ISSUE 15 EDITORIAL STATEMENT
(From Taped Conversation, October 21, 1982)

A little bit of opening up is a miracle. (M.S.)

Here you had the Civil Rights Movement, you are always aware of the years of struggle between Black and white. But in Latin America, particularly in Chile where I come from, racism is simply not discussed. So I had never had the opportunity to think about racism in relation to my own experience. It was a fantastic thing to think in those terms with Black and white women. My experience in this capital of the world is that whatever art my Latin friends do, it’s ignored by the mainstream. It does not exist, or it’s “ethnic.” Which is why I got out the issue of differentiation. And I realized nobody in this collective shared this thing with me. I was disappointed that everybody said the same issue is about racism and nobody was willing to go a bit further, to raise a more cultural and ideological issue. Nobody was willing to go from the emotional level of personal experiences about racism to the more philosophical level. So I decided to open it up.

I remember those early meetings being very exciting, when there were Asian and other Latin women in the group too. A new experience for me. Before that I had worked on racism in a group of all-white feminists. I think I was afraid at first, of working with women of color on a racism issue, but I decided I wanted to do it anyway. At first, I guess, that I’d unpack new horrible layers of my own racism. Instead this was a really wonderful experience. I think I’ve become much more aware of racism... There are shortcomings in the issue, like the lack of input from Native American women, but in general I’m proud of it. If racism is going to change, white people will have to do something to make it change. I think what we did here will be a tool for that change. What I discovered was just that simple step—that you just say, “Oh it’s all so horrible,” but that you can do something about it.

Me too. Another thing I get out of the whole process was a deepened sense of the complexity of racism. How it’s affected by elements of class, culture, education, degree of color, all that. And the intense ambivalence even of the most positive women of color toward the kind of work we do and the psychological and historical roots of that ambivalence.

(L.R.L.)

Working together you see how people feel and see. A lot of times white people aren’t aware that we’re being racist. We don’t really understand how it’s understood. A lot of the racism that we have on is unintentional, it’s due to the way we grew up and the psychological and historical roots of that ambivalence.

(V.B.)

That’s what I meant about Latin America. People are very ready to discuss class struggle because class struggle is a term that comes from European culture that everybody shares, so this is OK. But to go beyond that conception or even discuss the implications—like racism—it’s awkward. The subject of the Indians in Chile was usually treated as a problem of class struggle, not a cultural or religious difference. We have to question to what extent we’ve been conditioned by all this misinformation we’ve received. I worried about the narrowness of the experiences that were submitted. Most of the articles in this issue are individualized, separated experiences—“I felt this, you felt that.” But we also have to put together our own experiences of racism with what’s going on in the world, to reach a more general concept of global racism. It’s the American situation. If this collective were in Latin America, we would have arrived at a totally different conclusion because we are marginal. We’re always aware of the global situation because we have to be. (C.V.)

This sense of Heresiess is on the situation of racism in the U.S. today. It represents who we are and what we’re concerned with, and how far we could go.

(V.B.)

We do need to put discussion on an intellectual plane at some point, but I do not necessarily agree that the word “ethnocentrism” for this country is... On an intellectual plane, I still insist that for us here that’s a cop-out. When you say how you are not chosen by the art world because it centers on here, this puts another meaning on ethnocentrism which has nothing to do with racism. It does have to do with peripheral vision. I insist on calling racism racism, a spade a spade (laughter). That’s what it is and you cannot take it and water it down. But this is the way it is! The relation to the word is a watering down for you, but this country has gone through so much shit, and to come up with another name on top of the shit is to say it did not happen to us. All these personal little things make up this country. (V.B.)

[continued on inside back cover]
THE ORIGINS OF RACISM

A story about who
and when
and where

A story in passionate prose
and poetry
and pictures
to be read aloud
on cold snow nights when the blood is thin
on warm summer nights when the pulse is warm
to be read to music
to be said to music
to be said as music

BY ROSARIO MORALES

in the beginning...
capitalism spread slowly like an angry red infection up the arteries of Europe. Feudal Europe was strong- and vigorous-seeming but it was in no condition to resist the infection. In its tissues lay classes of people bleated off the tillers of the soil, off the toil of women. They leached enough from others' work to trade for the scarce goodies from Asia, like silk, like spice, to buy more and more war horses and armor and weapons to fight needless smaller and bigger wars in order to use them. No, feudal Europe was not healthy.

Capitalism spread like an angry red infection up the arteries, up the body of feudal Europe. Anybody who could escape the ladder of feudal hierarchies, who could wiggle out of the boxes on feudal classes and the constant, ever-present obligations to serve and serve and serve, ran away and vagabonded thru and around the heavy social structure and sang for their supper, or stole and/or bought cheap and sold dear. Sons of serfs (no, dears, not the daughters) became ratty peddlers, became richer peddlers armed to the teeth, traveling in caravans (to ward off other wanderers who wanted their merchandise or their gold), became substantial citizens, merchants living in towns and storing their goods in warehouses, became merchants in large groups, setting up rules for merchandising, setting up law and lawyers—the better to buy and sell, my dears—to make money, to arrange more of the city, of the society for the benefit of buying and selling, to push here and shove there and nose out, sniff out, smell more sources of profit, to set themselves up like the biggies of feudalism, like lords in big houses with lots of servants and an almost-idle wife to push around and show off, to set up in a home apart to provide a respite from it all, from all the buying and selling and constant calculating. Calculating a respite from calculating.

Capitalism spread thru Europe and in the body of feudal Europe, idling restlessly were numberless knights-in-arms who had ridden to the east, and held off and defeated the in-vading Magyars, and ridden to the north and pushed back the raiding Norse, and bashed and battered and beaten and raped and slashed and torn and scattered human bodies and been slashed and beaten and bloodied—

and oh!, how they missed it all! the jolly good fun of it and the lovely profit of looting and the honor and estates they were always promised and sometimes paid.

Capitalism spread and the merchants were many and there were more and more markets for them daily from more and more wearing of silks and perfumes, more buying of spice and sugar, but how to get more to sell when it all came from Asia and between them and Asia were Muslim cities and towns and fields, Muslim armies and ships and traders. Muslim traders, many Muslim traders—too many Muslim traders.

And . . .

so . . .

Pope Urban II declared a crusade.

declared a holy war

to free the holy land

with its holy relics

from the un

beatens who

tall

and the knights yelled:

Hot dog!

What a ball!
Across Europe and down it they walked and ran and galloped, down to the Mediterranean and across it and along it to fight and loot once more and oh! but it was good for their souls.

And their pockets.
But not their pockets only.
And not their pockets for long.

Because capitalists spread through the Mediterranean into Africa and the Near East. They lodged themselves firmly in the conquered cities and wrested rights to trade, to land, to buildings, to marketplaces. They bought and sold to Christians and Muslims, to the conquerors and conquered, to both sides of every battle, and the gold rolled in.

And those that settled there learned Arabic.

learned about Asia, about Africa
learned to take baths, to survive bathing
learned to wear muslins and silks and perfumes
learned to make maps
learned to navigate with compass and astrolabe
learned to make more and tighter commercial laws
learned to make better ships
to sail better ships better
learned to profit better
and more of them craved more
more of them enslaved each other
knead and tripped each other to get more.

Great gobs of them dumped in the city-states in the northern Mediterranean lands, prospered there, spread south from there and north from there and

Pisa coveted Genoa's advantage
Venice craved Pisa's good fortune
Genoa cursed Venice's power and profit.

so many merchants in the Mediterranean,
so many eager money-makers,
so few ports to trade at, to get Asian goods at,
so many cities,
so many traders jostling each other at these ports for these goods.
so few, so many
so... what
so now what?
Discover! a way to take away from him the privileges I want for me.
Discover! a way to get around the guys that have the markets in their hands.
Discover! a way to get to Asia that no one else controls.
Discover! a way to get.

Therefore:

Then:

Thus:

BOLD men
BRAVED high seas
to stare at unknown horizons
BRAVE men
FOUGHT choking jungles to
carve new paths to faraway places.
BOLD BRAVE
DARING ADVENTUROUS men

discovered
entirely NEW NEW
entirely EMPTY worlds

while chanting
upfront
and backstage

out loud
and under their breath
the competition chorus which goes thus:
I'm gonna cheat them
and spread
and spread.

Ravenous hordes of the get-rich-quick armed with swords and horses and corporations and Christian religions and royal grants in someone else's

land and royal prerogatives in the services of unsuspecting peoples, hordes of them descended upon the Americas, descended on Oceania, descended on Africa, descended on the East Indies, descended on the West Indies, descended on us.

The omens were bad, the omens had been bad for forty years. When they came, they came mounted on large hornless deer as high as the rooftops. Their bodies were covered all over with cotton armor and only their faces showed. They were white, white as if they were made of lime. They hungered and thirsted for gold, they fingered it like monkeys. Their bodies swelled with greed, their hunger was ravenous. They hungered like pigs for gold.

I was given as a gift to these strangers, these gods, these devils, these pigs. I was given as a gift of friendship.

But they set a price on us all, all of us women, on all the young men, on the priests, on the boys and girls. They took us to die in their mines, to work till we dropped in the fields they took us from us.

They brought plagues with them and we broke out all over our bodies. We couldn't move with the pain. So many were sick that there was no one to feed the ill and some of us died of hunger in our beds.

It was a terrible time. It was the end of time, the end of our people, a time of weeping, of mourning, of mourning without end.

and...

It was a time of feverish rejoicing of risking, of hoping.
of hope against hoping
for moving out of poverty
for rising out of peasantry
out of second son's handlessness
and third son's penury.

A time of yearning
of dreaming
of scheming
of plotting for prosperity...

Don't you want to raise yourself above the mob?! God has seen fit to fill whole worlds with richans and savages for us to use as we will, whole worlds full of adventure and possibilities. Dare! Dare to reach for your dreams, for positions, for power!

Dream!

You! Juan Rafael Furtado! You can dry your sweat, abandon your plow. You can wear the robe of the lordly and dress your women in yards and yards of silk and when you snap your fingers seventy souls will jump to your command!

And you, John Paul Fairweather—you can shake the mud from your boots, from under your fingernails! You can wear the clot of a man of substance and command a large prosperous household of women and children and servants and slaves! Master of all you survey!

Gone! This is the saddest moment. Fortune smiles and thru her lips between her ivory teeth beckons the gold of the Incas, the sweat of the Mayans calls! We! We are the new lords!

them:
much more and more ships with more and more men landed on the shores of...not America...on the shores of Boringuen.

Siboney
Quisqueya
Guahay
Canari
Chitinama
Wampaconag
Narraganset
Penacook!

and they went back to their patrons,
they wrote back to their patrons,
they reported back to their financial backers:

They are gentle and trusting,
We can conquer them and make them do the work in our fields.

They are naked and savage,
We must conquer and christen them and make them do the work in our mines.

They are cowardly and easily pleased,
We can conquer them and make them do the work in our fields.

They are licentious and unnatural,
We must conquer and christen them and make them do the work in our mines.

no!
no!
no!
no!

Stop them!
Fight them!
Stop all this! Save ourselves!
How?
Now!
No. Consider

The Spanish rise from the dead. On the third day, they say, they rise from the dead. How can we fight and win? How can we do them in?


How shall we know?
What can we do?

This is what we did. We carried the Spaniard Salazar across a stream on our shoulders and pretended to slip, pretended to slide. When we fell we pretended to drown and all the while we held him, held him down till he drowned.

and we apologized humbly.

And then we tied him down on the riverbank and lit a fire and kept a watch, by day, by night, we kept a watch and called on this spirit to return, to quicken, to animate him,

and we apologized humbly.

And when he lay there still and dead we tore our hair, we broke our bowels, we cried our regret. We offered our lives, offered up the lives of two clumsy Indians who had so offended,

and we apologized humbly.

We apologized humbly while we watched, three days we watched and three days more. We apologized humbly while the flies lit on his eyes and the sweet smell of the long dead filled the air.

And then we knew. And the women pounded the largest pestles in the largest mortars, and the men hit the ends of their spears on the ground, the sounds of gladness!

and we blew the couch to the four winds:

arm!
fight back!
kill those destructive devils!

We ought to kill all those treacherous bastards! You can't turn your back on 'em. And laiy! Never seen such lazy flash.

Lie around and smoke their pipes and fornicate, that's all they do if we didn't put the fear of God in 'em.

And lairs! Lie as soon as breathe! Now they're saying they're dying off. Sick, they say. Fear of hard work, more likely. Bah! They're not dying, they're hiding out there in those endless bloody thickens.

Get so you can't make a decent profit out here anymore. Why, thirty years ago you could go out and bring in 100 Indians as easy as I reach for this glass of gin. And any amount of honest English men and women ready to put their hands to anything and glad of a blanket and a crust. But now! I don't know what the world's coming to.

I've made up my mind! I'm going to Kingsport this week and buy me some of those Africans. Sure it'll cost me money, but I tell you, with the price of sugar the way it is I'm losing money letting that land lie idle. No, blacks it is. Hah! They'll have a time trying to find who to hide out here! Hah! And no peasy Englishmen's rights to this and rights to that. blast 'em! See a mile away, too. Ha ha ha! Yehas. Sugar's got a good price now, hmmm: a good price.

And the merchants perched on the coast of Africa and cast into its depths and fished out, plucked out, pulled in, black skin after black skin after black skin, and chained and branded and caged and shipped and whipped, and raped, pulled them into shape to be slaves, to do the unfree labor a free society requires.

And first by the hundreds and next by the thousands and then faster and faster until millions were pushed and pulled out of Africa and those who weren't killed in capture or whipped dead or jumped overboard or died in transit, those that were left—were left—in a thousand places in a distant land, never to return, never to return.

return

Oh, my people!
to return
Oh, my people!
Oh, my people.
far- away people—

Ibo
Congo
Mandingo
Kokombga
Fulan
Yoruba
Ashanti
Ashanti

(replete like drumbeats, like messages across the miles)
congo, congo
congo, congo!
Lukumi, Yoruba. (repeat)
work and strain
sorrow and pain
call/a, cane
sugarcane
sugarcane

No way, no right way, no one way, don't matter which you do you gonna get whipped anyway. That's the way they keep you doing and doing what you wouldn't da if you could choose. There's no way, don't you see, no one way to do it, to get thru it. Sometimes I just aim to please, appease, and do what's wanted before it's wanted, to keep the whip off, to have a bit of peace—"but that don't make it all right, that don't make it OK."

Sometimes I'm just as sly as and sneak, and steal myself a bit of life, a bit of food, a bit of joy. Don't give a damn bout no one else but me, but that don't make it all right that don't make it OK.

And sometime I care about is to keep you safe a bit, quiet a bit, rest a bit, but that don't make it all right, that don't make it OK.

And sometime I don't care what happens to me. I just want to kill. I just want to give them back every lash, every bruise, every pain and every single humiliation I have got from them, every one, but that don't make it all right, that don't make it OK.

And sometime I sit with you and plot and plan and work to get folks free to move them north to plot and plan and work to free another and another. And that don't make it all right, that don't make it OK.

Because I just trying to be human and this ain't human. I just trying to live and this ain't life. I just want to be free and this ain't free. I wanna be free now. I want to live now before I die while I got some young left in me—now—

and they ran away:
slave woman poisoned their masters, killed their mistresses, and they struck back:
they burnt the tobacco houses, the sugar mills, and they ran away:
in South Carolina slaves ran away and killed the guards they ran to the south and killed the white people and burnt the houses in their path

and they struck back:
in New York black slaves and Indians set fire to buildings and killed the white people who tried to stop them and they fought back:
The Native Americans fought back,
harassed the settlements.
The black slaves fought back.
Killed their masters and overseers.
The white indentured servants fought back,
rioted against the wealthy.

and often,
but often,
white and black together fought back
red and black together fought back together?
Oh no! Not together!

Because if there is anything more threatening—more scary, more hand-wringing, fist-clenching, lump-searing scary than black women and black men getting op- pidy and independent and angry and dangerous.
If there's anything more eye-wide, cold-sweat, foot-twitch, heart-pounding scary than black folks getting dangerous.

It's black men, black women rising up and conspiring seditiously and perniciously with the poor and white, the mean: the vile, the lowly, the dregs from Europe, getting together to stop, to kill, to destroy, to murder us all in our beds. Oh, lord! to murder us all in our beds.

And the trapped snapped,
the door slammed,
the law rose up and bore down.

And it bore down first and hardest on the slaves.
It said:
whip them!
scar them!
kill them!
dismember them!
burn them!
burn them slow!

And the law bore down next and next hardest on the whites who helped slaves who cared for slaves who married slaves who were kind to slaves who were not kind to slaves who were not vicious to slaves.

It said:
whip them!
scar them!
dismember them!

It said:
you are white
you have a duty and a care.
Take Care!
you are the better and will get the better share
Take Care!

and it said:
here's my carrot—
here's my stick—
ease and shellings,
or the whip's flick

and it said:
you can be one of us.
one of us.
you can be one of us.
one of us.
you can be one of us.
one of us.
you gotta know it,
you better show it,
better not blow it.

The profit-making, body-breaking infection ripped and broke out in pimples, pox-sules and pestilential sores. The sore oozed out privilege for some and unprivilege for others, it oozed out attitudes and postures and
positions, it oozed out hate and self-hate, it oozed out measure and weight:
my skin, dark skin, white skin. It oozed out white and measure: hair curl
and nose breadth and mouth width, it oozed out head or base, know your
place, be your race.

it oozed out the rotten green pus:

racism

a pus, an ooz, a crust, a sore,
a fever, a malaise, an unease, a disease.

It spread, penetrated, situated itself,
soaked deep into every fiber of every being.
It took hold, took form, took shape, took force,
took over.

Before Jefferson and Bolívar, the white, the males, the property owners
took over. "liberated" their countries and all the people in it

racism was in place

Before the French traders and merchants and bankers and the German
and the Italian forced out the feudal lords and kings and ruling classes and
and took over their countries and all the people in it

racism was in place

Before the land-owning, mill-owning, profit-making classes of the United
States tore off and took over the northern half of the country of Mexico
and all the people in it

racism was in place

Before the U.S. speculators and frontiersmen and cavalry took over what
was left of the Native American lands and all the people in it

racism was in place

Before the British man-o’wars and American gunboats cruised up the long
long Chinese rivers and sailed into the ports of India and China and im-
posed their rule on Asia and all the people in it

racism was in place

Before the English and French and Belgians and Germans and Portuguese
cut up and parcelled out the whole continent of Africa and what was left of
the people in it

racism was in place

A list of some of the books and records I used to tap the outlook, information,
feelings, or sounds for this piece:

Guillén, Nicolás. El Son Entero. Lo Viejo de Nicolás Guillén (Buenos Aires: Collect-
on Icon Poeta).
Leon-Portilla, Miguel, ed., The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Con-
quest of Mexico (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962).
Rico, C. G., \\n
Sweet Honey in the Rock, Good News (Chicago: Flying Fish Records).

Tiger, Michael E., & Levy, Medelhein K., Law and the Rise of Capitalism (New

The drawings are adapted from the art of Aztec, South sea, and Eskimo peoples
as seen in two books: Julius K. Lips, The Savage Huts Back (New York: University
Books, 1960), and Miguel Leon-Portilla, ed., The Broken Spears (Boston: Beacon
Press, 1982).
My name is Linda Nishio. I am 28 years old. I am a third generation (sansei) Japanese-American. I grew up in L.A. in a household where very little Japanese was spoken, except of course by my grandmother, who spoke very little English. During those early years I picked up some Japanese phrases, a few of which I still remember today. Then I went to Art School on the East Coast. I attended classes in an environment where very little art was taught but where iconoclastic rhetoric (intellectualism) replaced “normal” art education. Before long I realized I, too, was communicating more and more in this fashion. Ho hum. Upon returning to L.A. I found myself misunderstood by family and friends. So this is the story: A young artist of Japanese descent from Los Angeles who doesn’t talk normal.

KI·KO·E·MA·SU·KA
(Can you hear me?)
THE AMBIGUOUS JOURNEY OF A WOMAN IN SEARCH OF CULTURE

BY LYNDA HILL

A special paradox occurs to me each time I contemplate race prejudice and culture. Plaguing me, the dilemma arises at times I can never predict, often when I interact with people. I want to know who, after growing up believing racism is deplorable and irrational, many American people are unable to dissolve the color line with confidence.

As a black woman, I am on a perpetual quest to transcend negative stereotypes. I often grapple with the dark, like Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man. Sometimes I speak philosophically with friends about the transcendent and versus the existential.

"Where is the threshold between black and white and when does logic collapse into allies versus opponents?" I ask, although I know the question has no straightforward answer. Nevertheless, I do decide to discuss it with a close friend who is white, imagining that we can sort it out together or not at all.

"How can we be friends and ignore the potent force of racism?" I ask her one night, following an intense prelude in which I explain this is not going to be one of our usual gibber conversations. I will call her Sarah instead of Ann [as in Miss Ann] for the ethnic contrast. Sarah is Jewish, which is supposed to mean something special in understanding our friendship. The historical liaison between blacks and Jews in the U.S., however, may be one of the most disturbing issues of the century—a subject stripped of pretense in Harold Cruse's book The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual. By coincidence, I have just finished reading Cruse before this conversation.

"We have similar backgrounds," said Sarah.

As a child I lived in an integrated neighborhood, where many of the people were Jewish. My NAACP youth group, however, was where I found true camaraderie among my black peers. I remember marching with my friends, singing freedom songs, attending rallies and sit-ins, our energy concentrated on crushing barri walls as we sang our way into a frozen insidiousness. I became part of America. We forced others to see our color, acknowledge it, and accept it... or so we thought. Acceptance, we later learned, was not an automatic transition—and here I think I'm safe in speaking for others who, like me, have often felt cheated because we actually did believe our ideals would translate into reality. The Civil Rights Movement was a peculiar, misleading phenomenon, the outcome of an American interpretation of Pangloss' maxims: "There cannot be otherwise; for, since everything is made for an end, everything is necessarily for the best end."

Our songs were as clear then as they are elusive now; our quest for integrated schools, restaurants, buses, a civil victory. We sang, "Black and white to gether; We shall not be moved," but later we had to question our meaning. How "together" did we want to be with them? It got to be a bore, defending our own humanity. What about their humanity? Hadn't they been suggested us? Did we really have time to wait for them to listen to our message, hear our song, see our black skin, weep or smile, show some feeling, act like brothers and sisters, jump to embrace fair treatment under the law?

Sarah and I have known each other for more than ten years, since Barnard. At that time I thought friendships were based on arbitrary alliances between people with similar interests, regardless of race, color, or class. I dated an Anglo-Saxon boy from a broken family, who was poor and led a bohemian life. Together, we acted out our own countercultural rendition of the film Phantom of the Opera in our basement and performed our own adaptation, a performance artist in Los Angeles.

Rebel Without a Cause, improving a code of conduct as we define ourselves as a group. I am in question by my family and friends, black and white. Sarah thought I was more intelligent than he. As for as my family was concerned, my whole future was in jeopardy. What would my father, who died when I was eight years old, have thought? An architect, engineer, and religious man devoted to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, he gave me, so he had given my older sisters, an appreciation for black culture. When the race came, he wasn't around. "We shall not be moved" was in our hearts, as we approached El Dorado with Candide, and Pangloss gloomed down from what might have been heaven, existing, "Everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds."

I am an armchair psychoanalytic buff, with a penchant for free association and the subliminal. Authentic emotions are often buried beneath layers of breeding: Sarah and I shield ourselves from much of it.

"Are we hypocrites?" I ask her.

"Listen," says Sarah, "our being friends isn't so surprising. I'm from a liberal family. Swastikas were burned on our door when I was a child. I've always identified with being part of an outside group. I went to an integrated high school. We have the same middle-class background.

The mention of class alarms me. I wonder if we are elitists. How clever to subvert the issue of race by replacing the color line with a class line. Sarah crosses the street whenever she sees a black teenage males who don't look middle-class. Twice she was mugged and once she was forced to suck the penis of a boy who took her money. In all three episodes the aggressors were black.

"Do you think race had anything to do with it?" I ask the question. The question is calculated, a test of her liberalism.

"No," she says, passing the liberalism test, with points subtracted instead. I then asked her own answer, knowing she doesn't want to offend me. A friend of hers, who is black, she says was raped by a black man. "It's probably a matter of class," she says.

There may be some truth to this. Another friend with mind, a black male, tells me of a black woman who was robbed and brutalized by a white man. She wants revenge. I am frightened of the blurry contrast between poverty and race and of the violence seamless across color categories defined by fate. Where is Pangloss now? I wonder. Voltaire might have considered 1962 in New York.

I used to be an optimist, but now I am confused, as my paradox propels itself through psychic energy. Emily, a friend of mine from high school who is a successful corporate executive, a black woman, tells me one day she ran into another high school mate who is white. I am happy to receive this information, as I haven't been in touch with Clara, the white friend, in years. Emily tells me Clara is planning a move, a move with a man. When Clara calls me, it's a fine reunion, a long talk probing the events of our recent past. She tells me of her involvement in an unsuccessful political campaign and of her romance.

"I don't know if you would be surprised," she says. I am immediately reminded that because of our bourgeois manners two dialogues proceed at once—spoken, the other suppressed.

"He's not Jewish," I say, although I know she is half Italian. Her mother was communicated from the Catholic Church for crossing the religion line. If penetrating culture is so easily punishable, I speculate, what will be the consequences of Clara's transgression? I know what she wants
to say, and then the words spill out in staccato phrases, as we hesitantly and interrupt each other in turn. Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner, a flashback from the sixties, is revised with a new cast: he is black, with graduate degrees from two Ivy League schools.

"I’m not surprised," I say. After all, Clara dated a Hispanic boy when we were in high school. The muscles in my stomach are tense, however. Being a good friend and politically aware black intellectual novice feminist at this moment seems to require the same degree of diplomacy needed to negotiate an international border dispute. When everything is over, war may be imminent.

"What do your parents think?" I ask. "I know they weren’t pleased with Carlos."

"They’re not thrilled, of course, but with Carlos it was a class—they thought he wasn’t good enough. I was young...it was different."

The discreet barriers are reconstructed. Strange, I think, how we evolve into people trapped by second-hand social philosophies. Thorstein Veblen and Vance Packard must have conditioned us for this scenario. Somehow I, Zionism slips into our conversation. The Middle East may start World War III, says Clara.

"I’m not sure," she says. "I think of her red hair. "Zionism is irrational," I say. "Of course it’s irrational." Pangloss can’t console me now. When speaking..."

"As advertisements for the state, postage stamps encourage patriotism and project an idealized national history in which social contradictions vanish and democracy triumph. To question what is represented on postage stamps is to begin to imagine the history that has been left out." —Isaac Koenig

TESTIMONY
OF A

GIRL

BY CYNTHIA CARR

When I was eight maybe nine my parents sent me to an art class on Saturdays where I met some black children for the first time in my life—one boy and one girl. My parents had told me about black people (who I’m sure we called “Negro” or “colored”). That my old great-aunts were afraid of them when they walked to the German service on Sunday mornings. That if some moved into your neighborhood you wouldn’t go near them. And when you went to their neighborhoods, you had to roll up the windows. So I looked at these children.

The boy was serious and spoke to no one and I realized after a session or two that he was the best artist there. The girl was lively and friendly and slightly overweight like me. I decided I wanted to make friends with her. I can’t remember any of the other white kids who were there.

But I do remember sitting at a desk across from my new friend. I remember some of the horrible little artworks that I made there and how the teacher frowned at them. And I remember standing outside with my friend after the first or second class and talking while we both waited for our parents to come get us.

I was excited getting into the car that day. My parents had no Negro friends and obviously they’d been misinformed. Now I’d be able to tell them the real story and they’d be so pleased. "Mom, I’m making friends with this Negro girl in my class and she’s real nice." Something like that was what I tried on her first, but she didn’t reply. "They’re not bad after all, Mom." She was driving and acting like she hadn’t heard me. "Could I invite her to our house?" I realized that my mother, starting ahead like stone, was not going to answer. I remember the odd hollow echo in my chest as we drove home not speaking.

I remember my friend’s face but not her name. We continued our talking and sitting together for maybe another month—till the class ended. Then she was lost to me.
... MOVING ALONG ... THE PRISONERS OF HISTORY ...
... SET SAIL ....... LOCKED INTO THEIR BODIES ......

SUPERIORITY

INFERIORITY

STITUTE

PERPETRATOR

ANCESTORS

MYTH

REACTION

DESTINY

CONFRONTATION

ECONOMICS

ARCHETYPES

DIVISION

REPARATION

FEAR

EXTERIORITY

EPIDERMAL

PATHOLOGY

... BEYOND THE BODY OF HISTORY ... SKIMMING THE SURFACE ...
**DEATH AND DEFENSE:**

**PART 1**

Alaide was somebody who would try to see what was going on. She was certainly a fair cry from dogmatism of any type, feminist or political or any other...

I remember reading articles in which she said that feminism was a cultural revolution, that feminism could not be a sect of sects but had to change the consciousness of men and women in order to transform society as a whole.

But why was she when she disappeared?

Eighty-five.

Did the government of Guatemala ever acknowledge her disappearance?

That kind of government simply tries to disguise the truth. They lie, and they believe this lie has a chance of being believed. The first thing they said was that she was kidnapped by the guerrillas-

And the guerrillas obviously had nothing to do with it.

**How do you know?**

The guerrillas immediately declared they had absolutely nothing to do with it. They had no motive. No ransom was ever demanded. This makes it clear that it was not a kidnapping by a leftist group. So there is only one option. When you get three to ten of twenty people disappearing a day, and 99% of them have been taken by the Death Squads, you know, there is no question about it. And there is one more detail to corroborate the guilt of the government. Shortly before Alaide went to Guatemala, her brother-in-law, who was a Minister of Economics in the Guatemalan government at the time, telephoned her in Mexico, and warned her not to come. This means that somebody else is the government, knowing that he was Alaide’s brother-in-law, was friendly enough to tell him to tell her not to come because she would be killed.

**Why did she go?**

Her mother was very, very old. Alaide probably thought, “When I return to Mexico, if I start a campaign to make the public aware of what is going on in Guatemala, I will not be able to re-

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Isabel Frain was born in Mexico City, is a poet and literary critic. Her poem is in the ‘Lad of Death’ [Latin American Literary Review] recently appeared in a bilingual edition.
SE: GUATEMALAN WOMEN

How do you see the prospects for the future in Guatemala?

Well, frankly I think they will keep fighting. I think they cannot help but keep fighting. At present the government can carry on this warfare at tremendous expenditures, displace large numbers of people, and maintain theurette in the Indian areas with the assumption of 'well, that's a fact that desperate, that decided, that just be killed, and they will have to kill them all in Guatemala. There comes a point where it is no longer possible, when the armed forces themselves are no longer willing to go on, when they have to come back to the army. There could be a change within the army, but I don't believe they are flexible enough. I don't believe the situation is quite ready to give up anything at all.

What about elections, can they change anything?

Well, as in Salvador, the supposedly democratic elections are nothing but an endless farce. You don't even have what they call the center. You have nothing except the right and the far right. In the most recent elections what happened is that the far right claimed there had been a fraud; they marched in the streets and said the army's candidate, who had won, had been forced in by the army. I believe this is what is behind the recent coup. That the army saw those people marching in the streets, their photographs in the international papers, and being hit on the face with a gun by a soldier was bad public relations for the government, and they were afraid of being blamed for this.
The following is excerpted from an interview with three Indian women from Guatemala (a woman by Alaida Foppa (bald) done in November 1980 for "Women's Forum," a program on Radio University in Mexico City. All reports on Guatemala in the U.S. press fail to present the point of view of the Indians themselves, even more so, of the Indian women. This interview is a rare opportunity to hear the voices of three women from the Committee for Peasant Unity (Comité de Unidad Campesina, or CUC).

What has brought you to this serious commitment to the CUC at such an early age?

What has carried us to this point is the suffering, the pain in which we see our people. The CUC is mainly a committee of peasants in which the majority of participants are Indians, although there are also a few poor Laufins with us, so that all of us, the poor, participate in this organization. When did this organization begin?

In 1978.

Approximately how many members are there?

The CUC has local committees in small settlements (coserios), hamlets, villages, and even in the city, where there are poor people who participate in the struggle and who want to improve the situation in which we live.

The CUC is always present at all the protest demonstrations. How do women participate?

We women participate equally with men because we saw the men fight and protest against the injustices in the country, but we saw that they didn't accept a man's word because they didn't even listen to it. Then we women thought to participate to reclaim our rights as well.

And do you believe that they listen better to women's words?

In the beginning, yes, when we began to speak; even though the assassin Lucas was not resolving our problems, it was still not so easy to kill us.

For information on Alaida Foppa, see page 10.

But now, unfortunately, in recent times they have killed us just the same, men and women, because they see the struggle is equal for us.

Have there been many victims also among women?

Many, as many women as men. We have many coheros and coheras who fall at the Spanish Embassy, who Lucas himself ordered assassinated by his men.

Guadalupe refers to the action that was well known abroad, the shooting at the Spanish Embassy where a group of peasants had gone to state their needs and to reclaim their rights. I understand five women died there.

These peasants came from the region of Quiché, the same as two of the young women present, and Guadalupe is from Quetzaltenango, isn't that right?

Yes.

And María, what can you say of your early participation, to be only 15 and already participating in the struggle? María speaks very little Spanish, but Guadalupe can translate for us.

She says she is proud to participate at this age, because the assassin Lucas has killed so many people, mainly in the Quiché province, so they feel the necessity to participate in the popular struggle even as young ones. They have a vision of growing up as a free people. She adds that she began to participate two years ago, and that her participation has been taken into account in the struggle.

We're going to ask the same thing of Celina, the youngest, who is only 13. [Again Guadalupe translates.]

She says that she began not very long ago, only one year. She says her participation is with the people, giving testimony, and that she is going to keep on giving testimony to all the suffering they have endured in the Quiché province.

She could hardly have begun any earlier. Have there been victims in your families?

Yes, we have had victims, yes, in the family, cousins, nephews, even brothers have fallen.

Do your parents agree with your participation?

They agree. We have learned primarily from them, because they grew up as good catechumens and that's where the rebellion began, against all Guatemalan Christians. Then we began to organize ourselves, to search for other solutions with which to defend ourselves.

In the province of Quiché, the Catholic Church has been particularly repressed, so much so that the bishop was obliged to close the churches and leave, and just as, as Guadalupe just said, the catechists were the best educated. They were also the most threatened and singled out by the repression. . . . When you speak of testimony, to what are you referring? Before whom are you giving testimony?

Principally to the people of Mexico and to the President here. We need solidarity. We give testimony so that other people will aid us in resolving our problems. In our provinces we need many things; we need money, help, aid from abroad; we need medicine, everything. Recently, the assassin Lucas will not permit the peasants to buy medicines, not in Quiché or in other provinces, especially in the faraway communities up in the mountains. He wants the Indians to die, to die of disease or hunger, so in the face of this, we have to find aid, economic assistance, or other things which can help us.

I think this request of Guadalupe's is heard by many, and whoever wishes to contribute assistance can contact Radio University . . . What has the CUC done about the lack of food? What influence has the repression had, or the struggle, on the harvests in the fields?

Now and since the struggle began, the most pressing problem is getting fair wages, as well as equality and good treatment on the job. Now the CUC has gained a wage if three quetzals and 20 cents.

The quetzal is equivalent to a dollar, so this triumph represents a very low salary. I would like for you to speak for a moment about what you gained in the great strike in which the CUC participated.

In April of this year [1980] on the Southern Coast of Guatemala, some 4,000 peasants participated with us in demanding this wage. Many of them were assassinated, kidnapped and threatened, but we succeeded in obtaining the minimum wage.

How much did you earn before?

We earned one quetzal.

How long did the strike last?

It lasted a month or more.

How did women participate in this movement?

We participated equally with men, as we do not have a division between men and women, between children and young people; men, women,
AND
USE:

ART 2

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struggle, on
n. the most
as well

The other day we spoke of the harvests which have been undoubtedly jeopardized by the presence of the war. Are there places in which you have been obliged to abandon your lands?

Yes, principally the coffee growers of the provinces of Quiché, Nebajos, Pantano, where the repression has reached a certain point of intensity. Many times, only because they are catequistas, the Christians have had to leave, although they are not yet organized. Then we saw the necessity to organize ourselves in many hamlets; many have left their families, their houses, or have brought their families to wander in other provinces, because they cannot live there at home. Even though there are ways of defense, even though there is unity on the part of the peasants, we do not have arms the way the enemy does, so we don’t show as much bravery in defending ourselves.

Bravery you do not lack.

Yes, that we have, but we don’t have the concrete means to defend ourselves or to attack the enemy.

And is Quiché the only landowners? Are Indians the owners of their own land? As a group or as individuals?

Well, now they say all the land belongs to Lucas. Right? Yet we live not only in Quiché, but in the greater part of this country. We live on the land, yet we have to travel to Iota for Lucas to give us a piece of paper. We have gone to protest; have you had some success?

Yes, we have, because there are many farmers who wanted to throw us out of our lands in the Quiché province; the young ones, principally Indians who cannot speak Spanish and who no one listens to, they take them away and then the land is the farmers’. But confronted by the unity of the peasants and through our tactics of self-defense and our sense of security, we have succeeded so that the farmers are no longer encouraged to enter our lands. Before, the army arrived and entered houses and carried off eggs and money and anything else they could find. But now if they still do these things, we are able to fight up to a certain point, until nothing more can be done. As long as we can defend ourselves, with everything that we have at hand, we will fight so that it won’t be easy for them.

Is the resistance growing?

Yes.

This is very important and you are conscious of it, and it gives you courage to go ahead. I would like to ask Maria in what extent she has participated in self-defense?

She says that she has participated in almost every means of self-defense; principally she has been in defense duty, when they make search for each other, in order that some may rest.

A sentinel for observing the possible movements of the army?

Yes, in the province of Quiché the army would from time to time come in companies of 75 or 90 men. She says that she was on watch but she had no arms. She had a machete, she had a stick, and she also had hot water as her means of self-defense.

You mean they use the medieval system—hot water that women can throw on the army? Did she have the occasion to use these methods?

Yes, she was to occupy him for whatever time she could, so that the compañeros could retreat, or take up other means of defense.

We have to realize that it is not Maria alone. When there is resistance of this kind, one can expect the success of the resistance, despite the terrible repression and the aggression of the army. Since the time has run out, I want to repeat what we said in the beginning: these three young peasant women are seeking solidarity...
mistaken identity

her skin is white. her hair is thin, kink, and lays down straight. her voice is light, high, nearly a whisper.

in england they said she was spanish. in spain they said she was gypsy. in portugal they said she was angolan. in brazil they said she was obviously an alien.

in black america they said you are lucky to have such good hair, or you'll make it in this world baby, or which one of your folks is white? they never said look what the white man has done to our color, or you are a high yellow girl and don't trust you, or you are a woman that can pass and i want you, or your mammas musta been gettin' it from some white dudes, or you think you're white don't you bitch?

they never said these things, not to her face.

in white america they said what are you anyway? or which one of your parents is black, or you don't look like a negro. they studied her like a mysterious stone and she watched their eyes inspect her over and over and she hardened. they never said you don't look like a black girl so you might as well be a white girl. please be a white girl.

by tess randolph

so i can keep my prejudices intact, my guard down, my slurs unrestrained. it would be better for everybody all around if you were a white girl. that would explain your intelligence, talent, and presence among us. they never said these things, they didn't have to.

she became adept at mind reading and justifiably paranoid. she often lifts her head and realizes i am the only black at this concert, art gallery, office, university, beach, movie, meeting, hotel, airport, restaurant, party, lecture, and feels alone and wrong. she was known to speak of feeling alone and wrong to her white friends who stared blankly and her black friends who are distanced.

her father said you are my child, her mother said you are god's child, to everyone outside herself she had the best of both worlds. as if she had a choice.

tess randolph is a poet and visual artist currently living in los angeles. her poetry has appeared in small press magazines in europe.
I walked down those three little steps into the Bagatelle on a weekend night in 1956. There was an inner door, guarded by a male bouncer, assiduously to keep out the straight male intruders come to gawk at the “lesbians,” but in reality to keep out those women deemed “undesirable.”

All women. Far too frequently, undesirable meant Black.

Women stood three-deep along the bar and between the tables, and in the corner, the stages, as if they were at some movie-set dance floor. By 9 p.m., the floor was packed solid with women’s bodies moving slowly to the jukbox beat of Ruth Brown’s “When your friends have left you alone / and you have no one to call your own...” or Frank Sinatra’s “It’s a Lovely Day, Isn’t it?” I got a little stuck.

When I moved through the bunches of women crushing each other in the front room, or doing a slow flick on the dance floor in the back, with the smell of cigarette smoke and the noise and the beer pouring, whispering altogether like incense through charged air, it was always for me to be someone else, to love anything to do with being lesbian.

But when I, a Black woman, saw no reflection in any of the faces there week after week, I knew perfectly well that being an outsider in the Bagatelle and everything that went with being Black.

The society within the confines of the Bagatelle reflected the ripples and divisions of the larger society that had spawned it, and which allowed the Bagatelle to survive as long as it did, selling watered-down drinks at inflated prices to lonely whites who had no other social outlet or community gathering place.

Rather than the idyllic picture created by false nostalgics, the fifties were a white America’s cooling-off period of “let’s pretend we’re happy and that this is the best of all possible worlds and we’ll blow those nasty cummies to hell if they dare to say otherwise.”

Young America’s growing pains, within the Bagatelle, were represented by the fashion conflicts between the blue-jeans set and the Bermuda-shorts set. Then, of course, there were those who fell in between, both by virtue of our hair, our craziness or our color.

The breakdown into the mommies and daddies was an important part of lesbian relationships in the Bagatelle. If you asked the wrong woman to dance, or laugh, or play down the street by her butch, who had followed you out of the Bag for exactly that purpose. It was a no-go to pathway to know to yourself. And you were never supposed to ask who was who, which is why there was such heavy emphasis on correct garb. The well-dressed gay-girl was supposed to give you enough clues for you to know.

For some of us, however, the role-playing reflected all the deprecating attitudes toward women which we loathed in straight society. It was a rejection of these roles that had drawn us to “the life” in the first place. It was a rejection of the image that was given of the lesbian.

Instinctively, without particular theory or political position or dialectic, we recognized oppression as oppression, no matter where it came from.

But those lesbians who had served some niche in the pretend world of dominance/subordination rejected what they called our “confused” life style, and they were in the majority.

Felicita was so late on Sunday afternoon for our photography lesson that Muriel and I went off to Laurels without her, because you had to be early on Sundays to get something to eat. The Swing Roundhouse had closed its table, but at Laurels on Sunday afternoon there was free brunch with any drink, and that meant all you could eat. Many of the gay bars used this to get Sunday business at a traditionally slow time, but Laurels had the best food. There was a Chinese place there of no mean talent. He cooked back and kept it coming. After the word got around, every Sunday afternoon at four o’clock there was a line of gay-girls in front of Laurels’ smoking and talking and trying to pretend we had all arrived there at that time by accident.

When doors opened, there was a discreet but determined stampede, first to the bar and then to the food table, set up in the rear of the lounge. We tried to keep our cool, pretending that we couldn’t care less for barbe- qued spare ribs with peach and apricot sweet sauce, or succulent pink shrimp swimming in thick golden lobster sauce, dotted with bits of green scallops and bright yellow egg drops, tiny pieces of pork and onion affixed on top. There were stacked piles of crispy brown egg rolls filled with shredded ham and chicken and collar, rolled together and fried with a touch of sesame paste. There were fried chicken bites, and every once in a great while, a special delicacy such as lobster or fresh crab. Only the first lucky few got to taste those special dishes, so it was worthwhile being first on line and pushing your cool image a little bit askew.

We were healthy by young female animals mercifully more alive than most of our peers, robust and active women, and our blood was always high and our pockets empty and a free meal in convivial surroundings—meaning around other lesbians—was a big treat for most of us, even if purchased at the price of a bottle of beer, which was fifty cents, with many complaints.

During war I allowed at Laurels’ as it never got to be as popular as the Bar, even until late afternoon. Muriel preferred it because it was always quieter. Trix ran the place, and always had a band for “her girls.”

Tris, and a partner, both worked as tour guides for Howard’s and a keepsake. For a time, it was a joke to send a shine to Muriel and me, and sometimes she would buy us a beer, and sit down and talk with us if the place wasn’t too crowded.

We all knew the situation with gay bars, how they came in and out of existence with such regularity and who really profited from them. But Tris was pretty and bright and hard and kind all at the same time, and her par- ticular tan particularly endeared her to me. She looked like one of the nice of the hipker-skinned devils who used to people my dreams of that period.

Actually, the lifespan of most gay bars was under a year, with the notable exception of a few like the Bag, Laurels’ went the way of all the other gay bars—like the Swing and Smokey’s and the Grapevine, the Sea Colony and the Pink Stable Inn. Each closed after a year or so, while another opened and caught on somewhere else. But for that year, Laurels served as an important place for those of us who met and made some brief space for ourselves there. It had a feeling of family.

On Sunday afternoon, Muriel and I would split from the gay beach at Clearwater Island or Rais Park early, take the subway back home in time to wash up and dress and scatter over to Sylvania’s again in time for the food at 4:00. I had my first color open confront with a gay-girl in Sunday afternoon at the Bagatelle.

Muriel and I had come back that day from Rais Park, full of run and scat. We washed with the salt still on our skins, then bathed, washed our hair, and got ready to go out. I put on my faded card riding hitches with the suede crotch, and a pale blue short-sleeved sweatshirt bought earlier that week at John’s on Avenue C for sixty-five cents. My skin was tanned from the sun and burntished ruddy with the heat and much loving. My hair was newly trimmed and freshly washed, with the particular crispiness that it always develops in sustained summer heat. I felt young and restless. We walked out of the hot August afternoon sun into the suddenly dark coolness of Laurels’ downstairs. There was Muriel, in her black Bermuda shorts and shirt, ghost pale, her eternal cigarette in hand. And I was beside her, full of myself, knowing I was fat and Black and very fine. We were without peer or category, and on that day I was conscious of being very proud of it, no matter who looked down her nose at us.

After Muriel and I had gotten our food and beer and copied one of the tables, Dottie and Paul came over. We saw them sit at a bit at the Bag and in the supermarket (over on Avenue D, but we’d never been to their house nor they to ours, except for New Year’s food, when everyone came...)

“Where you guys been?” Pauli had an ingenuism smile, her blonde hair and blue eyes inadherence to the turquoise minidress she wore. “Rais Gay Beach.” Muriel’s finger clicked over the bottle as she took a slug. All of us enclosed glasses as faggy, although I sometimes longed for one because of the cold beer hurt my teeth.

Pauli turned to me. “Hey, that’s a great tan you have there. I didn’t know Negress got tans.” Her broad smile was intended to announce the remark as a joke.

My usual defense in such situations was to ignore the overtures, to let it go. But Dottie Daws, particularly out of her own nervousness at Pauli’s reference to the unmentionable, did not let the matter drop. Reved on and on about my great tan. Matched bar arm to mine. Shook her pale blonde head, telling whoever would listen on and on about Pauli’s tan, like that instead of burning, and did I know lucky I was to be able to get such a tan like that? I grew tired and then shakily furious, having enough of whatever it was.

“How come you never make so much over my natural tan most days, Dottie Daws: how come?”

There was a moment of silence at the table, punctuated only by Muriel’s darkly appreciative chuckle, and then we moved on to something else.

Tuss Randolph

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BY AUDRE LORDE
mercifully, I was still looking inside. I never forgot it.

In the gay bars, I hunged for other Black women without the need ever taking shape on my lips. For four hundred years in this country, Black women have been bought to view each other with deep suspicion. It was no different in the gay world.

Most Black lesbians were closeted, correctly recognizing the Black community’s lack of interest in our position, as well as the many more immediate threats to our survival as Black people in a racist society. It was hard enough to be Black, to be Black and female, to be Black, female, and gay. To be Black, female, gay, and out of the closet, even to the extent of dancing in the Bagatelle, was considered by many Black lesbians to be simply suicidal. And if you were fool enough to do it, you’d better come on so tough that nobody messed with you. I often felt put down by their sophistication, their clothes, their manners, their cars, and their femmness.

The Black women I usually saw around the Bag were into heavy roles, and it frightened me. This was partly the fear of my own Blackness mirrored, and partly the realities of the masquerade. Those women felt to me like parts of my own sexual self I had not yet come to terms with. They seemed tough in a way I felt I could never be. Even if they were not, their self-preserving instincts warned them to appear that way. By white America’s racist distortions of beauty, Black women playing “femme” had very little chance in the Bag. There was consistent competition among butches to have the most “gorgeous femme” on their arm. And “gorgeous” was defined by a white male world’s standards.

For me, going into the Bag was like entering an anomalously no-woman’s land. I wasn’t cute or passive enough to be “femme,” and I wasn’t mean or tough enough to be “butch.” I was given a wide berth. Nonconventional people can be dangerous, even in the gay community.

With the exception of Felicia and myself, the other Black women in the Bag could be characterized by all the power symbols they could muster. Whatever else they did during the week, on Friday nights when Lion or Trip appeared, sometimes with expressively dressed women on their arms, sometimes alone, they commanded attention and admiration. They were well-heeled, superbly dressed, self-controlled high-steppers who drove convertibles, bought rounds of drinks for their friends, and generally took care of business.

But sometimes, even they couldn’t get in unless they were recognized by the bouncer.

My friends and I were the hippies of the gay-girl circuit, before the word was coined. Many of us wound up dead or demoted, and many of us were disturbed by the many fronts we had to fight upon. But when we survived, we grew up strong.

Every Black woman I ever met in the Village in those years had some part in my survival, large or small, if only as a figure in the head-count at the Bag on a Friday night.

Black lesbians in the Bagatelle faced a world only slightly less hostile than the outer world which we had to deal with every day on the outside—what world which defined us as merely nothing because we were Black and because we were Women—that world which raised our blood pressures and shaped our furies and our nightmares.

The temporary integration of war plants and the egalitarian myth of Rosie the Riveter had ended abruptly with the end of World War II and the wholesale return of the American woman to the role of little wife. So far as I could see, gay-girls were the only Black and white women who were even talking to each other in this country in the 1950s, outside of the empty rhetoric of patriotism and political movements.

Black or white, Ky-Ky, butch, or femme, the only thing we shared, often, and in varying proportions, was that we dined for existence in the name of women, and saw that as our power, rather than our problem.

All of us who survived those common years had to be a little strange. We spent so much of our young womanhood trying to define ourselves as woman-identified women before we even knew the words existed, let alone that there were ears interested in trying to hear them beyond our immediate borders. All of us who survived those common years have to be a little proud. A lot proud.Keeping ourselves together and on our own tracks, however wobbly, was like trying to play the Dinuzlu War Chant or a Beat- hoven sonata on a tin dog-whistle.

The important message seemed to be that you had to have a place. Whether or not it did justice to whatever you felt you were about, there had to be some place to react and check your flags.

In times of need and great instability, the place sometimes became more a definition than the substance of why you needed it to begin with. Sometimes the retreat became the reality. The writers who posed in cafes talking their work to death without writing two words; the lesbians, virile as men, battering women and their own womanhood with a vengeance. The bars and the coffee shops and the streets of the Village in the 1950s were full of nonconformists who were deadly afraid of going against their hard-won group, and so eventually they were broken between the group and their individual needs.

For some of us there was no one particular place, and we grabbed whatever we could from wherever we found space, comfort, quiet, a smile, nonjudgment.

Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black together was not enough. We were different.

Each of us had our own needs and pursuits, and many different alliances. Self-preservation warned some of us that we could not afford to set for one easy definition, one narrow individuation of self. At the Bag, at Hunters Point, at Dominick’s, we were part of a place of the real me bound in each place, and growing.

It was a while before we came to realize that our place was the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference. And often, we were caddies in our learning. It was years before we learned to use the strength that daily surviving can bring, years before we learned that fear does not have to incapacitate, and that we could appreciate each other on terms not necessarily our own.

The Black gay-girls in the Village gay bars if the fifties knew each other’s names, but we seldom looked into each other’s Black eyes, lest we see our ownaloneness and our own blunted power mirrored in the pursuit of darkness. Some of us died inside the gaps between the mirrors and those turned-away eyes.

"Instances of violence by the Ku Klux Klan have been on the upsurge throughout the country. In April 1980 four Black women were simply shot down, without provocation, by Klansmen in Chattanooga, Tennessee; a fifth woman was injured by flying glass. Only in February 1982 were these women awarded damages (the three Klansmen had been acquitted by an all-white jury in July 1980). According to the National Anti-Klan Network, "Since April 1980, targets of vengence, attempted bombings, standing and shootings by the Nazis, Klansmen and their mimics... Victims most often have been Black people or other people of color—but other targets include synagogue, union members and women's rights offices. During this same period, the U.S. Department of Justice consistently has refused to intervene against right-wing violence utilizing the existing civil rights and anti-Klan statutes." For more on what you can do to fight the Klan, write National Anti-Klan Network, P.O. Box 19980, Atlanta, Ga. 30310."

Photograph on left by Helen Koh. Girls in Patterson, N.J. 1950. Helen Koh, who lives in Portland, Oregon, has been taking pictures of people for the last five years.
DON'T admit to being over 20 unless you are over 58. It's hardly to be either young and hot, or a dowdy, like Neel or Nevelson. In the middle, it's finding time and space, jobs, kids, lovers, husbands, and hard sloggin', no glamour, no news.

DON'T take your art to Soho or 57th Street without Alex Katz's written introduction. Soho/57th Street doesn't dig blackface art. (They do still like "primitive" art, but don't be confused.) I think un solicited slides are reviewed so the director can continually reinforce decisions about what he or she will NOT show.

DON'T complain about being a black woman artist in the '60s. Many people, both black and white, think you were fashioned to fit the slot in a puzzle—a mere token, baby. They may also think, deep down, that your minority face is a meal ticket entailing you to some special treatment they're not getting. All minorities have this problem; you've just got to tough it out.

DON'T forget about winning recognition without breaking your bank for it. There are no "in- stant winners" in today's art world, the MacDonald Awards not inclusive. (Hope springs eternal.)

DON'T fret about things over which you have little control:

- The landlord raises your rent when you put new wiring in the studio.
- Your work overflows every available space, and even your new $400 flat fill is demolished already full.
- The show you're in next month is not insured. The show you're in gets reviewed, but the writer went to the John Simon school of criticism and your work gets singled out as too

DO take good slides every 3 months or so. Business in the art world is transacted through transparencies. Art that doesn't look good reduced to 1 x 1½ probably shouldn't be reproduced. More people may look at your ekstrems than will ever see your work for real.

DO show as often as you can— new work if possible. Discount curators from selecting work whose likes you're no longer involved with. It's hard to do, but each show should reveal something more about you, a progression.

DO exhibit with people whose work you like and in which you find similarities to your own. There's nothing intrinsically good about being a loner; finding parallels won't make you a "groupie,"

DO be supportive of all your artist friends. Your peers are the people who see your work as it's happening. They give you feedback and keep you going.

DO extend yourself:

- Let the Studio Museum know you're alive.
- Let the Met know you're contemporary.
- Let the Museum of Modern Art know you're permanent.
- It'll probably not happen now; a "thank you," but we need to let them know how many of us are out there.

DO be thankful and shout "Hallelujah!" for:

- Dealers, agents, and pales who work at JAM.
- Lovers, husbands, children, patrons, and friends.
- Norman Lewis—whose art, elegance and concern impressed so many of us.
- Alma Thomas—she hung on, and it was worth it.
- Nellie Mae Rowe—she keeps working, an incredible Atlanta "folk" artist.
- Norma Morgan—the engravings, the work!
- Where is she? Ramona Bearden—bright, open and deserving of all the praise.
- Samella Lewis and Val Spaulding—whose Black Art Quarterly is so beautiful.
- Hatch-Billops—the collection you must see, to know what "black art" is.
- Bob Blackburn—the artist's printmaker and shoulder for 25 years plus.
- James Van Der Zee—who has always been an artist.
- Hale Woodruff—who helped any artist, black or white.
- Lena Horne—for her transformation and hard work.
- Tina Turner—who found herself and is free.
- Toni Morrison—who invents and forms worlds.
- Duke Ellington—whose music is our soul.
- Stevie Wonder—he deserves to be taken more seriously.
- Bill Cosby—kills us on Carsons, and buys art, too.
- Ntozake Shange—who shows us how to use the system and how to survive success.
- Maya Angelou.
- Katherine Dunham.
- The "do praise" list goes on.

Some DO's and DON'Ts FOR BLACK WOMEN ARTISTS

BY EMMA AMOS

"...speaking of oneself is allowed for reasons of necessity. The first is when one could not put a stop to great injury or danger without disclosing of oneself. It was necessity which moved Antinous to speak of himself in order that he could defend himself against the perpetual disgrace of exile. Demonstrating its injustice, since no other defender had risen up." —Dante Alighieri, "The Banquet"

When I was a little girl I liked to put a feather in my hair and say to the other children in the neighborhood: "Can you imagine what we'd be doing if the Spaniards hadn't come here? Dressed or naked, we would be jumping from rock to rock, swift as arrows after a small bird, or quiet and absorbed in the perfume of fruit, we would be listening to the sound of waterfalls, ferns swaying in the mist... We wouldn't be subject to the silly idea of spending life sitting in a chair, listening to what the teacher says."

But in the neighborhood where I lived, the Sunday movies annulled my work of persuasion: the cowboy and Indian films imposed prestige of the opposite version. The Indians appeared defeated and impoverished, so who would want to be like them? Most of us came out of the theater imitating the fractured English of the Far West: "Wassa matta, ya stickemop."

In our war games, I became the leader of the girl's army, probably inspired by Wonder Woman and other ancient amazons. To conquer fear and demonstrate that we, too, could run with our eyes closed to the edge of the abyss, on a building top, was the main test. I liked the image of heroism in battle, until I began to read and discovered that I liked the image in pre-Columbian mythology, Shakespeare, and Homer better than fighting.

I became a writer and discovered that I had chosen a double symbol: the feather was both my race and my form of doing battle.

From the start I understood art and poetry as a form of transgression. I had an intention of accepting the role assigned to me: My childhood had a strong European cultural tradition, but the advice of the women sculptors saved me. Aunt Rosa, who had learned from the old Indian potters the techniques she later applied in her ceramic sculpture, my first works were an emblem or declaration. A joyful challenge nurtured them: the primal impulse to make an offering, and a conscious desire not to replicate that already existed.

As I wrote poetry, I instinctively followed my inner voice. I would notice a tension at the nape of my neck—proof of a clear, sustained listening. The density of the texts produced this way differentiated them from my other verbal constructions. I surely had at the back of my mind the images and metaphors of Guaraní literature. The spiritual and concrete eroticism of their body-song:

The divine soles of the feet,
their little round seats...
The divine palms of the hands
with their flowering branches.

And the incorporation of this vision into their laws: "Whoever, out of lack of love for his neighbor's beautiful body, sets fire to their house shall suffer the same punishment. Only this way will there be justice."

Poetry, as the essential life-transforming experience, led me to search for different ways to extend its effectiveness. And the silence in poetry, which could not be expressed in words, drew me to art.

I began to paint, and painting led me to sculpture... a process that began in 1963 and culminated in 1966, when I found myself gathering debris on the beach. The stones, sticks, and feathers I found as I walked, and the sun above me, called out for a form. The sticks asked for a specific tuning, the stones for a specific placement. I had to listen and obey. The same tension, vibrating at the nape of my neck, would occur as I listened. The paths of the mind I explored, looking for the precise positioning, led me to an ancient silence, waiting to be heard.

These fragile constructions on the beach, which high tide would carry away, were the symbols of an inner rit." In 1966 I called this work "arte precario," from its propensity to disappear. Years later I discovered that precario comes from the Latin precis, prayer, and from precursus, what is obtained through prayer.

I understood this work as a way of remembering, of recovering a language; the shaman is the one who remembers his other lives.

All along, the obverse of this silent work was my collective experience with TRIBU NO (the NO tribal), a group of artists and writers who gathered around my "NO manifesto" [1967] and remained active until 1971. Together we maintained our confessions, manifestos, theatrical spectacles in Santiago. Our poetry was published in Mexico City and other Latin American and European cities, but in Chile it was neither acknowledged by literary critics nor anthropologists.

My Autumn installation, a room full of tree leaves piled three feet deep, and the pages of my "Autumn Journal" were presented at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago in 1971. The installation's cosmic metaphor established a specific intersection between sculpture and poetry... the celebration of autumn and the text's call to attend to the here-and-now evoked the seasonal cults of primordial religions. This piece was dedicated to the construction of socialism... but it was not and has never been mentioned by

CHOOSING THE FEATHER
BY CECILIA VICUÑA
TRANSLATED BY LORRAINE O'GRADY

Cecilia Vicuña is a poet and artist from Santiago, Chile. Living in NYC. She has shown her art in NYC. Europe, and Latin America.
In 1971 I signed a contract with the University Press of Valparaiso for my poetry book Sobor a m.$ It was never fulfilled.

It took me years to understand the silencing of these works. Autumn and the precious sculpture had been pioneer events. (Experimental art forms began in Chile much later. In 1971 the scene was dominated by political art—"political" in content, but formally derivative.) And my poetry was not like anyone else’s, so who could notice it?

I left Chile for London in 1973, to do post-graduate work, and was caught there by the military coup in 1973. There was no time for thinking about the suppression of art when the anti-fascist movement demanded an active concern with the human and political problems of the day. Eventually reflection on the failure to secure the democratic process began and I questioned the effectiveness of my previous work. As a result I adopted the prevailing view that our struggle had room only for the most immediate calls to rebel. I forgot the double symbol I had chosen: the poetry of self-discovery I had produced until then.

I returned to Latin America in 1975—not to Chile, but to Colombia. Encountering the mountains of Bogotá, the smell of the land, the color and bones of the people, made me feel again my Indian ancestry. But the feeling did not become awareness until the Guambiano tribal cooperative invited me to Gauss to give an art workshop. Being with them taught me that the Latin American struggle for independence cannot be fought exclusively with European ideologies, which are derived from the same ethnocentric world view that suppressed the Indian cultures.

The search for liberating thought would have to include the spiritual vision of the American Indians, just as it has already acknowledged the contribution of revolutionary Christianity.

One day, the leader of the cooperative asked me: "What tribe are you from?" A shiver ran down my spine. I don’t think I ever felt so proud. Suddenly my mestizo blood took sides, as clearly as it had when I was a little girl. I was an Indian, even if I had lost my tribe generations ago.

For me, being an "Indian" means to listen, to let the slow, hidden presence within raise its voice above my European education. This is the business of poetry.

I remembered what Guaraní literature had meant to me: poetry for them had the power to heal, to communicate with the divine.

In their dreams they obtain their most sacred songs, the most powerful, those that benefit their fellow men. Their poetic images were not simply beautiful arrangements of words, they were the complete and truthful image of their reality, and they had to be taken "literally," that is to say, poetically.

But who knows now what it means to think poetically?

I had known from the beginning that Western civilization had done away with poetry as a necessity of life, that poetic thinking was a transgression, that the poet had to struggle to be heard, because poetry had been divorced from thinking creativity. But I had had to forget, in order to remember.

Finally I understood the suppression of my art and poetry in the contest of a much larger phenomenon. I concluded that its criticism is heroicism, or heroism if the erotic), apparently so shocking to the machismo and Catholic squeamishness of the publishers, had obliterated the deeper vein of my work its link with our Ancient American poetic tradition.

Latin American intellectuals, for the most part ignore this tradition, considering pre-Columbian poetry as an aspect of anthropology. And this blatant ethnocentrism is enforced with all the more strength because our dependent, colonial societies are perpetually trying to demonstrate their Westernness.

The poet Humberto Díaz Casañeva has noted that no anthology of Chilean poetry includes either Mapuche ceremonial poetry, chants and prayers, or their battle harangue.

Only then will we be able to allow a metamorphosed poetic thinking to arise from our mestizos America, and thus call ourselves as independent people.

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5. The great exception is Gisir Wélan, and there are other ones: José Martí Arque- dís, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Ernesto Cardenal, Jorge Zalama, and Juan Rulfo.
GROWING UP NEGRO, SOON TO BE BLACK
BY SYLVIA WITTIS VITALE

It happens all the time. For me as well as other Black people, some racist instances are every day, every week, no big deal, the norm, what the hell did you expect, so what, who cares. So what occurs is that I get used to it.

For the most part, I, as a Black person, have experienced so much overt and covert racism that it is hard to focus on in one specific area. When my white acquaintances tell me of instances in their lives that have made them feel uncomfortable because they were in "minority" settings, I find it hard to feel anything for them. Yet these instances stand out in their minds.

I was raised during the Negro era and gradually graduated to the Black era. My mother was raised during the colored-Negro era. My grandmother was raised during the colored or, as they said, "culled" era. These are very distinct times in my development. I did not grow up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as a girl proud of her race. All I knew was what was on television, radio, what I learned from school, church, family and peers. I knew that my race came from Africa, but that was nothing to be proud of in the 1950s. How could I be proud when Taronz, the white man, was always Taronz, the right man? I felt proud of Nat King Cole, Sammy Davis Jr., Harry Belafonte, Marlon Anderson, Richard Carrod, Johnny Mathis, Pearl Bailey, the Harlem Globetrotters, and a few others. But I only got to see those people when they were on the Ed Sullivan Show or the Nat King Cole Show. My white teachers led me to believe that this was all there was. As a people we did not do anything other than sing, dance, entertain, do sports, get in trouble, go to jail, drink and be on relief, a.k.a. welfare.

I can remember being the only Black girl in class when the teacher showed us an anthropological film on--where else but--Africa. It made me mad to be Negro. Why did we have to look like that? Why were we always depicted as savages in skimpy cloth? This class laughed and said things like, "Oh, she talks funny." One tribe had pictures in their lips, another pictures from elephants. I felt so low, so bad that day. I was embarrassed and ashamed.

I was about 12 years old when I moved to New York. I blossomed into a singer and actor. It was a great way for me to break out of my shell, meet people, be accepted for my talents. I'll never forget my first year in the All City High School Chorus try-outs. I had been called back for my second week of auditions. The altos were sitting in "porture" position to sing. I started a conversation with a white girl about how nervous I was. She said to me, "What are you?" I didn't know what she meant so I said, "First alto." She looked at me and said, "You need to lose weight. Background." What a joke! I was not dark enough for it to be obvious so I just said, "Negro." "You talk real nice, you don't sound like a Negro." I bursted out in this big beautiful smile. I was so happy that I did not sound like a Negro. She made my day.

In 1967 I joined a group called Hector Rivers and the Latin Renaissance. We had just cut an album and I had time off from rehearsals. One of my best friends, Author, asked me to go down South with her and her family for a visit. I smiled at the invitation but behind the smile was fear. The South, oh no, they'll kill me! I was full of horror stories about what was done to my people in the South by white folks that it took all of my convincing to ease my fears. I was told that at least in the South you knew who did not like you but in the North they'll put you on the back with one hand and stab you with the other. I was convinced that the South had changed and that people got along better. Anyway, the "colored only/white only" signs were taken down.

My friend's family and I went to North Carolina to a dinky town called Clocktowney. We went: out to eat one night at this restaurant that advertised that the food was so good that it tasted like Mom made it. By the stories we got when I Black people walked into this small town restaurant, you'd think that we had done something wrong. We ordered our food and waited. And waited. And waited. I got scared and started thinking about what they must be doing to my food. I got images of the pronging glass and other junk to make me sick. When the food did come, I didn't eat it. I did not trust these white folks. They were nice. My only frame of reference for whites with southern accents was the Ku Klux Klan. It was like by day they were normal, by night they were sheep. My family is mostly from the South and although I have known of southern accents I could deal with a Black southern accent. Not a white one. Sometimes I still have problems with it.

Since I spent a great deal of my time singing throughout New York for various dignitaries and public officials, my racial horizons broadened. I figured that since I had to hang around my race prejudices that white folks were doing the same thing. So in 1969 I enrolled in Kingsborough Community College in Manhattan Beach. On my way to school one day I met a middle-aged white woman on the train platform. She asked me what I was doing in the neighborhood, I told her I went to Kingsborough. She looked relieved. I found out later that most Black people in the area worked there either cleaning houses, in restaurants, or as other workers. I was too young looking for the above. She asked me what I was studying. I really had not made up my mind yet and I was torn between majesteering in music or psychology. So I said I was a music major. She smiled and said, "Oh that's nice. Your people sing and dance so well." I didn't smile. I went to school and made a decision to major in psychology. I sang in a chorus and even won the music award but I refused to major in it. That's when I realized the difference between the North and South. The South may have "for colored only" signs but the North has "for colored only" made. In fact every time a white person told me negative things. I excelled it spite of it.

My first Black history course was taught by a white woman. She's the one who really changed the course of my life when she told me I was illiterate. After my first B in English, I aimed for and received A's throughout my college career. I could not wait to find this teacher one year later to show her that I now had become an English tutor. My quest to please her, to have her accept me and take back those words. I worked my ass off. I never remembered going to her office on several occasions to talk to her. She asked me how I came. I never gave her eye contact. I didn't know. I never gave anybody eye contact. During the course of her class I learned about how eye contact could mean death to slaves.

In slavery, Blacks taught their children how to act and how not to act around white folks. Black people were lynched, beaten, and severely punished for merely looking a white person in the eye. Eye contact was too close to equality, sharing personal space and meaningful communication. These lessons may have been painful sometimes in terms of discipline, but it kept many Black folks alive. I never learned this directly from my parents, but they probably did not either. I was told to put myooky, and never gave her eye contact. I didn't know. I never gave anybody eye contact. During the course of her class I learned about how eye contact could mean death to slaves.

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trying to figure out what feminism was and why so few Black women were in it. The following week Queens College was back to normal. Classes as usual. All of a sudden I missed the high I was on. A white woman, whom I met during the festival, saw me in the student lounge and came over to talk to me. She told me about this meeting that was coming up at the old NOW headquarters in Manhattan for Black women in the Women’s Movement. She couldn’t go because she was white and her Black lover did not want to go. So I thanked her for the information.

I showed up at this meeting. I was in a room full of approximately 30 Black women. This was the first time I had seen so many sisters together talking about feminism. Some faces I recognized from Queens College. I felt so good. People like Reenard Magora Kennedy, Michelle Wallace, Lore Sharpe, and Faith Ringgold were there. Faith seemed to be experiencing “consciousness raising.” I could dig it. I felt it. We knew we had to meet again. And we did. Again and again and again until we formed the National Black Feminist Organization. We held a press conference and our story was carried in the New York Times. Florence Kennedy, Eleanor Holmes Norton, and Shirley Chisholm were just a few who wished us well and gave substantive support.

In the meantime some of my white feminist friends began to have problems with our organization. They somehow thought that we were dividing and therefore weakening the movement. They could not see the need for Black women to gather and focus in on issues that specifically spoke to our needs. I said then and I still maintain that this autonomy is necessary. My analogy is simple: During the 60s Black folks had to go behind closed doors to redefine ourselves. We yelled, we screamed, we disagreed, but when we finished, we told the world. “We are BLACK! NOT NEGRO, not COLORED.” We insisted on it and we succeeded. The tactics we used ended up being the model of operation for all liberation groups to follow. Similarly, women had to go behind closed doors to scream, disagree, argue until we decided who we were. We emerged as WOMEN, not GIRLS, not CHICKS, not BITCHES, not LADIES. It was accepted. We defined ourselves with strength.

Somehow both of these groups who fought so hard to define themselves could not see the validity of Black women uniting to work on our issues. Black men and some Black women were led to believe, via Black Nationalist philosophy, that when Black people were liberated, all benefited. Not true. Thanks to non-Blacks like Daniel P. Moynihan, who wrote “The Moynihan Report,” the focus was on finding jobs for Black men. The theory was that if the Black man had a job he could therefore take his rightful place as head of the household. He would marry Black and take care of his family. I even heard discussions from Black women about how if they were in a situation where the job opportunity came between them and the Black man, they would yield to the Black man. Although Black women worked just as hard as Black men in all of our liberation struggles, sexism was still a major problem. So when some Black women embraced the Women’s Movement, somehow we felt that our common struggles were paramount. White feminists wondered where all the Black women were. One white feminist even told me that the Women’s Movement needed Black women. That we were strong and good leaders. But some Black women soon realized that our issues went far beyond their issues. Black women could not afford to sepa-
...
LOOKING BACKWARD IN ORDER TO LOOK FORWARD

Memories of Childhood

By May Stevens

Quincy, Mass. 10 miles south of Boston. 1930. In elementary school: Scots, mostly, or Anglo-Saxons and Nordics. Lovejoy, Mackenzie, Scrimshaw, Rogers, Robertson, Gordon. My friend Frances Fitzgerald was Catholic as my mother had been before she married. I was safely Congregational and Scots-English with the slight stain of my mother's Irishness. My father despised the culture of poverty. Catholicism, sacrifice and forbearance she brought with her from Canadian mill town.

Selma Brick and Faheem Hanna. Both dark as Italians, but less open, available, confident. The hakan community in my town was larger than any other minority. And though they were Catholic, they weren't Jewish or Muslim. Catholic was a known aberration. Selma was the only Jew in school. Thick black hair, huge grave eyes, face shaped like a mandala, she was invariably serious. We often ended up together receiving honors. A teacher's praise and students' envy. I longed to extract from her the admission that the story of the Nativity was beautiful even if it wasn't true. I didn't know if it was true but I knew it was beautiful and I loved it. I was afraid to ask her, afraid of insulting her. I did not know that while my culture disliked religious argument hers encouraged it.

Selma was a cherished only child but Faheem had brothers, sisters, cousins. They were part of a small Syrian colony, some of whom ran a bakery, sold good Syrian bread. I remember Faheem and his sister as not good in school; big, clumsy, slow. I think my mother too, feeling far from the place where she belonged, must have seemed, even become, clumsy and slow, out of her element.

On my street, on my block on all its sides, and on all the surrounding blocks; on the nearby beach where I spent nearly every summer day; in all my six years in elementary school, there were never any black people. Racism was something that went on in the South.

The geography lesson Miss Marjorie Bassett wasn't pretty but she was well-liked. I remember softly-waved black hair and a pink satin blouse, very lush for a fourth grade teacher in a red brick building standing alone and treeless in the gravelly schoolyard. The sun cast her profile, one lens of her glasses and her arrogant nose, distorted and dramatic, on the blackboard on which she had drawn a map of Mesopotamia, Land Between Two Rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates; Cradle of Civilization; the Fertile Crescent; probably site of the Garden of Eden. I was enchanted. I never dreamed that the beings in the land so full of history looked more like Selma and Faheem than me. I'm sure I thought without thinking they had red hair, blue eyes and freckles like my father's family or white skin and silky black hair like Miss Bassett's. But odd features like Selma's or undistinguished ones like Faheem's?

When I was small and behaved in a wild or "outlandish" fashion, my mother sometimes called me an A-rab, her term for nonhuman. Did I know Faheem was an Arab?

At home my father talked against Jews, blacks, Italians and Catholics in general. He had his own internal chart: English, Scots, Scandinavians, Germans, Irish, French, Italians, Jews/Syrians, Blacks.

He never said these things publicly, nor did he act on them. He had the Yankee character of reticence, common sense, responsibility, moderation. He hated too much: too much religion, passion, expression. He often told me I guessed.

He never said these things publicly, nor did he act on them—to my knowledge. But he said them over and over. To my child's ear it seemed to have something to do with drinking and laughing loudly. Doing something immoderately.

My father was raised by his older sister Addie, who kept house for her widowed father and five siblings. They both expressed pride in their Yankee heritage. Addie by reading American history and claiming she and I had the right to join the DAR twice over since we had two ancestors who had fought in the American Revolution, and by keeping the family archives and drawing in branches on the family tree. All this was done in a matter-of-fact and orderly way; it was an ordinary housekeeping task, keeping the records straight.

What in Addie appeared almost a virtue, was in my father a condemning of evil. He approved of Hitler's policies towards Jews; he said Jews were niggers with their skin turned inside out. Was it some sort of game he was playing, saying things that were mildly unhappy? Was he far from unappreciable; that I knew, he who had been motherless and was now in every way the counted worthless? What does it do to a big, lumbering, laboring man to lose a son to illness at fifteen and carry along a wife whose mind is misshapen with anger, whose will is incapable of any action but refusal?

On the through the public school system I went. Selma and I competed for and alternated first-in-class and head-of-house-roll. In high school we were a pair, little met others who did equally well. Ruth Eng was almost as smart as we were. Her family ran the one Chinese restaurant in town. Ruth wanted tables after school. She made fun of everybody and criticized non-Chinese people freely. I could not understand why she was not embarrassed, that she often joked about herself in the presence of Chinese. Here her voice was softer, more secure in the degree that I dissociated myself from Marilyn and Selma, emotionally, socially? Did I really want to know what Skeeter thought?

My mother's sister Mary, Mary's daughter Dorothy, and I (still in art school) all faced the issue of our anti-Italian feelings when we all three fell in love, at slightly different periods, with men by the names of, respectively, Tardo, Puglisi, and Fabrizio. Only the names presented problems. I used to imagine myself married to Roberts and breaking into tears when asked my last name. I did not marry him because I loved only his melting Italianate good looks, but Mary and Dorothy took on these strong-flavored names and were installed in the middle of abundant and loving families. Was it Italian paint-ings (Raphael) and Greek marble statues (Athena, Hermes) that legitimized these features, made them seem less foreign?

Art school changed as returning GIs brought a new sense of reality into which had been essentially an all-female, protected environment. About to graduate as the war ended, we became aware of the dangers that lay out- side. I dreamed I heard people crying in a foreign language; I wrote a poem about Hitler and the camps, about kindness and individual evil. I had no tools for analysis, but a desire to know, a desperate need to understand. The dream prefurred my meeting R. in New York; the murder of his family by Fascists in the Lithuanian countryside—those, I felt, were the crisis I heard. Here was someone—a few who had fought with the American army in Europe. anti-csistant, socialist—who could teach me what I needed to know. I fell in love. Missing pieces were falling into place.
A R D

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R. and I married and went to Paris to study painting. Paris in 1948 was in post-war turmoil. Art was dominated by Picassos. Leger, and Fouqueton, around whom political and cultural controversies swirled. Picasso did a peace dove. Leger construction workers full of optimism, and Fouqueton miners with broken bodies and missing limbs. Anti-Americanism ran high. A painter I met told me I was too sympathetic and human to be an American.

It was the era of SHAPE and the Marshall Plan abroad and McCarthyism at home. Graffiti on pavements under our feet said AMERICANS GO HOME. We were actually afloat to return to our country. Abroad I felt patriotism for the first time. Abroad I saw. The desire to begin with people I had grown up among, to bear my own language in the street, to have a fullness in my speech that comes only from stored-up images and remembered relationships. Paris was not beautiful to me until I had met someone on that street corner, had lunch in that cafe, and it developed a human I could touch.

After three years we returned to newspaper photographs and television films of buses burning in Alabama and Civil Rights workers being hosed and beaten in southern towns and cities. The novelistic nature of the struggle spoke to my New England upbringing. I lived out that drama daily and turned the media documentation into a series of paintings and collages I called Freedom Riders. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote an introduction to the catalog (a sign of white-kin privilege since I had access to him through largely white artists' groups). I wanted to donate a percentage of sales to CORE but the gallery said no. Nothing sold until later when the AFL-CIO circulated the exhibition to its New York and Washington, D.C. headquarters. Then someone bought a little painting on which I had written edge-to-edge:

**WE SHALL OVERCOME**

People who saw these works over my Anglo-Saxon name thought I must be black. John Casaday of the New York Times thought they were not violent enough. Others thought paintings and politics shouldn't be mixed. I almost despised of being understood.

If I had been able to leave my five-day-a-week teaching job and my small
son and go south, I would have painted different paintings. (Or perhaps not
painted at all. How many paintings came out of that struggle, painted by
people who wore there's Northern white that I was romanticized distant
battles. But I painted with a feeling of great excitement, risking my art in an
attempt to move others as I had been moved. I would move out of the guilty
past into a fighting present.

These collages, drawings, and paintings approached the social issue I
cared most deeply about. The personal aspect was my father's racism and the
racism I had breathed in growing up where and when I did. Since my
father's ethnic centricism had many faces, I saw them as part of the same
pattern in spite of their differences and the extremity and singularity of
black history in America.

In my private emotional journal through this swamp, I
turned to a Jew and a radical and married him turned against my Yankee racist father
publicly painted him as a big
home turned toward my Catholic mother
celebrated her in poems and painted her as companion
to Rosa Luxembourg
turned to Rosa Luxembourg, Jew, radical, as spiritual mother
bore a half-Jewish son in Europe when the smoke from the Owens
smoke in the air
painted the Freedom Riders of the Civil Rights Movement
painted myself in the place of Courbet's mast maressus/leader/master
surrounded by art world friends and supporters
painted contemporary women artists as they enter a new role in
the history of art

I think I've come to a place where it's necessary to say: No simple oppres-
sion justifies the practice of, or indifference to, or ignorance of, any other.
No doubt there is need for different emphases at different moments and we
each fight best our own particular victimization. But surely nobody believes
any more we can take them in some sort of sequence, assigning values-
whose pain hurts more, whose sense of rejection is more profound.
Strangely, my racist father taught me to hate racism just as his oppression
of my silent, sick, lapsed Catholic mother taught that oppressions come in
clusters. Somehow I must look at what he did and what he became in doing it,
without throwing up on the wall of the cave another phantom that carri-
catures the world.

May Stevens has used political themes in her art since the mid-60s, when she ex-
hibited Freedom Riders.

Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Supreme Headquarters Allied Expedi-
tionary Forces (SHAPE), and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) are acknowledged.

*In 1958 E.S. Bogardus published a social distance scale which spelled out this com-
mum stylization of prejudice, with only minor variations from my father's. In a lovely
absurdist touch one investigator, E.L. Hartley, included in the groups to be rated
three groups which he simply made up: Danzians, Penmans, and Waldonians. People
who tended to hold groups other than their own at a considerable distance placed
these three non-existent groups far on their scale. I wish to thank Nilus De For-
drawing my attention to the following texts: E.S. Bogardus, "Changes in Social
62; E.L. Hartley, Problems in Prejudice (New York: King Crown Press, 1946); Mu-
zeil Sheriff and Carolyn W. Sheriff, Groups in Harmony and Tension (New York:
RACE? SEX? CLASS? PREJUDICE IN THE

1190 New York is the largest district of the national hospital and health care union (AFL-CIO), with a membership primarily Black, Hispanic and female. Among the cultural projects sponsored by 1190’s Bread and Roses program is a musical comedy called “Take Care, Take Care,” now touring hospitals across the U.S. to an enthusiastic reception. Like its predecessor (“Take Care”), this revue is unique in that the materials for its songs and skits were gathered from a series of oral-history workshops within the union. The result, written by Lewis Cole, Onnie Davis, Marcia Grant and Alan Marken, is real labor theatre, emerging from daily workplace experience of the rank and file. The excerpts below were edited from transcripts of the sessions on June 3 and June 9, 1981, led by Cole and coordinated by Tony吉利. The participants were housekeepers, social workers, technicians, nurses, maintenance anc dietary workers: Bertha Allen, Frankie Ammons, Eugene Benjamin, Carleton Coller, Imogene Evans, Gwen Gittens, Linda Halliday, Juanita Hamilton, Curnen Jackson, Georgianna Jones, Norris Kipper, Virginia Knight, Wondo Long, Lysethe Mate, Anna Rodriguez, Tony True and Allen Walker. (—L.R.L.)

People may talk down about 1190, saying, “You don’t want to be in the same union as so-and-so; you don’t want to be together with her, because of color.” This is the garbage, the way they divide us. “You’ll be more high class,” they tell our members, that they’d be stepping down to join us. This is their union, they said, and the union lost out.

I want to tell people you’re not going to turn Black; you’re not going to change.

Well, what about the fact that they’re white and they’re going to be joining a union which is predominantly Black and Puerto Rican?

And a lot of white too.

It is a predominantly Black and Latin union.

People always think that this is a Black union because the majority of the workers haven’t really seen the full majority of the union members. I’ve had the privilege of going to the convention twice, where you get people from Kentucky, Virginia, Alabama—all white. What really made me very happy was that after the last convention we had a dinner first and then we white people had a jamboree on their expense for everybody. And we were all jumping together, holding hands together.

You associate words like “poor,” “worker,” “illegitimate” with. In this country alone there are definitely more poor whites than poor Blacks because there’s more whites in this country. This is a union of working-class people. It’s just that simple.

It seems that for a lot of white people that in itself is a challenging situation because they’re used to being in organizations which whites are the majority and suddenly, like in a chapter, they’re a minority.

I find in organizing that money has no color. I started the ball rolling with the secretaries. Up until 1978 we only had the service people and we had the guild; we didn’t have the RNs and we didn’t have the secretaries. By 1978 I happened to be talking to a secretary; there I came to find her salary was $150 a week. I said to her, “A maid makes more than that.” She goes to her office and starts talking to her people. And the next day she comes back to me, she says, “Can I go into the union?” I said, “Be my guest.”

There’s discrimination not only in terms of color but also in terms of job. One position being better than another position. One class being better than another class.

Some of the nurses are very prejudiced. They think because they wear a white dress, you are nothing if you wear a blue dress. A couple of days ago there was a problem with a patient. I showed it to a nurse and she didn’t do nothing about the whole mess on the floor. So I said to her, “Why don’t you get some soap and clean up some of that stuff?” and she said, “I have to do that? Why don’t you do it?” I said, “No, that’s your department.” She had to do it. I just walk away and leave her. And she did it.

Sometimes when we hear the word “prejudice,” the first thing that pops into our minds is Black and white. But it’s not always Black and white. My boss, he wouldn’t care if you’re pink, brown, blue. He’s just prejudiced. He’s sick. Prejudice is a sickness. Like cancer. You might contract cancer in one part of the body but eventually it spreads out over the whole body.

In the health care field and in the hospital we have all nationalities, all colors, and we all work together for a common purpose; we all get along beautifully. Between management and your employees, there’s the prejudice. Like you say, I don’t think it makes any difference what color you are. If you’re union, they don’t want any part of you.

Part of this anti-union thing is everyone becomes supervisor. It becomes part of you. You got to make those workers produce, and you will get somebody on your back to make these workers produce. The process divides us. Racism, or any other kind of prejudice. You had college, whatever, that divides us. And that’s what they want to do. You will see that all those management guidelines will bring in these things. They have these labor consultants that they hire, guys who come in with the most prejudices, in terms of nationality, in terms of color, because they really say what the boss wants them to say.

I heard my boss say (he didn’t know I was there), “I want you to whip those guys into line. Come down on them. Let ‘em have it. Whip those guys.” It is a racial prejudice thing, because over me I have managers, right? They don’t want me as a supervisor in a department, so they will give my department more work to do than the department next to me which is doing the same job. I say it’s color. I’m Black and she’s white, and she has more people in her department than I have in mine. Why should they give my department the larger load?

If you’re pushing to get more work out, the opposition is the worker, who says, “I just want to work like a human being. I don’t want to be rushed.” After a while you develop an attitude. It’s like a guy becomes a cop. He may be a nice guy, but after going to a couple of riots and dealing with some of these people out there, he develops a hardness. And it’s tough. And it’s the same with supervision. We want to get him to do more work and he don’t want to do it and he gives me a hard time. I’m going to say he’s a creep.

I think she’s right. As far as prejudice between Black and white in our clerical. Before they re-unimized, there was no tense colored or minority in the whole clerical division in that hospital. And we were having problems bringing them in every time there’s a job open. We had a battle royal for everyone we brought in.

Once there was a nurse and she was so prejudiced I was shocked. That attitude of prejudice towards the housekeeper. Everybody tried to get rid of her. If you’re Black and you come in there to ask her about a patient, she goes: “You see me doing something, can’t you read?” etc. If a white person comes in, it’s: “Can I help you, ma’am?”

We have a cafeteria, and this cafeteria is for everybody—nurses, housekeepers. When everybody’s off, it says “closed.” A few minutes later, when the nurses come marching down from maternity, you see the sign removed. They have to bar it up, so that we nurses’ aids, workers, we won’t sit there. This is a cafeteria for everybody.

Uniformed workers and non-uniformed workers. Uniformed workers tend to have a harder way sometimes. This tends to cause a lot of friction. It gets into a class thing.

Going into a hospital division where we did have a race problem. They had a very large operation in Fleming Hospital. In all the years that it was
want to be an attitude. Say be a nice introverts and dealre, he deve- it’s the same get him to do then he gives a creeps.

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we did have the operation so that it was open, there was not one Black there who worked as an aide. When I became the delegate we had won seniority in our contract and there were nursing aides who worked there long years and wanted to come downstate to central. Our super- vision, he would not move them. They were doing a good job in the contract and they fought it. A white person, well, she wanted to come down. It was really a fight, even after we had seniority. So there you meet prejudice with a department that wants to keep the department white. It’s the other way too sometimes.

What are they afraid of? What are they afraid is going to happen if these Black and Hispanic peo- ple get treated equally? They’re afraid of unity. At our hospital, where the working people are concerned, the majority, like secretaries and RNs are solidly white. In the service unit we’re majority Black. And they don’t want us to have the power, because we do have it. We didn’t need the organizer to come in there. We controlled the hospital. It would be nothing for us to pull 600 people and set them right in the lobby.

No one in the administration is Black. The only person that they put in a department head or a housekeeper because they feel they have to handle a lot of Blacks and Hispanics. Otherwise all of administration is predominantly white.

You ask what they’re afraid of—having the Blacks in power. This is only my feeling. I may be wrong. They have a white majority in our administration too. They have meetings, and there are certain things they discuss. Say they want to cut the bud- get. And they sit around and make plans of how to work around cutting the staff. So they will make some dirty schemes: Well, look, force them to do some things that will get them fired, won’t have to give them unemployment. Now if they had a Black there or a Spanish man there, he’s not going to sit down and listen to that kind of thing and go along with it with his workers. Especially Spanish people. They stick together like glue. They’re liable to take those workers in a corner and say, "Look, I want you to be careful. Don’t spill, don’t litter, don’t shit. There’s a possibility you’ll get fired." I feel that management wouldn’t want those people up there to forward us, "cause they couldn’t have a chance to get rid of us.

Most hospitals act like they are run by the direc- tors, they would say the the director’s go. And they’re pressured. They just don’t deal with Blacks. They hire you to do that dirty work.

What happens to all this equal rights legislation? That it is the educational system, our grad- ing and upgrading system. They have upgraded everything now.

What does upgrading mean?

For instance, when you went into housekeeping, you didn’t use to have to know how to run a wash- ing machine, you didn’t have to say that you know how to mop a floor. Now you must have experi- ence for that. Now in certain areas you must have high school education, so they’ll say, "We are paying you the training and upgrading fund, we want something for our money." So this is how they’re getting around the fact that we have a hiring hall, making them take the union people first. This person must have a qualifi- cation. If they hire someone off the street they don’t have to have it. They’re asking a porter for the high school diploma, just for moving a mop.

Was there ever a point in any of your organi- zing when you have openly discussed any kind of prejudice that occurs, where it was talked about, the attitude the nurses had toward nonprofessionals?

On the ninth floor we have a monthly stuff meeting. Our NPC—the head nurse—she always talked down to us. So we all got together at a stuff meeting and brought it out to her; she wasn’t aware that she was talking down to us. We told her, "Didn’t you ever work around Blacks before?" Then, "I never have, you have to give me a chance and try to help me along." She was up there, and we were down here, and instead of coming on the same level, she would come out with, "You do this and you better do it." and she forgot you were a human being.

Like she wouldn’t say, “please.”

No, she’d say, "Do it or you’ll get written up." We got tired of it, and mostly the union mem- bers...she would demand us to do things in a way, and we told her there’s ways to go about ask- ing, you don’t come out and just demand.

When she said that thing of not being used to working with Blacks, did she also work that way with white workers who were at the same level as you?

No, she never did.

So how did they respond when she said she’s not used to working Blacks?

They were surprised, everybody was shocked. She said she came from a little hospital and there was all white people in Canarsie, etc., the whole thing. She still acts that way. She’s improved a little bit, but you can see that’s still there.

What would you say is in the main kind of prejudice that you find working in the hospital? Is it Black/ white, age, male/female, status?

Male/female. I find that the female doctors, they’re constantly under fire. And all of them constantly have to prove themselves, ‘cause they’re in the minority. And they constantly have to struggle, they’re very very defensive, there’s all this sexual innuendo.

What kind of sexual innuendo?

At my hospital recently a female doctor got hit by a male doctor, physically pushed, and it hap- pened once and she reported it to everybody, then he did it again. She’s having trouble getting anyone to take this seriously. People are amused by it instead of incessed by it.

Do you think it’s because she’s a woman?

Yes. He wouldn’t take a chance with a man.

Maybe he pushed her because he likes her.

I think it’s an extension if what happens on the outside with male/female pick-up kinds of things.

We had an incident—to give you an example of just how powerful the doctors are, and how lim- ited the nurses are. I was working in the emer- gency room and this doctor came in; he crossed his legs and I saw he was wearing a gun on his leg. I said to him, "I’m not a cop, you can’t carry a gun in the hospital." He said to me, "I’m a police officer, when I am in the hospital I can carry a gun." I said to him, "I don’t understand that thing here. Go put it in your lock- er. I’m afraid to work in the room if you’re gonna have a gun." He said, "I have a right to defend myself, I can carry a gun, I don’t have a right to be killed, I’m here. I’ll protect you." So sure enough, I called the security. Can’t take that kind of responsibility, he could blow his toss off. The administrator came and said that every
American has a right to bear arms. And he let the man work with a gun. I went to work in a different portion. But believe me, if it was a nurse or an aide or a orderly or the guy in the kitchen, you don't think they'd let them wear a gun.

I've gone to the Operating Room in a lot of cases and I just want to wave something at what we've been saying. It's always been traditional almost that they abuse the nurses. And of course they say they're under strain, so forth and so on. But the language they use would make anyone blush in the street. And there's no doubt, when they have male technicians, they will be different than they are to the nurses. They respect them as men.

They wipe their hands on a towel. If I'm there, they will throw the towel on the floor. If there's a male taking care of them, they're going to put it in a liner basket.

Speaking about prejudice, I work in a unit with all kinds of kids. Now we had a Chinese patient come in, very sick with hepatitis. He was spilling blood all over the place. We found out that instead of putting it in the basin they were putting it in the garbage can right after cleaning. The patient died. A month later, the head of nursing came in: "Who was working with such and such patient? We got the report, he had the worst type of hepatitis. Who was working here?"

She bypassed me. I'm standing there. We work every day on that unit. So I said, "What's going on?"

"Oh," she says, "It don't call for you!" The idea was that those people who had worked with him had to get shots, or else they would get hepatitis. Everyone got the works with the exception of the two Black people that were working there. So when she was ready to leave, I said, "Excuse me. Miss. What the hell happened to me that I was on the ward and I don't need help?" She said, "Now don't get excited." I said, "Why? Is my skin the kind of skin that won't pick up anything?"

I've worked in recovery. Patients will say to me, "Oh, I can't believe I see a white nurse. I have all these chocolate people. And all the doctors are dark. Everybody in the hospital is dark."

I have a joke for you. This is both a joke and a true story. A patient is sick. The nurse there says, "Good morning. I'm going to give you a sponge bath.

"Who, you?" says, "Yes." Patient says, "You ain't gonna touch me!" Nurse said, "Why?" She said, "Because no Black person gonna give me a bath. You know to get a white man to come here. The girl with the bath, she's so embarrassed. I came in behind. We use black bags for the garbage, so I come, shaking the bag. Patient says, "You gonna put that?"

I said, "In the garbage bag." She said, "I don't know no black bag in my garbage bag!"

Sounds like a nut to me.

No, she was not. I wouldn't take that black bag out. The supervisor had to come with one of those small white plastic bags and put it in that garbage. Tell me if that's racist.

Some racially prejudiced patients like having a Black aide. They'll say, "That nice colored girl came in."

Reminds them of the past. They had that little taste of heaven, make them pancakes.

One wanted me to come clean up her house. She said, "I need a girl like you." I said, "Do you think you could pay my price?"

"Oh yeah, my husband'll pay it."

Some of our ladies were upstairs serving the food, in microwave ovens, and they were having a fire drill. So the starching occurred not, he walked in and said, "Get this damn thing out of here, we're having a fire drill." He pushed it out of the way, and they had this oozing case is this, and he went into the office, and as we walked in, he said, "Look, this is what you get for girls who are 45-46 years old. That's down, girls."

I told him, "I think that's the problem; you forget that these are grown ladies, and I expect that you should treat them accordingly." He said, "Being that I'm so much older than they are, they're girls to me." Like I'm supposed to stop this shit up. I said, "Cool, that's the way you feel, but they're not girls. I'm not into the game part of it. I do a lot of laughing and joking, that's a side of me, but when it comes down to, what do you call it, nitty-gritty time? When it comes time to get down on it, I can get down just as hard as anyone else.

It's kind of hard for me to sit here and talk about prejudice because it's something that I have eaten my entire life. That I've had to live with, that I've seen. I remember going to Cortland State, 250 miles, people looking at me like I'm a goddamned zomble. Ah, who is that? Because I was Black. It's hard to talk about prejudice when you know that you still have to slow down at all. If anything's sped up. It's hard to talk about prejudice when you see children, Black children, who have problems, real problems when they go to school, and you see a timid white woman walks into the class. The main thing is that she wants to survive so she can go home, so her thing is survival behavior. She spends so much time with survival, so much time trying to get everybody to behave, that teaching is a luxury. And then at the same time, this little boy grows up to be an adult, and can't get a job, has to sweep streets and things like that. And people still play along with that. There's a lot of prejudice in the hospitals: when you're dealing with the hospital workers and the guild workers, there's prejudice in that. There's a lot of prejudice when you're talking about a education.

When you talk about rank and file, and status. As you go up the ladder, the more prejudiced you become. Now we can talk about Black and white prejudice which is always going to be there. You can sit back and look at it right now. How come as a Black person, I sit back and say well, hey, Black people in this country were worked for. The Indians, they were sitting here waiting for the Jews, and some of you might have come at the same time. And there was never a prejudice in the story of the American Indian. No one even talks about that. They're just there. But when you show the cowboy honkies riding down. He's talking about the Indians are savages, right? Indians knew how to live among themselves. They were called savages.

Did you ever find a Black nurse prejudiced against her own kind?

There's a lot of seers around, Black on the outside, white on the inside. You can even tell from the way they talk. They talk through their noses. Do you think that's the position the person's in? I'll be talking to some of the supervisors, and they'll say, "Well, you know I have to do this role." And I'll say, "What role do you really have to play? You might as well get into a hunkers show if this is the role that you have to play."

Uneducated Hispanics have the hardest time. Like interpretation, as they try to explain things. People take advantage of you. All you have is a language barrier. Like, we've got one Spanish guy who works in our department, who washes pots all the time. Like, he's required to have every other weekend off, but sometimes they bring this guy in four weekends straight. I try to explain certain things to him, get someone else to talk to him, but then it's a matter of him feeling that he might lose his job. A lot of them don't know enough about the union to know that there are a lot of rights, they have a lot of benefits.

A lot of them can speak English. I take my time with any patient I meet. I find that the majority don't have any problem understanding me. Lots of times maybe it's that they're not comfortable, because of their English, or it's easier for them when they have somebody.

Was what you said an implication that they pretend they're not understanding? That used to be so old school.

Of course a lot of them speak English but sometimes something gets lost in the interpretation; they might want to say something else and wind up saying something completely different because of that. I think I'm Spanish and I don't agree. Came here 3 years ago from Colombia. South America. I speak English before I came here. One day I remember I had a big problem with a doctor and a patient. He wanted me to interpret this Spanish patient who didn't know one word of English and he wanted me to tell her that, she must learn English, that he could not attend to her because she did not know English. And he made me so angry and I said to him, "Why don't you go and learn Spanish?" I said, "You are on the same boat with that patient. You cannot learn Spanish, she cannot learn English." I said, "You know something, doc, I think you're rusty." And the nurse in charge, she says, "Mrs. Jackson, how dare you talk to the doctor like this!" I said, "I'm Mrs. Jackson and he's Mr. So and So."

I just want to say that all the prejudice that you find, you can find... You find men against women, you find white/black, you find West Indian Black against American Black, Jews against gentiles, gentiles against Jews, poor against rich, rich against poor.

As a matter of fact I would say it's amusing that we have gone so far we have and the lack of unity that we have, in spite of the fact that in the back of people's minds it's there. But they fight against it. I think there has been a shift there in that sense, because otherwise we wouldn't have what we got here today. But we just reflect what goes on in the outside world. It's all there just to divide us, objectively speaking. That's what it's there for, and that's what it's done.
even tell from their noses. A person's in a burlesque shoe to play this you really have to a burlesque have to play."

hardest time, explain things. But you have a Spanish guy washing pots to have every try to explain else to talk to feeling that he m don't know at there are a lot of things I take my time at the majority xing me. Lots not comfortable, easier for them that they pre-bat used to be

link but some interpretation; else and wind different before to express it. I am here 17 saris. I speak I remember I and a patient. A patient agitated and be learn English cause she did so angry and I go and learn in same basis I Spanish, she know some-ud the nurse in how dare you say. "I'm Mrs.

advice that you hospital. You white/Black met American allies against 1st poor.

amazing that id got the kind be fact that in were. But they been gains in wouldn't have we just reflect. It's all there asking. That's it does.

Lorna Simpson (with Irene and Rejendra), Untitled, 1982. Mixed media. Photo by Jerry Kearns. The text on the dress appears on the right.

BY LORNA SIMPSON

She works as a maid in a house I am visiting. We are introduced and recognize each other as strangers in a foreign land. She speaks Portuguese and Italian. I speak English. We communicate in sign language and Italian. Her employers tell me she is "like a part of the family." We have both heard that before. Her family is far away. She works hard, saves her earnings and goes back home two months out of the year. She is 19 years old. One evening she arrived late for work. I entered her room: she had scratches on her breasts and above her eye, which was swollen. She needed closeness, to be embraced, to feel protected. Her employers couldn't afford her this comfort. I wanted to hold her longer to make sure she had realized that this was not her fault. She should feel anger and wait to kill. Between our silences we knew why this had happened: our skins considered "exotic," targeted for brutal fantasies in cultures that interpret us as an orifice to be filled with nightmare. There is no one to call in case of such an emergency. But calling on ourselves. They called her into the next room to sit and watch a TV comedy to calm herself. I wanted to hold her longer.

Lorna Simpson, a photographer, is studying for her Master's degree at the University of California, San Diego.

© 1982 Lorna Simpson
BY ELENA PONIATOWSKA
TRANSLATED BY ANNE TWITTY

Teleca couldn't go to bed: "I'll be her as a ghost in the doorway." She peered over the balcony. The empty street leaped at her.

"Then she must have shut herself in the bathroom. She does it because she knows it infuriates me."

Teleca had seen her with heartfelt exasperation: "Lupé! Lupé! Lupéeeeee!"

The problem was, she couldn't think about anything else; nothing obscured her relationship with Lupé, who could now be heard shuffling around the kitchen.

"Lupé! Where were you?"

"Utterly, sir, ma'am.

"Doing what at this hour, if you don't mind?"

"Having a bath."

The black hair was dripping down the damp back, the wet feet, the stockings: very long hair, now wound up after the shampoo, had up to a certain extent become the trademark of her house."

"Didn't you tell me to have a bath every day?

The bather looked at her, and Teleca saw the red tinge of resentment in her eyes.

"Bring me my breakfast.""

"OK.""

"That's no way to answer. Say, Yes, ma'am."

"Yes, ma'am." Teleca almost shouted.

"The woman was silent. Then she seemed to make up her mind: "Yes, ma'am."

Teleca slammed the door as she left the kitchen. In her bedroom, she could do nothing but go from one place to another, pick up one thing after another, put it somewhere else. She paced back and forth next to the door like a caged lion. She couldn't wait for the moment when she could go back to the kitchen, see what Lupé was doing, look at her face, smooth as a river pelvis." She felt a curious sense of pride at those more tacit words. "I'm going to wait five minutes."

She went into the bathroom and brushed her hair furiously. The telephone rang. She thanked the lord for that phone call. Lupé was late in answering, dragged her feet toward the telephone, and suddenly came to knock at the door.

"Something for you." Teleca's heart beat faster.

"Yes, there's a telephone call for you, ma'am. Besides, you took your time before answering.

That wasn't what she wanted to say. She wanted to accuse a certain expressiveness, a certain trembling on her lips, ready to blossom and open.

Drops of water were still falling from Lupé's mane. Teleca pushed her aside.

"Who is it? Oh, Arthur! How delightful. Are you all right? Well, just so-so. I feel so nervous, I don't know why, maybe it's the domestic drama, you know those people just don't understand, however much one would like to approach them, there's just no way. At any rate I can't find one; oh yes, I know there are other topics of conversation, but you see that's my everyday experience and that's what I have to talk about. It helps calm my nerves... At the Lady Baltimore? At five? Yes, of course. What fun! Bye-bye... Thanks.

Teleca walked toward the kitchen. "Can it be that a ragged Indian can get me into this state? But... it's impossible. It's not fair! It's these loneliness that..."

"Lupé, my breakfast."

"Yes, ma'am."

At this she said, "Yes, ma'am." Lupé entered with the tea, the warm egg, the toast, the dazzling white cup, the sugar cubes in a sugarbowl just as dazzling.

"And the newspaper, isn't it here yet?"

"I'll go see."

"Have I told you to bring the paper up first thing in the morning and put it next to my place? It must be shaping up.

The servant returned with the Universal, her face a mask of itself.

"Lupé, the marmalade. Why don't you put the bitter orange marmalade on the table? The marmalade and the butter."

"Oh, a month ago you told me not to because you didn't want to get fat."

"But I'm not on a diet anymore."

"OK."

"Not, OK! How many times have I told you to say, 'Yes, ma'am!' "

Elena Poniatowska, born in 1938, was the author of many books, including "El poeta de los inválidos," about the 1989 student massacre in Mexico City. She is now living in Mexico. Most recently, she has written about the students in the "Ley de Lucha." Her novel "Love Story" is translated into English.

Teleca tried to concentrate on the headlines: she realized she didn't care, nothing interested her except Lupé, to know what Lupé was thinking, to follow her, stop next to her as she stood at the washbath, look at her strong round arms, her arms, two apple trees extending into leafy twigs—how proud her fingertips were, wrinkled from the water. The black young voice, juicy as her hands. Lupé must have secretly noticed the power she had over her mistress, because she frowned and cursed her lips haughtily, in a temper. When she finished breakfast, Teleca went into the kitchen.

"I'm going to take a bath."

"Lupé! Lupé! Lupéeeeee!"

"Keep your ears open for the telephone and the doorbell."

Teleca felt her nerves getting raw; she could have struck her, pulled up the sleeves of her nightgown over the Indian, Indian Indian shoulders. But she also would have liked to see her smile, her eyes, her cheeks, her pink cheeks —how newly washed brown skin glow— to hear her ask in the musical voice of earlier days, "Is everything all right, ma'am?" Everything all right, everything all right, nothing was all right. Teleca made her morning laps, pushing her mind in all directions, crossing her one-foot from the French window, up to the window where she knew Lupé will be once I leave. She preached the truth. "Lupé, I'm leaving now; remember, I'm not lurching about. I'm going down into the Gensure, as I told you yesterday."

"Yes, ma'am. That's fine; Poli will lose the silver. Have a good time, ma'am."

Once in a while she said. "Have a lovely time," and Teleca still remembered it gratefully. Lupé had stayed with her longer than any other girl. Her solitude made Teleca appreciate the shared hours, the other presence in the house. And in the past she had felt it, but when something angered her, she branded formalities to emphasize the distance. "When I leave, I'll casually tell her to take the radio into the kitchen, so she won't be bored." Teleca talked on. "But what's happening to me? I'm paying too much attention to her, as if Lupé were the only person in my life. My nerves are playing tricks on me. What must Lupé think of me? Does she like me? What a long-mouthed woman! She's a blind lump of dough!"

Just at the doorway, Teleca adjusted her hat and said with false gaiety: "Lupé? I'm leaving now. Say goodbye!"

The answer was the hum of cars in the Avenue of the Insurgents. So Teleca left, in a less friendly voice: "Lupé? I'm leaving. Have my tea ready at five, and don't leave steaks on the silverware. Remember now, the polish and a flannel cloth, no soap and a scrub-brush, like last time."

Silence amplified her order.

"Lupé? Lupé? Did you hear me?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am."

The words echoed mournfully, coming perhaps from the kitchen or the ironing board or the inside of a closet or who knows where. From the thick darkness in which Lupé moved, that squawk, that idiot that snarls creature, I don't know why, I'm worrying about a beast like that. And Teleca marched out. "It will do me good to see some people of my own sort and give up this useless effort to uplift the ones who are past saving." She walked toward the Gensure's house, her dress swirling around her legs, but at the first corner she almost turned back. "I didn't tell her to turn the radio in the kitchen," and she remembered that slow, heavy, muddy "uh-huh" and thought (with what she imagined to be a pedagogical impulse), "It will do her good. She'll miss me. Of course she'll miss me. It's awful to be alone in a house."

She imagined herself in earlier years, alone in her kitchen with no one to teach good manners to, anxiously waiting for the water to boil furiously in the tea kettle, defenseless against the attack of the bells, ready to start up a conversation with anyone, the first green widow, the new mother, the boy, yes, yes, like any alley cat; she remembered the warnings she had written for herself a convent student's angular band and had stuck up in plain sight, in the kitchen, the hall, not so much because she needed them as to keep her company: "Please close the door," "don't forget to turn off the gas," "check your keys before leaving," "the electricity bill is due the first Friday of every month," "any effort is a success in itself." And in large letters, the numbers that connected her to the outside world. Teleca was ready to scream, angrily growing on her heart. "Help! I can't breathe." Or to run as she now ran toward the Gensure's house, where she entered panting, ruffling the welcome mat that takes refuge in other places. "How are things? How are things? Look you so pretty sitting there?" The Gensure raised startled eyes to their friend's flattering. What did she mean, "pretty," when they looked like a couple of witches? Teleca immediately asked to use the telephone.

"I forget to tell Lupé something."

"We're having soufflé to start with, Teleca. Don't be long."

"How marvelous, oh how marvelous, I'm so hungry, I'll be right with
and she didn't say anything, ib, look at her is a head twister—hear her i rod the power ser lip hung in to the kitchen.

She took the receiver off the hook. A bell sounded, extended itself on the air, an unanswerer signal. How long would that lazy square talk to answer? Telata nervously dialed again. The third time was the charm.

"Lupé."

"Uh-huh.

"Haven't I told you...Oh all right, look, I want you to polish my father's polo trophy. It's been ages since you cleaned it and it looks terrible."

"The what?"

"The polo trophy."

"What?"

"Don't you understand? The polo trophy, the tall silver cup with the handle in the form of a woman...I forgot to tell you."

"The biggest cup in the living room!"

"Yes, that one. Lupé." (She almost said, "Dear Lupé," but caught herself.)

"Don't think there's enough polish."

"Why didn't you buy some?"

"You wouldn't let me."

She would have liked to go on talking with Lupé for hours, but the Guemes were calling, "Telata, Telata." How dear it was to speak to Lupé through that mouthpiece that fit her hand, without seeing her stubborn, stony, almost impervious face. Telata would often call home to give some advice, in order to make sure Lupé was there. She would keep on and on until she found her and then scold her: "Where did you go? Who told you you could go out? You can't go out and leave the house empty, like a child! That's why you're addressing an immense caravel of servants, a host of women in aprons and braids who were advancing towards her across the desert) are in this state, because you're irresponsible, deformed, stupid, because you have no ambition and no self-respect and don't even want to rise above your lethargy? She recalled that Lupé never moved a muscle in her face.

"Lupé, if Mr. Arthur calls, tell him I went to have lunch with the Guemes."

"Didn't you talk to him this morning?"

"Yes, but I forgot to tell him."

"Ah!" said Lupé surprisingly.

"Did you open the bathroom window? The towels have to be aired before it rains. You always forget."

Telata hated the Guemes for interrupting the dialogue, but she had to give in. "All right. I'll call later to see what has been happening." She heard a murmur that sounded like "uh-huh" and the click of the telephone.

"That dirty beast, she hung up on me, she didn't even give me time to say goodbye, but I'll get even, I'll call her after coffee."

The obsessed have the strange power of attracting everyone to the center of their spiral; they press harder and harder, closing tighter at each turn until the circle becomes a single point, a swirling drill. At the table Telata brought the conversation around to servants—in French, of course, so the good Josephine wouldn't understand. "Why are servants such idiots?"

"Because if they weren't they wouldn't be servants."

"It's because this is a brutish race. In France, in England, in Spain, servants are different. They know how to behave, they realize to whom they're speaking, they're responsible, they're of a different sort, but these brutes who don't...who don't even have a mail to drop dead on...aren't even grateful for the favor you're doing them."

"I think it's the sun. They're out in the sun so much they've all gotten sunstroke."

"On the Spanish Conquest."

"Oh yes, they lost everything with the Conquest, even their sense of shame."

"It's the whole race. They're definitely low on gray matter."

Telata went on talking without a break until coffee was served. It was her way of being close to Lupé, circling around her, evoking her. One of the Guemes sisters, fat and good-natured, suggested [to block the avalanche]: "Why don't we play a little bridge, right now? We can take our coffee with us."

They agreed. At five Telata cried: "I've got a date with Arthur in the Lady Baltimore at five. How awful! I'll never get there in time. If I thought, I would have put it off, since I knew I was having lunch with you."

What really bothered her was not calling Lupé. Now she couldn't. Where? Where? There was no way to leave Arthur alone at his table in the tea room.

"What a shame the chauffeur isn't here, otherwise he could drop you off, Telata."

"It doesn't matter, I just love taxi drivers."

Over tea, apropos of Telata's comments, Arthur launched into a long dissertation on the Conquest according to Berard Diaz del Castillo. That wasn't what she was after. Nobody could give her what she was looking for, nobody but Lupé. Would Arthur ever finish and go away? But Arthur, a dilettante of history, seemed ready to examine everything, down to the U.S. laws on racial segregation. Telata felt sick to her stomach. Arthur stretched out his arm toward her necklace.
“Look at that chunk of amber hanging from your chain. It’s worth ten slaves.”

“Because of the worm inside?”

“Precisely. Perhaps, on account of that worm, it’s worth fifteen slaves.”

“Oh, Arthur, let’s go.”

Delfiantly, without writing for him, Teleca got up. There was something of the rich lady about her; Teleca that disconcerted Arthur even while it attracted him. Her way of taking the stairs two at a time, her long thin legs that galloped rather than walked, her lipless body, her intimate, tea-colored eyes—hadn’t they taught her not to stare at people when she was a little girl? Her open smile, from ear to ear, that revealed wide white teeth, strong as grains of corn left out a sun and wind. Teleca winked, too. “It comes naturally,” she said when they reproved her.

“I’m going to play bridge at the Lucerne. I can drop you off in a taxi, Teleca.”

“Thanks, Arthur. You’re going to play with Novo and Villarrunta? Who’s the fourth?”

“Torres Bodet. Haven’t you read The Countershooters yet?”

“I told you I’m very nervous. I can’t concentrate.”

“If you read it, you’ll forget your nervous. Look,” said Arthur, pressing his nose against the window. “It’s night already. In Mexico, it gets dark all at once. Either there’s nothing happening at all and we’re absolutely smothered in the thickest boredom, or else we have a catastrophe and everything’s over. My God, what a country!”

“It’s your country...”

“Arthur smiled reproachfully. ‘You’re so contradictory, Teleca. This sudden patriotism doesn’t suit you. After all, you’re always talking about leaving for Spain.”’

“But meanwhile I stand up for the dark.”

“The black holes?”

Teleca didn’t answer. She felt a strange sense of solidarity with Lupe. She could kick her, but she was front of anyone else she defended passionately anything related to Indians: the earth, the forest, beans, corn, warm stones. Teleca told her never remembered to turn on the light in the entryway.”

“Arthur got out of the axi and stretched out his hand, a soft hand with very pink, fine, thin nails, like a newborn baby’s. He bowed low to kiss Teleca’s glove.

“Beautiful Teleca.”

“She’s left the street dark!”

“Arthur made his nails dance like lightning bugs.”

“Light, more light.”

“Please Arthur, try to understand. Your mother takes care of every- thing for you, you don’t understand how hard it is to deal with these people.”

“Arthur’s lips, an rosy as his fingernails, curved in an annoyed grimace. He smiled, and they grew thin to the point of cruelty. Nevertheless, in their natural state they were full, so full that they stuck out.”

Telega, do some reading. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. I want your opinion.”

Teleca abruptly stuck her key in the door. She could just glimpse Arthur striking the driver lightly on the shoulder with the handle of his cane, and the taxi drove off.

Teleca strode up the stairs. “Lupe! Lupa! Hasn’t anything happened?”

She went on up to the second floor. “Lupa!” She passed through the ironing room, the kitchen. “Who has that sweat got to her? She must be moaning in her room—Lupa! Didn’t anyone call?” She stopped at the top of the maid’s staircase. “Lape! Lupapea! Teleca never entered the room in the attic. It was one of her rules. ‘Maybe she’s in the library waxing the furniture. I doubt it, but anyway...’ She headed for it hopefully. When she opened the door, the bookcases glared, and Teleca followed the ray of light with her eyes; in the darkness they acquired the tonality of a Venusse; some of the corners seemed to float in the air. cutting it, their edges shining; the round arm of a sofa lit up in the darkness, silky and electric as the humped back of a cat. Time polishes, time melts, time shapes. “It smells shut-in. Not only is she asleep, she hasn’t been here for a long time, even though I ordered her to. What a filthy woman.” She went up the stairs again. “Lape, Lupa.”

she went flying through the rooms. “Lupa.” Again she stood at the foot of the maid’s staircase and shouted, shielding her call with both hands, “Lupa!” She had never been so slow in answering. ‘Bawdy old thing. Uppity Indian!” Finally, Teleca decided to climb the stairs. Her heels caught in the iron steps, she almost fell through. Above her she heard the wind moan- ing. There were no sheets on the washing lines. She burst into the room; it didn’t even have a lock. The smell of sweet, sweat, and confinement assailed her and made her gasp in search of air.

“Is he dead?”

“Arthur is dead? But... at this hour? She never, never goes at this hour. Besides, I’ve told her never to leave the house empty. I’m going to get after her. I can’t stand having her around, she’s bad for me.”

She went through the striped room. She looked for the cartons Lupa had brought her things in. Nothing. She opened the closet. Nothing. The breeze lashed the bare window. At last Teleca had to yield to the evidence.

“She’s left.” She went down the stairway without noticing what she was doing and went directly to her room. The key, yea, the key. No, she didn’t take anything. There is the jewelry. She waited a few minutes in the middle of the bedroom, her arms hanging at her sides, no knowing what to do. There was not a sound in the house. Teleca allowed herself to swoon at the feet of her fear, beside herself from the search, her emotion. She tried to encourage herself. ‘Well, that’s better. I’d planned to fire her anyway. She was always looking down on me. She’s saved a friend. I was bored with that flat now, anyway. Truant. It’s an ill wind that blows nobody good, or what’s that saying? Truant. It’s the best thing that could have happened.’

She began by taking off her hat, switching on the bedside lamp, closing the curtains one by one. A rosy light spread through the room. The houses of the rich always glow with a rosy light. Almost euphoric, she went to the kitchen to look for the water pitcher she kept beside her bed night and the glass. “Now I’m really going to read The Countershoters. I didn’t plan on eating dinner anyway, so how could it matter?” She came and went, walked through the living room, crossed the dining room, her heels resounding like castanets, up, left, right, turn. “I sound like a flamenco dancing teacher,” she told herself affectionately; she put two of the vases of flowers in the hall. “Pl, the water is green, she didn’t even change it. Lape! Lupa! But I must be crazy, she’s done me a favor by getting out of here. Yes ‘getting out of here,’ the way they say it, even though it sounds so ugly.” She hung up her coat, or rather tried to, in front of the closet. “Lape, where are all the hangers? The wooden one for my coat is missing.” ‘I’m obviously delir- ious, my mind is wandering. I keep talking to that wretch in my mind all the time tomorrow I’ll wear lacquer red it’s the color that suits me best has that idiot thrown my shoes out! Lupa! Lupa!” Exhausted, Teleca fell to the carpet and rocked her head in her hands. Only then did she notice that her cheeks were wet. She couldn’t have been crying all this time? She forced back a sob. ‘Little Lupa! The best thing for me to do is lie down, take a tran- querizer, tomorrow I’ll look for somebody else.’ Teleca often forgot she had a body—it was so light—but now it was burning, echoing, amplifying all the noises inside. Teleca stretched out her arms to turn back the beautiful, thick damask coverlet that had been her parents’; she did it slowly, care- fully, and suddenly, there on the sparkling linen, at the height of the hand- embroidered A and S interlaced under the family emblem, she saw the excrement, an enormous turd that spread out in concentric circles, in a terrifying rainbow, green, coffee-colored, greenish-yellow, ashy, steaming. In the silence, the stink began to rise.

Years later, when Teleca told Arthur—she had never dared tell anyone—Arthur replied that it was impossible, that Indians were neither vulgar nor scatological, much less proctological, that they would never do anything of the kind; no doubt of that, it was not within their patterns of behavior, any researcher of Indian traits could confirm that. Perhaps Lupa had let a delivery boy in, a poor devil corrupted by city ways, a drunk, and between the two of them they thought up that piece of mischief which, from an im- partial point of view, could be considered infantile, but Teleca, protesting, scowling, stuborn, hunched over, insisted.

“No, no. No it was Lupa.”
PLAIN ENGLISH

BY NELLIE WONG

Plain English is not the flattlands, not doughnuts
with holes intact. When we speak plainly in poetry
it is not to say we deflower the English language,
its richness, its golden light.

When an Asian American speaks
when a Black American speaks
when a Native American speaks
when a Latin American speaks
he sings, she sings the languages
of cultures, of songs and festivals
and bells and rhythms and dialects
of ancestors long buried but alive.

Why a poem, why not an essay?
Ah, but you see, we write poems in our essays
and essays in our poems.
We do not confuse the form from the content.
We fuse them, see threads of silk and cord intertwined.
We make love in the heart of sense
in the abdomen of pain and struggle
in the eyes that see clarity
in the roar and dancing of lions.
If you say that I am being ethnic
If you say that I am being reductionist
If you say that I am being limited
I say no, I do not consent
to your reducing me, my language, my learning, my life.
I say no, I resist.
What white America has taught me
to obey its standards of beauty
because beauty is
the mountain is our eyes
because beauty is
the glow of our yellow, black and brown skins
and if we dance what you’ve never seen,
we say, “we are, we are.”

So we must gather
we who are golden
we who are women, we who are men
we who are artists, poets, writers, singers, dancers,
to breathe this air fresh as fall chrysanthemums
even in the din, the momentary silences
the pollution of cigarette smoke.

We remove ourselves several hours each week
to gather our strengths, to forget racism,
a tool of oppression, a stronghold
and we see our lives in new movements
in language of our making, our mothers’ and fathers’
We visualize what we have rejected.
Call it heritage. Call it love. Call it what you will.

Plain English is not the flattlands, not the void
of human existence. Plain English is the love
we feel for ourselves, our sisters and brothers.
It is what we learn now to unlearn
the self-hate of the colors of our skins,
our women’s bodies, our brains, our hands
boxing shadows into the light
to talk to you with our whole selves
our lives hanging there on the laundry lines,
blowing in the winds in all colors that fly
in this land we call Gom Sahm, Gold Mountain, America.
If we see colors other than red, white and blue
do not accuse us of being unpatriotic.
do not say we came to America to steal its gold
do not say we do not belong.
for our generations prove you wrong
for our history in slavery, exclusion, incarceration.
We insist on plain English,
to understand the richness of our struggles
not to blend in a melting pot
but to see the dignity and elegance
of our people
who seek to rise
and feel the sun on their backs, their faces
who seek to speak out
and not be silenced by a gun,
by censorship, by ignorance.

Physical death is no monster.
Cultural genocide snakes around our necks
and until we loosen free
until you hear us
as we’ve heard you
until you see our backs break
we will sing in plain English
flowering from our own tongues.

Nellie Wong, a poet and writer living in Oakland, has published Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park (Pisgah Street Press).
SOME PERSONAL NOTES ON RACISM AMONG THE WOMEN

BY DONNA ALLEGRA

In some circles, Black women have become so synonymous with the black female race. As feminism has become respectable and Black women criticize white women on their racism, a lot of whites want to prove it’s just not so. They invite us to submit articles, perform, read, or speak on panels. This has brought about a relatively new situation in my life—I write coming to me, asking for input. Once I welcomed being in this position; often I went for it. I consciously figured on getting across my point. That position would be my point of entry to place, where an issue would ordi-

narily have left me out of the program. Now, with a Black woman’s community to live and work in, white structures are not so appealing. I look back with bitterness at whites whose dealings with me were not based on who I am, but on what I look like: a Black woman to lit into their program. It was a real disservice when white women looked at me, saw the Black, and greeted me with a suspiciousness because of a hidden agenda. It took a while before I realized it wasn’t my charm and personal magnetism that was operating—I’ve got a big ego and I’m a slow learner. How bitterly I remember the white woman who took me in a token and how bitterly I remember myself going for the bait—look, line, and sitter. I want to be treated as an individual, not seen with awe and fear as someone’s dream nightmare. I want to be seen as a person who wants to do a job for reasons other than their own: a person subject to pride, fear, greed, ambition, high ideals, willingness, trust, and love, like myself. In-

stead, many see me as a “Third World” woman to be used to make a project look good if I act right.

I feel a personal shame for having been will-

ing to be that statistic or chocolate chip in the sea of white cookies. From that token’s position, I tried to take myself somewhere, but doubted underneath that I could have gotten in on my own merit, not being sure of my place in the structure. That’s the legacy I inherited from the perverted relationship where white women looked good practicing tokenism; I was willing to let them get over through me. I was left not knowing where I really stood with them, trying to figure out what they thought about me, and then trying to be that so I could do what I wanted to do in service of who I really was.

Once I looked with trust to the feminist option. It wasn’t the minority viewpoint I would read and

hunger after and identify with. I appreciate that there is a women’s community with networks and publications, and that we do share a general point of view. With feminism established as a part of the current order, some things are easier for me, but elements of the old ways do continue to take on new forms. Now that a feminist angle is being targeted into cigarette commercials, I feel ruined off all over again. In a like manner, Black is “hip”—well, not so hip anymore. More accurately, now white women aresupersensitive to being accused of racism and try to avoid any word like the plague; it makes their slit turn to water if anyone even thinks the word in their direction. Now that they are sometimes of Black women who come with such very hip analysis and delivery, many of them want to hold back. I resent feeling that they want us around for the power of a positive picture of a handsome, angry Black woman on the cover of some magazine that ever so rarely deals with a Black view- point. So many women who are talking about racism are more concerned about public rela-

tions than they are with sisterhood. They want us so that they don’t have to feel un-

comfortable should any Blacks call them on the question, or should any other whites get into the game of reminding their sisters that there are no women of color in evidence. Real reconstruction is bypassed. It’s easier to opt for the cosmetic treatment. This is like being a nice girl. You smile at anyone who smiles at you and you don’t dislike anyone because that’s the way you’ve been brought up. But the truth of the old is that only by trading honest viewpoints can people negotiate and work out frank differences.

White women deny that they seek out women of color because pressure has been put on them. These white women are actually trained to re-

spond with a politically correct manner when they’re questioned. If some of them would ac-

knowledge reorientation or that they are bewild-

ered that they can’t do anything right by Black women anymore, some truth could emerge that’d free us on all sides. But as many are afraid to come from anything other than masks of good behavior.

Yet I know now when whites are running from me, trying to deflect any confrontations they fear I will want to bring into play. I can tell by their aggression on the subjects of race and rac-

ism—as if though it were outside of them somehow, or as if by giving an appropriate nod to guilt, blame, and responsibility in a politically correct stance, they’d be safe from the anger they seem to expect from me. They are ill at ease and run from a feeling of discomfort that they project onto me. When whites beat their breasts and talk

about what’s being done to the poor darkies, they are still taking the missionary position and fuck-

ing Black people. I have yet to hear white women talk about Black women as people, as individuals they like or dislike. In the conversations I have heard, we are either “bad-asses,” “nigger loving or trio drugs pressed.” They urge sympathy on us for Black men’s purported lusts or conquests white men as a class group, but never voice a criticism of Black women. It makes me wonder. When a white woman actually shows any interest in something just because I’m Black person, I withdraw all giant step inside. “I’m dismayed when I see women at concerts or poetry readings knowing how to clap in all the right places and saying a nervous “yeah”...” seems accented in racism as they put out. Others get mad at whites for trying to include Black people. It seems like you’re dismayed if you do and damned if you don’t—so what’s a poor white girl to do?

This thinking is, of course, not leading to the real truth. I think the answer to the seeming paradox is consciousness-raising and examine what they come up with among themselves. The working class of racist activists would have women to do for themselves, with one another. Once they’re on their own they’ll have the rough stuff, they will actually be freer and truer to themselves. I appreciate that kind of honesty in an individual manner, but I really need something I sense, can open up to and trust. Rac- 

differences are real, but they’re not everything. We work out our real differences from honesty.

But after they’ve done their own CR, I hope the world doesn’t come to me for a stamp of ap-

proval. I’m having a hard enough time dealing with my own stuff and hoping my women will give me the pats on the back I crave. I don’t think many Black women are going to credit whites for doing their own homework. Whites seem to want this at some level and when it doesn’t come, they feel pinned and neglected. Well, that’s not enough for Black women who have other concerns and don’t want to play many in any mode. I’ve been brought up to feel I should be grateful for every little bit of progress, but I finally get angry at white women who are active praying with their racism and the new trips they lay on me in their growth process. Those white women who aren’t so anxious and eager to clean up their acts and attitudes around race are the ones I can have friendships with. ‘Tis a frightening find, but I think the important personal quality I respond to is honesty.

What is going on with all our concerns about racism is, indeed, change. There is a willingness among some white women to do some work, but the transformation isn’t complete yet. Racist atti-

dues linger because the job isn’t all the way done. People who haven’t seen that change is possible can’t wholeheartedly believe in it. If they haven’t lived in their personal lives, it’s hard to see change in political terms. It won’t all come together in one fall swoop. After the major reconstruction, there will be corners to straighten-

out and the maintenance work will be a day-

today job. This is Life Work. Any attempt to make it better can only come to good.
OBJECT INTO SUBJECT: SOME

In my room there is a postcard of a sculpture by the Venetian artist Doccene Cattaneo, done in the mid-16th century—Black Venus. The full-length nude figure is bronze. In one hand she holds a hand-scarf in which she looks at herself. On her head is a turban, around the edges of which her curls are visible. In other her hand she carries a cloth—or at least what appears to be a cloth. Who was she? A slave? Perhaps in the artist's own household, or maybe that of his patron—one of the many black women dragged from Africa to enter the service of white Europeans. I have no idea who she actually was: she was an object, then as now.

Around this image are other images of black women: Bernadette Powell, who killed the man who beat her and is now in Bedford Hills; Fannie Lou Hamer; Billie Holiday; Elizabeth Freeman, who sued for her freedom and won it, in Massachusetts in the 19th century; Josephine Baker; Harriet Tubman, portrayed in a linocut by Elizabeth Catlett; women students making basket furniture at the Hampton Institute; Lucy Parsons; Ida B. Wells-Barnett; Audre Lorde; Phyllis Wheatley; two women in Botswana seated around a guard; Seoljumma Truth; women in the Black Liberation Movement in England; Betye Saar's Aunt Sally Hoodoo; a girlchild balancing a basin on her head in southern Africa.

My moving toward the study of the work—written and visual—of black women has been a moving toward my own wholeness. My interest in this work is a deeply personal interest, because through these words and images I begin to capture part of who I am.

I should begin my subject—"Object into Subject." What does it mean? We live in a society whose history is drenched in the philosophy and practice of racism, the oppression of black and other Third World peoples. This is the point at which my definition begins: If you study racism—if you understand the history of the United States—you will find that under racism the person who is oppressed is turned into an object in the mind of the oppressor.

The white anti-racist southern writer Lillian Smith was among the first to offer a metaphysical and psychological explanation of racism as a personal and political American practice. One essential to the maintenance of things as they are in this society, Smith—whose influences included Kerouac, Jung, Freud, and Brecht—traced the origins of racism, and its more apparent manifestation, segregation, to that place in the human mind she called "mythic": that place where dreams, fantasies, and images begin; where they continue and take form as art, literature, politics, religion. The mythic mind is a source of psychic energy—it contributes the motion necessary for sustained thought. But the mythic mind needs a structure in which to function, so that its products will be understood. This structure is provided by reason. Reason, Smith argued, is merely a technical, an enabling; its sole purpose is to create the form which will support the ideas moving out of the mythic mind. Reason is incapable of moral judgment, and therefore will support any idea or image, regardless of its moral basis.

When the mythic idea of whiteness, the obsession with skin color which is the irrational and immoral basis of racism, is given a construct from which the myth takes its form—that is, the philosophy of white supremacy—the result is cultural or institutional racism, contained in the politics, literature, art, and religion of the dominant culture. An insane idea now exists within a reasonable reality, not an irrational dream.

Whatever we may feel about Smith's analysis, or her sources for that matter, her treatment of American racism as something embedded in the white mind, regenerating itself within a psychological construct, is extremely important. She recognizes the connection of racism as it is in a sense "larger than life," something which could not be removed by congressional legislation or Supreme Court decisions, unless these actions were the result of a completely rationalized mindset within the dominant culture. I think that the resurgence of white racism in this country today bears witness to her understanding.

Within the rationale reason lends to racism, Smith argued, is the practice of objectification, an absolute necessity in the racist effort to oppress. (I use the word "effort" because it is and has been so, one which has been carried on on every level of this society, against constant, historical opposition.) Through objectification—the process by which people are dehumanized, made ghostlike, given the status of Other—an image created by the oppressor replaces the actual being. The actual being is then denied speech; denied self-definition, self-realization; and overridden in all this, denied selfhood—which is after all the point of objectification. A group of human beings—a people—are denied their history, their language, their music. Their cultural values are ignored. This history, this language, this music, these values exist in the subculture, but in the dominant culture only certain elements are chosen, recast, co-opted, and made available to the definition of these people. And these elements presented by the dominant culture tend to serve the purpose of objectification and, therefore, oppression.

The practice of objectification stands between all black people and full human identity under the white supremacist system: racism re-
quites that Black people be thought different from white; and this difference is usually translated as less than. This requirement has been stated in various ways throughout the history of America. Did you know, for example, that Thomas Jefferson held the point view that the Black race was created when Black women mated with orangutans? (I do not know where the original Black women were supposed to have come from.)

Last October on my local PBS station I watched the NBC film Birth of a Nation, introduced by a rather heafty film buff as an American classic, the work of a "tragic poet." I had never seen the movie, nor did I read the book on which it is based. I felt I "had to watch it." The first thing I noticed was that all the Black charac-
ters were portrayed by white actors in "black face." Throughout the film the thing most evident to me was the playing out of a white American's image of Black people, crude and bigoted at best, but not that far from gone from Gone with the Wind (another American classic), or even from such white-inspired television pro-
grams as "The Jeffersons." If anything, the very crudest caricature of Birth of a Nation is closer to the history of the slavocracy than perhaps any other American film. I could see as I watched this film how white people were capable of commit-
ting both the acts of the slave period and the lynchings which flourished during Reconstruction and thereafter. D. W. Griffith's imaginings of Black women and men attempted to justify this history by replacing a people with the fantasies of one's own race. This is the act of whitewashing, the first step in the process of self-recognition.

The trouble with and activist Lorraine Ha-
berry, in her essay "The New Nationalists,"
America long ago fell love with an image. It is a sacred image, fashioned centuries of time. This image has been repeated, unconscious, glibly, habitually, simple, rhythmic, America, a symbol above all else, a symbol of sensuality. It was cre-
non deeper than legal statute or town custom.
She saw segregation as an act of dichotomizing within the white Western male culture. She ob-
An interview conducted by Minneapolis, where people really wanted to live alongside whites. Many white people pictured the ending of Birth of a Nation as "happy," unaware perhaps of white means for a Black family to move into a white neighborhood in Chicago to live. Outside the town of any of these white people know of Hanabusa's own life and her personal experiences with segregation. Her family moved into a white Chicago neighborhood of poor and tenement residents. From this move was white violence: the eighty-year-
Black woman on the slave plantation knew that he was used rape against Black women. She knew that Black

Ome Thoughts on the Work of Black Women Artists

By Michelle Cliff

Sula's tragedy, and the tragedy she represents, is "cruel enough to stop the blood." Because of her race and gender, she has been shut out from art and denied access to art forms. She is an intelligent, thinking woman, who ultimately has nowhere to go.

The objectification of Black women has taken

accepted, and therefore without any con-
sciousness of its ordinariness, the music of the
"waist." In the same sentence, the woman
saw it, therefore, and therefore the music is not

2 Michelle Cliff

1900.

many forms: The Mammy, Mamma—wetnurse, midwife, cook, usually—largely uneducated; usually dark, com-
non, and usually poor; and the sex-object, where—sometimes mulatto (from the word "prostitute"). This is a creature unable to repro-
duce herself—nurse's daughter, and the tragic, the power of the master: the mother toward her powerless wife. These two (she and the man with whom she was created of her) could be projected on; into another female: under slavery, he might keep his "niece" and her husband (who was a per-
turbant "prostitute."). This sort of southern people's fear of giving up segregation is that of giving up the "dark woman," who has become a symbol which the men no longer wish to attract to their own women.

Smith's observation is important: White and Black women, the two faces of the same coin are different, from one another. I feel that Smith oversimplified the split, however. For example, the sacred ma-
donna, in her role as mother to her power and beauty, (she had often been intent on maintaining her status), had to objectify the Black woman according to the white male imagination. The white woman on the slave plantation knew that he was used rape against Black women. She knew that Black women were for the most part handmaids, work-

Alongside men—when they were pregnant, when they were not caged. The Black woman was made into a sex object, yes, but Smith's use of the word suggests more choice than any slave woman ever had. It also denies or glosses over the use of rape by white men against Black women as an instrument of terror, of oppression.

Black women have been doubly objectified—
as Black, as women; under white supremacy, under patriarchy. It has been the task of Black women to express their anger, to speak out, to become the subject: commenting on the mean-
ing of the object, or to become the subject reject-

The objectification of Black women has taken

1. The Mammy, Mamma—wetnurse, midwife, cook, usually—largely uneducated; usually dark, com-

2. Michelle Cliff is the author of a forthcoming novel, Abeng, and co-editor of Sister Wisdom.
accompany her—passing Harston off as an "African princess." Harston remarked, "Who would have thought that a gentle maid could be so bitter?"

In this incident, the black woman is presented as a liberator, revealing herself as an objectifier. This phenomenon occurred over and again during the Civil Rights Movement. It was most commonly expressed in the notion that unless Black people behaved in certain ways, allowing whites to overstep and control their access to liberation, that liberation would not be achieved. What is present is the need for whites to maintain power, and limit the access of Black people to that power, which, finally, is the power of self-definition.

Imitation of Life, published in 1933, concerns the relationship between two white women and their daughter and her black daughter. Both parents are essentially alone in the world. The black woman, Delilah, is hired to run the house by the white woman, Miss B., who has been recently widowed. Delilah carries with her various recipes, and these prove to be the "salvation" of Miss B. and family. In a relatively short time, Miss B. is the proprietor of a chain of restaurants in which Delilah's food is the main attraction, and which are recognized by a likeness of Delilah on the sign. When Miss B. hires her on the idea of photographing Delilah as the advertising gimmick for the enterprise, she dresses Delilah as a chef, Delilah, faithful servant throughout the book, is this one instance when she is expected to portray herself as well as to allow her to wear her best clothes.

Miss B., however,prevails. Hurst describes the final result: "Breaking through a white background, as through a paper-covered hoop, there burst the chocolate-and-scream effigies that was Delilah." Here is Aunt Jemima, the female server of Sanka; even Mrs. Butterworth, whose color literally pours forth. Here is an instance of the black woman, her recipes, her art form, passed through generations of black women, co-opted and sold, with a caricature of the artist used to ensure its success.

In and around the main theme of the novel—the "success" of Miss B. as an "independent businesswoman"—is the subplot concerning De-
ilah's light-skinned daughter, Paula—unable to be white, unwilling to be black, in the course of her dilemma denying her mother. Paula moves west, works as a librarian, poses for white, and marries a white man. She has herself "sterilized," eliminating any chance of "throwback." Her husband is also matthevian in color, but of a hand. Perhaps he is all he is entitled to. Delilah has the final say: "Black women who pass, pass into damnation."

Taken together, Delilah and Paula represent what George Fredericq has characterized as "soft" and "hard" stereotypes. Bell Hooks also juxtaposes two stereotypes of black women: Mammy and Sapphire.

It is not too difficult to imagine how whites came to celebrate the black mastry figure. . . . She was first and foremost aesthetical and consequently had to be fat (preferably obese). She also had to give the impression of being clean so she was the weaver of a greasy dirty headdress, her too-light shoes from which emerged her large feet were further confirmation of her bestial worldview quality. Her greatest virtue was that above all she loved her work and poured her soul into it. She skillfully and patiently served. In a sense whites exploited the mastry figure. The mastry woman who embodied solely those characteristics they as consumers wished to exploit. 41

As Sapphires, black women were depicted as evil, treacherous, lecherous, and hateful. In short all that the mastry was not. White men could justify their dehumanization and sexual exploitation of black women by arguing that they possessed inherent evil demoniacal qualities. And white women could use the image of the evil succubus black woman to emphasize their own innocence and purity.

To talk about the history of black women in America, and of the various images I have mentioned, we must begin with the woman who was a slave. Who was she? How did she survive? How many of her did survive? What did she teach her children? What was her relationship to her husband? What were her options?

She could be broken, beaten, tortured, mutilated, raped. She could have her children sold away from her. She was forbidden education. She was considered the property of her master. He was subject to the white man's power and the white woman's power. A man's man, and a woman's man. His sexuality was his womb was a commodity of the slaveowner, and her childlessness, a liability of the slaveowner. She was not expected to love—but she did. She was not expected to work away—but she did. She was not expected to induct, and induce abortion rather than have her child be a slave. She was known to commit acts of violence and rebellion—with magic, poison, force, even with spit. And she sometimes learned to read and write and sustain the art forms she had carried with her.

In 1960 Lorraine Hansberry was commissioned to write a play about slavery for national television. She wrote The Drinking Gourd, about a Black family and a white family under slavery. In it, as in Raisin, Hansberry attempted to con- tradict the myths about black people and to re- capture and recast history. Her play was never performed: it was judged "too controversial" by the network. Hansberry had described Lena Younger, her mother-figure in Raisin, as an "af- firmation," as the black mother unborn, the heir of the Negro family since slavery, the embodiment of the Negro will to transcendence. It is she, who in the mind of the black poet, stands the floor of a nation in order to create black diplomats and university professors. It is she, who, seeming to cling to tradi- tional restraints, who drives the young on into the firebox. And one day simply refuses to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery. Or goes out and buys a house in an all-white neighborhood where her children may possibly be killed by bricks thrown through the windows by a shrieking racist mob. 43

With her mother-figure in The Drinking Gourd, Hansberry went further. Raisa, the slavemother, does what the Black mother-figure in white American mythology has never done. She, in effect, kills a white woman (the "green-eyed monster") and gives his guile to her children, after her son has been blinded for learning to read. The play ends as Raisa and her band of revolutionaries escape into the woods.

We know that Black women—mothers and nonmothers—have been intrinsic to the activism of Black History. There is the following story, for example, quoted by Angela Davis.

She didn't work in the field. She worked at a loom. She worked so long and so often that once when she went to sleep at the loom, her master's boy saw her head, and told his mother. His mother told him to take a whip and wear her out. He took a stick and went out to beat her awake. She beat my sister till she woke up. When she woke up, she took a pole out of the loom and beat him nearly to death with it. He hol- lowed, "Don't beat me no more, and I'll let you whip you." She said, "I'm going to kill you. These black titties sucked you, and then you come out here to beat me." And when she left him, he wasn't able to walk.

And that was the last I saw of her until after free-
dom. She went out and got an old cow that she used to milk—Dolly, she called it. She rode away from the plantation because she knew they would kill her if she stayed. 44

Drawing by Vivian E. Brown. This story tells of a Black woman in the act of freeing herself. A selfish need for freedom, and a recognition, that freedom is their right, is some-
thing usually denied to Black women historically, even when they are recognized as liberators of their race. But Fannie Lou Hamer, Idia B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, Sojourner Truth—and the many women whose names we do not know—
all felt a personal desire for freedom, which came from a feeling of self-worth, and translated this into a political commitment that their people also be free

Harriet Tubman said: I looked at my hands and said: I was done with slavery. I was done with the time when there was such a guilty secret—ever since that I have been free. I have been a stranger in a strange land, and my home was always down in de ole cotton quarter, will de de folks, and my brothers and sisters. But de ole slaves' race's came: I was free, and dey should be free also; I would make a home for de in de North, and de Lord helping me, I would bring them all here. 45

The artist, like the liberator, must begin with herself.

Edmonia Lewis (1843–1900) is the first wom-
nan of color we know whose work as a visual artist was recognized by the dominant culture. During her life as a sculptor she was confronted with the objectification of herself as Black and female.
While her work was not set ignored, it was given a secondary place of importance by most critics. Lewis was seen as a "wonder," a work of art in herself—a curiosity. "In following excerpt from an abolitionist newspaper describes the artist and her marble group: "Forever Free" (1867).

No one . . . could look upon this group of sculpture without profound emotion. The noble figure of the man, his very muscles seeming to yield with gratitude; the expression of the right arm toward heaven; every twist of his arm around his kneeling wife; the "Praise of Love" towering on their lips; the long, lean, all so instinct with life, in the very poetry of stone the story of the last ten years. And when it is remembered who created this group, an added interest is given it. . . . Will any one believe it was the small hand of a girl that wrought the marble and kindled the light within it?—a girl of dusky hue, mixed Indian and African, who not more than eight years ago sat at the steps of City Hall to eat dry crackers with which alone her empty purse allowed her to satisfy her hunger; but as she sat and thought of her homeless state, something caught her eye, the hunger of the stomach ceased, but the hunger of the soul began. That quiet statue of the good old Freindism kindled the latent genius which was embroiled within, in her, as her own group was in marbles, till her chisel brought it out. Per se she haunted this spot and the State House, where she could see Washington and Webster. She asked questions, and found that such things were first made in clay, she got a lump of hard mud, shaped her same sticks.

have won it and placed somewhere "out there." It is commonly believed that the slaves were freed by white Northerners. But as W. B. E. Du Bois observed: "Proportion to population, more Negroes than whites fought in the Civil War. These people, withdrawn from the support of the Confederacy, with the threat of the withdrawal of millions more, made the opposition of the slaveholder useless, unless they themselves freed and armed their own slaves." The journey out of slavery was one in which Black people played a dominant role. It is this that Lewis is commemorating in her work. She had earlier commemorated the slave-woman in her piece Freedwoman on First Hearing of Her Liberty (which has been lost to us).

In an interview with the Lorain County News, Lewis spoke of her childhood:

"My understanding was a wild Indian and was born in Albany, of copper color and with straight black hair. There she made and sold mocassins. My father, who was a Negro, and a gentleman's servant, saw her and married her. . . . Mother often left home and wandered with her people, whose habits she could not forget, and thus we were brought up in the same wild manner. Uncle was ten years older. I led this wandering life, fishing and swimming . . . and was made to marry.

Alice Walker speaks about looking "high-and-low" for the artistic antecedents of Black women; she speaks specifically of her own mother's generation.

Left to right: Lillian Smith, Lorainia Henbry, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Phyllis Wheatley.

in the act of freedom, and a light, is a nation historically, liberators of Ida B. Wells.

7 Truth—and to know—a woman, which came, and they united them.

Tubman said a person akin to her stereotypes, and other. . . .

Isolde woven—stranger in a sown down in do my brothers, it I came I would make Lord helping

at begin with her first woman a visual artist stature. During named with the and female.
tively early in her career left this country and moved to a country of colored people—Mexico. Yet her piece Homage to My Young Black Sisters (1966), when we make allowances over

time and across space, is not that far removed in political intent from Lewis’s Nigger. In form the differences are enormous. Hagar’s hands are clasped in front of her, is resignation, in supplication—in the wilderness she has to turn to Abraham’s god to save the life of her son. The female figure of Homage has one arm raised in a powerful and defiant fist. The similarity between the two pieces is that both, I think, represent part of the history of Black women, particularly Black motherhood, in America. The misdirection of the Homage figure is an open space, which I take as Catlett’s statement of the historical white denial of Black women’s right to motherhood in any self-defining way, and of the theft of the children of Black women, and of what these children repre-

sent—whether through the laws of the slaveocracy or those of postindustrial America.

Catlett uses the theme of Black women and children often in her work, depicting over and again the heretofore required of Black women sim-

ply to survive. In her lithographs, engravings, and linocuts, Catlett seeks to tell the history of Black women, breaking away from the objectifi-
cation of the dominant culture. We might, for ex-
ample, look at her wood engraving of Harriet Tubman (1975), in contrast to Judy Chicago’s Sejourner Truth plate in the Dinner Party. 24 Cat-
lett’s Harriet dominates the foreground; one pow-
erful arm points forward, the other holds a rifle. She is tall and she is strong and she is Black. In the background are the men and women she leads. What is interesting to me is the expression on Tubman’s face—is she fiercely determined. This expression is repeated in the group she leads. There is no passivity here, no resignation, no impotent tears, no “humming.” Rather, this is a portrait of the activity of a people in conflict with their oppression.

Catlett has stated that art should be obviously political, available to the people who see its sub-
ject. We have no such clear statement from Lewis, but we must wonder for whom her work was done, finally, and whether she stopped work-
Description for this image is not available.

Edmonia Lewis. Nigger in the Wilderness. 1866. Mar-
ble. 44 1/4 high. Frederick Douglass Institute, Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.

Harriet Powers’s second quilt—now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts—was commissioned in 1866 by the wives of professors at Atlanta University. This quilt, known as the second Bible quilt, con-

sists of five columns, each divided into three

frames. All the frames deal with the themes of

God’s vengeance and redemption, illustrated

through Biblical images and representations of cataclysmic events in 18th- and 19th-century

America.

This ... much exhibited quilt portrays fifteen scenes.

Ten are drawn from familiar Bible stories which
come to mind, but more than any other, these

are the scenes which are the most familiar to

Europe. Others are shepherds on the hillside,

Shepherds in the field, and the Like.

The one frame which does not fit into this cate-
gory, or with which one might compare it, is

Ezekiel’s Vision. The one which may be compared is

Marie Jeanne Adams observes, is the key to the quilt. Powers left a description in her own words of all the scenes in the quilt; of this particular frame, she said:

Rich people who were taught nothing of God. Bob

Johnson and Kate Bell of Virginia. They told their

parents to stop the clock at one and tomorrow it

would strike one and so it did. This was the signal

that they had entered everlasting punishment. The

independent hog ran which 500 miles from Ga. to

Va. Her name was Bettie. 26

The frame has a clock in the center, stars and a

moon scattered around, two human figures. At

the bottom is the independent hog named Bettie, the

largest figure of the quilt. Metallic thread outlines the clock face and creates a tiara around the head of the white woman Kate Bell. Bettie is made from gray cloth, but she is placed over a

had five to give. After going out consulting with her

husband she returned and asked, "Owen, what

goodness of do times, my old man "I'd better tuck

hit." Not being a new woman she obeyed.

After giving me a full description of each scene with

great assurance, she departed but has been back

several times to visit the defining offspring of her

brain. 26

Powers’s second quilt—now in the Boston

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America.
sweat of orange so that her figure unmistakably stands out. This quilt represents a great spiritual vision, but it also represents a great political vision: as white folks. I take Betts to be a metaphor for this experience. Angela Davis has quoted Frederick Law Olmsted's description of a slave crew in Mississippi returning from the fields:

a confidence in their ability to struggle for them- selves, their families and other people. 41

Black women were not dehumanized under slavery; they were dehumanized in the white mind. I return again and again in my own mind to the adjective "independent," which Powers uses to describe Betts, a "chaosseur on the march."

It is not that far a distance from Lewis's House, to Catlett's Homage, to Powers's Betts, to Betty Saar's Aunt Jemima. Saar's construction, entitled The Liberation of Aunt Jemima, is perhaps the most obvious illustration of what I mean by the title of this essay: "Object into Subject." Here is the most popularized image of the Mammy—in the center of the piece she is a cookie jar, the source of nourishment for others; behind her are faces cut from the pancake mix. In front of the central figure is another image of Mammy, holding a white baby. And there is a broom alongside the central figure. But she also holds a pistol and a rifle, and the skirt of Mammy with the white baby forms an unmistakable Black fist. Saar's message is clear: Aunt Jemima will free herself.

In an interview in Black Art, Saar described the components she uses in her work:

They are all found objects or discarded objects, so they have to be remnants. They are connected with another sensitivity so they are a memory of belonging to another object or at least having another function. 42

Aunt Jemima has been created by another sensitivity than that of the artist who has made this piece. As Aunt Jemima has memory of belonging to someone else, of being at the service of someone else. She exists against an image, which exists in another mind. The cookie jar is a remnant of another life; most likely she "lived" on the kitchen counter of a white family; maybe Saar found her discarded on a white elephant table, or at a garage sale. She has appeared to me in my travels, usually turning up in rural antique stores or church basements, labeled "collectible." The pictures of Mammy with the white baby reminds me first of old magazine advertisements, usually, as I recall, for soap or cereal or other necessities of the servant role. And I additionally recall the many films of the 40s and 50s about white middle-class America, in which a large Black woman who worked in the kitchen was always present but only occasionally given a line to speak. She was played by Louise Beavers, Hattie McDaniel, or Ethel Waters—and she was usually characterized by her loyalty to her white master or mistress, with whom she worked. She also appeared on television: "Danish" was a program in which she was featured. She was kind, honest, a good cook, always with a song to turn her troubles away; and "useless devices to white folks."

All but three of the elements in Saar's construction are traditional to Aunt Jemima; the two guns and the fist are not Saar, by including these unfamiliar aspects has changed the function of the figure she is representing. She has combined the myth with the reality of Black women's historic opposition to their oppression.

This representation of Aunt Jemima is startling. All of us who have grown up with the mythic figure of Aunt Jemima and her equalitarian attributes—whether or not we recognized they were mythic—have been affected. We may not have known her, but aren't we somehow convinced that somewhere she exists, or at least has existed? The last thing we would expect would be that she would carry a gun, or raise a hand. As a child in Jamaica I was taught that the women who worked for us were to be respected and


[1 saw] forty of the largest and strongest women I ever saw together; they were all in a simple uniform dress of a black check stuff, their legs and feet were bare; they carried themselves lofty, each having a bow over the shoulder, and walking with a free, powerful, swing like choristers on the march. 29

It would be very simple to romanticize this group of women. But, as Davis says, it is not slavery and the slave system that have made them strong; it is the experience of their labor and their knowledge of themselves as producers and creators. She quotes Marx: "labor is the living, shaping fire; it represents the imperialism of things, their temporality." Davis makes a brilliant connection here:... perhaps these women had learned to extract from the oppressive circumstances of their lives the strength they needed to resist the daily denunciation of slavery. Their awareness of their endless capacity for hard work may have imparted to them...
obeyed, and yet I remember my 12-year-old light-
skinned self exercising what I felt was my au-
tority over these women, and being quite taken
aback when one of the women threatened to beat
me—and my mother backed her up. Just as I was
shocked to find that another houseworker had
tied up my cousins and shut them on the veran-
dish because they were interfering with her work.
So while we may know the image is an image,
the expectations of Black women behaving ac-
cording to this image persist. As far as I can tell,
Harriet Tubman carried both a cane and a pistal.
And she threatened to shoot any slave who
decided to turn back on the journey north. Just as
Lorraine Hansberry's savior mother armed her
children and set out with them—after leaving a
white man to die.

1. For Lillian Smith's definition of racism, see "The
Med and the Mat" and "Words That Cheer Us and
Words That Set Us Free," in The Winner Takes the Age, ed.iscollie Smith (New York: Nor-
ton, 1976).
2. Erlene Stevenson, "Studying Slavery," in Rut Some of
Us Are Brave, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott,
3. Lorraine Hansberry, quoted in Las Blancas: The Col-
lected Lost Plays of Lorraine Hansberry, ed. Robert
4. Lillian Smith, Killers of the Dream (New York: Nor-
to, 1948), p. 31.
5. Smith, Winner, p. 204.
6. Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gar-
des," in Working It Out, ed. Sara Ruddick & Pam-
7. Tim Morrison, Solo (New York: Bantam, 1973),
p. 106.
8. Quoted by Roberta Hemmerway, Zuma Meela Hurston
10. Although Fredericka's The Black Image in the
White Mind deals primarily with stereotypes of
Black men, with some alterations his categories
apply to stereotypes of Black women.
11. Bell Hooks, Ain't I a Woman (Boston: South End,
1981), p. 84.
12. Ibid., p. 86.
14. Angela Davis, "The Black Woman's Role in the
15. Quoted by Sarah Bradford, Harriet Tubman: Moses
16. Quoted by Phoebe A. Henderson, Daughters of Amer-
17. Quoted by Sara Bennett & Joan Gibbs, "Racism and
Gayness in the Lesbian Community," in Top Stun-
king, ed. Bennett & Gibbs (Brooklyn: Firebrand
18. Quoted by Eleanor Tufts, Our Hidden Heritage
21. General, 31-34.
22. For a brilliant analysis of the Sojourner Truth plate
in Chicago's Dinner Party, see Alice Walker, "Our
Child of One's Own," in But Some of Us Are Brave.
23. This detail, as well as the information, about
abuse and her quilts, comes from Marie Jordan
Adams, "The Harriet Powers Pictorial Quilt,"
25. Michael Baszill, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy (London: Oxford University
26. Quoted by Mirra Bank, Anonymous Was a Woman
28. Mrs. Powers's description of the quilt appears in
both Adams and Bank.
30. Ibid.
31. Betty Sear, "Interview with Houston Connell,"

is it true
what they say about
colored pussy?

by hattie gossett

hey is it really true what they say about colored pussy?

come on now
dont be trying to act like you dont know what i am talking about
you have heard those stories about colored pussy so stop pretending you have

you have heard how black and latina pussies are hot and uncontrollable
and i know you know the one about asian pussies and how they go from side to side instead of up and down

and everybody knows about squaw pussies and how once a white man got
him some of that he wasnt never no more good

now at first i thought the logical answer to those stories is that they are
gnignorant racist myths

but then i thought what about all the weird colored stories about
colored pussy?

can you know colored pussies were always treated with the highest
regard we deserve in the various colored worlds prior to our
discovery by the european talent scouts/explorers

and we still arent

so now why is it that colored pussies have had to suffer so much oppression
and bad press from so many divergent sources?

so is it really as evil and nasty and looking and smelly and
ugly like they say?

or is it cuz we possess some secret strength which we take for granted but
which is a terrible threat to the various forces which are trying
to make us what they want?

mean just look at what black pussies have been subjected to alone
starting with ancient feudal rape and polygamy and clitoridectomies
and forced child marriages and continuing right on through colonial
industrial neocolonial rape and forced sterilization and
experimental surgery

and when i put all that stuff about black pussies together with the
stories i hear from other colored pussies about what they have had to
go through i am even more convinced

we must have some secret powers!

this must be why so many people have spent so much time vilifying
abusing hating and fearing colored pussy

and you know that usually the ones who are doing all this vilifying
abusing hating and fearing of colored pussy are the main ones who
just cant leave colored pussy alone dont you

they make all kinds of laws and restrictions to parthaindize colored pussy
and then as soon as the sun goes down guess who is seen
sneaking out back to the cabins

and guess who cant do without colored pussy in their kitchens and fields and
factories and offices?

then ther the people who use colored pussy as a badge of certification
to ensure entry into certain circles

finally when i think about what would happen if all the colored pussies
went on strike even for a day

look out!

[especially if the together white pussies stpped a same day sympathy
strike]

the pimps say colored pussy is an untapped goldmine

well they got it wrong

colored pussies ain goldmines untapped
colored pussies are yet un-named energies whose power for lighting up
the world is beyond all known measure

hattie gossett work history: babysitter paid companion sey cleaning person still
seeking insightful and venturesome publisher for her collection presenting sister
oboles & the original wild & free wahmamas jazz & blues desert caravan & fish fry.
“Which would you guess was the biggest catch to me? I said as I handed my new black woman therapist the organization chart I’d made of nine months’ worth of dreams.

I’d finally located her in September. Even in New York it hadn’t been easy. Only one percent of the therapists in America are black, and I’d spent July and August going to one white therapist after another who’d ask the standard question: “Why have you come into therapy?” When I was too embarrassed to answer directly, they’d accept me as a case study in assimilation, of wanting to take a symbolic journey in self-discovery.

There was the arrangement from my son, of course. But even if I’d been able to talk about it, I couldn’t have placed it in its deepest perspective by describing the specter standing behind it—just my problems with motherhood, but with those with my family, sex, and my artistic persona. With these male and female white therapists I couldn’t break out of the defense I’d adopted toward the whole white world, the mystique that everything was all right, that I had no racial problems. Even when I trusted their capacity for empathy, I couldn’t talk to them about the subtle identity problems of a fair-skinned black woman, born and reared in Boston at a time when “social blacks” (the families who sent their children to Ivy League schools) were still trying to be white.

Meanwhile, shopping for a therapist was becoming expensive. I’d had it that series of dreams were far more illuminative than dreams taken singly, and since I’d begun collecting my dreams at the beginning of the year, I now had nearly 150. To save time and money I decided to organize them. At the end of August, after saying goodbye to my last white therapist, I took my Journal to Martha’s Vineyard and arranged the dreams into 14 categories with names like Upstairs/Balconies and Downstairs/Attics. In my sister, Sex, Art, Fear of Ending Up Alone, and Blacks/Racial Attitudes.

The results were startling. The Blacks/Racial Attitudes series was the largest, with roughly 30 dreams containing the motif, 10 more than the next largest series. I knew I’d been kidding myself, as well as white people, about the extent of my problem, but seeing it statistically tabulated like this surprised me.

The black women psychiatrist, Vassar-educated and 10 years older than me, looked over the list. “I don’t want to guess which category covers the most dreams, Lorraine, but I don’t know you. But I know there are experiences that would lead me to—could it be Blacks/Racial Attitudes?”

On Thursday, August 20, I was feeling depressed about Reagan, and preoccupied about the fascism lying in wait just below the surface of the country. In my worst-case fantasies, the dragon breaks out and, as in Nazi Germany, gobles up those closest at hand: assimilated blacks first. That afternoon I wrote in my art journal a proposal for an installation to be called Walter Benjamin Memorial Piece (A Black Intellectual Gets Ready in Time) with a wall plaque containing the following quote:

On September 24, 1945, Walter Benjamin, who was also exiled to America, took his life at the Franco-Spanish border. The Gestapo had confiscated his Paris apartment, which contained his library (he had been able to get “the more important half” out of Germany) and many of his manuscripts. How was he to live without a library? How could he earn a living without the extensive collection of quotations and excerpts among his manuscripts? (Hannah Arendt)

Mounted on three dry walls was to be a life-sized photo reproduction of my library alcove (the shelves contain 3,000 volumes). In the center of the alcove, my actual desk, extremely cluttered, a typewriter and chair, and scattered about on the floor, a jumble of packing crates with labels not yet filled in.

That night I had the following black dreams. I made the journal responses a couple of months later and gave them, together with the dreams, to the black woman psychiatrist.

“Shit. So that’s the way it’s going to be.” I say to myself. “We’re going to pretend that it didn’t happen, that it never really was.”

Needless to say, this pleases me no end. It’s a pattern I recognize only too well, and this time I’ve determined not to play along with that game. I’m getting the hell out of there.

Response:

No matter who revolves against whom, I won’t be safe. If the whites decide to quarantine, or if the blacks and the browns rise up, there I am. In the middle.

Driving to work with my boss, Alice Shurtliff, a Brahman from Boston’s Beacon Hill, but now my neighbor in the fluid Dupont Circle area. She talks about buying a co-op in a more exclusive part of Washington. “It’s the early ’60s. The new apartment has “reasonable resale restrictions, of course.”

“How many rooms will you have?” I ask, and
the car does not explode.

Back from Europe, temporarily teaching in an inner-city high school. Vivica, a 16-year-old shy beauty, my pet, arrives one morning, eyes swollen, red with tears. She has been assaulted by a white male customer outside the restaurant where she has to work midnights after school.

"What do you know?" she hisses at me as I try to put my arm around her to console her.

"The way you live, the way you look. What do you know about being black?"

Marty, my beautiful Jew, my big love, after two years of mutual fantasizing about permanent commitment, announces: "I just don’t want to marry a..." He can’t even say the words.

In the camp’s community room, a young black woman is singing, rehearsing for a concert she’s giving in a few days. She is extraordinarily talented. Her song is excellent and I listen to it with rapt attention. The words seem very significant (but I can’t remember them). She goes over to straighten out details of the show with the music director, a signal that it is time for me to begin packing. When I ask someone about the singer, I’m told she is an off-duty policewoman. I marvel at this, and feel the police are no longer as bad on people as I think. I finish packing, and go outside sick from the smell of a place I can’t define as being white.

Suddenly I have many relatives with me. Men and all the variousunts. They are supposed to be helping me with my bags, but they really don’t. When we hail a cab, Dan Goldberg comes along driving a gorgeous black convertible, acting as the living room of a European country house on wheels. Mama and the others are fascinated by the decor and climb in.

First I put the small suitcase inside, and then I have to go back for the big one. I return, case in hand.

"Why are you here?"

"Mama and the aunts can’t help me—their part of the baggage I’m carrying. Problems of racial identity, it’s their fascination with European elegance that’s been transmitted to me.

The ‘European country house on wheels’ is driven by Dan Goldberg, a friend whose rich, liberal parents sent him to a racially mixed high school. Danny identified so completely with his black classmates he became a junkie to keep up with them."

We’re meeting in the middle here! Is this a projection of my belief in the mulatto as the crucible of identity?"

Earlier today, flipping back through pages of responses to dreams in other categories, I felt I should make a note here.


But now, seeing the image of the two suitcases making a somehow less dangerous, fully visible, the living room of a European country house on wheels transformed by laughing Caribbean women.

This cab actually drove off. Is it possible that change can take place after all?
A fat, cross little girl, strapped on the back of a mule, glaring. To one side, holding in cap and uniform that used to serve as pitching peas and later stood as ornaments on lawns.

At the Harlem Center

—No—I answer, slowly, carefully, truthfully—not as far as I know. But I was very close to a West Indian woman when I was a child.

My mother, asking, after my son and I came back from London: Do all of Gerardo’s English friends have those wonderful rosy cheeks?

—Well, not exactly. Most of them are West Indians.

She laughs: You know, Ethel, our old cook down in Panama, was from Jamaica. You took your first steps toward her. She was a big, tall woman, used to hang on to one of her legs—she had huge legs—and she’d carry you around the kitchen that way. You wouldn’t let go...

Now there was a daughter and her mother living all alone in the bush. They lived in a tree. And when the mother went out hunting, she would leave porridge and dried meat hanging in the tree.

... Ethel was a very dark woman, but she had a light-skinned daughter named Elma who was married to a very black man. When you were following Ethel around the kitchen, she used to say, She look [my Elma], she laah [dark skin].

The chief sent his men to carry the daughter away, but the mother returned in that moment and dropped down into the tree, singing:

Many as you are, I will stitch you with the big needle.

And they died. All of them died.

(Where is Ethel? Why are there no pictures of Ethel?)

But one day a dove came to tell the mother that her daughter had been carried off to the village. She knew, she already knew, and already she was coming down the path, carrying a pot full of magic powders and swinging a whisk made from a zebra tail.

—Tell me more about Ethel.

—Oh, Ethel? Well, you know, she was very superstitious. She was always dreaming numbers for the lottery: Mistress! Mistress! I’ve dreamed! she’d say. And then she’d tell me—oh, all about her dreams. She loved you so much. I remember you never wanted to eat with us. She would cook herself West Indian food—she ate in a little anteroom off the kitchen—and you never wanted to eat with us, you always wanted to go in there and eat West Indian food with Ethel. She’d say: Mistress, she laah [dark food].

She stood over the spot where her daughter had sunk into the ground. She took the pot full of magic powders and began to blow on them

Whooo

Whooo

Whoop

Three times she blew, and listened. And faintly, her daughter’s voice came up from under the ground, slinging.

Whoop

She blew again. The singing came louder...

Years after Bill does the oral history interviews, Ms. B. comes in to examine her transcript. I have brought it; she expected Bill. She can change anything she wants to, I explain.

She turns her head, sits down, crosses her knees. Begins to pick the transcript apart, delete a phrase here, add a comma there, insist on quotation marks. Saying: This isn’t correct, at all. If I’d known it was going to turn out like this, I’d never have agreed to it.

I want to say to her: Yes we tall, graceful, lovely lady. You’ve had half a dozen careers. During the war you drove a 2½-ton truck and loved it. (Bill asking: Did you ever think about getting a job driving a truck after the war?—A woman? and a black woman?—her eyebrows arch—Impossible! You walk fast, like to dance, like to laugh. Do you think I judge you by semiclasses?)

Yes, she obviously does think. She knows where to put them and proceeds to do it, shutting me out. I am Miss Anne.

Bill, during one of those hour-long phone calls: Do you know what the female equivalent of Mister Charlie is?

—Nope.

—It’s Miss Anne. Now, you’re going to get Miss Anned sometimes.

We laugh. It’s my first name.
She blew again. The singing came louder...

stand-in for history

At the Harlem Center

I used to just HATE white folks—...the voice comes loud from the side of the room—

Bill jerks his head toward the door: Let’s get out of here. Takes me into the office, angry, jaw set. Bill angry so easily, especially with his own people, the case he loves so much and demands so much of. I tell him of the summer night coming out of Fifteen, no room at the hotel, riding in a town taxi through the night of the olive groves, beyond the few streetlights toward the railroad tracks. I go inside to buy tickets to Guidi. Francisco, Damian, Gerard, wait on the platform.

From the window of the cramped office comes the dim glow of a kerosene lamp. I buy tickets for all of us and take them back to the platform, quiet in the middle of that Andalucian night. A few groups of people standing, waiting, like us, for the train to make its way up the coast, through the bare hills and sparse mining towns.

There, in front of me, is the stationmaster. A young man.

—You’re American?

—Yes.

—We don’t want Americans here. We don’t need Nixon—a torrent of Spanish—What we want is Mao and Ho Chi Minh (still living these). No Americans. (Franco still living then, too.) Mao and Ho Chi Minh!

And going on to apologize. It wasn’t me nothing against me, it was... America. Mine, the only reachable ear to receive that stoned-up wrath, accumulated as he read alone, right after night, in the circle of the kerosene lamp.

I am crossing a side street off Broadway, halfway across when a grey van suddenly swerves toward me with a vicious jerk. I see a long straight flat two-lane highway running between no horizons in the Salinas Valley, Wartime. A couple speeding down the road the only moving shape, except: the black-and-white puppy rolling in ash grey fat along the edge of the road, sags flying—until the car swerved, intentionally, smashed the leaping, rolling body, which was then quite still, and, when we reached it, broken, and requiring the asphalt, sped away.

Instead, anger, head deep somewhere on a dust-bowl farm, saved and sowed all across the country, aggravated here. Somebody’s jaw clenches, hand slips the steering wheel smoothly to one side. 1943, it might have been, or 4.

The van squeals and stops as I scramble up the curb. Looking back at me over his shoulder, the driver’s dark face, his eyes burning rage.

tourist in the city

At the Bushwick Center

Dorothy Jones, when I ask the time (I always have to ask what time it is), saying: We don’t wear watches. We don’t dare wear jewelry around here.

Two people mugged in front of the center last month. One of the women, 63, grabbed a pair of sewing scissors and stabbed the mugger in the chest. He ran off. Her friend was knocked down and kicked, though.

Harlem Center

Sunday Number Two train that speeds up the expanse instead of the west. First chance of reversing is 12:45. How do I get back to meet the people waiting for me?

Nighttime

Out on the street, doubtful about it, but maybe I can find a cab. Tim light nothing metered out there. Street repair, barricades.

I start to walk west, quick and fast, ask a young woman as I pass where I might find a cab—Nothing but cars parked up here—she tells me, walks with me to a promising corner, says: I’ll wait with you. It’s not too cool around here at night.

Which I knew. I definitely knew.

Crown Heights Bus Stop

Grateful as on a corner when a woman passing by glances at my open shoulder bag—nothing but books and papers in there—and says: You be careful with that bag, honey, they’re bad, around here.

Post Office

Early in the morning, buying three 30-cent airletters with a 20-dollar bill. I laugh and apologize, saying: You know, yesterday I was reading an essay my students liked and getting mad because it said women never had changed, and here I am with a 20-dollar bill.

Crown Heights Center

The woman behind the counter says firmly. Don’t you worry, honey. I’ve had four people in here already with 20-dollar bills, and they was all men.

And going on to apologize. It wasn’t me nothing against me, it was... America. Mine, the only reachable ear to receive that stoned-up wrath, accumulated as he read alone, right after night, in the circle of the kerosene lamp.

I am crossing a side street off Broadway, halfway across when a grey van suddenly swerves toward me with a vicious jerk. I see a long straight flat two-lane highway running between no horizons in the Salinas Valley, Wartime. A couple speeding down the road the only moving shape, except: the black-and-white puppy rolling in ash grey fat along the edge of the road, sags flying—until the car swerved, intentionally, smashed the leaping, rolling body, which was then quite still, and, when we reached it, broken, and requiring the asphalt, sped away.

Instead, anger, head deep somewhere on a dust-bowl farm, saved and sowed all across the country, aggravated here. Somebody’s jaw clenches, hand slips the steering wheel smoothly to one side. 1943, it might have been, or 4.

The van squeals and stops as I scramble up the curb. Looking back at me over his shoulder, the driver’s dark face, his eyes burning rage.

lordmakeusallonesheart

His name is St. John Love (given him, he says, in a dream). I have just told the audience in wheelchairs a Creation story. Dark as the pupils of his eyes, he sits up in his chair, head thrown back, line stretched wide and skinny, whistling it out: Cainen. Cainen. Cainen in you. Cainen in me.

I come closer and stand. Puzzled. He repeats, moving the hand with the crooked fingers toward me, him, bringing it to his own chest. I listen, staring at the pattern of pink gums and the gaps between long yellow teeth.

The aide comes up to say: I think it’s something Biblical. Cainen? I wonder. Cain...something or other?

Cainen, he insists.

Suddenly I know: Kingdom! Kingdom in you. Kingdom in me! He nods energetically: Cainen in you. Cainen in me.

His eyes are shining.
SEX, COLOR, AND CLASS IN CONTEMPORARY PUERTO RICAN WOMEN AUTHORS

BY MARGARITE FERNÁNDEZ OLMOS

If a study is made on the race composition of the people who live in slums and low-cost housing, who attend the mediocre public school system, who make up the bulk of the indigent population, who patiently wait long hours at public hospitals, the result would be that the majority of the Puerto Rican people, or as Puerto Ricans would rather say—triquedus. Until it is realized that the racist prejudice inherited from the Spaniards on one farther cemented by the North Americans has barely changed, a cultural and class integration will not be achieved. Only when Puerto Ricans startigituating the white images created and nurtured by mass media, and accept...that this is an island whose racial composition is multiracial, only then can there be integration and then unity to struggle as a whole. 1

Contemporary Puerto Rican writers are dealing with the issues of racism and its divisive effect on Puerto Rican society. Many women writers are producing critical works that confront race and class problems as they affect relations between women, as well as the consequences of racial constrictions in the larger society. Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are all, regardless of skin color, considered "non-whites." Yet, for Puerto Ricans, ethnicity is a determining factor in their identity according to gradations of color and physical characteristics. It is a highly developed skill which everyone learns from childhood; this reveals the racism of Puerto Rican society.

One of the more noteworthy examples of contemporary writing deals with the theme of race and class differences among women in the short story "Cuando las mujeres quieren un pelo bombeo" ("When Women Want Hair") by Rosario Ferré. This piece is considered to be a wealth and prominent family. Ferré focuses on the upper classes and their social relationships. In this story, published in 1976, a white middle-class widower—Isabel Luber—is meets her husband's Black mistress—Isabel la Negra. The theme of the Black or mulatta mistresses can be found throughout Caribbean literature and is related to the historical difficulties persons of different races had in legalized marriage. Not until 1861 was it possible for a white man to marry a woman of color in Puerto Rico without securing special permission. The laws, and the ideology that created them, forced Black and mulatta women into the role of mistress and contributed to the myth of the dark-skinned woman as the sensuous, forbidden fruit.

In contrast to the traditional literary presentation of the Black mistress, in Ferré's story Isabel la Negra (based on a legendary madame) thrives economically as she perfects the art of sex with the young white men of the town. She eventually supplants the white widow and is a successful and socially accepted. As a "self-made" woman, she has gained a certain respectability and power. Her success can be seen as she withdraws into an enclosed world of resentment and pain to which she clings to an imagined superiority based on marital status, social class origins, and color.

The most significant aspect of the story is that Ferré presents these very different women as mirror images. She matches their two voices in an interior monologue that combines their flow of consciousness so as to demonstrate the commonality of their roles as women—both exploited by a man of wealth and power. Ferré does not dismiss the social and economic advan-

tages of the white "middle-class" wife, but she seeks to give light to the unrecognized affinities between women who share a common victimization.

Wife, your lover and your wife, have always known that a prostitute lacks the skin of every kind. It is apparent in the way they slowly cross their legs, rubbing themselves lightly with the silken insides of their thighs. It is apparent in the way they get bored with men. They don't know what we go through, plagued by the same man for the rest of our lives. It is apparent in the way they jump from man to man in the tips of their eyelashes, hiding a swarm of greens and blue lights in the depths of their vaginas. Because we have always known that such prostitution is a potential lady, dressed in the metal-\n
Fig. 1. Papel mache and wood, with glass eyes. Norma Bencomo is an Argentinean artist living in NYC.

ge of a white house like a dove that will never be bred, of that house with a balcony of silver amethysts and plastic fruit garnishing hanging over the doors, drowned in the nautical of the sound of china when invisible hands set the table. Because we, Isabel Luber and Isabel la Negra, in our passion for you, Abaroxin, from the beginning of these, had been growing closer; had been hugging each other without realizing it, purifying ourselves of everything that defined us, one as a prostitute and the other as a lady. 2

For the poet Sandra Maris Esteves, whose experience has been primarily in New York's barrios, her African origins are a source of pride, strength, and cultural identity—something frequently denied to Puerto Ricans in the metropolis, where they fell into a category described by the historian Manuel Maldonado-Denis as "an unknown terrain equidistant from Blacks and whites. From the point of view of the class structure of the metropolis, the classification in question performs an important divisive function: instead of placing us alongside Afro-Americans, who are united with us by their common experience of slavery, as well as intermarriage, it opens a gap between Boricua and Afro-Americans. What stands out, therefore, is not what unites both minority groups—exploitation and discrimination—but rather the alleged "color line" that separates us." 3

New York Puerto Rican poets of the '60s and early '70s were conscious of the affinities of their struggles with those of the militant Afro-American writers, and their works were greatly influenced by Black writers in style, tone, and theme. Identifying with the Black community was an important step in the direction of class unity, which has yet to be realized.

For women writers, there are particular political dilemmas as they examine their roles within Hispanic culture and in relation to North American women and the feminist movement. They must define and affirm their language and traditions in the face of cultural penetration and appropriation in which they are immersed. For Puerto Ricans the relationship to North American society would eliminate Puerto Rican culture. Yet the presence of the metropolis. Latina writers, however, must also identify and denounce the internalized myths concerning their reality in Hispanic culture itself, and the contradictions and contradictions of its traditional, patriarchal values if they are to achieve true dignity and equality. Many Latinas feel that a definition of themselves as Third World women, based on their racial origins, is critical to take into account the cultural and socioeconomic complexities of their reality, limiting their ability to unite with other women who may share common concerns:

As Third World woman, we understand the importance, yet limitations of race ideology to describe our total experience. Cultural differences get subsumed when we speak of "race" as an isolated issue: where does the Black Puerto Rican sister stake out her alliance in the country, with the Black community or the Latina? And color alone cannot define her status in society—how do we compare the struggles of the middle-class Black woman with those of the light-skinned Latina welfare mother? 4

Sandra Maris Esteves' poetry proclaims her Black ancestry within a Puerto Rican and working-class context as she deals with the difficulties of life in the barrio: "My same is Marfa Cristina / I am a Puerto Rican woman born in el Barrio / Our men...they call me saiga because they love me / and in turn I teach them to be strong." In her poem "From the Commonwealth," Esteves combines the identity of race, language, and a woman's search for dignity:

So you want me to be your mistress and find dignity in a closed room because you say your real life is music even though...the sum total of contrary chords and dissonant notes occasionally surviving in ruffled harmony even though my great grandfather was black traded off in marketable conceptions of how black should brown even though the organic fruit of my womb carries your living blood while I am slowly crushed under the weight of disenchanted solitude...

© 1982 Margarite Fernández Olmos
Y si la patria es una mujer

Then I am also a rebel and a lover of free people

and continue looking for friction in empty spaces

which is the only music I know how to play?

Her longing for synthesis and integration, the ultimate goal of a people who understand that their survival depends on unity and the recognition of common struggles and goals among all colors, is best reflected in the poem "Blanket Weaver." Esteves—like Ferrer and other contemporary Puerto Rican women writers—attempts to go beyond the traditional barriers of race and class that have separated women in the past. She and other Latinas are creating psychic bridges and blending the different tones of our experience into a harmony; a song of many threads that will dance with the colors of our people and cover us with the warmth of peace.

Weaver

weaves a song of many threads . . .

weaves us a song of red and yellow

and blue, that holds the sea and the sky in its skin

that holds the bird and mountain in its voice

that builds upon our guess a home

for injustice foes oppression abuse and disgrace

and upon these fortifications of strength unity and direction

weaves us a song to hold us when the wind blows so cold to make our children well

submerged in furious ice

a song pure and raw

that burns and

attacks the colorless venom staking hidden in the petals of your sweetness of the black night

weave us a rich black hats lives

in the eyes of our warrior child

and feeds our mouths with moon laces

with rhythms intertwining

through all spaces of silence

a black that holds the movement of eternity

weave us a song for our bodies to sing

weave us a song of many threads

that will dance with the colors of our people and cover us with the warmth of peace.


6. From Hersey’s multilingual notebook: nuestro padre nuestro que estás en el cielo. Sin embargo, Rafael Rodríguez (Rafael Rodríguez Sánchez), "El Padre y El Hijo," in La Nueva Cultura, 1996, pp. 112-114.

7. From Víctor Jara’s "Canción de Amor," in the collection of his songs (La Nueva Cultura, 1996), pp. 73.


Margarette Fernández Olmos is Assistant Professor of Spanish at Brooklyn College, where she also teaches Women’s Studies. Right: Sue Heinemann is a NYC performance artist.

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The sun had slipped behind the horizon, the dust was settling into the ground and the tin roofs on the buildings on Main Street were popping. People too were cooling off. It was the time of day when sweat begins to dry on a person.

Tom Rainily and Jim Owens sat at a table in the bar. Dust was caked in the cracks in their boots. They drank their beer in big swallows to quench their dryness as much as to quench their thirst.

Tom settled in his chair and wiped his hand across his face feeling the dampness and coolness from the frosted glass. Hey, did you hear about Massoda?

What? asked Jim as he scowled back fanning himself with his hat. He liked the chills he made as his hot’s breezes hit his shirt, still damp from the day’s sweat.

You know. Massoda. That little jap that moved onto Miller’s place.

You mean the one that took off a while back? Hey, who’s taking care of that place for him?

Hell, I don’t know. Hey listen, he’s back. So? What’s it to you? Japs come and go.

He came back with a wife.

Well? They come back married all the time too. Come to think of it that hasn’t happened in a long while. I wonder why? Well, what’s all the to-do about?

He married him a nigger up in Sacramento, Jim. That little feller? Where’d he get the guts to go out and find him a nigger woman? Well, you don’t say. That little Massoda feller. Fast-looking is she, Tom?

Nish, Jim. I hear she looks the quiet type. Not one of them fat mammys is she. Tom? It’ll seem like that little squirt was outsized by a big woman.

I hear she looks like a hot one. Jim. One a them mulattas. Tom? I hear they’re a sexy woman. Damn! I wonder what folks in Little Yokohama are saying? One thing about those Japs, Tom. They hate niggers as much as we do.

On the outskirts of town Kenji Yasuda and his hired hand Tok Itô still worked in the Yasuda fields. Their bodies clouded against the thinning colors of the sun. They had just opened the skis and were standing and watching the water spill into the ditches. Around the troughs the thirsty earth darkened as it soaked up the water.

Ken crouched beside the gate wiping his brow with the back of his hand. Tok sat cross-legged next to him. They spoke in their native Japanese. Mmm…even that dirty water looks good after a hot day like this one, doesn’t it, Itô? What do you think about Matsuda bringing back a kurumbo for a wife, eh?

Well, Yasuda, it’s been five years since Japanese women, since any Japanese were allowed to come to America.

Five years. That’s right. 1929—five years since that damn law. Time passes quickly.

Perhaps it passed quickly for married men like you, Yasuda, but for bachelors like me it passes slowly. And do not forget California has laws forbidding marriage with hokujin. We have had little hope for the future and for having families. We’re watching Matsuda. He is the first to try this.

It is different, isn’t it, Itô? Different from running away with other men’s wives. That is all you young men have tried to do so far, isn’t it? Yes, all of us married Japanese are happy to see that Matsuda married.

Tok smiled. It’s true Matsuda is a flashy one. Almost like a Filipino.

The women think so too, oh Itô said, Ken nodding his head. Loris younger wives have a weakness for Japanese men who are more like Filipinos than like Japanese. What can a man who’s fifteen years older than his wife do? There are so many unattached younger men around.

That’s why you keep me out in that shack Tok thought to himself. Afraid to let me come up to your house. Afraid pretty Maseko will like me. Yes.
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AWOMAN IN THE WORLD

BY JAN GADSON ELLIS

Growing up, when I looked in the mirror, I used to see a skinny little girl, with slanted eyes and dark coppery skin, and I was pleased. I had not yet learned that dusky color would lock me in a prison for which there was no key.

Much of my childhood, I was protected from obvious racial slights because Momma thought the world of her pretty brown baby, and Grandma too. They worked hard, Momma and Gram, and they provided me with examples of the realities of being a Black woman. Momma always told me, in verbal and other ways, that I was important, that I was as good as "anybody" and better than most.

During my adolescence, many Black people, insecure about their own self-worth, projected their fears unto me and other dark brothers and sisters. It made our lives miserable. All too often, I would overhear people remark to Mama: "Such a pretty child, with such long hair, too bad she's so Black!" My soul cringes even now, whenever I remember those careless remarks that hurt so much.

In my later teens, I rebelled because of the limited societal and cultural roles dictated for a Black woman. White society and Black culture are still defining roles for women and Black people. They are over-enduring, long-suffering, supportive, nurturing, mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, and wives. The common thread is dependency. The roles identified as "appropriate" are narrow and restrictive. They would not let me live up to my full creative potential.

Now, I am careful about my life. I know I am not finished; there are several choices I have yet to make, and many things I have not experienced. I am still in process, giving rebirth to myself. My life, connected to Gram's and Mama's, is a work in progress—a great Black woman's tapestry that I am working on. What a legacy these women have left me. I still experience deep bitterness and frustration as I struggle against oppression to make my voice heard. I rage against the injustices that weighed my grandmother down, and limited Mama's life to one of survival. I rage for Gram, Mama, and me. The lessons they have taught me, these strong, loving women, are a wonderful gift. I treasure the spirit of self-sufficiency as I travel, bound to them, yet still unprotected, a Black woman in the world.

The above is excerpted from a longer piece by Jan Gadson Ellis, a Black feminist based in Massachusetts.
ON BECOMING A FEMINIST WRITER

BY CAROLE GREGORY

My hands were soft instead of agile like my mother's and grandmother's from farm work they had done in Mississippi. Even explained white racism or white male sexism to me. Because white sexism had convinced a friend of mine that she should go into the army to become a man. However, in 1969 I waited in brown hush puppies and a cotton dress to register for freshman classes. I was paying my own tuition and could not afford the expense of Central State or Wilberforce colleges for Negro youth. I knew little about my family's roots except that my grandmother had come North under strain. A white landowner had run her husband off their small farm and my grandfather had been told to choose the land or his life. Then, his same white man had come to my grandmother and insisted that she become his mistress. "I told you that Charlie wasn't no good," he said. Grandma, a Seminole African Negro, did not believe in submitting to white racism and so she managed to bring her four girls up North. In her maturity, my mother married my father, a steelmill worker. I was the first child from my mother's side to attend college.

Dr. Brown, one of my professors, said, "English departments do not hire Negroes or women." Like a guillotine, his voice sought to take my head off. Racist in my hometown was an economic code of etiquette which stilled Negroes and women.

"If you are supposed to explain these courses, that's all I want," I answered. Yet I wanted to kill this man. Only my family's history kept me from striking his xenocidal face. My murderous impulses were raging.

Moving like a man putting on boxing gloves, he pushed a university catalogue toward me. I memorized his hate stare which said that Negroes were irrational and women were intellectually inferior. Picking up the catalogue, I went outside for relief.

"English departments do not hire Negroes or women." This is my own experience. In the English department, I was told that the course I was taking was not recognized by the library. The English department and I went outside for relief.

Negro women were rare in the library. Mrs. Elsie Lee, a graduate of Tuskegee University, told me that I could not make any mistakes. She was a gentle woman who reminded me of the Negro teachers I had as a child. My second and third grade teachers taught me to read independently. My father's sister stressed that I should always be independent. These women protected me. "I have a librarian's degree, but they will only let me work as a clerk typist," Mrs. Lee confided one day. I felt more anger. The whole world was a male world, and I was not going to let it take me. I was going to write like Sarah Vaught sang. I was determined not to be "sweet" as Shakespeare once said. I was afraid to tell my parents and they might suggest that I get married. To counter my nightmares about racism, I joined the campus NAACP chapter and then I took a job typing at the adult branch of the NAACP. Although I enjoyed talking to people who discussed racism, I found myself identifying with the more militant SNCC.

On Ellis

Carole Ethel Gregory is a creative writer living in NYC. She teaches writing and lectures on Afro-American literature.

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One day I was doing a mailing for the local NAACP chapter and a tall, Lena-Horpe-looking woman walked into their office. Wearing a blue negligee, she stood in swish blue slippers.

"I'm an investigator," she whined.

Her name was Cora Emerson and her father had owned the first Negro funeral parlor in our town. They were not just owning a business, they were providing comfort and support to their community. They barely had any money, but they were barely able to pay off their mortgage and buy new slippers. They barely had a job, but they were barely able to make ends meet. They barely had a house, but they were barely able to keep it clean.

After working late one evening, I left to walk home. White cab drivers did not drive into Negro neighborhoods and I should not let Negroes drive cabs. Anger, I thought about my dinner which was two brothers always ate before I arrived home. Cora called out to me and invited me to stay with her for the school year.

I accepted Cora's offer and left my mother's home. Seated on a chase lounge, Cora told me many stories about our race. Her legal mother was white-looking, but would not have sexual relations with her wealthy husband. Her father's mother was white-looking, but would not have sexual relations with her wealthy husband. Her mother's mother was white-looking, but would not have sexual relations with her wealthy husband.

As the years passed, I became aware of a link between racism and sexual repression in our society. In the English department, I was told that the course I was taking was not recognized by the library. The English department and I went outside for relief.

Black women who did not have sex-repressive policies in the Black community had Natchez, Mississippi. The Birthmark" portrayed a man's love for science, which rivaled his love for men. Natchez, Mississippi, where I was born, was covered by a shower port. I was born on a farm where I was brought up by a birthing woman to make a baby. I was a woman who did not have sex-repressive policies in the Black community. I was a woman who did not have sex-repressive policies in the Black community.

We read Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms in which men were "pregnant" with bullets and the heroine died in childbirth. I was sensitive to how harmful this psychology had become because of the anti-war movement on campus. Yet literature did not reflect the destruction I was experiencing. Richard Wright's The Long Day came the closest to expressing some of my reality. A Black male writer with a white-looking mistress showed her son the body of a castrated Black man. His father tried to teach him to have sex with women as "whites" as possible, but to avoid the black-skinned woman. He said, "Oh, there ain't nothins would teach a white woman's got that a black woman ain't got... When you in the presence of a white woman, remember she means death." Ironically, our integrated Civil Rights Movement became middle-class white women's opportunity to fight racism and to mate with Black men. Black women who did not have sex-repressive policies in the Black community had Natchez, Mississippi. The Birthmark" portrayed a man's love for science, which rivaled his love for men. Natchez, Mississippi, where I was born, was covered by a shower port. I was born on a farm where I was brought up by a birthing woman to make a baby. I was a woman who did not have sex-repressive policies in the Black community. I was a woman who did not have sex-repressive policies in the Black community.

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women. Janie was not a feminist; she would bow.

Caribbean women were more open to a critique of male supremacy and more obvious to racism. In a 1938 essay, "Women in the Caribbean," Hurston wrote: "Naturally women do not receive the same educational advantages as men. This sex superiority is further complicated by class and color ratings. But if a woman is wealthy, of good family and mulatto, she can overcome some of her drawbacks. But if she is of no particular family, poor and black, she is in a bad way indeed in that man's world.

Caribbean women helped Black American students to see sex as a metaphor for power. Thus, to discuss the element of conquest in sex was not to be disloyal to Black men. I argued that Hurston probably felt more free to examine sex in the Caribbean. Their men protested less.

I raised this question of sex as a metaphor for power in a Caribbean literature class, as well as for folklore, negritude, and Black Church classes. Since there were no white students, it was possible to analyze authors of African descent. Three women had given us insight into the particular kind of sexism we men practice. They prefer European-looking women. Hurston's "Women in the Caribbean," "Govan Brookes' "Mord Martha," and Paule Marshall's essay "To Da-Dah, in Memoriam" explained that women with African features have been considered ugly by everybody and that they have been kept deformed by bigoted attitudes in our families.

Most of the men in the class were about people of African descent; a racist male-supremacist outlook on women and life. To show that they have status, some men want white women. This was a way a man like Frederick Douglass, who married a white feminist, was rejected by the Black women of his day. Oddly, Ida B. Wells' "acceptance of Douglass' second wife caused him to support her anti-lynching campaign, but Ida came to understand the racist nature of Black male sexism when Dr. Du Bois humiliated her at the founding of the NAACP. (He refused to read her name on the list of NAACP founders.) The white woman had become the ultimate power symbol for some men. Thus, Ida B. Wells wrote about Mary White Ovington, who served as a US Senator: She had basked in the sunlight of adoration of the few college-educated Negroes who have surrounded her, but has made little effort to catch the soul of a Black woman. She was a well-meaning but indolent man. I added African and Caribbean authors to the curriculum, I could not understand middle-class Black invisibility. The Black actors performing to assimilate students from the Third World. These students were arrogant tutors and they were hired by Miss Lawrence, the coordinator of English. Miss Lawrence said, 'I told you they were Black.' But I added a few more Black men in a social fiction class.

Miss Lawrence had said that she had scheduled me so I would have to miss studying with the author of "The Wrath of Race," I asked a journal question: "What is worse—Black inferiority or white racism?"

Our Black inferiority was unbelievable. I left NYU, earned a Master's in Black literature, and wrote a text. Teacher's College. That text, English for People Who Hate English, served to get me an interview to teach in the CUNY system.

When my name of many students argued that neither Nanny nor Leafy in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God had raped, I knew that male supremacy was retarding male development at York College. Male supremacy repressed thought in academia. For example, my Norton Anthology of American literature—John D. Killess and Gwen- delyn Brooks. Yet, as I taught, he respected my ability and supported me when Black students protested against my feminist critiques.

Black women felt the violation of Nanny and Leafy in very personal ways. They cried for Nanny and despaired Leafy. Several women said that the raped had judgment to look like survivors. The white women, to be considered beautiful by Black men. In addition, Native New Yorkers had mixed feelings about Leafy's daughter, Janie. Brown- and black-skinned women with wooly hair said that they were tired of losing Black men to white. Latin women, Asian women. Ironically, they liked to identify with Janie because darker women had a chance to experience being desired by Black men.

Women in the class observed how the wife of a slave owner had beaten Nanny and said that this beating was one cause of hostility between white and Black women. Could white women encourage sexism in white men? The white wife said to Nanny: "You didn't wash hands on them. But if she didn't wash hands on them, will you take him to the whippin' post and tie you down on yo' knees and cut de hide off yo' yaller back." Not only did slave women have to tolerate rape by owners, but they also had to bear the jealous rages of white husbands.

The rights of male supremacy were so uphold that the Black men ex- clude the rape of Leafy. Leafy's blindness said. Didn't the marriage proposal revoke the schoolteacher's use of force on this blonde virgin? Their Eyes allowed us a way to discuss sexism. Black or white men could brutal- ize a "foo" like Leafy, or she was a bastard. Several Black men said that they could dominate bastards like Leafy and Janie more easily than darker

women. Janie was not a feminist; she would bow.
I was on my first trip to Europe—my companion, a white friend who was a gregarious, charming and experienced traveler. I was just the opposite. We were on a large, slow ship which boasted a German crew, German cuisine, a large number of first-generation German-American passengers, and a Pan-american flag. In tourist class, where we were, everyone shared the communal bathroom. We lined up with washcloths and toothbrushes each morning. There were usually two lines for everything. My line was always the shorter one, with me at the end, since a point was made by the other, white passengers not to use a cabin or any other facility after I did. It took eight days to reach England. During that time, with the exception of my friend, no one ever did stand behind me.

El Al is reputed to be the most punctual, the most secure, the salt of airlines. They pay attention. The travel agent booked me with them on a flight to Israel. At the security tables at Kennedy Airport I was questioned so closely that other passengers later remarked on it. El Al security wanted to know what I was carrying to Israel, the purpose of the trip, the length of stay, the names and addresses of friends there, how long I'd known them, and even more. They thoroughly examined my luggage. Other passengers watched and listened to all this with great curiosity. I had been chosen for this scrutiny at random, the way they do with income tax returns, I thought. When the same thing happened at Lod Airport when I was leaving Israel (this time they spread the entire contents of my two bags of luggage the length of the ramp and unwrapped everything), I knew had been singled out. I was convinced, finally, that it was because of my appearance. I suffered the humiliating inconveniences with as much dignity as I could muster and wrote a scathing letter to the airline as soon as I got home. They never answered.

In Cuba I listened, along with other American visitors, to a government official relate the history of the Cuban government. One of the questions, whom he stopped speaking, had to do with the employment situation of Black people and women. As I was the only Black person present and therefore represented the entire American Black population, the first answer was directed at me. I was told that the Cubans do have a racial problem. All races are now equal in Cuba. There was this difficulty in the past. However, the Spaniards did not think the same thing about the races. They produced the mulatto. The next day I photographed workers laboring to renovate the old city of Havana. They were all Black. Other workers at the drawing boards, directing the restoration and planning, both men and women, were all white.

I had struck up an acquaintance with Black Americans living in Paris on my second trip to Europe—during this time. And my salad fixings were invited to Sunday dinner. That night it was difficult to find a vegetable stand open and when I did it was far from satisfactory. I questioned the price of the rather unsavory-looking tomatoes chose for me by the shopkeeper. In one motion he grabbed the bag of tomatoes—threw it across the shop. They splattered over the door and the wall. In French, which he could not have supposed I understood, he roughly, loudly declared that if I did not want them at that price and as they were, they're not for sale to me. He had charged me three times the normal price.

A colleague and I drove to Washington, D.C. to spend a weekend museum-hopping. We left New York on a Friday immediately after our classes, driving the length of the New Jersey Turnpike and beyond. We stopped just outside Baltimore at the last diner before the city. My friend went to the counter to order. I went to the ladies' room. I returned to find my kind, 64-year-old white friend standing transfixed with a terrible look on her face. "They say they will serve me, but you will have to take your food out," she said. We left the diner—without food. I spent the weekend consumed with shame.

Back in New York I called the NAACP, CORE and SNCC. They were all familiar with that dinner. It was one of the last holdouts against integration on that route. They gave me numbers to call. They told me what to say, how to act when I was arrested, certain this would happen if I went back. Two friends, both male and white this time, drove down with me. (Black males were asked, but refused because they could not trust themselves to be nonviolent.) We arrived and sat. We were under constant observation through the windows of closed kitchen doors. Someone must have got on the telephone and stayed on it. We were given the water treatment. Other customers stared. After an hour or so, the man got off the telephone. Someone served us. I had ordered a black and white sundae.
AN AMERICAN BLACK WOMAN ARTIST IN A JAPANESE GARDEN

by HOWAREDNA PINDELL

My first June day in Tokyo, I wandered confused, dazed by the 12½-hour flight, the 13-hour-640 a.m. change, and the flat, drab words I could not read. My previous rigors were in 1976, courtesy of a Japanese newspaper, had been an Eastern Cinderella story complete with a handsome prince. The homely white male status bestowed on a black woman represented, to the Japanese, a formidable institution. Royalty as the artist, without the protection of "benamori"—corporate sponsorship, was what one might imagine it would be like for a non-white person granted temporary white status in South Africa only to find oneself stranded, unaccompanied in the wrong room.

The painting at close range, the staves and the laughter, took courage to face daily. Central Tokyo, around the Gaiwa, was one of the few places where Japanese faces did not produce unexpected responses. Wandering out of a small radius of the tourist mecca revealed another Japan—not the polite one of the package tour propagandas, but a sometimes harsh, fragile and unhappy, brittle reality. (My short stay often brought crises to the public bath. Before I could address women would run screaming, thinking a foreign male had strayed into the wrong place.)

On the long wooden stairs of a small shrine near Tanjum Onomol, Nikko, was a sign which read in English: "Please take off your shoes." I removed my shoes and ascended. A young woman sitting in a glassed-in room, left of the entrance, waved violently to me to go away. At first I thought there was a private ceremony in progress, but the shrine was small and open enough for me to see that it was absolutely empty. I decided to ignore her and proceed, seeing no activity. The attendant became extremely agitated and relayed to me as best she could that it was absolutely forbidden for me to enter. I felt angry and puzzled. Why have a sign in English, if foreigners are not allowed to enter? Several experiences later it struck me that she perceived me as defiling her precious shrine as I was a non-white foreigner—hence "imure." I later read in Minnix Hanae's Peacocks, Rebels and Outcasts (New York: Pantheon, 1982) that the brokum (Japan's "untouchable class") are not permitted to enter temples and shrines as they are considered "unclean." They are relegated to earning their living in professions the Japanese consider dirty, such as butcher or tanner. The brokum are Japan's scapegoat group, along with the Koreans and all non-Japanese Asians. For them it has been a seemingly endless history of discrimination and segregation in education, housing, and jobs. Some say, according to Hanae, that it is because they are descendants of vanquished clans like the Tsara (Heike) who were defeated by the Minamoto, or that it is because they are descendants of the Kuresan or Aines (Japan's original "native" people, who are referred to as Caucasian because they have more body hair than the "Japanese"), or that it is because they eat meat in a vegetarian, Buddhist, fast-eating nation. (Several people I met during the course of my seven-months—in some odd attempt to reassure me—pointed blankly, with pride, "I am racially pure Japanese!")

I stumbled constantly over taboos and codes of behavior deeply embedded in a rigid hierarchical society. Rich was superior to poor, old superior to young, men superior to women, with few questions asked in passive obedience to the demands of conformity. One moment, I felt I had grasped the system—the next, I was thrown into confusion by some new pattern of behavior that did not fit what I thought were their rules. I learned to carry the conspicuous signs of the temporary tourist, the camera and the map. People would scurry to my aid, taking me by the hand to my destination, or would lash out at me, the intruder, in ridicule. (One male child on a country road in Nara tried to kick me as hard as he could. Fortunately he missed and lost his shoe in mid-air.)

The person in charge of my great arrangements, a man in his late twenties, told me soon after I arrived that it was forbidden for me to speak directly to an older man in authority. That I could speak only to the women in the room, and that it was forbidden for me to visit certain places because I was a woman. I was the first Black woman and the first single woman to have participated in the program. The married women who proceeded me were white. They were never told these things. I often felt I was faced with a Jokiy and Hyde dilemma in which the same person would act in a diametrically opposite way depending on who he was dealing with. Grant money would be withheld from me for long periods of time, whereas the other grantees received their money unhindered—except for a few, a young puppeteer who encountered questions about whether or not his puppets, "because of their big noses," were Jewish. When I showed my videotape Free. White and 21 privately (I was not offered a public screening, although other grantees were invited to show their tapes), the remarks were always accompanied by laughter at how Jewish I looked in white acne.

Women, along with non-Japanese, were used as a target for all the rage that had not been displaced elsewhere. Late evening TV burst with images of women being raped, mutilated, stabbed, hanged. It seemed as if all classes of Japanese men favoured comics filled with sadomasochistic pop images of the rape and torture of Japanese and foreign women. White women, in an odd contradiction in terms of the preferential treatment I saw them receive were used in very much the same way that non-white women are used in the American media—as stereotypes of the reckless wants, the prostitute, the mistress. The Black woman was portrayed as the cold, aloof high-fashion model.

After World War II, children of a Japanese mother and Black father were deported to Brazil. In Japan the children of Japanese emperors and non-Japanese fathers are not born with Japanese citizenship. This is a "gift" which may only be bestowed by a Japanese father. The Koreans, although they were made citizens during the war to add to the common folder, are denied citizenship today unless they are willing to give up their Korean heritage and adopt a Japanese name. An article last summer in the Japan Times revealed that during the war the Japanese planned to build death camps modeled on the Germans' extermination camps for Jewish people in order to rid the world of "imure" races, starting with the Korean people.

I think often about the Japanese and their frantic attempts to emulate the white man's more negative aspects—magnified by their own singular history of repression and harsh, discrimination. Their franticness to emulate seems to root itself in an unconscious realization that they too are the targets of racism—"If you can't beat them, join them." They cannot forget that twice they received the bomb that whites at the time would never have dropped on their own race.
WRATH OVER RACISM AND RAPE

The American Indian Community House joined with the New York Chapter of NOW, the Women's Liberation Center of Nassau County, and Women Against Pornography outside the New York Hilton on October 14, 1982 to protest the introduction of a new video game which features the naked figure of General Custer, macho in western hat and boots, picking his way through a barrage of arrows to take his "prize": a bound and helpless Indian woman. The president of American Multiple Industries, the game's manufacturer, described the scenario: "There is no rape and ravage scene. He does make an impression on the Indian girl, but you can see she's having a good time. A smile comes across her face."

"Custer's Revenge," with its mix of rape and racism, is only the most repellent of three new products AMI brought to the Hilton's National Music, Sound and Video Conference. Other titles in this line of so-called adult entertainment are "Boot 'Em and Boot 'Em" and "Bachelor Party." The Custer cartridge promotes a version of sex as "conquest under threat of obliterating, which is what rivets adolescents to consoles in the first place," writes Richard Goddell in the Village Voice (Oct. 23).

The American Indian Community House statement says in part: "As American Indians, we are vehemently opposed to the exploitive use of our race for the titillation of the public. We see this disgusting video game for what it truly is, a sexist, racist, sadistic expression, the sole purpose of which is to fill the pockets of its creators and promoters. . . . Would the caricatureization of a people be acceptable if the depicted were: Begin attacking a Palestinian woman? "Prince Charles chasing a female IRA member? Hitler have his way with a Jewish maiden?"

"If it were a kid's game, I'd say take it off the market tomorrow, but it's not," the company spokesman said. But Robin Quinn of Women Against Pornography believes these games invariably wind up in the hands of minors, and Diane Wood of NOW adds, "I don't think adults should be playing it either." (Daily News, Oct. 14.)

The gamesters learn the thrill of danger, the risk of personal injury—prongs raining on prongs, dodging projectiles—as the lascivious general aims for the women of darker skin, who is tied up and immobilized. "The very idea that rape could be considered as a reward—what type of aberration of the human spirit is that?" asks Diane Wood. "It's meant to be funny, not erotic," replies its manufacturer (Daily News, Oct. 14).

Into the electronic age with the same old primitive prejudices: sexist, racist computer graphics aimed at producing men who master machines, who objectify women and use push-button violence without a qualm.

From AMI's promotional packet for "Custer's Revenge."
IF THE PRESENT LOOKS LIKE THE PAST, WHAT

Equally important, however, is to "What it is, however, is very important. It is this feeling of cruel racism directed toward the black women by the black middle class. The black middle class has for generations excluded the black block women from the mainstream of middle-class society, and it is by the black immediate against them, in itself a derivative factor that has chipped off the black race as a country into thoughtlessness, consequences: consequently the black middle class has de- served his own position and is a stunted, a large number of black working-class people believe, to extinguish. What it is, is an enough that has helped whites turn blacks into themselves and that has caused the black middle class to view itself as a force of psycho- logical annihilation.

Thus the black working-class is beginning to ask itself the question: "What is a people that prepare themselves for the future in spirit? What is a people that teaches the worth of our own genetic heritage?" For certainly, every Afro-American is descended from a black woman. What then can be the destiny of a people that pillages and cherishes the blood of the white slaveholder who maimed and degraded their female ancestor? What of the thought of a race of descendants of slaves that implicitly gives themselves a greater honor than the African women they enslave? What can be the end of a class that pretends to honor blackness while secretly it despises working-class black women who raise race no trace of white blood?

-Treille Tillery, "The Black Woman, the Black Woman and the Black Woman," The Black Scholar (March 1974)

For many years I pondered Tillery's statement, then turned to black literature, because it is so very instructive, to see whether he had support. I began with three 19th-century novels by black women, as background, and this is what I found.

In the first novel one character says to another:

"If you'd send them putty white hands of him you'd never think she kept her own house, let alone anybody else's.

"My but she's putty beautiful long hair comes way down her back putty blue eyes, an' putty white as anybody in the place."

In the second novel, it goes like this:

Maggie Reade opened wide a pair of lovely dark eyes and raised two small white hands in surprise.

"Where did you find it?"

"I don't know, but it was in the back of the trunk."

In the third novel:

Her dress was plain black, with white chiffon at the neck and wrists, and her breast was a large bunch of "black roses" was fastened. Tall and fair, with heavy ringlets, curling nest, round face, soft brown eyes veiled by long, dark brows which gave her a darkly attractive character. Her white skin flushed, she blushed upon them—combination of "queen rose and lily in one."

The novels quoted are: Jane Ladislaw, Old Laura, Or This Sunday was first published in Chicago, July 22, 1922, Alice Walker, etc. "Black Ribbon," in the Color Purple.
WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE? ... 

BY ALICE WALKER

Degan kneeling female figure. Mall Wood. 2315.17.

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What is really being said here?

What is being said is this: that in choosing the "fair," white-looking woman, the black man as-
sumes he is choosing a weak woman. A woman
she can own, a woman he can beat, can enjoy
beating, can exhibit as a woman beaten; in short,
a "conquered" woman who will not cry out, and
will certainly not fight back. And why? Because
she is a lady, like the white man's wife, who is
also beaten (the slaves knew, the servants know,
the maid always knew because she doctored the
bruises) but who has been trained to suffer in
silence. Even to pretend sex is better afterward;
that she enjoys it because her husband obviously
does. A masochist.

And who is being rejected? Those women "out of the middle of the road"? Well, Harriet
Tubman, for one. Sojourner Truth, Mary McCleod
Bethune, Shirley Chisholm, Ruby McCallum, As-
ata Shakur, Joan Little and Destele "Bashilda"
Woods. You who are black-skinned and fighting
and screaming through the solid rock of America
up to your hip pockets every day since you ar-
ived, and me, who treasures every 99 cows of
my jaw teeth, because they are all I have to chow
my way through this world.

That black man choose light and white women
is not the women's fault. Any more than it was
their fault they were chosen as commodities to
rich plantation owners during slavery. Nobody
seems to choose big, strong, fighting light or white
women (and these have existed right along with
those who could be beaten). Though there used to
be a saying among black men that for white wom-
ens are best because the bigger they are the more
whiterness there is to love, this is still in the realm
of ownership, of "prize." And any woman who
settles for being owned, for being a "prize," is
more to be pitied than blamed.

We are sisters of the same mother, but we
have been separated—though put to much the
same use—by different fathers. In the novels of
Frank Yerby, a wildly successful black writer,
you see us: the white-skinned black woman
placed above the blacker as the white man's mis-
tress or the black man's "love." The blacker
woman, when not preparing the whiter woman
for sex, marriage or romance, simply raped. Put
to work in the fields. Stirs in the kitchen. Raising
everybody's white and yellow and brown and
black kids. Or knocking the overseer down, or
cutting the master's throat. But never desired or
romantically loved, because she does not care for
"esthetic" suffering. Sexual utilization is out, be-
cause when you rape her the bruises don't show
so readily, and besides, she lets you know she
hates your guts, goes for your balls with her
knives, and calls you the motherfucker (in the
original sense) you are until you knock her out.

Perhaps one problem has been that so many
of our leaders (and writers) have not been black-
skinned themselves. Think of William Wells
Brown, who could pass; Charles W. Chesnutt,
who could and did pass; Jean Toomer, who passed
with a vengeance. Langston Hughes, who could
cannot (when young) as a Mexican: Booker T.
Washington, John Hope Franklin, James Weldon
Johnson, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois,
Arna Bontempe, Nella Larsen, Richard Wright,
Cleve S. Herndon, Frank Yerby—still very differ-
ent from the way they wrote because we
understand America; but we must be wary of their
definitions of black women because we
cannot understand ourselves.

In his landmark essay, "Of the Dawn of Free-
dom" (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois wrote: "The problem
of the twentieth century is the problem of the
color-line—the relation of the darker to the light-
er races of men in Asia and Africa, in America,
and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this
problem that caused the Civil War." This is a
true statement, but it is a man's vision. That is
to say, it seems clearer across seas than across the
table or the street. Particularly it omits what is
happening within the family. "The race" at home;
a family also capable of civil war.
FOR THE WHITE PERSON WHO WANTS TO KNOW HOW TO BE MY FRIEND

BY PAT PARKER

The first thing you do is to forget that I'm Black.
Second, you must never forget that I'm Black.

You should be able to dig Aretha, but don't play her every time you come over. And if you decide to play Beethoven—don't tell me his life story. They made us take music appreciation too.

Eat soul food if you like it, but don't expect me to locate your restaurants or cook it for you.

And if some Black person insults you, mugs you, rapes your sister, rapes you, rips your house or is just being an ass—please, do not apologize to me for wanting to do them bodily harm. It makes me wonder if you're foolish.

And even if you really believe Blacks are better lovers than whites—don't tell me. I start thinking of charging std fees.

In other words—if you really want to be my friend—don't make a labor of it. I'm lazy. Remember.

THE SUBURB DREAMS OF EVIL IN NEWARK, NJ

BY HILDY YORK

Small groups of teachers huddle like prisoners within circles of students, mostly Black; all the department stores are filled with sleazy rayon blouses and the signs are in Spanish;
they have stolen the horses of the mounted police and cannon arrogantly through the parks, not even stopping several rapes and muggings, even laughing and shouting obscenities; the city is completely locked, barred, gated, barred, or locked; the people are all thieves, rapists, murderers, or drifters; all they do is drink, laugh, dope, pimp, collect welfare and stand around on corners;
someday they will screech toward the suburbs in Cadillacs with fins or old jalopies with missing fenders, and we will have to give up our mads and hide in our split-level closets.

Pat Parker lives and works in Oakland. Her most recent book is Movement in Black. Hildreth York, an art historian and artist, is an Associate Professor and currently Chair of the Art Department at Rutgers University. Newark College of Arts and Sciences.

Linoleum prints by Michele Godwin, who studies at the School of Visual Arts, NYC.
ASIAN-AMERICAN WOMEN:
IDENTITY AND ROLE IN THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

BY LIANG HO

These personal experiences out of my life are not uncommon for Asian-Americans. And they persist for non-white Americans whether they have lived here for several generations or are newly arrived immigrants. Regardless of our/our dress or mastery of "standard English," our common bond is that we cannot "pass for white" and therefore, our identity and role in America is subject to uncertainty. We don't easily fit into our ancestral ethnic shoes, and we can't pass for "all-American" either. Because we continue to experience other people viewing us first as "exotic Orientals," we are forced to respond to a double image of our selves. Our dilemma is built into the requirements of living in America as non-whites.

Facing our bi-cultural identity and role is more than just facing reality; it's coping with a far more complex and delicate balance of different cultural realities based on tradition, upbringing, and survival. Cultures structure and condition the ways in which their members experience themselves and relate to the world. For instance, what we feel, how we feel, when we feel it, and in what way we express it, vary greatly from culture to culture. (See Edward T. Hall's "The Silent Language" [1959], The Hidden Dimension [1966], and Beyond Culture [1967] for a brilliant critical examination of cross-cultural differences.) The principles and dynamics of bi-cultural identity and living are remarkably similar no matter what cultures are compared it various place and time settings.

For example, my own cultural background is Chinese. One basic war Chinese approach life and living is through a situation-appropriate view, emphasizing sensitivity and adjustment to human interaction, and the maintenance of interpersonal harmony, particularly in public. Proper respect and deference are shown to others according to age, rank, and gender. Open display of strong emotions and personal opinions, especially negative ones, is suppressed or even punished by Chinese parents when raising their children. In this context, there is discouragement of the development or expression of "individuality" or "white American" think of it. Our psychological formation is more directed toward adjusting our behavior to suit the situation, not imposing our personality on it.

A good example of different cultural perspectives is in a public social function where Chinese and white Americans are interacting. From the Chinese point of view, we want very much to "let you have face" so we tend to go along and be more agreeable with what you say. For us, the merit of what you say is often not as important as good interpersonal relationships. Even today, Chinese-Americans who are too "independent and assertive" in their behavior, and not sensitive or deferent enough to the group, may find other Chinese showing strong disapproval. In general for Chinese, open public conflict and disagreement are to be avoided because they still carry a strong connotation of being "bad, abnormal, and unhealthy." Conflict literally means loss of control, and therefore "social face," which also leads to illness.

White Americans would experience and interpret this same public interaction differently. They would expect a discussion or verbal response in some detail, pertaining to the issues raised from their end. They would also expect someone Chinese to express her or his person's individual opinion. Better still, different or opposing opinions should be offered for discussion in order to arrive at the "superior position or truth." The American would interpret the Chinese person's agreeable, smile, and perhaps nod of head as a personal affirmation of the statement.
of my life are not. And they whether they actions or are recipes of our world," our com- white and" and in America is easily fit into can’t for re continue to first as an "respond-to a lemma is built America as non-
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collections. From the y much to "let alone and be. For us, the is an important s. Even today, "independent and not sensi-
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discussion in (in or truth). Ch...
I want to welcome each and every one of you this evening. It's really a pleasure to see so many of us here. We have the races represented, we have people from all walks of life represented, and we are here in friendship to share a meal and honor women from our past. This is a very special occasion. —Carolyn Whittow, co-mistress of ceremonies

On October 15, 1981, one hundred women in Ithaca, New York, brought a "dias de paso" to the Unitarian Church parlor. They came to honor Eleanor Washington, great-grand-niece of Harriet Tubman, and Helen Buevett, town historian and daughter of a suffragist. This evening and the week-long process that preceded it was a performance artwork commissioned by the Johnson Museum at Cornell (Tree: A Performance with Women of Ithaca was created by Suzanne Lacy and Marilyn Rivchin).

From an open workshop on art and politics, the major metaphor for our dinner emerged:

We're fortunate in Ithaca to have a heritage rich in both Abolition and Suffrage Movements. It seems appropriate we think about the context of women's friendships in relationship to these two movements and how we can build upon the ways in which anti-sexist work and anti-racist work among women who are friends can move forward, perhaps starting from tonight. —Nancy Berenson, co-mistress of ceremonies

We were not trying to gloss over the suffragist betrayal of black women, nor the distrust that exists now between the races. But we hoped that the pride in the strong women of our heritage and an experience of warmth would provide a context for a future dialogue about the fragile relationship between women of different races.

I know I've learned something tonight. Being a新鲜man and all. I feel it's my time to listen, and I was right, because I was able to hear the beauty of your history, your color, and thank you for the wisdom of your presence. I didn't have to wait till you spoke. I felt it the moment I walked in. . . . It made me remember my great-grandmother, her touch, her color, and a line from Ntozake Shange, who wrote, "We must all learn our own commons and bring them and share them with the world." —Participant

So we created a potluck dinner, with a program equally balanced between white and black music, poetry, and history, and we invited each woman to bring the name of a woman important to her own past to sign in the roots (with her own name in the branches) of a large painted tree.

I look around tonight and I see my mother; I see Mrs. Montell, Mrs. Eastman. . . . I see church women here. Mrs. Washington has been a presence in my life as long as I can remember. Sitting together around the kitchen table, I talk about what was, what will be, what could have been, what ought to be—all of the beautiful things in life and some of the troubled things too. In our community we sit down together in our kitchen every day of the week. It's nice that tonight is so large and all, but it's not new to me and not new to them. I think the beautiful thing about the women is the gathering of the different generations. There's a long continuity from grandmother to children to children's children. Mrs. Washington and others here tonight have made the path, and made it easy for me. These ladies are my thing: check them out! —June Williams

There were students, church women, artists, housewives, cooks, clerks, administrators, teachers, scientists, and organizers. There were vats and suspenders, knot hats and fall. There were potato scarves and rope pearls, levis and t-shirts, silks and polyesters: 100% cotton. Older women baked sweet potato pies and sponge chocolate cakes; college students served noodles and made mince soup; working women ran into markets on their way from their jobs to pick up cheese and bread. In short order the food was gone, all of it, down to the last slice of pie, and the room grew quiet as Nancy Berenson and Carolyn Whittow announced the program. That program was in itself something of a miracle:

Can you imagine only five short days ago tonight was just an idea in a few people's minds? Sunday we began planning. On Monday we started to talk to women in the community. On Tuesday we invited the guests of honor. On Wednesday the singers were approched. This woman came forward to offer a poem, that one to hang an etching from Harriet Tubman's grave. "Backstage" we who've been planning it feel like a miracle somehow happened, and that miracle is your spontaneity and strong networks that made this possible! —Suzanne Lacy

One woman sang spirituals, another sang Emily Dickinson's poems set to music. Someone read Susan Griffin's poem on 'suff arise Tubman, and Mrs. Washington read from a book about how her great aunt was the first woman to receive a pension from the army. Mrs. Blair said she had heard about the history of women's suffrage in Ithaca and how her red-haired mother became a feminist after visiting a workshop. In the warm interlude after they spoke, the guests settled deeper into their seats, and someone asked what came next. It seemed to all as if we had come to a beginning rather than an ending...

I am amazed by how few people I know in this room, and I've been here 11 years. I think it would be just fantastic to do this again. If we each brought the people we know. . . . To begin a dialogue is very very important—to view this as a beginning, not as a once in a lifetime happening. That would be very sad. —Carolyn Whittow

One at a time each woman in the room rose to introduce herself to the others. After the first few women spoke, it was clear that here, in the experiences of each woman, was the real "heart" of the evening. This was the beginning of the dialogue.
My name is Jean. I’ve wanted to say something all evening but I’m so shy. I’ve always felt the meals I prepare for my family are works of art. I’m Blanche Thompson and I used to work with Mrs. Washington in the women’s club. In 1940 we met with a group of women at Southside Community Center and we unveiled a monument to Harriet Tubman. I praise God for being able to be in your midst tonight, because one time today I told Mrs. Washington I wouldn’t be able to come. I love arthritis and heart condition and I didn’t think I’d be able to drive, but truly the Lord made the way for me to be here tonight. I enjoyed the dinner and I enjoyed being with you tonight, so just pray for me.

I’m Bernice Miller. I’ve been knowing Mrs. Washington a long time, and she and I talk half the night all the time!

I’m Pearl Murray, and I cook at one of the fraternity houses at Cornell. From there, I cook at home. The door is always open so anybody that would like to, can, and there’s always a cup of tea or something waiting there. Mrs. Washington is a lovely person, a lovely friend, and we don’t talk at night—I can never get her on the phone! Everybody else is talking to her! Anyway, I catch her on the weekends. Many many more borng right like Big, and food—I love to cook.

My name is Joan Alber. I’m member of the Bernadette Powell defense fund. I spend a lot of time organizing cooking at Moosewood Restaurant where I work, and I would love to do it for a function like this!

I feel really tongue-tied around all you fascinating people. I’m a part-time secretary at Cornell, a mother and a grandmother, and I’ve been active in the nuclear weapons freeze campaign. I just so happen to have a petition with me tonight (if anyone’s interested!) This has been a great night and I’d like to see it continue. There’s so many important issues we could work on, something for everybody and even still there’s work to go around.

The morning after the dinner, a small planning group met to brainstorm ideas for the future. Nancy had always wanted to stage tours of under-ground railroad stations in conjunction with dramatic readings along the way. Matlinsky suggested a city-wide patchwork quilt, each square a portrait of a woman important to a woman resident. The tree painting could be signed by all the women involved in the planning process. Another dinner might honor all the ethnicities in Ithaca—big enough to fill the football stadium.

We met that morning because we knew that our single dinner, no matter how successful as a first experience, would not substantially address racism and sexism among the women of Ithaca (as one black woman said before the dinner, “It’s the second meeting where the shit starts to come down!”). Nor would it create particularly deep experience of women’s community where there was as yet little recognition of it. It seemed to us that the process we had set in motion needed to be nurtured with subsequent events. I left a tired but enthusiastic planning group and returned to Los Angeles. They continued meeting two or three times, and then stopped.

When I went to Ithaca I set up a question for myself. How long was it necessary to be in a place in order to produce a networking performance, and how long could the process set in motion by the artwork be sustained? I could not tell, but it seemed possible to adapt the model of the suffragist “stumper” who traveled from town to town raising the vote—a person-to-person consciousness-raising and community building process, a kind of interaction subsumed in our culture by mass media. Could we create a network among women across the country through performances? In Ithaca I learned that in the right community, with the support of activists there, a very moving event could be produced in a week. But the lack of time to build a follow-up group and the unfamiliarity of the goals and processes of such performance events, together with the press if people’s normal lives, seemed to contribute to our inability to sustain energy after the performance.

This issue is related to another problem with such performances: as rich an experience as one evening might be, the real problems of racism, the daily perpetuation of oppression and its institutionalization, are staggering in their enormity. How can we even presume to touch upon them with a single evening, particularly one clothed in good feelings rather than with real underlying hurt and anger? The contradiction with broad-based networking is that the purpose (at least the apparent and stated purpose) must be unbreathing and wide enough in its appeal to attract many different kinds of women—sometimes appears hopelessly “lib- eral” when measured by a radical yardstick—yet were we to pose more difficult political issues at these beginning stages we might run the risk of attracting only the converted.

It is important to remember when assessing such networks that though they may approach the problems of real life, the things they offer are not always the same as political strategies. Artists cannot take the place of activists; exactly what they can offer to political movements, aside from “illustrating” the cause, is not always clear. They may be able to offer us models and strategies; only careful analysis and questioning will show that. The Tree dinner was developed on the premise that over-come oppression on an individual level begins with dialogue, and that a dialogue is facilitated by experiences of pleasure in being with one another—building, if ever so slowly, situations of trust. This may or may not be an effective long-term strategy for dealing with racism; in the short term, for that night, the experience of love among the women in that room was undeniable. I’m really not sure how much art can do toward social change. One thing I’m sure it can do, however, is to offer us a vision of the possible; it can realize, over and over, metaphors for community that create for us, if only temporarily, the experience of the social relationships we one day hope to have with each other.

Suzanne Lacy is a feminist performance artist from Los Angeles. She explained, during the performance at Cornell: "I am an artist but I don't paint. I do performance art—your worst enemy that takes place in real life with each of us as an actor playing herself."

From Tree. Photo by Marilyn Rivchin.
what did you
learn in school?
Images found by Mary-Lisa Hughes and Jane Thurmond.

La Salle takes possession of the land.

Raleon takes possession of the Pacific.

STATEMENT TO THE RACISM WORKSHOP

BY JUANA MARIA PAZ

Jaime Quick-to-See Smith. Ghost Dance Series. 1983. Pastel. In the late 1880s, ghost dances [performed at night] were started by a Native American who thought that if you kept on dancing, the white people would go away, the buffaloes would return, and everything would be the same again. "My Ghost Dance is a symbol of what is going on in this country now, of all the anguish society is going through. This is my own personal ghost dance about these conditions," explains Jaime Quick-to-See Smith, a Flathead, French Cree, and Shoshoni born on the Flathead Reservation in Montana.
I am glad to hear white women are planning racism workshops. I would like to feel people have my best interests at heart. I have done a lot of thinking on this group and this is what I want from all of you.

I want you to stop talking in abstractions and about historical facts. I want you to talk about real things that are happening in this community and make a commitment to change it. I want white women to take responsibility for their actions and consciously and publicly affirm the need for change in those actions. What happens in this group is not an isolated, sheltered discussion but can affect the community immediately.

The first thing women to examine is how they have helped women of color in this community. And how they haven't helped.

When you helped third world women in our struggles, did you do it in a decondescending way and on your terms? Did you make it clear that you would make your own demands about what you want and give that you did not want to be asked next time or every time? Did you make it clear that women of color have no claims on your time, energy, homes, resources?

In situations where you knew a woman or child of color needed help, did you decide it wasn't your responsibility? Did you make yourself unapproachable so you wouldn't have to be asked? And therefore, couldn't be criticized for refusing?

When you talk about women and children of color in this community, do you talk about how difficult we are—unreasonable, difficult to deal with and demanding? Do you validate that we have to be crazy, or do you try to get your friends to feel sorry for you for having been victimized at the hands of a bitter third world woman?

Do you know that you do this? Do you realize that you treat us like monsters who are scaring your pure little-white world when we fight back? Again, do you positively affirm that we have the right to be angry? Can you say that out loud?

Do you expect women of color to be in a "butch-type" role? Racism is very sexual in nature. What are your sexual feelings toward the women of color in this community, including the children? What do you do when you're attracted to a woman of color? Do you break out and feel sorry for yourself, tell yourself she'd never be open to you because you're white? This puts all the responsibility on the women of color to deal with the energies you know she must feel. Do you have fantasies of being seduced by a third world woman? Do you find us beautiful, exotic, fascinating? Do you feel attracted and a raid at the same time by the differences you see in us?

What about money? Do you have money in the bank, stocks, resources, rent funds, left-over power, unspoken guilt that destroys you? Do you share these resources, or again is it only with lovers that you open up?

When a woman and child of color come to town, do you open your home to them? Do you extend yourself in any way? Do you take enough interest in the situation to see what they need—rides to the welfare office, co-op, help with childcare, a place to stay, information on resources in town? Do you avoid possible confrontations and criticism from women of color by withdrawing your energy as soon as things get tough? Again, white women punish us for our separatism. The subtle message is that if we don't take the racism, we don't get the privileges either. In other words, if we don't take you as you are, you won't feed us, or whatever help we happen to need at the time.

Do you assume you're not being racist unless someone tells you you are? What do you do when a woman of color tells you you're racist? Do you say she's not accepting you as you are and try to make her feel guilty? Do you cry and try to make her feel sorry for you? Are you such a pig about it that she wants to run away and forget the whole thing? Do you go back to your white friends and try to get support for feeling attacked? Do you take any responsibility at all for your actions?

When someone tells you you are racist, do you get defensive and demand that she prove it? Do you do the worst thing of all—the old divide and conquer tactic—you try to get another third world woman to say you weren't racist and defend you? Do you try to get the woman who defends you to attack the woman who criticized you?

Do you try to turn women of color against each other and disguise your own racism? Have you ever in this community gone to a woman of color on your own and capped to your racism is dealing with her WITHOUT BEING CONFRONTED FIRST?

Are you laying all the responsibility for calling the racism on us so that when we do do you can say we're attacking you?

Bearing all this in mind, this is what I want from you—I want you to examine the ways you have been racist to women of color in this community and our children.

I want you to take responsibility for your actions without being confronted. I want you to make each other to deal with your racism and change—not feel sorry for yourself and soothe each other's guilt.

I want you all to come out of this group knowing how you have been racist to specific women and children of color in this town in real things that have happened. I want you to examine your behavior before you go to that woman and cop to it. Then I want you to seek that woman out, already knowing how you can change; be more supportive, so no one has to tell you that. Do not place the responsibility on the woman of color to deal with your racism; in other words, tell you what you did and how to stop.

The subtle message of that is that we want you to stop hurting us—and that's what racism is, hurting people, remember—that then we have to talk you into it and support you every step of the way.

I want this step.

In case I haven't made myself perfectly clear, I expect every woman in this group to make a public verbal commitment to go to the woman of color they have been racist to and take responsibility for their actions.

This includes our children, who get the double oppression of being black and color and power-tripped by ALL the adults.

Again, I want you to go to the women of color you've had struggles with in this town and take responsibility for your actions; in other words, admit your racism to the people when you direct it to. Do this without expecting to be comforted or supported or forgiven for your racism.

Do not expect thanks for this recognition of your own power and the pain you inflict. Also, your privilege not to see and deal with it.

This may be a big step to you. Believe me, you have a long way to go.

This essay has an interesting herstory. It was read aloud at that first meeting of the Fayetteville women's racism workshop in March 1980. From what I understand, the statement was very well received. Sexuality was selected as a key issue to focus on in future meetings.

What serious white women thanked me in the following weeks for sending the statement. It was typed by someone in the workshop on a good typewriter and I got the original. A group on the way to the west coast asked my permission to reprint the article.

All of which is very gratifying, except that the racism workshops fade out. Fewer and fewer people showed up for the meetings, until the workshop ended, only weeks after it began.

As far as I know, no white women took responsibility for individual acts of racism toward any women or children of color. However, a white woman did criticize me for trying to intimidate all the white women and make them feel guilty, because I'm Puerto Rican. She also implied that no one was having problems with the issue of race except me.

The essay sat in my writing box for two years before I resurrected it. I submitted a copy to a woman of color who was editing an anthology on dialogue between lesbians of color and white lesbians. She loved it. Her lover loved it. She wanted to use it to open an anti-racism workshop.

I was not in a position to question my mind: Why did this essay sit in my box for two years? Did it take the white women outside the shop convince me that my work wasn't valid, no matter what people verbally said? Because they obviously weren't going to deal with it.

The realization is overpowering to me that that's what words like "support" and "validitation" mean—the difference between important work sitting in a box for two years or being circulated.

It is not that women of color do not write. We don't get recognition for it. We don't get identified as "important feminist writers" the way white women do. Either.

It takes a lot of time and money to pursue publication, even in women's press. I saw a notice in a women writers' newsletter recently that said all manuscripts received without a stamped, self-addressed envelope would be trashed unread.

Who do women think they are excluding by doing that? You can bet your ass Gloria Steinem and the ladies at Ms. magazine still see their names in print. Besides, often the cost of return postage is greater than the cost of xeroxing an article. And who the hell wants to pay to receive their own rejection slips?

These are not just personal小事, but it doesn't take too many of them to pile up before people like me are excluded. Again.

The message the racism workshop transmitted to me was: "Okay, apic, we can't just ignore you this time and you may have some valid grapples but we're sure as hell not going to encourage people like you..."

If you validate my struggle, what comes next—confrontation or freedom?"
UNLEARNING RACISM

FACE-TO-FACE,
DAY-TO-DAY
RACISM CR

BY TIA CROSS, FREADA KLEIN,
BARBARA SMITH, BEVERLY SMITH

On April 4, 1979, the four of us met to discuss consciousness-raising guidelines for women's groups working on the issue of racism. All of us had had experiences, as white and Black women, thinking and talking about racism with white women's groups, or participating in ongoing racism groups ourselves. We taped our discussion, and the ideas and guidelines that follow are based on it.

We feel that using consciousness-raising to explore our racism is particularly useful and appropriate. It is a feminist form based on the ways women have always talked and listened to each other. The CR format encourages personal sharing, risk-taking, and involvement, which is essential for getting at how each of us is racist in a daily way. It also encourages the "personal" change that makes political transformation and action possible. The women's movement has begun to address racism in a way that no previous movement has, because we have a growing understanding that our racism often manifests itself in how we interact with each other women. Doing CR acknowledges that how we feel can inhibit or lead to action, and that how we actually treat people does make a difference.

Theoretical and analytical comprehension of the political and historical causes of racism is essential, but this understanding on an intellectual level doesn't always help to make face-to-face meetings with women of color real, productive, or meaningful. We need both a political understanding of racism and a personal-political understanding of how it affects our daily lives. Many women start doing CR about racism because they are already confronting it in other areas of their lives and need a place to explore what is happening. CR about racism is not merely talk, talk, talk, and no action, but the essential talking that will make action possible. Doing CR is based on the fact that as a person you simply cannot do political action without personal interaction.

We also want to stress, however, that these guidelines are not instant solutions. You cannot spend 15 minutes on each topic and assume that you're done. Racism is much too complex and brutal a system for that. The absence of language to explore our own racism contributes to the difficulty and is in itself part of the problem. Only one term, "racism," exists to describe the range of behavior from subtle, nonverbal daily experiences to murders by the Ku Klux Klan. "Racism" covers individual acts and institutional patterns. But this stumbling block of language presents another theme to explore, not a reason to give up. CR is just one step in the whole process of changing the legacy of oppression (based on difference) that white male rule has imposed on us.

Actions can grow out of the CR group directly. For example, the group can find out about and publicize the resources which exist in its area, such as other CR groups, study groups, Third World women's groups, and coalitions of Third World and white women. The group can compile reading lists about Black women, racism, and white women's anti-racist activity. It can spread the word about the CR process through writing articles, and by giving workshops and talks. It can also compile its own CR guidelines. The legacy of racism in this country is long. It will take a great deal of time and ongoing commitment to bring about change, to alter the insidious and deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes we learn from the time we are children. It is important to show other women what is possible.

The following guidelines are divided into three sections: (1) Early Memories/Childhood Experiences, (2) Adolescence/Early Adulthood, and (3) Becoming a Feminist/Racism in the Women's Movement. The group should plan to spend a substantial amount of time sharing personal histories and feelings in order to build trust, especially at the beginning. It is good to pose questions constantly that make women backtrack and remember their own pasts. General questions which can be applied to any topic and which should be raised along the way are: "How do you experience yourself as a white person?" "What were your fears and what was your anger?"

"What did you do with your fears and anger?"

We have included some guidelines that deal with anti-Semitism, but the primary focus of the guidelines is white racism against Black people. It is important for groups to discuss the ways in which anti-Semitism in America is similar to and different from racism aimed against Black people. It is also important to connect racism aimed at Afro-Americans with the racism and oppression aimed at all peoples of color and with the discrimination aimed at white nationality groups who are not Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Insights about how class identity connects with racism should also provide an ongoing topic for discussion.

Early Memories/Childhood Experiences

1. When were you first aware that there was such a thing as race and racial differences? How old were you? Recall an incident if you can. How did you feel?
2. What kind of contact did you have with people of different race? Were they adults, children, playmates?
3. How did you experience your own ethnic identity?
4. How did you first experience racism? From whom did you learn it? What did it mean to you? How did it function in your perception of yourself? How did it make you feel? How did it affect you in relation to other people?
5. When did you first notice yourself treating people of color in a different way?
6. When were you first aware that there was such a thing as anti-Semitism? How old were you? Recall an incident; How did you feel?
7. What did you learn at home about Black people and other people of color?
8. What did you learn about Jewish people?
9. How was what you learned about Black people and what you learned about Jewish people connected?
10. What terms did your parents use to refer to Black people and other people of color? If these terms were negative, how did hearing these
TEACHING ABOUT RACISM IN THE CLASSROOM AND IN THE COMMUNITY

BY LINDA L. SHAW & DIANE G. WICKER

Introduction

In this article we will describe teaching methods intended to raise consciousness about the personal and political nature of white racism as well as what can be done to work against it. This work originated from our search for ways to teach about racism to classes of predominantly white students, and from our commitment that whites need to raise consciousness about racism among other white people. In every class we teach, both in the community and in the Women’s Studies program, we present materials concerning the experiences of women of color, whatever our specific topic. But we think it is crucial to focus specifically on the ways in which institutional racism victimizes all people, and especially how it functions systematically to oppress people of color.

In order to accomplish these goals, we first provide information about institutional racism that clarifies the relationship between personally held beliefs and attitudes about people of color, and the structural and political means by which racism is maintained in our society. When we first began teaching about this issue, our focus was almost entirely on this structural level, and some students responded with defensiveness, helplessness, and even anger and blame toward one another. We were dissatisfied with these results because we felt they did little to change students’ understanding of racism or enable them to act more effectively against it.

A more productive approach, we felt, would be one that facilitated nonjudgmental and nondefensive ways for participants to explore the stereotyped thoughts, feelings, and actions toward people of color that whites, through no fault of their own, have internalized from childhood. Thus, we included several experiential exercises that would encourage participants to express the feelings of guilt, anger, or sadness they may have in response to increased awareness of racism.

Our techniques are designed for use within...
UNLEARNING RACISM

traditional educational settings as well as in community workshops. The content and the order in which they are presented are carefully planned. These materials may be presented either during three or four class sessions or as one longer, intensive workshop experience.

Finally, it is imperative that any one leading these exercises must first have participated in them herself. Because these are difficult and sometimes intimidating exercises, using them effectively requires a firsthand understanding of what students or workshop participants are experiencing. Even though we have participated in these exercises and conducted them many times, there is still a possibility that a situation will occur that we cannot handle well.

Ground Rules

Before proceeding with this work on racism, we have found that ground rules are helpful in order to create a safe, nonthreatening environment for both participants and workshop leaders. Some of these rules more easily fit into a community workshop, but they can be adapted for use in the classroom setting.

1. We make the assumption that each person is attending the workshop because she wants to work against racism and has a sincere desire to change.

2. We state that the purpose of the workshop is not to attack or blame each other. We are not playing the game “You are more racist than I.”

3. We use some guidelines from Greece Lyon’s book From Criticism to Dialogue, which gives information on how to give and receive criticism. If someone makes a statement that a participant feels uncomfortable with, we ask her to think to herself: “Is my intention in telling her?” “Do I want to make her feel guilty, or stupid, or do I want her to help her struggle against racism?” We give examples of both positive and negative ways of responding to people.

4. We ask each person to answer these questions: “What is my greatest fear about participating in this workshop?” “What prevents me from combating my racism?” “What do I want to get out of this workshop?” Finally, we ask each person to share something positive about herself for participating in the workshop.

Defining Racism

We begin teaching about racism by defining what we mean when we use the term. While many of our experiences have confirmed that students have many definitions in mind when they use the word, and this confusion can be a source of serious misunderstanding. To clarify these differences and to involve students in the discussion of the issue, we ask class members what the word “racism” means to them. Typically, the answers include examples of racist stereotyping or instances in which one person has acted in a bigoted or prejudiced manner. It is difficult for students to recognize the importance of simply a matter of individual attitudes or behaviors. Thus, of course, reflects much of the day-to-day experience each of us has with racism. Our purpose, however, is to solicit an understanding of the relationship between the personal, institutionalized attitudes of individuals and institutional racism, through which whites have power and privilege, and Third World peoples are systematically denied access to rights and resources in the society. We read the following descriptions from a pamphlet entitled Definitions of Racism.

Prejudice: Unfavorable opinion or feeling formed before acquiring knowledge, training or experience

Racism: Any attitude, action or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of their skin color... Racism is not just a matter of attitudes; actions and institutional structures can also be a form of racism (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Racism in America and How to Combat It, 1970).

Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred or discrimination. Racism involves having the power to carry out systematic discriminatory practices through the major institutions of our society (Delores Dellos D-Dora, What Curriculum Leaders Can Do About Racism, New Detroit, 1979).

White Racism: Power + Prejudice = Racism (Pat A. Bibol, Developing New Perspectives on Race).

We then discuss the reasons why many people view racism only as personal or individual heresy, and what some of the implications are, especially in regard to how we approach social change. We stress that racism persists despite individual efforts to free ourselves from racist attitudes and behaviors; nor are individual attempts to convince relatives and friends a sufficient strategy to combat racism. This lays the foundation for pointing out that all whites, regardless of their intentions, are implicated in racism. Again from Definitions of Racism:

WHO IS A RACIST? All white individuals in our society are racists. Even if a white is totally free from all conscious racist prejudices, he remains a racist, for he receives benefits of our racist society through its institutions. Our institutional and cultural practices are so arranged as to automatically benefit whites, just because they are white. It is essential for us to recognize that the benefits of our white racist society are embedded in racist institutions and are awarded automatically, unconsciously, and unintentionally (National Education Association, Education and Racism, 1973).

Typically, most students listen quietly to our presentation up to this point. However, when we get to the part where we state that all whites are racists (white students encounter resistance, defensiveness, even some anger, and lively discussion ensues. Many of those who have followed our explanation so far and accept our analysis of power relationships and institutional racism are not prepared to argue in good faith that the argument reject this part very strongly, denying their own implication in racism. Yet, we think it is important to stress that just as racism is not only an individual problem, it is also not simply a distant, impersonal force operating independently of each of us.

When we hear responses from white students such as, “Not me. I’m not racist. I don’t have any power,” we believe a number of reactions have been triggered. Incorrect identification of the complacent, helpless, white, guilt, and sometimes genuine self-righteousness. It is painful and frustrating to hear that if we are white, we are still implicated by being beneficiaries of institutional racism, especially if we have made active efforts to combat racism. We are faced with a paradox: the imperative for the recognition of racism and the desire to avoid an accusation of racism. This is especially difficult for many white students in Women’s Studies classes, who are just becoming conscious of their own oppression, to accept that they too benefit from the oppression of people of color. Knowing how hard and painful it has been to work on our own racism, we anticipate the students’ reactions. Yet, there are few things more difficult to deal with in teaching about this issue.

Because we know this reaction is part of the process involved in working on racism, we listen and take seriously the expression of these feelings, remembering what they reflect and realizing that their expression is necessary. Our ability to work with such reactions is critical for the rest of the process. Although we challenge and disagree with students, we recognize that anger or personal disapproval from us will only result in withheld responses. We ask students how they feel, and when they say, “I feel bad, or I feel guilty,” we talk about guilt: What is it? Where does it come from? What are its consequences? Students often say they feel hopelessness and at fault for something they did not create and are powerless to change. Some express anger, even hostility at us for stimulating unpleasant feelings. Recognizing these feelings of guilt, we again recall how racism functions through the institutions of the society, and how whites receive these benefits automatically and unintentionally. As whites, we are not personally responsible for the existence of racist institutions within capitalist society. We participate in the perpetuation of racist institutions, but we did not start them, nor as single individuals can we bring racist oppression to an end.

Once students have made a good start in processing their feelings of guilt and pride, we have communicated as clearly as possible that it is not our purpose to create guilt because we think it cannot contribute to a struggle against racism, we give more examples of institutional racism in employment, health, education, housing, etc., from a pamphlet entitled Fact Sheets on Institutional Racism. This helps to demonstrate that racism is pervasive and systemic in its denial of rights, privileges, and resources to people of color. We point out, for example, that large income differences exist between whites and Third World people, that whites live longer, have a lower infant mortality rate, and suffer less malnutrition, while Third World people are used without their knowledge or consent as subjects in scientific experiments and are the victims of forced sterilization. From such documentation, white students begin to see that racism systematically denies rights, privileges, and resources to people of color, and that they, without any overt racist action of their own, benefit. With this concrete information, we find the tendency
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While not everyone experiences racial op-
pression as directly as people of color, racism
nevertheless diminishes the lives of each of us.
One consequence of racism is that people of color
are defined as different or "other" by the
dominant white culture. Further, whites who
have an awareness of the destructiveness of white
racism often think they have no distinctive
cultural roots or feel ashamed of being white.
One result is that whites come to identify with or
romanticize the lives of Third World people,
which only perpetuates their objectification.

When white people value their own roots and
terstanding the differences that exist between
themselves and Third World people, they are
better able to be their allies in the work against
racism.

Thus, we begin the experiential work with an
exercise which focuses on a valdizing each per-
son's roots. We ask each participant to take five
minutes to make positive statements about her
background. These statements generally bring
people into contact with pain, fear, embarrassment,
and/or anger about their internalized oppres-
sion, and crying and laughing will occur. We
continue to have the person speak proudly about
herself, allowing for feelings to emerge. Finally,
participants are asked to give several examples
of how they are allies to people of color, for
example, interrupting a racist statement that is
made at the workplace or by family and friends.
Throughout, observers are urged to be supportive
and to encourage the speaker to say more about
her life. In a small workshop, there is time for
each person to speak in turn of the entire group
about her ethnic, class, and cultural background.

In a larger classroom setting, we work in dyads
or in small groups. This exercise, including time for
feedback, takes 20 minutes to complete.

Fantasy

At this point we lead a fantasy experience
about being a person of color in order to create a
nondefensive, sharing atmosphere, as well as to
encourage heightened awareness of white rac-
ism. The fantasy begins with a mini-relaxation ex-
nrcise which enables participants to have a full
experience. We say: "Put down all articles in your
hands; kick off your shoes; close your eyes and
begin to do deep belly breathing." We then give
the following instructions:

1. Imagine yourself being the same person you
are now, living in the same environment, but be-
longing to another racial group.
2. You are alone in your apartment; you look
at your hands. How do you feel about them? You
go to the mirror and look at your face. How do
you feel? Touch your hair and so on.
3. Go outside; say hello to your neighbors.
How do you feel about them? What kind of feelings
do you pick up from them? Do you live in a pre-
dominantly white neighborhood? What does it feel
like to be a person of your skin color there?
4. Imagine yourself sitting in your classes
where most of the faces around you are white and
the teachers are almost all white men. How do
you feel in this situation? What does it feel like to
be learning about mostly white experience from the
books you read in these classes?
5. Go to the grocery store (embellish as above).
6. Go to work (embellish).
7. Go visit your parents, relatives. How do
they feel about you?
8. Go back home. Your family, lover, or friends
are there. How do they feel about you? How do
they react to you? If you have children, what is
their reaction?
9. Now you are alone again in your house. Sit
down in a comfortable place and reflect on your
day. Look at your hands again; look in the mirror.
Tell the person in the mirror something you felt
today and then something you learned. Take
some time to say goodbye to her.
10. Now you have changed back to your own
color. Look at your hands and look at your face in
the mirror, experiencing what this feels like.
11. Slowly begin to come back to this room.
Don't talk to anyone, but stay with your feelings
from the fantasy. Slowly open your eyes and let
your feelings be there.
12. Choose a partner now and share your ex-
perience with her. (Or you may have the class
divide into small groups to share their fantasies.
Some people may also want to share with the
Total group later.)

During the fantasy, it is important to go slowly
with many pauses so that people may elaborate
their experiences. This exercise has been useful
in helping white women become aware of white
racism on an intense, emotional level. Many
women have found it to be a profound experience
enabling them to understand the meaning of the
more subtle forms of racism in a way that dis-

cussive analysis alone could not teach. In the
discussion following the fantasy, responses can be
varied, including sadness and anger, although
occasionally there will be little reaction. It is im-
portant to remind participants to listen to each
other in a nonjudgmental manner. If judgments
begin to take place, participants will become
distracted, and the purpose of the exercise will be
lost. We allow 15 minutes for the fantasy and 10
minutes for the sharing of feelings in the larger
group. Afterwards, students often write moving
papers in response to the fantasy.

(When we have used this exercise in multi-
racial groups, some interesting experiences have
been verbalized by women of other racial groups,
for example, a Black woman chose to assume a skin
color lighter than her own, and imagined what it
would have been like to have experienced rejection
by her peers during childhood. Another Black wom-
man, west sc-
be was being
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Also in 1979 in Boston, 12 Black women were brutally murdered. After the sliguht murder, a rally was organized. overnight. The next morning, demonstrators heard that
yet another woman had been killed. The media and police virtually ignored these murders of Black women. Photos ©1979 by Tia Cross.
UNLEARNING RACISM

as close to a darker skin color, and was better able to understand some of the anger and hurt that dark-skinned women feel.

Concept of Discharge

Thinking about racism or acknowledging the racist words and stereotypes taught to us as children often brings feelings of anger, guilt, shame, helplessness, and embarrassment to the surface. Unable to deal with these feelings, white people often become detached, denying the existence of internalized racism and carefully controlling actions that would betray its existence. We doubt we could go through a single day without feeling outraged by racism if we did not become detached and indifferent in this way. Yet, denial of these thoughts and feelings makes work against racism very difficult. So deal with this problem, Sara Winter, a co-counselor and radical therapist in the Berkeley community, implemented a reevaluation counseling technique called “discharge.” Her basic premise is that through work with one another to acknowledge and express racist words, stereotypes, and images, whites will be less controlled by them and better able to work against racism.

We will describe the several discharge exercises which enable us to do this emotional work. We ask participants in the classroom/workshop to work in dyads. Since one purpose of this exercise is to help white people to discharge their racist stereotypes and feelings, people of color should work with whites. Third World people do not need to hear any more racist statements: they do not need to listen while whites work out their racist thoughts and feelings.

Each white woman takes about five minutes to state, one by one, all the racist words, thoughts, feelings, stereotyped images and experiences she has accumulated since childhood. This is only the beginning, as students can continue this work on their own once they are skilled at the technique. Jihad is for the participants to hear their statements and to confront them, allowing them to be exposed (i.e., embarrassment, anger, fear, sadness). The partner is to listen attentively and to encourage and be supportive to the one who is discharging. Judgmental statements should not be made during this process. You may want to visit these dyads to support participants when they become embarrassed or scared. After they have finished this exercise, which takes about 20 minutes, these groups can stay together to discuss specific means of struggling against racism as described later in this paper.

In another discharge exercise, students spend 10 minutes talking in dyads about their earliest memories of racist messages that were given to them by their parents or other significant adults. It is important for students to describe specific incidents and the feelings they had as children in as much detail as possible. Next, each person in turn treats her partner as her parent, saying the thoughts and feelings she has about the incident as well as those she may not have been able to express as a child.

Again working in dyads, each person describes a time when she felt victimized, and then a time when she acted in ways that were oppressive to someone else. For some students, this may involve examples of racism or sexism, while other students may recall incidents concerning physical appearance or sexual preference. Next, each person talks about a time when she interrupted a racist incident. She then recalls a racist situation which she did not interrupt, what stopped her and what she could do differently were she in that situation again. The purpose of this exercise is to help white people to discharge their racist stereotypes and feelings. Students can work together in groups, and groups can form larger groups, and try to share a common memory and experience. The purpose of this exercise is to examine the circumstances that have inhibited them from taking action in the past, and to emphasize instances in which past action has been taken to interrupt racism.

Each person takes three minutes to respond to these questions, with both partners being allowed to answer the question before the next one is given.

Third World Panel

Only after we have done work together on our own racism, do we ask Third World women from the campus and the community to come to class and talk about their experiences. We emphasize the importance of doing prior work because of our belief that racism is a white problem against which whites must actively struggle. Also, by this stage, the raised consciousness about racism enables students to integrate more effectively the information and experiences shared by Third World women and to ask informed questions. We invite Third World women with diverse backgrounds, who may or may not identify themselves as feminists.

We describe to the women in advance the work we have been doing in class and we ask for their feedback. We suggest that they talk about such topics as their family backgrounds, socialization, school experience, when they first experienced racial sexual oppression, how they feel about the feminist movement and how they are combating racism. We also emphasize that we would like as much dialogue with the class as possible. We want students to understand how the double oppression of race and sex personally affects the lives of Third World women. We especially want the class to see firsthand the diversity of women’s lives, to understand that the concerns that are important to women of color may not be the same as those to which white feminists give priority. In addition to the broad range of experiences, politics and lifestyles, we want students to see the strength reflected in the different ways each woman has struggled in response to the conditions of her life.

Small Groups

The next step is for the class to work in small groups of not more than six for about 20 minutes. These groups allow each student to participate more fully in the discussion of the larger class. We ask students to think of examples of racism from their own lives. They try to think of racism with the class as a whole of some of these instances, which include white professionals teaching most of the classes the students take, cutbacks in university funding for ethnic cultural programs, material presented in classes that is almost entirely about white experience... White students begin to see that the tension they feel in relating to Third World students is their class are also a result of racism. We discuss at some length concrete examples from our own campus which provide us with a common experience in our daily lives. By making the instances we work with more immediate, we they are not as alien and interpreted as exceptional cases.

Finally, we spend time in the small groups and in the larger class discussing further work we can do against racism. We suggest that we all think especially about what we can do about the examples just discussed, or we give study questions such as: How can you deal with either personal or institutional racism at your workplace or in your class?... These groups can also be self-directed and choose their own topic. We talk about individual and collective actions as well as short- and long-range ways of working against racism. Examples that have come from our classes include interrupting racism at the workplace, forming a coalition with ethnic student groups to protest cutbacks in funding for Third World student organizations on campus, participating in the IMAC trotz of Smoke products, and supporting efforts to integrate public schools. It is crucial to continue to work on racism with a discussion of specific ways to struggle against racism so that students are not left feeling overwhelmed, helpless and inactive.

How Hard It Is

Over the time we have used and developed these methods for teaching about racism, we...
We emphasize work because of problem against in. Also, by this built racism on-affectionately the aid by Third 1 questions. We diverse buck themselves in advance the and ask for they talk about sounds, socialize first experiment how feel I how they are based that we the class as understand how and western world. men. as beforehand the stand that the canvas of color sich white female broad range types, you want at in the diffused in re.

3 work in small out minutes. to participate in the larger of examples of 3 then discuss these instances. asking most of 25s in univer- sities, material of almost entirely students begin in relating to issue are also a range that covers our in the daily we work with likely to be in- sail groups and other work we to that we all could do about we give study deal with either at your work- can be also. We talk. We talk thus as well as working against on our classes we be workplace, from groups to iod World in- standing in laws, and sup- : schools. It is racism with a ragged against it feeling over-

and developed it racism we have encountered a number of problems. Like all whites, we experience our own resistance to working on racism, which results partly from the fact that we had no models for dealing with the complexities of teaching/earning about racism from our own educational experience, and our colleagues in the university provide few exam- ples. We also find it painful to acknowledge and point out the racism that exists among feminists because we spend a great deal of time with stu- dents, analyzing our experiences as women, the interrelatedness of racists and sexism, and the hope feminism offers for change. To say now that feminists, too, are racist is a bitter medicine, in- deed. On a personal level, we experience our own blind guilt and, as we examine racism, Transcendentalists of racism and sexism, and the hope feminism offers for change. To say now that feminists, too, are racist is a bitter medicine, in- deed. 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HERESIES is published by a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, Marxists, lesbian feminists, or anarchists. Our fields include sculpture, photography, video, and gender studies. All issues will be different editorial staff, composed of women who want to work on that issue as well as soon as possible. HERESIES provides a new perspective on the role of art.

We deeply regret the death of Theresa Hall King Cox, who was attacked and killed on a street near her apartment in lower Manhattan on Friday, March 5, 1982, in the early evening. Theresa's work appears in HERESIES No. 4: The Women's Pages.

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