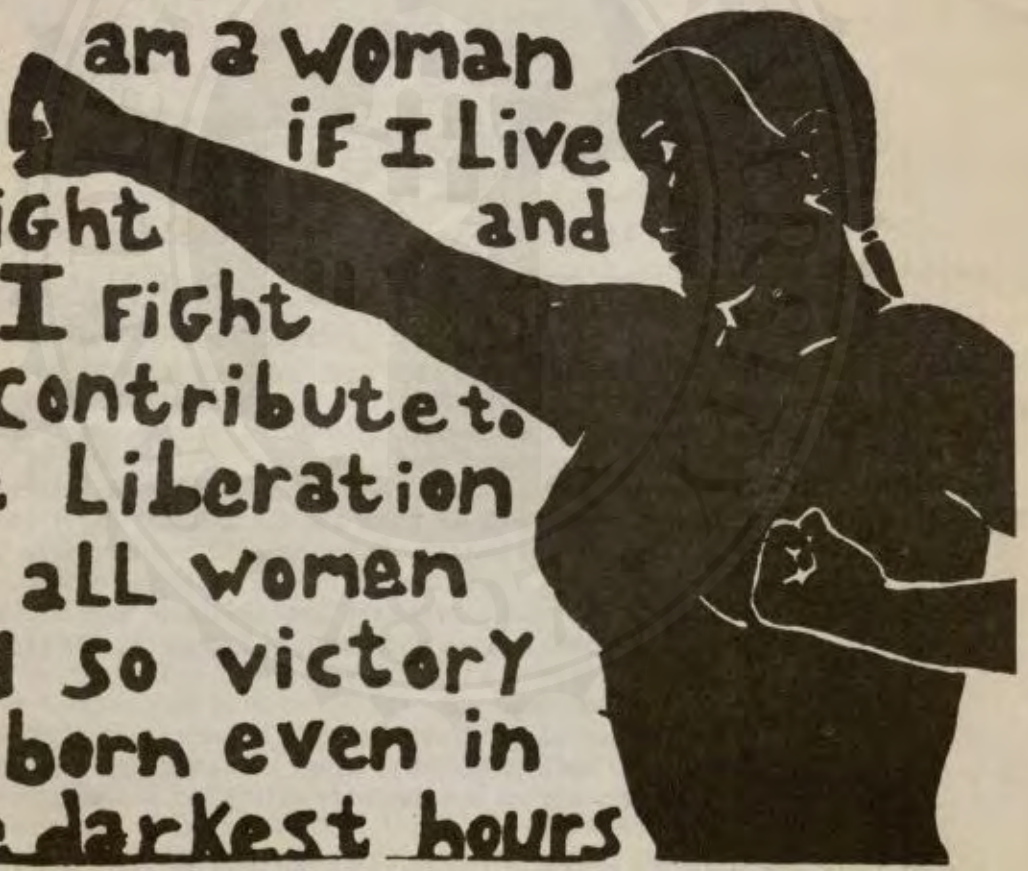


WOMEN'S STUDIES
AND
SOCIALIST FEMINISM

I am a woman
and **I** if I Live
I Fight and
if **I** Fight
I contribute to
the Liberation
of all women
and so victory
is born even in
the darkest hours



RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY:
The Women's Studies Board
San Diego State College
San Diego, California 92115
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DEDICATION

This pamphlet is dedicated to all Socialist Feminist who work toward the development of a unified Socialist Movement, a movement which has it's base amongst Third World people, working-class people, gay people and women.

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INTRODUCTION

This statement on the future direction of the Women's Studies Program at San Diego State has been collectively written by the women students, staff and faculty who are serving on the Programs governing body. We have felt with increasing certainty that significant decisions had to be made this year about the future direction for women involved in Women's Studies who are committed to the struggle to end sexism, racism, class oppression and heterosexual dominance in our society. We feel that the change in the social forces operating in the university from the late sixties when we developed, to today have created a situation in which we see it as no longer desirable for socialist feminists to put their energies into maintaining Women's Studies. We are writing this statement to communicate our analysis and ideas to other women involved in Women's Studies here in San Diego and in programs around the country. We also feel that our analysis is relevant to Third World Studies Programs as well as individuals who consider themselves part of the forces committed to revolutionary change in the structure and purpose of our society. Basic to our desire to communicate our ideas is our awareness that there are no individual solutions to the political questions facing us. A collective strategy and movement will only come from a struggle among all of us as women, lesbians, working class and Third World people to develop and communicate our analysis, criticisms and suggestions for future direction.

WHAT IS A UNIVERSITY ANYWAY? WHY DOES IT EXIST?

The answer to these questions have many different aspects. For one, it creates the training ground where the ruling class can intermingle, socialize and educate itself, so that it may better know how to control and manipulate the resources and labor of the world. (examples of these kinds of universities: Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Exeter, etc.). On another level the university produces the "brains" behind the ruling class. The Henry Kissingers, the mental elite that serve as educated flunkies for the benefit of the rich who never really own anything, but sell their brains.

The University also does research, much of it war related, that assists the ruling class in its imperialist wars (such as Vietnam, Santa Domingo, the Philippines, Mozambique — and on and on). The University contributes research on electronic battlefields, defoliate chemicals, and psychological research done on cultural aspects of other societies and how to control them. These things the university provides for the rich.

Another of the unique purposes that colleges and universities serve for the ruling classes is that of research bases and tax write-offs. An example of this would be that Rohr Corporation (a local company involved in defense work) needs research done on a water table, a form of a calculator. What most of us think would happen is that Rohr would buy a water table and hire trained people to operate it, right? Wrong! Instead Rohr would contact the San Diego State University Foundation (every college has one attached to it). Then Rohr would donate to S.D.S. University a water table (which costs close to \$50,000.) and a research

grant to pay someone to staff that water table and do research. Then, what happens? Well, Rohr Corporation gets a tax write-off for the research grant and the cost of the water table. S.D.S.U. gets 10% off the top of the transaction. In addition somewhere in the Science Department at S.D.S.U. some student is getting paid about \$2.45 per hour to do research on this water table, and guess in whose hands this research falls? You guessed right Rohr.

Education for the mainstream of American life serves different purposes. For the majority of us, 4 or 5 years of college is a further step in our socialization, (if we didn't get the message in high school we'll be sure to get it in college). It produces the managers, the social workers, the skilled technicians to keep this system running smoothly and efficiently. But those jobs are generally attained by white, middle class men. For the majority of women, Third world and poor people the institution of college serves another purpose. Women go to college to find prospective husbands and get married, and end up perpetuating the labor force. If you are not in college to get a husband you shouldn't be there. For the most part we come out of college able to get about the same kind of job we would have gotten before we went in. Can you imagine what would happen if upon graduation from high school every student went straight into the labor market? Catastrophe! Colleges absorb the shock these people would create in the labor market and under capitalism we know that there are never enough jobs. Instead we are all shoved and pushed by counselors, teachers, parents and so on "to get a good job, get a good education". Go to college and "presto", you get a plush job in a successful business.



Since 1966, poor people have made demands on institutions that they struggle with their racism. There have also been demands made by those in power in this country for these institutions to absorb these problems. One result has been Educational Opportunity Programs instituted in order to make it look like these colleges are really progressive and willing to rectify all past wrongs. What they are actually doing is starting these programs to placate those agitating for change without really changing the core of the problem — the system.

Modern education tries to absorb everything. As long as ideas remain ideas, they can exist at an "institution of higher learning". It's important to remember, however, that once we act upon our ideas, that is make them real, we can be shot; i.e. Augusta State, Jackson State, Kent State; or arrested en masse, i.e. Columbia and Berkeley.

In the three years of this Women's Studies Program we have found that the university not only absorbs our struggles, our ideas, but it absorbs us, those of us who work here on a day to day basis. It prevents us from raising important political issues on the campus at large that relate directly to women. The incredible paper work and bureaucracy, the deans meetings, faculty meetings, space (office) allocations, faculty time sheets, on and on the list goes. All of this works to bog us down into the structure of the university and to make us lose sight of our original struggles and demands. This form of bureaucratic bullshit (BB) keeps us from initiating struggle. If we do a lot of BB we can maintain the program, if we don't we lose it. After all, what we really wanted was a Women's Studies Program, wasn't it? Or did we really want women's lives to be dealt with as a reality in every class, in every aspect of the university. Well, after a while you forget what you really wanted, you just work to maintain what you've got.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST?

Women's Studies Program at San Diego State began in the Fall of 1970. The original struggle for this program was based on the resurgence of the women's movement in the late 1960's. It was based on the massive struggles of women throughout the country, in communities, on the job, and on campuses. For women in the community the struggle shaped itself into many forms; health clinics, childcare facilities, legal assistance programs and so on. Women on the job are members of a large work force which includes most third world people; those basically unorganized or denied access in already

existing unions. They have developed women's caucuses and coalitions within trade unions, organized strikes, such as the New York and San Francisco hospital strikes. On the campus two distinct types of organizations were developed; the student based women's unions and organizations, and autonomous educational programs and classes.

In the spring of 1970, a group of women at San Diego State formed the Women's Studies Committee and, with the help of several faculty women, designed curriculum for a Women's Studies Program. This committee formulated a program in the interest of the administration, which was to be taught by women but not defined by women. A group of women from the campus and community, through political struggle and support, wrestled the program out of the hands of the Women's Studies Committee and into the hands of a board composed of students, staff, and faculty. This new board designed a program in the interest of the students and women in general. In response to this development, the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters appointed a faculty advisory committee to advise the program and provide it with a tenured faculty direction. The committee did not initiate policy, it just accepted or rejected the Women's Studies board's decisions. The FAC in the first 3 years never rejected a board decision.

In the first two years of the program the administration did not attack our structure (they just hinted around that if we wanted to "develop" our program would have to step up to hiring PhD.'s). While they never attacked our structure, they never acknowledged it either, we were simply allowed to slide along.

In our third year we recognized that we were absorbed in beauracraty pro-

cess. We were not raising the political issues on the campus-at-large, which we had been raising before the program was formed. An internal paper was presented by women in the program who felt that we should no longer be working with students, because in their analysis students at this time were not a revolutionary force. The paper made two other points, 1) that we had no political unity as an organization, and 2) that we should all be doing work force organizing.

There were women who disagreed with this analysis on the grounds that all women are oppressed and should be worked with, that there was no need for political unity — all opinions should be expressed and considered equally. They did not feel there was any danger of co-optation, and urged us to "trust women".



WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE

The majority of the board, however, did not support either position. We shared criticisms of the beauracraty drift of the program and were very much aware of the danger of co-optation. We trust that women can grow and change — through struggle — We had learned from our practice that women who do not struggle with their class, race and hetero-

sexual dominance were not to be trusted. We had also learned that socialist women who were not feminist could not be trusted. For us the politics of socialism and feminism must merge to create the politic that would best fit the needs of women. At that point the board began the long process of defining that politic. The outcome of that process was the Working Draft of the Socialist Feminist Paper (See pamphlet *Three Years Of Struggle*).

We believe that a student movement based on working-class politics is indeed a revolutionary force. For us the feasibility of political work on campus had more to do with the university structure, and its limitations, rather than with the question of whether or not students are revolutionary.

In the past we had control over hiring, firing, and policy making, only because the administration had chosen not to exercise its power. Now they want to integrate us into the structure of the university and control us in the same way they do other departments. That means our collective process and our politics are to be no longer tolerated. It was made clear to us by the administration, that as untenured faculty, community women, students, and more particularly socialists we are allowed no power. Our illusions of control are gone.

We have realized that professionalizing Women's Studies and the institutionalizing of this program is part of the strategy of those in power in the university. Two distinct approaches to Women's Studies have emerged in the past four years. Programs such as ours at San Diego State originated with student initiative growing out of the women's movement. They were based on women's desire to have an education

which would speak to our needs. Such student based programs have maintained commitment to student involvement and student participation in defining the direction and content of Women's Studies. As the understanding and analyses of the politics of women's liberation changed and developed, so did this type of Women's Studies Program. San Diego Women's Studies has developed from a vague knowledge that women are oppressed and should be studied, to a socialist feminist perspective that acknowledges the need to include an understanding of racism, class oppression and heterosexual dominance in our analysis of women's oppression.



PROFESSIONALISM AND THE UNIVERSITY, ARE THEY INTERRELATED?

In the past four years other forces have been operating in the general area of women's studies. The national media

and many university intellectuals have acknowledged the significance of women's studies. A second and very different type of Women's Studies Program has popped up across the country. Characteristically, this type of program was initiated by the administration of a school or by a group of faculty who were already on the university payrolls and saw in Women's Studies a way to expand their traditional areas of academic interest. Students have been asked to participate as tokens in these programs but the real power unquestionably lies with faculty and administrators. There is little connection between the Women's Movement and these programs, they are not committed to changing our society to free women. Instead, they place emphasis on developing academic credibility of Women's Studies in the eyes of traditional sexist professional disciplines. Professional women who are interested in gaining security in university faculties participate in administration controlled programs.

Increased professionalism affects the students in many ways. In the classes professionalism creates a student-teacher hierarchy, and mystification of who has leadership ability and knowledge and how this is learned. Professionalism assures that students will get a bourgeois education, at best mildly critical of society. It also provides role models to encourage students to find their individual solution in becoming professionals themselves. Many women in Women's Studies may try to fight all these built in attributes of the institution, but it is hard to change the foundation of the university when your job demands you become part of that institution. In the process of programs becoming institutionalized and professionalized, faculty spend more time being concerned with

tenure, new faculty positions, more PhD's, more publishing, etc. Faculty and programs become accountable to the administration and not the students or the women in the community.

Some women are caught by the pressures to become professionals. Teaching assistants with BA's and MA's are encouraged to work to get their PhD's. Non PhD's learn that if they want to stay in the university they have to meet the required criteria in order to become a full-fledged member of the "club." Attending the correct classes, spending the allotted time in intensive study of a particular discipline, developing friendly relations with the "important people" in the university community to get their required letters of recommendations; qualifies a woman for "club" membership. Once she has professional credentials a woman has to choose between a career for self-interest or the collective interest of women students and women in the community. The affect of having been tied to the institution causes most women to feel that maintaining their job is most important. They then make their own self-interest more important than collective needs and assume the role of bourgeois professional.

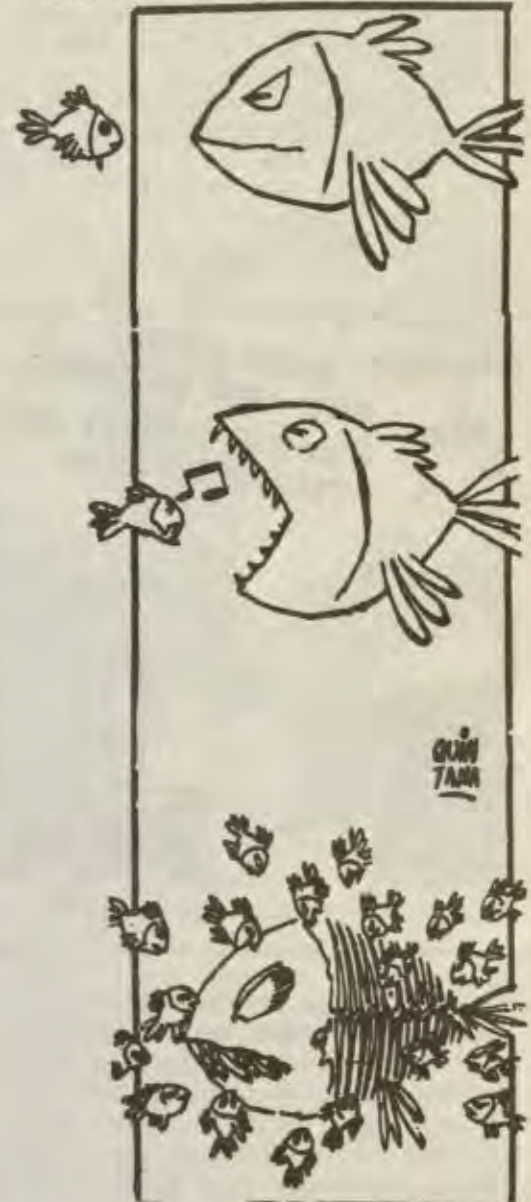
Programs with administration control from the beginning never face the problem of how to eliminate student control. "Club" members are hired from the start. In student controlled programs like ours, control must be seized and put in the hand of "responsible club members" before any permanent resources are given. No woman regardless of her ability as a teacher, strength of her analysis or the clarity of her ideas can overcome the reality of what it means to be faculty and accountable to the institution. Since our faculty is controlled by a collective body (the board), which is made up mainly by students, the

faculty is responsible to them. If we were to function individually our ability to resist the administration would be destroyed. Even though faculty members share a common experience with other women, the conflict between collective commitment and professionalism is inevitable. Professional academic standards are based on individualism — "My ideas, my dissertation, I am more intelligent than other women, and I should be free to do research for other women." It is not a question of unique or strong women being able to resist the pressures of the institution. The price you pay to be an accountable part of the institution puts you in conflict with students and women on campus.



The choice we face in Women's Studies is between individual self-interest and collective decisions about the future of the program. The university will not tolerate, for very long, the existence of a program like ours, which is based on our own assumptions and priorities. A collective program like San Diego's either must develop into a traditional elitist approach to education, or the women who have maintained the collective approach will be fired and replaced by women who are not committed to students interests or needs. In either case Women's Studies as we have known it, is incompatible with the institution and is eliminated.

HOW DO WE OPPOSE THE UNIVERSITY STRUCTURE?



We find it necessary to talk about our structure for one basic reason: Structure is directly related to function, goals, and politics. In other words the way we are set up is in direct relationship to

who we are, what we stand for and what we do. In discussing our structure we can see concretely how our goals and organization are in conflict with the university system.

As socialist feminists we believe that as women we are oppressed. We lack control over our lives; our basic needs are not met. In addition to the forms of oppression suffered by many under capitalism, women are the victims of sexism.



Some people say that women's oppression will end when we are equal to men. but in capitalist society it is clear that all men are not equal; neither are they free. To us, the basic needs of women include not only equal pay and equal work, but decent pay, meaningful work and participation in deciding what gets produced and how it is distributed. "Liberation" means freedom from economic want, from human degradation, as well as from male supremacy.

We also maintain that these needs and this liberation cannot be satisfied under capitalism. The very structure of capitalism is based in the exploitation and oppression of people and upon the institutions of sexism, racism, heterosexual dominance and classism. We believe in order to change the way people relate to each other we must ultimately change the social structure. Our analysis of what determines the form and basis of women's oppression is basic to what is taught in our classes and how we can best meet the needs of the students.

The university is a social institution with certain definite political functions in bourgeois society. The actual curriculum of the university is less important than the structure of the education itself. What is taught in the classes rarely gives you the skills you need on the job. What you do learn in school is how to fit into the structure of domination and power hierarchy which is the basis of all institutions of class society. That is, the university serves the interests of capitalist society by producing workers who will fulfill their assigned roles in the existing power hierarchy and who are socialized by the institution not to question or threaten that power structure.

Women's Studies, based on collective structure, exists in opposition to the structure of the university. We refute the basis of capitalist society — individualism, competition and tracking people into certain positions in order to maintain the class structure. Instead of decisions being made by one person, the chairwoman, they are discussed and decided upon by the board made up of students, staff and faculty. Our framework for all discussion and decisions are the principles of feminism, collectivity and socialism. This form of political organization is in total conflict with the university structure. No one person is

"accountable". No one person is playing the boss, training others to be workers, and others to function in the middle.

But our structure is clearly more than form. The ideology we teach and the analysis we convey also undermine the purpose of the university. The ideology of the university manifests and supports those ideas that are important to contemporary monopoly capitalism and imperialism — classism, racism, ethnocentrism, sexism and heterosexual dominance. Within the university one of the fundamental examples of classism is found in the class structure of the campus. It assumes that those who think (professors, deans) are better than those who do (secretaries, maintenance). The institution teaches that those in capitalist society who are in "doing" jobs have those jobs because they are too stupid and couldn't make it as "thinkers".



The foundations of racism in American society are also put forth in most classes — "white is right". The cultural, political and economic domination of people

of color is justified because "they are lazy" or more recently with new theories of biological inferiority (Jensen, Shockley). The fact that capitalism needs a surplus labor force and that Third World men and women have provided the land and labor that built this country is dismissed.



Ethnocentrism or cultural imperialism is also an important part of bourgeois ideology. Other people are studied not with respect, but with an attitude that what other cultures do is "quaint" or "odd". What white Americans do is "normal". Imperialism is conveyed in many forms — Manifest destiny; Columbus discovered America", the idea of the "developed vs. the underdeveloped nations." All of these are justifications of the expansion of the Anglo capitalist ruling class across North America and to other countries. By doing this the ruling class gains natural resources, cheap labor and more markets to dump surplus goods.

Sexism is taught as truth in every area of the university — Freud, history, politics — on and on. Women are everywhere subordinate to men. The economic benefits and power of men is presented

as based on their natural abilities rather than institutionalized male supremacy. Heterosexual dominance is sustained by teaching that homosexuality is an "arrested state of development". The privileges, power and assumptions of normalcy that accompany the dominance of heterosexuality are unquestioned.



*i sometimes wonder
if you're the right one
for me to be submissive to...*

The university is the base of support for all these ideas. Bourgeois education passes this false, exploitative and individualistic ideology on to the students. College textbooks and lectures are filled with these ideas. The Women's Studies Program opposes these ideas because they are based on this capitalistic economic system which does not meet the needs of most people in society. We teach that institutions of this society are not "natural" or given, but that they exist

to serve those in power. They can be challenged and changed. In our classes we provide an alternative ideology which discusses the purpose of classism, racism, imperialism, ethnocentrism, sex-



ART CREDIT: Pat Gluchey

ism and heterosexual dominance. We show how capitalism exploits the many for the benefit of the few and we discuss how university education is partly responsible in maintaining control. We discuss women's needs, not based on what you read in someone else's life, but based directly on your own life experience. Our educational ideology incorporates women's needs, the differences and similarities among us and how we can struggle to meet our

needs. In practicing our educational ideology, we show how capitalism through the bourgeois educational system offers only individual solutions to the social and political problems we all face —

"Become a woman astronaut, engineer, etc.". Our collective structure and our social analysis illustrates that there is an alternative to the trap of individual competition and to the struggle of a token woman making it.



WHAT WILL HAPPEN NOW?

From our experience it is clear that the university has ultimate control over all programs and departments. We feel the most effective way to confront the university and to struggle against its role in perpetuating sexism, racism, imperialism, heterosexual dominance and capitalism, is through a student political organization which does not depend on the university for its livelihood. Students have the best ability to define their own needs and confront the university by demanding that it meet their needs.

We have also found that the benefits of university attendance in many ways are an illusion for most women. We come here wanting an education that will prepare us for a "good" job so that we can make it in the system. The reality is that most women end up in jobs they could have gotten right out of high school. The four years we spend in college has kept us off the labor market, and has also caused those of us from Third World and working class families to run up debts of \$2000 or more. If a woman is not coming to college for the purpose of finding a man who will get a middle class job with HIS degree and support her as HIS WIFE, most women are wasting their time. Only a few women who are willing to sell out other women and become tokens in the middle class professions and business will use their college degrees.

We realize the inherent limitations of being a Women's Studies Program under capitalism. We have learned many things from our struggle that can help us in developing an understanding for our future lives and political work. First

we have learned that we do not have all the answers to the political questions facing the women's movement today. We also do not have a blueprint worked out for building a socialist struggle or socialism in America. Many people who have been at the university assimilate the bourgeois ideology that "educated" people really do understand the struggle and the contradictions better than the "masses". The left today is filled with former students and university people who feel they are taking a "message" to the people. This arrogance and elitism is a product of the value attached to the university under a capitalist society. What we have learned is important to the women's movement — our practice in struggling with class differences, racism, and heterosexual dominance all contribute to what we will politically have to offer in our future practice. But the direction and strategy for a revolutionary movement will have its base among oppressed and exploited people in our society. We have much to learn from them in their day to day struggles to survive and define their lives against the power of the dominant system.

The actual nature of our future practice will be determined by where we work and where we live, by whether we are gay or straight, Third World or white. In addition, lesbians will have to integrate an understanding of gay oppression with the struggle against class and race oppression. All of us, straight and gay, will work with other women in building towards a united struggle against oppression and exploitation. This revolutionary force will exist when working class people, Third World people, women and gay people have struggled with the realities of each others oppression and goals, and when the struggle of one becomes the struggle of all, unified against our common enemy.



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