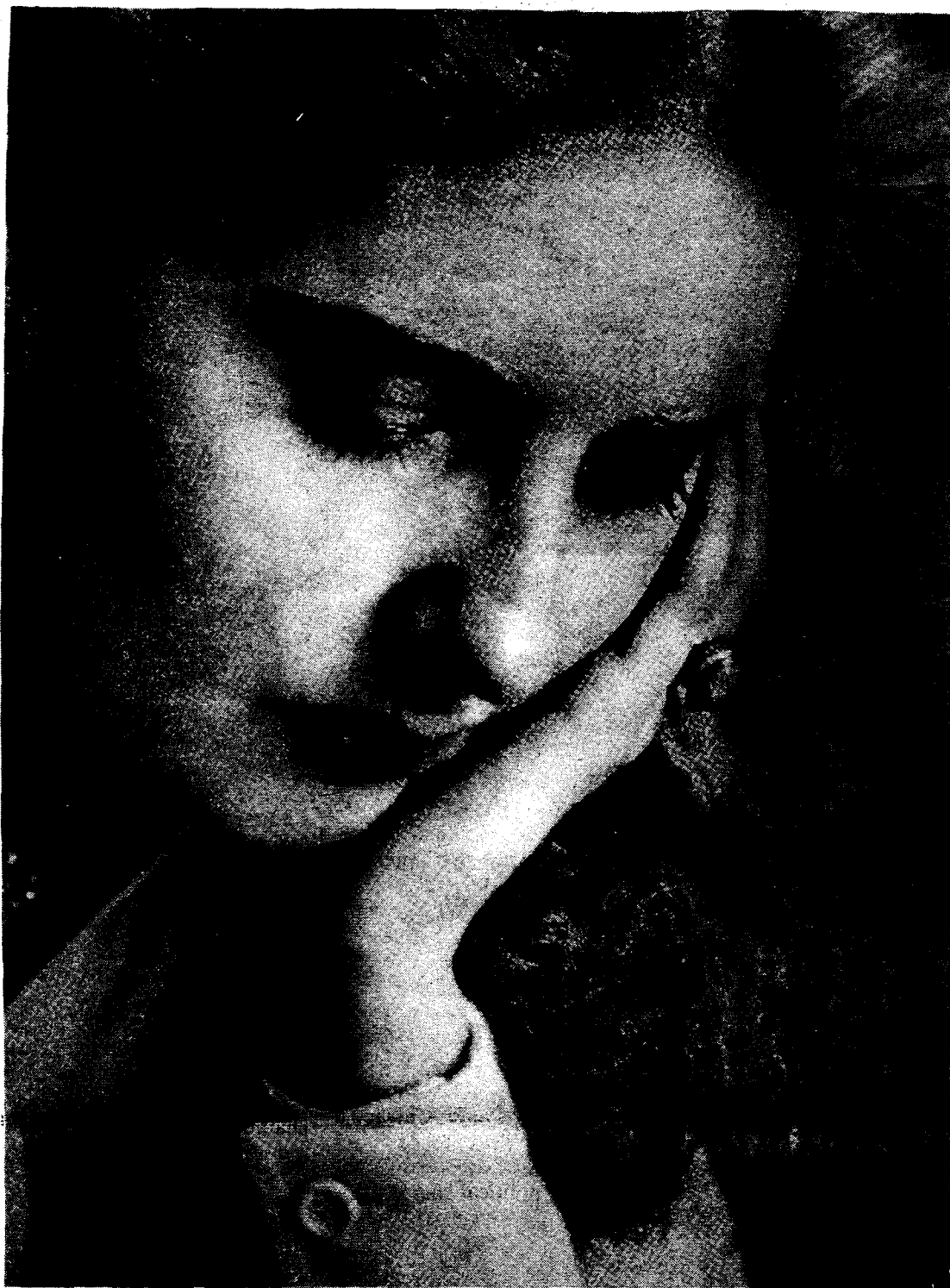


BOOKS

Hite Report suggests a new society is the solution



Shere Hite

THE HITE REPORT

By Shere Hite
Macmillan, \$12.50

Newsweek hailed this bestseller as one of the most "significant events of the year 1976." *Ms.* and Erica Jong in the *New York Times* loved it. On the other hand, nothing but pans have marked its reception by the left press. A lengthy critical review in *Seven Days* said it has "potentially dangerous political impact;" *Mother Jones'* pallid review wondered what all the fuss was about. And, in the pages of this publication three weeks ago, Barbara Ehrenreich poked fun at the "wave of masturbatory enthusiasm" to which, supposedly, the book has contributed.

For once, I'm with *Newsweek*.

►Too many feminists?

Critics have charged that the 3,000 American women interviewed by Shere Hite are an unrepresentative sampling because the early distribution of her questionnaires was conducted through feminist groups like the National Organization of Women. But her final sampling includes readers of *Oui*, *Brides*, *Mademoiselle* and *The Village Voice*, as well as women reached through church newsletters. The respondents range from 14 to 78 years old; come from 49 states; almost 50 percent are or were married. While almost 50 percent had at least some college, the majority are housewives, clerical workers, nurses or medical technicians,

teachers, or students (in order of statistical ranking)—hardly a feminist constituency. Also, her key statistical findings correlate with studies by Alfred Kinsey and others.

But the book's importance does not rest on statistical validity anyway. What is significant is that in it a large number of women speak for themselves for the first time about sex—and with almost a unanimous voice.

►Sex from a position of strength.

The book's lengthy opening chapter on masturbation has been criticized (and mocked) for Hite's seemingly obsessive focus on technique. On the basis of her survey, she divides masturbation technique into six types and, yes, 32 subtypes! This approach does at first appear to be mechanistic—not to say silly. But in the context of the whole book, this chapter is key.

It reveals, first of all, the enormous amount of sexual creativity and imagination the women channel into masturbation, which is described as "a sacred ritual," a way to "teach you about your own body," and an ability to have sex "from a position of strength."

Secondly, as the book goes on to document guaranteed physical satisfaction for most of these women is *only* available through masturbation. As one woman puts it: "I have wanted orgasm with a man for 12 years. Seems like the impossible dream. I can be a loving eunuch to him, but a full sexual person by myself."

►Feelings of shame.

Hite reports, however, that most of the women questioned said they enjoy masturbation physically, but not psychologically. Many find that it leads to feeling "adrift" or "ashamed," "self-conscious," "self-absorbed." These women want satisfying emotional contact with a sexual partner.

►"Monotonous, drill-like and boring."

If *The Hite Report* shows ambivalence about masturbation, it shows definite dissatisfaction with (hetero)sexual relations. (92 percent of the women surveyed were heterosexual.) Hite's finding—that only 30 percent of the women were satisfied sexually by intercourse—has been previously documented by Kinsey, Masters and Johnson, and others. But the several thousand separate voices of this book join together in mutual complaint not only about a lack of sexual satisfaction, but a lack of emotional satisfaction as well. The dominant sexual pattern is experienced by the majority of Hite's respondents as mechanical, dull, repetitious, and uncreative.

Some representative comments: "It is monotonous, drill-like, and boring." "I'm beginning to think that there must be something like a Roberts Rule of Order which every guy follows." "A man acts as if it's damn impertinent of me to suggest that my responses aren't programmed exactly like those mythical women in the classics of porn."

Much of the book consists of the respondents' answers about

every aspect of sexual technique and their feelings about sex. But as the collective voice becomes louder, Hite interjects more of her own analysis.

►Who defines sex roles?

In a chapter entitled "Sexual Slavery," Hite sets forth her view of sex as one of the ways in which women are oppressed in our society. The dominant (hetero)sexual pattern expresses the fact that male sexual satisfaction is identical with the male role in reproduction, although for the female, the two are separate. Since men dominate women, the male-oriented sexual model has defined female sexuality.

Her theoretical underpinning is the standard "radical feminist" analysis that biology originally determined the female condition and that patriarchal society has perpetuated it although changes in technology and population growth have now created the preconditions for the liberation of women from biological dictates.

►There was no sexual revolution.

Hite explores contemporary "sexual slavery" in terms of general cultural conditioning, sexist psychology, and, most importantly, the continuing economic dependency of women on men. There is much painful, personal testimony by the respondents on the trade-off of sex for economic security, and of sex for love (cf. old adage "Men give love for sex; women give sex for love").

On the so-called "sexual revolution" of the '60s, Hite concludes that there was no such thing, that "sexual liberation" in a male-supremacist society has only meant freedom for men to further exploit women. Feminists have said this before, but the many angry replies from the women Hite studies lend tremendous force to her criticism.

►Hite sees solutions in new society.

Hite's tentative probes at a solution cover some ground not previously explored by radical feminists. She first offers such directive epithets as: "seize control over our orgasms," demand "androgynous intercourse," and, implicitly, try to overcome the guilt associated with masturbation. But she also goes on to say:

Although sexuality is very important, it is questionable whether it is important in and of itself, apart from its meaning in your life as a whole.... Most people do not have the luxury of being able to choose work that they would like to do.... And...since technology and the growth of large corporate business have taken over almost every aspect of life, most jobs have become very repetitive, impersonal, and boring.... As one woman put it, "Sex is clearly used as a universal panacea, to keep the masses quiet and stop them from realizing the emptiness, meaninglessness, and alienation of their working lives."

Sexuality and sexual relationships can be surrogates for (or obscure our need for) a more satisfying relationship with the larger world—with work. As long as we accept this schizoid compartmentalization of public and private life, we are abrogating our moral obligation to take an active part in the direction of the larger world, and accepting an ethic of powerlessness.

Although she never fleshes out these perceptions, they stop her from wholeheartedly promoting individual solutions. For her, individual women asserting their sexual needs is much like the karate class or self-help clinics of the women's movement, which are not ends in themselves but small, important steps enabling women to overcome basic fears and conservatism and to gain some elementary control so as to meet larger challenges.

►Personal is political.

At another point, Hite says: "The challenge for us now is to devise a new kind of society," one in which the desires articulated by these women for real warmth and emotional connection, for more equality in sexual relationships, can be fulfilled. Vague her final vision may be, but Hite does not simply push women down the dead-end route toward personal liberation, with a guilt-free orgasm available if you go out and buy a vibrator; nor does she suggest that sexual and emotional satisfaction will automatically come if women learn to communicate better with hubby. She sees the limitations of these measures, even while she thinks they may help.

The Hite Report is important because it challenges, forcefully if briefly, one of the most crucial and cooptive ideologies of corporate society: that private or personal life can compensate for the alienation in one's work life. In addition, its feminist analysis once again powerfully argues that the "personal is the political," that sexuality is defined by sexism—that the individual woman's experience of sexuality is part of a collective phenomenon.

—Torie Osborn

HOW DEEP DID
ROOTS
DIG?

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Photo from City Lives

BOOKS

New York City Lives records humor, heroism of survivors

CITY LIVES

by James Wagenvoord
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$7.95 in paper

For more than a year James Wagenvoord walked around New York City, entering the lives and homes of its people, photographing, talking, touching, listening.

"Walking through the city, riding its noisy, crowded transportation, living in it, is to experience a barrage. Witnessing the heroic honesty of some of the people...leaves one slightly limp. But there is also a steadiness... the incredible insight and emotional power that comes to virtually everyone as a result of surviving for a while."

City Lives is a celebration of that survival—sometimes shocking, sometimes touching, sometimes poetic, sometimes analytic, often funny. Everyone and everything Wagenvoord observes is brought into focus. The city becomes a backdrop for its people's lives. We are permitted to see into them as if we were peeking through a hole in the back fence.

The author-photographer handles words and visual images with equal skill. One wonders whether his quoted conversations owe any of their authenticity to a tape recorder. He does not say. But listen to a Karate instructor talking about the larger purpose of his art:

"I would rather teach my people how to fight with their God-given weapons than teach them how to fire a gun at each other. If presidents would do that, okay, if whoever the hell it is that's running countries would get out there in the middle of 161st St.

and kick each other's ass, then we wouldn't lose so many guys. They're the ones that start all the damn wars, and we end up fighting while they sit back on their butts."

Or to a man who used to be the "super" of a building that burned down and now lives as a squatter in his jerry-built hut surrounded by rubble.

"I got a hammer. I got me some wood. I got me some nails. ... It took about an hour to make the frame of the balcony and the kitchen. Then some other friends helped us make the second floor. ... Now four of us are staying here.... We share the house and we don't do no harm to nobody. The water's right at the curb in the hydrant. We wash the dishes there."

"I've never taken any help from the city.... I ask a person for money—I'm not ashamed because I need it. I got a mouth. I can talk, and people can say no."

Or the welfare mother of seven:

"There are too many kids, like, in the neighborhood. All of them go to the same school. Like, if they have a fight out here on the street, they says, well, 'We gonna get you at school'. And they wait for the kids, you know, after they come out of school and they beat them up. My ten-

year-old daughter, she's very smart.... Now I gets reports that she's not doin' her work right... When you is scared and you have doubts about, you know, somebody gonna beat you up outside, you can't think."

There is as great variety to the subject matter Wagenvoord tackles as to his approaches. There are sections on ethnic communities of Hassidic Jews and of Italians who make their own wine because "they admire it," there are interviews with pensioners and with poverty workers and university professors; an account of the "police riot" at the entrance to Brooklyn Bridge, and of the new experimental community "surrounded by a moat—actually a major river," connected to the rest of the world by a bridge and an aerial tramway.

City Lives is a book to read uninterrupted, or to pick up for a short visit now and then. It is a chronicle of nerve and hope, recording the tenacity, humor and fragile hopes of people—like Wagenvoord himself—who make New York City their home.

—Gehla S. Knight

Gehla S. Knight is a freelance writer who lives in Oregon.

MUSIC



Jamaica Reggae singer proves too political for U.S. "Music machine"

Events in the recent Jamaican election campaign proved that some people take Reggae music very seriously. The day before Reggae star Bob Marley was to appear at a rally for Prime Minister Manley's Socialist Party, he was attacked at home by machine-gun-toting thugs who, in wild or selective fire, only managed to graze his guitar arm. It may have been a serious attempt to eliminate Reggae's most impressive musician/writer, or just a warning to stay out of politics. Nonetheless, Marley appeared the next day and performed before 80,000 Manley supporters, singing songs like "Rat Race" ("Don't involve Rasta in your say say, Rasta don't work for no CIA") and "Crazy Baldhead":

*Build your penitentiary, We
build your schools,
Brainwash education, To make
us the fools,
We gonna chase those crazy
baldheads out of town.*

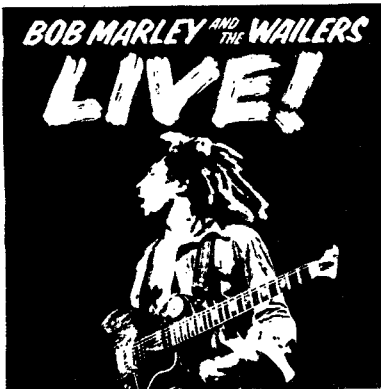
Marley's music is a combination of radical political awareness and driving rhythmic percussive sounds. Like Brecht, he seems to believe that you have to capture the attention of audiences before they can participate in active criticisms of their own conditions.

Many Reggae groups have connections with Jamaica's Trenchtown—a combination Harlem, Watts and Chicago's South Side. Trenchtown is alive with music and hopes for economic and political change promised by Manley's party.

It will be interesting to see how the relationship between Manley's political philosophy and Jamaica's music develops in the future. At present Reggae mirrors the aspirations of Jamaica's poor in an immediate way.

This may be one reason why Reggae is a commercial failure in the U.S. The notion that popularity and social concern cannot mix has been created by the music industry, which incorporates much of the critical establishment. Most American critics are either suspicious or contemptuous of popular or folk music whose reason for existence is rooted in radical politics. The American music machine tried to market Reggae and failed.

When Bob Marley was first "discovered" and lionized by the press, the word was that super-



stardom was around the corner for him. The predictions didn't materialize. Only in cities like New York and Chicago, where there are fair-sized Caribbean populations, does Reggae get the serious attention it deserves.

The widest exposure so far has been accorded Eric Clapton's lame version of Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff." This rendition was the sort that American audiences could hum on the way to school or work with no idea that the song came from an album whose tone was set by "Get Up, Stand Up," "Small Axe" or the angelic harmonies of "Burning and Looting."

Island Records still releases Reggae in the States. In the past few months its most notable releases have been Burning Spear's *Man in the Hills*, Toot's and the Maytals' *Reggae Got Soul*, Justin Hines and the Dominoes' *Jezebel*, new groups like the Mighty Diamonds and Third World, and their latest volume of *This Is Reggae*, which highlights a number of important pieces by groups like Aswad, Max Romeo and the Upsetters and Jah Lion. All these albums are important for their integration of music and social consciousness, which is startling when placed against the wave of disco that we are forced to witness every day.

Though you can dance to Reggae, the real meaning and intent of songs like Marley's "Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)" and "Revolution" (it takes a revolution to make a solution) are beyond entertainment. They demand involvement and commitment and must be understood as products of a new Jamaican spirit and not as part of the industrial music process that is stamped Made in U.S.A.

—Joe Heumann

Joe Heumann teaches media-related subjects at Eastern Illinois University.

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