

# Double Trouble For Black Women

## An Interview With Margaret Sloan

By Karla Jay

**Karla:** What is the National Black Feminist Organization \* working on?

**Margaret:** Because we grew so quickly, we really didn't have time to work on our internal structure, so we're making plans for a convention of our membership. It will be held some time in October in the Midwest. Because we are involved in other organizations, because we work, and because we are very, very busy anyway, it's very difficult to sit down and hack out a national policy that you hope that the members will either accept, reject, or add to or whatever. And we're trying to get some action coming out of our committees, because we look at the committees as being the strength of the organization. And we're moving into office space. That's just where we are now.

**Karla:** How large is the organization?

**Marg:** We have almost 2,000 women across the country, and it's growing, and we have several chapters that are actually formed and women in many cities and states have written to us saying that they would like to form a chapter of NBFO. We just have to make sure that it grows right - that there is a feminist foundation for those chapters because there is a lot of confusion as to what NBFO is all about and what they think NBFO should be about. And so we kind of are slowly moving on requests to form chapters.

**Karla:** The Women's Liberation Movement is often accused, as you know, of being white and middle-class. Is your group ever accused of being predominantly Black middle-class women?

**Marg:** Number one: I don't respond to the accusation that the Women's Movement is white and middle-class any more than I respond to the accusation that is nonexistent that our movement is Black middle-class. Nobody criticized Dr. King for having a Ph.D. or Stokely for going to Howard University or Fred Hampton for coming from a suburb. People were able to be excited about the fact that these Black men were able to get up and out of their oppressive situations and bring about a movement. And I don't criticize women who had a B.A. degree and stood in front of the kitchen sink and asked themselves questions about why they should be there. In any movement, it's always the overeducated that get it together anyway. People who are so oppressed - rock bottom - don't even have time to shit.

In terms of the NBFO being Black middle class women, I think that people must understand that when you're talking about class with Black people, it's totally different than when you're talking about class with white people. There is really not that much second-generation Black money around. There's very little of it. In terms of the Black women who got NBFO together, most of us by white definitions do not come from the middle class at all. Our membership dues are based on a sliding scale according to income, and if you go by that, most of our women make less than \$10,000 per year. But even if we didn't, I would feel no need to apologize for that because I think that wherever I can get Black women to come into NBFO and can start connecting with Black women about their lives, about their frustrations, about issues that affect them - those kinds of class issues have not really divided Black women and I don't think we're about to let it happen in NBFO.

I think that one of the things we have noticed in NBFO is the ability of Black women to get together and organize across so-called white-defined class lines, across sexual preferences.



Margaret Sloan—Chairwoman of NBFO

At our conference we had 500 women from all over the country. It's so important for Black women to survive that we can't afford the luxury of saying: "Well, you oppress me because your father is a minister or the chairman of IT&T." We can't get involved in that.

**Karla:** People usually bring up class as a divisive tactic.

**Marg:** Yes, I know, but I don't think that feminists should do that - not saying that we shouldn't have sound arguments about class. But when feminists do that, here we are women who claim not to be male-identified but when we go into a class thing what we do is judge her by the man she's attached to, because most women who do come from a privileged class got it from the dude they sleep with, the man that kept them, the father that had them. It's never because of their money. Very few women in this country really have power and money. It's usually parasitically through somebody else.

So I have a problem with the whole class argument. Especially being a Black woman - being poor and my mother having middle-class pretensions as all poor people do.

**Karla:** Why do you call yourself the National Black Feminist Organization instead of perhaps the National Third-World Organization? Do you feel the oppression of Spanish women and Black Spanish women, for example, is different?

**Marg:** Well, the women who organized NBFO are Black women of African descent, and so we didn't feel the need to organize around somebody else's oppression. I do not know what it is to have a bilingual problem, for example. I don't understand the whole problem about "familia." Those are not the experiences of my culture.

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Karla: I think that there's not only apathy on the part of Black women but there's a lot of apathy on the part of white women towards the needs of Black women. Do you think

you'll be able through your organization to get white women more involved?

Marg: Well, I don't think NBFO's responsibility is to educate white women - I think what we'd like to do is educate Black women, to make Black women feel good about themselves and get our self-image together so we can in fact organize, and the white women will just have to see that we're there. I don't think though that any group should have a responsibility of organizing other people. See the problem with some people is that people expect white women to be somehow supersensitive to the needs of Black women. I don't agree with that at all. If you don't come out of a culture where you have a history of your mothers being domestic workers, you won't have domestic workers as your priority. It would be nice if you did, but you won't. I think that people have to organize around those things that are important to them. That's why it was necessary to form a national Black feminist organization because - as one of our women said - we have a double perception because of our double oppression: We look at things twofold.

I think it's the responsibility of those white women who are sensitive to talk to their own sisters, instead of trying to talk to us saying, "Look here, we are responsible." There are a lot of white women who have come into the women's movement and brought their racism with them because they hadn't been into the Civil Rights Movement - they had not ever had the benefit of coalition politics; they had never been around Black people, so it is ridiculous to expect this group of women's movement people to have this sensitivity and consciousness about the Black female experience or the Black experience when they did not have the same history as people who were involved in the civil rights movement.

Karla: What kind of distinction do you make between a feminist and someone in the women's movement?

Marg: Well, I think that there are billions of women in the

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