

How low

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Today

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Flo Comes Out Fighting

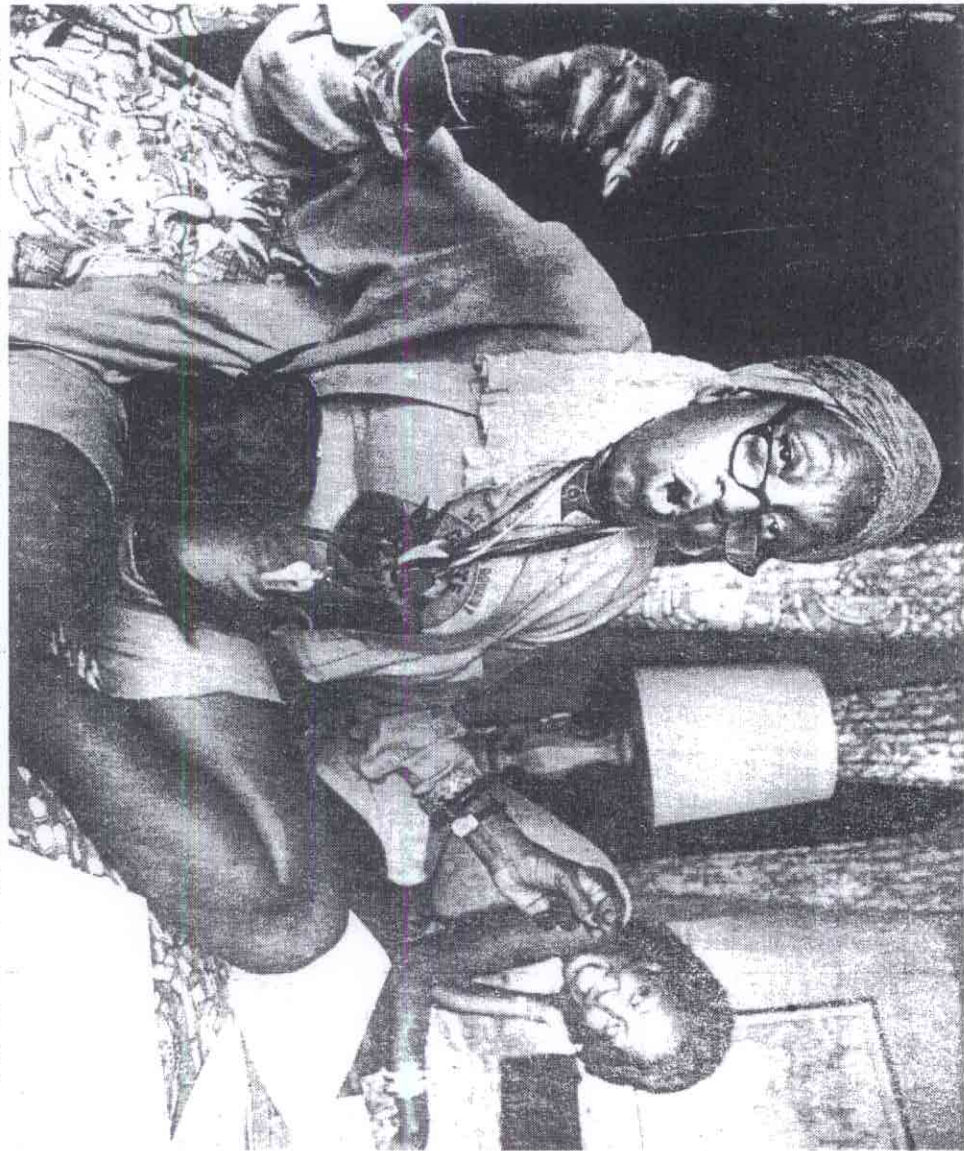
By Susan Yin, Star-Bulletin Writer

Florence Kennedy, sprawled on a hotel room bed, does not look like the ordinary tourist. A pink cloth wound around her head covers her hair like a turban, hoop earrings dangle from her ears. She sits up to show the photographer her T-shirt under an unbuttoned yellow blouse. "My ass is Mine" is emblazoned in black across the front of the shirt, above a coyote's head. The words are difficult to read under the clutter of necklaces—among them a whistle

on a chain—and the status-y Louis Vuitton pouch slung over one shoulder. There also is a Vuitton pocketbook worn like a holster over cut-off shorts, and the wrists and fingers are ringed with more jewelry.

"This'll make a great picture," says the photographer.

Flo Kennedy, knows what he means. She calls herself "a crazy, black old lady." Other people have called her "a four-mouthed haridan," "the mouth that rear-ed," "the fighting feminist" and a host of



Florence Kennedy, a 'crazy, black old lady,' with her sister, Faye, in the background.—Star-Bulletin photos by John Titchen.

unprintable names. Kennedy couldn't care less in fact she delights in the notoriety. "I'm proud of what people say against me. It means my enemies know what I'm trying to do," she says.

SHE HAS NEVER believed in doing things quietly, and her outspoken, outrageous manner is a trademark. Her language is sprinkled with expletives and she gestures effusively. Already she's loudly predicting her death in 18 months.

"Why do people want to get old? I'm in bad health at 61, making \$60,000 a year. Why should I keep working my tail off to maintain my life style. I don't want to be sick, old and crazy. My poor daddy was paralyzed when he died. Do I need that (bleep)?"

Kennedy, an attorney who gave up her practice to become a full-time activist in the civil rights and feminist movements, is in the Islands to speak tomorrow night at the national meeting of the Women in Communications, Inc., at the Sheraton-Waikiki Hotel.

In a 1975 Parade magazine interview, she admitted encouraging people to punch anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly in the mouth.

"I don't think she should be damaged seriously," Kennedy elaborated, "but I don't think it would hurt her if somebody slapped her. We're arguing with people (like Schlafly) who obviously aren't speaking from a rational perspective. Instead of so much argument, people should slap."

KENNEDY, WHO founded the Feminist Party in 1971, has moved on to other crusades, disgusted with the myopic views of the movement which is "hung up on fighting sexism instead of other things" like nuclear arms.

"The average feminist is very moral. They're like the missionaries," Kennedy laments. The photographer tells her the Island line about the missionaries. "They came to do good and they did well."

"Oh, I love that," Kennedy booms, clapping her hands.

She is now busy fighting all forms of oppression or what she calls "niggerization." And everyone is a victim of niggerization, Kennedy announces, including herself and Honolulu.

"This is beautiful," Kennedy says, gesturing toward the view of the ocean from the lanai, "except for those (bleep) huff-rises. Actually, this is just like Florida."

The original room she and her younger sister, Faye, were booked in at the Hilton Hawaiian Village had a view of "the terraces across the way. I could see that in New York."

FAYE MARCHED downstairs with a copy of her sister's autobiography, "Color Me Fio," pointed to it and told their tour director who her sister was and that she was here to give a speech at the Women in Communications dinner Saturday night. She informed them that the theme of the speech would be "the niggerization of the tourist" and their hotel room was an example.

She said they wanted a better room, with a view of the ocean as they had requested when they made tour reservations. That's what the Kennedy sisters got. And that's what Fio Kennedy is encouraging others who feel "niggerized or arbitrarily oppressed" to do.

"Sure, Faye used pressure to get her way, but she got it and I don't think anything's wrong with that," Kennedy says. What bugs her is when people just sit back and accept injustice.

"It's like you're lying on the ground with a car on you. You don't send someone to the library to find out how much the car weighs. You don't go to the library when you're oppressed. You get the car off you."

That's what Kennedy will talk about Saturday night, in between songs. She travels with a briefcase full of reading material, correspondence and her songbook. These are songs Kennedy has written or has added her own words to, and she sings them during speeches to add humor. Kennedy leads through the pages of her songbook.

"THIS IS FOR the prostitute union. This is the boycott song. I'll sing 'Move Over, the Niggers' Time Has Come' for you now."

She snaps her fingers and launches into the song, which is to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

There is another version for feminist gatherings, "Move Over, the Feminists Time Has Come."

Why the songs, why the loud voice and the obscenities?

"Why not," demands Kennedy. "I don't see how anybody can take oppression any other way. Do you want the cancer specialist to say softly, 'Well, cancer is...'"

"Well, I don't. First, I like dramatics. Maybe I'm strident; maybe I'm shrill. I'm trying to make it interesting. I think politics should be fun rather than dreary."

Her sister smiles understandingly from a corner of the room. Faye Kennedy Daly is a slender, soft-spoken woman—the antithesis of her sister. Faye and another sister,



Joy, have had novels published. Fio is the non-fiction writer in the family.

"On the Mainland, some people call us the black Brontes," Fio notes.

There are also two older Kennedy sisters, but none is as outspoken as Fio. When she makes statements like, "Id Amin is my favorite African leader, not because of the things he does but because he dares to do them," my sisters go bananas," she says, covering her forehead with her hands in a gesture of exasperation.

She has always been different, even as a child growing up in Kansas City, Mo. Her father was a taxi driver. Her mother worked as a domestic.

"My mother made us all pink gingham pinafores with ruffles around the collar and flared skirts like she'd seen in Ladies' Home Journal. She was the kind of woman who tried to grow rose bushes around the house. I think she felt a need to bring beauty into our lives," Kennedy explains.

FIO, THE MIDDLE child, took things into her own hands early. In 1944, she entered Columbia University after working at a number of jobs, including as a domestic, a civil servant and in her own hat shop. In 1948, she entered Columbia Law School after having to fight to get in.

"At first they told me I had been refused admission because I was a woman, not because I was black. I said, 'It feels the same.'"

That's why Kennedy gets so angry when she reads about the Bakke case. Allan Bakke, who is white, has sued the University of California at Davis after it rejected his application to its medical school. Bakke charges that he is a victim of reverse discrimination, that the school has admitted members of minority races who ranked below him by the school's criteria.

The case will be argued before the U.S. Supreme Court later this month. As Kennedy sees it, the Bakke case is an example "of a new form of racism, an attempt to project guilt on people already victimized."

But there's no way Fio Kennedy is going to feel guilty. "I've gone from making \$3 an hour to \$60,000 a year. I helped Faye buy a home and she drives a Cadillac. I drive a Mercedes and Joy drives a Cadillac, too."

KENNEDY SUPPORTS herself by lecturing and writing, most recently her autobiography. She gave up her law practice years ago after representing H. Rap Brown and the estates of Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker.

She is concentrating on setting up a new coalition, Black Women United for Organizational Action, in New York. Hopefully the organization will be on solid ground within 18 months, Kennedy says, because that's when she wants to call it quits for good.

"I won't commit suicide because I'm too clumsy," she predicts. "But I've always said I want to leave a party before anyone gets drunk. I want to be hot right down to the end."



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