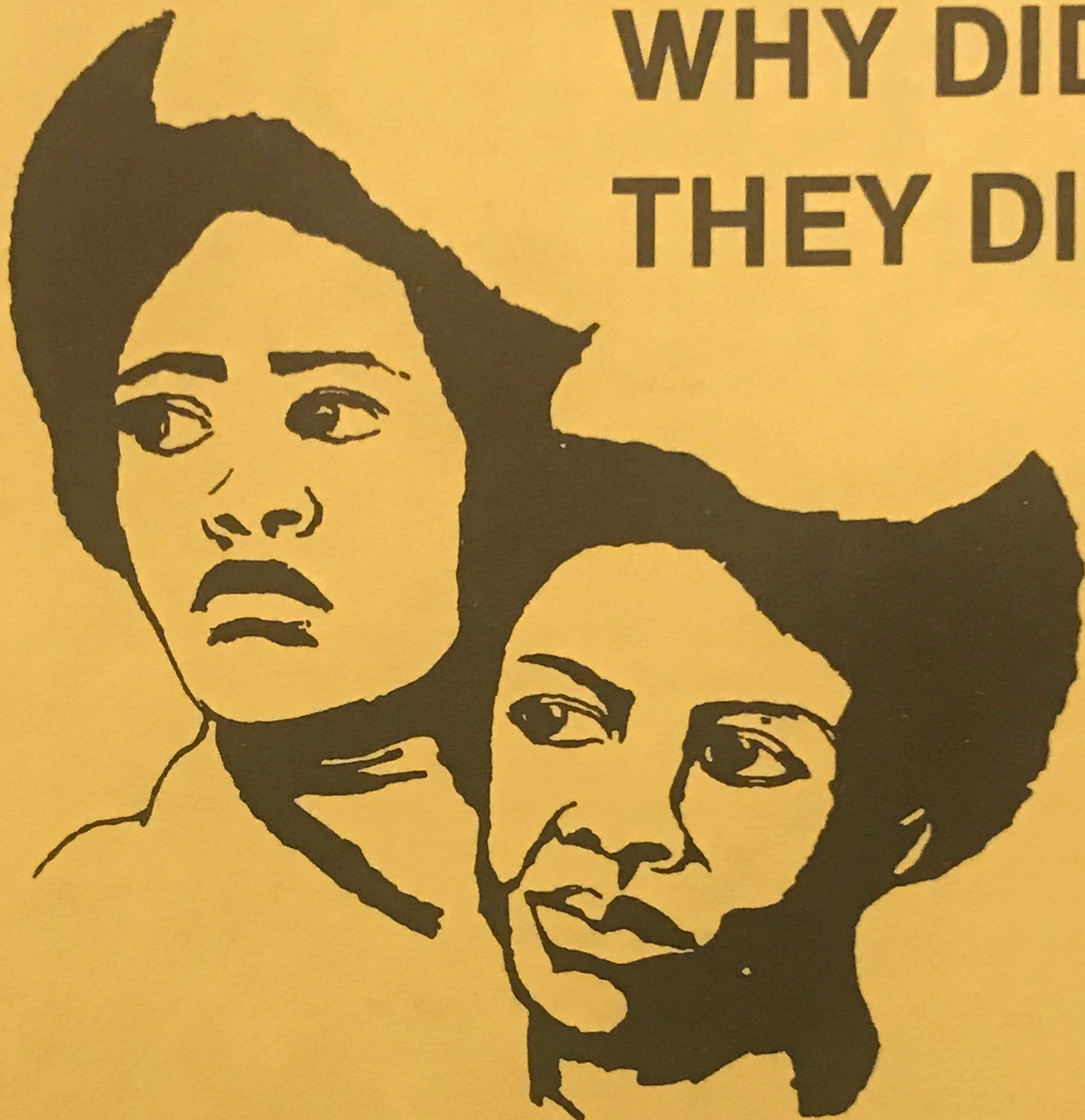


ELEVEN BLACK WOMEN

WHY DID THEY DIE?



This pamphlet was prepared by the Combahee River Collective, a Boston Black Feminist Organization (c/o AASC, P.O. Box 1, Cambridge, MA 02139.) It was created for Third World Women. If you are not a Third World woman, please read it and share it with Third World women.

ELEVEN BLACK WOMEN

Recently 11 young Black women have been murdered in Roxbury, Dorchester, the South End and the Back Bay. The entire Black community continues to mourn their cruel and brutal deaths. In the face of police indifference and media lies and despite our grief and anger, we have begun to organize ourselves in order to figure out ways to protect ourselves and our sisters, to make the streets safe for women.

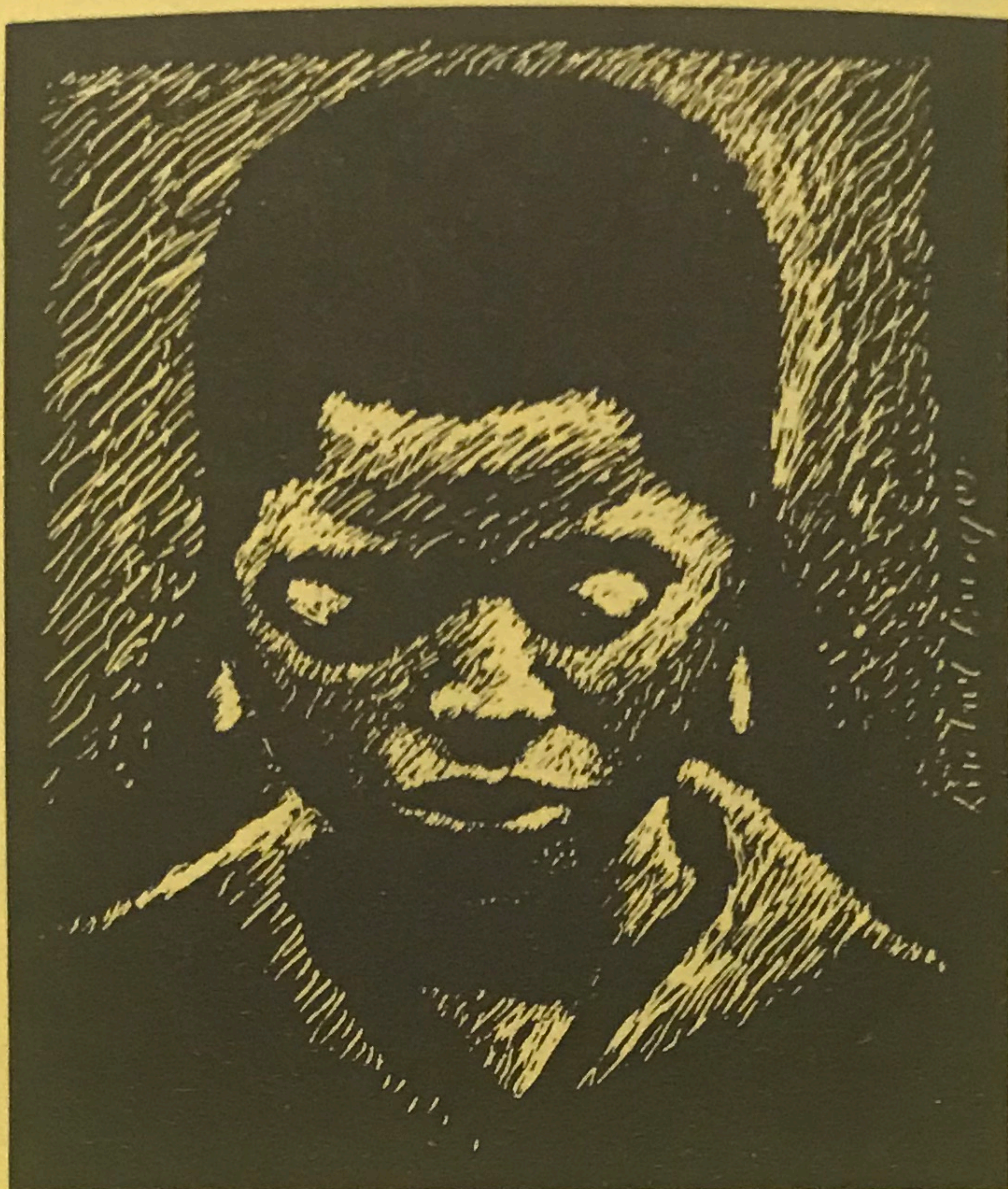
We are writing this pamphlet because as Black feminist activists we think it is essential to understand the social and political causes behind these sisters' deaths. We also want to share information about safety measures every woman can take and list groups who are working on the issue of violence against women.

In the Black community the murders have often been talked about as solely racial or racist crimes. It's true that the police and media response has been typically racist. It's true that the victims were all Black and that Black people have always been targets of racist violence in this society, but they were also *all women*. Our sisters died *because* they were women just as surely as they died because they were Black. If the murders were only racial, young teen-age boys and older Black men might also have been the unfortunate victims. They might now be petrified to walk the streets as women have always been.

When we look at the statistics and hard facts about daily, socially acceptable violence against women, it's clear it's no "bizarre series of coincidences" that all eleven victims were female.* In the U.S.A. 1 out of 3 women will be raped in their lifetimes or 1/3 of *all* the women in this country; at least 1 woman is beaten by her husband or boyfriend every 18 seconds; 1 out of every 4 women experiences some form of sexual abuse *before* she reaches the age of 18 (child molesting, rape, incest) 75% of the time by someone they know and 38% of the time by a family member; 9 out of 10 women in a recent survey had received unwanted sexual advances and harassment at their jobs.** Another way to think about these figures is that while you have been reading this pamphlet a woman somewhere in this city, in this state, in this country has been beaten, raped and even murdered. Just to show how true this last statement is, when this pamphlet was originally written at the beginning of April, six Black women had been murdered. One month later the number is eleven.

**Boston Globe*, April 1, 1979, p. 16.

**Statistics from the paper "Grass Roots Services for Battered Women: A Model for Long Term Change" by Lisa Leghorn. Available from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C.



These statistics apply to all women: Black, white, Latina, Asian, Native American, old, young, rich, poor and in between. During this time, a white woman was also murdered and her body found in Dorchester. We've got to understand that violence against us as women cuts across all racial, ethnic and class lines. This doesn't mean that violence against Third World women does not have a racial as well as sexual cause. Both our race and sex lead to violence against us.

One reason that attacks on women are so widespread is that to keep us down, to keep us oppressed we have to be made afraid. Violence makes us feel powerless and also like we're second best.

The society also constantly encourages the violence through the media: movies, pornography, *Playboy*, *Players*, *Hustler*, *JET*, record covers, advertisements and disco songs ("Put Love's Chains Back On Me"). Boys and men get the message every day that it's all right even fun to hurt women. What has happened in Boston's Black community is a thread in the fabric of violence against women.

Another idea that has been put out in this crisis is that women should stay in the house until the murderer(s) are found. In other words Black women should be under house arrest. (Remember

WHY DID THEY DIE?

that three of the eleven women were found in their own apartments.) If and when they catch the murderers we still won't be safe to leave our houses, because it has never been safe to be a woman alone in the street. Staying in the house punishes the innocent and protects the guilty. It also doesn't take into account real life, that we must go to work, get food, pick up the kids at school, do the wash, do errands and visit friends. Women should be able to walk outside whenever they please, with whoever they please and for whatever reason.

WE WILL ONLY HAVE THIS RIGHT WHEN WOMEN JOIN TOGETHER TO DEMAND OUR RIGHTS AS HUMAN BEINGS TO BE FREE OF PHYSICAL ABUSE, TO BE FREE OF FEAR.

The last idea we want to respond to is that it's men's job to protect women. At first glance this may seem to make sense, but look at the assumptions behind it. Needing to be protected assumes that we are weak, helpless and dependent, that we are victims who need men to protect us from other men. As women in this society we are definitely at risk as far as violence is concerned but **WE HAVE TO LEARN TO PROTECT OURSELVES.** There are many ways to do this: learning and following common sense safety measures, learning self-defense, setting up phone chains and neighborhood safehouses, joining and working in groups that are organizing against violence against women are all ways to do this.

The idea of men protecting us isn't very realistic because many of us don't have a man to depend upon for this — young girls, teen-agers, single women, separated and divorced women, lesbians, widowed women and elderly women. And even if we do have a man he cannot be our shadow 24 hours a day.

What men can do to "protect" us is to check out the ways in which they put down and intimidate women in the streets and at home, to stop being verbally and physically abusive to us and to tell men they know who mistreat women to stop it and stop it quick. Men who are committed to stopping violence against women should start *seriously* discussing this issue with other men and organizing in supportive ways.

We decided to write this pamphlet because of our outrage at what has happened to 11 Black women and to 1000s and 1000s of women whose names we don't even know. As Black women who are feminists we are struggling against all racist, sexist, heterosexist and class oppression. We know that we have no hopes of ending this particular crisis and violence against women in our community until we identify *all* its causes, including sexual oppression.

SELF-PROTECTION

- Do not accept rides from strangers.
- Do not get into unlicensed cab services or cabs with 2 people in the driver's seat.
- Lock your car doors at all times. Check back seat before entering.
- Lock your house door at all times, make sure all windows are locked.
- Vary your route to and from home. Stay on well-lighted main streets. Avoid side streets and alleys.
- Travel in pairs or groups.
- Learn some simple self-defense like how to get out of a hold or how to use available objects as weapons: comb, keys, hair brush, lighted cigarette, edge of books, whistles, salt, red/black pepper.
- Wear shoes and clothes you can easily run in.
- Always have your keys ready in your hand as you enter your house.
- Let someone know where you are at all times and your planned route. Phone ahead to your destination.
- Get to know your neighbors on your street. Keep an eye out for each other. Make an effort.
- If you hear someone in distress, don't ignore it. If you can't safely investigate, call 911.
- Call your local hotline number at **445-1111** if you need to talk or if you have information.
- If you feel like you are being followed . . . check first — change directions, then REACT . . . Stay calm, change your pace, cross street, walk next to curb or in middle of street against the traffic . . . DO NOT GO HOME, the attacker will follow . . . run to the nearest lighted place.
- Yell FIRE! if someone is attacking you, people are more likely to come to your aid, than if you call "Help".
- Encourage your friends to take these precautions.

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RESOURCES

Weekly neighborhood meetings organizing against the recent murders.

CRISIS

Harriet Tubman House
7:00 Tuesday Evening
566 Columbus Ave.
Boston (South End)
536-8610

Aswalos House
7:00 Wednesday Evening
246 Seaver St.
Roxbury
442-9645 or 442-9646

Community organizations providing services in connection with the recent violence.

Women Inc.

442-6166 (Forming a network & information clearing house for all the groups working on the recent murders.)

Dorchester Greenlight Program
427-4910 (Building a safe-house network where women can go to designated houses when in danger on the streets.)

Community Programs Against Sexual Assault (C.P.S.A.)

442-9603 (Services for preventing rape, support for women who have been assaulted.)

Blackstone Community School
262-2190

(Classes in self-defense.)

Jamaica Plain Phone Chain and Greenlight Program **522-8644**

Hotline: Roxbury Multi-Service Center **445-1111**

Other organizations working against & providing services for violence against women.

Casa Myrna Vazquez

262-9581 (Temporary shelter for women and their children in crisis.)

Jamaica Plain Battered Women's Task Force

524-9206 9 am to 1 pm
Monday Thru Friday (Assistance for battered women.)

Transition House

661-7203 24 hour number
(Temporary shelter for battered women and their children.)

Women Inc.

442-6166 (Residential drug program for women and their children.)

Elizabeth Stone House

522-3417 (Temporary refuge for women in emotional crisis.)

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
492-RAPE (Information, counselling, support services.)

Domestic Violence and Technical Assistance Project

266-4305 (South End) (Provides information concerning domestic violence and violence against women.)

WAVAW: Women Against Violence Against Women

c/o The Cambridge Women's Center **354-8807**. (Organizing against pornography, violence in the media.)

Take Back the Night

492-0120 (Organizers of August 26, 1978 march against violence against women. Another march is in the planning stages.)

Emerge

267-7690 (A men's counselling service on domestic violence.)

AASC: Alliance Against Sexual Coercion

482-0329 (Information and services for women who are sexually harassed at the workplace.)

Cambridge-Riverside Safe-house Program

c/o The Cambridge Women's Center **354-8807**. Spanish-speaking: **864-1471**.