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CURRENTS

READINGS IN RACE RELATIONS

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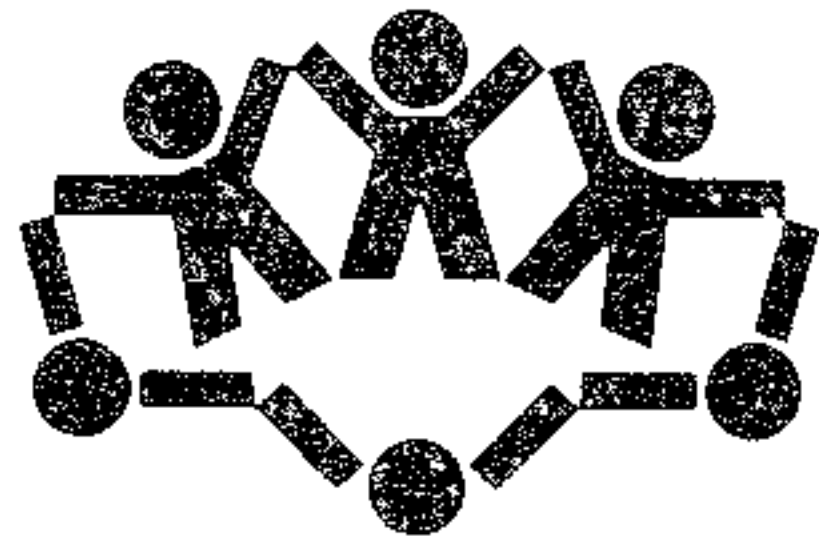
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FOCUS
ON
VISIBLE
MINORITY
WOMEN

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The Urban Alliance on Race Relations, formed in July 1975 "to promote a stable and healthy multiracial environment in the community," is a non-profit organization made up of volunteers from all sectors of the community.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations is an educational agency and an advocate and intermediary for the visible minorities. It works toward encouraging better race relations, increased understanding and awareness among our multicultural, multiracial population through programmes of education directed at both the private and public sectors of the community. It is also focusing its efforts on the institutions of our society including educational systems, employment, government, media, legislation, police, social service agencies and human services, in order to reduce patterns of discrimination and inequality of opportunity which may exist within these institutions.

The work of the organization is carried out through working committees such as: Educational Institutions; Legislation; Media; Law Enforcement.

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THE NON-WHITE CANADIAN WOMAN as a human being, as a topic of research, and as the subject of this issue of *CURRENTS* is an elusive being. Myths and stereotypes abound. Nowhere in our society is the social terrain more complex, controversial and contradictory than where a racial minority and the "weaker" gender intersect.

This issue of *CURRENTS* is a very tentative attempt to begin to explore some of the challenges and concerns of contemporary non-white Canadian women. Hopefully it will encourage further discussion and analysis of the socio-economic conditions faced by non-white women in Canada, of racism and the women's movement, and of sexism within minority communities. It is also hoped that it will contribute to an increased recognition of the considerable achievements and ongoing efforts of non-white women to confront these problems against considerable odds.

The pervasive oppression of non-white women in Canada has been entrenched deep in the country's history and is rooted in racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. This oppression is manifested personally and institutionally.

Double Jeopardy

The non-white woman suffers the double jeopardy of being inhibited from fulfilling the responsibilities of a full and equal citizen in this country because of the insidious influences of both sexism and racism.

Unfortunately it can be said that neither the race relations or women's rights movement has proven capable of addressing fully the issues most relevant to non-white Canadian women.

Combatting these two areas of discrimination imposes a double role, or raises the question of what should be the priority? Should she melt into the melting pot of femaleness rather than divide the women's movement? Should she be drawing from the limited energies that should be utilised for her non-white community, and at the same time emasculate the non-white male just at the time when he is beginning to find his manhood? These are of course false and specious questions and suggest an ideological trap to insist that one struggle is more important than another.

The necessity of pursuing both is clearly justified and succinctly explained by this quote from Rosemary Brown who said: "As a liberated woman, I bring to the Black struggle the confidence which I have in myself as a person as well as the respect which I have for myself and others."

In spite of racial and sexual oppression, which affect all non-white female Canadians, non-white women of course are not a monolithic group. Due to the cultural diversity, the many goals, life styles and objectives among non-white women, it is not feasible to make them all fit into one niche. For this reason, the goals and objectives of non-white women's concerns will be achieved through a variety of organisations and ideologies.

Non-white women have traditionally participated in the many campaigns against racism. In recent years, greater numbers have confronted the impact of sexism. They are beginning to meet informally and to organise formally to discuss, analyse and solve their problems. Non-white women in Canada are defining themselves, their goals and their struggles as they work individually, collectively and in coalition to defeat racism, sexism and other forms of oppression.

Tim Rees

The Visible Minority Woman

Dr. Mavis E. Burke

Since it is our custom as Canadians to devote a great deal of time and energy to esoteric definitions of terms, and the reference to 'visible minorities' is not without its detractors, even from amongst ourselves, let me establish at the outset that, for the purposes of this article, the frame of reference is to be non-white ethnic minority women in the context of a predominantly white society. While it is true that a large number of this group have immigrated to Canada at varying points over the past two decades, it should also be recognized that an appreciable number of visible minority women are Canadian-born. The irony here is that they also often experience the same kind of rejection in the workplace and share the alienation felt by the newcomer. For those who know no other home than Canada, discrimination and continuing disadvantage in labour force participation may yet threaten the social fabric of this country. Racism and sexism challenge the concept of fair employment practices and equal opportunity employment in the Canadian workplace.

To a certain extent these problems reflect the role and status of women in general in Canadian society, even at the present time when according to Statistics Canada's latest estimate, women outnumber men by 12.6 million to 12.3 million. According to the 1981 Census, 50.7% of the Ontario population are female. One might therefore expect common cause to be made on issues affecting women, particularly the No. 1 issue of Equality of Payment – Equal Pay for Equal Work and Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value – as well Equality of Treatment in the Workplace. But there is still little if any recognition by mainstream women's groups that racism and sexism in the workplace pose specific threats to the livelihood, the well-being and the very survival of the visible minority woman in this society.

Although the total visible minority population in Ontario represents only 5% of the total Ontario population, a high proportion are women, most being located in the Toronto region. Statistics for the 1981 Census indicate that approximately 75% of women from the Black, South Asian, Indonesian, Filipino, Korean, Chinese and Japanese communities live in this region. The notable exception is the Native people with only 14% of women resident in this locality. However, as the 1981 Census indicates, visible minority women are also distributed in smaller and varying numbers across the province, in major Ontario centres.

A profile of the visible minority woman as worker indicates the majority are to be found in low paid, non-unionised areas of service occupations, in temporary jobs on contract but without tenure, or in a variety of occupations holding down jobs with no clear-cut criteria for promotion.

Within recent years, the situation of domestic workers, (a high percentage being from visible minorities), has been brought to the attention of the public, legislators and immigration authorities. As a result of the work done by INTERCEDE and representations by other groups, some changes have been made. Conditions of work require further study, including the need for opportunities to develop skills not only in language, but also in other educational areas. For many of these workers domestic service was seen as temporary employment on the way to advancement, but, without further training, this often becomes the impossible dream. More must be done to assist in setting new standards and protecting the interests of household workers while recognizing their skills in household management and childcare. There is ample evidence to suggest that the lifestyle of employers and employees fictionalised by Austin Clarke's

novel, "Meeting Point" comes closer to reality than one would care to admit. It poses some critical questions about employer-employee relationships as well as about the need for protection of non-unionised workers.

Some visible minority women may have had previous experience in the garment or textile industry. Many more have become a part of this group through the small business operator, prepared to turn a deaf ear to lack of prowess in the official languages of Canada, and a blind eye to immigration status, so that a minimum wage or lower can be offered and any claims to workers' rights ignored. Working hours and conditions injurious to health are a matter of continuing concern for the visible minority woman in this predicament.

It is understandable that women feel comfortable for a time to be working with others functioning almost entirely in their own language, but without opportunities to learn the language of work in the Canadian marketplace, there is a danger of creating their own 'Job Ghetto' with little opportunity for escape. This is equally true of other occupations in which there is no demand for communicative skill in English, as for example in the case of office cleaners who are often recruited from one ethnic group. Here too the worker will find that an intended stop-gap can become a permanent job without a future. We should demand that public and private sector employers exercise their responsibility in seeing that contractors fulfil their obligations to their workers. I see no reason why the various levels of government cannot set an example by creating a real learning environment for their own service staff composed frequently of visible minority women. In many instances Affirmative Action Programmes have not included this kind of vision.

Other visible minority women who have no language problem are increasingly found in areas such as those identified by West Indian poet, Vibert Cambridge when he asks -

"Did we stay here to continue
sleeping on our
Eaton's salesgirl clerk typist
clerical officer, grade 5 civil
service jobs?"

A major issue is the under-utilization of skills and under-employment of visible minority women. Inability to rise through the system adds to the frustrations of the work-

place. There appear to be few opportunities for advancement and employers have a general distrust of foreign qualifications, reinforced by official positions on accreditation of non-Canadian credentials - a matter which needs to be pursued with greater vigour.

There is often a widespread assumption by the employer, and tacit acceptance by the visible minority woman, that there is no further for her to go. In such cases the employee may decide that any job is better than none. Until recently the only recourse would be to change jobs. A 1979 Ministry of Labour study about labour market experiences of recent immigrants to Canada (Bogue and Shakeel, 1979) indicates a high percentage of voluntary job changes before that period. Female respondents in the sample were more likely to cite the need to improve themselves as the main reason for job change, whereas males cited the need to seek better pay and better working conditions. Neither group emphasized that their job had no possibility of promotion, but it is a reasonable assumption in the circumstances.

In this same study of visible minorities as major wage earners supporting a household, assessment of the relative success of male and female holds no real surprises but emphasizes a situation to which we need to turn our attention, as it states -

"According to each of the indicators of success adopted for this study (intended occupation/personal income/satisfaction level), male immigrants are more successful than female immigrants. Sixty-eight percent of the male immigrants who stated an occupational preference are now working in their intended occupation, and only 61.0% of the female immigrants are working in their intended occupations. The personal incomes of female immigrants are also lower than those of male immigrants: 57.6% of the females earned a personal salary below \$10,000 a year, while only 26.8% of the male immigrants earned that little."

A number of questions arise. For example, were the initial levels of education and training different for males and females or is it that the visible minority woman had lower levels of expectation for herself, even as head of household with family commitments. According to the study, on arrival in Canada female

immigrants were more likely than males to accept any job available or to accept a low paying job. It would appear that for the majority the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is confined to an Ontario Lottery ticket.

A 1981 survey (Reitz et al) of ethnic inequality and segregation in jobs in Metropolitan Toronto, provides a useful point of reference for our assessment of the visible minority woman's situation in the full time labour force in this region. The hierarchy of average income reported in the sample is to some extent predictable. Women of West Indian origin were at the bottom of the scale, earning \$6,000 less than the "Majority Canadian" woman and \$3,000 less than the woman of Portuguese origin. When education and factors such as language and work experience were taken into account, visible minority women underearned by several thousand dollars, women of Chinese origin by \$3,500, and West Indian Black women by \$3,000.

Two issues seem relevant here, the first is the need for equal opportunity so that visible minority women can seek and find employment that makes good use of education, skills and experience. But there is also the problem of relegation to jobs that are assumed to be worth less than those occupied by men. The demand for comparable worth or equal pay for different jobs that require similar effort and skills is of tremendous importance to the visible minority woman. This is an important trend in compensation practices in the United States: As reported in *Business Week*, July 18, 1983 - "Public employers are accepting pay equity in large part because politicians recognize the voting power of women".

One of the questions we need to ask ourselves concerns the self image of the visible minority woman. How do we rate ourselves? The key factor however remains - how does society perceive us and what role has been ascribed to us? These two perspectives have to be reconciled if racism and sexism are not to continue to be over-riding factors in the workplace and in career development. According to Porter's Study of the Vertical Mosaic, new immigrants are ascribed "Entrance Status", and are allowed to share in certain occupational roles in Canadian society, being denied others that are deemed appropriate only for the "Charter" ethnic groups. So as pointed out in the 1979 study above,

"the 'White Collar' aspirations of the caribbean and East Indian immigrants may be out of line with the entrance status thought proper for these ethnic groups, in spite of the personal qualifications they have to offer".

This concept of ascribed roles is very relevant to the experience of the visible minority woman and can explain some of the attitudes to her as a worker. It seems likely that education level and job skills are not the critical factor in her assignment to low status work. To those who argue that the newcomer to Canada begins at the bottom of the work ladder it should be obvious that the analogy breaks down. There is every indication that the only mobility scheduled to take place for this disadvantaged group is to be removed from this rung by seniority, lay-offs and shut downs.

In other situations, the employer may know little and understand less about previous education and career experience as well as aspirations. However, it is generally assumed that there would be no desire for promotion, that the culture of the visible minority woman would not permit acceptance of responsibility, that she is happy with her current position and sees no reason for change. More invidious still is the assumption that she has no leadership skills or administrative ability and could not be expected to compete with fellow workers from the mainstream. Employers at times conclude that in any case colleagues would not willingly accept promotion or supervision by a visible minority woman so it is consciously or unconsciously decided to exclude her from promotion lists.

The whole question of attitudes of fellow workers has to be examined as a two-way street requiring adjustment on both sides. In many situations an exotic aura associated with visible minority women encourages the persistence of stereotypes deriving more from tourist brochures than from the harsh realities of life in their countries of origin. Derogatory attitudes - such as that displayed by a recent newspaper cartoon about the visible minority woman - at times result in sexual harassment in the workplace. The protection of the law is provided by the Ontario Human Rights Code (1981) where it states that -

"Every person who is an employee has a right to freedom from harassment in the workplace because of sex by his or her

employer or agent of the employer or by another employee." (Section 6-(2))

An appreciable number of complaints brought to the Ontario Human Rights Commission concern racial or ethnic discrimination in the workplace. There has been an increase in complaints of sexual harassment and one case in the courts that has recently been receiving public attention with reference to visible minority women and a supervisor of another ethnic background. It remains to be seen whether the visible minority woman with workplace complaints will come forward to seek redress either through the Commission or other grievance procedures.

Networking

This brief overview has so far concerned itself with some of the ways in which racism and sexism combine to affect the employment prospects of the visible minority woman. Hopefully this has provided a context for considering my second concern of networking among visible minority women. As headlined by Joanne Kates, (City Woman, Fall 1983), this is *the* 'contact sport - networking as the hottest movement in town'. I urge you to apply this possible source of strength and solidarity to your own specific purposes.

There is the possibility of information exchange across cultures and identification with role models in various fields by using the kind of process that has developed among mainstream women. Kates highlights the opportunity to lessen 'Horizontal Hostility'. This refers to our mistrust of women with leadership potential and jealousy over career advancement, accusations of tokenism when the very appointments we request are made.

As you establish your own priorities for networking, you might wish to consider combining the more conventional meeting and greeting approach with that of the skills exchange. If there is to be a more assertive role for the visible minority woman in employment, every effort must be made to establish job preparedness. Attitude to self and to colleagues in the workplace, knowledge of the work context, of rights, responsibilities and prospects - all require attention and can be developed through co-operative activity that goes far beyond 'Yellow Page' exchanges of a social nature. There is already an excellent outline of the content needed for "making

changes", designed by the Cross Cultural Communication Centre to meet some of these needs. One of the networking priorities could usefully be developing teams to implement programs geared to specific workplaces. I might add that too often networking is seen as tied to a single locale, whereas cable television, radio programmes or a citizens band for isolated areas can also supplement information exchange on a continuing basis. Since an increasing number of visible minority persons are going into the computer field as an occupation without traditional status ascription, networking can also benefit from special application of this technology. The proposition that I am putting forward is that networking can also benefit from special application of this technology. The proposition that I am putting forward is that networking be treated as task-oriented and use innovative communication techniques since the corridors of power have not yet embraced the visible minority person.

Combatting racism and sexism

Development of strategies and mechanisms to combat racism and sexism is of course another important focus. In my opinion there have been few attempts to develop a structured approach to changing racist and sexist attitudes and behaviour in workplaces. Where there have been attempts to discuss racism they often tend to be random efforts of a guilt-raising nature for a selected group rather than an overall plan for all those who form part of the work context. For example, a school might arrange a professional development session for teachers but ignore support and maintenance staff; or a factory manager may agree to arrange for discussions with workers on the shop floor involved in an incident but not see the need to combat racism and sexism throughout the whole operation. Here again, the Toronto Cross Cultural Communication Centre has moved ahead by providing a course for "combatting racism in the workplace". Additional material needs to be developed relative to various other work contexts as well as approaches with varying levels of sophistication.

Strategies should relate to the ways in which institutions or systems discriminate against the visible minority woman. This requires approaches at the policy making level.

It is surprising that Affirmative Action parameters have not been expanded to include policies that accommodate women disadvantaged by race as well as sex. It is likely that, until this occurs, the women's movement will continue to lack credibility by appearing to be selectively self-serving rather than supportive of justice for all women. This is particularly important at a time when economic difficulty exerts unbearable pressure on those who are most vulnerable to budgetary restraints and workplace pressure - visible minority women.

There can be no doubt that the merit principle, with clearly drawn job criteria, performance evaluation and an open process of advertisement, application and selection should remain the norm for hiring and promotion in the workplace. Differences of race and sex should be viewed as providing additional perspectives rather than as disadvantage for employment. In my opinion, Affirmative Action has nothing to do with hiring the incompetent and unqualified. It has everything to do with a conscious effort by policy makers to break through the stereotypes, remove the artificial barriers, facilitate entry by providing training relevant to employment in areas from which some categories of persons have traditionally been excluded. Further, it has to do with recognition that persons with relevant qualifications and experience gained in other countries could, with an opportunity to get Canadian experience, become qualified, if they are not already prepared, to enter a particular field.

Both the Ontario Human Rights Code (Section 13 - (1)) and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 15 - (2)) make specific provision for such programs. The Ontario provision permits -

"The implementation of a specific program designed to relieve hardship or economic disadvantage or to assist disadvantaged persons or groups to achieve or attempt to achieve equal opportunity..."

There has however been no evidence of a rush for implementation by various levels of government or by the private sector. The objective of establishing a working relationship between policy makers and visible minority women to effect meaningful change recognizes that change is a process and that there should be continuing involvement rather than

presenting a list of actions recommended for some other agency to pursue on one's behalf.

It is important to recognize that, until all Canadian institutions, agencies, boards and commissions represent the diversity of our population, special efforts will be needed to ensure that the interests of particular sectors of the society, such as the visible minority woman, will be taken into account in decision-making. Unless ways are found to make ones' views known, little if any change will take place, since it will continue to be assumed that the visible minority woman desires and deserves to remain at the bottom of the totem pole in the workplace.

It is of course essential to avoid popular assumption that legislation is all that is required to bring about change. With all due respects to the Ontario Federation of Labour and others in the labour movement who have taken a stand against discrimination, the reaction of some unions and professional associations may be one of the barriers to improving the position of the visible minority woman in workplaces in this period of high unemployment and financial restraint.

We must ask ourselves how many visible minority women are knowledgeable and actively engaged in the union or the professional association? It would be advisable to look at ways in which persons now in the workforce can become involved in helping to create an environment that makes sense of the work ethic to which the visible minority woman is, and has always been, firmly committed.

In conclusion, I would like to raise a number of questions. Without adequate statistics on the employment situation of the visible minority woman in private and public sectors, how can we obtain the public recognition needed for the problems posed by racism and sexism in the workplace? For example - how much mobility is there in the civil service?

- How can existing structures, unions and professional associations in particular, more effectively represent the interests and project the rights of the visible minority working woman?
- Do collective agreements take account of workplace diversity?
- To what extent can voluntary programs correct the historic imbalance in the position of the visible minority in the workforce?

- Do we need contract compliance provisions?
- Could employment standards provisions take account of special factors?
- How far have Affirmative Action Programmes included the special concerns of the visible minority woman?

At what point should visible minority women's groups seek linkages?

- with visible minority men
- with other women's groups
- with ethnocultural groups
- with various levels of government
- with the general public

For example, would visible minority women be justified in calling for a provincial working group on women's equity in the workplace - joining with unions, management and government - as well as other women's groups, to build a work content inventory, refine job evaluation techniques, develop cost estimates prior to implementing private and public sector pay equity pilot programmes that demon-

strate feasibility for general application.

My intention has been to indicate problems and to identify possibilities. To emphasize my belief in the possible, I end with Olive Senior's 'Ancestral Poem' from *Jamaica Woman*, an anthology of poems by Caribbean women.

".....

Now against the rhythms
of subway trains my
heartbeats still drum
worksongs. Some wheels
sing freedom, the others:
home.

Still, if I could balance
water on my head I can
juggle worlds
on my shoulders."

Dr. Mavis E. Burke is Chairperson of the Ontario Advisory Council on Multiculturalism and Citizenship.

Rosemary Brown

Interviewed by Brooke Forbes

Rosemary Brown represents the riding of Burnaby-Edmonds for the NDP in the BC legislature. She was born in Jamaica into a political family which was involved with the founding of the PNP and to a large degree still supports it. She left Jamaica to attend university at McGill in Montreal, and went on to receive a graduate degree in social work at UBC. She has an honorary degree from Mt. St. Vincent's in honorary letters. She was first elected in 1972 as a member of the provincial legislature in what was called the NDP "Sweep". The Social Credit party took charge again in 1975, but she retained her seat. One of her most memorable performances in the house was a week-long filibuster about the community resource boards. She's known as an extremely humane politician, has served for several years as the critic for the Human Resources portfolio and is now acting as the critic for the Attorney General's office.

In this interview for CURRENTS, Brooke Forbes, who is a producer with the CBC in Vancouver, talked to her during a break in the hearings of the Royal Commission on Pornography and Prostitution.

Forbes: *What got you into politics?*

Brown: I always *was* in politics. All my life I've been in politics.

I wasn't active while I was a student at McGill because, during the Duplessis era, students were being deported for being actively involved in politics. So I stayed out of it at that point. But as soon as I moved to B.C., I became involved with the NAACP, or the BCAACP, as it was called at that time. In 1967, just after the Royal Commission on the Status of Women started, I became actively involved with the women's movement, was one of the charter members of the Vancouver Status of Women Council and remained in it until I was elected to the Provincial Legislature.

There are a couple of things that acted as

catalysts. The first was while I was working as a counselor at Simon Fraser University, dealing specifically with women on welfare, mostly single mothers who were trying to get an education. Not only did the system not help them, but actually did every thing possible to prevent them from achieving their goal. Their support was cut off as soon as it was discovered that they were at university. I found that very destructive because it was a deliberate attempt on the part of the government to enshrine people in poverty.

Secondly, the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women report acted as a catalyst in terms of my involvement with the women's movement. Also I was very much encouraged by women in the NDP seeking political office as one way of trying to deal with the whole aspect of minority groups and women and poverty in a political context.

Thus, believing firmly then, as I do now, that democratic socialism is the route to take in terms of addressing oneself to these problems, I decided to run in the provincial election of 1972.

Forbes: *What was that first campaign like?*

Brown: The toughest part of it was winning the nomination because the person I was running against for the nomination was actually my husband's partner! It made for some very strained relations between the two men – it certainly didn't upset me at all. The end result of it is, of course, that they are no longer partners! But that was their problem; it certainly wasn't mine.

But then it was very exciting and exhilarating. I was part of the NDP sweep, the province was ready for change, and I was lucky that I was a part of it.

Forbes: *Looking back over those years as a member of the legislature, what would you choose as your greatest success or triumph?*

