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OF FEMALE BONDAGE

Statistics do not tell the whole story. The estimated figure of up to 1.5 million illegal abortions a year in the U.S. fails to convey the fear, the shame, the pain, the all-too-frequent injuries and death suffered by the victims. It is these women's rights -- and the right of all women to end unwanted pregnancies -- that two lawyers, Diane Schulder and Florynce Kennedy, publicly defend in Abortion Rap, a provocative, significant book published today by McGraw-Hill (\$7.95 in hardcover, \$3.95 paperback).

This work, the authors declare, should "be viewed as a brief to be presented to a people's tribunal." It is a distillation of the more than 2,000 pages of material, including depositions and legal papers, in a case brought in January, 1970 to declare the New York State abortion laws unconstitutional. When the law was liberalized in New York State on April 3, 1970, the case was declared moot, but many of the problems surrounding abortion are still unsolved.

Schulder and Kennedy quote extensively from the actual courtroom hearings, where women for the first time testified as to their own experiences. These ranged from shotgun marriage to the desperate and humiliating search for an abortionist. Clashes between defense and prosecution, spectators' outbursts, judges' reactions lend a dramatically vivid background to the candid, often-times heartrending statements of the women on the witness stand.

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Insights are provided into social abscesses which are little known to the general public, such as a "home" for unwed mothers where "a pall of guilt hung over the place. The women were sworn to secrecy; they told each other that, if they ever met on the street, they should give no sign of recognition."

"What we were really doing," the witness recalls, "was producing babies for this home to market. They counseled all the white girls to give their babies up for adoption and counseled black girls to keep their babies, because there was no market for black babies."

Experts called upon in the momentous hearing -- over 300 plaintiffs and other interested parties were involved -- included an expert in theology, a doctor, a psychiatrist, a social worker, and two population experts.

In one section of the book, "Black Genocide," the authors examine the reasons why many members of the black community oppose the repeal of abortion laws. The title of the final section, "The Fight Goes On," summarizes the position still held by the champions of freedom for women -- the new, more liberal laws notwithstanding -- and the appendix of legal papers provides valuable material for those interested in taking up the fight in their own states.