

In November, 1977, I petitioned the Federal Court to become a plaintiff in the pending suit, Alexander vs. Yale, publicly known as the sexual harassment case. I petitioned the court for redress on two counts in the absence of any effective action being taken by Yale University to investigate my complaint and/or to offer relief. The two counts are inextricably linked, the one being the direct result of the other. On the one hand, I was sexually harassed by a professor employed by the defendant; on the other, I received a grade unreflective of the merit of my work at that time which can and/or will possibly irrevocably damage my career opportunities. On both counts I remain unsatisfied as to the nature and the extent of the action taken by Yale.

The primary issue on both counts is one of sexual discrimination. I entered Yale University in the fall of 1974, aware of its reputation as a bastion of male supremacy. Like most freshman and undergraduates in general, I did not take that reputation seriously. Yet, my experience over the next two years proved the reputation well earned in the past and in too many cases perpetuated in the present. In too many instances, I was subjected to the assumption of my inferiority as a black person as well as the assumption of my lack of seriousness as a woman. The particular incident which brings me here today was only a reflection of assumptions perpetuated and reinforced by the failure of Yale University to confront and effectively deal with the issue.

The issue is that as a woman student at Yale I am subject to prejudicial judgements prior to the beginning and completion of my course of study. The issue is that some, acting upon archaic and feudal assumptions, will attempt to compromise my respect for myself as a human being (i.e., as more than a sex object). The issue is that professors particularly are in a position of power; whether or not and how I will complete my education is determined as much by them as by my own efforts. Their position is totally based on the legitimacy granted by the institution which employs them. As such, that legitimacy should be restructured to more appropriately meet the needs of the students, male and female. More important, what is and is not legitimate in the relationship between the professional and his/her student should be defined by the institution which confers that legitimacy. Yale University has not only failed to confront and accept that responsibility in any systematic manner, it accepts, upholds and defends the right of a professor to act in a manner detrimental to a student's education. (i.e. by a pattern, practice and policy of neglecting and refusing to process and consider seriously complaints of sexual harassment of women students).

That detriment can be manifested in various ways, each of which intimately connects a woman's intellectual growth, both to herself and others, to a man's judgement of her sexuality. In my particular case, this detriment has manifested itself not only in terms of my

own intellectual development but also in the form of a concrete obstruction to my educational advancement. I received a grade which is a reflection of the professor's personal defects rather than the quality of my work. This grade is a concrete expression of his racist and sexist appraisal of me as a person -- in my case the one attitude is inherently linked with the other. This grade not only excludes an evaluation of the quality of my work, it includes a historical conception of the relationship between my racial heritage and my sexuality. I am offended on both counts.

At this point, the arbitrary nature of the grade threatens my educational advancement beyond my relationship with Yale. It can and will have a substantial impact on my chances of being accepted at the law school of my choice. Not only must I strive to overcome the general racist and sexist attitudes prevalent in society, I must also deal with a specific manifestation of those attitudes on a very personal and individual level.

Hence, it becomes clear that the acceptance of that grade with no investigation whatsoever of the circumstances surrounding which it was given, requires an assent to sexual harassment and racism not only at Yale University but also in the attainment of my own academic goals. While others may be prepared to give their assent, I cannot in all reasonableness give mine. Consequently, I have petitioned the court not only to require the establishment of a procedure within the university to effectively deal with these issues, I have also requested that the offending grade be temporarily removed from my transcript until this matter is resolved. As the transcript is crucial to my application to law school (which must be made soon), unless immediate and effective action is forthcoming it will be too late. Six months from now, the grade will have no effect upon my admission to law school in 1978. Now it could mean everything. Yale's failure to deal in any systematic and effective manner with the issues raised by this suit and numerous complaints from women at Yale, and the invocation of the "sanctity" of the grading procedure and of this grade in particular, reflects a completely inadequate and repressive perspective on the position of women within the university. It follows that this perspective serves to condone, uphold and defend a practice of racist sexual discrimination and consequently subordination of women not only within the University, but within the society as a whole.

Pamela Price 21 December 1977
New Haven, Connecticut