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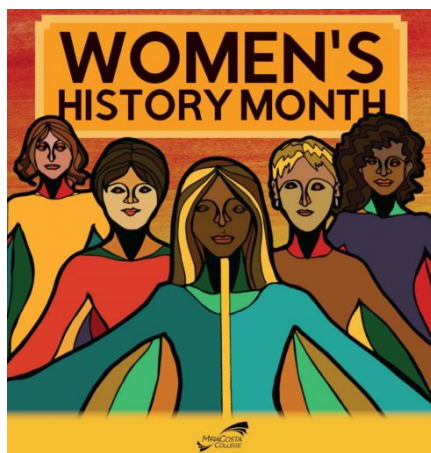
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Domestic violence, racism and state repression — a WW commentary

This slightly edited article first appeared in the 1995 pamphlet, “Capitalism’s War on Women: Why the system is responsible for violence against women,” published by World View Forum. The article was written before O.J. Simpson was acquitted of murder charges by a majority-Black Los Angeles jury on Oct. 3, 1995. The article was also written before the #MeToo movement was founded in 2006 by Black feminist activist Tarana Burke.



There can be no doubt that the O.J. Simpson case has been instrumental in bringing national and international attention to the growing epidemic of domestic violence. All the talk shows have devoted considerable time to the issue, so certainly consciousness has been raised to a much higher level because of the tragic murder of Nicole Brown Simpson.

But what will happen after the spotlight disappears from the trial? Will domestic violence disappear all of a sudden, or will it remain a serious threat for millions of women who continue to live in constant fear of what might happen to them? Did the issue of sexual harassment go away following the fallout from the [1991] Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings? Of course not.

The state's response to violence against women

Many women will be looking to the courts to help relieve them of their fears and to literally help save their lives. That certainly is understandable. The laws protecting women from domestic violence were fought for and won by the strength of the women's movement and other progressive forces. What other recourse do women have in this society but to look for protection from the judicial system?

But are these laws strongly enforced? Can they truly be enforced in a society that views women as second-class citizens and, in the case of women of color, as third-class citizens? How many more women have to be attacked or die before some fundamental change takes place?

In ever-spiraling repetition, male judges have turned their backs on these women, treating them as if they were the criminals instead of the victims. For instance, in 1986, Judge Paul Hecferrman in the Somerville [Mass.] District Court told Pamela Dunn, a battered wife, that she was wasting his time in requesting police protection at the taxpayer's expense. Shortly after that, she was found shot, stabbed and strangled to death.

Another judge commented after Dunn's murder: "Judge Hefferman gave her a good dose of what I like to call reality therapy. I don't believe in breaking up families." (angelfire.com) In other words, he didn't believe that a woman should leave her male spouse under any circumstances — because, like it or not, she is his "private property till death do they part."

[In 1994] a Maryland judge sentenced a man to only 18 months in jail with time off for good behavior — for murdering his wife. What was her "crime"? She was found in bed with another man. The judge commented that he was very reluctant to give any jail time to the man because he sympathized with his reaction. Is that justice? Hardly.

This is not an uncommon response from the courts nor from the cops, who often do not even respond to emergency calls by battered women. Remember how the police responded with a ho-hum attitude to Nicole Simpson when she called 911 out of desperation in 1989? Instead many cops refer to cases involving women as “domestics” and are known to abuse their spouses and girlfriends in great numbers.

Lynching — and African-American response to Simpson case

What was the initial response by the African-American community to the O.J. Simpson case in 1994? In almost every poll the response of African Americans to the question of whether they thought Simpson would get a fair trial was “no” by well over half of those interviewed. The fact that the O.J. Simpson case had turned into an unprecedented, sensationalized media spectacle had not gone unnoticed by African Americans and other progressive people.

Even before Simpson was arrested for these murders, the press tried to convict him in the minds of the masses. First, Time magazine ran deliberately doctored images of Simpson on its cover that made him look menacing. Second, the media played the tape of Nicole Simpson’s 1989 call to 911 over and over, saturating the airwaves. These tactics were used by the media, in collusion with the police and the courts, to paint a racist, stereotypical picture of Simpson as being just another dangerous Black man who murdered a white woman.

There is also feeling among some Black people that because Simpson is Black and his ex-wife was white, he is presumed guilty in the eyes of whites and therefore will become just another statistic in the legal lynchings that have taken place against African Americans and other people of color. These lynchings were historically commonplace when an alleged rape of a white woman was claimed.

The most well-known of these cases was the Scottsboro trials. The Scottsboro defendants were nine young Black men accused of raping two white women on a train in Alabama in 1931. The case garnered national and international attention. A number of the young men were sentenced to the electric chair by an all-white jury before one of the women recanted the accusation. The Alabama courts were key in coercing these women, who were poor, to

make false statements against the young men. These young men's lives were spared from this attempt to legally lynch them, but other Black men have not been as lucky.

Between 1930 and 1981, court records indicate that 405 out of the 455 men executed for rape were Black, and in many of the cases, the alleged victim was a white woman. This is what is often referred to as the “racist use of the rape charge.” Contrast this with the fact that there is no recorded instance of even one white man being executed for raping a Black woman, as in the case of Recy Taylor, a Black woman gang-raped by six white men in Alabama in 1944.



The late Recy Taylor in 1944 and at age 97. This heroic rape survivor fought for justice for the remainder of her life

Yet such rapes were commonplace during the epoch of slavery. Black women were viewed as sexual objects by slave owners, in addition to being outright private property. And this monstrous legacy of slavery has continued right into contemporary times. Thus, it is no wonder that there is deep suspicion and resentment in the Black community over the Simpson trial.

Sports culture promotes violence against women

The topic of the O.J. Simpson case would be incomplete without mentioning the role of the sports culture under capitalism and its promotion of domestic violence. Regardless of nationality, boys are taught from an early age to be more aggressive and competitive. In order to be considered a real “man,” you have to play some type of sport, while girls are

groomed to be homemakers — though more women are oriented toward nontraditional roles and jobs these days. The term “sissy” is used to describe males who exhibit any “feminine” behavior.

Male athletes and coaches, both college and professional, are some of the worst perpetrators of domestic violence. The famous football coach at Penn State, Joe Paterno, once said following a loss to a rival team, “I’m going to go home and beat my wife.” (Chicago Tribune, Jan. 27, 1991) Later, he described the statement as being “just part of the sports culture, locker room talk, harmless, a joke that did not mean anything.” (New York Times, June 22, 1994) Well, what Paterno said was almost true, except for the parts about being “harmless” and a “joke.” Referring to women in graphic, degrading terms is an unfortunate aspect of the sports culture under capitalism. And O.J. Simpson is a product of that patriarchal culture.

Athletes in general are commodities under capitalism. They are nothing more than modern-day gladiators who are exploited to make superprofits for their multibillionaire owners. But if you are an African-American athlete like O.J., you are superexploited because racism permeates every aspect of life in the U.S., including sports. Athletes may make millions of dollars a year, but they, like women, are used by big business and the media to sell everything from sneakers to hamburgers.

The media play a decisive role in elevating these athletes, and especially Black athletes, to almost iconic status in a day. Then they seem to delight in tearing them down the next day. Look how Michael Jordan was treated in 1993 when he was accused of being addicted to gambling. He was literally hounded and crucified by the media. Baseball’s Pete Rose, who is white, didn’t receive half the flack that Jordan did, and he was actually found guilty of fixing games.

When the question of domestic violence is raised where athletes are concerned, the list of examples is usually headed by Black athletes like Simpson, Vance Johnson, Sugar Ray Leonard, Moses Malone, Darryl Strawberry, Mike Tyson [Ray Rice in 2014] and others. But singling out these athletes only reinforces racist stereotypes and lets plenty of white athletes like Steve Garvey, Mark Gastineau and Ben Roethlisberger off the hook. That kind of racism must be opposed — while at the same time not excusing what these men did to their spouses or girlfriends.

Sports in this country has become a dangerous institution, with men in general encouraged to become killing machines on and off the playing field. The women associated with these athletes are the ones who may pay the price, sometimes with their lives.

This topic would not be complete without citing the Pentagon and all arms of the military for also promoting inequality of women and “women as objects.” This mentality fosters violence against women.

The state won't end domestic violence

While Workers World Party supports the rights of self-defense by battered women in the long run — like the Framingham 8 [in 1995] who had the courage to fight back against spousal abuse — relying on the cops and courts is not the answer to eliminating domestic violence as an institution.

Having more police and more prisons will not wipe away women's oppression, gender oppression — or any other oppression for that matter. The state is not an unbiased player, even in domestic relations. The state, in compliance with the white, straight, male-dominated ruling class, preaches to the diverse, multinational working class as to what constitutes a family and what does not. Just think of how it intervenes and removes children from lesbian, gay and non-binary families. The state upholds and defends the ideas of the capitalist class, which are diametrically opposed to the interests of our class — the working class.

The state is a naked example that not only do class contradictions exist between the working class and the ruling class, but that these contradictions cannot be reconciled without the intervention of the class struggle. Once we can grasp this concept, we can begin to objectively look at how the state keeps women down; keeps Black, Latinx, Indigenous and other nationally oppressed people down; keeps LGBTQ2+ communities down, along with others — either through the legal system or, if necessary, through brute force.

In order to keep the numerically small capitalist class in power, the repressive state apparatus — the police, courts and jails — is there to keep the majority of workers and oppressed subjugated, divided and disenfranchised. The state pits one oppressed sector

against another, especially ideologically. This is where the media play a very instrumental role. The mainstream media are owned by the capitalist class and therefore are an appendage of the state.

Hardly an objective player, the media reinforce through print, electronics, social media and other forms of mass communications all the ideas of the ruling class. We can never forget the role that movies, TV and videos play in reinforcing antiwoman, antiworker, antipeople of color or anti-LGBTQ2+ themes. For instance, an abusive man told a counselor that he was influenced to attack his wife by the TV show "The Honeymooners" in which Jackie Gleason threatened to punch his wife Alice "to the moon" in almost every episode.

No justice from an unjust system

So how can O.J. Simpson possibly receive real justice in the midst of a media circus and from a system that perceives him as just another criminal Black man? This is the same judicial system that let wealthy white rapist William Kennedy Smith go free. The Kennedys are one of the most well-known ruling-class dynasties, and the state always protects its own kind.

This is the system that gave drunken U.S. Navy officers a slap on the wrist after their heinous assaults against women naval officers during the Tailhook scandal in 1991. This is the same system that sentenced George Jackson (later a Black Panther who was assassinated in prison) to a life sentence for taking \$70 from a gas station!

How can young women, women of color, poor women, lesbians, gender nonbinary people realize their full potential in capitalist society when all they face is violence, unemployment, exploitation and oppression in their lives? Look how the racist, sexist [anti-LGBTQ2+] 1995 "Contract with America" sought to erode over 60 years of progress to better the lives of women — the right to birth control; safe, legal, accessible abortion; affordable day care; Aid to Families with Dependent Children and welfare; affirmative action on the job and in education; as well as the right to raise healthy children.

Women are being propelled into the mass struggle to fight back to defend and expand all these progressive gains.

Workers World Party declares that the capitalist state cannot be reformed and will not change its class orientation without the intervention of the working class.

History has shown that the capitalist state is not invincible. That state, based on cruel and unjust laws, must be smashed as it was in Czarist Russia in 1917, in China in 1949 and in Cuba in 1959, and replaced with a new kind of state — a worker's state that will defend the interests of all the workers of all nationalities in the name of socialist reconstruction and harmony.

Only through the class struggle and the overthrow of class oppression will women be liberated, along with their class brothers and other genders, from centuries of sexism and backward ideas. Smash women's, gender and racist oppression!

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