

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, 1979

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Moving On

review
of

books



**Narcissism, Personal Politics, Black Macho,
Soviet Union and Education**

Moving On

Toward a socialist America

This is a special issue of **Moving On**—the last one that the current publication team will be involved in together.

Actually, the July issue was the last for Dolores Wilber, our Production Coordinator. Under her direction, **MO** has developed what can modestly be called one of the best formats of any magazine on the left. And this is with almost no production budget to speak of. Wilber has had to do all the work in her "spare time" while holding down a full-time job, her only salvation being the invaluable assistance of people like Judy and William Johnson, Bob Quartell and Andrea Gundersen and the excellent graphic and photographic contributions of people like Michelle Russell, Carol Becker, and Mary Clark.

Richard Healey, Marilyn Katz and Judy MacLean will no longer serve as **MO**'s Editors because their terms as NAM's national leadership are expiring and they are not planning to stand for election again.

Each of them has made an important contribution to **MO**'s development and direction. Healey has been involved with the magazine since its inception. He has been a wellspring of ideas and has been responsible for conceptualizing—and even writing—some of our most important political articles.

Katz has provided an abiding concern with international issues and has helped **MO** to develop a stronger focus on developments around the world.

MacLean has been particularly vital in fostering **MO**'s focus on feminism. In addition, her emphasis on issues of daily life and popular culture has provided the genesis for many of our "Looking for America" pieces. MacLean has also been author, copy-editor, NAM News Coordinator and chief worrier for the magazine.

Although we have had many differences over specific articles and occasionally strong disputes over political issues, on the whole their contributions over the last two years have enriched me and the pages of this magazine very considerably.

Roberta Lynch

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MOVING ON is published monthly except August and January by the New American Research Institute, 3244 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60657. Subscription price: \$5 yearly. Controlled Circulation Postage Paid at Chicago, Illinois.

Show Butterfly what you look like, and we'll help make you over into a more beautiful woman.



*The Culture of Narcissism: American
Life in an Age of Diminishing
Expectations.*

By Christopher Lasch

New York: W.W. Norton. 1978. \$11.95.

Pp. 268.

By Ronald Aronson

WE WILL ALL FIND OURSELVES ON the pages of Christopher Lasch's brilliant and important *The Culture of Narcissism*: the teachers caught up in "grade inflation" but ambivalent about demanding excellence from our students; the lovers determined to avoid possessiveness while feeling irrational needs for commitment that we can only control by keeping "cool"; the therapy patients who learn to respect our feelings that tell us to retreat and enjoy ourselves rather than struggle for change; the parents who try to avoid being authoritarian to children we cannot otherwise control; the political and trade-union activists uncertain about the "arrogance" of exerting leadership; and the radicals who hate a society which keeps people from living up to their abilities but who have such difficulty accepting the "elitism" implied by becoming skilled at what we do.

Active in Detroit NAM, Ronald Aronson is the author of *Jean-Paul Sartre*, to appear this fall. With Charles Rooney he is currently writing *Dialectics of Hope*.

Lasch's Culture of Narcissism—Mood Piece

Obviously this is a disturbing encounter; for Lasch spells out with great penetration and power the connection of all these tensions with "the narcissistic personality of our times" and its roots in the requirements of a dying capitalist culture. It is also disturbing because Lasch shows no mercy to what he regards as the deeply conventional "pseudo-radicalism" at the root of many cultural currents initiated or supported by 60s and 70s radicals—from those that attack competition and promote cooperative sports to those that call for black and women's studies programs at the university.

Aspiring to be social theory rather than the cultural criticism of a single man, Lasch's description of narcissism seeks to be specific and precise, then to be rooted in the structure of late capitalism as its characteristic personality structure. His clinical analysis rests, first, on Freudian theory and, second, on recent psychiatric and

psychoanalytic literature about the increasingly typical phenomenon of narcissistic personality disorders. The narcissist is above all absorbed with him- or herself, not out of ego strength or a positive self-regard, but out of a deeply rooted sense of desperation and emptiness.

Such traits stem "from general changes in the structure of society: the shifting emphasis from capitalist production to consumption; the growth of large organizations and bureaucracies; the increasingly dangerous and warlike conditions of social life." According to Lasch, these trends lead people to concern themselves above all with their own survival, undermining the older discipline of postponement of gratification and the ties of personal and organizational loyalty.

In addition, the exhaustion of liberalism destroys the sense that society has a future. Our connection to the past has been eroded, so that people live in and for the moment, a trend furthered by the new therapies emphasizing the "here and now." All these features of life and attitudes under late capitalism are accompanied by the deskilling of work. Therefore, the older, higher standards of performance, excellence and competence are destroyed. Every area of private life is invaded by the machinery of capitalism and the cult of experts, leading to a breakdown of traditional patterns of authority and the traditional strength of the family. And finally, the obsession with personal images leads people to seek celebrity rather than accomplishment.

Without discipline

The people produced by these social conditions have lost the sense of the past as sustaining tradition or the future as posterity inheriting our works. Raised without the formerly stabilizing discipline of the superego, they are terrified by their own strong desires which threaten to take control. Frightened of the rage released by competition and love, such people are both desperately self-obsessed and in flight from feeling. Encouraged by the economic apparatus of late capitalism to postpone no satisfactions, they live in a hedonism which is fraudulent because accompanied by no authentic or lasting pleasure. They remain unable and unwilling to establish ties of loyalty, love or commitment.

For Lasch, narcissism is not a term connoting a mere cultural mood, but a characteristic personality pattern and life-orientation of late capitalism. The "me generation" of the 1970s was a long time coming, and was already reaching fruition in the media-hypnotized radicalism of the 1960s. Indeed, Lasch traces its roots to the 19th century when capitalism bureaucratized and spread into every profitable corner of life. Today, decaying because it is no longer a progressive historical force, capitalism has come of age; it no longer needs the personality and moral strengths, or even the



Or Social Theory?

prejudices, required in its building stages.

Lasch develops these theses not only in broad strokes but in specific studies in which the new narcissism comes into sharp focus: the new therapies of "liberation," the educational system, how aging has come to be regarded today, the present battle between the sexes, our current experience of and attitudes towards sport, the new ethic of success, and the contemporary patterns of child-rearing.

Specific points of such a bold enterprise as Lasch's will inevitably draw criticism. For example, his historical sketch of American education is an unnecessary prelude to his spirited defense of standards and excellence. Furthermore, his tortuous study of male-female relationships needs the distance of history and suffers from too much "women today are" and "men today are" generalization. Still, *The Culture of Narcissism* will leave no reader unaffected. It is the kind of book that provokes us to rethink our whole world of experience, from how we raise our children to what we see in our movies. What else might we expect from a book that traces the deterioration of the character strengths and standards that not only built bourgeois society, but which Lasch seems to claim as norms for any healthy society?

Such an undertaking as Lasch's may be forgiven for implicitly tending to idealize the past: after all, no redeeming movement is in sight with a coherent vision of a better future. But we cannot keep from raising our eyebrows at a kind of Marxist critique, no matter how subtle, that consistently and centrally celebrates an earlier bourgeois society and its virtues. Even if older workers would agree with Lasch on how society and values are deteriorating, the sense of loss would likely be tempered by a sense of gain: this "warlike" society offers the working class far more than the presumably more pacific one of a generation or two ago.

The problem is that the locus of Lasch's critique is the middle and upper-middle class, not the working class. This by itself may be no great fault, but the question of class in Lasch's study is repressed only slightly less than in most bourgeois cultural criticism: the universal "man" is used when the writer is, after all, describing the man of the middle class. Workers scarcely appear in *The Culture of Narcissism*, and for good reason; it is doubtful that they have absorbed much of the new sensibility and character structure. Rather, they seem to remain under the rubric of an earlier ethic. This is important because Lasch is writing social theory, not just cultural criticism and, as such, is trying to describe basic societal trends.

Determinist view

Overall, however, Lasch has strikingly little to say about social process. While he quickly but illuminatingly mentions some structural trends of late capitalism that supposedly un-

derlie the culture of narcissism, he both moves too rapidly and at the same time presents a rather determinist view of how these new features of capitalism produce strikingly different and weaker character structure.

The point is that today's bureaucracy and need for consumption appear on, even if they alter, the original socio-economic-political basis of capitalism; wouldn't the new boundaries of character similarly depend on, while altering, the old required forms of character? I say *boundaries* and *forms* in order to underscore that any complex social order makes complex, multifaceted and overlapping demands on its citizens, depending on their class origin and individual proclivities. Lasch describes the relationship of social structure to character by far too quickly and narrowly historicizing a theoretical analysis which Freud meant to describe civilization as such, and which has come under considerable recent revision and attack.

Certainly it would be wrong to expect everything of a book filled with such dazzling insight. Accordingly, I would be tempted to ignore the un-Marxist coloration of much of *The Culture of Narcissism*, if it were not for a more fundamental omission. The Movement of the 1960s and early 1970s plays no part in this study of contemporary society, except in the dubious role of antagonist.

Lasch's work is severely damaged by this blind spot: black people's respect for education is mentioned, but their massive struggle for social and political equality remains unacknowledged; women's liberation is treated as a decisive fact of contemporary life, but with absolutely no sense of how it

emerged; the neuroses of Jerry Rubin and Susan Stern are duly exposed, but with no mention of the eruption of the movement they belonged to out of the "silent" 1950s, or its unprecedented mass opposition to a major national war, or its role in ending that war. The discipline, mobilization, moral courage, empathy, commitment and persistence of the millions of activists, including the Jerry Rubins and Susan Sterns—contradict virtually every major thesis of *The Culture of Narcissism*.

Contradictions

But, after all, hasn't Lasch indicated from the outset that "while much could be written about the signs of a new life in the United States" his purpose is to describe "a way of life that is dying"?

Indeed, here is where we encounter the most fundamentally un-Marxist line of *The Culture of Narcissism*. For what is "dying" today exists in a kind of interconnection with the "new life" coming into being, making it impossible to appreciate the one without the other. The new therapies, the new emphasis on intimacy and expressing feelings, the recent casualness about the body and sexuality—to mention only a few strains of the new sensibility—are far more than symptoms of decay. Connected with the false individualism that has always been central to bourgeois culture, they certainly appear contradictory and regressive, but connected with a deep social awareness and values of commitment and loyalty, as they sometimes are,

they appear as a considerable historical advance over the authoritarian, guilt-ridden, strait-laced and repressed character structures of the past.

Much in the new currents of liberation represent an advance, even if their emergence under late capitalism at times distorts them like virtually every other trend in capitalist society, into their bourgeois caricature. But just as Lasch fails to appreciate the Movement, so does he fail to appreciate the positive dimensions of these recent explorations; just as their proponents one-sidedly and falsely trumpet their "revolutionary" character, so does Lasch equally one-sidedly and falsely expose their "reactionary" character.

Historical truth lies in the tension between the two: the "age of diminishing expectations," after all, is taking place in a "post-scarcity society." By losing track of the contradiction, Lasch gives us a rather one-dimensional, old-fashioned and pre-Marxist moral history conveying no sense of the dialectics of change. In the end, he gives us a personal vision which, if haunting and brilliant, seems more a mood piece of the 1970s than an adequate vision of our age.

In making the narcissists and "pseudo-radicals" the enemies of his account, Lasch has deflected his study away from the real enemies of humanity today. At the beginning I said that we will all see ourselves on the pages of this book. The weakness of the picture is not that we will find it painful or unflattering, but that it is so wholly one-sided. Lasch's cold tone in rendering the "new narcissism," his construction of the argument so as to make in advance many of our replies appear to be mere symptoms of the disease, betokens, ultimately, a deep distance from those of us laboring to assert and explore new and positive directions of living and struggling. *The Culture of Narcissism* lays bare a strand of today's negative dialectic, but it does so only from the outside. Lasch's distance and lack of compassion make his book fatally unable to grasp the possibilities today for anything other than a "culture of narcissism."





How they grew...

Personal Politics
By Sara Evans
New York: Knopf

By Amy Kesselman

THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT HAS grown so rapidly in the last ten years that it is difficult to remember a time when most institutions in American society, including the "new left," did not find it necessary to offer even a token response to charges of sexism. Moreover, the women's liberation movement has changed enormously in the past decade and the media has played an increasingly important role in disseminating information about feminism and shaping its image. As a result, we have in many ways been severed from our history. While feminist histo-

Amy Kesselman studies and teaches the history of American women and has been active in the women's liberation Movement since 1967.

rians argue strenuously for reclaiming our distant past, the recent origins of our own movement have receded into obscurity.

Personal Politics takes an important step towards rescuing the early history of contemporary feminism. It is a moving, well-written account of the experiences of women in the Southern civil rights movement and the part of the "new left" that centered around Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Using over sixty oral interviews, as well as traditional sources, Evans documents the development of feminist consciousness among these women, many of whom were crucial in laying the groundwork for the women's liberation movement that emerged in 1967 and '68.

Personal Politics is not a comprehensive study of either women in the radical movements of the sixties or of women who participated in the early stages of contemporary feminism. It is rather an examination of one strand of experience which was central to the

emergence of women's liberation. This occasionally results in an uneasy feeling of incompleteness as one wonders how Evans is selecting her sources, but in general it is clear that the study is meant to be suggestive and the stories of individual women are to be viewed as clues which help to map out the terrain of the subject.

Evans places the emergence of women's liberation in its historical context in a prologue that skillfully weaves together the cultural, economic and political developments of the late fifties that contributed to the growth of feminism. She effectively demonstrates that "...the pressures on most women were building up not on the level of public discrimination but at the juncture of public and private, of job and home..." And she argues persuasively that "...a new movement would have to transform the privacy and subjectivity of personal life itself into a political issue."

Personal Politics begins with the activities of women in the Southern civil rights movement of the early 1960's. Evans differentiates carefully between the experiences of black and white, Southern and Northern women and explores the ways in which women made connections between sexual and racial oppression. The study then moves to Northern new left activities, focusing primarily on ERAP (Economic Research and Action Project), the community organizing efforts of SDS. After a brief discussion of the effects on women activists of the changes in the left brought by the escalation of the Vietnam War, the study concludes with the confrontation between men and women in SDS and the emergence of women's liberation groups in 1967.

Evans is best when describing the positive effects of movement activity on female participants. She communicates well the excitement of stretching one's limits, of believing one can change the world, of discovering hidden capabilities. She effectively describes the central role played by women in civil rights and community work.

But Evans' project, tracing the devel-



Evans effectively demonstrates that in the late fifties "...the pressures on most women were building up not on the level of public discrimination but at the juncture of public and private, of job and home..."

opment of feminist consciousness, requires that she also describe the immense frustration, humiliation and trivialization experienced by women activists in the male dominated left of the sixties. In this part of the dialectic Evans is delicate, restrained and abstract—so much so that the fear, anger and rebellion of the women activists sometimes seem inexplicable.

For example, we read about a "kind of memo" written in 1965 by Mary King and Casey Hayden indicting the "caste system" within SNCC that "at its worst, uses and exploits women." The brief excerpt that appears in the book vibrates with pain and anger. But the context in which the memo is presented

is not a description of the female experience within SNCC which would explain its rage and frustration. Instead, the memo follows a discussion of SNCC's movement towards black power and is treated as "...part of an attempt to halt the metamorphosis in the civil rights movement from nonviolence to nationalism...."

While reaching out to black women across the widening gulf that separated black and white SNCC workers was certainly an element in the King-Hayden paper, the memo, which is included in the appendix, is about the oppression of women—in society as a whole and within the movement. *Personal Politics* provides us with scanty hints about what

provoked the memo—some discussion of the effects of interracial sexual relationships on women, discrete allusions to the division of labor.

Unfortunate socialization

Sexism in *Personal Politics* often appears agentless. It is presented as either a structural problem or a result of the unfortunate socialization of both men and women. This approach seriously blunts the explanatory power of Evans' analysis. For example, Evans explains the secondary role played by women in SDS as a result of the intellectual mode of the organization—a style that emphasized verbal and writing skills. "No one was forbidding the women to write,"

she comments, "rather it was simply the men who carried the internal expectations and self confidence necessary to do so. In addition they were in a position to define the nature of the movement and they created one most appropriate to their own needs and skills."

While this might be true, it is not a sufficient explanation. The birth of contemporary feminism unleashed an avalanche of literature, some of which was authored by the very same women who were not writing in the male dominated left. No one ever accused the women's movement of being nonverbal. What is missing is an honest description of the sexism which pervaded the left of the sixties—sexism which often took the form of degrading, abusive behavior of men towards women.

Women were not participating fully in the verbal and written life of the new left because their efforts to do so were consistently undermined by men. "And when a girl does speak," wrote a SSOC (Southern Student Organizing Committee) woman in 1969, "how often is she listened to inattentively—or even interrupted, actually shouted down by some guy with a bigger voice if not a bigger brain? Or how often does the talk resume when she sits down exactly as though she hadn't spoken?"

Male power.

This kind of behavior does not appear in *Personal Politics* until chapter seven when the women in SDS confront the men about sexism. The men present responded by "...creating a constant hubbub of noise interspersed with derisive hoots and catcalls." This picture of men aggressively defending their power comes as a surprise to the reader, who in the previous portions of the book has met only sincere, "well intentioned" male activists who, like the women in the book, happened to be "well socialized" into traditional sex roles.

In general, Evans' emphasis is on the internal rather than the external constraints on women's behavior in the radical movements of the sixties and she



rarely confronts the question of power. What was the significance of male power in the left? Why did men hold onto power so tenaciously? How did this affect their politics? These are questions Evans shies away from.

One result of Evans' inadequate description of sexism in the left is her failure to understand the pain and terror involved in the process by which women in the radical movement came to identify themselves as women. If there's one thing radicals need to understand it's the dynamic which keeps oppressed people afraid of identifying with each other. And if we obscure this process for ourselves, we're never going to understand it for anyone else. We read in *Personal Politics* about the haste with which women asserted that *they* didn't have problems with personal life, of women being threatened by each other at workshops, of women wondering if it was "legitimate" to discuss women. These phenomena need to be understood in terms of the risks that women felt they were taking within the movement and

these risks can only become clear if one has a fuller sense of sexism in the left than Evans provides.

Now isn't this all pointless guilt tripping? Haven't the men in the left been castigated enough? Isn't it enough to record that radical movements of the sixties were sexist without going into grizzly detail? I think not. Radical movements have remarkably bad track records at sustaining commitment to women's liberation, even after a feminist critique has been levied. If there is any hope of radical women and men working together effectively we need to understand as clearly as possible what happened when they didn't.

Nevertheless, *Personal Politics* is an important book because it begins the process of understanding contemporary feminism in a historical perspective. Despite its delicacy and occasional evasiveness, it is a useful contribution to left and feminist history. I recommend it to anyone interested in feminism, women's history or the twentieth century left.

New Myths for Old—



Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman

By Michelle Wallace
Dial Press, New York

By Brenda Daniels-Eichelberger

BLACK MACHO AND THE MYTH of the Superwoman by Michelle Wallace is an attempt to analyze the psychosocial division between Black women and men. Interspersing personal observations and autobiographical anecdotes with her perceptions of the myth and realities of Black people from slavery to the present, Wallace presents two major themes: The first is the existence of a "Black Macho," emerging out of

Brenda Daniels-Eichelberger is a founder and the Executive Director of the National Alliance of Black Feminists, headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. Her involvement in movement activity includes working on boards of several Black and women's organizations, speaking out against racism and sexism throughout the country and abroad, and writing articles for publication in the Black and feminist communities.

the Black Movement of this century; the second is the "Myth of the Black Superwoman," which had its inception in slavery and has continued to this day.

Wallace's concept of Black Macho is accurate. Male chauvinism or Black Macho is alive and well in the Black community. Too frequently many Blacks have either totally denied its existence or else have attributed it solely to the white man.

Basically Wallace argues that even though the white man may be responsible for the sexism the Black woman has had to suffer in the wider community, the Black man is responsible for much of the sexism the Black woman has had to suffer in the Black community.

Regardless of how one feels about the Black man's chauvinism or lack thereof, the fact still remains that America is a patriarchy; as such, it is Black men, not Black women, who are the recipients of male privilege. Wallace accurately points out the discrepancies in the ways Black women and Black men could distinguish themselves during slavery. Black women could excel by: a) doing physical labor, b) becoming sex partners with their masters, c) achieving status as a mammy, or d) being a house servant

with a special skill, e.g. laundress, weaver, or spinner. However, Black men could excel by: a) becoming artisans, craftsmen, or mechanics, b) becoming drivers or even de facto overseers, c) becoming body servants, butlers, or coachmen, d) achieving far more prestige in field labor than Black women, e) fighting in the American Revolution and then in the War of 1812, and f) planning and leading slave revolts. Both qualitatively and quantitatively, the Black man had more avenues open to him.

On the second point, Wallace is again accurate. Seen as being able to withstand slave labor and breeding like cattle, Black women were perceived as possessing physical strength no other woman could claim. In addition, they were perceived as possessing a dominion no Black man could claim either. Wallace points out that the catapulting of Black women into the labor force en masse, combined with the denial of decent jobs to Black men, created the impression that the Black woman was the major, if not sole, wage earner in the Black family.

To assume the task of provider—the role traditionally accorded to men—meant that she had to be strong so that she and her family would survive. However, rather than being perceived in a human way, as having both strengths and weaknesses, her weaknesses were basically overlooked and her strength was often interpreted as *invincibility*. She was accorded superhuman powers and the "myth of the superwoman" was born. When the Moynihan Report was published in 1965 (Daniel P. Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," Washington D.C.; U.S. Department of Labor), it identified the Black family as being matriarchial in nature. As Moynihan viewed it, every instance of social pathology afflicting the Black community was directly attributable to the role of Black women which seriously retarded Black progress in general and imposed a crushing blow on Black men in particular.

Wallace does an adequate job of debunking this myth. She points out that

fatherless Black households are in the minority and were an even smaller minority at the time of Moynihan's report. And she notes that the Black man's income has always been greater than that of the Black woman.

Greatly Flawed.

In spite of the accuracy of Wallace's two themes, however, her work is greatly flawed. In her attempt to illustrate the male chauvinism that did in fact exist in the Black Movement of the sixties, Wallace goes overboard. Through gross simplification, exaggeration, generalization, and lack of documentation, she distorts this very serious movement. For example, she states: "With freedom presumably on the horizon, black men needed a movement that made the division of power between men and women clearer, that would settle once and for all the nagging questions black women were beginning to ask: Where do we fit in? What are you going to do about us? It was the restless throng of ambitious black female civil rights workers—as much as any failure of the Civil Rights Movement—that provoked Stokely Carmichael to cry 'Black Power!'"

According to Wallace, the Black Power Movement was not aimed at ending white domination over Blacks but at furthering Black male domination over Black females!

Wallace goes on to offer this pithy summary of the Black Movement: "Come 1966, the black man had two pressing tasks before him: a white woman in every bed and a black woman under every heel. Out of his sense of urgency came a struggle called the Black Movement, which was nothing more nor less than the Black man's struggle to attain his presumably lost 'manhood.'"

How tragic that a movement based on *human* rights and which cost so many lives and so much pain and suffering is reduced to mere male sexual gratification! Wallace's depiction of Black men is reduced to their thinking between their legs.

Wallace offers no proof for this assertion and this lack of historical docu-

mentation permeates her work. She simply personalizes from her own experiences and then generalizes them to apply to most, if not all, Black people.

As a result, Black people are not seen as being multidimensional. For example, by not distinguishing among black middle-class men, she lumps them all together; the effect is indeed a distortion: "The middle-class black man—he may have a Master's Degree in business, he may only have a union card—believes that he has found some alternative to being black. He believes he can sneak in and raid whitey's piggy bank while whitey's back is presumably turned, live in a white community or a suffocating black middle-class community with his white or nearly white wife, avert his eye when the company he works for wants to do something abusive to blacks, drive a Mercedes, wear expensive European suits, become indignant at blacks who are inelegant enough to nod out on the subway—he believes he can do all this and not die inside, completely and irreversibly."

Has Wallace gone into the minds of *all* middle-class Black men to know their feelings? What survey has she taken? Whom did she interview? To make a blanket statement about *all* middle-class Black men gives the impression that they have done *nothing* positive for Blacks.

Black middle class men, however, are not the only ones who are the targets of Wallace's ire. She does not spare the middle-class Black woman from her scorn: "The first impulse of upwardly mobile black women to pursue an advanced education, a higher salary, to become a professional, is not motivated by a desire to improve the lot of their race, but by a desire to break away from all its accessories of humiliation and guilt."

Again, what Black women did Wallace interview? How many Black women did she survey? Does Wallace's statement imply that the Black woman is *supposed* to feel humiliation and guilt? If so, *what* is she to feel humiliation and guilt about?

When Wallace depicts Black people one dimensionally, she is making them monolithic. Her stereotyping of Black girls is particularly disturbing. In her typical style of generalizing from her own experiences, Wallace projects her youthful defiance to include *all* Black women. She relates that as a teenager, she rebelled against her mother and was placed in a home for girls. There, she came in contact with even younger girls, most of whom had likewise rebelled against their mothers. Based on this slender survey, she paints a devastating picture of *all* Black women: "In the girls I met at the Residence I could see generation after generation stretched out into infinity of hungry, brutalized, illiterate children. Born of children. Black women have never listened to their mothers. No black woman every pays much attention to any other black woman. And so each one starts out fresh, as if no black woman had ever tried to live before."

How sad that the implication is an overall lack of respect for Black motherhood. In addition, Wallace gives the impression that promiscuity and stupidity are common traits of Black women. Though a rise in teenage pregnancy is definitely a reality in the Black community, it is a reality in the white community as well! And though proportionately more Black girls are having babies than white girls, the pregnancy rate is—to some extent—more apparent in the *white* community.

In the past, many white girls who did not get abortions frequently placed their babies up for adoption. Now, however, many of them are following the traditional pattern of Black girls and keeping their babies. That white girls are more openly walking their white streets with swollen bellies and proudly—or indifferently—carrying around their white infants is a statistical reality. Yet, what white person has generalized that all white women are promiscuous?

Wallace further deprecates women in her depiction of Black female activists, resulting in the trivialization of a very

important movement and a caricature of some of the risk-takers in it. For example, Angela Davis' struggle to help George Jackson is reduced to this sarcastic account: "Angela Davis, a brilliant, middle-class black woman with a European education, a Ph.D. in philosophy, and a university appointment, was willing to die for a poor, uneducated black inmate. It was straight out of Hollywood—Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart."

What Wallace perceives as a scenario "straight out of Hollywood" was in fact a struggle for one Black person to help gain freedom for another Black person without the trappings of Hollywood contracts and seven-figure salaries!

In spite of their standing in the Black community, no Black woman—writer, politician, or otherwise—escapes Wallace's criticism. It is around Wallace that the world revolves and prior to the "revelations" in her book, no Black woman had ever given any outward manifestations of consciousness of the Superwoman Myth. Wallace states: "Through the years this image has remained basically intact, unquestioned by the occasional black woman writer or politician. In fact, if anything, time has served to reinforce it."

In reality, the contradictions Black women have had to face with regard to their mythology have been discussed by Black women for *years*. The Moynihan myth of the Black matriarchy, which Wallace so aptly dispels 13 years later, was *first* dispelled by Black men and Black women shortly after it was published in 1965. Even Angela Davis, the Black activist whose activities Wallace reduces to a "Do-it-for-your-man," eloquently challenged this myth in the *Black Scholar* in 1971. Moreover, contrary to what Wallace would have her reader believe, time has *not* served to reinforce the myth, but only to help further dispel it.

And Black women have definitely addressed other aspects of this negative mythology. The book, *The Black Woman*, published in 1970 and edited by Toni Cade, is a collection of essays and

poems written by a cross section of Black women. It illuminates the two basic themes of Wallace's work: Black male chauvinism in the Black community in general and the Black Power Movement in particular (Black Macho) and the extra burdens of Black women who are far from infallible (Myth of the Superwoman). In fact, the mythology of invincibility can be seen as a recurring theme in the literature of Black women long before Wallace was born!

What is *most* damaging about Wallace's work is that she undermines Black Feminism. Even though she stereotypes Black people, at least *most* Black people—if not most whites—will realize the fallacies of her arguments. But since so few whites and Blacks are familiar with the concept of Black Feminism, it is seriously maligned.

Twice Wallace directly refers to herself as a Black Feminist; however, in neither case does she explain what that means. "Though I am a black feminist, and that label rightly suggests that I feel black men could stand substantial improvement, I still find it difficult to blame them alone. Black men have had no greater part than Black women in perpetuating the ignorance with which they view one another."

Aside from the fact that she appears to be one of the Black women who perpetuates ignorance of Black people, the context in which she identifies herself as a feminist needs an explanation of what feminism means, at least what it means to Wallace. Does it mean that only Black feminists feel Black men need improvement? Does it mean that *all* Black feminists are anti-Black men? Does it mean that Black feminists need *no* improvement?

One must also question Wallace's claim to feminism when she refers to "the black woman's rather mindless rejection of feminism." Obviously, Wallace has done little, if any, feminist research or organizing. If she had, she would know the *majority* of Black women *are* for feminist issues such as equal pay for equal work, reproductive freedom, and affirmative action, to cite

just a few. If Wallace spent just some of her time organizing Black women rather than castigating them, she would know that most Black women embrace the concept of feminism and that their "mindless rejection," is nothing more than their absence of a working definition of "feminism," a term which Wallace does very little to clarify.

Distortions.

Wallace further distorts Black Feminism when she gives her Wallace-centric view of Black feminist activists: "Lately I've noticed the appearance of a number of Black women's organizations and conferences. The middle-class black woman in particular is beginning to address herself to feminist issues. But everything I've seen so far has been an imitation of what white feminists have done before. I now hear students refer casually to a Black Women's Movement. But I haven't seen black women make any meaningful attempt to differentiate between their problems and the problems of white women and, most important, there seems to be no awareness of how black women have been duped by the Myth of the Superwoman."

Just the fact that Wallace admits that lately she's "noticed the appearance of black women's organizations and conferences" should be considered a triumph for Black womankind, as it indicates that not all Black women have a "mindless rejection of feminism." Moreover, Black women *have* differentiated between their problems and the problems of white women. While both women have sexism to combat, the Black woman is straddled with the additional oppression of racism. And common sense would indicate that these organizations *must* be addressing the needs of Black women. Why else would Black women join them?

Black feminists have confronted the Superwoman myth. Wallace had only to read the Statement of Purpose of the National Black Feminist Organization which was founded in 1973 and headquartered in New York, the city from which she hails. Further research would

have shown that the National Alliance of Black Feminists, presently the *largest* black women's organization with "feminist" in its title, has addressed this issue via its Speakers' Bureau and its published writings since its inception in 1976 (drawing on the work its forerunner carried on since 1974).

Wallace reinforces the negative stereotypes of feminists when she says of Black feminists: "Some black women have come together because they can't find husbands. Some are angry with their boyfriends. The lesbians are looking for a public forum for their sexual preference. Others notice that if one follows in the footsteps of the white feminists, a lucrative position or promotion may come up before long."

Again, Wallace trivializes; this time Black feminists are her target. How does Wallace know that these Black single women are in fact looking for husbands? For those who *are*, common sense would indicate that a feminist organization is not the most likely place to find one. What women did Wallace interview to know that some are angry with their boyfriends? Any who do join for this reason quickly discover that feminist organizations have little time to spend in a personal harangue of men—Black, white, or any other color. There are just too many *pro* woman issues on which to focus.

And lesbians? Since Wallace indicates that it is the *middle-class* Black woman who is beginning to address herself to feminist issues, it would logically follow that the lesbians must be middle-class, at least in the feminist organizations. Wouldn't that suggest that many of these middle-class Black lesbians would be deeply entrenched "in the closet," and therefore *not* want their sexual preference exposed? Imagine, if you will, "upwardly mobile Black women" who receive a "lucrative position or promotion," ridding themselves of their "humiliation" by proclaiming their lesbianism to the world!

Wallace maligns Black Feminism even further in one of her closing paragraphs: "These women (Black feminists)

have trouble agreeing on things. Their organizations break up quickly and yet more keep forming.

Wallace charges that "Their organizations break up quickly and yet more keep forming"; but isn't it a cause for celebration that they form at all? The very fact that more keep sprouting in spite of the number which break up is in itself a testament to the fact that the Black woman's "mindless rejection of feminism," must not be so *mindless* after all. How sad that a Black woman who calls herself a "feminist" does not stress the major point here which is that Black Feminism is alive and well and that like the Black woman, it will survive despite great obstacles!

One must seriously question *any* self-appointed leader who would treat her/his following with the disdain that Wallace continually expresses. She can see the frailties of other Blacks but somehow misses them in herself. In this regard, her characterization of Imamu Amiri Baraka—formerly LeRoi Jones—is apropos: "Whites labeled him racist, but there turned out to be no cause for worry. In time Jones would prove himself neither a politician nor a general. He was first and last a writer. As a writer, even in his essay, he was most concerned with compelling images. What did it matter whether they were real or imagined? He would frequently pass up the moderate when there was an extreme within reach. Black Macho was the stuff of which stirring, gut-spilling prose was made and Jones seized the opportunity."

Sadly, by modifying a few words, she could as easily be speaking of herself: Wallace labels herself a "feminist," but there turns out to be no cause for worry. In time Wallace proves herself neither a politician nor a general. She is first and last a writer. As a writer, even in her essay, she is most concerned with compelling images. What does it matter whether they are real or imagined? She frequently passes up the moderate when there is an extreme within reach. Black Female Macho is the stuff of which stirring, gut-spilling prose is made

and Wallace seizes the opportunity.

And Black Female Macho her book is. Wallace is guilty of the very same charges that she levels at other Blacks, especially Black men.

Wallace's two major themes, the existence of Black Macho (Black male chauvinism *does* exist) and the Myth of the Superwoman (Black women *have* suffered from the mythology which surrounds them) are excellent ones. But *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* must essentially be viewed as a polemic, not a historical document or a feminist treatise. Couched in historical inaccuracies, lack of documentation, stereotypes, distortion, arrogance, sarcasm, and disdain, this book does a gross injustice to what might have been a monumental work.

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Correction: Drawings on page 10 and 12 of *June Moving On*, illustrating "Suffer the little children," were drawn by Maggie Block for *WIN Magazine*. The creditline was mistakenly left out.

GULAG, PAST AND PRESENT

*To Build a Castle—My Life As A
Dissenter*

By Vladimir Bukovsky; translated by
Michael Scammell

New York: Viking Press, 1978, \$17.50

*Coming Out of the Ice: An
Unexpected Life*

By Victor Herman

New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,
1979, \$12.95

By Louis Menashe

IF YOU'VE SEEN ONE CAMP IN GULAG, you've seen them all. Reading about short rations, sadistic guards, numbing cold, and backbreaking labor has become all too dreary and all too familiar. Solzhenitsyn said it best and most concisely in *One Day In the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. His multi-volume *Gulag Archipelago* only piled on detail after relentless detail. This is especially dreary business for socialists. Who needs this stuff, especially when the media chortle with the publication of every chronicle about the grim underside of Soviet socialism? The answer is: socialists need it, every bit of it, for reasons of historical truth as well as contemporary politics.

When the fur started flying over Joan Baez's "Open Letter to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," William Kunstler argued that he wouldn't sign the letter because he didn't "believe in public attacks on the socialist countries, even where violations of human rights may occur." This kind of response is common on the Left. Unfortunately, it's also nonsense, morally corrosive and politically irresponsible. Building a socialist movement in the U.S. doesn't need cover-ups about socialism elsewhere.

Official camouflaging of arbitrary repressions and other disorders has bred a certain amount of political indifference,

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disillusionment, and even anti-socialist, anti-communist attitudes among large numbers of people in the socialist countries themselves. In this country, the Communist Left was devastated and never fully recovered from its single-minded devotion to defending the USSR against all damaging charges, a habit still exemplified by the Communist Party-USA.

When Moscow set off its political bombshell in the form of Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956, many in the Communist movement felt betrayed, cruelly deceived. They blamed the Party or Moscow for their illusory faith. But wasn't some of the betrayal self-prepared, some of the deception self-inflicted? The facts were known or suspected; it didn't have to take Nikita Khrushchev to reveal them. They could have been faced up to, explained, *criticized*; socialist ideals could have been insulated from bizarre Soviet practices rather than identified with those practices. And quite possibly—an idle speculative wish, perhaps—those Soviet practices might have been different if Communists everywhere applied critical pressure instead of dutiful conformity.

To be sure, things were never so simple. From the 1930s through the mid-'50s the Soviet Union was besieged from the outside in one form or another. Internally, the terrain for constructing socialism was exceptionally harsh. Allowances had to be made in forming an attitude towards the USSR and shaping a politics that made defense of the first socialist state a central concern.

The tragedy was that contorted rationalizations prevailed over allowances based on an honest admission of the facts. Rationalizations always have a way of backfiring on the rationalizers and the ideas they stand for. Socialism was for a long time terribly compromised by its identification with Stalinism.

The question has become how to get out from under. Some ex-Stalinists have gone through an interesting metamorphosis: they have become born-again Marxists baptized by Chairman Mao (or other Third World socialists), and have written off the Soviet Union altogether. Others have become anti-communists pure and simple. But for those who have not responded with dogmatic reflexes and still seek to understand the Soviet experience and why politics hitched to Moscow led up blind alleys, confronting the past with a sober eye is essential. We can't control the past, but we can infer some political lessons from it.

Remarkable Footnote.

Victor Herman's remarkable book is only a footnote to such an agenda. But it is an absolutely compelling personal chronicle of survival as well as a document on one small corner of the relationship between American Communism and the Soviet Union. There is no political discourse in the book. Occasionally, Herman offers a detached observation on the awesome riddle of things that converted a Detroit youngster into a Gulag victim. Only twice does he delve into causation. At one point he asks the reader to "remember that these were exceptional times—and that everything I describe was played out against a backdrop of routine chaos." At another point, he surrenders to the hazard of it all: "Me, I'd learned long ago not to bother trying to figure out anything Russian and official."

From this reluctance to moralize or preach comes some of the power of Herman's book, much as Ivan



Denisovich stands so tall because of his silence. But Herman's strange fate is not so hard to figure out. He was just 16 years old when his father took the family from Detroit to Gorky (Nizhnii-Novgorod). His father was a devoted Communist who organized auto workers. In 1929 the Ford Motor Company was contracted by the Soviet government to help build a plant in Cen-

tral Russia.

Herman's father leaped at the opportunity to take part in the heroic Five-Year Plan to modernize Soviet industry and became an important intermediary in recruiting hundreds of American auto workers who, out of political idealism, curiosity, or the need for work, agreed to go to the USSR. According to Herman, he is the sole survivor. (The Soviet

government ended the relationship with Ford in 1934.) Many were swallowed up in the terror of the Great Purge period, 1936-1938, which fell with particular dread on Communists, foreigners, and probably the most vulnerable group, *foreign* Communists. As for his father, Herman records only that he last saw him in 1938 and that he died in 1953.

When the family arrived in Leningrad

in 1931, Herman's mother sensed trouble. These were the lean and tense days of crash industrialization and peasant collectivization; Stalin was in charge politically after having disposed of the main Bolshevik oppositions from "Right" (Bukharin) and "Left" (Trotsky). "It is crazy, Sam!" cried Herman's mother, "It has nothing to do with politics. This is a bad place, and if you love me and the children, you will get us out of here this very instant." A shrewd observation, an analysis in embryo that Soviet socialism was inevitably wracked by the inhospitable legacy of Tsarist Russia. But Herman's father was determined to stick it out. (His mother died a couple of years later of a cerebral hemorrhage and, Herman suggests, of a broken heart.)

Herman describes work at the Soviet Ford plant, with its hazards on the shop floors, its unskilled peasant labor, the violence of winter cold, and finally, the enormous pride of production. One of the most vivid scenes in the book, speaking mouthfuls of commentary on the quality of building socialism (or something) in the USSR, is Herman's description of a caravan of new trucks and cars driven to the Kremlin to honor the first fruits of the assembly line. At each village, no matter what time of day or night, peasants were herded out by armed escorts to tamp down the snow so the vehicles could negotiate the roads. (Another valuable book depicting the strange adventures in Soviet industrialization is John Scott's *Behind the Urals*, the experiences of a young American welder at the great metallurgical combine in Magnitogorsk in the 1930s.)

Victor Herman was a talented athlete. In 1934 he was hailed as the "Russian Lindbergh" for his record-breaking 142 seconds of dead fall from a high-flying aircraft. His 16-year ordeal began when he was suddenly cashiered from his teaching post at a jumping school in Moscow and then arrested as a "spy" in 1937, a victim of the political paranoia engulfing the country in those days. After 55 nights of beatings at in-

terrogations, Herman "confessed" and was shuttled from one horrid outpost to another in the Gulag universe until his official exoneration in 1955. After much arduous effort, he was permitted to leave the USSR in 1976. He is now back in Detroit, a living, unsentimental martyr to, as he puts it laconically, his father's "large belief."

Soviet New Left.

Vladimir Bukovsky is a different kind of martyr, a man who might, out of their common experiences in the grip of a terror apparatus, sympathize with Victor Herman's ordeal but couldn't possibly identify with Sam Herman's "large belief." Bukovsky, a leading Soviet dissident until his expulsion from the USSR in 1976, is a product of the liberalizing reforms of de-Stalinization as well as a victim of its backlash. De-Stalinization triggered an enormous ferment of ideas and even organizations in the USSR, many of which called for a revived Leninism and neo-Marxism. This extended from roughly the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties, at which point the Soviet leadership thought it was time to stop the dangerous erosion of official authority, history, and politics in the eyes of the Soviet public, especially among younger people.

It is fair to describe Bukovsky's generation (he was born in 1942) as a Soviet version of the New Left. They were hostile to established authority, they had inchoate philosophical stirrings, and above all, they had a reckless courage that equated personal acts of witness and protest with real politics. Like the Western New Left in its initial phases, they thought the other kind of politics—ideology, theory, mass organization—led straight to Stalinism.

The difference between the Western and Soviet strands of the New Left was generated by the differing environments of each. For the Western New Left, arriving at Marxian and socialist positions was a logical extension of the vague "anti-establishment" impulse. For the "Soviet New Left", the establishment claimed to be the highest embodiment of

the ideas of Marx and Lenin. Consequently, Bukovsky and his friends, in a twist of the self-deception mentioned above, came to loathe Marxism, Leninism, and virtually everything associated with Soviet socialism.

It is a sad outcome for which the Western socialist and Communist Left must take partial responsibility. For too long, that Left refused to raise its voice on behalf of Soviet dissidents under siege from the authorities because they were deemed reactionary and anti-communist. This had two effects. For one thing, the dissidents became suspicious of the Western Left and it solidified their anti-communism. For another, the moral and political initiative went over to anti-communists such as, say, Jimmy Carter and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who posed as champions of human liberty. (Unlike some other dissidents who see Washington as their savior, Bukovsky seems skeptical of the intentions of *all* official power.)

One of the more intriguing innovations of the Eurocommunist movement is coming out on behalf of the Soviet dissident movement, regardless of the ideological-political hues within it.

Despite some jejune political analysis and occasional pontificating, Bukovsky's memoir is a moving document that tells us a great deal about "the movement" in the USSR, its beginnings, activities, triumphs, and ultimate fragmentation through exile, psychiatric detention, intimidation, and imprisonment. Soviet authorities have always taken the opposition of their intelligentsia very seriously. Moral, "personal-as-political" protest is often the first telltale of mass protest embracing other strata.

Developments are far from that point in the USSR, though Czechoslovakia and Poland show signs of having reached that stage. The Western Left, by offering its solidarity to such a process, could assist in creating fresh socialist currents in the USSR. Bukovsky probably wouldn't be pleased by such a turn of events, but his courageous stance will have helped pave the way.

Back to the Basics—

Competition, Hierarchy, and Inequality

The Revisionists Revised

By Diane Ravitch

New York: Basic Books

By Debbie Goldman

AS IN MANY AREAS IN AMERICA today, the trend in education has swung back to the Right. Many changes implemented in the schools over the last ten years are rapidly disappearing, if not already gone. Reforms to further equal opportunity and lessen competition—the elimination of ability level tracking, the institution of pass-fail grading and affirmative action programs, and the push for de-segregation—all are in the process of retrenchment.

Anti-authoritarian measures—such as the open campus, alternative programs, and the relaxation of rules—are being eliminated. Anti-bureaucratic policies aimed at increasing democratic control over the schools, especially the emphasis on community control, have declined. Public support for education has gone down, resulting in closed programs and occasionally closed school systems.

To be sure, some remnants of the educational struggles of the 1960's remain: no more dress codes, no more study halls, sometimes a "free school" within a public school, and most notably, bilingual educational programs. However, often these are either only symbolic changes or, as in the case of some "alternative programs," programs designed to get federal money. In general, "back to basics" is the language of education today.

Many of the 60's radicals had pinned their hopes for a radical transformation of American society on the changes in education, seeing changing conscious-

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ness as a first critical step in making revolution. They had read Ivan Illich and others and had learned how the "hidden curriculum" of the schools functioned to teach young people the values of capitalist culture: grading inculcated competition; tracking taught hierarchy; hall passes and attendance rules trained young people in obedience to authority.

Or, as the Marxist historians of education, such as Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis pointed out, the "hidden curriculum" taught future workers the "social relations of production." A key to changing consciousness, then, was not only to change the curriculum but to change the rules and authority patterns of schools.

A new breed of educational historians provided an intellectual basis for these critics. These radical revisionists looked back in American educational history to prove its liberal tradition was a myth. They showed that although schools in America are purported to foster social mobility, in reality they have served as a means of perpetuating the social class system.

And they pointed out that the expansion of schooling to the children of the poor and working classes has not been one glorious line of progress, but rather reflective of the changing needs of the American economy. As America industrialized, schools were given the task of teaching workers the new skills and work habits needed by industry. In addition, schools were expected to assimilate each influx of immigrants—promoting a homogeneous WASP culture that further reinforced the power of the dominant class.

Finally, many radical historians argued that liberal reformers have tended to see a panacea for social and economic ills in the schools, rather than in a more basic transformation of the entire society.

Resurrecting liberalism.

In order to resurrect the liberal educational tradition in the wake of these scathing attacks and to provide intellectual justification for the current rightward shift in educational policy, Diane Ravitch has written what she calls "A Critique of the Radical Attack on the Schools." In *The Revisionists Revised* she singles out for attack the following radical historians: Michael Katz, Clarence Karier, Paul Violas, Joel Spring, Walter Feinberg, Samuel Bowles, and Herbert Gintis.

The impact of her book is to shift the terrain of educational discourse, among both professionals and the public, to the Right. In order to push the discussion back toward the Left, we must understand and be able to refute Ravitch's arguments.

For her, the liberal tradition in American education is one that prizes freedom of inquiry and expression, trains people to think and participate in a democracy, and promotes social mobility. The goal of liberal educational reformers over the past one-hundred years has been to further the realization of these ends. "That liberal aspirations," she writes, "have not been fully realized (and have even occasionally been negated) is not an indictment of the aspiration, but is rather an acknowledgement of the difficulty of the goal and the stubbornness of human nature and institutions."

In contrast, Ravitch defines the radical revisionists as people who refuse to engage in the struggle over reform or public policy in education:

The radical preserves the purity of his principles by remaining aloof from the system and from any ultimate responsibility for its success or failure. By definition, then, the reformer (liberal, she means) is one who grapples with political and social problems and seeks solutions, while the radical eschews entanglement with a 'corrupt' system, since any incremental improvement would only help secure the social order.

Having established her own definitions of liberals and radicals, Ravitch proceeds to critique the radicals' arguments. The gist is in the titles of two chapters: "Education and Social Mobility: the Radical Case Examined" and "Education Still Matters." She summarizes studies to try to prove that education does in fact lead to increased social mobility, and that, therefore, the radical revisionists have not proven their case.

However, at the conclusion of the chapter on social mobility, when discussing Christopher Jencks' book *Inequality*, she rephrases the whole issue. The tension, she says, is between definitions of equality. Should one define equality as equality of opportunity (as the liberals do) or as equality of results (as she purports radicals do)? Ravitch chooses equality of opportunity because she claims to value liberty and efficiency more than she does equality. Then, in two paragraphs, she proceeds to dismiss all attempts to achieve equality of results as either bureaucratic or inefficient.

Ravitch also objects to the radical revisionists' views of history. She indicts Bowles and Gintis, for example, for their "functionalist" analysis. Although the effect, or function, of a certain educational reform might be seen with hindsight to have buttressed the capitalist system, Ravitch argues that the radical historians simplify the motives and political forces that vied for educational policies at a given time.

Because their current political con-



cerns focus the questions they ask of history and the facts they choose to present, she believes the radicals abandon all attempts to write objective history, producing rhetoric and polemic instead.

Perhaps some of the revisionists did overstate their case, but Ravitch has erred more grievously in her attempt to discredit the radicals and re-assert the primacy of liberal educational theory. Her definition of radical is the first glaring case of inaccuracy. A radical who refuses to be engaged in the political struggles of our day? Admittedly, there are people who call themselves radical who are quite content to stand on the sidelines and criticize every struggle as "reformist." But they are the exceptions, also on the sidelines of the dominant radical tradition.

In reality, the radical reformer differs from the liberal in that he/she sees the *connections* between the inequalities and injustices in different arenas in our society and their relationship to the larger economic order. And the radical has

a vision of an alternative society that embodies fundamental, not piecemeal, change in the institutions of American life. This is not to say that the radical does not struggle for change in all areas that affect peoples' daily lives. Rather, that struggle is imbued with an understanding of the link between various immediate reforms and the larger struggle.

Different questions.

Ideally, this leads the radical to ask different questions: Will vocational education reinforce the class structure or will it be a needed training ground for skills for the working class? Does bilingual education promote or inhibit equality for non-English speaking students? Is integration a policy for better education for minorities or is it a weapon to divide the working class while maintaining inferior schools? An understanding of the effects of these policies in the past will help radicals make wiser choices today.

Ravitch's argument that "schools do



matter" is also weak. Her statistics and surveys show no more than she claims—that some individuals within each ethnic group and some ethnic groups as a whole have had upward mobility through education. This does not prove equal educational opportunity for all in America. It does not take statistics to see the discrepancy between the public high schools in suburbia and those in the inner city, nor to see the differences in the number of students going to college or in the test scores of students from these different schools. Some upward mobility in society (and little downward) cannot be equated with equal educational opportunity.

In addition, the manner in which Ravitch poses the tension—equal opportunity versus equal results—obscures the point. What is meant by "equal opportunity?" For example, she says that food stamps, public housing, aid to education, and community development monies are "intended to improve the condition of those who have not succeeded in the competition of equal op-

portunity." But couldn't these programs just as well be to give equal opportunity to those born without the means or education or background to provide them? Similarly, affirmative action programs can be seen as tools necessary to provide equal opportunity to individuals and groups who do not have the advantages other groups have acquired.

Ravitch fails to see that when the cards are stacked against you in terms of unequal power, control, and participation, it is impossible to achieve equal opportunity. In true liberal tradition, she isolates education from other aspects of society. Thus her incongruously brief indictment of "equality of results" (her way of saying socialism, I think) comes off as incredibly simplistic.

Finally, Ravitch's critique of the revisionists ignores the validity of much of their research. Regardless of the motives of the reformers and the complexity of the struggles (not irrelevant, I agree), the fact remains that certain clear patterns have emerged in American schools. They are structurally unequal, they are

bureaucratic, the vast majority are segregated, most teach assimilation into "American" culture, and they tend to inculcate certain patterns of behavior that include obedience to authority, hierarchy, and competition.

The questions the revisionists ask, and the research they do, is critical in understanding why American schools have come to be this way. If certain political forces lost a fight at some point, why? If a seemingly progressive reform turned out to help buttress the capitalist system, how did this happen? True, we need history that tries to get an accurate picture of what was going on in a particular period, but a functionalist, political concern for history need not overlook this. Rather, it can point us in the right direction in our research.

Ravitch concludes her book by reminding us that schools are limited institutions, that educational change cannot be seen as the panacea for all of America's problems. On this last point, I (and I believe the radical historians) would agree with her. It has been an American tradition to try to solve society's problems in the schools—and to neglect genuine intellectual training as a result. One of the contradictions of many of the liberal reformers was just this.

Socialists should recognize that schools both reflect and perpetuate currents in capitalist America and, therefore, focus our struggles for change both inside and outside educational institutions. Our vision cannot be limited to schools that provide people with an equal opportunity to get ahead, but must encompass a society where there is equal participation, control, and access to power, regardless of the job one has. Under such conditions, many of the educational tensions that Ravitch describes and the revisionists discuss would no longer exist. In the meantime, we must struggle, with vision and historical understanding, for increased equality in the schools and in other institutions in our society. The work of the best of the radical historians, not that of Diane Ravitch, points us in the right direction in this task.

We Get Letters...

Self-serving

In the many months we have had occasion to deal with NAM and some of its members in our area, we have come to expect very little from your organization in the way of firm principles or commitment to the working class. But Judy MacLean's viewpoint, "Left Turn," in the June issue of **Moving On** really hits rock bottom.

MacLean congratulates the Eurocommunists for helping to find the way to bring socialism to advanced capitalist countries, and then congratulates NAM, and indirectly herself, for the fact that a contingent of Eurocommunist representatives had dubbed NAM the "true left flank" in the U.S.

These remarks are hypocritical and self-serving nonsense. Do we need to remind the members of NAM's New Haven chapter that in 1977, Spanish Communist Party leader Santiago Carillo [one of MacLean's favorites] crossed a picket line of striking, low-paid service employees in order to deliver a speech to a group of Yale University students? Are MacLean and her type so contemptuous of the working class that they think the way to build socialism is by snubbing a bona fide workers' struggle just to spend some time with the bored children of the bourgeoisie?

How convenient it must be to bask in the glow of their newly-discovered self-righteousness, while feeling no need to suffer any of the hardships involved in messy day-to-day activities like strikes. Cancel the remainder of our subscription to **Moving On** immediately.

**Jerry Lombardi
Jan Stackhouse
Derby, CT**

MacLean replies: No doubt about it, Carillo shouldn't have crossed that picket line. However, the shine on Lombardi's and Stackhouse's revolutionary haloes seems to blind them to any of the other things the man has done, for example, keeping a mass, working class communist party together in secret under fascism. That party, by the way, participated in hundreds of strikes, which were illegal in Spain at the time.

Eurocommunists are not perfect, but they have created massive parties under advanced capitalism, something we have not yet been able to do here. There is much we can learn from them. NAM members were part of the Yale service strike, and are part of "messy, day to day activity" in cities across the country. If I have a choice between respecting someone like Carillo (who has done things, I am sure, even worse than crossing that picket line) and respecting the kind of snotty purism embodied in this letter, I'll choose the former every time.

Solar Power

This letter is a response to your articles on energy ("Sizing Up the Future") in the June issue of **Moving On**. I believe both of them missed the mark.

The article "Cheapest is Best" had a simple thesis: Capital intensive industry should be favored because it produces goods more cheaply than labor intensive industry. It also provides higher paying jobs and living standards.

But in proving their point, the authors rely on faulty reasoning. They discuss the issues as if there was no difference between capitalist and socialist organization of industry. Under capitalism, in fact, increases in productivity do not go to the mass of the population. Instead automation results in unemployment, destruction of the earth, more air and water pollution, wider wage disparity in the working class and often more alienation of workers from their work.

Luria and Price are right that socialists should not favor a general return to more labor intensive methods under capitalism. This would take a colossal struggle which would be better spent expropriating the capitalists and organizing things for the benefit of society. However, we should support workers who strike against automation. It is part of their effort to maintain jobs at the expense of corporate profit. We should also push for shorter work

weeks at full pay and guaranteed employment funded by taxes on corporations.

In the case of energy, we should favor a massive shift to renewable resources. They are less destructive of people and the environment than fossil fuels or nuclear power. They also tend to be more decentralized which cuts the cost of energy transmission (which now accounts for 2/3 of electricity costs). Solar power especially is more thermodynamically matched to its end uses. As such it requires less investment to get a specific job done. The fact that renewable resources are more benign to people and the environment also cuts overall social costs. Solar systems also have less complex parts and last longer also making them cheaper. Nuclear and coal plants need expensive safety and scrubbing systems that raise their costs.

The actual price of energy to the consumer will be strongly influenced by political decisions. Whether solar power becomes "cost competitive" with other sources depends on whether the government decides to develop it or not. So far it has suppressed renewable resources and subsidized nukes and fossil fuels because they are more profitable to the corporations. Socialists should demand that this change, not acquiesce in the government's present priorities.

In general, Luria and Price seem to buy the capitalist arguments that solar power is a long way off and we need to raise productivity for everyone's benefit. Socialists should not accept these arguments.

The article "Small is Better" on the other hand goes to the opposite extreme. It seems to imply that solar power and decentralization are cure-alls for our energy and social problems.

We should be realistic. Under capitalism, solar power is unlikely to be developed much. If it is the corporations will make it as centralized and profitable as possible. Even this would be better than the present use of nuclear power and fossil fuels in terms of effects on people and the environment but it would not solve our other social and economic problems. Unemployment and inflation after all come from the very structure of capitalism. They cannot be reformed away even by widespread use of renewable resources.

**Steve Leigh
Seattle, WA.**

Fiction in Brief

Because fiction can explore complex issues and feelings in a personal way, it has the ability to move people deeply at both an intellectual and an emotional level.

Perhaps the most recent example of the novel-as-social-force is *The Women's Room*. Like many feminists, I have my problems with this book. It is too often superficial, its women too wholly victims, its political pessimism at times near reactionary. Still, I find it amazing that a book that portrays women's lives in such painful detail, and that expresses such outrage at what men have done, is hanging on the best seller list even as Gothic romances come and go. I've seen black secretaries at the phone company engrossed in it and middle-aged, suburban wives overwhelmed by it. It is a book that allows women our anger. (Now we need one that allows us our hope.)

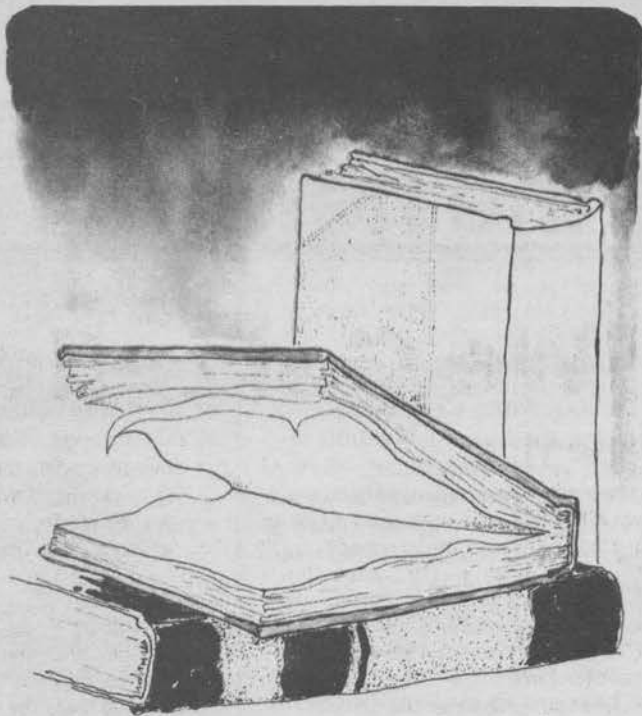
In addition, the past year has seen the paperback editions of two extraordinarily good works, which have achieved a solid measure of popular success: Toni Morrison's *The Song of Solomon* and Mary Gordon's *Final Payments*.

The current crop of novels—hardbacks and recent paperback releases—does not offer anything quite as dazzling, but it does provide some fascinating and, in a few cases, profound reading.

I hate to recommend a book that was almost impossible to find in Chicago bookstores, but this one is so remarkable that we should try to increase the demand for it. *A Weave of Women* by E.M. Broner is a beautifully written book that manages to expand the perimeters of reality without ever seeming simply fanciful.

Broner's poetic and skillful weaving of the lives of a small group of women who have all been drawn to an old stone house in Israel vibrates with a visionary energy. She does not offer a feminist utopia (or even the vision that many of us might choose), but a brilliant evocation of both the horror and the joy of the journeys on which women have embarked.

History, by Elsa Morante, is a powerful novel of the lives of ordinary people in Italy during the Second World War. Morante portrays in almost excruciating detail the daily struggle for survival and she movingly demonstrates the ability of love—however truncated—to withstand the rawest environment. Although this book is clearly anti-fascist, some leftists may be offended by its seemingly anti-political posture. Perhaps as a rationalization for my own partiality to it, I prefer to see it as a depiction of how yet incomplete is the



necessary connection between public and private worlds.

Selena is a work much closer to home in both time and place. Spanning the tumultuous years from the mid-fifties to the early seventies, it focuses on a Mexican American woman, born into a California farmworker family, who refuses to accept the given order of her life.

Ernest Brawley vividly depicts the complex interaction of deeply personal and powerfully social motivations that compel her to become a major leader in her people's fight for justice and dignity. He is as aware of the power struggles between men and women—and their enormous implications—as he is of those that drive farmworkers and landowners to their inevitable confrontation.

Alice Adams' latest novel, *Listening to Billie*, is the story of a white, middle-class woman trying to make her own way in the world. While less explicitly feminist than other works of this genre, it displays a sensitivity to the nuances of a woman's life and an awareness of basic needs—meaningful work, companionship, connections that count over the years. It follows Eliza Quarles from the early days of a marriage that ends abruptly through middle age when she confronts her own daughter's life choices.

Mortal Friends, by James Carroll, is an engrossing novel pegged on the rise of the Irish in Boston over the past century, told chiefly through the life of the immigrant Colin Brady. Carroll is primarily concerned with male power and bonding, particularly the father-son relationship (whether by blood or by instinct). Although women are largely peripheral to this story, his female characters—when they do appear—display surprising strength and integrity. Don't read this one looking for the "correct" political line—or anything close.

Roberta Lynch

All the news...

Moving and Shaking

•Tim Jenkins, Santa Cruz NAM member, is being sued for \$1,000,000 by a local real estate developer, Telford Smith. Smith claims an ad run in last spring's campaign to stop the recall of three progressive county supervisors defamed him. (Smith put up \$12,000 to help recall the supervisors.) The defamatory portion of the ad was a direct quote from a local newspaper; Jenkins has been singled out for the suit among 50 signers of the ad because he was treasurer of the Coalition Against the Recall. Smith intends to chill activity against real estate developers in the Santa Cruz area by making people fear the hassle of a court case. But the community has rallied around Jenkins and formed a defense fund to defray the legal costs...**St Louis** NAM members helped organize a "Women, Take Back the Night" march June 9. The all-women's march called attention to violence against women and demanded that the streets be made safe. A task force of men did childcare and support work for the march....**Pittsburgh** NAM members joined a picket line at the annual meeting of General Public Utilities Corporation in Johnstown, PA May 9. GPU is the owner of the Three Mile Island nuclear plant. The picketers called for no nukes and vowed, "We won't pay for Three Mile Island"....**Long Island** NAM is part of the new Long Island Progressive Coalition. The coalition combines several union locals, including the Machinists and the United Auto Workers, Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, National Organization for Women, no nukes groups, and others. They met June 5 to hammer out a "People's Platform for the 80s"....Members of **Champaign-Urbana** NAM joined 500 protesters June 3 demanding a halt to construction of a nuclear power plant in nearby Clinton, IL.

Gay Pride

•Christine Riddiough, of **Blazing Star** NAM, was one of two featured speakers at a Chicago march and rally of 4,000 on Gay Pride Day, June 24. "We've come a long way in the past ten years, but the fight for liberation is just beginning," Riddiough told the crowd. Gay Pride Week activities this year celebrated the ten year anniversary of the founding of the gay liberation movement....**New Haven** NAM members co-sponsored a week of gay awareness in that city June 17-24....**Pittsburgh** NAM co-sponsored a week of gay pride activities including a poetry reading, forums, sports, a dance, films and a march....NAM members in **Baltimore, San Francisco** and other cities also took part in Gay Pride Week.

Reproductive Rights

•Fifteen hundred people marched through Cincinnati on June 23 to counter the national convention of the so-called "Right-to-Life" forces and defend women's right to choose abortion. The march and rally, sponsored by Reproductive Rights National Network, included members of **Madison, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Dayton** and **Lexington** NAM, as well as activists from other Midwest cities. The demonstration ended with a car caravan to the "Right-to-Life" convention. "The large turnout and friendly reception from people in Cincinnati shows the tide is turning on this issue," said Marilyn Katz, head of NAM's Reproductive Rights Task Force.

Down Under

•Richard Healey, member of NAM's Political Committee and Dorothy Healey, member of **Los Angeles** NAM and co-chair of NAM's Inter-

nationalism Commission, were guests of the Communist Party of Australia at their Congress June 15-18 in Sydney, Australia. The Australian party does not automatically adopt political positions put forth by the USSR or China and has many views similar to those of New American Movement. In the past years, the party has made feminism, gay liberation, and ecological issues part of its program. Both Healeys gave speeches to a variety of groups in several cities while in Australia. Richard Healey spoke to a group of metalworkers at a lunchtime meeting held at the plant cafeteria. (The right to hold such meetings has been one of the things negotiated by the workers.) "I was impressed by the anti-uranium mining movement. It's very strong among workers, most of whom live thousands of miles from the actual danger," said Richard Healey.

Talkin' Union

•Four Texas women who organized unions from the 1930s to the 1960s tell their stories in *Talkin' Union*. The recently released hour-long documentary was co-directed by **Austin** NAM member Glenn Scott along with Maria Flores. The women are black, white and Latina, garment and farmworkers, whose struggles in a hostile environment have been largely forgotten. "An effective and inspiring piece of work," says a Texas film critic. *Talkin' Union* is available in English and Spanish, film or video cassette from People's History in Texas, Inc., 1506 Concordia, Austin, TX 78722.

Office news

•NAM's national office has a new summer staff member. Peggy Hepp is a senior at Michigan State University doing an internship with *Moving On*. She majored in International Relations, and hopes to work with the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women after graduation. Welcome,

NAM in Brief

The New American Movement combines a Marxist analysis with careful attention to the current realities of American politics. It combines a deep commitment to its socialist principles with a tactical flexibility in its political approach. It combines a focus on the development of theory appropriate to our times with an activist orientation that stresses involvement in the crucial issues of the day. And it combines a vision of a socialist future based on democracy and human freedom with efforts to project

in our work elements of that future.

NAM has over 35 chapters involved in organizing for labor union democracy, against nuclear power, for abortion rights, against violence against women, for affirmative action, against apartheid in South Africa, and much more. Chapters also organize cultural and educational events that attempt to present a new and challenging socialist perspective on our world.

All of this work is informed and united by certain basic political ideas:

- NAM is committed to working toward a socialist society in which material resources and the decision-making process are democratically controlled by all people.

- We are committed to a socialism that has equality and respect for all people at its core—one that carefully balances the need for collective planning, ownership, and decision-making with a high regard for individual rights and freedom.

- The development of a movement for socialism in America will require the growth of socialist consciousness within

the working class—all those who have to sell their labor power (even if they are not directly paid) in order to survive. For it is only a broad-based movement representative of the diversity of the American people that can fundamentally challenge the power of capital.

- American capitalism is a powerful and entrenched system. Yet it is also rife with contradictions. Organization is key to changing power relationships and exposing these contradictions. We are committed to the development of a socialist party that can carry out these tasks, as well as to the growth of the most strong and progressive possible popular organizations.

- Democracy is central to the process of building a movement for socialism. Only as working people become active, organized and begin to take control over their lives can a new society take shape.

- NAM sees the struggle for the liberation of women as integral to a socialist movement. We value the contributions of the women's movement in showing how revolutionary change must deal with all aspects of people's lives. And we defend now, and in the socialism we project, the liberation of gay women and men.

- Racism cripples national life—it denies the humanity of minorities and thwarts the potential of the working class as a whole. NAM is committed to fighting against racism and national oppression in all forms.

- The fate of socialism in the United States is tied to the rest of the world. We support struggles for national liberation and human freedom wherever they occur.

- NAM supports the positive achievements of the existing socialist countries. However, we are also critical of various aspects of their policies, and see no one of them as a model for our own efforts.

New American Movement National Convention

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
August 8-12

Debates:

Labor strategy, electoral politics

Workshops:

Feminism, culture, anti-racism, Third world liberation struggles, health, gay liberation, community organizing

Concert:

Kristin Lems and Tim Lear

Film Festival:

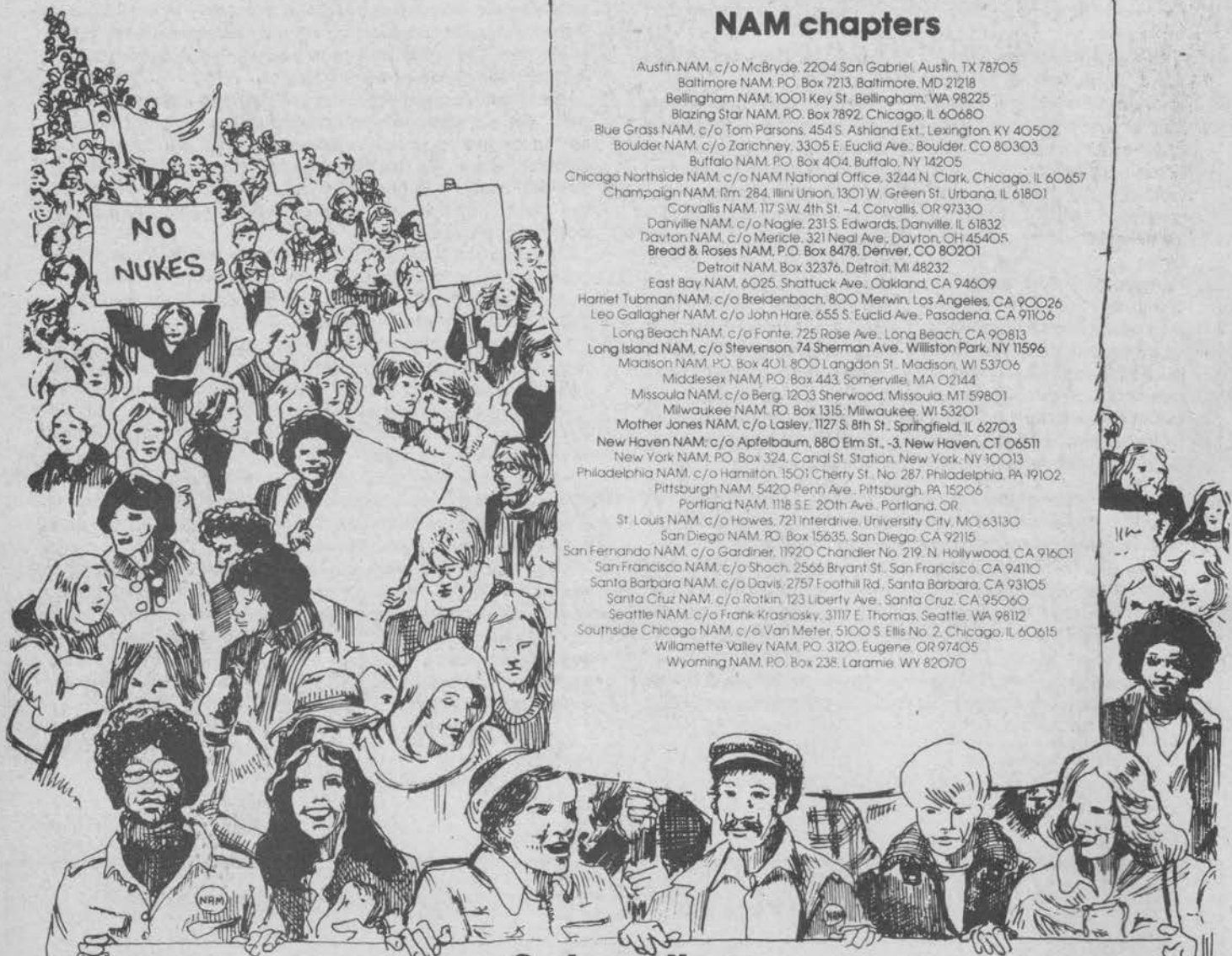
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 Bellingham NAM, 1001 Key St., Bellingham, WA 98225
 Blazing Star NAM, PO. Box 7892, Chicago, IL 60680
 Blue Grass NAM, c/o Tom Parsons, 454 S. Ashland Ext., Lexington, KY 40502
 Boulder NAM, c/o Zarichney, 3305 E. Euclid Ave., Boulder, CO 80303
 Buffalo NAM, PO. Box 404, Buffalo, NY 14205
 Chicago Northside NAM, c/o NAM National Office, 3244 N. Clark, Chicago, IL 60657
 Champaign NAM, Rm. 284, Illini Union, 1301 W. Green St., Urbana, IL 61801
 Corvallis NAM, 117 S.W. 4th St., -4, Corvallis, OR 97330
 Danville NAM, c/o Nagle, 231 S. Edwards, Danville, IL 61832
 Dayton NAM, c/o Mericle, 321 Neal Ave., Dayton, OH 45405
 Bread & Roses NAM, P.O. Box 8478, Denver, CO 80201
 Detroit NAM, Box 32376, Detroit, MI 48232
 East Bay NAM, 6025, Shattuck Ave., Oakland, CA 94609
 Harriet Tubman NAM, c/o Breidenbach, 800 Merwin, Los Angeles, CA 90026
 Leo Gallagher NAM, c/o John Hare, 655 S. Euclid Ave., Pasadena, CA 91106
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 Long Island NAM, c/o Stevenson, 74 Sherman Ave., Williston Park, NY 11596
 Madison NAM, PO. Box 401, 800 Langdon St., Madison, WI 53706
 Middlesex NAM, PO. Box 443, Somerville, MA 02144
 Missoula NAM, c/o Berg, 1203 Sherwood, Missoula, MT 59801
 Milwaukee NAM, PO. Box 1315, Milwaukee, WI 53201
 Mother Jones NAM, c/o Lasley, 1127 S. 8th St., Springfield, IL 62703
 New Haven NAM, c/o Apfelbaum, 880 Elm St., -3, New Haven, CT 06511
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drawing by William Johnson