it is perpetuated and enforced by outmoded systems, and above all the dominant system of capitalism-imperialism, makes it all more outrageous.

More "postcards of the hanging"

It is a striking fact—which is starkly evident in the U.S. now—that, in comparison to what is done to women, there is no other group in society that is so systematically reviled and defiled in a way that has become acceptable (or widely accepted in any case) as a significant part of "mainstream" life and culture, as happens in a concentrated way through pornography and the extremely demeaning and degrading images and messages about women it massively and pervasively purveys (with the Internet a major focus and vehicle for this), including pornography's extensive portrayal of sadistic and violent sexual domination of women. (In this regard see, for example, Pamela Paul's book, *Pornified, How Pornography is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families*, Holt Paperbacks, 2005.)

I began the "Revolution" talk with "They're Selling Postcards of the Hanging," reviewing the ugly history of the lynching of Black people in America and the way in which celebration of this became a cultural phenomenon in the U.S., with the selling of picture postcards of these lynchings a major expression of this—often including smiling and leering crowds of white people surrounding the murdered and mutilated body of a Black man. In a recent exchange, a comrade emphasized this profoundly important and compelling point: Today, the way in which pornography depicts women—the displaying of women in a degraded state for the titillation of viewers—including the grotesque brutality and violence against women which is involved in much of this, is the equivalent of those "Postcards of the Hanging." It is a means through which all women are demeaned and degraded.

All this while pornography is an accepted part of Internet and other mainstream culture and is in fact a highly profitable business, through which billions of dollars are made

each year and in which many "pillars" of the capitalist economy are heavily involved. And this "mainstreaming" of pornography is facilitated and furthered by the fact that the degradation of women is a regular feature of TV programs and other forms of "popular culture," which routinely use the term "bitch" and other demeaning words to refer to women, crassly discuss the physical attributes and commodity value of female body parts, and often extol the sexual conquest and domination of women by men.

As has been noted by Pamela Paul, and a number of other authors who have examined this phenomenon, the great increase in the dissemination and consumption of pornography in recent decades, along with its increasingly extreme forms of humiliating and degrading women, is unquestionably related to the inroads women have made in a number of previously "male only" spheres of society and the challenges that have been posed to male domination overall. This is occurring, however, within the confines of a system in which patriarchy and male domination have not been, and cannot be, eliminated or uprooted—but are, in fact, essential and indispensable components of capitalism, and indeed all systems marked by class division and exploitation and oppressive social relations. In such circumstances, and given the prevailing ideology that corresponds to continuing male domination, despite—and in significant ways because of—real challenges to it, pornography serves as a vehicle of crude and vicious revanchism, a forceful reassertion of relations and traditions in which women are subjugated by and subservient to men. In all this pornography has, in a real sense, a "mirror opposite identity" with fundamentalist religion in today's world, in its Christian as well as Islamic, and other, forms: they have in common a dark misogyny and determination to slam, and chain, women in a position of enforced subordination.

So when we say, "look at all these beautiful children," and then we confront the question of what does it mean to be born into this world?—this has profound meaning for the masses of oppressed people and it has a double meaning for the female half of humanity, not only among the most oppressed and exploited sections of society, but among all strata of women. Back in the days when the women's movement first emerged as a radical force in the late 1960s, focusing on the oppression of women as a crucial social question, some of the men who purported to be radical would come back with "quips" like: "Is Jackie Kennedy oppressed?" That was supposed to somehow be an answer to the fact, the very real fact, that the masses of women of all strata are treated as less than men, and in many ways as less than human. Yes, women of the ruling class take part in the exploitation of the masses of people. But that does not eliminate even their subordinate status within the ruling class, and it certainly does not eliminate the many and horrendous forms of the oppression of women of all strata throughout the world. We could go on and on and still not do justice to this, and still not give anything like full expression to what this means.

Phony science and bankrupt theories rationalizing oppression

To get into this more deeply, let's step back a little bit. Let's recall, for example, the official characterization of Black people that prevailed in mainstream and respected institutions well into the 20th century. To cite one really horrendous example, in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a very prestigious institution, well into the 20th century "the

Negro" was characterized as being highly emotional, intellectually inferior, childlike and yet "subject to sudden fits of emotion and passion during which he is capable of performing acts of singular atrocity" (this is drawn from the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, under the definition of "Negro"). This, again, in the prestigious *Encyclopedia Britannica*—portraying "Negroes" as in essence an inferior subspecies among human beings.

Let's compare that to the "official" characterization of women during that same general time period. Let's look, for example, at the medical profession. In *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English catalog some of the prevailing views about women in this profession and cite particularly sharp examples of it: the way in which women were associated with "flights of hysteria"; the supposed "child-like ignorance" that they exhibited toward the larger, male-dominated world; the whole attitude that prevailed toward menstruation, pregnancy and menopause—treating these as illnesses and/or defects; and even the alleged negative effect on the uterus if a woman were to use her brain too much! As Ehrenreich and English point out, with the appropriate caustic irony, "The great uterine manifesto of the 19th century, Dr. Edward H. Clarke's 'Sex and Education, or a Fair Chance for the Girls,' concluded with startling but unassailable logic that higher education would cause women's uteruses to atrophy." (Ehrenreich and English, Second Anchor Books Edition, January 2005, p. 140) Things like this were actually written by respected scientific experts late in the 19th century.

Ehrenreich and English call attention to the fact that there was a highly influential trend in natural history in the 19th century which held the view that "the existing human races represent different evolutionary stages"—and this was applied to the sexes (p. 128). Ehrenreich and English point out, for example, that with regard to the supposed hierarchy of human types, Karl Vogt, a leading European professor of natural history in the second half of the 19th century, categorized the Negro male as follows: "[T]he grown up Negro partakes, as regards his intellectual faculties, of the nature of the child, the female and the senile White." As Ehrenreich and English go on to comment: "Where this left the Negro female one shudders to think, not to mention the 'senile' female of either race." (p. 129)

And there was no prospect for the status of women improving with further societal development, according to Vogt, for as Ehrenreich and English quote him further: "'The inequality of the sexes increases with the progress of civilization.'" (p. 130)

Attitudes and notions akin to those cited here not only were prevalent in the 19th century but continued well into the 20th—and, in fact, are far from having lost all currency, even in "modern-day" imperialist society. They are at times voiced by powerful and influential figures in countries like the U.S. For example, the following statement, made by E.O. Wilson, only a few decades ago:

"In hunter-gatherer societies, men hunt and women stay at home. This strong bias persists in most agricultural and industrial societies and, on that basis alone, appears to have a genetic origin.... My own guess is that the genetic bias is intense

enough to cause a substantial division of labor in even the most free and most egalitarian of future societies.... Even with identical education and equal access to all professions, men are likely to continue to play a disproportionate role in political life, business and science." (Cited in Ardea Skybreak, *Of Primeval Steps & Future Leaps: An Essay on the Emergence of Human Beings, the Source of Women's Oppression and the Road to Emancipation*, Banner Press, 1984. E.O. Wilson is known as a prominent proponent of sociobiology. As can be seen in the statement by Wilson cited here, this approach involves erroneous attempts to attribute the development of human behavioral characteristics and social relations in a linear and mechanical way to biological factors and causes, significantly underestimating the role of social factors in the development of—and changes in—human relations, behavior, traditions and ways of thinking. "Steps and Leaps" contains an important critique and refutation of the viewpoint and methods of Wilson and other sociobiologists.)

And more recently views of this kind were expressed by Lawrence Summers, insisting that women were naturally inferior in things like math and science. This at a time when he was the President of Harvard University—and, we should note, he is now an official in the Obama administration.

In this connection, also—and this is something referred to by Ehrenreich and English—the role of Freud and his theories and the whole psychoanalytic tradition, with the great harm this has done to women, as well as overall, is something which needs to be dug into and criticized much more thoroughly. Some important criticism of this has been raised by various feminists and some others. But, again, there remains a need for a much more thorough and radical exposure, critique and refutation of this, particularly through the application of dialectical materialism/historical materialism and the consistently and systematically scientific outlook and approach this embodies.

I recall myself that back in the 1960s, many of us were influenced, to varying degrees, by Freud's theories, and there were many attempts by radical theorists—particularly male ones, but not only them—to somehow link and commingle the theories of Freud with the theories of Marx. In reality, these theories are in profound opposition to each other, and the influence of Freud not only has had a negative influence in society overall, but did so within the radical movements of that time. More thoroughly critiquing Freud's theories and their influence can play an important part in the further development of the truly radical, and scientific, theory of communism, as applied to the oppression and the liberation of women, and overall.

It would have been far better then... and doing even better now

Returning to the point made earlier about *Red Papers 3*—in terms of economist and related influences within the RU and more broadly within what was called the "new communist movement" at that time, and how this interfered with moving toward a correct synthesis with regard to what was being raised by the women's movement in that period, particularly its more radical sections—I want to refer to a comment that was made about 40 years ago now, at a meeting of what was then called the Revolutionary

Youth Movement.

This was at a time when within SDS there were splits into different tendencies: there was the "Weatherpeople" phenomenon, which is well known; there was also Progressive Labor Party and its decidedly economist line (I mean, after all, what does it say when "communists" choose to call themselves the Progressive... Labor... Party—you only have to look at the name to know that such an organization is not going to lead to any kind of a radical new society!); and then there was this trend which identified itself at that time under the heading of the Revolutionary Youth Movement.

At the time of this split in SDS, there was a conference of the Revolutionary Youth Movement trend which some of us took part in as representatives of the RU. At one point in that meeting the question of sexuality, and more broadly the woman question, was being discussed, and one guy made an impassioned speech in which he very pointedly and emotionally said: "If you are a male and you want to be radical, you have to learn what it feels like to be a woman."

Now, while this statement itself was pointing to something very important, it was made in the context of, and was in fact a part of, a trend that was increasingly giving up on the possibility of effecting truly radical change on a societal, and even global, level. It was part of an emerging trend of "identity politics"—of lowered and narrowed sights—a view that each "identity group" must concentrate on its particular situation and demands, which objectively would remain within the confines of the existing system. This was a retreat from the whole orientation of building a movement to go up against, and overturn and uproot, imperialism and bring a radically different world into being. Even then you could recognize that this was part of taking steps in that direction. And we were right to reject the road of "identity politics" and reformism and, in a basic sense, to insist on continuing on the communist road, even while that was marred then to a significant degree by economism. But, at the same time, and especially looking back on it now, it is clear that there was something very important being raised which was too easily dismissed.

It was too easy to recognize and seize on the obvious "identity politics," reformist and petit bourgeois orientation that was coming through in this statement. But it would have been far better to have united with what was correct and important in this statement. It would have been much better if those of us who were serious in considering ourselves communists had taken that kind of approach and on that basis had striven to achieve a further synthesis, through the application of the scientific communist viewpoint and not one marred significantly by economism. And now there is all the more need—and, yes, there is more of a basis—to do precisely that. This is the challenge we face and the important task we have to take up urgently.

Stepping back to look at this with a broader sweep, it is important—without negating or downplaying the very positive character overall, and the very real contributions, of the 1960s movement—to recognize that there were, within this movement, and even on the part of its most advanced forces, real weaknesses with regard to the woman question, including a significant element that involved the assertion of "manhood." Now,

especially as applied to Black people, this is a complicated question, because one of the main and most humiliating forms of the oppression of Black people in the history of this country has been the way in which Black men have been subjected to being treated as subordinate beings, as though they were at one and the same time child-like and extremely dangerous, forced—with the real prospect of death as the price for not doing so—to act in a manner subservient to white people, and in particular white men, as reflected, among other things, in the way that white people, including young white males who themselves had not yet reached adulthood, would consistently address grown Black men with the demeaning term "boy." But the answer to all this—if the goal is to finally and fully uproot the oppression of Black people, women as well as men, and to abolish all forms of oppression—is not to strive to establish the "rightful place" of Black men in having, equally with white men, a dominant position over women—in asserting traditional relations between men and women which fasten tradition's chains on women, as a key link in keeping humanity as a whole in an enslaved condition.

In a world marked by exploitative and oppressive divisions—where one of the most profound, and most oppressive, of these divisions involves the subjugation and degradation of the female half of humanity—the assertion of "manhood," whatever the intent might be in doing so, can objectively only mean, and find expression as, active participation in that subjugation and degradation. And in a world where oppressive and exploitative divisions, including those in which men dominate women, would have been abolished and surpassed, the word—and the very concept—"manhood" would not have, and could not have, any real meaning, and certainly not a positive one.

To put this another way—to draw the necessary line of demarcation sharply—the assertion of "manhood" is ultimately and fundamentally a form and a means of accommodating to and seeking to "find your place" within the oppressive system, with all of the horrific crimes it embodies and enforces. In this connection, the role of Booker T. Washington is instructive. In the latter part of the 19th and the first part of the 20th century, after the reversal of Reconstruction, Washington became a prominent figure—and was promoted by the powers-that-be, including the openly segregationist and white supremacist powers-that-be in the South—in advocating that Black people not struggle against segregation and their overall oppression but instead strive to "better themselves" within the confines of their segregated and oppressed condition. An interesting insight in this regard is found in Jackson Lears' recently published book, *Rebirth of a Nation—The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (HarperCollins, 2009). In *Rebirth of a Nation* (whose title rather clearly invokes, critically and ironically, the overtly racist, and highly influential, early-20th-century epic film *Birth of a Nation*) one of the main themes Lears explores is how the assertion of "manliness" and "manly virtue" has, in the history of this country, been closely linked with militarism in the service of U.S. empire, with Theodore Roosevelt the most salient personification of this. Lears' focus is on the period marked by the advent of capitalist imperialism—at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century—but clearly, and very correctly, he has in mind, and frequently suggests, parallels with phenomena today, a century later. And, as part of this discussion, Lears makes the following observation about Booker T. Washington—citing his role in preaching subservience to the established oppressive order, and contrasting him, significantly, with the much more militant and

non-accommodationist Ida Wells, who boldly stood up against and organized against segregation and lynching:

As resistance to the emerging Jim Crow regime seemed increasingly futile, the frankly accommodationist views of Booker T. Washington appeared to hold out more promise than the angry resistance of Ida Wells. Washington epitomized the marriage of manliness and black uplift. (Lears, p. 131)

While here Lears seems to be conceding too much to the notion that resistance, like that of Wells', was futile, there are important insights in his observations about Washington, in contrast with Wells, particularly in the linking of "manliness" and "uplift" with accommodation to the oppressive system.

Once again, the 1960s had a radically different and much more positive character and impact—with regard to the struggle of Black people in particular, and overall—than what was represented by Washington's "accommodationism" (or, to use a less elegant but no less accurate phrase, Washington's "Uncle Tom-ing") in the period after the defeat of Reconstruction. In fact, the struggle of Black people in the 1960s, in its main and overwhelming aspect, was in direct opposition to, and a powerful refutation of, the kind of stand taken and promoted by Booker T. Washington. But the link remains, and is all too real, between the assertion of "manhood" and the orientation of accepting, and even seeking to "get in on," at least some of the oppressive relations that are the lifeblood of this system. To repeat a statement of mine, which is cited in *A Declaration: For Women's Liberation and the Emancipation of All Humanity*:

In many ways, and particularly for men, the woman question and whether you seek to completely abolish or to preserve the existing property relations and corresponding ideology that enslave women (or maybe "just a little bit" of them) is a touchstone question among the oppressed themselves. It is a dividing line between "wanting in" and really "wanting out": between fighting to end all oppression and exploitation—and the very division of society into classes—and seeking in the final analysis to get your part in this. (emphasis in original)

And, as that *Declaration* also makes clear, quoting the special issue of *Revolution, The Oppression of Black People, the Crimes of This System, and the Revolution We Need*, the role models that are needed, by Black children and by people in general, are not "male role models" but

revolutionary role models, women no less than men. They need to see men and women who model the mutual respect and equality that reflects the world we are fighting for: a whole new liberated world where girls grow up strong and without fear of being raped, degraded or abused, where no child is ever deemed "illegitimate," and where men—like everyone else—find their worth in contributing to the betterment of all humanity through the revolutionary transformation of society rather than by getting in on even a little of the oppression of this nightmare world. (boldface and emphasis in original)

Again, as we look back on the movement of the 1960s overall, the point now is not to be determinist and teleological, as if it would have been impossible then to achieve the basic elements of the correct synthesis—with regard to the liberation of women, in its fullest dimensions, and the crucial relation between that and the emancipation of humanity as a whole—even though that would have been difficult to achieve given the overall weaknesses of the communist movement at that time; nor is the point that "it's all good," everything that has happened has led to the situation where such a synthesis is—only now—possible. Not only would it have been far better if a more correct approach had been taken back then, but the fact is that there is a great need now for that synthesis—and there is the basis, through focused and concentrated work and struggle, to make the leap and ruptures required to actually achieve that synthesis in theory and line, as a much firmer foundation for carrying forward struggle around this fundamental sphere of human social relations, as one of the most decisive elements of actually unleashing a new stage of communist revolution in the world at the crossroads we are now facing, and in order to really be a vanguard of the future.

Challenging Traditional Gender Roles and Sexuality

One of the most important things that emerged in the upheaval of the 1960s (and into the early 1970s), particularly through the more radical currents within the women's movement, was the challenging of traditional gender roles in many different ways. And this, again, owing significantly to economist influences, was not thoroughly taken up and pursued by the emerging communist forces, including the RU at that time. Even while we did learn some things from this movement and did take up aspects of this, it was not taken up in the kind of central and thorough way it should have been. (This was interconnected with influences of the communist movement internationally and historically, which I will also discuss further through the remaining part of this talk.)

At the same time, and along with this challenging of traditional gender roles, there were many questions of sexuality and sexual liberation that were being brought up by the women's movement: a lot of experimentation, some of which led to dead ends, some resulting in bad ends, as is spoken to in our party's *Declaration*. Nonetheless, very important questions were being raised and answers were being sought in this sphere too. The whole question of emancipating women's sexuality—and that sexuality not being reduced to a "duty" to fulfill men sexually—was a very important dimension of what was being brought forward. But this didn't fit neatly into the views and the tendencies of the communist movement internationally and historically—it was something that, to significantly understate it, was at odds with a lot of the prevailing tradition within the communist movement, which significantly influenced the RU at that time.

And, along with this, in this whole context of throwing into the air and challenging traditional notions and oppressive conventions and mores with regard to sexuality, homosexuality also became a major social question and focus of struggle. And this, as we know, was way outside the pale of what the communist movement historically and internationally was prepared to engage in any kind of way other than to just reject it outright—and this included the RU, and then, for much too long a period, the RCP.

Now, it is true that, while there were, as our *Declaration* points out, many positive aspects to the sexual exploration and the challenging of tradition with regard to sexuality, and in particular the sexuality of women, which emerged through the upsurge of that time, there were ways, as that *Declaration* also emphasizes, in which the traditional roles and the traditional domination by men over women reasserted themselves and took advantage of, and turned into their opposite, these attempts to liberate women's sexuality. Notwithstanding these negative aspects, the questions that were being thrown up and the answers that were being sought were extremely important, as we can recognize more clearly now, particularly as we now view things not through a reified and economist understanding of what the proletarian revolution is all about, but understanding it in its fullest expression as (in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*) the most radical rupture with all traditional ideas, as well as with all traditional property relations. If, at the time of that powerful upsurge, in the 1960s and into the 1970s, we had really understood that fully, and proceeded from that understanding, we would have welcomed and embraced, and scientifically synthesized, what was being brought forward and thrown into the air and wrangled over in the realm of sexuality.

The Communist Movement, Socialist Society and Women's Emancipation—A Critical Overview

This brings me to some important points concerning the history and historical influence of the communist movement on this question—not just the question of sexuality but of gender relations and the woman question more broadly speaking. Here again, I want to emphasize that more definitely needs to be learned about this. But the following are some observations which may, in turn, serve as a part of the framework for further investigation, analysis and synthesis.

Now, not only to be "fair" in some abstract sense, but to be objective and scientific and to recognize what has in fact been the principal aspect of things, some very important fundamental analysis was made by the communist movement with regard to the oppression and the struggle for the liberation of women. Historically new breakthroughs were made, with Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* seminal in this regard. But, at the same time, intermixed with this, within the communist movement, there was from the beginning and there increasingly developed strong currents of economism, nationalism, patriarchy and traditional views and values with regard to women. This took very sharp expression in the Soviet Union over the period in which it was actually a socialist country.

To briefly touch on some important aspects of this, which, again, require further investigation, analysis and synthesis: In the Soviet Union during the period of socialism (from the time of the October 1917 revolution up through the mid-1950s, when capitalism was restored) transformations of a truly major and in some ways quite profound nature were carried out which did qualitatively change the position of women in a positive way and significantly strike at deep-seated inequalities between men and women. We should not ignore or underestimate this.

As part of this, there was some challenging of traditional gender roles in the popular culture as well as in official policy, especially in the 1920s. But there were significant limitations and shortcomings in this, and especially after the 1920s there was not only a lack of continuing to challenge and transform traditional gender relations and roles, but there was, in some aspects, a retreat from this. This is part of a larger phenomenon that we've noted, which was manifested in a number of different dimensions. For example, in the sphere of art and culture there was a lot of experimentation, a lot of throwing things up into the air, particularly in the early years of the Soviet Republic. But then at a certain point, after Stalin's leadership was firmly consolidated, things changed. However, it is necessary to look through a broader lens and not attribute this simply to a single individual. The larger context was set by the view—which did have a basis in reality—that, in the 1930s, and especially as that decade went on, there was a growing danger of imperialist attack on the Soviet Union, and that in any case it was necessary to rapidly industrialize and transform the economy, including in the countryside, or else, as Stalin put it, "we will perish." As this approach was applied, everything tended to get reduced to and funneled into the drive for rapid development of the economy. And to a significant degree, different forms of experimentation in different spheres—whether it was art and culture or the sphere of sexuality and gender relations—tended to be hemmed in and "compressed" within this framework, wherein it was held that the transformation of the economy, viewed essentially as a matter of technology and technological development and transformation, would lay the basis for, if not itself bring about, the elimination of the social relations that remained from the old society.

And then, particularly in the periods more or less directly leading into and during, and then after, World War 2, there were a number of statements from official sources in the Soviet Union that emphasized not only that it was "natural" for women to have a "maternal instinct" and to want to have and rear children, but also that it was their patriotic duty to do so—their duty to the Motherland, as it was formulated.

Now, we should not in this context ignore the objective factors of first the impending and then the actual massive attack on the Soviet Union, with the tremendous loss of life that occurred as a result of the Soviet Union's involvement in World War 2. In various studies I've seen, the estimate of 20 million (which we all sort of grew up with as the standard estimate of the number of Soviet lives lost during World War 2) has actually been challenged from the standpoint of saying that the number was probably even higher; some estimates of 25, 30 or even 40 million are offered, and not by people who are totally out of touch with reality. To emphasize the enormity of this, 20 million, the low estimate, would represent at least 10% of the Soviet population at that time, while 40 million would amount to about 20%—1 out of every 5 Soviet citizens! So it's understandable, on one level, why, in the aftermath of that war, there would be an emphasis on the need to increase the population, and that along with this tendencies to view this as the essential role and contribution of women would be strengthened. This is understandable, but it is not legitimate, justified or acceptable for communists to be putting this forward as their answer to this very real and acute contradiction—the

tremendous loss of population as a result of the war.¹⁴

Obviously, in the history of the socialist and communist movements up through the experience of the Soviet Union during the period of Stalin's leadership, while again many truly profound changes and great achievements were brought about in relation to the status of women, as well as in other spheres, there remained a salient need for a further radical rupture with regard to the conception of women's role in society and its transformation, including a thorough break with the "motherhood cult" and with traditional gender roles.

As some observers of the Soviet experience (and not only the most overtly anti-communist) have pointed out, with some justification, while there was an advocacy of equality for women—and, it is important to emphasize, very important steps were taken in that direction, in the Soviet Union when it was socialist—there was no fundamental nor consistent effort to educate and mobilize masses to challenge and transform traditional gender roles in any kind of thorough way as part of fully uprooting tradition's chains. And, as one expression of this, increasingly after the early years of the Soviet Republic, the idea of the abolition of the family receded and then all but disappeared and was to a significant degree replaced by glorification of the family as it existed in the Soviet Union—and it was proclaimed that this was a different kind of family, and therefore women's role as mother had a different meaning. This went along with increasingly extolling motherhood in particular, even while this coexisted with significant steps that were being taken to overcome inequality and ways in which women's role had been limited—particularly as this applied to their role in work and the economy—including by removing barriers to women in traditionally male occupations.

In other words, as some have formulated it, there was a conception and even policies moving in the direction of equality for women, but there was no fundamental and consistent challenge to, or effort to transform, traditional gender roles, at least not after

¹⁴ It should be stressed here that this view, of women's contribution to the country through childbearing, was not unique to Stalin and the Soviet leadership in the time of Stalin. Take, for example, the following statement by German socialist August Bebel in the early part of the 20th century: "A woman who gives birth to children renders, at least, the same service to the commonwealth as the man who defends his country and his hearth with his life against a foe in search of conquest." (From *Woman Under Socialism*) It is important to stress that this statement by Bebel is made in the context of emphasizing the dangers women face in childbirth, as part of a polemic on behalf of equality for women and in opposition to attempts to limit their role in public life and in contributing to society overall. And this statement by Bebel is not in the same category as the following, made during the same period, by the aggressive champion of American imperialism, Theodore Roosevelt: "But ... the woman who, whether from cowardice, from selfishness, from having a false and vacuous ideal shirks her duty as a wife and mother, earns the right to our contempt just as does the man who, from any motive, fears to do his duty in battle when the country calls him." (Cited in *For Her Own Good*, p. 209) Nonetheless, Bebel, like Stalin and other prominent socialist and communist leaders who advocated for and led struggle on behalf of equality for women, was not free of the influence of paternalistic and even patriarchal views toward women.

the beginning experimentation in the 1920s.¹⁵

All this does illustrate the basic point I have been emphasizing: In the Soviet Union, when it was socialist, there were, both in conception and in practice, not only important breakthroughs in terms of overcoming inequality for women in many different spheres, but also, especially in the early years, some challenging of traditional gender roles; but this latter aspect in particular was also in conflict with, and was increasingly giving way to, the assertion of traditional patriarchal views and conventions, along with economist and nationalist tendencies within the Soviet Union and the international communist movement overall, in which the Soviet Union exerted a great influence.

Now, in China, there were definitely significant advances beyond the Soviet experience, including with regard to the role of women in many different spheres of society. One of the ways this was powerfully expressed was in the sphere of culture, particularly through the course of the Cultural Revolution—with the model opera works and ballets, and so on. And this included a definite element of challenging traditional gender roles in many different spheres.

But still there were significant influences of economism, nationalism, patriarchy and traditional views and values, with regard to gender roles, and especially with regard to sexuality. Let us put it this way: What I referred to earlier, regarding the questions that were being raised and the answers that were being sought in terms of sexuality and, in particular women's sexuality, through the women's liberation movement, and especially its more radical sections, during the 1960s and into the 1970s—that would not have met with great welcome, nor was it embraced at the time, by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. This is something we have to squarely recognize. And, for the most part, this was not welcomed and embraced by new communist forces looking to the Chinese Communist Party at that time, including specifically the RU and then the RCP. I will say that in visiting China in the early 1970s, along with the many tremendously positive things that I took note of and was inspired by, you did get this feeling of a certain heavy atmosphere and some sense of repression with regard to sexuality. And, looking at this in larger perspective, it does seem to have been part of an historical trend in the communist movement with which the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese

¹⁵ *Footnote by author:* In this connection, as part of research on this question, I came across a reference to a book which I haven't yet read—and therefore I can't evaluate the book overall—but the passage referred to did seem to be making an important point. This book is *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender and Propaganda During World War II*, by Maureen Honey (Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1984). It appears to be comparing the experience in the U.S. (as attested to by the reference to Rosie the Riveter) and in the Soviet Union in the context of the second world war, and it identifies some significant similarities, it seems, between the two: the situation where (although estimates are that in the Soviet Union nearly a million women did take part in guerrilla warfare and other forms of military activity in fighting the Nazis, which is different than the U.S.) with large numbers of men in the military, women increasingly, in the Soviet Union—and in a new way, in some senses, in the U.S.—were fulfilling roles in the economy which men had traditionally occupied and from which women had generally been barred. But there was a way in which—even in the Soviet Union, and not just in the U.S.—this role of women in production, along with their role as mothers, was presented not only (and in the U.S. particularly, not so much) as a matter of rights and equality but also as a matter of duty, and more specifically patriotic duty to the country. This is something which is worth pursuing further.

revolution did not really rupture. This was not something that was unique to, or a specific weakness of, the Chinese revolution in contrast with the communist movement overall.

While, again, there is certainly more to be learned about this, it can be said that, with regard to the sphere of sexuality, in some significant ways for the communist movement overall, and specifically for our party and the RU before it, the question of homosexuality has been emblematic of the weakness of the communist movement and socialist states historically—from the time of Engels, with his unfortunate remarks denigrating homosexuality, up through the Chinese revolution. This, in a significant way, has concentrated a weakness of the communist movement on the question of sexuality more generally, including specifically how this relates to the status, and the struggle for the complete liberation, of women.

The Need and the Basis for a Further Leap and Radical Rupture

So, while again there is definitely more to be learned through further investigation, study, analysis and synthesis, all this does, I believe, establish that there is a need for a further radical rupture, to lay a firmer foundation for really achieving the "4 Alls"**** in their fullest dimension. This has not been given full expression or been fully recognized in the history of the communist movement, including in the history of our party, until very recently when we have begun to seriously address questions from a different and much more radical standpoint.

The change in the position of our party on the question of homosexuality¹⁶ is, in very significant measure, a result of what has developed into the New Synthesis, and specifically the method and approach embodied in that New Synthesis. It represents a breaking with trends and tendencies within the communist movement which, to no small degree, have been suffocating of the kind of radical theory and radical movement that communism actually should be and must be. But, in a real sense, this constitutes a beginning, which we need to build on and go much further with—on the basis of a scientific approach and the scientific synthesis of what I referred to earlier as the visceral and the theoretical.

At the same time, the struggle against the oppression of women, aiming at nothing less

*** [Editor's Note: Earlier in this work Bob Avakian explains what is meant by the "4 Alls": "This is the goal around which people must be brought forward: the advance to communism, the achievement of what we refer to as the '4 Alls,' as they were popularized in China at the time of Mao: the abolition of all class distinctions, the abolition of all the production (or economic) relations on which these class distinctions rest, the abolition of all the social relations corresponding to those production relations, and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that correspond to those social relations."]

¹⁶ For a discussion of the RCP's position on homosexuality, and the development of that position, involving a major, qualitative change in its views on this question, see "On the Position on Homosexuality in the New Draft Programme," RCP Publications, 2001. See also Bob Avakian and Bill Martin, *Marxism and the Call of the Future: Conversations on Ethics, History, and Politics* (Open Court, 2005), especially chapter 21, "Sexuality and Homosexuality."

than the complete and final abolition of this oppression in every form, is also a crucial part of making revolution in the first place, without which there can be no revolution, certainly not one aiming for communism. Building a movement for revolution as powerfully as possible toward the first great leap of the seizure of power and the creation of a new, revolutionary state, empowering people to actually build a new society free of exploitation and oppression—when the conditions for that have been brought into being through the unfolding of the contradictions of the system itself and the conscious, consistent and determined ideological, political and organizational work of the growing ranks of the revolutionary communists—this is what we have to be taking up and proceeding from. Viewed in this light, there is a present and pressing need for further grappling in the realm of theory, analysis and synthesis to deepen our understanding concerning the oppression and the liberation of women—building on and advancing from the work that has been done, in order to learn still more about the origins of the oppression of women, but also about the specific forms this oppression is assuming in today's world as well as the actual material underpinnings and dynamics underlying this—all focused toward a deepened grasp of the necessary conditions for the complete emancipation of women and the role of the struggle around this contradiction as a pivotal and decisive front of the overall struggle for a communist world and the emancipation of humanity as a whole from all oppressive divisions.

In this context I want to say something briefly about the important role of our comrades in the Communist Party of Iran (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) around the woman question. These comrades have made a very important contribution in their insistence that the communist movement overall must focus much more attention on this question, as one of decisive importance for the radical transformation of society and the world as a whole; in their recognition of the even greater role that the struggle against the oppression of women—and, as our slogan says, unleashing the fury of women as a mighty force for revolution—can and must play in the next, new stage of communist revolution; and in calling for a scientific materialist, as opposed to a sociological or a cultural, approach to this question, while emphasizing the need to learn from, and to synthesize from a scientific communist standpoint, the work of others and in particular feminist scholars on this question. All these are important contributions of our Iranian comrades.

In carrying out further work on this crucial question, it will be important to consistently ground this work in the scientific outlook and method of dialectical and historical materialism. There is a need to guard against tendencies toward mechanical materialism and, specifically, toward attempting to situate the essential basis for women's oppression in, or even to reduce it to, the fact that throughout human history it has been women who have borne children and that women have had to take the main responsibility for the nurturing of children in their early years. Along with this, it is necessary to guard against ahistorical tendencies that fail to give the necessary attention to the specific forms which the oppression of women takes in the context of different modes of production and the property relations, as well as the ideas, customs, etc., that correspond to a particular mode of production.

In order to more fully chart the path of the emancipation of women, as a pivotal part of the emancipation of humanity as a whole, while recognizing the role of women's

biology—specifically in giving birth to children and in their early care, particularly in conditions where prolonged nursing remains a necessity—it is also important to recognize that it is not this biology itself which is the fundamental source of women's oppression. Rather, it is the way in which this biology has figured into—or, better said, has been encompassed and subordinated within—definite production relations (and the corresponding social relations). These relations are historically evolved and have, in different societies and different epochs since the emergence of class society, differed with regard to the specific forms and the specific ways in which they embody class division, exploitation and oppression, even as they have in common that they all are, in one form or another, an embodiment and a fountainhead of exploitative and oppressive relations.

This understanding and approach is critical in order to be able to fully develop the conception, the strategic orientation, and the policies and actions flowing from this, which can lead, in fact, to the emancipation of women and of humanity overall in the most fundamental and thorough sense.

In this regard, it is also important not to underestimate the importance of the *Declaration* by our party: *For Women's Liberation and the Emancipation of All Humanity*. This *Declaration* begins with, and throughout brings forward, searing exposure of the oppression of women in many different forms, in all parts of the world, including the so-called "advanced" capitalist countries. It also contains important analysis of how and why the capitalist-imperialist system does not, and cannot, eliminate the oppression of women, including as this is embodied in traditional gender roles, but on the contrary this system perpetuates and enforces such oppressive relations, in both "modern" and "medieval" forms, in both the capitalist-imperialist countries themselves, most definitely including the U.S., and in the Third World countries it dominates and exploits; and it drives home that only through revolution and the advance to communism throughout the world, and the decisive role of the struggle for the liberation of women in that revolution, can the oppression of women be ended together with all forms of exploitative and oppressive social relations.

Still, this *Declaration* is precisely that—a declaration, a very crucial statement of basic principles and orientation, situated in both the current conditions in the world and in the strategic framework of communist revolution. It is not intended to itself make, but to help inspire, the further deeper analysis and synthesis with regard to this question which is necessary in order to have a still more powerful foundation for carrying forward the struggle for the liberation of women—from all tradition's chains, from all the horrific forms of their oppression, not only throughout history, but in the present world—as a crucial part of achieving the emancipation of humanity as a whole.

And here I want to (so to speak) step back to "Steps and Leaps" (Ardea Skybreak, *Of Primeval Steps & Future Leaps: An Essay on the Emergence of Human Beings, the Source of Women's Oppression, and the Road to Emancipation*, Banner Press, 1984). This is an important—and, I believe, still too much overlooked—work. The following concise statement in "Steps and Leaps" provides some rather jolting historical perspective with regard to the development of a scientific understanding of the origins

of the oppression of women: "It is sobering to recall that the material origins of the subordinate social status of half the human species throughout recorded history was not posed as a question, nor certainly deemed worthy of serious investigation, until the middle of the nineteenth century." And Skybreak goes on to point out that Marx and Engels:

cut through the societal prejudice of their time to insist that the subordinate position of women had nothing to do with either some innate deficiencies of female nature or any divine decrees (or "natural features") sanctifying this order of things. They maintained, instead, that the oppression of women was a product and consequence of the social organization of human beings, basically determined in any given society by the particular level of development of the productive forces and the corresponding set of production relations. (The above quotes are from Skybreak, p. 107)

In no way should the profound importance of this initial breakthrough by Marxism, and its continuing significance, be underestimated. At the same time, however, this is, from an historical standpoint, an initial breakthrough—a beginning foundation which must be built on and qualitatively advanced. This, of course, is something which applies to all scientific breakthroughs, and all the more so when they have to do with the crucial, and highly contentious, question of human relations, the character and prospects of human society and the struggle bound up with all this.¹⁷

"Steps and Leaps" points to, and makes very important contributions to the analysis of, pivotal developments in relation to this very important contradiction: the initial and essentially unavoidable division of labor between men and women in early human society, owing to biological differences relating to childbirth and the rearing of children in their early years—emphasizing that this division of labor would not have constituted an oppressive relation, at least not in any fully developed and institutionalized sense, but that, on the other hand, it contained seeds of oppressive relations, between men and women in particular, which would then (to continue the metaphor) ripen into oppressive relations with changes in the productive activity of various human societies,

¹⁷ Here it is worthwhile taking note of the statement by Engels, cited in "Steps and Leaps" concerning, as Engels put it, "one of the most absurd notions taken over from eighteenth century enlightenment ... that in the beginning of society woman was the slave of man." (Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, cited in Skybreak, p. 111)

This is a very pungent observation by Engels, and it underlines once again the basic orientation that we have stressed: the Enlightenment, yes and no. There are definitely things from the Enlightenment that must be upheld and defended, and this has special importance today when the Enlightenment, and specifically its more positive aspects, are under attack by Neanderthal fundamentalist Christian Fascists, who are a major force in the U.S. and are in fact no less obscurant than the most backward Islamic fundamentalists.

But, at the same time, there needs to be a recasting of what is correct and what is valuable in the Enlightenment, and a radical rupture with what in the Enlightenment is not positive, as part of a radical rupture with all traditional ideas as well as all traditional property relations. (In this regard, see "Marxism and the Enlightenment," in Bob Avakian, *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*, Insight Press, 2005.)

the relative weight which different kinds of basic productive activity acquired, and along with that the emergence of the differential accumulation of material surpluses, and corresponding changes in the property and other social relations.

And "Steps and Leaps" points to this truly world historic conclusion: "the biological necessities associated with bearing children are themselves not immutable or necessarily permanent factors, and eventually the further elaboration of human social organization will be such that biological attributes will no longer contribute to channeling or restricting the activities of half the human species." (p. 137)

Along with this, one of the things that stands out very powerfully in "Steps and Leaps" is the way in which it examines all the different attempts—from sociobiology to general theories about human nature, and on and on—to evade, or in any case to come up with an alternative to, a scientific understanding of the fact that stares us in the face: The oppression of women, and all oppressive and exploitative relations, are rooted in actual material conditions that have resulted from the historical development of human society. Toward the end of "Steps and Leaps," this great irony is highlighted: At the very time when the need and possibility of abolishing and moving beyond all this is objectively posing itself more and more forcefully, there is more and more an attempt to turn away from that and to find any other kind of explanation for the state of human social relations and the very real horrors bound up with this—explanations which, whatever the intent, can only lead to the perpetuation of all this.

In acting on this objective basis, in terms of our conscious understanding and ability to take conscious initiative, we have a great deal to build on, but we also have many challenges to meet in going forward and achieving new advances. There is a need for further study and wrangling on the basis of consistently applying a scientific outlook and method, and specifically the scientific outlook and method of dialectical and historical materialism, as it has been developed up to this point, and doing so in a way that will contribute to its further and even qualitative development.

It is important to understand that here, too, it is not a matter of linear development. This is one thing that should be learned from the historical experience I have reviewed here, in stressing the need for further synthesis, including the missed opportunity for synthesis going back decades, as captured in the story about the meeting of the Revolutionary Youth Movement and the very heartfelt statement there—that if you are a man, and you truly want to be radical, you have to learn what it feels like to be a woman—and the overall point about how much of what was being challenged and wrangled with by the women's movement, particularly its more radical currents that came forward through the 1960s and into the 1970s, involved crucial questions which should have been, but were not then, fully welcomed, deeply engaged and correctly assimilated and synthesized through a consistent application of the communist outlook and method. This is what we have to do now. And, in doing so, we have to learn from our mistakes: We can't go back and correct that error of 40 years ago, but we can and must learn from it.

In 1970 Susan Brownmiller wrote that, "We want to be neither oppressor nor oppressed.

The women's revolution is the final revolution of them all." (Susan Brownmiller, "Sisterhood Is Powerful: A Member of the Women's Liberation Movement Explains What It's All About," *New York Times Magazine*, March 15, 1970. Cited in Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs, Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (Free Press, 2005)—a critique of women who promote the degradation of women through pornography and other aspects of "raunch culture.") Now, in reading Brownmiller's *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (Dell Publishing, 1999) it is clear that her politics have gone in the direction of reform rather than revolution. Even at the time when she was part of a more radical upsurge and made the above-cited statement, it seems clear that there were significant limitations in how Brownmiller conceived of "revolution," and that she was influenced by contradictory trends, including not only revolutionary but also revisionist ones. But whatever the full picture is with that, it does not negate the important contributions she and others like her made, particularly in the period of the late 1960s and early '70s, nor does it remove from us the responsibility of correctly understanding and synthesizing something very important that's spoken to with the statement that "The women's revolution is the final revolution of them all."

There are two things that are important to emphasize once more in relation to this. First, that the emancipation of women can only be achieved as part of a real and profound revolution—the communist revolution—the most radical revolution in all of human history, aiming for the emancipation of all humanity, the historic leap beyond all forms of oppression and exploitation, through the transformation of all the material and ideological conditions which give rise to and reinforce exploitation and oppression. And, at the same time, a fundamental and decisive component of that revolution, without which that revolution will never achieve its goals, is the struggle for the complete liberation of women.

This takes us back to the very important point from "The End of a Stage—The Beginning of a New Stage" about unresolved contradictions under socialism. What is said there is another way of expressing the understanding that the struggle for the complete emancipation of women will be a crucial part of "the final revolution." In other words, it will be a crucial component in propelling and driving forward not only the revolutionary struggle to overthrow the rule of capitalism-imperialism but to continue the revolution, within the new, socialist society itself, in order to advance on the road toward the final aim of communism. The point is that, among the unresolved contradictions which will remain in socialist society, and which can be a driving force propelling that revolution forward, the continuing ways in which the emancipation of women will need to be fought for and fought through will be one of the most decisive aspects and expressions of that.

It should be clear that what will be involved in this whole process is not a matter of linear development—not a simple straight line continuation of the theory of the communist movement and the experience of socialist society—but will of necessity be a more complex and much richer process, drawing and learning from a much greater variety of experience and of analysis and theorizing, carried out from different perspectives, representing ultimately different class viewpoints—all of which must be encompassed and embraced by, and at the same time synthesized through, the

application of the communist outlook and method.

In conclusion on this crucial question, all that has been touched on here underlines the need for further ruptures and leaps—in theory, and in practice guided by that theory—with regard to the liberation of women, as a decisive part of the communist revolution and the achievement of the "4 Alls" in the fullest sense. It underscores the need for the method and approach of the New Synthesis to be more fully and systematically applied to this question and for crucial and urgently needed advances to be made on this basis.

"The Reality Beneath William Bennett's 'Virtues,' Or We Need Morality but not *Traditional* Morality"

(from *Preaching From a Pulpit of Bones, We Need Morality, but not *Traditional* Morality*, 1999)

[*Editor's Note: In this excerpt Bob Avakian critiques William Bennett's Book of Virtues. Bennett was an official in the Reagan and Bush administrations who was notorious for waging war on the poor in the name of the "War on Drugs" and the "War on Crime" and aggressively attacking any departure from old-time traditions in education and in general.*]

Fairy Tales and Gender Stereotypes

Once again, despite Bennett's platitudes about being against racism, sexism, chauvinism, and the rest, and despite the fact that a few selections about people like 19th-century feminist Susan B. Anthony can be found in Bennett's "Virtues," it is unmistakable in reading through this book that from beginning to end very "traditional" gender roles, or stereotypes, are being held up as models—after all, Bennett's whole point is to extol the "virtues" of such "tradition."

Thus, the poem that Bennett introduces with his dire warning—learn to control yourself or be controlled in ways you won't like—is titled "There Was a Little Girl," and it presents once again that old "double standard," where what is good for the gander is not good for the goose. The final stanza makes it clear: "Her mother heard the noise,/And she thought it was the boys/A-playing at a combat in the attic;/But when she climbed the stair,/And found Jemima there,/She took and she did spank her most emphatic." Along with gems like this, sprinkled throughout "Virtues" are the familiar fairy tales of the virginal princesses who are saved or carried off to bliss by the handsome princes (even if the princes first appear as frogs).

But, after all, isn't this pretty harmless—sure, this could be said to perpetuate sexual stereotypes, but isn't it a case of "politically correct overkill" and the tyranny of "feminazis" to make a big deal out of little things like this? Isn't all this "political correcting" getting rather ridiculous, even infuriating? That is obviously the point of the little book of parodies—*Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*—that apparently became something of a bestseller in the U.S. in recent times. But, in reading over those "Bedtime Stories," which spoof "politically correct" criticisms of old fairy tales, what stands out to me is not so much that the original tales should be rewritten but more that they should be seen in their true light—as illuminations of an era when divisions between rich and poor, princes and commoners, men and women, and so on, are thought to be natural and inevitable.

Can it really be said that the influence of tales like these—the models and morals they provide—are after all really so harmless? Among the things I reviewed in preparing to write this article were clippings from U.S. newspapers that were sent to me, and one of them is an article from the *USA Today* (January 24, 1995) by Judith Sherven and James

Sniechowski. It is titled "Why women stay with abusers" and the subtitle (or "kicker") is "For millions, the ideal man is a romance-novel fantasy—powerful, protective, sexually aggressive. And an invitation to trouble."

The romance novel is, in U.S. society today, the equivalent of the "Prince Charming" fairy tale. It is aimed at teenage girls and women—and according to this article (citing *Forbes* magazine) 25 million American females are reading an average of 20 romance novels each month! This article asks a very important question and gives a very telling answer: "What do these women find so compelling? The hope and thrill of being 'saved' by a strong, dominant male who will take care of them and make them feel secure." But the reality of life with—which means living under the domination of—such men does not end up fulfilling the romantic fantasies of Harlequin novels. Often it turns into a dreadful nightmare.

(This reminds me of Engels's observation that, in its origin, the word family [from the Latin *familia*] referred not to "the ideal of our modern Philistine, which is a compound of sentimentality and domestic discord," but to the "totality of slaves" in a household in ancient Rome—a household presided over by a male who had the power of life and death not only over his slaves but also over his wives and children.)

Is it not possible to see that the influence of Grimm fairy tales—and more modern-day versions of the same kind of fables—play a significant role in conditioning girls to accept and seek to act out these romantic fantasies, and that the consequences for them may well be anything but harmless or humorous? And when William Bennett & Co. seek to reinforce this ideal of "feminine virtues" and the "rewards" they will bring, what after all is the nature and effect of the "moral education" they are pushing?

Home: A Dangerous Place To Be

With the whole unrelenting barrage of propaganda and hype about violent crime, crime in the streets, kids murdering kids, and on and on—and despite the fact that violent crime is a major social problem in America today—one of the things that is not so highly publicized by the media, the politicians, etc., is the fact that, for women and for children, the place where they are *most likely* to be subjected to violent crime and brutality, including murder, is *in their own home, by "the man of the house."* Women are more likely to be raped by their husbands—and children more likely to be sexually assaulted and molested by their fathers—than by strangers. It is only in recent years—and largely as a result of the social upheaval of "the '60s" (which actually carried over well into the 1970s), and in particular because of the women's movement that was brought forth out of that upheaval—that much light has been shed on *this* horrendous "domestic" violence. Before that, this was largely shrouded in darkness, behind the closed doors of "the home," protected by the "sanctity" of the "traditional family."

Until quite recently, in the dominant culture the concept of "marital rape" was considered a contradiction in terms. Well into the 1980s, in most states in the U.S. men could *legally* rape their wives, and it is only within the past two years that this has been declared a crime in all states (North Carolina was the last state to do this, in late 1993).

Of course, despite the passage of these laws, marital rape remains a major form of violence against women and one of the major crimes for which people are least punished (along with various kinds of "white collar crime" and crimes in which the victims are Black people and others who are portrayed and treated as less than human by the dominant institutions of society). A fortifying of "traditional relations" and their accompanying "traditional values" will, to say the least, hardly help to eliminate this crime and violence, and in fact will only serve to provide more cover or even "legitimacy" for it—and more generally for the oppressive social relations of which these crimes are a dramatic expression.

When we hear Bennett and others tell us that it is time to "get back to the basics" on which the USA was founded, and that "the '60s counter-culture" attack on this tradition has been the cause of "moral decay" and rampant crime in America, we must ask: Do you mean we should go back to the situation where untold numbers of women were raped by their husbands every year, and this was all legal? Where hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Black people were lynched, year after year, and yet this was rarely if ever treated as a crime?

Bennett & Co. would no doubt answer that they do not mean *this*. But the fact is that they do want to reinforce the "tradition" in which girls and women are in effect the sexual possessions of men—presented as "pure virgins" under the "protection" of their fathers until they are married and become the objects of gratification, and even plunder, by their husbands.

(The commodification of sex and sexual conquest and plunder—and the *misogynist core* of all this—must be exposed and uprooted, but "traditional values" and their adherents cannot point the way to abolishing this—they are, in fact, expressions and exponents of it.)

And Bennett and Co. *do* want a situation in which Black people are granted certain "civil rights," in words, and in turn are made to "act in a 'civil' manner"—that is, to quietly, submissively accept the reality in which they are subjected to systematic discrimination and brutality, daily outrage and insult.

The truth is that people like Bennett most definitely *do* mean to aggressively reassert the male supremacy and white supremacy which are in fact built into the very foundation and the institutional structure of capitalist America, and they do mean to—they must—uphold and carry forward the fundamental "tradition" of monumental and monstrous crimes on which this system has been built and on which it depends.

"Religion, Patriarchy, Male Supremacy and Sexual Repression"

(from *Away With All Gods! Unchaining the Mind and Radically Changing the World*, 2008)

One of the most important aspects of the role of religion as a shackle on humanity—and here again I am examining particularly the role of the world's three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—is the way in which this represents a concentrated expression, and reinforcement, of patriarchy and male supremacy. To put it simply, all of these religions are patriarchal religions. Each one of them pictures a god that is a powerful male authority figure: The Father, the Lord, Señor—in whatever language this is expressed. These are religions in which patriarchal relations, in the real world, are projected into an other-worldly realm—to then be, in turn, reimposed on *this* world—and in which patriarchy, and the reinforcement of patriarchy, is an integral and essential part of the belief system and of the behavior that this belief system is intended to enforce, as part of the broader network of oppressive and exploitative relations that characterize the societies in which these religions arose and the succeeding societies in which these religions have been perpetuated by the ruling classes.

The ways in which these religions promote a strong father figure, and absolute male authority, can be seen not only in how they portray the god which people are commanded to worship and obey—and this, of course, is all the more the case in the fundamentalist versions of these religions—but is found in the heart of the scriptures of all these religions. Christianity once again provides a clear illustration of this.

In a way you could say that the essential message of the Christian religion is put forward in John 3:16. Now, some of you may be familiar with this—those of you who know the Bible, and/or others of you who just watch sporting events, especially football games, where often, when they kick the extra point after a touchdown, there is some fool sitting behind the goalpost with a crazy wig on his head, holding up a sign saying "John 3:16." [Laughter]

So let's talk about John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (or in the classical English rendition: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but shall have eternal life"). Let's dig more deeply into this—what it is actually putting forward and what it is actually promoting. Let's go back to Genesis: once again, the myth of the fall of mankind, the treacherous role of woman in this, and the view of the nature and the fate of humanity that is put forward in Genesis (see in particular chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis). It would not have been necessary, according to the Bible, for God to make this great sacrifice (of giving his "only begotten son") if it weren't for the fact that human beings messed up in the Garden of Eden, and in particular that Eve seduced man—Adam—into doing the wrong thing and going against God's will. So, built into, or underlying, this very verse (John 3:16) that tells us how loving God is to humanity, is the notion that

humanity is all screwed up—that it is the very nature of humanity to do things wrong and to commit sin—that mankind has a "fallen" nature, which on its own, humanity can never change or get away from. That's the first point to keep in mind here.

But, then, there is a second thing—think about it: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Why a *son*? And anyway, the idea is absurd. [Laughter] If you believe in God, God could have as many sons as he wanted. [Laughter] So what's the point of "*only begotten Son*?" Well, for *human beings* who live in a patriarchal society, giving up your son is one of the greatest sacrifices you can make, because in such a male-dominated society men count for more than women. So, who cares about daughters? You can give them up to be raped—and that's there in the Bible, too, for example in the story of how Lot offered up his daughters in this way (and remember that Lot is looked upon so favorably by God that Lot is spared when God destroys Sodom—see Genesis, chapter 19). But a *son*, that's a very different matter.

To bring out the point even more sharply, try thinking of the Bible saying: "For God so loved the world, that he gave up his only begotten daughter." It doesn't ring true, does it? [Laughter] It doesn't fit with the Bible—because the Bible was written by human beings living in a patriarchal society who are reflecting that society in what they write and projecting an imaginary god into the heavens who makes this great sacrifice of giving up his "only begotten son," which is the greatest sacrifice that these human beings can think of.

This takes us back to the role of women and the fall of man. This is not only a pivotal and seminal story in the Bible's history of mankind and mankind's relation with God, but it is picked up and carried forward by Paul in the New Testament. For example, in his first letter to Timothy, Paul repeats the notion of a curse on women, because of what Eve did in the Garden of Eden; but, says Paul, women can be saved by bearing children for their husbands and generally by having the "modest" qualities appropriate to women, including that they are obedient to their husbands and subordinate to men in general:

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (1 Timothy 2:11–15)

So, right there, we see two things that are essential components of Christianity and the "Judeo-Christian tradition": women are to be submissive in relation to men, and women's essential role is to bear children. Think of the terrible influence of that, and all the oppression and pain it has contributed to, through the centuries and down to today.

Now let's return to the origin myth regarding Jesus and a point that was spoken to earlier in connection with this. When you read the Bible and you get to the first part of the New Testament, in Matthew, it starts off with something very few people can

follow: the "begats." [Laughter] And so-and-so begat so-and-so, who begat so-and-so, who begat so-and-so...down through 14 generations; and then so-and-so begat so-and-so, who begat so-and-so, who begat so-and-so...down through another 14 generations; this passes through David and then on, through more generations, down to Joseph, Jesus's father. Now, if you actually look at history and compare the historical record with what is said here in the Bible, there are discrepancies: the schema that involves repeated reference to 14 generations doesn't correspond to what you can actually learn from history about the succession of patriarchs that is being referred to here.

But these "begats" are, once again, in the service of reinforcing male domination and patriarchy. The whole thing in Matthew is an attempt to trace Jesus's roots from Abraham—a patriarch of the ancient Jewish people, according to the Bible—through King David to Joseph, the father of Jesus, even though Joseph's "seed" had absolutely nothing to do with it. Think about this: A crucial part of the Christian mythology is that Jesus was born—of what? A virgin, Mary. So what the hell did Joseph have to do with it? [Laughter] The point is that *this is a history of patriarchs*—an attempt to put Jesus squarely within the tradition of patriarchs and patriarchal kings and rulers of the Jewish people in ancient times.

Even though Mary is Jesus's blessed mother, her genealogy does not count. Why? Because she's a woman. Her role is to be the loving, long-suffering mother of Jesus (and, especially in the Roman Catholic version of Christianity, to be a kind of "intercessor" for people in their supplications to God). But when it comes to tracing the lineage from the ancient patriarchs of the Jewish people down to Jesus, and to prove his right to be the Messiah, Mary doesn't figure into it at all. Joseph does figure in, even though, according to the Bible, he had no part, biologically, in all this.

For many people who have lived in a society in which patriarchy and male domination and the consequent oppression of women is an integral and indispensable part—a part without which the society in that form could not exist—one of the attractions of these religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) and of the fundamentalist versions of these religions in particular, in this period, is as *a forceful reassertion of that patriarchy*. Why is there a felt need for this? Because patriarchy is being undermined in various ways. Not eliminated. Not transformed in a qualitative sense. But being undermined in various ways by the very functioning of the society. Even in countries where there are still very open and powerful patriarchal traditions, customs and conventions, the uprooting of people, and the changes that accompany this, tend to undermine aspects of the patriarchy. People are leaving—or being forced out of—the countryside in huge numbers and landing in the urban areas, often in the shantytown slums; families are moving from Pakistan to London, from Egypt or Turkey to Germany, from Algeria to France—and being confronted by a very different culture. The point is not to apologize for or to extol bourgeois society and *its* forms of the oppression of women; but, in some significant aspects, this is very different in these "modern" imperialist countries than it is in the countries where feudal relations and traditions, or remnants of them, continue to exert a significant influence, and where, along with that, patriarchal domination is more overt and more entrenched in a

traditional form. That's important to emphasize: *in a traditional form*. So, in these new circumstances, fathers who have had absolute authority within the family, suddenly find that their daughters are harder to control. And supervising the behavior of daughters is one of the main roles of the father in these patriarchal family relations (although the father is generally assisted in this by his wife, or often his mother—the mother-in-law of his wife—will play a significant role as an enforcer of this).

In some ways this is similar to what happens when people in rural areas in the imperialist countries get MTV and the Internet. All of a sudden the kids don't want to act any more in the ways that have been traditionally expected of them—or at least some of them don't—and this gives rise to a lot of clashes within the family, even in an "advanced modern country." Well, imagine people moving from Algeria to France—it's a whole different culture and very different forms of oppressive social relations. It is not that in these imperialist countries the social relations are not oppressive, but in significant ways they are in a very different form, one which envisions and embodies a different role for women and a different way in which they are oppressed and degraded.

All this is very complex because, to a significant degree, the ways in which women are oppressed in a country like France, or the U.S., appears, especially to people coming from a traditionalist framework, to involve "an excess of freedom." Women are not regulated in all the same ways and not required to wear traditional clothing in the same way, nor to act in the same "modest" manner. In reality, this "freedom" for women is part of a different web of oppressive relations, which often assumes extreme expression in its own way. There is pornography, soft or hard core, everywhere you turn. Advertising, to a very great extent, is based on the use of the female body to sell commodities—and the female body itself is, in very extensive and very degrading ways, treated as a commodity.

So the opposite poles once again tend to reinforce each other. Even people who aren't steeped in traditional religious convention look at a lot of this exploitative decadence and justifiably say: "This is terrible. I don't want my kids exposed to this." And, especially if you are coming from a traditional patriarchal framework, you not only recoil at all this, you are inclined to all the more forcefully assert patriarchal authority.

Even if people in Third World countries don't leave their homelands altogether and emigrate to an imperialist country—even when, instead, they migrate to the urban areas within their own country—these urban areas in Third World countries are very different, in significant ways, from the countryside. The way of life in the shantytowns is very different, including in its volatility, from what the situation was in the rural villages. In these circumstances there can be a powerful attraction to a form of religion which forcefully asserts traditional patriarchal authority and reinforces that patriarchal authority with a seeming supernatural power behind it.

And then, more generally, in a world that appears to be full of uncertainty and the unexpected, and seems threatening in many ways—economically, but not just economically (all of a sudden, in the U.S., you have September 11th, for example)—there is a strong tendency for people, proceeding from within an established patriarchal

framework to begin with, to feel the inclination to gravitate to a powerful father figure who will protect them. This is something that, in the U.S., George W. Bush and those around him consciously play on: "I'm a war time president," Bush continually repeats, with the implication: "I'm the big daddy, the big strong father figure who can keep you safe—if you just get in line with me." And, at the same time, a religious fundamentalist outlook is promoted to reinforce this.

So that is another way in which a form of patriarchy is asserted, amidst uncertainty, volatility and the feeling that there are constant, even if often vague, dangers. This feeling is not simply spontaneous—it is promoted and reinforced every time you turn around. If you turn on the news, anywhere in the U.S., what do you see? Crime, crime, crime. From this you would think that you are about to be jumped on by somebody every time you go out your front door—even though the probability of actually encountering this, directly and personally, is very minimal if you are in the middle strata in a country like the U.S. But the constant barrage of "news" about crime, reinforced by "entertainment" which very extensively revolves around this same theme, adds to this general feeling of alarm. And, in a society which is steeped in a tradition, thousands of years old, of powerful patriarchal authority, what is a way to feel that you can get some security? Relying, once again, on a big powerful father figure, wielding big weapons, who will protect you—who is gonna get those "bad guys" out there before they can get you.

But just presenting such a powerful father figure in a *human* form is not enough for many people. So there is an aggressive assertion of an even more extreme and absolutist form of this father figure, in the image of an all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful God—for whom, lo and behold, the powerful head of state is a representative and for whom he speaks and acts.

Another major dimension of the way in which patriarchy is being threatened, and in which people feel it being threatened, is the whole gay question. In the U.S. right now this is rather acutely posed. It is not that something like gay marriage in itself is going to undermine and destroy patriarchy. So long as things remain within the confines of a system built on exploitation and oppression, patriarchal relations will assert themselves within gay marriage as well—and this is already the case in many gay relationships, even where they do not have the formal sanction of official marriage. But, at this juncture, the assertion of the right to marriage for gays and lesbians does, in some significant ways, pose a serious challenge to traditional patriarchy.

While Christian fundamentalists, from the U.S. President on down, repeatedly insist the Bible ordains that marriage must be only between a man and a woman, it is not at all the case that the Bible consistently presents things this way. In fact, Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, and his successor Brigham Young, as well as Mormon fundamentalists today, have plenty of evidence for their claim that polygamy (a marriage in which one person has multiple spouses) and more specifically polygyny (where a man has more than one wife) is justified in many places in the Bible.

If you look at First and Second Chronicles, which discuss all the supposed great

kings (as well as the bad kings) of Israel and Judah, you will see that the greatest king of all, David, had more than one wife, and besides that he had hundreds of concubines. Now, let's be clear: David is *not* condemned for this in the Bible. In fact, all this is presented as part of his majesty and glorious nature that is upheld and extolled in the Bible. And looking once more at the "begats" that I spoke of earlier (which in Matthew trace the genealogy of Jesus), these "begats" go from Abraham to David and from David down to Jesus—and once again the point of all these "begats" is to establish that the line of Jesus descends from David, which, according to the ancient Jewish scriptures (the Old Testament of the Christian Bible), was a necessary requirement for the Messiah. So David is hardly a negative figure in the Bible—on the contrary, he is highly exalted. Solomon, David's son and also an exalted figure in the Bible, had hundreds of wives and concubines as well. Abraham, too, had more than one wife—and, when Abraham's wife was apparently barren, he "went in to" his wife's servant in order to have a child. As we see in Genesis 29 and 30, another prominent Biblical patriarch, Jacob, also "went in to" his wife's servant in similar circumstances; and Jacob had more than one wife at the same time. In Deuteronomy 21, along with setting forth how, in war, if "you see among the captives a beautiful woman whom you desire and want to marry," you may do so, there is a whole discussion of what should happen "If a man has two wives, one of them loved and the other disliked, and if both the loved and the disliked have borne him sons." (See Deuteronomy 21:11–15 and 16–17.)

But, as we have seen, the Christian Fascist fundamentalists do not really strictly adhere to Biblical literalism—they, too, practice "salad bar Christianity" when it serves their purposes. And they misrepresent what is said in the Bible when that serves their purposes. Now, in their opposition to gay marriage and the ways in which they see it as a threat to patriarchy, they have fashioned this saying: "God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." Well, the fact is that God didn't create either Adam and Steve *or* Adam and Eve. [Laughter] Human beings came into existence as part of the overall process of natural evolution, stretching back over billions of years in the history of life on the planet earth. And in the history of human beings, they have had different kinds of societies, and many different sexual relations and practices, both exploitative and non-exploitative, depending ultimately on the basic character of the society. A study of human society throughout history reveals a very great diversity of sexual relations, both heterosexual and same-sex. In the ancient Greek society of Plato and Aristotle, which was definitely patriarchal, a man—a real "man's man"—had sexual relations with other men and boys all the time. My point is not to promote the notion of a "man's man," or any kind of "manhood," in the sense of male supremacy and domination. What we need is for people—female as well as male—to assert and give expression to their humanity, and moreover to become *emancipators of humanity*, struggling to finally abolish all relations of domination, oppression and exploitation. My point is precisely to emphasize that there is nothing about heterosexual or about same-sex relations, which, in and of itself, is either positive or negative, or in some way more or less "natural." And neither heterosexual nor same-sex relations, as such, constitute either an embodiment of, or a negation of, patriarchy. Rather, the essential question is what is the *content* of any intimate and sexual relation: does it embody and promote affection, mutual respect and equality between the partners—and contribute to the realization of equality between men and women—or does it constitute and further contribute to the degradation of

people and the oppression of women in particular? But in a society in which patriarchy has been an essential and defining element, even breaking out of the more *traditional forms* of patriarchy—including by raising the demand for formal equality for same-sex relations—at particular junctures, such as the present one, can pose a serious challenge to traditional, oppressive relations, even while many of the individuals involved are simply trying to form traditional marriages. That's one of the ironies and complexities of this situation.

And the fact is that opposition to gay marriage is not simply an election gimmick to get more Republicans elected. Yes, some Republican Party functionaries have used this issue in that way. But what is involved is much more profound than that and has much bigger implications. The real objective of the Christian Fascists around the issue of gay marriage, and their condemnation of homosexuality in general, is to enforce "traditional morality" and all the relations of oppression embodied in and enforced by that traditional morality—including patriarchy and the oppression of women, the subordinate position of women in society, and their essential role, as the Bible presents it, as breeders of children within the confines of male-dominated marriage relations, sanctioned not only by the church, but also by the state.

This is all very deeply rooted, but in a real sense today it is being challenged at every turn. Not yet in a way that is going to lead to its abolition, but in a way that does undermine some of the forms in which it has traditionally existed. And the Christian Fascist offensive around this is a forceful and absolutist reassertion of these oppressive relations.

This has also found sharp expression in the contention around the raising of children: what should be the relationship in the family between children and parents? In this regard as well, there is a forceful reassertion of patriarchy. Among the religious fundamentalists in the U.S., there is a definite current that insists that one of the main reasons for (and one of main manifestations of) the fact that, in their view, the country is going to hell is that, for several decades now, parents have not been able to beat their children so freely. After all, what does the Bible advocate? There is that familiar saying from the Bible, "Spare the rod and spoil the child" (or, as it actually says in Proverbs 23:13–14: "Do not withhold discipline from your children; if you beat them with the rod, they will not die. If you beat them with the rod, you will save their lives from Sheol"—or, in the more classical English version: "Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and shalt deliver his soul from hell.") This is what a lot of these Christian fundamentalist leaders are actively promoting.

Here I have to say that, as much as I love Richard Pryor, I have never enjoyed his routines that seemed, in the final analysis, to uphold the beating of children to keep them in line. This was treated in a somewhat contradictory manner in the routines that he did where this was the subject, but it does seem that there was always a certain element of drawing the lesson that, "after all, when my grandmother beat me with a switch, this did have the effect of keeping me from getting completely out of line." In any case, sentiments like this are echoed even among people who are in many ways

advanced politically and revolutionary-minded; even among such people, one will sometimes hear the complaint: "Things are all messed up now because you can't beat your kids anymore, can't get out that switch like grandma did and beat the kids back into line, so they do right." And it should be said that even though, as in the case of Richard Pryor, it sometimes might have been grandma who was wielding the switch, this was still done as part of an overall assertion of relations marked by patriarchal domination—relations in which a strong father figure would be the ultimate authority in disciplining the children and, with regard to daughters in particular, would ensure that they remained virgins so that their value as property, to be realized at the time of marriage, would not be diminished or spoiled. This is thoroughly embedded in the Christian tradition, every bit as much as the Islamic traditions which lead to the horror of "honor killings," where family members, and brothers in particular, are sent out to kill their sisters if it becomes known that they are no longer virgins before marriage—even if this occurs as a result of rape. While not, in itself, as extreme an expression of this, beating children ("sparing not the rod in order not to spoil the child") is part of the same overall package of oppressive patriarchal relations.

Let us be clear: female children, and children in general, should not be seen and treated as the property of their parents, and their father in particular. That is not the world we are aiming for, not a world worth living in. This is the way it has been for thousands of years, and this has been embodied in and promoted by religious scripture and tradition, but this is not how we want the world to be, and not how it needs to be. Yes, children need discipline. But they don't need to be beaten with a switch or a rod in order to be disciplined, and to have a sense of purpose. They need to be led—inspired, and yes, at times, taken firmly in hand—as part of an overall vision and goal of bringing into being a radically different and much better world. And, as they become older and more conscious of this objective, and capable of acting consciously to contribute to it, they can increasingly become a part of that process. But even before they are capable of being consciously a part of this, the principles that apply to bringing such a world into being should apply, in a fundamental sense, in relating to children—your own and others. Children are conscious human beings, even as their consciousness is in a process of development. They can be and need to be reasoned with—and yes, at times, they have to be told, "that's the way it is, and you just have to do it this way, because the ability to understand this, and why it has to be this way, is beyond you right now."

Now, at the same time, it is not hard to see why many people gravitate toward "spare the rod, spoil the child"—toward the logic that if you don't beat kids to keep them in line, they will turn out badly—because there are all kinds of things pulling kids in terrible directions. And, especially among sections of "the middle class," particularly in a country like the U.S., there is a whole approach of indulgence toward children—which may have less selfish motivations in some cases but in fact is often bound up with, and in the final analysis is another expression of, treating children as a commodity, who have to be pampered and indulged as part of giving them every opportunity and advantage in the race to achieve a privileged position in society, in the context of the overall parasitism that is part of living in a powerful imperialist country. Here I am talking about phenomena such as parents who start playing symphonies for a new-born child (or even for a fetus during pregnancy), especially if this is done with the idea that

in this way the child, from an early age, will have a better chance to develop as a "talent," or a "genius"—will be able to go to the best music academy or the most prestigious university, and be launched into a lucrative career. Often permissiveness on the part of parents is bound up with—and seeks to be in the service of—that.

Somewhat as a reaction to this kind of permissiveness—but more in response to the kind of madness that too many of the youth in the inner cities get caught up in—a lot of people in the oppressed communities look around and see the kids acting the fool and doing all kinds of crazy things, and they are drawn to the conclusion that something strong has got to be done to get these kids to act right. This becomes another factor reinforcing the role of the church and religion. What are two prominent alternatives that are available to the most oppressed in the U.S. right now? Well, there are the gangs on the one hand, with all the madness and mayhem that this involves; or the church, on the other hand, with its assertion of traditional, oppressive and, yes, patriarchal values, relations, codes and customs. For the youth in particular: when you get tired of the gangs, then go to the church; if you get sick of the church, then go back to the gangs. Neither of these offers a way forward for the masses of people, a way out of the oppressive conditions that are driving many to a lot of madness in the first place.

Here again, is another sharp manifestation of the need to "break through the middle." Just as, on another level, Jihad and McWorld/McCrusade*** cannot be allowed to stand as the only two alternatives, here too there is an urgent need to bring forward a radically different alternative, on the basis of the communist world outlook and the communist program and objectives. It is necessary to be boldly saying to people: "We don't need the church, we don't need the switch, we don't need the rod and, no, we don't need the gangs and the drugs—**we need revolution.**"

Yes, this is a hard road. But what are people dying and killing each other over now? What is that serving? What is that reinforcing? Where is that leading people? What good is that doing for anyone—except those who rule over the masses of people and who couldn't be happier than to see them killing each other over nothing worthwhile? And what good does it do for the masses of people to go down on their knees to some oppressive and patriarchal authority, which is invested with the aura and awe of supposed supernatural power, and which acts as a shackle helping to reinforce conditions of enslavement and powerlessness?

***[Editor's Note: Jihad and McWorld/McCrusade refers to Islamic Fundamentalists on the one hand, and global imperialism—in particular U.S. imperialism—on the other hand. As Bob Avakian has repeatedly emphasized, "These two reactionary poles reinforce each other, even while opposing each other. If you side with either of these 'outmodeds,' you end up strengthening both."]

"Seeing Jesus in a True Light"

(from *Away With All Gods! Unchaining the Mind and Radically Changing the World*, 2008)

With all the mystical and sacred "aura" surrounding Jesus, it is important to look at him, and examine what he stood for, in its true light. According to the Bible, Jesus encounters somebody who has epilepsy, and how does he supposedly cure the epilepsy? Through *exorcism*—by casting out a demon. Apparently, the all-knowing God, in the person of Jesus, hadn't been paying attention to the field of medicine. Even though people back then didn't know what was the actual cause of epilepsy, if God existed, then *God* should have known. There are many things that people didn't know about in those times, and so (as still happens far too often today) when they didn't understand things, they made up rationalizations and explanations for them—explanations which often, and in fact generally, ended up blaming the people themselves for their own misfortunes. That's the whole point about sicknesses being caused by sin: Jesus, the Bible tells us, goes around curing sickness by casting out demons and casting out sin. This is all in the New Testament.

And it's not just that Paul, in his letters—again, in the New Testament—upholds slavery; but Jesus himself, in his parables, accepts slavery as a given. There is the parable of the weeds among the wheat, the parable of the unforgiving servant, the parable of the wicked tenants, the parable of the wedding banquet, the parable of the talents—all these parables accept the idea that slavery and oppression will exist in this world, and use these as a way of drawing lessons for life. Look at Matthew 10:24-25: there Jesus says, "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master."

And, with regard to the status of women, Jesus once again accepts as given the relations of male domination that run through—and in fact are foundational to—the whole of the Bible, in the New Testament as well as the old. Often, those who seek to find in Jesus—and to present Jesus as—a champion of the downtrodden, oppressed and marginalized, argue that Jesus allowed women who were outcasts and condemned as sinners to approach him and even to become part of his close circle, and therefore Jesus provides a model and a way for achieving equality between men and women and overcoming thousands of years of the subordination and degradation of women. But the truth is that from the Bible it is clear that Jesus *never challenged* but instead incorporated into his teachings the view of women as inferior in their relations with men, and indeed as essentially the property of men—a view deeply rooted in the scriptures and religious traditions to which Jesus himself adhered. Nowhere does this find a more concentrated expression than in the question of *virginity*.

Not only does the Bible place a great emphasis on Jesus's supposed "virgin birth" and the image of Jesus's mother, Mary, as someone who had not "lain with man" before her marriage and who, furthermore, we are told, conceived Jesus not through intercourse with her husband, Joseph, but through the embrace of the holy spirit; but, again, the teachings of Jesus assume that virginity and chastity are qualities that are

essential for women—this is reflected, for example, in the parable of the ten virgin bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1–13) as well as in Jesus's discussions of marriage (and divorce). So, it is important to understand what this whole concept of virginity—and the great importance attached to it—rests on, and in turn what it reflects.

Once human societies, thousands of years ago, evolved and changed in such a way that the wealth that was produced by society was taken for the most part by a small group of people who dominated and exploited the rest—once private property and wealth of individuals emerged and developed—then not only was the basic role of a woman increasingly reduced to being a breeder of children, but it also became crucial to ensure that her children would be those of her husband, so that he could pass his property on to *his* heirs—and in particular his *male* heirs—and *not somebody else's*. So then women's sexual activity had to be very carefully controlled.

What were the means through which this was done? Well, in a society of private ownership of wealth and property, a female child, when she was a girl and then grew into a young woman, was the property and possession of her father. Sometimes, he used his wife, or his mother (the wife's mother-in-law) to carry out direct control over his daughter, but in any case it was he, the father, who ultimately controlled her. And, in keeping with the requirements of these patriarchal, male-dominated social relations, he was responsible for guaranteeing that when she got married, she was a virgin. We see this tradition continuing down to today, and not just in Islamic cultures where young women are often killed, by members of their own family, if they have "lost their virginity"—even if they have been raped—because this is considered to bring dishonor on their family (these are the so-called "honor killings"). Look at the whole "abstinence" campaign, being promoted from the highest levels of government in the U.S. today. While boys as well as girls are encouraged, and coerced, into making pledges of "abstinence" (virginity until marriage), there is no question that, as it always has, such an emphasis on virginity falls most heavily on girls and young women. And, as we shall see, if the Christian Fascists were to have their way, the punishment, particularly for girls and women, who did not "abstain"—who were not virgins when they were married—would be *death*: that is what a literalist reading of the Bible would demand, and these Christian Fascists are very serious about making a strict adherence to "Biblical commandments" the law of the land.

And look at the renewed emphasis in America in recent decades on the traditional wedding ceremony: here comes the bride in her "beautiful white wedding gown." How come it has to be *white*? Because white is the color representing virginity. And who "gives the bride away?" The *father*. In effect, and with whatever degree of consciousness may be the case with particular individuals, what is objectively happening is that the father is carrying forward the patriarchal tradition of bringing his property up to the altar and handing it over to the husband who will now take it over as *his* property.

If we go back to the "Judeo-Christian tradition," which embodies and promotes this whole view and practice of marriage, it is very clear that the question of virginity—the virginity of the *bride*—is a deadly serious matter. For example, if you read Deuteronomy, chapter 22 verses 13 through 21, you will see this *very graphically*

spelled out. There, under the heading "The Accused Bride," it speaks to what happens if "a man marries a woman, but after going into her he dislikes her and makes up charges against her, slandering her by saying, 'I married this woman; but when I lay with her, I did not find evidence of her virginity.'" Well, then, what is supposed to happen, if the husband accuses his wife in this way? As the Bible, in Deuteronomy, sets forth, the parents of the bride are to provide proof of the virginity of the bride to the (male) elders of the community. What is the proof? They have to bring a bloody sheet from the wedding night before the town, and hold up the sheet and say: here is the evidence that she was a virgin. And, according to Deuteronomy, if such evidence can be provided, then the husband who has falsely accused his bride has to pay a fine—to the bride's *father*. On the other hand, "If, however, this charge is true, that evidence of the young woman's virginity was not found, then they shall bring the young woman out to the entrance of her father's house and the men of her town shall stone her to death, because she committed a disgraceful act in Israel by prostituting herself in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst." (Deuteronomy 22: 20–21)

It would be hard to ask for a more clear-cut statement of the fact that what is involved in all this is *relations of property ownership*—in which *the young woman is property*: first she is the property of her father (which is why false accusations against her for not being a virgin will result in a fine paid to her *father* and why, if the accusations are true, her *father*, along with the *other men* of the town, must take part in killing her); and then, upon her marriage, and assuming she passes "the virginity test," she becomes the property of her husband and the breeder of further property for him (children—again, especially *male* children).

Think of all the oppression and brutality bound up in this, and all the ways in which this has led not only to physical abuse of women, in many forms, but also unbearable mental anguish and torment for women—right down to today.

This is the tradition in which Jesus was deeply steeped—a tradition with which he never ruptured, but in fact propagated and fostered.

As another illustration of this, consider what Jesus says about divorce. According to Jesus (for example, in Luke 16:18, and Matthew chapter 5:31–32), getting a divorce and remarrying is committing adultery—is a sin. Imagine, and unfortunately we do not have to imagine, what the effect has been of this "teaching" down through the ages, through thousands of years of male-supremacist social relations. Think of the effect of this especially on women who are trapped in marriages that are oppressive and abusive—the idea that if they leave an oppressive and abusive husband, that is a sin, a sin equal to adultery. Think of all the truly horrific suffering this has caused and reinforced down through centuries and centuries and centuries—people, and women in particular, having this preached at them by the religious authorities, citing the Bible and the words of Jesus himself. And today, in 21st century America, we find Christian Fascists, inspired by—and wielding—these "teachings," working to make it more much difficult to get a divorce, with the ultimate aim of outlawing and criminalizing divorce altogether (witness key steps in that direction, with the "covenant marriage" provisions that have been adopted in more than one state in the U.S.).

"Putting an End to 'Sin,' Or We Need Morality but not Traditional Morality"

(from *Preaching From a Pulpit of Bones, We Need Morality, but not Traditional Morality*, 1999)

[Editor's Note: In this excerpt Bob Avakian is discussing a book by Jim Wallis entitled *The Soul of Politics*. Wallis is a religious activist and editor of *Sojourner* magazine.]

Perhaps the most concentrated expression of what is wrong with Wallis's vision comes through in his discussion of women, patriarchy, and the family. Here again, in a section entitled "Pattern of Inequality, Exploiting the Sisters," *The Soul of Politics* contains searing exposure of some of the more horrendous aspects of this exploitation, including the sexual plunder of women by U.S. soldiers in countries like the Philippines as well as the widespread rape and battering of women in the U.S. itself. And the inseparable connection between "Sexism and Advertising" in the economy and culture of U.S. society today is graphically illustrated. Yet, when Wallis seeks to examine "The Structure of Sexism" and to ground an understanding of this and opposition to it in Biblical terms and values, he is compelled to turn back on himself and to end up upholding or conciliating with much of this very structure of oppression.

Wallis states that "the real issue between men and women is not sex, but the inequality of power." He speaks of "the pattern that underlies and fuels" violence against women, and goes on to say that "The name of the pattern is patriarchy—the subordination of women to men...the control of women...has been the dominant characteristic of patriarchy from the earliest times.... Like slaves, women were made into property themselves—male property." (pp. 104-105, 106-107) But the problem is that the source to which Wallis wants to turn for guidance in opposing this patriarchal oppression, the *Bible*, is itself a *major pillar* of precisely that oppression. This is strikingly evident from the very first books of the *Bible* (the first five, so-called "Mosaic," books) through the remainder of the Old Testament and throughout the New Testament, including very blatantly in the Epistles of Paul, who is generally acknowledged to be the major influence on the New Testament and the Christian religion as it developed and spread in its early formative period.

The subordination of women to their husbands and to male domination in general is both advocated and assumed throughout the *Bible*, and in many places—including the very chapters and books where the Ten Commandments and Mosaic Law generally are presented—the acquiring of women as slaves, and as prizes of war and objects of sexual plunder, rather than being proscribed is prescribed and ordained (see, for example, Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 22, as well as Judges 21).

This *profound* contradiction—that Wallis wants to see an end to patriarchal oppression and inequality for women but at the same time he wants to uphold the morality and conventions associated with the *Bible* and the "Judeo-Christian tradition," which embody and reinforce this very patriarchal oppression and inequality—runs through the whole of Wallis's discussion of the pattern of sexual inequality and asserts itself very

acutely in Wallis's treatment of the question of abortion—which he correctly identifies as one of the major "battlegrounds" in U.S. society (as well as many other societies) today.

Inconsistent Opposition to Patriarchy

Wallis writes that he and his colleagues at *Sojourner* magazine "have advocated for the rights and equality for women" and at the same time "we have upheld the sacred value of human life, drawing from our religious roots and our commitment to nonviolence." And he concludes: "These two values—the rights of women and the sanctity of life—have become the antagonistic poles of our public discourse." (p. 109)

Once again, and characteristically, Wallis wants to see an end to this antagonism through reconciliation—he wants to "tone down the rhetoric" of what he sees as two "extreme" positions—he insists that "we need answers that speak to the concerns of both sides." (See pp. 109, 110.) But what does it mean when someone who says he is opposed to patriarchal oppression describes unapologetic insistence on the right of women to abortion, and passionately militant opposition to the attempt to take away that right, as "extreme"?! It means that this person's opposition to patriarchal oppression is, at best, incomplete and inconsistent, as indeed is the case with Wallis.

As many of us who support the right of women to abortion "on demand and without apology" have pointed out, the right of women to determine when and if to have children—their right not to be forced to bear children against their will—is the same kind of fundamental question as the right of Black people not to be slaves. Calls for reconciliation over questions and rights as fundamental as this can only serve those who would enforce enslavement and deny such fundamental rights. This is precisely what Wallis serves in treating abortion as something that should not be legally forbidden under all circumstances, but something that is also not an inalienable right and (as he quotes "Feminist Shelley Douglass") "is 'almost always a moral wrong.'" (p. 110)

In addition to the fundamental fact that what exists within a woman's body, from the time she becomes pregnant until that pregnancy ends, is not a full-blown "baby" or a "child" but a developing fetus, which is in effect an integral part of the woman's body and physical functioning—which has *the potential* to become a separate full-blown human being but is *not yet* that—Wallis's attempt to find justification for his position on abortion by invoking "the sacred value of human life," and grounding this in Biblical tradition and injunction, cannot stand. Wallis refers, approvingly, to "Some women [who] favor a consistent ethic of life, which views threats posed by nuclear weapons, capital punishment, poverty, racism, patriarchy, *and* abortion as parts of a seamless garment of interconnected and interwoven concerns about life's sacred value." (pp. 109-110, emphasis in original) But, in fact, the *Bible* and "Judeo-Christian tradition" do not provide a basis for this "seamless garment" position.

No Refuge in the Bible

As I pointed out in critiquing William Bennett's "Virtues," the Sixth Commandment, read in the context of the "Mosaic Law" of which it is a part, clearly means only that it is forbidden to kill someone unless "The Law" and "The Lord" say it is right and necessary to kill someone. The *Bible* not only does *not prohibit* but *insists upon* killing people for many reasons—and there are many cases where such killing would be considered by almost everyone today to be wanton and atrocious, however much it may be *celebrated* in the *Bible* (see, for example, Exodus 32:16-28, as well as Exodus 21:17 and Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

What this reflects is that in all human societies, including those which gave rise to the *Bible*, the taking of human life—as well as the aborting of fetuses, which are a form of life but not yet full-blown separate human beings—will always be evaluated by society according to the criterion of how it affects society in an overall sense. And where society is divided into different social groups—and most fundamentally different classes—then the view toward these questions that will predominate is that of the class in society which holds the dominant economic position and therefore dominates the political as well as the cultural and intellectual life of that society.

The societies that the *Bible* reflects and upholds are societies in which slavery and other forms of exploitation and oppression, including the patriarchal oppression of women, as well as rivalry and plunder between various nations and empires, are all integral and indispensable elements, and the way the *Bible* treats the taking of human life is a reflection of this.

Thus, while the *Bible* does not provide justification for the "seamless garment" position, it certainly does provide justification, or rationalization, for various forms, including the most extreme manifestations, of oppression and plunder, including of women.

So long as one insists on clinging to the *Bible* and its moral vision—to "core values, derived from our religious and cultural traditions," as Wallis expresses it (p. 42)—one will never be able to struggle, in a thoroughgoing way, to abolish all these forms of oppression, to uproot all exploitative and enslaving economic and social relations and their corresponding political institutions and ideological expressions. In the final analysis, only by rupturing with this vision—with these traditions and "traditional values"—is it possible to wage, and to win, such a thoroughgoing, truly revolutionary, struggle.

"The Bible and Baby-Killing: The Right to Abortion and the Whole Direction of Society"

(*Revolution* #13, August 28, 2005)

[This was included in the pamphlet *The Coming Civil War and Repolarization for Revolution in the Present Era*, 2005.]

In countering the attack on abortion as "killing babies"—which is one of the main lines of attack of the religious fundamentalists—we should bring out forcefully things like Psalm 137 and the book of Isaiah (for example, chapters 9 through 14 in Isaiah). In those chapters of the book of Isaiah in particular, "The Lord" (the "god" of the Bible) and the prophet Isaiah, speaking directly on behalf of "The Lord," calls repeatedly for destruction and atrocity to be brought down on the peoples, including the small children, who have angered "The Lord." And, as in Isaiah, so Psalm 137 ends with this call for smashing to pieces the little ones of Babylon:

*"O Babylon, you devastator,
Happy shall they be who pay
you back
what you have done to us!
Happy shall be they who take
your little ones
and dash them against the rock!"*

Here in Psalm 137, as well as in the book of Isaiah, and elsewhere in the Bible, when it calls for, demands and celebrates the bashing in OF the heads of babies, what is being talked about is NOT a *fetus*, in the uterus of a woman, but babies that have been born and are distinct human beings, physically separate from their mother. So, the next time we hear of these fanatical fundamentalists howling that women who have abortions and doctors and other providers of abortions are "baby killers," these "Bible-thumpers" should be confronted like this: "Do you believe in the Bible?" "Yes," they will of course reply. "Well, then, do you believe in *this*?"—referring to what is in passages like the end of Psalm 137 or in the book of Isaiah, where "The Lord" and those representing for "The Lord" demand and celebrate the killing of actual babies. "If you won't uphold *that*," we should insist to them, "then don't wave your Bible around and invoke 'biblical authority' to denounce others as 'baby killers'! If you are going to try to 'pick and choose' what you will uphold from the Bible, then you are *hypo-crites*—because all this time you have been insisting that the Bible is the literal word of god and has the absolute moral authority of god's law. So, unless you will uphold everything, every last word, that is in the Bible—including where it repeatedly calls for wanton and grotesque atrocities, like the mass murder of actual babies—then you need to just shut up, and quit harassing and threatening women who want abortions and providers who enable them to have safe abortions."

Now, if these fundamentalist fanatics *will* uphold these atrocities in the Bible, *including the slaughter of actual babies*, then they definitely are the *worst hypo-crites* when they

condemn *others* as "baby-killers." And this is especially outrageous when they hurl this accusation of "baby-killers" at women (and doctors and others who assist them) who in fact are not "killing babies" but are carrying out a medical procedure which aborts a fetus, not a separate, developed human being (I will come back to this in a minute). In this case, too, the fundamentalist fanatics have nothing to say—nothing that anyone should listen to—about "killing babies."

Another very important point is this: These people who attack the right to abortion are overwhelmingly *opposed to birth control* as well—and they are opposed not only to the IUD, which technically prevents the embryo from attaching to the uterus after the egg has been fertilized, they are opposed *to any and every kind of birth control*. Certainly, all these Catholic reactionaries who are opposed to abortion are also opposed to birth control. It is a matter of official Catholic Church doctrine to oppose birth control, for a fundamental reason that is very much at the heart of this whole issue: according to this reactionary religious viewpoint, a woman's role is to be a subordinate to her husband and a breeder of his children, and birth control as well as abortion can undermine that. And the Protestant fundamentalist fascists are also overwhelmingly opposed to birth control—not only outside the confines of marriage, but even *within* it (this is clear from many statements of leading Protestant fundamentalist opponents of abortion, although it is important to pin them down on this very concretely).

These are ways that we can hit back hard at them, politically and ideologically, getting to what is the essence here: It is not the supposed "killing of babies," it is that they want women to be in essence the property of men, to be controlled by their husbands and to be breeders of children, breeders of property, for their husbands. We should continue to hammer at them: "*That* is what your Bible advocates, and *that* is what you are for. And this is shown not only by your opposition to abortion but also by the fact that, at the same time, you are against birth control."

It is also very important to be bringing things back to the reality of what 90 plus percent of abortions actually consist of—the fact that they are performed in the first trimester, the first three months of pregnancy, when the fetus is anywhere from the size of the period at the end of this sentence to about an inch in length. Those opposed to abortion distort and play up things they make sound like horrors, like late-term abortions. First of all, they label these procedures "partial birth abortions," distorting what they actually are. Second of all, they misrepresent how often they actually occur—the fact that they are really quite rare—and they misrepresent under what conditions they generally occur, they leave out or push to the background the health of the woman in question. And then *this*—their distortions of late-term abortions—becomes, in their propaganda, identified with *all* abortions. Not that we should be defensive about the necessity for late-term abortions, but all this is just total distortion. We have to wage a counter-offensive here, and get to what the essence of the issue is. In the case of the great majority of abortions, over 90 percent, what is involved, in terms of the fetus, is a very tiny clump of cells—it is that versus a woman's fate. That's what we're talking about here. Physiologically and socially, that's essentially what we're talking about here—the fate of women vs. a clump of cells, which at that point (during the first three months in particular) are by no means even completely differentiated (into different organs and parts of the body with different

specific functions) and certainly are not anything like a developed human being—and are, in fact, a tiny clump of cells. We have to get things back to the *real* issue.

This is not only a crucial issue in an overall sense, but it is being even more sharply posed in the aftermath of the 2004 election, where the Christian Fascists are pushing like crazy to abolish the right to abortion—they are insisting to Bush and the Republicans: "You've gotta deliver on this now." That is why they went after Arlen Specter (a long-time Senator from Pennsylvania, who is supposedly a more "moderate Republican," whatever that means), because Specter cautioned Bush about nominating people as judges who would support the outright outlawing of abortion.

And, as with the political situation in general at this point, the polarization around the question of abortion is not favorable now. Even among women, particularly younger women, there is a lot of confusion around this issue, a lot of influence of the reactionary offensive against abortion, including the characterization of abortion as "killing babies." Many of these young women have not understood the essence of this issue—and many other people have lost sight of it, or become "fuzzy" and "conflicted" about it—not only because of the reactionary offensive but also because the bourgeois-democratic leaders of the women's movement have let themselves believe that they could just become passive and let Democratic Party politicians like Clinton and Gore take care of it. They fell into the false notion that, "Oh, they'll never really take away the right to abortion—or, if there is a real threat of that, we just gotta vote for Democrats." They have let the other side—the Christian Fascists and the reactionaries generally, with their offensive against abortion—completely have the initiative, politically and ideologically (including morally), for years and years now.

And, while it was of course a very good thing that a million people came out to demonstrate recently in support of the right to abortion, by itself that will not end up amounting to very much, because these people haven't seized the political and ideological initiative around this question. And, to be blunt, many of the million women and men who were there, to support the right to abortion, would have a very hard time answering the moral and overall ideological offensive of the other side—other than to just sort of retreat into certain catch phrases about a woman's right to choose, without being able to engage the substance of the attack on that.

It is also a fact that in general the women's movement is shrinking because it is not engaging, or not effectively engaging, key issues that affect women. There is a lot of right-wing Christian Fascist organization among women who are frightened by all the things that the feminists, for good reason, cherish and uphold. And those questions are not really being addressed by the more reformist women's movement. It's not that the women who are being heavily influenced by the Christian Fascist arguments are the main group that needs to be reached right now, but they shouldn't be just ignored and written off either.

I am going into this and giving it a lot of emphasis because these questions are very important themselves, because all this is a major part of how polarization is presently taking shape in U.S. society—and because this could play a big part in favorable

repolarization, touching profoundly on the whole direction of society.

This is yet another crucial challenge that we must take up, coming from our full revolutionary communist perspective and its goal of the complete emancipation of women, the abolition of all oppression and exploitation and ultimately the emancipation of all of humanity.

"Women's Liberation and Proletarian Revolution"

(from *From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist*, A Memoir by Bob Avakian, 2005)

For myself personally, I began going through a further transformation in terms of understanding women's oppression, as a result of coming into contact with and taking up communist theory. There were also other influences—the women revolutionaries that I knew, the beginning upsurge of a women's movement. But it was particularly the whole tradition and theory of communism that had a big influence on me in that way. There were certain influences from the history of the international communist movement that were in the direction of trade unionism and reformism, but there were also some very important positive traditions and influences—including International Women's Day, that had been institutionalized in a positive sense and made a significant part of the history and tradition and ongoing practice of the communist movement internationally. And there was the whole analysis, from Marx and Engels, down through Lenin and Mao, about the emancipation of women and how that was an integral part of the whole socialist revolution and the struggle to reach communism.

Becoming a communist and taking all that up was the central way in which I began to undergo radical transformation myself on this question. As I said, when we first went to Richmond we saw ourselves as sort of "macho revolutionaries." There were women who came to Richmond, sometimes as part of couples who moved there and sometimes on their own, and that had an important influence. Some of them were very strong and independent, both in terms of their thinking, but also just in the whole way they dealt with everything. And there was the radical development inside the movement, as well as more broadly in society, of what became the feminist movement, or the women's movement, and some of it wasn't just more narrowly feminist, some of it had a communist perspective, at least in a general sense.

All these different influences had an important effect, but I think what was most essential within all this was a communist understanding of the oppression of women and the pivotal role this played in the development of class divisions and oppressive society overall, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the pivotal role that abolishing all that and completely emancipating women played in the overall struggle to end all oppression and establish a society, a world, without class divisions and without oppressive relations.

And you can't separate that from the impact of revolutionary China at that time. When you start studying and learning more about the Chinese revolution and the experience building socialism in China, you very quickly come to see what it meant that this was a society that was steeped in feudal oppression before the revolution triumphed in 1949. They were not just taking on and uprooting capitalist forms of oppression, including of women, but also these deeply rooted feudal relations, customs, traditions and ideas. 1970 was only twenty years, more or less, from the triumph of that revolution, and you'd see that there were women like Chiang Ching in the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, but more to the point you'd read things like the *Peking Review* and *China Reconstructs* and other publications that came out of socialist China, and you'd

see women active and playing crucial roles in all different spheres of Chinese society, even though—as the Chinese comrades themselves acknowledged—they still had a long way to go. I was struck recently by watching that movie, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, because that is set, obviously, in pre-revolutionary China, and you see how deep the feudal stuff was. If you look at that movie and you are aware of what happened in China after the revolution, you can't help thinking "my god,"—if you'll pardon the expression—"within 20 years or so after the revolution triumphed, they'd made these tremendous transformations." And not only in an overall sense, but specifically with regard to the role and status of women in the society.

I still remember, for example, seeing Barbara Walters on a morning talk show in the early '70s, doing this little segment on shoes from all different parts of the world. And when she got to China, she had these shoes that were worn by women who had bound feet in the old feudal Chinese society, where the feet of women would be bent under and their bones broken to make their feet petite and "dainty," and supposedly sexually appealing in that way. She was showing these little shoes that women had to wear after their feet were mutilated in this way, and she commented, "Well, they need an equal rights amendment in China—which in fact they have." And it was striking: here's Barbara Walters having to acknowledge that women, as she put it, had "an equal rights amendment," that in fact they had gone a long way toward achieving not just equal rights but an emancipated position and playing crucial roles in China, even though as I said, and as the Chinese openly talked about, there was still a long way to go with that.

They were only a few decades out of feudalism, and there was also still a lot of bourgeois stuff with regard to women to uproot. Still, the transformations they had carried out—and the contrast not only with feudal society but with a "modern" bourgeois society like the U.S.—was very striking. I saw this very clearly when I visited revolutionary China. This was true on every level—the relations among people, and in particular between women and men, were so radically different from anything I'd seen before. For example, the kitchen workers and waiters in the hotel where we were staying would engage you in friendly casual conversation but would also talk with you about world affairs and what was happening in the U.S., as well as what was going on in China. Some young women who were university students from another part of China were spending a certain amount of time working as staff in the hotel, and there was no subservience in their relationship, nor was there any standoffishness. They came up and were very interested in who we were and what we thought about all kinds of things. I remember that when I came back from China and put on the TV in the U.S., how starkly it stood out—everything is this fucking commodification of sex and in particular of women's bodies. And that was three decades ago—all this is even more overt and grotesque now! All that had been strikingly absent from China and the culture there.

"Imperialist Hypocrisy and the Taliban Oppression of Women"

(*Revolutionary Worker* #1124, October 28, 2001)

Has anyone noticed the glaring hypocrisy in the fact that many of the same assholes—all the way up to the highest levels of government—who have tried to prevent women from having the right to abortion and reproductive freedom in general are all of a sudden pretending to be outraged by the oppression of women under the Taliban?!

What is done by the Taliban, in the name of Islam, is in essence no different from what would follow from the literal interpretation of the *Bible* that many "Born Again Christians" like Falwell, Robertson, and a number of Bush's closest advisers (not to say Bush himself) insist upon. If you don't believe it, read the *Bible*!

Now the apologists for U.S. (and "Western") imperialism are opportunizing on outrage about the egregious forms of the oppression of women carried out by the Taliban (and more generally the overt forms of inequality and oppression that women are subjected to in "the Muslim world") as part of the justification for their "campaign" and even to generally assert (whether noisily and crudely or more "softly" and subtly) the "superiority of Western civilization" over Islamic civilization. Given all this, it is important not only in general but specifically in relation to this whole crisis and war to continue to do hard-hitting exposure of the oppression of women, in its many different forms, in the U.S. and other "advanced" and "modern" imperialist countries.

In this connection, there is relevance and importance to the point in *Preaching from a Pulpit of Bones* that there is a fundamental unity between the "traditional" (and "fundamentalist") forms of the oppression of women touted by the *Bible*-toting Christian Fascists, on the one hand, and on the other hand, "end of the empire" forms of the oppression of women—the widespread pornography and the widely promoted commodification of women's bodies and sexuality, the enslavement of millions of women in the "sex trade" that "services" men mainly in the imperialist countries, the fact that at least 1 out of every 4 women in the U.S. will be subjected to some form of sexual assault, and on and on.

These different forms and manifestations of degrading and subjugating women are "mirror opposites" and are all part of the overall oppression of women in the imperialist-dominated world today.

Preaching was speaking particularly about the imperialist countries themselves, and more particularly the U.S.—and focusing on the Christian Fascist program vis-a-vis that of more "laissez faire" bourgeois democracy and decadence. But this basic point also applies to the relationship between the "traditional" and "fundamentalist" forms of oppression of women in much of the "Middle East" and other "Islamic countries" (and much of the Third World more broadly—including countries in which **Christianity** is the dominant religion—where the bourgeois-democratic transformation of society has not been carried out, or carried out only partially and incompletely) vis-a-vis the

bourgeois-democratic imperialist countries themselves. In short, while it may take some different forms, brutality against women, inequality and subordination and degradation in every sphere of society is no less a fundamental and indispensable feature of "modern" bourgeois-imperialist countries than it is in "Islamic" and other societies where there are significant aspects of pre-capitalist forms of oppression and exploitation.

"The Confusion about Abortion"

(from *Reaching for the Heights and Flying Without a Safety Net*, 2002)

Let's take another example of how the ruling class maneuvers and manipulates: the right to abortion. This was a major concession on the part of the ruling class. It's hard to imagine it, and I know a lot of young people, including a lot of young women, have a hard time imagining what it was like before this concession was made in the form of the Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion. Many people today, including unfortunately many young women, take this for granted and they get confused even about the "moral issues." Part of the reason for that is because of the ideological offensive of the ruling class to make abortion seem like, at best, a "necessary evil." But part of the reason, also, is that, for 30 years now, people, and women in particular, haven't been living in a situation where, if they decide they really want an abortion, they can't get it, legally. And that can be a life-determining decision—to have, or not to have, a baby at a particular time in your life. I don't mean that in the sense that the reactionaries say it: that you're going to regret it the rest of your life if you "kill your baby." I mean it in the sense that whether you're going to have a child at a given time, and all that is bound up with that, is obviously a big decision about the whole direction of your life, and it has a major impact on what your life's going to be like. The right *not to have this decision forced on you*—the right for a woman to be able to make this decision herself—was a major concession that was also wrenched out of the ruling class coming off the '60s and the whole emergence of the women's movement and everything related to that.

For its own reasons, the ruling class hasn't yet moved to take away this right wholesale, but they've been chipping away at it, practically—putting more and more restrictions on it, doing more and more things to define fetuses as people with rights, etc., etc., even when they aren't now trying to overturn *Roe* and outright abolish the right to abortion. And politically and ideologically, bourgeois politicians and spokespeople, including "defenders of the right to abortion" like Al Gore (and Bill Clinton), have been propagating this whole notion that abortion should be "legal but rare"—that, in essence, while it is a right, it is also a real tragedy. Again, they are presenting it as a necessary evil—instead of what it is: a key aspect of the struggle to emancipate women.

I would like to understand this more fully, but my definite sense is that there is a lot of confusion on this question, including among a lot of young women who "should know better"—not to blame them, but they're confused, they've been bombarded with this whole idea that your role is to be a breeder...or even if it's not that crude, that it's "selfish" of you to want to have your own life separate and apart from being a bearer of children. And this is another thing that powerful forces in the ruling class have been pushing—another way they're seeking to reverse right and wrong and turn things upside-down. And this goes so far as to attack people who stand up against oppression and have sacrificed in the struggle against oppression as "self-indulgent." Here we have the whole "'60s generation"—and, of course, I'm not talking about Dan Quayle or people like that, but the people who defined that generation. What was that generation defined by? It was Black college students and white college students and others who went to the

South to join in the fight against open segregation and white supremacy, and who faced what that meant, lynching and all the rest of it. And then many of these youth came back and initiated or supported the Black liberation struggle, the movements among Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, the antiwar movement, the women's movement.

These were people making all kinds of personal sacrifices for larger social objectives and for the social good, in broad terms. And all of a sudden that's been redefined as a self-indulgent generation! Here is a generation that was the most self-sacrificing we've had so far—to be surpassed by the new generations hopefully—it was young people motivated by and acting on the objective of fighting against injustice and uprooting oppression. And how do they slander it to make it seem "self-indulgent?" You know: "sex, drugs, and rock and roll." Well, loosening things up, breaking out of repressive constraints, bringing forward new and fresh things in the culture and in relations among people, was part of the rebellion of the '60s too.

It may be hard to imagine now the uptight and suffocating shit that was the norm, socially and culturally, at the time in the U.S., and it was righteous and necessary to rebel against that. Of course, the bourgeoisie does what they do with everything—you know, people come forward with opposition to all this uptight, socially and sexually repressive stuff, and what do the powers-that-be do? They promote pornography and all kinds of bourgeois shit as if that's the alternative. But that's not what people were rebelling for. Again, it's important to understand that many of those things that were like "personal life style" questions had to do with rebellion against the whole highly restrictive and repressive social and cultural rules and regulations and ethos of the time. They were part of a larger, overall rebellion against repressive and oppressive relations and values. And somehow that's all been redefined to be "self-indulgent"; and somehow now it's declared to be "self-indulgent" to want to have an abortion, to want to have a larger life, to take part more broadly in society and not be reduced to being a breeder.

One of the things that should be posed is this question: How many of these people who oppose the right to abortion also don't oppose birth control? Very few. So there you get right to the essence of the matter. It's not a matter of "killing babies"—they want women to play a certain social role, it's very important to them. The family, as a patriarchal institution, is very important to them, it's very important to the whole bourgeois structure, especially when there are a lot of strains and contradictory trends pulling at society and a lot of changes that are undermining a lot of the traditional, oppressive relations and values.

The point I'm trying to emphasize here is that there was a high tide when some of these things were very clear and there was a whole generation of women—and secondarily, but importantly, men—who were enlightened about the whole role of women in society and the struggle to break tradition's chains in this regard, and this became concentrated in one major way around the question of abortion. And yet, one of the things that frustrates some of even the more reformist-minded feminists today is that a lot of the younger women coming along don't understand this. It's not just that they don't understand everything, all the struggle, that went into winning the right to abortion; but,

beyond that, it's how many younger people, including many young women, have been influenced in how they look at the question, "morally," ideologically and politically, how they're being influenced by this bourgeois rampage, really, and this concerted effort to "reverse verdicts," to reverse right and wrong, just as there has been around the question of national oppression and racism in this society.

Beginning in the 1980s, there has been a whole orchestrated and concentrated campaign to blot out the whole history of white supremacy in the U.S., right down to today, to pretend that the U.S. is a "color blind society," or one in which everyone not only should be but actually is judged simply according to their merit and achievements...*and therefore*, if you talk about the reality that there is not equality, that national oppression is still rampant and deeply rooted, that this remains a society in which white supremacy is widespread and deeply embedded, then *you* are somehow being "racist." In other words, according to this perverted logic, in order not to be "racist" you must accept white supremacy and inequality! This is a whole offensive that has been waged, for more than two decades now, to turn things around. And this is not just in the realm of ideas—it is not just affecting people's thinking about this decisive question—although that is very important; it is given practical application in things that are under attack—ethnic studies, affirmative action, bilingual education...all these things that were wrenched as concessions and have since been made into focuses of attack.

"The Qur'an, Islam, and the Oppression of Women – Bob Avakian Responds to a Letter on the Qur'an"

(Revolutionary Worker #969, August 16, 1998)

Letter from a Reader

Gentlemen:

I happened to pick up a copy of your 7/20/97 issue and noted an article on Islam. I'm sure it was well-intentioned, but there is at least one horrendous inaccuracy in it. I don't mind people airing our dirty linen if it's real—it helps to keep us honest, but lies or unverified untruths help no one. Specifically, the reference to the Quran chapter "Prohibition" (RW 7/20 p. 14, first column) is to chapter 66, verses at the beginning. Keep in mind that the Prophet was a head of state, and any matter of great political consequence confided to his wives should not be a subject of gossip. The quote from the Maududi translation reads as follows: "...the Prophet had confided a matter to a wife in secret. Then, when she disclosed the secret (to another), and Allah informed the Prophet..., the Prophet made known (to his wife) part of it, and overlooked part of it. So when the Prophet told her...she asked, 'Who informed you of this?' The Prophet said, 'I was informed by Him Who knows everything and is All-Aware. If you both (women) repent to Allah (it is better for you), for your hearts have swerved from the right path, and if you supported each other against the Prophet, you should know that Allah is his Protector, and after Him Gabriel and the righteous believers and the angels are his companions and helpers. It may well be that if the Prophet divorces all of you, Allah will give him in your place better wives, who are true Muslims, who are believing and obedient, penitent and worshipping and given to fasting, be they widows or virgins.'" (66:3-5) Be aware, also of two things: that the oppression of women one finds sometimes in "Muslim" societies is a carry-over from earlier, pagan and occult religious practices, and is not approved by the Quran; and that more than a few women have fled to Islam for safety and freedom from oppression—and they seem to be happy here.

Anyway, the scurrilous slant given to this particular quotation of the Quran does no service to your publication, as anyone at all familiar with the Quran will see immediately that either the reference was not checked for accuracy, or someone feels it is in their best interest to lie. Please be more careful in the future.

Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,
Maria Abdin

Bob Avakian Responds: The Qur'an, Islam, and the Oppression of Women

First, after receiving this letter, I went back and looked again into the particular passage in question from the Qur'an. (This is in the opening sections—in particular verses 3 through 5—of the chapter, or *surah*, called "The Forbidding" or "The Prohibition" or "The Banning" in various English translations.) I reviewed a number of commentaries on this passage, as well as on the Qur'an more generally, and I did some further reading of historical studies and other reference material relating to Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islam. Finally, I re-read the entire Qur'an (in English translation). All of this has strongly confirmed what I wrote in the original article (to which the above letter is responding): the Qur'an does in fact uphold and provide "religious authority" for the oppression of women, including the taking of women as prizes of war and plunder and generally a subordinate and "second class" status for women in society. The particular passage in question, regarding Muhammad's relations with his wives (and concubines), is both an expression of this in a general sense and is also, as I stated in the original article, an instance where, to say the least, Muhammad receives a "revelation from Allah" which is very convenient for Muhammad personally as well as serving his larger objectives.

As the above letter mentions, this particular passage refers to a situation where one (or more) of Muhammad's wives was gossiping about a matter involving Muhammad. An important question here—a question which the Qur'an itself does not directly speak to, and which the above letter also does not take up—is what exactly was the *content* of this gossip, what were his wives gossiping *about*? In reviewing various commentaries, etc., on this passage, it seems that there are several different interpretations, or traditions, concerning this. Some say that the passage in question refers to a tendency, on the part of at least some of Muhammad's wives, not to speak with proper deference to Muhammad, which was setting a bad example for other Islamic wives, in not being sufficiently respectful and obedient to their husbands. Others tell of how some of Muhammad's wives, who were upset that he was spending more time than was customary with one wife, played a trick on him so that he would no longer do this. But the interpretation of this passage that seems most in accord with historical accounts of Muhammad's life, and in particular his relations with his wives and concubines—and most consistent with what is said here in the Qur'an itself—is the interpretation I referred to in the original article (to which the above letter is replying).

This interpretation recounts how Muhammad had been given a Coptic slave girl, Mariya, as a concubine—this was part of a political arrangement with the ruler of Egypt at that time. Mariya bore Muhammad a son. This itself is said to have caused jealousy among Muhammad's wives, because sons were considered more valuable than daughters. (This son, however, died while still in infancy.) Further, on a certain day, when Muhammad was supposed to be sleeping with one of his wives, he was discovered by her sleeping with Mariya. Muhammad then promised to have no more sexual relations with Mariya; at the same time he insisted that nothing be said about all this. But some of Muhammad's wives did not obey this instruction and began gossiping about the whole affair. In response, Muhammad refused to have anything to do with these wives for a

month. Furthermore, he made known a "revelation from Allah" which became part of the Qur'an—in particular the warning (in verse 5 of this surah) that, if Muhammad's wives continue to give Muhammad trouble, it may be that Muhammad will divorce them and Allah will provide Muhammad with better wives! (Among other sources, this interpretation is included, and gone into in some detail, in the historical study of *Muhammad* by Maxime Rodinson, which is available in English translation from the original French.)

Oppression of Women in the Qur'an—and Resistance

Clearly, not only this particular interpretation but all of the various traditions associated with these verses in the Qur'an reflect the fact that Muhammad's wives (and concubines) were in an inferior social position, both in relation to Muhammad himself and more generally in terms of the larger Islamic society and state in which they lived. Women in that society were regarded and treated as subordinate persons who must be dependent on and under the domination of men. This oppressive condition of women is asserted and authorized repeatedly throughout the Qur'an. This is the tradition that is represented in Islam—as in other major religions.

In other writings, including the article to which the above letter is responding, I have shown how the Qur'an (like other religious scriptures) upholds the oppression of women. Here let me just cite one example—one passage from the Qur'an—that makes this unmistakably clear, including in its call to whip or physically beat ("scourge") women when they are not obedient. This is from the surah entitled "Women" (verse 34):

"Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they [men] spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High Exalted, Great." (From *The Glorious Qur'an*, translation by Mohammad M. Pickthall)

Adherents of Islam often argue—as the above letter does—that, with regard to women's status, Islam actually represented a step forward in relation to "earlier, pagan and occult religious practices." And there is some truth to this. To cite one significant aspect of this, the Qur'an condemns and forbids the burying alive of female children, which was a common practice among the "pagan" Arabs of Muhammad's time (see, for example, the surah "Cattle," in verse 140). More generally, the Qur'an declares that women who are believers and act in accordance with Islam will also be rewarded in paradise; and the Qur'an sets down certain rights for women. But the fact remains that the Qur'an also sets forth that women occupy—that it is "Allah's will" for women to occupy—an inferior status to that of men. This is directly stated in such passages as the following: "they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them. Allah is Mighty, Wise." ("The Cow," verse 228—Mohammad M. Pickthall translation) And then, again, there is the instruction (quoted above) that men should "scourge" and otherwise punish women who are disobedient.

With regard to the claim, which is made in the above letter, that "more than a few women have fled to Islam for safety and freedom from oppression—and they seem to be happy here": The fact is that in those parts of the world where Islam is the dominant religion, there is resistance, in many different ways and forms—including open declarations and mass movements as well as clandestine organization—against the oppression of women and the way in which the Qur'an and the tenets of Islam are invoked as the ideological/religious "justification" for this oppression. For example, among the powerful exposures of this oppression—and calls to resist such oppression—have been statements from women in such countries as Iran and Afghanistan which have been printed in the *Revolutionary Worker* in the recent period. And it is important to recognize not only that such oppression exists and is upheld and enforced by the religious and political authorities in those countries, and other Islamic countries, but also that the "justification" for this is found in the Qur'an itself.

Once again, the point is not that the Qur'an and Islam are somehow unique among religions in terms of upholding the oppression of women and exploitative and oppressive relations generally. All major religions and religious scriptures have this in common. This is certainly true of Christianity and its Bible—as expressed in the New Testament as well as in the Old. And I am not saying that Islam represented a step backward, with regard to the status of women and in terms of oppressive relations in society generally, at the time and place in which Islam arose (Arabia, nearly 1500 years ago). The fundamental and essential point is precisely that the time has long since passed when Islam, and religion in general, can act as a standard and a guide for moving society forward. The social relations of which Islam (and religion in general) is ultimately an expression, and all the various forms of slavery and oppression bound up with these relations, have long since become historically outmoded and obsolete—they represent the past and, in today's world, they represent a direct barrier to the full emancipation of women and all of humanity.

In today's world, in order to carry out the great historical revolutionary leap which will bring about a society and a true global community that is not divided into oppressors and oppressed, as Marx and Engels wrote in the "Communist Manifesto," there must be a *radical rupture* with religious ideology. There must be a radical rupture with all ideology that upholds and reinforces relations of exploitation and oppression, just as there must be a radical rupture with the property relations that embody this exploitation and oppression, including the oppression of women. These radical ruptures are at the heart of what communism is all about—of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and the revolutionary struggle and revolutionary goal it represents.

As an expression and application of this ideology, our Party seeks to unite all who can be united, including people who hold religious views of various kinds, in the fight against the many different ways in which the masses of people are exploited and oppressed. Our orientation is to carry forward a dynamic of unity-struggle-unity with these many diverse people and forces, throughout the entire process of preparing for and then carrying out the overthrow of this capitalist-imperialist system and then moving forward to revolutionize society and abolish all oppression and exploitation, as part of the

world-wide proletarian revolution. And, as a very important part of this, we seek to carry out, in a comradely way, struggle over the question of religion as well as other decisive questions of world outlook, in order to continue advancing toward the final goal of breaking all the chains binding people, both in the economic, social and political realms and in people's thinking.

Excerpt from *What Humanity Needs: Revolution, and the New Synthesis of Communism, An Interview with Bob Avakian by A. Brooks* (2012)

The oppression of women, particularly in the form of this aggressive, violent pornography and the sex trade, and all that, as well as the enslavement of women in the form of seeking to deny them the right to have reproductive freedom, to be able to choose when and whether to have children, for god's sakes, if you'll pardon the expression—something as fundamental as that—denying them the right to that is tantamount to slavery, is virtually slavery, is a form, in fact, of enslaving them.

"Overcoming the Wounds and Scars that are Left Over from Capitalism"

(transcribed from the film of a talk given by Bob Avakian, *Revolution: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About*, 2003, and published in *Revolutionary Worker* #1246, July 18, 2004)

I think, for example, of China. Before the revolution succeeded and won power in China in 1949, a common thing for women in China is what's known as bound feet. Now this doesn't mean that they just tied something around their feet. They took the feet of women, they bent the toes, and then they broke their bones, crushed them, and then bound them in that way, to give them small and dainty feet which would be more sexually appealing to men. This was done...even prostitutes couldn't be prostitutes if they didn't have bound feet in most cases, let alone be a wife or in some other way be appealing to a man. Think of that brutal tyrant Mao Tsetung, who led the people to do away with this time-honored tradition in China. [Laughter and applause] Imagine, imagine, going against the grain of all of nature and denying the women the right to have their bones in their feet crushed and bound.

When you look at China and think, in 25 years of socialism there, the great things that were accomplished in terms of women coming forward in every sphere of society. Think about even something like the arts in China. They made breakthroughs in the ballet. We hear all this terrible stuff about Chiang Ching and everything. But do you know something? They made breakthroughs in ballet in China, revolutionary ballets, that women were making moves in the ballet that had never been done before in the history of ballet anywhere in the world, these were women 25 years away from having their feet bound and they tell us how horrible this was. Imagine them forcing these women to unbind their feet and dance in revolutionary ballets.

But this gives you an idea of the tremendous inequalities. In this society, we don't have bound feet, but we sure as hell have high heels that are ridiculous. [Applause] And all for what? So your ass thrusts out and your booty looks better. This is the whole idea of it. It's the same thing. It's just a different form. Maybe not as extreme.

But these are just outward symbols of the much deeper oppression that has to be thoroughly uprooted. And the ways of thinking as well as the customs that have to be fully transformed by the conscious and willful act of the people...not simply by enforcing it.

Excerpt from *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon* (2010)

[From the section "**Profound and acute contradictions, real potential for revolution**"]

And, even though things are different now [compared to the 1960s], there is an important potential role for radicalized women, particularly young women. This is so, even though right now many are caught up in a lot of nonsense, and even though what holds sway now—to a significant degree, not uniformly and unilaterally, but what has significant influence—is the idea of "empowerment." Instead of liberation, it's "empowerment"—and "empowerment" is basically reduced to the notion of increasing your value as a commodity in one form or another—this has all too much sway, particularly among younger women, but more generally as well. Still, even though things are not the same as in the time of the 1960s upsurge, and things right now are not very positive in terms of what is happening on the political terrain and the polarization in society, we should not look at things only in immediate terms, and in a short-sighted way—in an empiricist, pragmatic way—but should look at the underlying contradictions and the potential for things to be radically transformed on the basis of what in fact are driving forces that are embodied in these unresolved contradictions.

It is not the case that there is not a tremendous amount of alienation and anger—which is now largely pent-up—over these oppressive relations. It is that this is being directed and channeled into—and "spontaneously" finding—outlets in ways that are not leading toward emancipation and toward revolution which is necessary for that emancipation. But we should not therefore underestimate the potential radicalization and potential force for revolution that exists among the masses of women, and in particular young women, as well as other sections of the people.

Selections from Bullets, From the Writings, Speeches, & Interviews of Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (1985)

Recently I heard a startling statistic: one out of every four women in the U.S. will be the victim of a sexual assault during her lifetime. One out of four!, and the number is expected to rise to one out of three. Right there, even if this "way of life" did not produce any of the other seemingly endless outrages and genuinely monstrous crimes—all the way to world war—that it does produce; even if what stands behind that statistic were the only thing seriously wrong with this system, that alone would be enough to rise up against it and not stop until it had been overthrown and something better put in its place.

"Provocations," *Revolutionary Worker* #228, October 28, 1983

You mean to tell me that there is no distinction between the violence of a rapist and a woman's violence in fighting back against that? Wake up and realize what is going on in the world!

"Grasp Revolutionary Theory—Rely On the Masses,"
Revolutionary Worker #58, June 6, 1980

The word "bitch" as applied to women plays the same social role as the word "nigger" applied to Black people.

"Down on the Word Lady (to Say Nothing of Bitch),"
Revolutionary Worker #198, March 25, 1983

The woman question—that is, the position and role of women in society, and more specifically the abolition of the oppression of women—is much more than a mere question of democracy and equality. It does involve the question of equality—eliminating unequal relations between women and men is a decisive question and a decisive part of the proletarian revolution—but at the same time it is much more fundamental than that. It is much more central and fundamental to the whole question of the split-up of society into antagonistic classes, to the basic division of labor in human society—that is, the development and perpetuation in various forms of an *oppressive* division of labor and antagonistic social relations—and to the elimination of all this and the attainment of communism.

First published in
*Bullets, From the Writings, Speeches, & Interviews of Bob Avakian,
Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (1985)*

I am going to say this straight up, some of these guys out here will say, yeah, they dig revolution but they cannot go along with this part about equality between men and women. Bullshit! If you are serious about making revolution, if you are serious about abolishing every form of exploitation and oppression, if you are serious about sweeping away this system and all its monstrous crimes, how are you going to tell me that you want to eliminate every form of oppression except one, every form of inequality among the people except one, every form of degradation in society except one? You can't do it! How are we going to achieve equality and unity between different races among the masses of people and overcome all the other divisions they put in our ranks and yet still maintain among ourselves a position of slavemaster and slave, of commodity-owner and owned, of possessor and possessed between men and women? No, we cannot do that! And why should we want to? We want a world free of any form of exploitation, oppression, discrimination, and degradation among the masses of people. We do not want, it is not the outlook of our class, and it is no consolation—let's say for men—to have somebody to kick around and somebody to lord it over. Our class, the working class, is going to rise up and remake this whole world in our image and advance humanity to a whole new stage where nobody owns anybody or oppresses anybody in any form whatsoever! And if we are going to do this, we cannot break all of our chains but one; we cannot break all of our mental shackles but one. We have to break and smash and bury them all forever!

"You Can't Break All the Chains But One,"
Revolutionary Worker #95, March 6, 1981

The whole question of the position and role of women in society is more and more acutely posing itself in today's extreme circumstancesIt is not conceivable that all this will find any resolution other than in the most radical termsThe question yet to be determined is: will it be a radical reactionary or a radical revolutionary resolution, will it mean the reinforcing of the chains of enslavement or the shattering of the most decisive links in those chains and the opening up of the possibility of realizing the complete elimination of all forms of such enslavement?

Cited in *A Declaration: For Women's Liberation and the Emancipation of All Humanity*,
a special issue of *Revolution*, #158, March 8, 2009

"Ask the Chairman: Why Only Proletarian Revolution Can Liberate Women"

(*Revolutionary Worker* #846, March 10, 1996)

Question: What is your Party's policy on women?

The Chairman [Bob Avakian] Answers: Our Party's policy on women can be summarized in the slogans: "WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY" and "BREAK THE CHAINS—UNLEASH THE FURY OF WOMEN AS A MIGHTY FORCE FOR REVOLUTION!" These slogans and the policy they express are grounded in the understanding that women have a tremendous contribution to make—fully equal with that of men, in every respect—in revolutionizing society in every sphere and bringing about a whole new realm of freedom for human beings as a whole.

The oppression of women, on the greatest scale and down to the most personal and intimate detail, is an everyday fact of life under the present order. In personal-family relations, and everywhere in society, women—even those of the propertied and financially well-off classes—are continually subjected to insult, threats, abuse, degradation, and brutality at the hands of men. They are virtually treated as property themselves—as commodities to be bought and sold and to be used to sell other commodities. Male supremacist domination and oppression of women is not only an everyday fact of life—it is a foundation stone of capitalism and of all systems where one section of society dominates and exploits others. And therefore it is woven into the fabric of society and the dominant culture—in religious-based "traditional morality" as well as in the flagrant sexual plunder of pornography and prostitution.

At the same time, in the U.S. and more generally throughout the world, the increasing involvement of women in the workforce and in many other spheres of social life, and the growing resistance of masses of women to their "traditional" enslavement and to the attacks on them, is coming more and more openly into conflict with the need of the ruling classes to aggressively enforce this "traditional" enslavement and its accompanying "traditional morality." This is a very explosive contradiction—a potentially very powerful force for the most radical revolution in human history, *proletarian revolution*.

The oppression of women did not always exist—for thousands of years, men and women related to each other without domination and exploitation. The oppression of women first arose when early communal society split up into different and antagonistic classes. This happened not because of some unavoidable "flaw in human nature," but because changes in production—in tools and technique—undermined the old communal way of carrying out production (mainly gathering and hunting) and of sharing what was acquired in this way. Private accumulation of wealth went along with the new forms of production, which involved *private ownership* of the *means of production* (land, tools, and even people taken as slaves). One group in society now monopolized control of the means of production and dominated social life as a whole, forcing the others to labor for them. And, bound up with this, the more or less "spontaneous" or "natural" division of

labor between women and men—where women took responsibility for the rearing of children in their early years—was *transformed into an oppressive relation*.

The family so familiar in today's world (the "nuclear family") where the man is the "Lord" of his household, with domination over his wife and children—this emerged with the accumulation of wealth as private property. The man controlled this property and insisted upon control over his wife, including her sexual and reproductive activity, in order to see to it that this property was passed on to *his* children, in particular his *male* children (and not someone else's). As Frederick Engels pointed out, the word "family" itself is derived from the ancient Roman word, *familia*, which referred to a household in which the man had the power of life and death over his wife and children as well as his slaves.

In some recent writings on the question of morality, I have called attention to the fundamental point that, throughout the entire revolutionary process that aims to create the conditions for communism, the struggle must be waged to continually, and ever more thoroughly, overcome and uproot the relations of inequality and oppression that shackle women; to promote personal, family, and sexual relations that are based on mutual love and respect and equality between men and women; and to increasingly develop forms for the masses of people to carry out—through cooperative efforts involving men equally with women—the functions which are now focused overwhelmingly in the family and which are a burden on women in particular. Through this profound revolutionary process, the "nuclear family" will be finally abolished and replaced by new forms of social relations in communist society—a society based on conscious and voluntary cooperation among people—without economic, political, and social domination and inequality.

Engels, in discussing the connection between the family and the accumulation of wealth as private property in human historical development, also emphasized something even more important and profound: While, in the past, changes in production undermined the basis for a communal society and brought into being relations of exploitation and oppression—including very centrally the oppression of women—humanity has now reached the point where such exploitation and oppression is not only *unnecessary* but is a definite *hindrance* to the all-around development of human beings and their society. The only thing now holding back a great leap in this development is the capitalist-imperialist system of exploitation that dominates the world and the continuing oppressive relations bound up with this system and with the division of human society into exploiting and exploited classes.

Humanity as a whole and its forces of production—including not only technology but, most importantly, people and their knowledge and skills—have long since reached the point where poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and literal starvation could be completely eliminated. Yet these things are still very widespread in the world, affecting the great majority of the world's people. Humanity has reached the point where meeting the all-around needs of the people, including the rearing of children and providing for future generations, could be achieved through the cooperative efforts of all members of society, women and men, with equality and in a way that continuously advances people's

understanding of and transformation of society and the world in the interests of humanity as a whole. But the control and organization of humanity's forces of production, and of political, cultural and intellectual life, by a small number of exploiters stands directly in the way of all this.

That is why revolution, and nothing less than revolution, is needed and urgently called for—a *proletarian revolution*—a revolution that, in achieving its final aim of communism, will sweep away all class divisions and exploitation and all oppressive social relations, including the shackling of women in "tradition's chains." And, at the same time, the struggle to overturn and uproot the oppression of women will play a great and central part in carrying out this proletarian revolution and bringing a communist world into being.

Basics 3:22

You cannot break all the chains, except one. You cannot say you want to be free of exploitation and oppression, except you want to keep the oppression of women by men. You can't say you want to liberate humanity yet keep one half of the people enslaved to the other half. The oppression of women is completely bound up with the division of society into masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited, and the ending of all such conditions is impossible without the complete liberation of women. All this is why women have a tremendous role to play not only in making revolution but in making sure there is all-the-way revolution. The fury of women can and must be fully unleashed as a mighty force for proletarian revolution.

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About the Author

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