

# Transformation

Vol. 13 Issue 1  
Winter 1998

## 1997 Year End Report

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Suzanne Pharr

**F**OR THE FIRST TIME in our 16 year history, we at the Women's Project are presenting a public annual report. In 1997, as in other years, we wish we could have done more to fight off the punitive effect of selfish right-wing conservatism, have created more lasting and extraordinary social change, but we are also proud we have done strong, solid work and made the small changes that move us toward a world of greater justice and equality. Our three full-time and two part-time staff members and our 50 volunteers have given the best of their time and creative energy to ensure that the often silenced are heard, that violence never goes unacknowledged and sanctioned, that people move from exclusion to inclusion, and that we all build the relationships that sustain our deepest and most humane connections.

### WOMEN'S WATCHCARE NETWORK

OF ALL THE WORK WE DO, it is the work of the Women's Watchcare Network that most intimately touches the lives of every woman, man, and child in Arkansas—across race, class, gender, sexual identity, physical and mental ability. We monitor biased violence against religious minorities,

women, people of color, sexual minorities and people with disabilities as well as the activities of the religious right and far right groups such as the Klan and neo-Nazis. In addition to our public education about violence, we work with communities to respond to violence and work with public officials to change policy.

In 1997, we have logged the murders of over 60 women and 35 children under the age of 21 and tracked racist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic incidents. This is our first full year of gathering information about biased violence against people with disabilities. We are currently establishing an accumulative database of women murdered since 1989 which will list not only the circumstances of death but also the original charge, final conviction, and sentencing. This database will make our information more readily accessible for research and public policy work.

When Promise Keepers came to Little Rock to recruit African Americans, we sent out information to pastors and the press, helping them to understand the politics of the right-wing organizations that back this organization. We also attended a na-

*(continued on page 2)*

tional meeting of political activists and people of faith to create strategies to counter the organizing of Promise Keepers. In Arkansas, we tried to introduce a progressive voice by focusing on churches for training concerning biased crime and holding workshops for their adult educators.

We spoke at the postmarch rally at the National March of Solidarity Against Hate Crimes, which was held in South Carolina, worked with parents in Fayetteville whose children experienced homophobic violence, supported an environmentalist who was brutally attacked, and held a town meeting on hate crimes at the UALR Law School.

Our anti-violence work stalled in the Arkansas Legislature. We worked with a coalition to work against a same sex marriage bill—and lost; tried to tack on an amendment to another bill that called for employment nondiscrimination against lesbians and gay men—and lost; tried to move a bill to establish schools as hostility-free zones so all kids can be safe—and lost our sponsor. However, we did have a small success in the Medicaid debate with our attempt to get public officials to consider community-based services for people with disabilities.

Because there is only one staff member and a corps of volunteers working on the Women's Watchcare Network, we have to find ways to help as many people as we can in as efficient manner as possible. We spent a good portion of this year working on the revision of two of

our important publications which we provide for women who need assistance.

The *Handbook on Legal Rights for Women in Arkansas* covers common legal issues women call us about: divorce, child protection, abuse of children, adoption, domestic violence, sexual harassment, discrimination in employment, etc. We have updated it to reflect changes in the law.

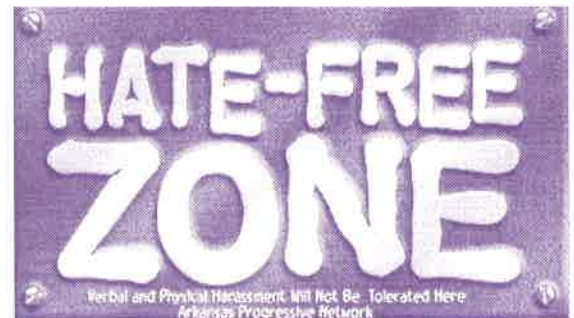
The *Resource Manual for Women* is particularly for Arkansas women in crisis caused by such things as violence, coming off welfare, etc. It provides local information about resources such as domestic violence services, continuing education for literacy and vocational training, attorneys willing to go against the system in employment cases, support groups, hate crimes, rape and incest, HIV/AIDS, government assistance, housing and homelessness, medical and dental assistance, mental health, legal assistance, crisis hotlines, programs related to aging, disabled persons, lesbians and gay men, incarcerated women, and youth.

## PROGRESSIVE AGENDA

OUR IDEA FOR DEVELOPING a progressive agenda and network came from our daily encounter with violence and discrimination in the Women's Watchcare Network. Because facing the grim accounts of murders and abuse each day exacts such an emotional toll, staff members are usually assigned to this work for no more than two years. Also, it is clear that monitoring and

teaching about violence is not enough: we have to find some way to change the world that creates it. This thinking led us to recognize that we need more bodies, more organizing, more strategies for creating a progressive agenda that is multi-issued and multi-cultural, built on justice and equality.

We set a goal to establish a network of individuals and organizations in Arkansas that promote a progressive agenda, that will support each other on issues, and will work collectively to make progressive social change. A half-dozen meetings have been held to organize the Arkansas network, to re-



cruit new members, and to grow the organization slowly and deeply. It has taken on a "Hate-free Zone" project which invites individuals, schools, businesses, and towns to create hate-free zones. The project had its kick-off at World Fest, a multi-cultural festival sponsored by the city of Little Rock. Members gave away signs and stickers which read "Hate-free Zone: Create One." The theme was taken on-stage of the festival, and the sign was the opening graphic for television coverage that night. The Network is currently working on a television public service announcement promoting the idea.

Building on the work we are doing in Arkansas, we also called a meeting of representatives of Southern states to discuss the idea of creating a progressive network in each state, with the ultimate plan to connect all of these groups in the region. People from seven states attended and agreed to work together to create a directory of progressive organizations in the South, to initiate networks in three states for each of the next three years, to share information, and to participate in each other's work.

At the Women's Project, we try to promote a progressive agenda through workshops, consultations, and technical assistance to people who are working to end discrimination and to promote inclusion and democratic participation. In 1997, we worked with a wide variety of groups on a broad spectrum of issues. We presented two eight-week classes on ethnic and gender dynamics at UALR; a workshop and panel on economics and lesbians and gay men; a training for white women working with women of color; organized a white women's reading group focusing on African American literature; organized an African American women's reading group; led a two-day queer institute for Western States Center; gave four workshops on adults/youth, power & sex; provided training on the Women's Project's organizational model for the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence; training for the Western State's Center's Advanced Leadership & Mentorship Program; anti-racist training for Oregon State University; homophobia work-

shops for Volunteers of America; an 8-hour intensive on white privilege for the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force's Creating Change Conference; workshops on coalition building for Montana Human Rights Network in three towns; motivation and confidence building

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workshops for the Good Faith Fund in Pine Bluff; racism workshops for the Foundation of the Mid South; organizational and board development for Advocates for Battered Women; a workshop on economics for teenage girls. Speeches were given at the Men and Masculinity Conference; Oregon State University, Western States Center's annual conference; Deshutes Co. Human Rights Coalition; William Patterson College; St. Paul Companies; Red and Black Books; Gay Lesbian Straight Teachers Network conference;

Winona State University; Outfront Conference in Willmar, MN; In Other Words Bookstore; and the Atlanta Book Club.

## OREGON OFFICE

IN PORTLAND, we organized a group to advise and support the work of the Women's Project in Oregon. A multi-racial group of 19 women, the Women's Project Working Group, meets quarterly to discuss politics, the activities of the Women's Project, and to plan events. Its focus this year has been on economics.

Much of our work over the last 16 years has been to support the formation and well-being of other organizations so that a progressive movement is built to bring about social and economic change. Therefore, we incubate some organizations and provide technical assistance and support to others. This year we provided 20 hours per week staff time to Oregon's Lesbian Community Project which was \$35,000 in debt and facing closure. We thought that its 10 year history made



it a strategic organization that showed much promise, and we were interested in providing a year's support toward its reorganization and renewal. We were particularly interested in the idea of a long-term organization

that has been based in identity politics and service provision



transitioning to an organization that maintains much of its identity but includes a multi-racial, multi-issued organizing approach to social change. Since LCP had already been doing much of this work, we wanted to help expand its organizing focus and take on new challenges. Such an organization could be a model for others across the country who are struggling to meet the political demands of the present moment.

In the 10 months we have provided staff support, LCP has accomplished these things:

- paid off \$30,000 in past debts
- developed a leadership team
- hosted 11 dinners which served both as fund-raisers and opportunities for dialogue
- sponsored forums on gender, cross-generational lesbian(queer) realities and a forum on gender as seen by those under 25
- sponsored and supported the Amazon Dragon Boat team
- greeted hundreds of well-wishers from the LCP Pride Day Float
- organized the annual Tournament of Choice Softball Extravaganza (450 participants)
- organized the Women in the Woods retreat with 149 women attending
- sponsored a week-end retreat for lesbians under the age of 30 (35 participants)
- held three dances
- published four newsletters.

The organization is now prepared to hire a full-time staff person, and the Women's Project's assistance will end April 1998.

## PRISON PROJECT

SINCE 1988, we have been working with women in prison. This year we continued our weekly domestic violence group that runs for eight-week cycles. It is open to 20 women each session, and out of any group of 18-20, at least half of them are usually survivors of rape, physical abuse or incest. Then there are 7-8 women who are in prison for having killed their batterer. In almost

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every case, they have had restraining orders, called upon police and family, and still have not been able to get adequate protection. These women share their stories with one another, learn to identify domestic violence, and learn ways to live lives without violence.

We devoted two issues of *Transformation* to our prison work, and for one of those, women prisoners wrote about their experiences.

Our deepest concern this year has been about the plan to move women from their state-operated

prison in Tucker to a privately-operated prison in Newport. This move triples their distance from us, places the prison in a white community rather than a racially mixed community, and isolates most of the women even more from their families, due to distance. It will be very difficult for us to offer services now. However, we are planning to provide training for the Newport battered women's shelter to continue the domestic violence work in the prison.

We began offering domestic violence classes for men in prison because incarcerated women told us that they wanted their male partners to learn the same things they have learned. They said that maybe such understanding would lead them to be able to have healthy relationships when they got out of prison. That request led us to offer sessions with men at Tucker and Wrightsville prisons as well as at the Benton Service Center. We work with men to identify what domestic violence is. The men are open to this information and often say they knew something was wrong with their relationship, but they just did not know what. They welcome the chance to talk. We talk about healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, the effect of abuse on children, denial, women as property, and women as equals. Recently, we have begun working with men in the Little Rock community to develop a group to address domestic violence.

Additionally, we provide HIV/AIDS education for the men once a month. In the women's prison, we give this training twice a month,

and once a year, we give a 19-hour course for 20 women to train them to be peer educators. With this training, they can do not only the work in prison while they are there but also in their communities once they are released.

## **MIWATCH**

SINCE 1990, we have worked with United Methodist Women to transport the children of incarcerated women to visit their mothers once a month. Since its beginning, there have been over 100 volunteers involved in the project. This year we transported 73 children to see 28 incarcerated mothers. An example of this work is a group of young couples from a United Methodist Sunday School class in Blytheville who transport children of five families on a long trip to Tucker, provide two meals on the road, develop relationships with the children and their caregivers, and provide holiday presents for them. United Methodist Women from all over the state collect personal hygiene articles (shampoo, deodorant, etc.) that many women do not have the money to purchase in prison. Thousands of these articles are distributed each year.

A new development in 1997 was that we began working with the Central Arkansas Community Punishment Center in addition to the women's prison.

The biggest problem that MIWATCH faces is when prisoners have children living in towns where we do not have volunteers to provide transportation. Some of the

women have not seen their children in three or four years. It is a constant struggle to develop and maintain volunteers in rural areas who can commit to a Saturday or Sunday a month as well as an ongoing relationship with families and children.

Another problem MIWATCH faces now is the new private prison in Newport where the women will be moved in January. It requires a new system of relationships with

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authorities, new rules, and new distances to travel.

## **ECONOMIC PROJECT**

OUR ECONOMICS WORK focused on two issues: trying to slow and shape the repeal of welfare, and advocating for and working with women who are losing their welfare benefits.

We worked with the Kids Count Coalition which is made up of 14 organizations that

monitor the welfare laws and their changes and hold strategy sessions to create ideas to improve the work of the Department of Human Services. We tried to get the legislature to postpone the two year limits imposed on welfare recipients. To do this, we provided testimony to the legislature—personal stories, accompanied by real facts about what it costs a family of three to live. We advocated for recipients of welfare to be at the table to help make the decisions that would affect their lives. To shape opinion on this issue, we did press work and wrote articles.

As part of the Welfare Working Group, we looked at the results of changes in the law. One of our tasks has been to try to trace the women who are coming off Transitional Employment Assistance to see the impact on them as they are living today.

For three years we have been working with women living in public housing in Marianna, preparing for the demolition of welfare. This year Women for Social Change celebrated the first anniversary of the food bank they created together.

Five women work at the food bank which feeds 68 families in this small town. This year they set up a library with books donated by individuals and the Central Arkansas Library. When one family lost everything in a fire, they were inspired to establish a perma-



nent clothes closet for emergency use. The goal of this project is to teach job and leadership skills such as bookkeeping, inventory, team building, communication with the public. As each woman is trained, she is expected to train another.

## FUNDRAISING

THIS YEAR WE RECEIVED funding from our membership and pledgers, major donors, book sales, fees for service, special events as well as from these churches and foundations: Public Welfare, Astrea, Gill Foundation, Ralph L. Smith Foundation, Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation, Veatch, Levi-Strauss, United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, Chicago Resource Center, Share Our Strength, Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, Fund of the Four Directions, and Threshold. Our 1997 budget was \$236,600.

We have created a fundraising group, "Friends of the Women's Project." Its purpose is to diversify and increase our sources of funding. It is made up of board and community members. Currently it is working on setting up house parties, membership renewals, strategies for a major donor campaign, and more visibility for the work of the Women's Project.

A significant part of our fundraising comes from the sale of books. We sell *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (expanded this year and printed in a newly designed second edition) and *In the Time of the Right: Reflections on Liberation* by staff member Suzanne

Pharr, as well as books from our traveling bookstore. The funds from the latter are used to support our lending library. Chain stores have cut into our business but we continue to sell alternative books that are hard to find in book stores. We maintain the store in our office but

**Many of our library users are high school and college students doing research, and we have many African Americans and lesbians who check out books for pleasure reading.**

also take it on the road to events that allow people from rural areas to purchase books.

## PUBLICATIONS, EVENTS, GROUPS, ETC.

FOUR TIMES THIS YEAR we published *Transformation*, a newsletter of political analysis and ideas.

We sponsored ten coffee houses which featured national and local artists performing music that ranged from folk to country to

rock and poetry, comedy, and short stories.

The Lesbian Network met monthly enjoying such events as the second annual butch-femme potluck, a Valentine's Day party, 2 camping trips, a homemade ice cream social, a film, a Thanksgiving potluck—as well as discussions about job discrimination, safer sex, transgender issues, holiday stress ("the birth family blues"), legal issues, and creative writing.

Women continued to visit our office to use our lending library of over 4200 books, 200 videos, 20 periodicals, and 50 audiotapes. Many of our users are high school and college students doing research, and we have many African Americans and lesbians who check out books for pleasure reading. To our surprise this year, we learned that we have one of the country's best collections of articles on lesbian battering.

We sponsored "A Piece of My Heart," a play about women's experiences in Vietnam, and a reading by Shelly Roberts, the "lesbian Erma Bombeck," and of course, held our 16th annual women's retreat which drew 90 women. At our annual meeting in June we gave the Evangeline K. Brown award to the MIWATCH volunteers, and we finished the year with our annual holiday party. ■





# Our Mission...

Our goal is social change or, as the poet Adrienne Rich writes, "the transformation of the world." We believe this world can be changed to become a place of peace and justice for all women.

We take risks in our work; we take unpopular stands. We work for all women and against all forms of discrimination and oppression. We believe that we cannot work for all women and against sexism unless we also work against racism, classism, ageism, anti-Semitism, ableism, heterosexism and homophobia. We see the connection among these oppressions as the context for violence against women in this society.

We are concerned in particular about issues of

importance to traditionally underrepresented women: poor women, aged women, women of color, teenage mothers, lesbians, women in prisons, etc. All are women who experience discrimination and violence against their lives.

We are committed to working multi-culturally, multi- racially, and to making our work and cultural events accessible to low income women. We believe that women will not know equality until they know economic justice.

We believe that a few committed women working in coalition and in consensus with other women can make significant change in the quality of life for all women.

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## Transformation

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Letters to the editor are  
welcome.

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## Moving Beyond White Guilt

*Two years ago in the summer of 1996, we published in these pages an article by Women's Project board member, Amy Edgington, entitled, "Growing Up With Racism: A Personal Odyssey." Through word of mouth promotion by our members, that article has now been sent around the country to individuals and organizations engaged in the struggle against racism. In it, Amy put out a call for white women to come together with her to read and discuss books, videos, etc., by women of color. In this edition, Amy presents ideas this work has brought her. At its conclusion are two of Amy's poems and a reading list. Amy is a poet, an anti-racist worker, an incredible resource for those working on lesbian battering, a library assistant, an artist, a disability rights activist, and, with the exception of a few years, a life-long resident of Arkansas.*

**F**or the past year I've had the privilege of belonging to a group of white women who read and discuss African American literature on a monthly basis. I learn a lot from the books we've read, and I also find it valuable to meet and talk with other white women who care about the issue of racism. I've been reminded through our discussions of what an enormous stumbling block guilt can be for white people.

I have frequently avoided discussions of guilt, because of what I see as a pervasive tendency in America to psychologize, individualize, and depoliticize every issue. Nevertheless, in my experience, guilt does have political consequences. It can become a substitute for change or an excuse not to change; it can also be the starting point for the acceptance of responsibility and meaningful change.

### What Guilt Is

I constantly hear the idea that guilt is a destructive emotion imposed by others in order to manipulate us. Guilt has such a bad reputation nowadays, that we can feel instantly justified in rejecting or avoiding anyone or anything that might make us feel guilty, from our parents to the issue of racism. But I see guilt as a mixture of positive elements like conscience and remorse and negative elements like fear and resentment.

**Conscience:** Often I feel guilty because my conscience is telling me I am in the wrong, not because someone is manipulating me. If I consistently reject my own judgement or avoid facing it, then I will wind up without a conscience. And no one is easier to manipulate than a person who has no conscience.

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## Beyond White Guilt

Conscience should not be a static thing. Like most people, I began to acquire one in childhood, when I started to take responsibility for deliberate wrong-doing. However, if we are to become full adults, we have to stretch and grow morally by taking responsibility for the consequences of harm we do unintentionally and for acts of omission, such as failing to stop others from doing harm and benefiting from wrongs committed by others. Nothing challenges the consciences of white people more in this respect than racism.

When I unintentionally did or said something racist, I often tried to clear my conscience by changing the focus from what I had done (or failed to do) to what I meant. What I had to accept is that racism has little to do with our individual intentions, good or bad, our personal prejudices or lack thereof. As long as we see racism only as the harm done to people of color by white people, we think we can shrink our culpability by limiting the damage we do as individuals. But in fact racism privileges us so thoroughly that most white people need do nothing but sit back and enjoy the many advantages of domination. The challenge racism poses to the consciences of white people is to recognize the full extent of the privileges white supremacy bestows on each of us.

**Remorse:** Once my conscience told me I was in the wrong, I felt remorse for the harm I had done. Remorse consists of grief and

shame. Grief for the other person's pain is a good thing. It reflects my capacity for empathy, which is the foundation for an ethic of love. But shame turned my attention back on myself and my bruised self-esteem. It undermined my ability to empathize with the person who was truly injured. Frequently, she had to take care of

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me, before she could hope to (maybe) get her own wounds tended. My challenge was to get my attention off myself and to focus on the person I had hurt. When I do that, I act against the history and culture of Whiteness, which always magnifies white people's pain and puts our needs first.

I can think of no better example of this than the term "racial recon-

ciliation." Adopted by the white leadership of the Christian right wing, these words imply that white people and people of color have suffered equally under racism. If that were true, given the power that white people have and how highly our culture values comfort and personal happiness, we would have wiped out racism out centuries ago. No matter how agonizing our remorse may be, it does not begin to compare with the injury racism inflicts on people of color or to cancel out the privileges domination brings to white people.

**Fear:** Like most people I learned in childhood to fear punishment for doing wrong. But far from punishing our racism, people of color usually don't confront us about it. Often, it may not seem worth the risk or effort to do so. Nevertheless, white people have an exaggerated fear of the anger of people of color. I think this fear comes partly from history: our theft of the land we live on and our ownership—less than 140 years ago—of African Americans. For generations we've been taught that our prosperity depends on maintaining control over people of color, that our lives and livelihoods are in danger if a dark-skinned person even looks daggers at us. As if history were not enough, modern white media forces into every corner of our lives the message that any agitated or even dissatisfied Black person is apt to do us bodily harm.

## Beyond White Guilt

In the days of slavery and genocide, white power decked itself in hatred and bold assertions of superiority. Today, as Black feminist, bell hooks points out, the most persuasive mask of white supremacy is fear. My fear of the anger of dark-skinned people convinced me I was powerless. It kept me from seeing how my actions and inactions helped to maintain a system of superior power that benefited me immensely. To move through the layer of fear that came with my guilt, I had to acknowledge that people of color have far more justifiable reasons to regard white people with terror.

I began to question what I had learned about who was most likely to do me violence. I had to face my fear of punishment from other white people for breaking ranks and opposing racism. White privilege is based on white solidarity, maintained by a combination of rewards for "good" (racist) behavior or silent complicity and by threats and violence against those who break the codes of Whiteness. Our obsessive exaggerated fear, of Black anger in particular, is meant to reinforce our loyalty to Whiteness.

**Resentment:** In childhood I frequently experienced resentment as part of guilt. When I was caught doing something "bad" but pleasurable, I was told it was wrong because it hurt others or because it would hurt me in the long run. Growing up meant learning sometimes to put others' feel-

ings ahead of my own or to forgo current bliss for the promise of future gain. When it comes to racism I am still learning this lesson. White privilege is something we enjoy. Besides the countless material advantages of Whiteness, it gives us a sense of entitlement, social acceptance, moral and intellectual superiority and personal

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importance. It puts us, in the words of novelist Jamaica Kincaid, "beyond confidence and beyond doubt."

Small wonder then that I felt resentment when confronted by people of color on racism. I didn't want to give up the privilege of pretending that as long as I never used the word "nigger," I didn't have any power over people of color. I didn't want to give up the privilege of defining what was or

wasn't racist. Whiteness taught me to think of myself as an example to the less civilized. It was a shock to find out, after all I had invested in a sense of superiority, that I didn't own the moral high ground. I had to climb down off my high horse and accept the word of people of color on what racism is and what we need to do about it. I had to learn to doubt everything I had been taught. I had to get off the white expressway and take the scenic route through other people's realities.

I found I had swallowed the belief that white people can't help being racist, that we are so thoroughly conditioned we can't be any other way. Of course I resented being told to make changes I believed were beyond my control. I confused being white with Whiteness. I was born white, but I learned Whiteness. If racism were inevitable, simply part of "human nature," then there would be no effort to indoctrinate white people with racist beliefs, no pressure on us to conform to white supremacy. In fact, as bell hooks maintains, white people have the ability to reject Whiteness, by acting against racism at every opportunity. I have a choice: I can continue to wear the armor of white privilege, or I can develop true confidence, by finding out who I would be if I moved through the world without it.

### **Acceptance of responsibility**

As I leave behind the shame,



## White

I come from a clan I can't love  
or leave. I wear its flag.  
The color resembles panic  
tinted with bloodshed.

I want to believe I'm descended  
from at least one red-necked woman  
in a clapboard house wanting columns,  
who spoke out against slavery.  
But I don't know her, anymore

than I know: Who rode with the KKK?  
Who received as a gift  
the slaves her father fathered?  
Who betrayed the black woman  
she once loved as a child?  
Ask these questions  
and the defenders of white honor  
turn into avenging sperm.

My guilt is individual.  
What coats my throat  
like red clay dust  
is collective privilege.  
Silence pledges allegiance;  
sisterhood demands proof  
of the treason underneath my skin.

© Amy Edgington

fear and resentment attached to white guilt, empathy tugs more strongly and the call of conscience rings out more clearly than ever. I choose disloyalty to Whiteness, because I embrace an ethic of love instead of the ethic of domination, not because I think I share what people of color have experienced under racism, and not because of a guilt-ridden, do-gooder, liberal mentality. I am an enemy of Whiteness because, as a woman, as a lesbian, as a person with disabilities, I have experienced the ethic of domination on my own body. I fight the dominators for the right to live, to love myself, to openly love those I chose, and to not pretend desires I do not feel. I believe I will never achieve or deserve these rights while I myself continue to practice an ethic of domination over others. Nor do I imagine that I will ever attain these goals without people of color as my allies.

As Americans we are trained to regard all problems and solutions as individual in nature. But in order to replace the ethic of domination with an ethic of love, we have to build broad coalitions with a multi-issue agenda. And each issue on that agenda will require collective effort. No amount of change in my individual behavior could remove the privileges I have as a white-skinned person in a racist society. Change is only possible if I take action with others to attack and dismantle the system of racism.

White Americans are taught to

## Beyond White Guilt

admire individual efforts, single-minded focus and quick results. Shame and contempt are attached to any condition that requires us to ask for help, such as childhood, poverty, illness or disability. But to fight racism we will have to find allies among people of color and other whites. We will have to help each other struggle on several fronts simultaneously for generations. If we regard fighting racism as an individual endeavor, we will quickly become immobilized by guilt.

### **How We Can Defuse the Negative Aspects of Guilt**

**Get information:** The more I learn about racism, the less I tend to see it as an individual moral problem and the fewer mistakes I make as an individual. The more I learn about racism the less work people of color have to do to explain to me how they experience the world. The more I learn about the ethic of domination the more I understand what I would gain by living in a world free of supremacist blinders, capable of respecting differences, and filled with true self-respect that does not demand submissive gestures from anyone.

**Do something:** The strongest antidote to guilt is action. The less I do about racism, the guiltier I feel. White supremacy is built largely on the complicity and inaction of white people. The simplest thing, such as interrupting a racist joke or writing a letter to the editor about police brutality is a significant break with the image

of white solidarity that racism depends on. Racism is so huge that all my acts seem small in comparison, but it is precisely this kind of lifelong chipping-away that we must commit ourselves to doing.

**Listen:** When a person of color says, "That's racist," it's time to take a deep breath, close my mouth, sit down and listen, be-

I had to learn to doubt everything I had been taught. I had to get off the white expressway and take the scenic route through other people's realities.

cause school is in session. I'm in the first grade again and it's gonna take a lot of study to move on to the next class. I try to put my feelings on the back burner. I tell myself that if I have hurt someone, even inadvertently, she needs to be taken care of first. I try not to expect instant forgiveness or restoration of trust. I must follow through on any commitment I make to change.

I can take care of my guilt later by breaking it down into pieces.

What do I feel remorse about? What am I scared of? Why do I feel resentment? What changes do I need to make? What do I need to know? Who can help me? How can I help other white people change?

**Talk:** Undoing racism cannot be done alone. It's important for me to find other white people who share the same goals. We must also seek converts, to try to turn the souls of other white people from the racism's cynical fear, mean-spiritedness, narrowness and indifference, to the kind of love for self and others that values diversity and feels no need to dominate. This is how white people can practice what Cornell West calls the "politics of conversion."

There are clearly many white people who are deeply committed to white supremacy; they are unlikely to be swayed. It's important to let them know that they face white resistance, to tell them, in effect, "If I cannot change your mind, I will put my body in your path." We should measure our commitment to fighting racism not by how many people of color we count as friends (or lovers), but by how many white people we are willing to speak to about racism.

### **Back to the Past**

Finally, I cannot talk about white guilt without talking about the collective guilt our race bears for atrocities such as slavery and the genocide of Indian peoples. History threatens to crash down

## Beyond White Guilt

on us whenever we are confronted with our individual racist behavior in the here and now. Collective guilt is like a herd of elephants in the living room that white people have been trained to ignore, and we tend to get freaked out when someone calls the dung to our attention.

Slavery and genocide are part of every aspect of contemporary white racism. All white privileges have their roots in these historical outrages. Americans, particularly white Americans, are allergic to looking at the past; we glorify the endless frontier of the future. We have been taught that this is a land where people can put aside their past and become whatever they wish to be. This dream is only attainable for white people, however; people of color are never allowed to leave their ancestry behind them.

White people often protest, in anger or frustration, that there is nothing we can do to change history. But in fact, history is collective memory; we actively work to change history when we ignore it or remain willfully ignorant about it. Our first duty to history is to know it, to look deeply and unflinchingly at the successive enslavements of Indians and Africans, at the forced labor of the Chinese who built our railroads, at the massacres, imprisonment and broken treaties Indians have suffered, at lynching and segregation (the evil step-twins of slavery), at the

incarceration of Japanese Americans and the anti-Semitic immigration policies that helped condemn Jews to Hitler's gas chambers.

**I am an enemy of  
Whiteness because, as a  
woman, as a lesbian, as a  
person with disabilities, I  
have experienced the  
ethic of domination on  
my own body.**

### **Finding Our Heroes and Sheroes**

It's not just the racist past that's been buried. The long history of anti-racist work in this country has been buried as well. Some white people may know the names, if not the lives, of some of the Black heroes and sheroes of abolition, thanks to the efforts of African-Americans to educate us. But the abolition of slavery, the most hopeful event in the history of social justice, was due, in part, to the efforts of a significant minority of white men and women.

Did we learn their names in school?

How many Americans know that the hymn, "Amazing Grace," was written by a slave trader, describing a religious conversion that led him to spend the rest of his life working to abolish the slave trade in Great Britain? It serves the interests of white supremacy for white people to forget both our frightful legacy of racism and those ancestors who opposed racism.

For me, the personal stories, fiction and poetry of those who experienced these atrocities, or whose ancestors did, are the most compelling kind of history. This is the only history not written by the "winners," and it's very different from what we read in school. It has the power to open our eyes to the concrete details of oppression and to the interior lives of those we were trained not to see. This writing is full of hope and wit, despair and courage; it colors in the blanks in our vision of what it means to be human.

### **Moving on**

Collective guilt might seem like an even bigger pit to fall into than individual guilt. But listening to the past is the first step in turning collective guilt into collective accountability. The next step is collective responsibility: to look carefully at the exactly how we experience privilege today and yet are able for the most part to remain blissfully unaware of it in a society dominated by white people.



## The Gang

You've seen them on the corner of Capitol and Main,  
in pin stripes and blue serges jaywalking Broadway,  
Watch for the \$100 haircuts, those Italian leather shoes,  
telltale bulges of cell phones and beepers,  
high-caliber laptops slung at their sides.

Everyone knows which houses belong to the gang:  
glass-studded concrete towers where nobody lives,  
where they peddle junk bonds and bail out S & Ls.

The neighborhood is full of graffiti: the S  
with a double line stands for the gang's motto,  
"How long can you keep a snake behind bars?"

On Wall Street, signs fly across the money pits;  
deals go down in L.A. with a few lines of coke.

In Washington, the gang robs groceries  
from Grandma, lunch money from the kids.

They send teens in baggy pants to drive by  
Panama and Grenada. Jets low-ride  
the asphalt skies of Baghdad and Mogadishu.

Assault guns can't touch fuel-air bombs,  
cluster mines, uranium-tipped shells.

Yes, we have a gang problem,  
yet every time shooting starts,  
the gang blames some other color.  
They mask themselves with smiles,  
they speak through muffled lies,  
but we hold the gang responsible:  
we know who they are.

©Amy Edgington

Most importantly, we can begin to turn collective guilt into collective action, to transform or overthrow institutions such as the racist educational system, media,

**W**hen a person of color  
says, "That's racist," it's  
time to take a deep  
breath, close my mouth,  
sit down and listen,  
because school is in  
session.

courts, prisons and police that put the power behind white privilege. It's hard work and it's scary, but it feels a whole lot better than wallowing in guilt.

—Amy Edgington

**FIGHT**

**RACISM**

# Reading List

**Race Matters** by Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

**Killing Rage: Ending Racism** by bell hooks (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1995).

**"White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,"** by Peggy McIntosh, available from her for \$6.00 by writing her at Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA, 02181. An abridged version has been published in **Race: an Anthology in the First Person**, edited by Bart Schneider (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1997).

**Lucy**, by Jamaica Kincaid (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990). Contains a keen-eyed fictional observation of Whiteness, especially in the character of Mariah.

**Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to be White**, edited by David R. Roediger (New York: Schocken Books, 1998).

**"Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia"** in **On Lies, Secrets, and Silences** by Adrienne Rich (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

**"Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart"** in **Rebellion: Essays, 1980-1991** by Minnie Bruce Pratt (New York: Firebrand Books, 1991).

**Memoir of a Race Traitor** by Mab Segrest (Cambridge: South End Press, 1995).

**Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice** by Paul Kivel (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1996).

**This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color**, edited by Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983).

**Home Girls: a Black Feminist Anthology**, edited by Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983).

**Making Whiteness: the Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940**, by Grace Elizabeth Hale (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

**Off White: Readings on Race, Power and Society**, (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1997).

**How the Irish Became White** by Noel Ignatiev (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1995).

**The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain**, edited by Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

**The Skull Measurer's Mistake: and Other Portraits of Men and Women Who Spoke Out Against**

**Racism** by Sven Lindquist (New York: New Press, 1997).

**The Invention of the White Race** by Theodore W. Allen (London/New York: Verso, 1994).

**Restoring Hope: Conversations on the Future of Black America** with Cornel West and edited by Kelvin Shawn Sealey (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

**Faces at the Bottom of the Well: the Permanence of Racism** by Derrick Bell (New York: BasicBooks, 1992).

**Everyday Acts against Racism: Raising Children in a Multiracial World**, edited by Maureen T. Reddy (Seattle: Seal Press, 1996).

**One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America** by Keith Boykin (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1996).

**Women, Race and Class** by Angela Davis (New York: Random House, 1981).

For young adults: **Spreading Poison: a Book about Racism and Prejudice** by John Langone (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993).





# Whiteness: A Brief Comment

**W**hen white people discuss racism, we usually focus on people of color and their experiences of discrimination, and we do not talk about white people as a race and our privilege, power and dominance. We need to ask, What does it mean to be white? What is white identity? What makes the white race different?

We have solidarity based on whiteness which involves non-conscious power dynamics. We white people are taught to think of our lives as morally neutral, normal, average and ideal. When we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be like "us." Because of the combination of our white identity and power, we define the U.S. as "white." Hence, to become American is to become white. To maintain one's culture is to be an outsider, and often, anti or not American.

We don't like to hear the words "white" and "identity" or "white" and "power" used together. We think of white identity and white power as terms that describe the far right—the Klan, the Christian Identity folks, the neoNazis. However, all of us white people have white identity and some form and degree of white power. We fight to keep our place in the power system of whiteness.

Often unconsciously, we bond around whiteness and establish solidarity. Some examples:

**Blood Sport**—a book describing the Clinton/Whitewater connection in Arkansas. This book describes the interconnection of white men (and a few women) in business opportunities, money favors, legal affairs, etc. It is not about people of color at all, yet I believe it is one of the best books about racism because it describes the careful knit of the white power structure that is too tight for people of color to penetrate except for the rare person who has adapted to the weave.

**Promise Keepers**—Recently I read an article in the *New Yorker* that describes the way in which Levi Strauss in 1990 persuaded men to change their dress to include khaki pants. Their studies had told them that what men missed most in their lives was bonding with other men. I thought to myself, "Bingo! Promise Keepers. They must have done the same study." Promise Keepers bonds men around maleness, but more importantly, and more subtly, they bond them around whiteness. There is a citizenship link (good fathers, good community men, good Americans) to nationalism that is about both gender and racial dominance. Their promotion of racial reconciliation is a call to men of color to join them in oneness. As they said in their *Breaking Down the Walls* (of denominationalism and racism) stadium event in Eugene, Oregon in

1976, "There is no black, yellow, brown or red. There is only one race under God." The oneness they call for is the "one race" which is white.

**Hot Issues**—The right has worked successfully to bond white people around their fears and identity in response to problems related to education, crime, drugs, poverty, immigration, etc. People of color are scapegoated as being the cause of the deterioration of institutions such as schools and of social conditions such as increased crime and drug use. The biased formula goes like this: white people are creating a great stock market and economy; people of color are creating social problems.

We have the choice not to bond around whiteness. A good example is "The Full Monty," a movie about unemployed steel workers in Sheffield, England, who have been left without employment possibilities when the steel mills closed. After seeing the success of the Chippendales (male dancers and strippers), six men decided to try to make some money doing the same kind of show. The movie is the touching and humorous story of their choosing to bond around their vulnerability rather than whiteness or gender. We can bond together around our common humanity in which we all have equal need for fair employment and education, healthy food and housing, safety and health-care. We can bond together to seek equality and justice for everyone.

—Suzanne Pharr



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# Our Beliefs

Our goal is social change or, as the poet Adrienne Tich writes, "the transformation of the world." We believe this world can be changed to become a place of peace and justice for all women.

We take risks in our work; we take unpopular stands. We work for all women and against all forms of discrimination and oppression. We believe that we cannot work for all women and against sexism unless we also work against racism, classism, ageism, anti-Semitism, ableism, heterosexism and homophobia. We see the connection among these oppressions as the context for violence against women in this society.

We are concerned in particular about issues of

importance to traditionally underrepresented women: poor women, aged women, women of color, teenage mothers, lesbians, women in prisons, etc. All are women who experience discrimination and violence against their lives.

We are committed to working multi-culturally, multi-racially, and to making our work and cultural events accessible to low income women. We believe that women will not know equality until they know economic justice.

We believe that a few committed women working coalition and in consensus with other women can make significant change in the quality of life for all women.



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## This Historical Moment

Suzanne Pharr

**I**t's difficult to be comprehensive or precise about the moment we are living in, but I'm going to try to hit a few broad issues that separate us from, say, the historical moment of the '60s which gave many of us the foundation for the politics we live today.

First, the grim:

1) There is a wider gap between the rich and the poor than there has been since the turn of the century. Those who drive the country's economy and our work lives are for the most part invisible and unaccountable and their corporations and capital cross borders in search of greater profits for the few, at the expense of the many.

2) This global market economy has demanded worker mobility and created a sense of transitory life, eliminating family, worksite, and community stability, continuity, and a sense of being rooted in people or place. Many people feel isolated, alienated, as well as stressed out from job insecurity and depleted community services. Lack of attachment to community (and each other), plus mis/disinformation has led to voters approving policies that destroy the tax base and infrastructure, leaving people to survive individually, if at all.

3) The right has changed in its shape, constituency, visibility and power. It has become the prevailing voice of this moment. Working along economic and social faultlines, it has led people toward a church/corporate society that is producing an authoritarianism that calls forth a specter of fascism with a new wardrobe. With highly sophisticated media work and organizing, it has intensified scapegoating of people of color, poor people, women, trade unionists, and queers who now stand to be demolished in its path or to organize together to create a resistance that saves us all.

4) Virtually everyone in the country is cynical about electoral leadership and the functioning of government. While exacerbating this cynicism, the right organizes within this context to dismantle government programs that support human needs and work against injustice. It has also promoted abandonment of civil liberties and an assault on the legal system. Indeed, many think its goal is to end democratic governance.

5) While crime has waxed and now is waning, we have nevertheless created a prison/industrial complex that is central to many states'

(continued on page 2)

## This Historical Moment

economic development which is accompanied by prisoner (free) labor for private businesses.

6) In the name of real estate development, economic growth, business interests, and tourism, the environment has been poisoned, demolished, polluted, destroyed, leaving many of us sick and sickened, wondering if there is still time to stop and, hopefully, reverse the damage.

7) A few major corporations control the media, and the media, in large part, control us, creating a massive consumer culture of people who do not have adequate social or political information to make critical judgments and informed decisions.

Now, the hopeful:

1) Despite orchestrated efforts by the right to create a climate of meanspiritedness (through talk radio, for instance), many people have become fed up with lack of civility, with dishonesty among civic leaders, with corrupt institutions, with lack of collective responsibility, and are seeking ways to build community life, live together, and discover solutions. It is common now to hear very diverse people call for civil discourse—and to express longing for community life.

2) Demographics are shifting radically, and we are moving toward a country where, in numbers at least, white people will not dominate. Despite wide scale targeting of people of color as scape-

goats for this country's problems, people of color continue to organize for justice, and offer leadership in some of the best thinking about transformational social and economic change.

3) Unions are beginning to fight back with new leadership, more of a commitment to organizing,

**Despite wide scale targeting of people of color as scapegoats for this country's problems, people of color continue to organize for justice, and offer leadership in some of the best thinking about transformational social and economic change.**

more understanding of the need to work with community organizations, more commitment to organizing low wage workers and people of color, and working with diverse groups.

4) There is a sense of spiritual renewal across the country that is not just within organized or unorganized religion but is expressing itself in a multiplicity of ways. People seem to be recognizing an emptiness at the heart of our culture and are longing for more meaning.

5) Despite the dissolution of the left, there are thousands of people working on a variety of fronts for justice. Many identity groups seem to be expanding to include a vision of multi-racial, multi-issue politics.

6) With leadership from bisexual, transgender, and youth groups, there is a radical analysis of gender that offers revolutionary possibilities.

7) Although widely unreported in this country, there is global labor unrest and demand for economic justice. There is major youth participation and leadership in these struggles around the world, and it is beginning to emerge in the U.S.

It is always helpful to remember that we can organize equally around the grim or the hopeful. Both offer opportunities. ■



# "There's No Easy Way to Say I've Sinned" And Even Harder to Make Amends

Suzanne Pharr

**A**t a Washington prayer breakfast in early September, Bill Clinton finally—after months of denial and manipulation of people and the truth—confessed to an improper relationship with a young intern. As he confessed, many of us were filled with complex and contradictory thoughts: that he had experienced an unprecedented and reprehensible invasion of privacy; that he had betrayed everyone he cared for, and nothing is more terrible than betrayal; that he had abused a young woman and a worker, at that, and he had committed perjury to save himself; that he was the focus of a major rightwing attack; that he was an arrogant and reckless fool; that he was simply human and to be forgiven—i.e., that he was both a perpetrator and a victim.

As the President gave his emotional confession, he stood before us as a symbol of our national confusion about good and evil and the ways to deal with the creation of one and the elimination of the other. He brought out our feelings of mean-spiritedness and cynicism and our surprising hope for a new day and a better tomorrow. We wanted to punish and to forgive.

People said we had witnessed Bill Clinton at his very best. However, when he stepped down from that podium, he stepped right into the midst of our national disorder and discontent. For the briefest moment, we thought there was going to be real change, that Bill Clinton, our President, would muster the charac-

ter and courage to lead us in the rebuilding of this country into a place where we feel that good is created. And then, after this unprecedented confession and call for forgiveness, Clinton showed no signs of repen-

**Here was an opportunity  
to examine the sins—  
political, corporate,  
personal—we have  
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out ways to atone for  
them.**

tance or atonement: he returned to his same pattern of denial and tampering with the truth.

But it could have gone another way. Instead of adding to our cynicism, suspicion, and broken faith, Clinton could have helped lead us toward positive change and a new mood of hope in the country. He could have helped us rebuild relationships that have been broken and people who have been betrayed.

Here was an opportunity to examine the sins—political, corporate, social, personal—we have committed and to figure out ways to atone

for them. For example, it is often the way of those who have committed wrong to deny it and to manipulate people and the truth, to re-arrange the facts and re-write history, to cover-up our actions. As a nation, we have done this regarding genocide of American Indians, slavery and segregation of African Americans, internment of Japanese Americans, to name a few.

To stop this systematic denial and manipulation of the truth, there usually has to be confrontation, an often painful presentation of the truth, and public exposure and sometimes humiliation and embarrassment. This is what the Starr report did for Bill Clinton's evasion of the truth. This is what community activists did for Nike's abuse of workers in its Asian plants. Community organizers and activists know this step.

The next step is admission or confession of wrong doing. This calls for acknowledgement of the wrong committed and the harm done. Contrition precedes the plea for forgiveness—for the opportunity to begin again, to make new, to find redemption. It was at this step that Clinton stopped, and in so doing, failed in his leadership. An emotional confession, an apology, and a plea for forgiveness are not enough just as it is not enough for the Southern Baptist Convention or the Promise Keepers to confess their historic and current racism and to ask for racial reconciliation. We also have to say that we will end the behavior that has caused harm—now, not in the future.



What must happen next is accountability or atonement. That is, the one who has done harm must create concrete, quantifiable steps for changing behavior and for providing reparation to those who have been harmed. Forgiveness can be only provisional until we see evidence of change.

What if our country, deeply in need of spiritual and political grounding, seized upon a plan to enact acknowledgement, contrition, and accountability?

What would that look like? Some of our national injustices, or sins, have been practicing persistent racism, exploiting workers here and abroad, polluting the planet, and providing political leadership that does not address the basic civil and human rights of people. In each area, there is the potential for change that would bring rebirth to hope and possibility and would dramatically improve the lives of each of us.

To African-Americans we might say, we (the nation) cannot remove the terrible damage that has been done to your hopes, dreams, and spirits in the past when we treated you like dirt and prevented the fulfillment of your lives. We were wrong and we inflicted harm. However, we can make a difference in one of the areas where we most injured you: financially. We will make reparation, not to individuals, but through direct grants to predominantly black, low-income communities to strengthen the institutions—the infrastructure—that enhance the well-being of those who live there. Such actions would be one step on the path to redemption, and these strong communities would help create a stronger nation. Everyone would be well served.

Logging companies might confess the error of clearcutting forests and say, we cannot replace the 100 year old trees or the topsoil that washed away, but we can do aggressive reforestation of the land that we now cut, as well as the land we cleared and abandoned in the past. In fact, we will create community

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partnerships and provide resources to plant trees on land which is not our own but needs to be returned to health. And polluting companies might say as well, we will eliminate toxic dumping, clean up the sites we have created, and create partnerships to clean up our rivers and streams. This path to redemption would provide us with two basic and profoundly important things: clean air to breathe and water to drink. No small accomplishment.

Corporations might say, for the sake of our shareholders and our own greed we have exploited workers, here and abroad. We will seek lower profit margins, end downsizing, advocate for the repeal of

NAFTA, introduce a \$10 an hour minimum wage with full benefits, employ full time workers, provide job training through our company rather than demanding it from public schools, and gladly pay our fair share of taxes, locally and federally.

And Congress might say, we have consistently turned our backs on the needs of people and supported economic interests instead. To begin our path back, we will create a program of free, universal health care, along with free, universal education, K through college, and we will go to the UN to sign the universal declaration of human rights so that everyone throughout the world has a fair chance of receiving health care, education, safety, a living wage, food, and shelter.

This is what you could have offered us, Mr. Clinton—a model for a moral life (i.e., one that considers the well-being of everyone), a life of growth and positive change. We have an organized rightwing in this country that works every day on behalf of privileged white people, on behalf of corporations, on behalf of an authoritarian theocracy. We, the people—workers, women, people of color, poor people, queers, old and young, Jew and gentile, urban and rural—need help.

We as a nation are crying out for vision, for leadership to help us assert our best selves. Yes, Mr. Clinton, we all make mistakes; we are all simply human; but what elevates us and gives us promise and hope is our capacity to recognize our wrongs and to remedy them. You have abdicated your role in our search for ways to create a better nation. ■

# Notes from the Field

Carolyn Wagner

**P**FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and others in Fayetteville, Arkansas, are working to end discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. PFLAG state coordinator, Carolyn Wagner, has written the following account of the struggle which is taking place in a growing rightwing environment.

In November of 1996, an African-American man, Allen Walker was followed home from a gay bar in Fayetteville and murdered. The murderers ransacked his house, slashed his car tires and wrote "KKK" in his blood on his bedroom wall. Allen was gay. His murder was not treated as a hate crime.

On December 2, 1996 our 16-year-old son was attacked during lunch near school by a gang of eight teens and beaten savagely. As they beat and kicked him, they yelled epithets such as "die, faggot" and "this is what you deserve, queer." This assault was witnessed by over a dozen students. His nose was broken in two places and he had kidney damage. The school's assistant superintendent continues to state that the school responded immediately to this assault, but they did not. The assault took place on a Monday and on Thursday, the police arrested in class the two boys who had been identified. The assault on our son, occurring the month after Alan Walker's murder, also was not prosecuted as a



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hate crime. In fact, our son's attackers had their charges reduced because Willi's injuries were not considered permanent. During the trial for one of the accused, the judge allowed the defense attorney to put our son, his sexual orientation and his parents on trial as being the cause of the accused's loss of control.

Our struggle to obtain an education for our son in our public school district was a failure. Willi had been subjected to continued

harassment, both verbal and physical, before and after the attack. There were some within the Fayetteville school district who did try to put a stop to the harassment toward our son. They were in the minority, however. We engaged an attorney to fight the harassment but he retired and we were not able to locate another willing attorney in the state. The ACLU in Arkansas was equally unsuccessful. What I began to do was to write letters of complaint to the Arkansas and United States Departments of Education. Much of the harassment our son endured had become sexual harassment and there is a statute prohibiting this. We went to Washington to visit with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education. We also met with the U.S. Department of Justice and assistant attorney general, L. D. Atchinson. The outcome was that the OCR did agree to investigate the Fayetteville School District under Title IX and later found that sexual harassment of gays and lesbians was prohibited under Title IX. This all took so much time. In the meantime, our home had been shot at, and Willi, our son, had received death threats at school.

As I began to educate myself on what rights, or lack thereof, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people had, I realized that there were absolutely none. This became very evident when my husband and I were trying to ensure our son a safe,

hostility-free learning environment at his school. It was clear that our son had no legal protection from discrimination in employment and housing. There are no hate crime laws in the state which protect LGBT people. It was clear that my son would not be assured of fair, non-violent treatment at school, in the community, or at work.

With the help of David Buckel of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, I acquired copies of many resolutions and ordinances from cities around the nation pertaining to the issue of fair treatment for LGBT people. I had also studied how similar ordinances had been dealt with in other cities, especially those where such a measure had failed.

I took copies of the resolutions and ordinances along with a proposal to Fayetteville Alderman Randy Zurcher. At the same time, I and other PFLAG members began circulating a public education petition to inform citizens of Fayetteville that LGBT people had no employment protection, parental rights, or housing protection under current federal or state laws, and were not included in hate crimes laws. We would read this information to citizens and if they were supportive of such protection for LGBT persons, we asked them to sign the petition and give their addresses and phone numbers. I wanted to have a list of supportive citizens when and if they were needed when we presented our "Human Dignity" resolution to the Fayetteville City Council. We started this process in May, 1997 with the intent to add "sexual orientation" and "familial status"

to the Fayetteville policy of non-discrimination in city hiring. Race, ethnicity, gender, religion and disability were already included in this non-discrimination policy. Besides "sexual orientation," we included "familial status" as we

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became aware of single parents and non-traditional family members who felt they had been discriminated against in employment with no redress.

The Human Dignity Resolution was presented to the Fayetteville City Council on April 22, 1998. The City Council approved the resolution 6-2. There was much coverage by the local press and the council room was overflowing with citizens representing both sides of the issue. There were over 2 hours of testimony to the City Council. The Northwest Arkansas Christian Coalition attended in force and

made statements of hate and ignorance. Many folks from the gay and gay-supportive community were shocked and frightened by what they heard and the vehemence with which many of these statements were made. My family was not surprised because we had been receiving hate-filled phone calls to our home and because we had witnessed what our son had endured for over two years at his school and in court. The mayor, Fred Hanna, vetoed the resolution on the following Monday and gave as his reason that the resolution was divisive to the community, the city did not discriminate, and therefore this was unnecessary. The mayor also made statements to some reporters that referred to the assault on my son as the only reason this resolution came forth. However, I had received reports from individuals who had been discriminated against, sometimes violently, but due to their current employment and fear of more violence or losing their job, they were too frightened to come forth.

On May 5, 1998 the City Council overrode the mayor's veto and sustained the resolution. One alderman, Cyrus Young, who had supported the veto, made the statement that his job might be in jeopardy if he "didn't vote the right way on this resolution." This convinced him, he said, of the absolute need for such legislation. Another council member, Donna Pettus, said as she looked right at my husband and me, (we were sitting on the front row) "this resolution has been campaigned in such a manner that to vote against it is equivalent to voting against the constitu-



tion, mother hood and apple pie." She then voted against it for the second time.

The gay and gay-supportive community were in shock and had tears of joy following the historic action taken by this Arkansas city council. One fellow came up to us later outside the building and asked us if we were willing to die for our beliefs and actions—because he was.

The resolution was not going to be allowed to quietly stay in effect. The Northwest Arkansas Christian Coalition passed petitions in their churches and obtained the required number of signatures for a referendum to put the resolution on the Nov. 3rd general election ballot. In response, we resolution supporters formed a committee to support the resolution in this race and called our campaign, the "Campaign For Human Dignity."

The Northwest Arkansas Christian Coalition also formed a political group to oppose the resolution and called their group, "Citizens Aware." The leader of this group is a former employee of the Christian Coalition and worked as a consultant for the U.S. Senate Republican candidate, Fay Boozman. The Citizens Aware group employed the usual tactics utilized elsewhere to attack gays, making statements such as the city will be overrun by AIDS, the children of the city will not be safe to go anywhere alone again, that the city will be deluged with homosexuals, and it will become a homosexual haven. PFLAG was also attacked and accused of trying to influence voters by obtaining a public education grant from the

Gill Foundation to spread lies about homosexuals.

On November 3, the Human Dignity Resolution was defeated by 58% of voters, but two incumbents who were in favor of the

**The gay and gay-supportive community were in shock and had tears of joy following the historic action taken by this Arkansas city council.**

Resolution were re-elected. Proponents of the Resolution felt Fayetteville benefited from the dialogue on gay rights and fairness. Fayetteville was the first city in Arkansas to be a stage for a gay rights battle.

This battle over the resolution took place in the midst of a highly organized rightwing environment. In northwest Arkansas we have a militia calling themselves the "Washington County Militia." They have erected a concrete, steel-reinforced building just south of Fayetteville on Black Oak Road and have a sign posted on the road in front of their building. The sign is

in the shape of the state of Arkansas with the image of a militiaman in the state along with the name of the militia. The militia was co-founded by a Baptist minister named Jay Cole. Cole runs 30-second commercials many times a day through local cable television condemning women who work out of the home as well as other issues of women's equality, homosexual rights, and so on. Strongly advocating a "Christian America," he frequently condemns our current elected officials, calling them "Godless".

In the city of Springdale in Washington County, mayoral candidate, Tim Hill, ran on a platform of keeping the city homosexual-free. He has boasted that if elected he would erect signs at all entrances to the city proclaiming "armed Christians live here, homosexuals not allowed." He also stated that if anyone admits to being homosexual or acts in a homosexual manner, they would be publicly caned. These statements and more were quoted in all of the local papers. When he made these statements at a mayoral forum sponsored by the Northwest Arkansas Christian Coalition, he received loud applause.

We live in our community within our home state with the feeling that we are under siege. I suppose that if we did shut up and just accepted the discrimination, harassment and violence, we would be left alone. This would be a false sense of peace. The price is too high. All too often we were told by some from Willi's school and in the community that all we had to do was to ignore the hate,

discrimination and violence and there won't be a problem. Our problem, in the eyes of the vocal minority such as the Christian Coalition, is that we refuse to accept and tolerate their hate and discrimination. A new rule the school established when our son stood up to his harassers said it

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best, "We will no longer tolerate reverse harassment from Willi."

We have LGBT (sexual minority) youth being beaten at home and in the community, kicked out of their houses, denied education and dying in record numbers—without any public outcry. These children are viewed as disposable. The right wing does not see that their attitudes, beliefs and behavior are the problem. Our son refused to accept this treatment and we refuse as well. We will continue fighting to make our schools and community safe places for all our children. ■

## BOOKNOTES Lynn Frost

### New Books in the Women's Project Library



#### **The Truth that Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom** by

Barbara Smith, (Rutgers Univ. Press). A long-time friend of the Women's Project, Barbara's work has examined the sexual politics of the lives of Black and other women of color and in making connections between race, class, sexuality, and gender. This collection of her essays brings together more than two decades of her political thoughts and literary criticism.

**Falling to Earth, A Novel** by Elizabeth Brownrigg (Firebrand Books), is about Alice, a computer honcho and closeted dyke by day/swimmer in the lesbian sea of women by night, who has been touched by an angel. Not the television variety of angel, but an insolent guardian angel.

**What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day** by Pearl Cleage (Avon Books) introduces us to feisty Ava Johnson, whose life in Atlanta's fast lane screeches to a halt when she tests positive for HIV. In this gritty and surprisingly funny novel... "Cleage shines... unafraid to

speak in the tongue of everyday sisters." —*Emerge*

**Legal Affairs: Essential Advice for Same-Sex Couples** by Frederick Hertz (Henry Holt & Co.) is a unique blend of practical advice, wise counsel, and social history. "With the help of (the author's) legal insight and practical advice, you'll have the freedom to create the relationship you want, knowing that you'll have the law on your side." —Eric Marcus

**Daughters of the Moon, Sisters of the Sun: Young Women and Mentors on the Transition to Womanhood** by K. Wind Hughs & Linda Wolf (New Society Publishers) is a book for girls struggling with self-esteem and growing-up true to themselves, women in need of healing from their own teenage years, as well as educators, professional counselors, and parents seeking insight into girls' lives.

**Switch, A Novel** by Carol Guess (Calyx) is the story of life and love in small-town USA. "...if you enjoy reading an author who describes her characters as a lover might, whose narrative lingers over details of setting so that you'd have to be comatose not to feel yourself right there, and whose use of language is as lush

as an alfalfa field after an August shower, then find a comfortable spot and settle in for a treat..." —*Philadelphia Gay News*

**Father Songs: Testimonies by African-American Sons and Daughters**, edited by Gloria Wade-Gayles (Beacon Press) includes pieces by James Baldwin, Gwendolyn Brooks, Bebe Moore Campbell, Langston Hughes, Audre Lorde, John Wideman, Alice Walker, and many others.

**The Last Time I Wore A Dress, A Memoir** by Daphne Scholinski with Jane Meredith Adams (Putnam) is a gripping account of the author's sojourn in the looking-glass world of psychiatric institutions. It's hard to believe, but doctors described 15-yr.-old Scholinski's treatment goals as becoming more obsessive about boys, learning more about makeup, dressing more like a girl, and spending quality time learning about "girl things" with peers!

**Who Speaks for God? An Alternative to the Religious Right—a New Politics of Compassion, Community, and Civility** by Jim Wallis (Dell). "Cogent and well-written" (Kirkus) attack on both the

extreme hypocrisy of fundamentalists and the spiritually-empty platitudes of the secular Left.

**The Antigay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right** by Didi Herman (Univ. of Chicago Press) probes the values, beliefs, and rhetoric of the Christian Right. Tracing the emergence of their antigay agenda, Herman explores how and why these groups made antigay activity a priority, and how it relates to their political history.

**Other New Books:**

**Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia** by Marya Hornbacher

**Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature** by Linda Lear

**Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender** by Riki Anne Wilchins

**Sexual Harassment on the Job: What It Is and How to Stop It** by Wm. Petrocelli and Barbara Kate Repa

**Generations: A Century of Women Speak about Their Lives** by Myriam Miedzian and Alisa Malinovich

**Soul Kiss** by Shay Youngblood (African-American Lesbian Novel)

**Hot Ticket** edited by Linnea Due (Lesbian Short Stories)

**Takes One to Know One** by Kate Allen (Lesbian Mystery)

**Only Twice I Wished for Heaven** by Dawn Turner Trice (Afr. American Novel)

**Prayers for Bobby: A Mother's Coming to Terms with the Suicide of Her Gay Son** by Leroy Aarons

**does your mama know? An Anthology of Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories** edited by Lisa C. Moore

**Like the Singing Coming Off the Drums: Love Poems** by Sonia Sanchez

**The Culture of Recovery: Making Sense of the Self-Help Movement in Women's Lives** by Elayne Rapping

**Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled** by Nancy Mairs

**The Abortion Resource Handbook** by K. Kaufmann

**Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood** by Cherrie Moraga





*Thanks to those responding to previous Wish Lists:*  
 Robin Ross, Esther Gordon, Carol Nokes, Freddie Nixon, Cindy English, Robin White, Debra Bailey, Melissia Gunter.

# Thank You Volunteers!

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## Annual Holiday Open House

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### For Little Rock office:

Copy paper (white or colors)  
 Paper towels  
 Toilet tissue  
 Letter-size hanging folders  
 Cool, dry storage space  
 Small frost-free refrigerator

### For Marianna Food Pantry & Job Training Site:

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 60 watt light bulbs  
 Paper towels  
 Ziplock bags, all sizes  
 Purex bleach  
 Rubber gloves  
 Manila file folders, letter size  
 Toilet tissue  
 Copy paper  
 Ink pens  
 Room freshener  
 Toilet bowl cleaner  
 Bucket for mop  
 Quart jars  
 Automatic stapler

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## Transformation

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Transformation is also available as an ASCII file and on audiotape.

\* Printed on recycled paper. \*

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# Our Beliefs

Our goal is social change or, as the poet Adrienne Tich writes, "the transformation of the world." We believe this world can be changed to become a place of peace and justice for all women.

We take risks in our work; we take unpopular stands. We work for all women and against all forms of discrimination and oppression. We believe that we cannot work for all women and against sexism unless we also work against racism, classism, ageism, anti-Semitism, ableism, heterosexism and homophobia. We see the connection among these oppressions as the context for violence against women in this society.

We are concerned in particular about issues of

importance to traditionally underrepresented women: poor women, aged women, women of color, teenage mothers, lesbians, women in prisons, etc. All are women who experience discrimination and violence against their lives.

We are committed to working multi-culturally, multi-racially, and to making our work and cultural events accessible to low income women. We believe that women will not know equality until they know economic justice.

We believe that a few committed women working coalition and in consensus with other women can make significant change in the quality of life for all women.



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Membership includes a subscription to our quarterly journal, *Transformation: A Journal of Political Analysis*, and monthly updates of our work with a calendar of events.

I would like to order \_\_\_\_\_ copies of *In the Time of the Right* by Suzanne Pharr. \$11.00 - Free shipping when prepaid.

I would like to order \_\_\_\_\_ copies of *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* by Suzanne Pharr. \$12.00 - Free shipping when prepaid.

I would like to pay for a subscription to *Transformation* for an incarcerated woman.

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