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Introduction and Dedication

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On January 8, 1962, Clarence Earl Gideon petitioned the United States Supreme Court in a handwritten letter to fundamentally change the law, stating, "[t]he question is very simple. I requested the court to appoint me attorney and the court refused"¹ Such a simple plea was the genesis of the right to counsel, now a bedrock principle of constitutional criminal procedure. There is something powerful in such a plea, made not by educated attorneys, the ACLU, or a learned professor on a pro bono case. The power is in the initiative by a prisoner, a literally disenfranchised individual, whose only appeal is to the highest authority.

Nearly twenty years later, a group of California women prisoners has also made a plea. After their trials and appeals were exhausted, they made a petition for clemency to the last and highest authority, the Governor of the State of California, Pete Wilson. In a one-page letter dated March 19, 1991, the female prisoners told Wilson that they were victims of violent abuse who were imprisoned for killing their former abusers in defense of themselves or their children, and they asked him to grant clemency in the form of pardons or commutation to time served. Like Gideon, the women received professional legal assistance once the plea had been made. But the initiative, and the resulting movement to aid them, had begun with the women.

¹ ANTHONY LEWIS, GIDEON'S TRUMPET 40 (1964).

The Hastings Women's Law Journal dedicates this issue to the women in California prisons who are incarcerated for killing abusive partners in self-defense or defense of others. One of the petitioners has reportedly acknowledged the fact that her chances are remote that her petition for clemency will be granted. But she added that the public support, and the fact that her case was important enough for her full story to be on the governor's desk for consideration, made the difficult struggle worthwhile. The Hastings Women's Law Journal adds its support to the growing list of supporters in the community, including various women's advocacy groups, social organizations, and policymakers.

In addition, the editors and staff of the Hastings Women's Law Journal mourn the death of an important advocate for battered women, Cynthia Gillespie. Ms. Gillespie died of breast cancer on January 29, 1993, at the age of 51. In addition to being the co-founder of a women's law center, she was the author of a nationally acclaimed book on battered women and the law of self-defense. Her work was cited widely in trial courts across the country, and she reportedly spoke of women who called to tell her they were out of jail because of the research and writing in her book.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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SUBMISSIONS

The *Journal* invites the submission of articles, book reviews, commentaries, personal narratives, fiction pieces, and poems that address issues of concern to women. The *Journal* is particularly interested in publishing pieces that recognize the unique concerns of communities that traditionally have been denied a voice in the legal discourse.

Manuscripts should be submitted with a diskette formatted for IBM WordPerfect 5.1. The *Journal* will accept works that follow the text and footnote citation rules of either *The Chicago Manual of Style* or *A Uniform System of Citation*. We regret that manuscripts cannot be returned except upon receipt of a self-addressed postage-paid envelope.

In order to further the *Journal's* commitment to gender equality, contributors are encouraged to use feminine pronouns for the third person singular when the pronoun is used generically.

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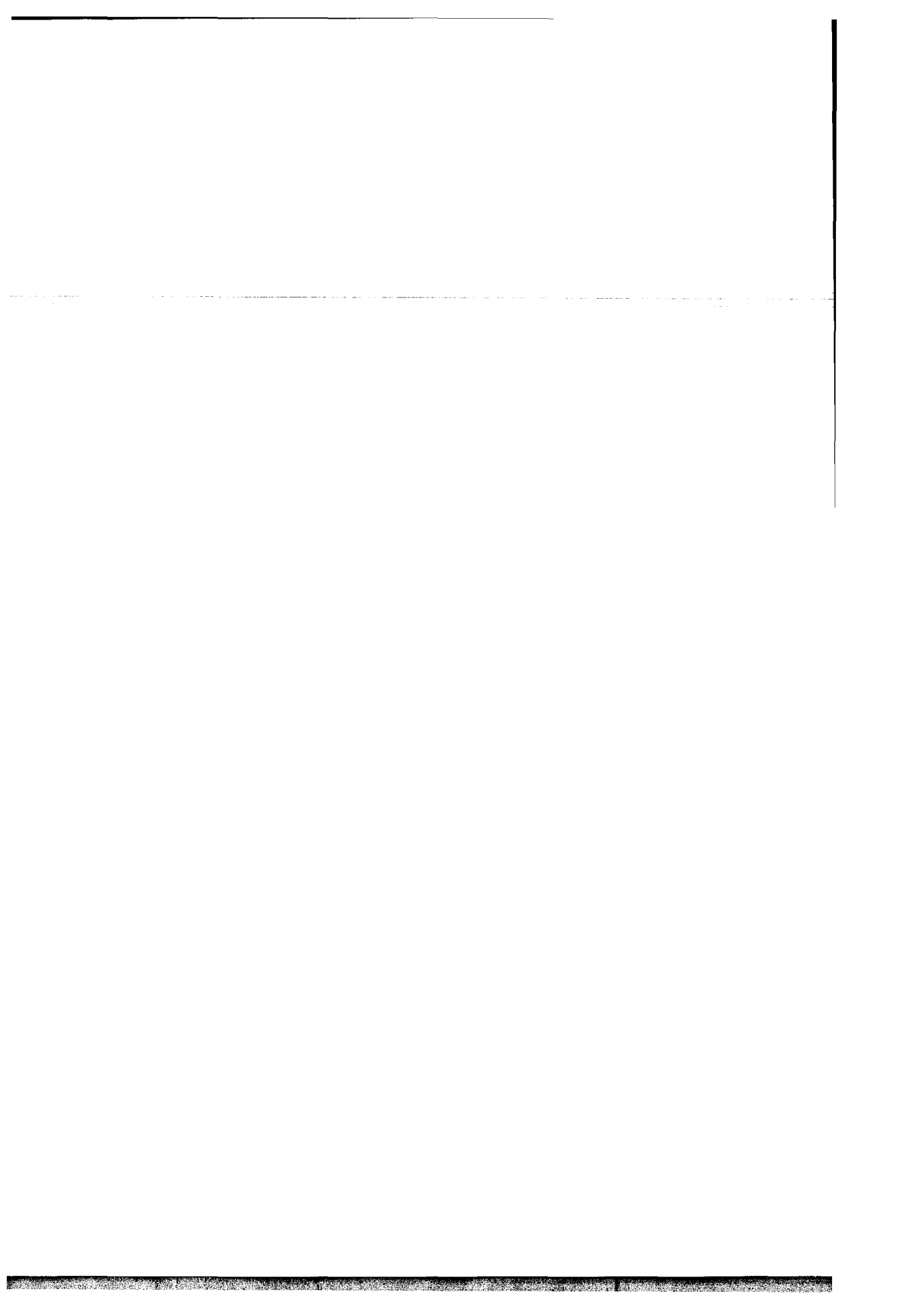
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