

The New York Times

He Said It, Sisters, but It's Not What He Meant

To the Editor:

Your April 14 Week in Review interview with Kwame Turé, the former Stokely Carmichael, refers to his "much-quoted line that the best position of women in the civil rights movement was prone."

This quotation appeared first in Robin Morgan's 1970 "Sisterhood Is Powerful." Unfortunately, the book got the date wrong (it was 1964, not 1966), along with the context and meaning of the quotation.

I was an author of a position paper concerning women in the movement that provoked the comment, and in 1973, Gloria Steinem called on me to find out if the quotation was true. Of course it was a joke, as Mr. Turé contends.

He made the comment at a retreat of the Student Nonviolent Coordinat-

ing Committee in November 1964, at the end of a long and uproarious monologue in which he had made fun of every constituency involved in the movement, starting with people from Trinidad, like himself.

It is unfortunate that my old friend — quoted in your interview as blaming white women in SNCC for spreading the misinterpretation — may not realize that such women are among those who have worked hardest to correct subsequent distortion.

At the time, I recall him as receptive and sympathetic when several women began to discuss whether the movement would be expansive enough to allow for broader issues of democracy to be raised — including the hopes of women for a more just society.

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Washington, April 17, 1996
