

WWII and Post-War Herstory

The everyday violence in Okinawa has been sheltered and kept quiet by the United States military for almost 60 years now. The occupation that remains to this very day began immediately after World War II. As with most wars, the women, children and elderly suffered the most. Before and during the Battle of Okinawa, Japanese Imperial Soldiers forced Okinawan women to serve as comfort women and as battlefield nurses. Women whose babies cried too loudly in hiding places could only watch helplessly as Japanese soldiers killed their children to prevent discovery by American soldiers. Rapes, torture, murder, and other violence towards women were rampant during this time.

After the Battle, weary and shell-shocked Okinawans were kept from rebuilding their homes and forced into internment camps. It was at these camps that the rapes by the Americans first began. Women were kidnapped at gunpoint by soldiers and carried off in broad daylight away from their families. Females of all ages were victimized. It is said that babies with different skin and eye color were born as early as ten months after the Battle. These babies often died soon after being born, smothered by their mothers in hopeless desperation and anguish.

Life in the Military Ghetto

From 1945 - 1972, the United States had held governmental control over Okinawa as one of the conditions of Japan's surrender. During this time, the United States government did not keep records of crimes committed in Okinawa by American soldiers, though crimes committed by Okinawans were documented. This was especially convenient considering that during this time, the escalating militarism contributed to unprecedented levels of crime in Okinawa.

Soldiers stopped in Okinawa either on their way to the war, on break from the war, or on their way home from the war. During these years, great abuses were committed upon women, especially those who worked in the red light districts. Soldiers came back from the war with memories of bloodshed and unspeakable horror or fury. They would strangle, bludgeon, beat, and rape women in either blind rages or fits of dementia.

Thus, women in Okinawa were the first to bear the brunt of the wrath and guilt of Soldiers; not wives, not sweethearts back in the United States.

Women as Enemies of the State

During its rule over Okinawa, the U.S.

Government implemented a system of economic control known as the "A" sign rules. U.S. soldiers could only take their money to those businesses whose standards and practices met the approval of the military authorities in Okinawa. Proprietors had to follow strict guidelines set for approval of restaurants, shops, and other business in order to display the coveted sign that marked their establishment with an "A" sign. This method of approval also applied to prostitution.

While the sexually aggressive behavior of the soldiers were tolerated by their commanding officers, there were concerns that sexually transmitted disease would disable or hamper a soldier from active duty combat; therefore, prostitution was carefully regulated.

When a prostitute was discovered to have a sexually transmitted disease, the business where she worked would immediately be shut down, and sometimes even guarded by armed military police. It was only when she had undergone an examination, and her health was verified to the satisfaction of authorities, would the business be allowed to open again. In this way, the military

occupation exacted an incredible stranglehold on the local economy, and crippled the survival efforts of those who were trying to work their way out of debt after the war, as well as those women who worked in prostitution to support their families.

Even women who did not work in the red light districts were deemed possible threats to "national security": an attempt was made to order that all women "of reproductive age" undergo exams for venereal diseases. This order was halted by a doctor, who protested the humiliation of subjecting all women and girls on the island to such exams.

*The rain of bullets ended
The fields and mountains burned by
flamethrowers*

*Those women who survived breathe a
momentary sigh of relief
Then, the warriors' violence began
anew*

Attacked at gunpoint

Trampled by their boots

*Once again women's bodies became a
battlefield.*

*In the internment camps, many rapes
occurred.*

*"Old women, pregnant women,
women searching for food or fuel,*

women out farming, snatched

*away from their group, violated in
front of family members' eyes."*

--Excerpt, Requiem to Women
Description of the End of WWII

Violence against women is political violence. When a woman cannot safely walk the streets of her city, when a woman is afraid to go out alone at night, it's political. When a woman goes with eagerness and hope to meet a new lover, and ends up dead in a gutter, that's political[...]. All forms of hierarchy are supported by the power men wield over women. We need to understand these connections ...

-- Starhawk
On political violence, after G8 Genoa

What is SOFA?

SOFA, or the Status Of Forces Agreement, is the security treaty that the United States agrees to uphold with each of its allies where U.S. military installations are hosted, and outlines every detail of how the military is to be treated in these countries. SOFA is what allows the United States to keep bases in Okinawa for as long as the Pentagon feels is necessary; it dictates the conditions under which bases will be returned, if ever; and it defines every aspect of life for the soldiers and their families while they are stationed in Japan.

It has long been argued that the Japan - U.S. SOFA provides a great deal of immunity to U.S. servicemembers who are suspected of having committed a crime. It also grants the Pentagon the right to harbor suspects within military installations until the Japanese have filed a formal indictment. This prevents authorities in Okinawa from being able to question a suspect at their immediate convenience and may even hamper the criminal investigation further in other areas such as collection of forensic evidence. There have also been cases where a suspect of a crime had managed to escape back to the United States while they were being harbored in a military installation.

Furthermore, SOFA grants jurisdiction to the U.S. military as well as the local Okinawan authorities in all criminal cases where a U.S. servicemember is involved. Such domination in all criminal proceedings can only increase resentment towards such an appearance of impropriety, and bias towards members of the military.

“Sympathetic Consideration”

In 1995, a 12 year old schoolgirl was raped by three G.I.'s who had kidnapped her on her way home from the store. When the United States government refused to hand over the suspects immediately, the indifference and lack of cooperation ignited mass protests that attracted thousands from all over the island.

After the suspects were finally transferred, the U.S. government stated it would give “sympathetic consideration” to future transfer requests in order to subdue the anger that had caused such massive protests. This euphemism describes the special treatment that the United States declares that it will give to those crimes which are of a “heinous nature” (such as murder or rape). However, there is no guarantee that “sympathetic consideration” will mean the suspects will be handed over immediately upon request. In essence, all that the U.S. government promised was to “give it a good think” – despite the obvious fact that *ALL* crime is heinous. Such an unwritten and loosely defined policy is anything but sympathetic, and is merely an empty gesture to pacify rising anger of those in Okinawa who demand justice.

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U.S. Militarism and its Impact on Women

Why U.S. National Security is a Threat to Women's Human Rights in Okinawa

“The systematic plunder of women by military forces is an instrument that promotes the fighting spirit, and is the tacitly approved outlet after the taking of bounty, lust, discontent and fear. In a patriarchal society that places high value on military power[...], using women as sexual instruments to achieve the purposes of the State is legitimized.”

Military Violence & Women in Okinawa
NGO Forum on Women, Beijing, 1995