

**Review of Karlene Faith. 1993. *Unruly Women:
The Politics of Confinement and Resistance.*
Pressgang Printers**

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In the first paragraph of the introduction of her book, Karlene Faith defines the unruly women about whom she eloquently writes: The unruly woman is the undisciplined woman. She is a renegade from the disciplinary practices which would mould her as a gendered being. She is a defiant woman who rejects authority which would subjugate her and render her docile. She is the offensive woman who acts in her own interests. She is the unmanageable woman who claims her own body, the whore, the wanton woman, the wild woman out of control. She is the woman who cannot be silenced. She is a rebel. She is trouble.

In *Unruly Women*, Faith displays the agility of mind that is necessary to apply information from years of experience and profuse research into a readable and definitely an enjoyable text on the history of women, their sins/crimes, and their punishments. From the Old Testament times into the 13th and 14th centuries, up to and into our present lives, Faith lays out all the good, the bad, and the indifference about women and their political, economical, religious, and social battles to survive and to be counted as assets, not liabilities, in society. This book must surely become a textbook for any women's studies classes. Men who really care about women should read it for a deeper understanding of the women who surround them. The book could be declared a handbook for all women everywhere. Faith's historical review is remarkably complete, informed throughout by her sensitivity to the plight of women. The book also shines with frank and open anger at the patriarchal traditions whose effects she documents.

Throughout her book, Faith raises many questions of "how" and "why" historically women have borne the brunt of patriarchal religious leaders' vengeance. Over and over she points out that women's crimes are sexual (prostitution), economical and political/religious because of the imbalance of money, education and power in a capitalist government. Women's crimes are normally much less violent than the crimes of men. Women's crimes are crimes of survival because of their position on the low rung of our economic ladder. Faith's facts prove that if women have the same educational and economic opportunities as men, then there is little chance that these same women will turn to drugs, prostitution or to forms of anti-social behaviour.

Faith points out that in the earliest days of England, the King was considered to be next to God in his power. He was looked upon as a divine being. Therefore, when he delegated authority, this same authority reached from God to the King, to the church and down to the husbands of all women no matter what might be the social position of the husband. The husband was the absolute ruler of his home. Any wife

who nagged her husband, who disobeyed him, who argued with him was punished by this same husband. It was the duty of the husband to flog his wife and children to keep them subdued and obedient to him. Disobedience to the husband was a direct affront to the King because of the line of authority delegated by this same King. Under this system punishment by the husband was usually considered to be sufficient. However, if the husband could not control his wife and if his disobedient wife was too rebellious then she would spend time in the public stocks where her head, hands and feet were locked through openings in a wooden frame. In this helpless, humiliating position, she endured all manner of taunting from the local citizens, plus she was pelted with raw, rotten vegetables. During this same period of time, a wife could gain equal rights under the law by murdering her husband. Then she would be hanged for her crime.

The author takes the reader back and forth through different geographical settings and different periods of time. However, this is not confusing due to the ability of the author to relate her facts, give her analysis of those same facts and then bring all of her information together in a well organized manner. For me, the text of this book is a mural painted not with a brush -instead, the picture is a definite word-picture painted by the intellect of the caring, curious, sensitive mind of Karlene Faith.

Faith covers in detail a broad spectrum of facts regarding women's history in crime, the types of crime, the facts and myths regarding women's psyches and their bodies. Faith also describes the punishments for these crimes from the days of the Old Testament to the 13th and 14th centuries and into our modern day penal institutions. She has gathered a bountiful supply of evidence that shows it is the imbalance of money and political power that causes women to commit crimes of survival. Crimes committed by women have a lower rate of violence than the crimes committed by their male counterparts. Crimes by women are committed by those who are from the less fortunate economic classes. These crimes consist mostly of prostitution, fraud, bad cheques, stolen credit cards and buying and selling drugs. The lack of education, job skills and the opportunity for university level education defeat many of these women before they have the chance to get started in life. Later in this review I will discuss a project that Faith started in the United States in 1972 at the California Institution for Women in Frontera, California. This project had such an impact on the rate of recidivism among the women prisoners there that it was astounding.

When a social structure teaches men to be authoritative and teaches women to be submissive and docile with the woman being denied the right to earn a meaningful living, women are placed again in the position of being dependent upon men and/or the state welfare system. Again, woman becomes the victim.

The working-class woman comes through in this book as a strong, defiant rebel, the vanguard of working class revolution. Historically, women have not only worked side by side with their male counterparts, but have gone to battle in great armies of defiance against the ruling classes and the land-owners. Battles of women have been, and still are, battles for the simple right to live.

In the historical punishment of the woman criminal the punishment has extended from "mere" flogging and public humiliation, to the supreme sacrifice of being hanged for stealing or being burned at the stake for not reporting a pregnancy. Eventually houses of detention were established, which came to be known as jails and prisons. Here the woman criminal was locked away from society.

Karlene Faith has spent 25 years researching penal systems throughout California and her own country of Canada. Her research has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that prisons and penal systems have always failed in their goal to change a woman's criminal behaviour. When a woman is released from prison she has gained no new knowledge, no trade skills and no higher education that would deliver her from her previous life-style. Therefore, she returns to the same environment, the same social and economic pressures that caused her to become criminal in the first place. Thus, the revolving door scenario develops. This means that a woman will be out of prison, on parole for a short period of time before she does something that will return her to prison. Sometimes these acts which return her to prison are deliberately criminal in order to provide her with the only safety and security that she has known - that inside the prison system.

Poor women are still the most likely to prostitute themselves. Aspects of prostitution are still illegal. Even today the law of the land refuses to allow women to have control over their own bodies. Religious leaders of Christianity continue to wield power in the political arena having their beliefs and moral issues about the control of the body of woman, about the sexual control of woman, made into law. Afro-Americans, Native Americans and Asians make up the majority of our prison population even though these same people are a minority in our society. The state builds more prisons to house "unruly women" to "protect society". Educational opportunities for the poor are a lopsided facade in a social structure where money and profit take precedence over human beings. We are still called witches with a depth of negative connotation to the word. Today's witches are developing an alternative lifestyle of worship in which they are in control, attaching themselves to their natural universe and earth for a better identity.

Faith is a citizen of Canada and most of her writing focuses on her native country. However this should not deter the reader who lives in the U.S.A. from studying this book. Upon colonizing North America the British instituted their patriarchal concepts of God, King, Church and State. Along with these they brought what seems to be their innate fear

and hatred of women. All of these beliefs were implemented and enforced into law.

In 1972, Karlene Faith made a contribution to the women incarcerated at the California Institution for Women (state prison) in Frontera, California (C.I.W.). This was the first time that state's penal system had ever allowed or provided university level classes and education for women prisoners. Women were still being taught to sew, clean and serve others. Faith approached the powers-that-be at the prison and obtained permission from them to introduce university-level education to the women at C.I.W. Under her direction, a large group of volunteers from the University of California at Santa Cruz entered the prison and began teaching. The response at C.I.W. was overwhelming. Even though racial tensions were high, these classes allowed women of every ethnic background to come together to learn, not only from their instructors, but also from and about each other, as women. This unity frightened the powers of the prison. The teachers who worked so hard, who gave so much, who received no pay, who brought in tons of books to feed starving minds and deprived and aching hearts were almost constantly harassed by prison officials. The teachers fought for the prisoners from outside the bars while the women prisoners organized and fought from within. A powerful force of resistance was built. The program continued to grow, even though at one point Faith was banned from the prison.

At the time that Faith organized and began the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project, the rate of recidivism was 70%! Faith and her volunteer staff did follow-up studies on 100 of the women who completed her program. Most of the women continued their education once they were released from prison and then established themselves in good jobs and new-found professions. This follow-up study showed a remarkable impact upon the women who completed the classes. Recidivism for this group dropped from 70% to 5%! Yet, eventually, all college courses and all university classes were forced out of the prison. Hungry minds were left to starve in order to feed the ego of the prison power group. Yet, even with all of the power at their command, they could not erase the knowledge, the self-esteem and the woman spirit which had been given in love and honour to those who received it. I feel that I speak with a voice of authority on the subject of C.I.W., for not only did I spend four and one half years of my life there as a prisoner for writing bad cheques, I was there when Karlene Faith introduced those first classes. I was one of the women who never returned to prison because of those classes. I attribute my success since then to those people - Karlene Faith and the teachers who came in 1972.