

# Anti-Oppression Reader



*“From their no-frills offices above 16th and Mission streets, Global Exchange can see around the world: factory workers in Indonesia just scraping by; Cubans in the streets of Havana eager to break the isolation of the U.S. embargo; artisans in a Guatemala crafts cooperative working to keep their traditions alive.”*

—San Francisco Examiner



**Global Exchange**, a non-profit international human rights organization, traces its origins to the passionate desires of a nutritionist, a welder and an academic to see human ties, rather than economic ones, define global relationships. Since Global Exchange's inception in 1988, founders Medea Benjamin, Kirsten Moller and Kevin Danaher have given priority to building people-to-people connections.

We continue to bring our founders' vision to light by maintaining a dedication to education for mobilization — through working to support international people's struggles for economic, social, political and environmental justice; sharing our window on the world with the U.S. public through an extensive public education program; and offering positive ways for people to get involved in creating more democratic, sustainable and equitable systems of governance and economy.

## Global Exchange's Programs

Our **Human Rights Programs** are divided into two areas: campaigns to monitor and report on human rights and elections in conflict areas and to support pro-democracy movements in those countries; and campaigns to improve relations between the U.S. and countries with whom we have been in conflict.

Our **Social and Economic Rights Programs** are divided into three areas: campaigns to encourage U.S. corporations to respect the rights of workers, honor local communities and protect the environment; campaigns against the unjust and undemocratic policies of the World Trade Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund; and campaigns to promote humane, environmentally-sensitive economic alternatives, including Fair Trade and an alternative green economy.

Our **Fair Trade Program** helps build economic justice from the bottom-up. Our two alternative trade centers in the San Francisco Bay Area, one in Portland, OR and our on-line store (<http://store.globalexchange.org/> ) generate income for artisans and crafts cooperatives in nearly 40 countries. The program also educates first-world consumers about the social and environmental implications of their spending and about the importance of building a more just global economy. Our campaigns work to increase the demand for Fair Trade coffee, chocolate and other available products.

Our **Reality Tours** provide people from the U.S. with an understanding of a country's internal dynamics through socially responsible travel. Participants in these intensive travel seminars examine political, economic and social trends in countries around the world, including Cuba, South Africa, Mexico and Vietnam. Reality Tours also serve as human rights delegations that observe and report on events in areas of conflict and as election monitoring delegations.

Our **Public Education Program** produces books, videos, articles and editorials through our online store and e-newsletter; organizes educational events and workshops; and works with the media to increase coverage of international issues from a grassroots, citizens' perspective. The program also includes an International Speakers Bureau that brings community leaders from around the world to the United States to educate people on pressing global issues.

**Find out more at [www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org) or call us at 1.800.497.1994!**

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## A Few Words about Anti-Oppression

Anti-oppression (AO) may be a new term for some folks so we feel it is important to talk about the goals of AO, how Global Exchange incorporates AO, and what you may experience in your work and life as a result of AO. It's our hope that by sharing with you these points, you find your undertaking to be an enriching journey.

Anti-oppression work incorporates goals such as contributing towards building multiracial social movements, creating a safer space for all voices to be heard and valued, and enabling all participants to increase their effectiveness in social justice through a collective learning process.

Global Exchange integrates AO wherever possible. In this reader, we include many articles, and a list of working definitions used to discuss AO issues. It's our means to providing you with some information that will lead to a better understanding of diverse communities in your future. Because we believe AO is important not only to furthering human rights and social justice movements in a positive and meaningful direction but to our Safety in the movement, we allot as much time possible to AO.

What does AO have to do with Safety? Global Exchange attracts a diverse population and AO is a means to better understand and care for each other. For example, you and I can be in the same place, engaged in the same event, seated at the same table, but that doesn't mean our experiences will be the same. AO provides a framework from which to have dialogue about these differences, to understand that both experiences are valid, and to determine ways to effect just change.

AO helps increase awareness about multi-paradigm experiences and increase understanding about responsibility and accountability of systems of power and privilege. Ideally, someone armed with AO awareness will step forward as an ally for another when a situation arises that may cause he/she to feel targeted. For example, there might be communities where the local population is not accustomed to people of color or queer folks being there. For discussion purposes, let's say the townspeople react defensively. An AO aware person will sense the defensive body language of the locals and

act as an ally for the other individual. This is a Safety act.

In this reader we introduce tools that may be new to some and old for others. We ask you all to try these tools on and see how they work for you and for the group. We hope that the use of an AO lens sits well with you all and that as the summer progresses, the number of you examining and synthesizing information through the AO lens increases.

We understand that AO work is not easy.

Emphatically as one examines a system and recognizes one's own privilege, it's tough for some and it's emotional for others! It's a good time to remember sage advice; we're all works in progress so be gentle with you and with each other. Your experience is, in large part, dependent on your group and the relationships you help build. Similar to how we don't have control over the family we're born into or where we're born, Global Exchange provides you with a unique opportunity to create your community. Like our society, this opportunity is equipped with a framework (AO) and has tools for you to use or not. The thing is, it will be engaged and YOU are a part of it!

We applaud you for taking this journey and we hope you choose to share your thoughts and epiphanies with us.

We invite you to use the open space on this page to write or draw.

Either write or draw an expression of how you feel and/or concerns you have now before you read the AO pieces then come back after reading them and write or draw an expression of any new or different feelings/concerns that arise for you.

**Before**

**After**

## II. Working AO Definitions

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### Definitions

Ableism a pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who have mental, emotional, and physical disabilities. Like other forms of oppression, ableism operates on individual, institutional and cultural levels. Deeply rooted beliefs about health, productivity, beauty, and the value of human life, perpetuated by the public and private media, combine to create an environment that is often hostile to those whose physical, emotional, cognitive, or sensory abilities fall outside the scope of what is currently defined as socially acceptable. No word perfectly describes what the range of people with disabilities experience. We use the terms ableism or disability oppression because they reflect the viewpoint that people with disabilities or with physical or mental limitations, are considered to be inadequate in meeting expected social and economic roles.

Adulthood Oppression of Young People (from the day they are born), based on their age, by care givers (who are used as the oppression agents) and by the society and its institutions. Because of the long history of adulthood and its pervasive nature in our societies, essentially all people suffer from this oppression, and the resulting internalized oppression and distress patterns are severe. The oppression is expressed, for example, by treating the young person as weak, helpless and less intelligent. For many, there is verbal or physical abuse and sexual abuse. Oppression of young people conditions them to accept all other oppressions that exist in the society.

Affirmative Action refers to social policies encouraging favorable treatment of socially disadvantaged minority groups, especially in employment, education, and housing, without regard to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, in order to reverse historical trends of discrimination and to create equality of opportunity.

Ageism the pervasive oppression of people based on their age. Discrimination comes from the societal myth that older and younger people cannot perform certain cognitive or affective standards in the same way simply because they are younger or older. Therefore, based on people's ages, they have unfairly prescribed roles.

Ally A person who supports marginalized, silenced, or less privileged groups without actually being a member of those groups. This person will often directly confront and challenge systems of oppression.

Anti-Racism more than an intellectual opposition to the principles of racial supremacy, it is the recognition of racism as part of institutional structures and the struggle to stop power and gain based on racism and/or race bigotry.

Anti-Semitism Prejudice and/or discrimination, either personally or institutionally, against Semitic people (mostly Jews). This can be based on hatred against Jews because of their religious beliefs, their perceived group mentality, and sometimes on the erroneous belief that Jews are a "race".

Assimilation Assimilation—from the Latin, *assimilare*, to make similar—is the process whereby newcomers to society are encouraged to give up their cultural way of life and accommodate as quickly as possible to values and culture of the host society. It is an ethnocentric, one-way process of cultural exchange, in that only the newcomer is expected to adapt, with the implied promise that group acceptance will be the social reward.

Bias An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment.

Bigotry An unreasonable or irrational attachment to negative stereotypes or prejudices.

Biphobia The fear or hatred of bisexual people. This term addresses the ways that prejudice against bisexuals differs from prejudice against other queer people. There is often biphobia in gay, lesbian, and trans communities, as well as straight communities.

Bisexual/Bi Someone who is or is capable of being attracted to members of both sexes or genders as prescribed by the binary gender system. Many people avoid this term because of its implication that there are only two sexes/genders to be sexually attracted to and thus reinforces the binary gender system.

Classism Prejudice and/or discrimination, either personally or institutionally, against people because of their real or perceived economic status or background.

Cross Cultural Communication Interaction between cultures resulting in an exchange of meaning through symbols and message systems.

Cross-Dresser Someone who enjoys wearing clothing typically assigned to a gender that that individual has not been socialized as, or does not identify as. Cross-dressers are of all sexualities and do not necessarily identify as transgendered. "Cross-dresser" is frequently used today in place of the term transvestite.

Culture Culture is the sum total of human creations material and non-material-that comprise the complex pattern of living that directs human social life, and is handed down through generations by communicative interaction rather than by genetic transmission.

Discrimination Unequal treatment of people based on their membership in a group. In contrast to prejudice, discrimination is behavior. To discriminate is to treat a person, not on the basis of their intrinsic individual qualities, but on the basis of a prejudgment about a group. Discrimination can be either de jure (legal as in segregation laws) or de facto (discrimination in fact without legal sanction).

Diversity By "diversity" is meant all the differences that people bring to an organization or group. It has two dimensions: the primary or Horizontal (mainly biological, usually visible-the little memes: age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities), and the secondary or Vertical (psycho-socio-spiritual, usually invisible-the big vMEMEs: values system, worldviews, mindsets, ethics, paradigms, core intelligences). These differences have the potential of giving rise to conflicts, but if managed well can result in a synergetic unity, where the effect of all working together is greater than the sum total of all the parts working independently.

Dyke Used as a derogatory term applied to lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. Some have reclaimed this word as a symbol of pride and strength.

Emigration To leave a country.

Ethnicity A group of people thought to have (or believe they have) a common way of thinking, feeling and acting, based on a shared common geographic and social history.

Ethnocentrism An attitude that one's own culture, society, or group is inherently superior to all others. Judging other cultures by your own cultural standards and since, of course, other cultures are different, they are therefore

inferior. Ethnocentrism means an inability to appreciate others whose culture may include a different racial group, ethnic group, religion, morality, language, political system, economic system, etc. It also means an inability to see a common humanity and human condition facing all women and men in all cultures and societies beneath the surface variations in social and cultural traditions.

Eurocentrism A mentality or position of superiority and privilege (conscious or subconscious) constructed by governments and populations of Europe and the United States towards oppressed and developing nations. The resulting feeling of entitlement leads to the exploitation of resources and peoples throughout the world-- easily demonstrated by the fact that the US accounts for only 5% of the worlds population, yet uses 25% of the world's resources. Although many institutions approach development as a means to better distribute resources from wealthy nations, even assumptions of benevolent superiority -- we are the only ones that can fix the problem -- lead to an exclusionary behavior reminiscent of colonial "white man's burden." Often, genuine efforts to counter Eurocentrism also result in perpetuating existing power dynamics because actions are done with an expectation of receiving gratitude, attention and preferential treatment.

Faggot/Fag Used as a derogatory term for gay, bisexual, and queer men. Some have reclaimed this word as a symbol of pride and strength.

Feminism A term commonly and quite indiscriminately used. Some of the currently used definitions are: (a) a doctrine advocating social and political rights for women equal to those of men; (b) an organized movement for the attainment of these rights; (c) the assertion of the claims of women as a group and the body of theory women have created; (d) belief in the necessity of large-scale social change in order to increase the power of women.

Fluid Identity The concept that identity is not rigid, but can and does change. This idea is often used in terms of gender, sexuality, and race, as well as other factors of identity. This concept is fundamentally contrary to binary systems. A person who feels her/his identity is fluid often believes that rigid categories are oppressive and incapable of accurately describing her/his experience and identities.

FtM/MtF Two more genders. Also abbreviations used to refer to specific members of the trans community. FtM or F2M, stands for female-to-male, as in moving from the female pole of the spectrum to the male. MtF, or M2F, then, refers to people moving from the male location to the female. FtM is sometimes, though not always, synonymous with transman. Similarly, one who identifies as MtF might also identify as a transwoman.

Gay Someone who is primarily and/or exclusively attracted to members of their own sex or gender. In certain contexts, this term is used to refer only to those who identify as men.

Gender A. In its most accepted definition, gender refers to the social roles (e.g., men, women) and characteristics that develop through cultural interpretations of biological or anatomical sex. In this definition, sex is seen as natural, and gender as the social construction that stems from readings of sex. B. A societal construct referring to roles, characteristics, behaviors, appearances, and identities that develop through cultural interpretations of genetic sex. one's sense of being woman, man, girl, boy, androgynous, or something else entirely, or of being perceived as woman, man, etc.

Gender Binary/Gender Dualism A system that defines and make room for two and only two distinct, natural, and opposite genders (i.e., male and female). These two genders are defined in opposition to each other, such that masculinity and femininity are seen as mutually exclusive. In this system, there is no room for any ambiguity or intermingling of gender traits.

Gender Identity The gender with which a person identifies, or is identified. This can be different from a person's assigned gender, which is determined as birth to be male or female or manipulated to resemble one or the other. It is important to note that gender identity, biological sex, and sexuality are not necessarily linked.

Genderism The systematic oppression of individuals whose actions, and other mannerisms, do not fulfill a society's prescribed gender roles. Embedded in individual, cultural/societal, and institutional beliefs that there are, and should be, only two genders, genderism targets any individual who does not conform to "acting like a boy" or "acting like a girl."

Hegemony Total control of ideological, economic & military of a society by a person or particular group.

Heterocentrism Heterosexism should not be confused with heterocentrism, which is an (often subconscious) assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and the attitudes associated with that assumption. Heterocentrism often shows up in unintentional ways in every day life. For instance, when a woman says she is going on a date, many people will ask, "What's his name?" or "Is he cute?" assuming it is a heterosexual date. Nevertheless, these people may not have anything against same-sex dating. Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia all stem from and are supported by heterocentrism.

Heterogeneity different

Heterosexism Discrimination and prejudice that stems from the belief that heterosexuality and only heterosexuality is natural normal, superior and required. Heterosexism is deeply rooted in our culture, and institutions. Heterosexism enforces and is enforced by a binary gender system. Binaries similarly reinforce racism and other systems of power.

Heterosexual A person who is primarily and/or exclusively attracted to members of a gender or sex which is seen to be "opposite" or other than the one with which they identify or are identified.

Hispanic For a history of the term, read the article [Hispanic vs. Latino](#)

Homogeneity similar

Homosexual A person who is primarily and/or exclusively attracted to members of what they identify as their own sex or gender. Because the term can have connotations of disease and abnormality, some people do not like to identify as homosexual. Others do not feel that it accurately defines their chosen identity.

Homophobia The fear or hatred of gays, lesbians, or queer-identified people in general. This can be manifested as an intense dislike or rejection of such people, or violent actions against them.

Immigration To arrive at a country.

Internalized Homophobia The fear or hatred of, or discomfort with one's own queer sexuality. Internalized homophobia is linked to low self-esteem and is presumed to be a contributing factor in the high rates of suicide among queer teens.



Internalized Racist Oppression The internalization by people of color (POC) of the images, stereotypes, prejudices and myths promoted by the racist system about POC in this country. Our thoughts and feelings about ourselves, people of our own racial group or other POC are based on these racist messages we receive from the broader system. It is a multi-generational process.

Internalized Racial Superiority A multigenerational process of receiving, acting on, internalizing, invisibilizing, and legitimizing a system of privilege.

Intersections of Oppression These occur when an individual is defined by more than one oppressed element of their identity. Often these intersections are used to further oppress an individual; this manifests frequently in situations where an individual is forced to choose one oppressed element of their identity over another for political reasons.

Intersex An anatomical variation from typical understandings of male and female genetics. The physical manifestation, at birth, of genetic or endocrinological differences from the cultural norm. Also a group of medical conditions that challenge standard sex designations, proving that sex, like gender, is a social construct. Intersex and transgender folks share some overlapping experiences and perspectives, but the terms are not synonymous, and the issues are not the same. "Intersex" or "intersexual" is used today in favor of the term "hermaphrodite".

Latin@ For a history of the term, read the article [Hispanic vs. Latino](#)

Lesbian One who identifies as a woman who is primarily and/or exclusively attracted to others who identify as women.

Minority Group A Minority Group is any group that is socially defined as different from the dominant group in society, is at a power disadvantage, receives less than its proportionate share of scarce resources due to its power disadvantage, and finds its differential treatment justified in terms of socially defined differences.

Multicultural Many or multiple cultures. The United States is multicultural because its population consists of people from many different cultures.

Multicultural Identities The concept that a person's identity does not rest on solely one factor, e.g., sexual prefer-

ence, race, gender, etc. Hence, no single element of one's identity is necessarily supreme, although certain identities can take precedence over others at certain times.

Nationality A group of people thought to have (or believe they have) a common geo-political identity.

Oppression 1. Prejudice and power. 2. A systematic social phenomenon based on the difference between social groups that involves ideological domination, institutional control, and the promulgation of the oppressor group's ideology, logic system and culture on the oppressed group. The result is the exploitation of one social group by another for its own benefit, real or imagined.

Orientalism In his seminal work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said defines the relationship of the Occident (the West) with the Orient, an imaginary and "exotic" objectified land with unknown boundaries or borders that defines European civilization and identity by serving as an Other. He notes that it is the study of and perpetuation of Orientalism that has allowed academics, writers and statesmen to accept a clear distinction between East and West, and to accept monolithic and simplistic stereotypes of the Orient, despite a complete lack of familiarity, knowledge, fact or correspondence with the "real" Orient.

Paternalism More accurately Paternalistic Dominance, describes the relationship of a dominant group, considered superior, to a subordinate group, considered inferior, in which the dominance is mitigated by mutual obligations and reciprocal rights. The dominated exchange submission for protection, unpaid labor for maintenance....As applied to familial relations, it should be noted that responsibilities and obligations are not equally distributed among those to be protected: the male children's subordination to the father's dominance is temporary; it lasts until they themselves become heads of household. The subordination of female children and of wives is lifelong. Daughters can escape it only if they place themselves as wives under the dominance/protection of another man.

Patriarchy In its narrow meaning, patriarchy refers to the system, historically derived from Greek and Roman law, in which the male head of the household had absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female and male family members. ....Patriarchy in its

wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources.

People (Person, American) of Color The term people of color was adopted to refer in a positive way to all people who are not considered "white" by "white people." In American "racial" terms, it refers to any one who claims other than European ancestry on either side of their family. It is a proud heritage representing 80% of the world population (but only 20% of the U.S. American population).

Power The ability to exercise control. Having access to systems and resources as legitimated by individuals and societal institutions.

Prejudice A positive or negative attitude toward a person or group, formed without just grounds or sufficient knowledge--will not be likely to change in spite of new evidence or contrary argument. Prejudice is an attitude.

Privilege An "unearned advantage" that works to "to systematically over empower certain groups" in our society. Privilege assigns dominance simply based on race, sexuality, or gender, a month other factors of identity. Privilege is "an invisible package of unearned assets" that members of privileged groups "can count on cashing in every day," but about which they "are meant to remain oblivious." (Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.")

Queer An umbrella identity term encompassing lesbians, questioning people, gay men, bisexuals, non-labeling people, transgendered folks, and anyone else who does not strictly identify as heterosexual. "Queer" originated as a derogatory word. Currently, it is being reclaimed by some people and used as a statement of empowerment. Some people identify as queer to distance themselves from the rigid categorizations of "straight" and "gay". Some transgendered, lesbian, gay, questioning, non-labeling, and bisexual people, however, reject the use of this term due its connotations of deviance and its tendency to gloss over and sometimes deny the differences between these groups.

"Race"- it is NOT based on biology; it is a CREATED category with historical roots used to classify groups of people.

- historically it was not determined by skin colour but by class inequalities (for example, the English defined the Irish as a "lower" race.)
- during colonial expansion by European nations, race was defined in terms of skin colour where non-white people were considered "lower" races.
- today, relationships between differently raced people are still determined by this moment in history and remain unequal, where white people have the most power and privilege and are considered the norm (ie. non-raced.)
- it is important to understand that white is also a created racial category.
- it is also important to understand that though racial categories derived from oppressive contexts, they can also be reclaimed and used as forms of resistance by communities of color.

Racism Racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported intentionally or unintentionally by institutional power and authority, used to the advantage of one race and the disadvantage of other races. The critical element that differentiates racism from prejudice and discrimination is the use of institutional power and authority to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors in systemic ways with far reaching outcomes and effects.

Religion A group of people thought to have (or believe they have) a common belief system concerning ultimate meaning at (usually) assumes the existence of the supernatural.

Religious Oppression The subordination, marginalization and persecution of an individual or group based on their religious or non-religious belief and/or practices. Occurring on the individual, cultural/societal, and institutional levels, religious oppression stems from opposing dualistic beliefs around religion, as well as certain teachings and traditions. Much like ethnocentrism, the dominant religious group of the society becomes engrained in its customs and traditions – including those that are secular/non-religious (e.g. court system, swearing on the Christian Bible).

Sexism Sexism is the outward manifestation of an inward system of values deliberately designed to structure privilege by means of an objective, differential, and

unequal treatment of women, for the purpose of social advantage over scarce resources. This values system gives rise to an ideology of supremacy which justifies power of position by placing a negative meaning and value on perceived or actual biological/cultural differences.

Sexual Orientation, Sexual Preference, Sexual Object Choice These terms refer to categories of sexuality, as indicated by the object of one's sexual desire (e.g., members of the "opposite sex/gender", member of any gender, etc.). "Sexual orientation" can imply biological roots of sexual attraction, whereas "sexual preference" and "sexual object choice" may connote an element of choice. Some people who see all these terms as loaded prefer the more general term "sexuality".

Sexuality This term can be used as a general term to refer to sexual orientation, sexual object choice, or sexual preference. It can also be used to describe the nature of one's desire, e.g., SM, monogamy, polyamory, etc.

Stereotype A set of beliefs, generalized about a whole group of people.

Tokenizing The action of making a member of a marginalized and/or oppressed group a spokesperson for that entire group, usually for the benefit of a larger, more privileged group.

Trans Abbreviation for transgender, transsexual, or some other form of trans identity. "Trans" can invoke notions of transcending beyond, existing between, or crossing over borders.

Transgender This term has many definitions. It is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to all people who deviate from their assigned gender or the binary gender system, including intersex people, transsexuals, cross-dressers, transvestites, gender queers, drag kings, drag queens, two-spirit people, and others. Some transgendered people feel they exist not within one of the two standard gender categories, but rather somewhere between, beyond, or outside of those two genders. The term can also be applied exclusively to people who live primarily as the gender "opposite" to that which they were assigned at birth. These people may sometimes prefer the term "transsexual".

Transsexual A person who has altered or intends to alter their anatomy, either through surgery, hormones, or other means, to better match their chosen gender identi-

ty. As a medical term, transsexual was coined in the 1950s to refer to individuals who desire not only to live as another gender, but also to change their bodies through surgery to reflect the gender that often feels more "natural" or authentic. This group of people is often divided into pre-op(erative), post-op, and non-op transsexuals. Due to the high cost, not all transsexuals can have genital surgery. Others do not feel that surgery is necessary, but still maintain a transsexual identity.

Transphobia The fear or hatred of transgendered and transsexual people. Like biphobia, this term was created to call attention to the ways that prejudice against trans people differs from prejudice against other queer people. There is often transphobia in gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities, as well as straight communities.

Transvestite See 'Cross-Dresser'

Transmen//Transwomen Two more gender categories. Also terms used to identify distinct members of trans communities. Transwomen refers to transgendered women, or women whose history transcends the gender binary. Transmen, similarly, refers to transgendered men, or men whose history transcends the gender binary.

White Guilt A frequent response of white persons to learning about white privilege. White guilt makes white individuals feel shameful about the history of oppression of people of color and the role white persons have played in perpetuating that system, as well as their individual complicity with that system.

White Supremacy A system, historically constructed by white peoples, European nations and the United States, to exploit and oppress nations and peoples of color. The point of the system is to maintain and perpetuate wealth, power and privilege for nations and peoples of European descent. White privilege is also a system, institutionally based, that (1) rewards and privileges white people solely because of their skin color and European origins; and (2) exempts whites and European-descended peoples from oppression. White supremacy anchors white privilege and racial oppression in our society, meaning that it is not simply about individual prejudice. Individual and organizational acts of racial prejudice are rooted in, and replicate, an entire social construct of white supremacy.

### III. Tools for Change



## Common Behavioral Patterns that Perpetuate Relations of Domination

by Margo Adair & Sharon Howell of Tools for Change



Power is the ability to act—the more access to resources one has, the more options one has. Power differences are expressed in institutional and cultural contexts. These power differences continually inform our interpersonal relationships. The following patterns are common ways people learn to interact in a hierarchical society. To not conform to expected behavior risks social ostracism, privilege and/or one's survival. These are *relational* patterns taking place in correspondence to each other, they are tendencies not personality characteristics. They are to be read horizontally. If these patterns are present, people find themselves duplicating the dominant culture's injustice, even when they aspire to egalitarian relationships. When the patterns are broken, space is made for justice.

<i>an individual from the—</i> <b>DOMINANT GROUP</b>	<i>an individual from the—</i> <b>OPPRESSED GROUP</b>
Defines rules, judges what is appropriate, patronizes.	Feels inappropriate, awkward, doesn't trust own perception, looks to expert for definition.
Is seen as, and feels, capable of making constructive changes.	Is seen as, and feels, disruptive.
Assumes responsibility for keeping system on course. Acts without checking in with others.	Blames self for not having capacity to change situation.
Self-image of superiority, competence, in control, entitled, correct.	Self-image of inferiority, incompetent, being controlled, not entitled, low self-esteem.
Presumptuous, does not listen, interrupts, raises voice, bullies, threatens violence, becomes violent.	Finds it difficult to speak up, timid, tries to please. Holds back anger, resentment, and rage.
Seeks to stand out as special.	Feels secure in background, feels vulnerable when singled out.
Assumes anything is possible, can do whatever one wants, assumes everyone else can too.	Feels confined by circumstances, limits aspirations. Sees current situations in terms of past limits.
Initiates, manages, plans, projects.	Lacks initiative, responds, deals, copes, survives.
Sees problems and situations in personal terms.	Sees problems in social context, results of system, "them."
Sees experiences and feelings as unique, feels disconnected, often needs to verbalize feelings.	Sees experiences and feelings as collectively understood and shared. No point in talking about them.
Sees solutions to problems as promoting better feelings.	Sees solutions to problems in actions that change conditions.
Thinks own view of reality is only one, obvious to all, assumes everyone agrees with their view. Disagreements are result of lack of information, misunderstandings, and/or personalities.	Always aware of at least two views of reality, their own and that of the dominant group.
Views self as logical, rational. Sees others as too emotional, out of control.	Often thinks own feelings are inappropriate, a sign of inadequacy.
Believes certain kinds of work below their dignity.	Believes certain kinds of work beyond their ability.
Does not believe or trust ability of others to provide leadership.	Does not believe has capacity for leading.
Unaware of hypocrisy, contradictions.	Sees contradictions, irony, hypocrisy.
Fears losing control, public embarrassment.	Laughs at self and others. Sees humor as way of dealing with hypocrisy.
Regards own culture as civilized, regards other's as underdeveloped, disadvantaged. Turns to other's culture to enrich humanity while invalidating it by calling it exotic.	Feels own culture devalued. Uses cultural forms to influence situation. Humor, music, poetry, etc. to celebrate collective experience and community. Sees these forms as being stolen.

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2408 E. Valley, Seattle, WA 98112 e-mail: info@toolsforchange.org phone&fax: (206)329-2201 see our web sight [www.toolsforchange.org](http://www.toolsforchange.org)



## Creating an Atmosphere Where Everyone Participates

by Margo Adair & Sharon Howell  
of *Tools for Change*

Organizations striving to create democratic relations usually function with the notion that everyone can and should participate equally. If s/he doesn't, it is viewed as a personal choice or limitation. All behaviors are seen as stemming from individual personality.

Yet patterns of social interaction form currents below the surface, directing how we view ourselves and each other. These dictate behavior, expectations, and to a large degree, who people take seriously.

Social power is accorded to individuals based on their membership in groups which have had more or less power in the larger society. Social power is not a direct result of an individual's personality, skill, talent or achievements. Rather, it is at all times embedded in a larger context, and reflects the social, economic and historical status of the group(s) to which a person belongs.

More often than not, social power is invisible, unacknowledged and unexamined. While formal roles and responsibilities are frequently clear, inequities based on gender, class, ethnicity, age, appearance and education are rarely addressed openly. For example, in most cultures, people are conditioned to give more weight to the words of men. As women enter organizational settings, they notice a distinct lack of attention given to their comments. Many studies have documented the tendency to rearrange papers, walk around the room, or begin side conversations while women are speaking. Efforts to explore this behavior as a socially conditioned phenomenon are blunted when incidents are explained away by particular circumstances. ("No one intended to show a

lack of respect, merely to get coffee-it just happened to occur when a woman started to speak.") Such patterns are deeply ingrained. They unconsciously dictate behavior forming a web of daily interactions that tell people from groups with less social power that their contributions are not as valued or welcomed as those from the majority culture.

Compounding the problem, those with social power take it for granted that they are the ones with the answers. They expect to be agreed with. After all, people have always sought out their opinions and given great weight to them. Yet it is exactly because of these dynamics that those with social power are the very ones least likely to have new information. Their presence in a group tends to provoke both compliance and silence. Those with social power usually have no idea that multiple realities have been relegated to the world of silence.

Creating a democratic atmosphere in which everyone participates means both putting ourselves forward and including others. To do this we must understand the dynamics rooted in issues of power, and do things which counter them. In the dominant culture, the degree to which one can operate purely as an individual without taking into account issues of social power is directly proportional to the degree of privilege one has inherited within that culture, i.e. how much social power one has.

A dominant/compliant dynamic is set when people simply jump in to express their opinions. The usual way that order is maintained is by having people raise their hands. This method does little to overcome social inequities. Generally, those with more

social power still take up the majority of the time available for discussion, believing they have the more important points. Those with less social power find themselves as listeners.

### Shifting the Dynamic

To shift these dynamics, the same voices should not be allowed to dominate, even if the people who are quiet say they are in agreement with what is being said. Room is needed for the initiative and participation of everyone. The less people contribute, the less ownership they feel of the group's process. The structures and processes of meetings need to incorporate new ways of working together that encourage everyone's contributions. Skillful facilitation can shift the way in which social power is exercised in meetings, challenging long-standing patterns of interaction which filter out the rich pool of experience rooted in our differences.

Some people need support in reigning themselves in, while others need encouragement to express themselves. Facilitators can take specific steps to open up more room in the discussion. For instance, if it is always the same people speaking, switching to a go-around format in which people are free to pass will draw out other voices. The facilitator can simply ask those who tend to be quiet what they are thinking, or ask them to speak first on an issue. The latter is particularly helpful because it is the first couple of comments that tend to establish the parameters of the discussion.

The facilitator can make room for the "unspoken" or "invisible" by conveying that there are always numerous viewpoints on any issue. When only one perspective has been voiced, it is good to summarize it and then ask for different perspectives.

### III. Tools for Change

This creates a more balanced framework for discussion, opening it up for a variety of viewpoints and breaking the mind-set that there is only one answer for any problem.

Generally, where each of us has social power, we need to step back and make room for other voices and experience to come forth. Where we lack social power, we need to put ourselves forward. Drawing on the experiences that have been locked out is the key to creating new ways of doing things which do not reproduce the dominant/compliant dynamic—the very antithesis of democracy.

Bringing in those perspectives we have previously felt compelled to leave at the door is the indispensable piece needed to expand the context for everyone. These taboo aspects expose inequity, and are critical to inform decision making that will establish an inclusive context.

#### Ideas for Equalizing Time

Encourage those who usually speak first to wait and those who usually don't to put forth their perspectives.

Use a round format.

Alternate between men and women.

Ask those from marginalized groups to speak first.

Everyone speaks once before anyone speaks again on an issue.

Ten seconds of silence between each speaker.

Give everyone a certain number of chips. Each time a person speaks they must give up a chip; when their chips are used up, they can not speak again until a new set are distributed.

Start with five minutes of silence in which people write down their main ideas and concerns on the topic. Writing each idea on a separate card can do this—three apiece is a good start. Put them in a basket, then have people draw out the cards and read them aloud.

### Transforming Organizational Culture

*so that everyone contributes their best.*

*Tools for Change* creates a respectful atmosphere in which power, history and culture are openly addressed. When we share our stories and full perspectives, we discover how to heal the schisms across the lines of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability. This enables everyone to transform guilt, blame, and distrust into supportive and creative relations, power dynamics and tokenism are replaced by an open, multicultural and democratic context.

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*The Subjective Side  
of Politics*

*From Leadership  
to Empowerment*

#### READER'S COMMENTS:

This makes visible the hidden barriers that block our ability to work together effectively. It's full of concrete strategies for creating a context that welcomes everyone's contributions.

*--Sister Guadalupe Guajardo*

A very important piece of work for both emerging and established organizations. Although it's good for individuals, it's best to study it collectively and use it for training programs.

*--Richard Moore*

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349 Church Street

San Francisco, CA 94114

Phone and FAX: 415-861-6347 or 800-99-tools

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## RACE: The U.S. Creation Myth and its Premise Keepers

By Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez

*This article was first written as a presentation for the “Challenging White Supremacy Workshop” founded by Sharon Martinas in San Francisco in 1993. Originally entitled “What is White Supremacy?” it was intended to offer a basic, introductory understanding of racism to a mostly white audience. Slightly edited and updated here, the article has always been a practical tool to begin opening minds that the society has kept closed for centuries.*

\* \* \*

### What is White Supremacy?

The basic definition of the Challenging White Supremacy Workshop says:

“White Supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.”

#### I. What does it mean to say it is a system?

The most common mistake people make when talking about racism (White Supremacy) is to think of it as a problem of personal prejudices and individual acts of discrimination. They do not see that it is a system, a web of interlocking, reinforcing institutions: political, economic, social, cultural, legal, military, educational, all our institutions. As a system, racism affects every aspect of life in a country.

By not understanding that racism is systemic, we guarantee it will continue. For example, racist police behavior is often reduced to “a few bad apples” who need to be removed, instead of seeing that it can be found in police departments everywhere. It reflects and sustains the existing power relations throughout society. This mistake has real consequences: by refusing to see police brutality as part of a system, and that the system must be changed, we guarantee such brutality will continue.

The need to recognize racism as being systemic is one reason the term White Supremacy is more useful than the term racism. They refer to the same problem but:

- A. The purpose of racism is much clearer when we call it “white supremacy.” The word “supremacy” means a power relationship exists.
- B. Although racism is a social reality, it has no biological or other scientific basis. Race is an unscientific term for differences between people; there is a single human race.
- C. The term racism often leads to dead-end debates about whether a particular remark or action by an individual white person was really racist or not. We will achieve a clearer understanding of racism if we analyze how a certain action relates to the system of White Supremacy. The term White Supremacy gives white people a clear choice of opposing an inhuman system—or not.

#### II. What does it mean to say White Supremacy is historically based?

Every country has a creation or origin myth, which is the story people are taught of how their country came into being. Ours says the United States began with Columbus's so-called “discovery” of “America,” continued with settlement by brave Pilgrims, won its independence from England with the American Revolution, survived a civil war, and expanded westward until it became the enormous, rich country you see today.

That is the origin myth we are all taught. It omits three giant facts about the emergence of the United States as a nation. Those facts demonstrate that White Supremacy is fundamental to its existence.

- A. The United States is a nation state created by military conquest in several stages. The first stage was the European seizure of the lands inhabited by indigenous peoples, which they called Turtle Island. Before the European invasion, between nine and eighteen million indigenous people lived in what became North America. By the end of the so-called Indian Wars, about 250,000 remained in what is now the United States, and about 123,000 in what is now Canada (see *The State of Native America*, ed. by M. Annette Jaimes, South End Press, 1992).

That process created the land base of this country.

The seizure of Indian land and elimination of indigenous peoples was the first, essential condition for the creation of what became the United States. The first step, then, was military conquest and genocide.

- B. The United States could not have developed economically as a nation without enslaved African labor. When agriculture and industry began growing in the colonial period, a tremendous labor shortage existed. Not enough white workers came from Europe and the European invaders could not put the remaining indigenous peoples to work in sufficient numbers. Enslaved Africans provided the labor force that made the growth of the United States possible.

That growth peaked from about 1800 to 1860, the period called the Market Revolution. During this time, the United States changed from being an agricultural/commercial economy to an industrial corporate economy. The development of banks, expansion of the credit system, protective tariffs, and new transportation systems all helped make this possible. The key to the Market Revolution was the export of cotton, and this was made possible by slave labor. So the second, vital step in the creation of the United States was slavery.

- C. The third major step in the formation of the United States as a nation was the seizure of almost half of Mexico by war--today's Southwest--in 1846. A few years later, in 1853, the U.S. acquired a final chunk of Arizona from Mexico by threatening to renew the war. This expansion enabled the U.S. to reach the Pacific and thus open up valuable trade with Asia that included markets for export and goods to import and sell in the U.S. It also opened to the U.S. vast mineral wealth in Arizona, agricultural wealth in California, and new sources of cheap labor to build railroads and develop the economy. Thus the third step in the formation of this nation was military expansion.

This completed the territorial boundaries of what is now the United States. Those were the three foundation stones in the creation of the United States as a nation. Then, in 1898, the U.S. takeover of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam and Cuba by means of war against Spain extended the U.S. to become an

empire. All but Cuba have remained U.S. colonies or neo-colonies, providing new sources of wealth and military power for the United States. The colonization and incorporation of Hawaii completed the empire.

Many people in the United States hate to recognize the truth of the three steps. They do not like to call the U.S. an empire. They prefer the established origin myth, with its idea of the U.S. as a democracy from its early days. They and the institutions that uphold that myth could be called the Premise Keepers.

III. What does it mean to say that White Supremacy is a system of exploitation?

The roots of U.S. racism or White Supremacy lie in economic exploitation by the theft of resources and human labor. That exploitation has been justified by a racist ideology affirming the inferiority of its victims. The first application of White Supremacy or racism by Euroamericans was against indigenous peoples, whose land was stolen; then Blacks, originally as slaves and later as exploited waged labor; followed by Mexicans when they lost their land holdings and also became wage-slaves. Chinese, Filipino, Japanese and other Asian/Pacific peoples also became low-wage workers here, subject to racism.

In short, White Supremacy and economic power were born together. The United States is the first nation in the world to be born racist and also the first to be born capitalist. That is not a coincidence. In this country, as history shows, capitalism and racism go hand in hand.

IV. How does White Supremacy maintain and defend a system of wealth, power and privilege?

Racist power relations are sustained by the institutions of this society together with the ideology of Whiteness that developed during western colonization. The first European settlers called themselves English, Irish, German, French, Dutch, etc.--not white. Over half of those who came in the early colonial period were white servants. With so many enslaved Africans brought to the colonies, the planters who formed an elite class in the southern colonies were soon outnumbered by non-whites. In the Carolinas, 25,000 whites faced 40,000 Black slaves and 60,000 indigenous peoples in the area.

Class lines hardened as the distinctions between rich



and poor became sharper. The problem of control loomed large and fear of revolt from below grew among the elite. There had been revolts by white servants and Black slaves from the early years. Elite whites feared most of all that discontented whites -- servants, tenant farmers, the urban poor, the property-less, soldiers and sailors -- would join Black slaves to overthrow the existing order. As early as 1663, indentured white servants and Black slaves in Virginia had formed a conspiracy to rebel and gain their freedom.

Then, in 1676, came Bacon's Rebellion by white frontiersmen and servants alongside Black slaves. The rebellion shook Virginia's planter elite. Many other rebellions followed, from South Carolina to New York. The main fear of elite whites everywhere was a class fear. Their solution: divide and control.

On one hand, the Slave Codes were enacted that legalized chattel slavery and severely restricted the rights of free Africans. The codes equated the terms "Negro" and "slave." At the same time, rules were set for "servants." Their bonds were loosened, they were granted certain privileges such as the right to acquire land, join militias, and receive bounties for slaves they caught.

With these privileges they were legally declared white on the basis of skin color and continental origin. That made them "superior" to Blacks (and Indians). Thus whiteness was born as a racist notion to prevent lower-class whites from joining people of color, especially Blacks, against their common class enemies. The concept of whiteness became a source of unity and strength for the vastly outnumbered Euroamericans -- as in South Africa, another settler nation—and key to defending White Supremacy against class unity across color lines.

## **Manifest Destiny**

Since the time of Jefferson, the United States had its eye on expanding to the Pacific Ocean and establishing trade with Asia. Others in the ruling class came to want more slave states, for reasons of political power, and this also required westward expansion. Both goals pointed to taking over Mexico. The first step was Texas, which was acquired for the United States by filling the territory with Anglo settlers who then declared their independence from Mexico in 1836. After failing to purchase more Mexican territory, President James Polk created a pretext for starting a war with the

declared goal of expansion. The notoriously brutal, two-year war was justified in the name of Manifest Destiny.

The doctrine of Manifest Destiny, born at a time of aggressive western expansion, said that the United States was destined by God to take over other peoples and lands. The term was first used in 1845 by the editor of a popular journal, who affirmed "the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole continent which providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government."

The concept of Manifest Destiny and racism are profoundly linked. Even those who opposed expansion did so for racist reasons. For example, major opposition to gobbling up Mexico came from politicians saying "the degraded Mexican-Spanish" were unfit to become part of the United States; they were "a wretched people . . . mongrels."

In a similar way, some influential whites who opposed slavery in those years said Blacks should be removed from U.S. soil, to avoid "contamination" by an inferior people (see *Manifest Destiny* by Anders Stephanson, Hill & Wang, 1995). Earlier, Native Americans had been the target of white supremacist beliefs that said they were dirty, heathen "savages" and also fundamentally inferior in their values. For example, they did not see land as profitable real estate but as *Our Mother*. Such people had to be forcefully isolated on reservations or, in limited cases, forcefully assimilated by being removed from their own culture.

The doctrine of Manifest Destiny established White Supremacy more firmly than ever as central to the U.S. definition of itself. The arrogance of asserting that God gave white people (primarily men) the right to dominate everything around them still haunts our society and sustains its racist oppression. Today we call it the arrogance of power and it can be seen in all U.S. relations with other countries.

The material effects of White Supremacy on peoples of color are all too clear in terms of economic, social, political and cultural inequity. Even that ultimate affirmation of dominion, racist murder or lynching, still occurs to remind us that age-old power relations remain unaltered. That is not to deny the positive effects of long years of struggle to change those power

relations, but to recognize that White Supremacy remains intact systemically, as seen in the constant harm it does to the daily lives and aspirations of peoples of color.

Less understood than the material are the psychological and spiritual effects of White Supremacy. Few whites understand what internalized racism does to people of color, who do not discuss those effects easily themselves. The self-hatred, desire to be like whites or even to be white, and assumption of inevitable failure are the dreadful legacy of White Supremacy's teaching those lies by every means at its disposal. Maintaining control over any community has always required not only physical domination but also the ideological domination that says: things are as they should be. As you inferior creatures deserve them to be.

### **White Supremacy and Globalization**

Racism has never stood still or remained unchanged in history. Today we see new forms emerging from the rapid growth of globalization. We can see that White Supremacy has become more global than ever and millions of people of color have become globalized.

Global economic integration is not new in itself; we have seen the world capitalist economy in operation since the 15th century if not earlier. But today it is an extremely powerful set of inter-related policies and practices with a huge field of operations. It includes the "global assembly line" for production, with parts made in different countries; the whole world defined as the potential market for a commodity; and technological advances that facilitate economic integration more than ever in human history. With corporate globalization has come a neo-liberalism that means privatization, deregulation, the decline of social services, and other policies.

The main victims are nations of color (politely called "developing" instead of impoverished) and peoples of color, as shown by the vast increase in migrant labor. The vast majority of immigrants to the U.S. today are the globalized: women and men, mostly of color, driven from home by dire personal poverty to find survival usually in the global capitals. New eruptions of White Supremacy often confront them.

It's been said that militarism is racism in action. We could also say that globalization is White Supremacy in

action, as never before. Manifest Destiny now rages across not only Las Americas but the whole world.

\*Elizabeth (Betita) Mart'nez, a Chicana anti-racist activist since 1960, has taught Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies as an adjunct professor since 1989 and lectures around the country. She is the author of six works on struggles for social justice in Las Americas, including two books on Chicano/a history. Her best-known work is the bilingual volume *500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures*, used by teachers, community groups, and youth since 1976. Currently she is director of the Institute for MultiRacial Justice, a resource center for building alliances between peoples of color.

## White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

*"I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group."*

*Peggy McIntosh*

Through work to bring materials from women's studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to women's statues, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there are most likely a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of while privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in women's studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a

base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are just seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us."

### Daily effects of white privilege

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty

well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
9. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.
11. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which s/he is the only member of his/her race.
12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
16. I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race.
17. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.
18. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.
19. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
22. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
24. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge", I will be facing a person of my race.
25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
26. I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
27. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared.
28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her/his chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.
29. I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.
30. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.

31. I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.
32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.
33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.
34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.
35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
36. If my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it had racial overtones.
37. I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me and advise me about my next steps, professionally.
38. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.
39. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.
40. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
42. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.
43. If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not the problem.
44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.
45. I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.
46. I can chose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.
47. I can travel alone or with my spouse without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us.
48. I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.
49. My children are given texts and classes which implicitly support our kind of family unit and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.
50. I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

### **Elusive and fugitive**

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a patter of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turn, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything

outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.

For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to over empower certain groups. Such privilege simply confers dominance because of one's race or sex.

### **Earned strength, unearned power**

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages, which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an unearned entitlement. At present, since only a few have it, it is an unearned advantage for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power that I originally say as attendant on being a human being in the United States consisted in unearned advantage and conferred dominance.

I have met very few men who truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance, and, if so, what

we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and angers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantages associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage that rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex, and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the members of the Combahee River Collective pointed out in their "Black Feminist Statement" of 1977.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant groups one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the system won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitude. But a "white" skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subject taboo. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and, I imagine, for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

Peggy McIntosh is associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. This essay is excerpted from Working Paper 189. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" (1988), by Peggy McIntosh; available for \$4.00 from the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley MA 02181 The working paper contains a longer list of privileges.

## DETOUR-SPOTTING for white anti-racists

*joan olsson*

For white people living in North America learning to be anti-racist is a re-education process. We must unlearn our thorough racist conditioning to re-educate and re-condition ourselves as antiracists. There is scant social or political encouragement for this journey of re?education. We are constantly tempted to detour off course by the racist propaganda of society and our own guilt and denial. In the face of society's and our own resistance, sustaining the will to continue this journey takes bold and stubborn effort.

This journey sends us into unfamiliar territory. No white person has ever lived in a non-racist North America. We were never taught the skills of anti-racist living. Indeed, we were carefully taught the opposite: how to maintain our white privilege. Racism, the system of oppression (of people of color) and advantage (for white people) depends on the collusion and cooperation of white people for its perpetuation.

Most of us first became aware of racial prejudice and injustice as children. As white infants we were fed a pabulum of racist propaganda. That early "training" was comprehensive and left little room for question, challenge or doubt. Our childhood games, rhymes and media conspired: "Eenie, meenie, minie, mo; Catch a n...r by his toe ..." We played cowboys and Indians. All of us knew the Indians were bad and had to die. My WWII generation watched "Bugs Bunny" outwit evil Japanese villains. As Lillian Smith acknowledged:

"These ceremonials in honor of white supremacy, performed from babyhood, slip from the conscious mind down deep into muscles and glands...and become difficult to tear out." (1)

Our generous child wisdom told us racism was wrong, but there was no escaping the daily racist catechism. We resisted the lies, the deceit and the injustice of racism, but we did not have the skills to counter the poisonous messages. Our conditioning filled us with fear, suspicion and stereotypes that substituted for true knowing of people of color. We internalized our beliefs about people of color ourselves, other white people and about being white. Those internalized attitudes became actualized into racist behavior.

As I continue my journey toward becoming a re?conditioned and effective anti?racist, I have become aware of “habits,” attitudes and their attached behaviors, which divert me from my intended goal.

To change the detouring behavior, I must first be fully conscious of what I’m doing, the behavior and its consequences. Next, I need to reflect on the behavior’s attitudinal roots. Finally, I determine the prescribed, desired change I want to make and the best strategy for achieving it. Sometimes I need to remove the behavior from my personal repertoire. More often though, re-tooling is necessary, replacing the discarded pattern with new behaviors. It will likely take repeated attempts before I have fully internalized and externalized the desired change.

Most of the obstacles and detours encountered on our journey of re?education are those same habitual behaviors birthed in our internalized beliefs. The behaviors will vary with each white person. I recognize that no two white people share exactly the same experiences and societal moldings. We learned racism in our unique and personal ways from different teachers and at different times. But we all learned the lessons well. I have observed in myself and other white people some common patterns of guilt, denial and defensiveness which appear regularly in our interactions with people of color and other white people.

Eighteen common detours from our anti-racist journey are examined in this way:

#) ***The Detour’s Title***

Attitudes or behaviors that signal a detour or wrong turn into white guilt, denial or defensiveness.

***Reality Check and Consequence***

A clarification of the underlying meaning and consequence of this behavior pattern.

1) ***I’m Colorblind***

“People are just people; I don’t see color.” Or “I don’t think of you as Chinese.”

***Reality Check and Consequence***

Statements like these assume that people of color are just like us, white, and have the same dreams, standards, problems, peeves that we do. “Colorblindness” negates the cultural values, norms, expectations and life experiences of people of color. Even if an individual white person

could ignore a person’s color, the society does not. By saying we don’t see their color, we are also saying we don’t see our whiteness. This denies their experience of racism and our experience of privilege.

“I’m colorblind” can also be a defense when afraid-to discuss racism, especially if one assumes all conversation about race or color is racist. As my friend Rudy says, “I don’t mind that you notice that I’m Black.” Color consciousness does not equal racism.

2) ***The Rugged Individual and The Bootstrap Theory***

“America is the land of opportunity, built by rugged individuals, where anyone with grit can succeed if they just pull up hard enough on their bootstraps.”

***Reality Check and Consequence***

The “rugged individual” and the “bootstrap theory” are two of the crown jewels of U.S. social propaganda. They have allowed generation after generation to say, “If you succeed, you did that, but if you fail, or if you’re poor, that’s your fault.” Belief in this propaganda is founded in a total denial of the impact of either oppression or privilege on any person’s chance for success.

3) ***Reverse Racism***

- (a) “People of color are just as racist as white people.”
- (b) “Affirmative Action had a role years ago, but today it’s just reverse racism; now it’s discriminating against white men.”
- (c) The civil rights movement, when it began was appropriate, valuable, needed. But it’s gone to the extreme. The playing field is now level. Now the civil rights movement is no longer worker for equality but for revenge.”

***Reality Check and Consequence***

- (a) Let’s first define racism:  
Racism= Racial Prejudice (white people and people of color have this)  
Plus  
Systemic, Institutional Power (white people have this)  
To say People of Color can be racist, denies the power imbalance inherent in racism. Certainly, people of color can be and are prejudiced against white people. That was part of their societal conditioning. A person of color can act on their preju-



*dices to insult, even hurt a white person. But there is a difference between being hurt and being oppressed. People of color, as a social group, do not have the societal, institutional power to oppress white people as a group. An individual person of color abusing a white person – while clearly wrong, (no person should be insulted, hurt, etc.) is acting out of a personal racial prejudice, not racism.*

- (b) This form of denial is based in the false notion that the playing field is now level. When the people with privilege and historical access and advantage are expected to suddenly (in societal evolution time) share some of that power, it is often perceived as discrimination.
- (c) This was said by Rush Limbaugh, who is obviously no anti-racist, but this comment is loaded with white people's fears of people of color, especially if "they" gained control. Embedded here is also the assumption that to be "pro-Black" (or any color) is to be antiwhite. A similar illogical accusation is directed at women who work for and end to violence against women and girls. Women who work to better the lives of women are regularly accused of being "anti-male."

#### 4) ***Blame the Victim***

- (a) "We have advertised everywhere, there just aren't any qualified people of color for this job." Or "If he only had a stronger work ethic." Or
- (b) "If she just felt better about herself..." Or "Internalized racism is the real problem here." Or
- (c) "She uses racism as an excuse to divert us from her incompetence." And "He goes looking for racism everywhere." (As if racism is so hidden or hard to uncover that people of color would have to search for it.)

#### ***Reality Check and Consequence***

All "blame the victim" behaviors have two things in common. First, they evade the real problem: racism. Second, they delete from the picture the agents of racism, white people and institutions, which either intentionally perpetuate or unintentionally collude with racism. As long as the focus remains on people of color we can minimize or dismiss their reactions, and never have to look directly at racism and our own responsibility or collusion.

#### 5) ***Innocent By Association***

"I'm not racist, because ...I have Vietnamese

friends, or my lover is Black, I donate to Casa Latina, or I marched with Dr. King."

#### ***Reality Check and Consequence***

This detour into denial wrongly equates personal interactions with people of color, no matter how intimate they may be, with anti-racism. It assumes our personal associations free us magically from our racist conditioning.

#### 6) ***The white knight or white missionary***

"We (white people) know just where to build your new community center." Or "Your young people (read youth of color) would be better served by traveling to our suburban training center."

#### ***Reality Check and Consequence***

It is a racist, paternalistic assumption that well meaning white people know what's best for people of color. Decisions, by white people, are made on behalf of people of color, as though they were incapable of making their own. This is another version of "blame the victim" and "white is right." It places the problems at the feet of people of color, and the only "appropriate" solutions with white people. Once more the power of self-determination is taken from people of color. Regardless of motive, it is still about white control.

#### 7) ***The White Wash***

"He's really a very nice guy, he's just had some bad experiences with Koreans." Or "That's just the way Uncle Adolf jokes. He's very polite to the Black janitor in his building."

#### ***Reality Check and Consequence***

We're trapped here by another version of our guilt response. We attempt to excuse, defend or cover up racist actions of other white people. We are particularly prone to this if the other person is close to us, family or friend, and if we feel their actions reflect on us.

#### 8) ***I Was An Indian in A Former Life*** (2)

"After that sweat lodge I really know what it feel like to be an Indian. I have found my true spiritual path."

#### ***Reality Check and Consequence***

This is spiritual or cultural appropriation and poses a serious threat to the integrity and survival of Native cultures. To fill a void in their own spiritual core, some white people are drawn into the New Age garden to pick from a variety of Native spiritu-

al packages usually offered for sale. Since Native spiritual practice is inseparable from their history and current community, it cannot be disconnected from that context to service white people searching for life's meaning. Appropriating selected parts of Native cultures romanticizes the lives of Nativ peoples while denying their struggles. Their lands and livelihoods stolen, indigenous peoples now witness white people trying to steal their spirituality. Rather than escape our white racism by finding a spiritual path, we instead collude in one more way with the genocidal attacks on Native cultures.

9) ***The Isolationist***

"I thought we resolved this issue (racism) when it came up on the board last year." Or "We need to deal with this specific incident. Don't complicate it by bringing up irrelevant incidences of the past." Or "This only happened today because the TV news last night showed police beating a Black kid."

***Reality Check and Consequence***

Attempts are made to isolate a particular incident of racism from of the larger context. We blame a publicized incident of racism outside our organization to rationalize an internal incident and to avoid facing the reality of racism within. When trying to resolve an accusation of racism within an institution, we often see the incident in a vacuum, or as an aberration, in isolation from an historic pattern of racism. Racism has been so institutionalized that every "incident" is another symptom of the pattern. If we continue to react incident to incident, crisis to crisis, as though they are unconnected, we will find genuine resolution only further from our reach.

10) ***"Bending Over Blackwards"*** (3)

"Of course, I agree with you." )Said to a person of color even when I disagree) or "I have to side with Betty on this." (Betty being a woman of color.)

***Reality Check and Consequence***

Our white guilt shows up as we defer to people of color. We don't criticize, disagree, challenge or question them the way we would white people. And if we do disagree, we don't do it with the same conviction or passion that we would display with a white person. Our racism plays out as a different standard for people of color than for white people. If this is our pattern, we can never have a genuine relationship with a person of color. People of color

when we are doing this. Our sincerity, commitment and courage will be rightly questioned. W cannot grow to a deeper level of trust and intimacy with people of color we treat in this way.

11) ***BWAME***

"But What About Me. Look how I've been hurt, oppressed, exploited..."

***Reality Check and Consequence***

This diminishes the experience of people of color by telling my own story of hardship. I lose an opportunity to learn more about the experience of racism from a person of color, while I minimize their experience by trying to make it comparable or less painful than mine.

12) ***Teach Me, Please***

"I want to stop acting like a racist, so please tell me when I do something you think is racist."

***Reality Check and Consequence***

White people often assume we can learn about racism only from people of color. We further assume that people of color have the energy and/or desire to do this teaching. My understanding is that most people of color are weary of educating white people about racism. We will get stuck. We'll get frustrated and impatient with ourselves and other white people in this struggle. And we'll stay stuck if we don't seek help from other white anti-racists. Our inclination has been to ask people of color to help us. We should seek out other white people BEFORE we go to people of color. Perhaps, as we become more trustworthy as allies, we will build genuine relationships with a few people of color who offer their reflections for us when w get stuck. This is at their discretion, not ours. We can't assume people of color should be so grateful for our attempts at anti-racism, that they will be willing to guide us whenever we are ready to be guided.

13) ***White On White, and Righteously So***

"What is wrong with those white people? Can't they see how racist they're being?" Or "I just can't stand to be around white people who act so racist." And

***You're Preaching To The Choir***

"You're wasting your time with us, we're not the people who need this training."

***Reality Check and Consequence***

We distance ourselves from “other” white people. We see only confirmed bigots, card-carrying white supremacists and white people outside our circle as “real racists.” We put other white people down, trash their work or behavior, or otherwise dismiss them. We righteously consider ourselves white people who have evolved beyond our racist conditioning. This is another level of denial. There are no “exceptional white people.” (4) We may have attended many anti-racism workshops; we may not be shouting racist epithets or actively discriminating against people of color, but we still experience privilege based on our white skin color. We benefit from this system of oppression and advantage, no matter what our intentions are. This distancing serves only to divide us from potential allies and limit our own learning.

14) ***The “Certificate of Innocence”***

Sometimes we seek or expect from people of color some public or private recognition and appreciation for our anti-racism. Other times we look for a “certificate of innocence” to tell us we are one of the good white people.

***Reality Check and Consequence***

If our ally commitment depends on positive reinforcement from people of color, we set ourselves up for sure failure. The first time a person of color is displeased with our actions, we could respond, “Well, if the people I’m doing all this for don’t want my help, then why bother? I quit.” Clearly, we’re challenging racism for “them” not for us. We have not identified our self-interest, as white people, for fighting racism. Until we do, we cannot stay on this lifelong journey.

15) ***Smoke And Mirrors***

We use the current PC language; we listen to the right music; we state the liberal line; we’re seen at the right meetings with the right people. We even interrupt racist remarks when the right people are watching and when there is no risk to us. We look like an anti-racist.

***Reality Check and Consequence***

This is the “Avon Ally,” the cosmetic approach. People of color and other white anti-racists see through this pretense quickly. This pseudo-anti-racist posturing only serves to collude with racism and weakens the credibility of sincere white anti-racists.

16) ***The Accountant***

We keep a tally sheet. If we perform some “feat of anti-racism,” we expect reciprocity from an individual or group of color, usually with some prestige or power that can serve our interests.

***Reality Check and Consequence***

“I scratch your back, you scratch mine is NOT justice seeking nor ally behavior. It serves only to reduce justice work to some kind of power brokering currency.

17) ***Silence***

We stay silent.

***Reality Check and Consequence***

Our silence may be a product our guilt or fear of making people of color or white people angry with us or disappointed in us. We may be silent because our guilt stops us from disagreeing with people of color. We may be afraid that speaking out could result in losing some of our privilege. We may be silenced by fear of violence. The reasons for our silence are many, but each time we miss an opportunity to interrupt racism, or to act as allies or to interact genuinely with people of color or other white people. And no anti-racist action is taken as long as we are silent.

[A note about silence: Silence is a complicated issue/matter. There are times when faced with a potential intervention situation that I may choose not to interrupt – for reasons of good sense or strategy. Anti-racists need courage, but foolish risks makes little sense. When the choice is between intervening in this moment, alone, or gathering allies to speak out later in a more strategic way, the latter may prove more effective.]

18) ***Exhaustion And Despair*** – Sound The Retreat

“I’m exhausted. I’m only one person. I can stop and rest for awhile.” Or “Racism is so pervasive and entrenched, there just isn’t any hope.”

***Reality Check and Consequence***

Despair is a real enemy of anti-racists. For our commitment to be a lifelong one, we must find ways to mitigate the effects. Burn-out or desertion are of no use to the struggle. We can remember men who jumped on a “Take Back the Night” bandwagon, challenging violence against women – for a while. Until the attention on them as good men waned. Until the “glamour” of the issue faded. One of the historical, repeated failures of

“liberals” in social justice movements has been short-term and inconsistent commitment to the “issue du jour.” If we quit, for any reason, we engage our “default option.” (5) As white people, we can take a break from the frustration and despair of anti-racism work. Such retreat will result in no significant consequences for us. Racism doesn’t allow such a respite for people of color. One of the elemental privileges of being white is our freedom to retreat from the issue of racism. If things get too tough we can always take a break. And our work against racism doesn’t get done.

## The Journey Continues

Once identified, behaviors like those above are possible to change. The patterns are repeated less often. We re-educate and re-tool ourselves to avoid racist behaviors and to take more potent anti-racist action.

People of color will continue to demand their rights, opportunities and full personhood. But racism in North America won’t end because people of color demand it. Racism will only end when a significant number of white people of conscience, the people who can wield systemic privilege and power with integrity, find the will and take the action to dismantle it.

That won’t happen until white people find racism in our daily consciousness as often a people of color do. For now we have to drag racism into our consciousness intentionally, for unlike our sisters and brothers of color, the most present daily manifestation of our white privilege is the possibility of forgetting about racism. We cannot. Racism continues in the name of all white people. While there is nothing about racism to celebrate, there is much to celebrate in a life lived in the pursuit of justice.

## ENDNOTES

1. Lillian Smith, *Killers Of The Dream*. W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1949. Page 91.
2. Paraphrase of title by Andrea Smith. “*For All Those Who Were Indian In A Former Life*.” First printed in *Sojourner*: The Women’s Forum, November 1990.
3. I first heard this phrase from Rev. Joe Barndt of Crossroads Ministry and the author of *Dismantling Racism*. Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis. 1991.

4. Credit to Kathleen Carlin for her “Principle of Intentions versus Effect” from her anti-sexism work. Translated here to a racism corollary. Before her death in 199 she was the Executive Director of Men Stopping Violence in Atlanta, GA.

5. Term from Dr. Moleshi Kete Asante, Chair of African American Studies, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

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# Color in the Anti-War Movement

## Activists of Color Mobilize Against War at Home and Abroad

by Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez

The education, mobilization, organization, participation and leadership of people of color in the current movement against the US war on Iraq (and its aftermath) have become recognized as issues today much more than in previous anti-war movements. While that recognition is good and long overdue, it is just a first step.

So many questions wait to be answered—many of which are outlined in the Open Letter to Activists (below). Why is there relatively little color in the anti-war movement when the troops who fight and die are disproportionately black, brown and red? Why isn't there more color at demonstrations when those who pay the biggest price for cutbacks in vital social services due to military costs are peoples of color? Why aren't more people of color active in protests against the Bush doctrine when they have the most reason historically to distrust government policy, actions and statements?

The answers to such questions can be found, first and foremost, in the effects of white supremacy on white/colored relations. Secondly, they rise from the effects of white supremacy on communities of color in and of themselves. The absence of more color in the anti-war movement cannot be blamed solely on white activists; it also rests on organizing problems within communities of color.

### Whites Only Need Organize

Throughout history, US peace and anti-war groups have been primarily composed of, and overwhelmingly led by, older white middle-class people. This year has seen little improvement. In the Bay Area, for example, one of the most racially diverse areas of the country, the four major coalitions that put on the big February 16 anti-war demonstration (February 15 elsewhere) fit that model.

In other areas, like New York City, the numbers were somewhat better. Organizations of color already existed to work on issues like Vieques in Puerto Rico, Black

reparations or anti-Asian violence and welfare rights; they could exercise influence and demand participation. But that did not exempt them from encounters with white supremacy in the anti-war movement. (See sidebar below.)

### Problems Within Communities of Color

The second obstacle to full involvement of communities of color has to do with the communities themselves. We cannot blame whites for blocking our participation if we are not building effectively among our own people. In the end, a successful struggle against white exclusion and marginalization requires people of color to be so strong, so numerous and so effective that we simply cannot be ignored.

Barriers that exist to mobilizing communities of color against the war on Iraq and other forms of US militarism include issues of class, gender, sexuality, politics and others. Setting aside those general sources of contradiction, we find specific barriers to participation in the anti-war movement that include:

the belief that anti-war activism can't be a priority for people struggling with daily life problems of survival—paying the rent and doctors' bills, dealing with bad schools, etc.

- distrust of “the left” and a dislike of working in a white-dominated movement
- for immigrants, fear of deportation and other anti-immigrant actions
- fear of repression by police, who target people of color
- fear of being labeled anti-American and, as a result, losing jobs or having trouble at school
- aggressive recruitment of low-income youth of color by the military
- fear of conflicts with family or friends

These problems are all real, and groups of color have combated them in various ways. Among Latinos, for example, organizing has been stimulated by church support; personal familiarity with US militarism in Latin America and its effects; the activism of Latina/o groups that began by working on immediate issues like immigrant rights and then linked them to the war; and the current high casualty rate of Latino soldiers in Iraq. A key factor has been bringing out the linkage between the foreign and domestic wars on peoples of color.

## Creating a Color-full Anti-War Movement

One of the most inspiring moments for activists in the Bay Area came when the first contingent of color marched as a unit on February 16. We had Korean drummers beating Mexican rhythms while Puerto Ricans danced salsa with blacks and Filipinos, and a sizeable number of Chinese marched with Latinos as a result of organizing together for low-cost housing. Other groups of color, like Freedom Uprising in Oakland, have since emerged, with youth playing a major role.

Nationally, RJ911 (Racial Justice 911, meaning of course September 11, 2001) has emerged as a network of people of color—primarily organizations—against the war. It has had two national meetings in Los Angeles since December, and local RJ911 groups are emerging.

In the Bay Area, the Institute for MultiRacial Justice—a resource center to combat racism and help build a society free of racism, classism and other inequities—has been working to mobilize communities of color against the war in Iraq. With help from a grant from Resist, the Institute will sponsor a statewide meeting with people from the African-American and Latino communities for joint strategizing and planning.

Few would disagree that building a multi-racial, multi-national, multi-lingual, multi-class movement is our best hope for restraining the current U.S. war and preventing future inhuman, illegal, and truly monstrous assaults by the world's most frightening empire to date.

*A social justice activist and organizer for over 40 years, Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez is director of the Institute for MultiRacial Justice, which recently received a Resist grant for work to increase participation of people of color in the anti-war movement. For more information, contact the Institute at 422 Valencia Street, San Francisco, CA 94110; [www.multiracialjustice.org](http://www.multiracialjustice.org).*

## Open Letter to Activists

Recognizing how racist dynamics prevent the movement from achieving its maximum unity and effectiveness, an Open Letter to Activists Concerning Racism in the Anti-War Movement went out from a group of individuals based in New York City February 2003. Many of the signers were active in organizing the demonstration in NYC, and they asserted that the anti-

racist politics outlined in the letter were critical to achieving an event with unprecedented inclusion of the majority people-of-color communities in NYC (as well as labor and working class people) in both the leadership, the program and the entire demonstration. The racist dynamics discussed in the letter were and remain a powerful factor in cross-race work, preventing the fullest unity and effectiveness.

The letter listed many specific examples of how white supremacy/racist dynamics have alienated individuals and organizations, including:

- Refusing to acknowledge and accept leadership from activists and organizations of color;
- Starting coalitions without input from or honest outreach to people of color and then calling the coalition “citywide;”
- Using their greater financial or volunteer resources to dominate;
- Not calling on activists of color or favoring the most “articulate” at meetings;
- Using terms like “us” when the reference is to an all-white or predominantly white group;
- Failing to link the war abroad with the war at home—which targets primarily communities of color.

Some problems involve tactics. For example, whites planning civil disobedience may not understand that immigrants and others of color risk jail, deportation and police violence for participating.

The Open Letter sparked discussion around the country and a flood of emails to its authors. At least partly because the war on Iraq began not long after that and inevitably consumed attention, discussion of the Open Letter has not yet led to concrete measures being taken thus far.

*The letter is available on Z Magazine's website; the authors can be e-mailed at [antiracistmovement@yahoo.com](mailto:antiracistmovement@yahoo.com).*

## How to be poor in January

*by Molly Goldberg*

Learn to like sweaters and hats. Wear mittens outside and gloves inside. Go to the Salvation Army store in town and smile when the lady at the counter offers you a photocopied section of the bible. Pretend to know who James and John and Peter are. Pretend like you don't think 14:18 is military time. Give the lady a dollar, and leave with four wool pullovers. Try not to mind the mothball smell. Bring them home to wear over your cotton long johns. Never turn the heat above 55. That's all you need to keep the pipes from freezing.

During the day, turn the heat off and make sure to let the water drip from the tap every half hour. Try to live in a house with a woodstove so that you don't have gas bills, and even though the wind blows under the floorboards, you can pull your mattress out into the kitchen so the stove from dinner keep you warm at night. Let the kids sleep with you on nights when frost forms from the moisture on the inside of the windows, otherwise just tuck them in tightly. Put their beds against an inside wall.

Use cloth diapers for your baby. Cover your hands in Vaseline before chopping wood so the skin between your fingers doesn't tear. Cook with a lot of garlic. If they still get sick, let them take a hot bath and add another log to the fire. Try not to think about where you'll get wood if it snows in April again this year. Save every chip and splinter just in case. Bring a bag to the fuel assistance office so you don't lose any of the forms they give you because they hate printing them twice.

Remember to wake up early every Tuesday so that the WIC basket doesn't freeze out on the porch. Try to thank the man who brings it before you check what kind of cereal there is and if any of the eggs are broken. If the snow is too heavy and they don't come, remember that crackers last longer than bread, so eat peanut butter sandwiches before opening the Saltines.

Park your car a mile away where the paved road is, so when they don't plow and the bus doesn't come you can drive your kids to school before work. Don't expect them to take care of your road until everyone else's has been plowed. Tie plastic bags around the top

of your boots so snow doesn't melt on your nylons and ruin them. Tie a cardboard box to the plastic sled so your baby doesn't fall out on the way to the car. Leave early so the car has time to warm up while you dig it out. Try not to swear in front of your children when the plow buries the car again as it goes by. Pretend no one has a garage. Call the new snow a wonderland, a winter playground, and let your son build a snowman while you dig.

## Confronting Classism

*From Handbook for Nonviolent Action,  
published by the War Resisters League*

We live in the wealthiest country in the world, but the greatest percentage of that wealth is in the hands of a tiny percentage of the population. It is environmentally and technically possible for everyone to enjoy a good standard of living if wealth were redistributed, exploitation ceased and the arms race abandoned. The inequitable distribution of wealth prevents the whole society from enjoying the full benefits of people's labor, intelligence and creativity and causes great misery for working class and poor people.

Classism is the systematic oppression of poor people and people who work for wages by those who have access to control of the necessary resources by which other people make their living. Classism is also held in place by a system of beliefs which ranks people according to economic status, "breeding," job and level of education. Classism says that upper class people are smarter and more articulate than working class and poor people. It is a way of keeping people down, it means upper-middle class and wealthy people define for everyone else what "normal" or "acceptable" is. Many of us have come to accept this standard as the norm and many of us have bought the myth that most of the country is middle class.

Criteria for determining class identity is subject to debate, being variously defined by origins, workforce status, income and/or outlook. For example, some consider all who derive their income from wages members of the working class; others exclude that percentage of the workforce which constitutes the professionals and managers whose incomes are high enough to provide a stake in the capitalist system. Depending on the breadth of one's definition, 70-85% of the population can be considered working class. This is true despite the fact that the individuals themselves might identify as or with the middle class. These individuals, however, are not beneficiaries of middle class privileges.

Class affects people not only on an economic level, but also on an emotional level. Classist attitudes have caused great pain by dividing people from one another and keeping individuals from personal fulfillment or the means to survive. Consequently, the process of rejecting such attitudes and their accompanying misin-

formation is an emotional one. Since people tend to hurt each other because they themselves have been hurt, and since most forms of oppression are accompanied by economic discrimination, class overlaps with many other social issues, all of which move as we unravel how we've been hurt.

The stereotype is that poor and working class people are unintelligent, inarticulate and "overly emotional." A good ally (a non-working-class committed supporter) will contradict these messages by soliciting the knowledge and histories of poor working class people, being a thoughtful listener, trying to understand what is being said, and not criticizing how the message is being presented or responding with automatic defensiveness. Distrust, despair and anger are common consequences of oppression; it is the test of a true ally to remain undeterred when these flare up and to refrain from withdrawing support at such points. When targets of oppression believe the lies about ourselves, we are "internalizing our oppression." To begin to undo the damage caused by classism, it is useful for everyone to examine our own feelings about money, education, privilege, power, relationships, culture and ethnicity. This advice applies to organizations as well.

### **For general discussion:**

As a movement, who are we and who are we trying to reach in terms of class? How? To whom do our literature and events appeal? How are poor people's needs being met in our organizing? What steps are being taken to change people's attitudes about classism? Are poor and Third World people invited to participate in organization planning? What is being done to reach and involve organized and unorganized workers? What are we doing to support poor, working class and people of color in their struggles?

The situation for poor and working class people in our movement and organization:

Is classism evident in who does what work in the organization? Are poor and working class people facilitators, spokespeople and/or media contacts and leaders, and not just relegated to cleanup crews and collating mailings? Are organizing expenses paid upfront, or promptly reimbursed?



### **Meetings and events:**

Make meetings and events known and accessible to poor and workingclass people. Be aware of how the length, time and frequency of meetings affects full-time workers, especially those who parent. Arrange for transportation. Routinely provide childcare and sliding scales. Ask people what they need to be able to attend meetings and events. How does income-level and class composition affect the development of resources, the dates of demonstrations, the levels of commitment and power working people can have, the events sponsored? What are the cultural offerings? Who are the speakers and entertainers?

### **Process:**

Make sure that process isn't actually being used to tell poor and workingclass people how to behave by "proper" etiquette.

Is consensus being used so that decisions favor those who can stay the longest, or who are used to getting their own way and will block to do so?

Watch that group hugs and rituals are not imposed--allow people to interact with each other in whatever ways feel comfortable to them.

### **Civil disobedience (CD):**

Does class determine who is able and who is unable to commit civil disobedience? How can we make it economically possible for those who want to commit CD to do so? How do we keep CD from being a movement privilege, with activists who can afford to tally arrest counts granted subsequently more political prestige? How do those who are arrested relate to the regular prison population (taking into account how class figures in their treatment)?

Be aware of how police are dealing with people of color, gay, lesbian, and known movement people during arrest situations. Be prepared to come to the aid of anyone who has been singled out by the police and may be receiving harsher treatment than others.

Realize that during the booking process questions that are being asked to determine whether or not people can be released on their own recognizance, are particularly discriminatory. These questions concentrate on your economic, social, sexual and prior arrest standing.

Realize that bail is the most blatant example of classism. Those who have money get out of jail--those who don't stay in.

*--from articles by Donna Warnock and Laura Briggs*

## VI. LGBTQ

### Read My Lips

By Riki Anne Wilchins

*This is an excerpt from Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender (Firebrand Books, 1997) by Riki Anne Wilchins, a transgender woman who has been struggling for justice in both queer and hetero spaces, in the mainstream and at the margins. Her work with the group "Transgender Menace" influenced the policies of large gay and lesbian organizations like the HRC, NOW and the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association beginning in 1993.*

*This is taken from a letter she and other trans people from Transgender Menace used to confront author Janice Raymond regarding her transphobic book, The Transsexual Empire: Making of a She-Male.*

"The notion that there is an innate sense to 'woman,' i.e., that a woman in Borneo perceives and constructs her womanhood, experience and oppression in precisely the same way that a suburban housewife in Shaker Heights, Ohio, or even in the same way that my Italian female-to-male transsexual friend, Nick Gianelli, is theoretically and factually indefensible. It reenacts that familiar imperialistic arrogance which seeks to submit all cultures and experience to western norms.

"Your attempt to rest gender categories upon a biological foundation is similarly indefensible. Within the category of those living as 'women' are infertile women, women without wombs, women with XY chromosomes, women whose blood flows primarily with testosterone, hermaphroditic women, intersexed women with both genitals, transgendered women, stone butches and diesel dykes, passing women, incredibly hot drag kings, female-to-male preoperative transsexuals, and even gendertrash rejects like me. When you (take on) the work of policing the borders of this diverse class, you reinstitute the very strictures of coercion and control, of exclusion and limitation, that feminism seeks to overthrow....

"Finally, as we look more deeply into the history of the category of 'women,' we can ask what the political stakes in creating and enforcing false and simplistic dichotomies like male/female, man/woman, and masculine/feminine are. It has become increasingly apparent that these binary structures benefit a presumptive and compulsive heterosexual economy. Heterosexuality requires binary and opposing sexes and genders: if there

were a hundred genders, 'heterosexuality' could not exist.

"If desire could finally free itself, as it continues to do within our queer community, it would have little use for rigid categories to contain its erotic expression or channel its hunger toward an acceptable, opposing and procreative gender. The unstructured multiplicity, the sheer creativity of queer genders strike at the very foundations of heterosexuality, and this is exactly why queers have historically been targets for straight prejudice, bashing and outright hatred. Again, when you reify gender roles into neat binary boxes, when you invest yourself to keep barbarians like me from the gates, you become an agent of the very oppressions we as queers seek to confound and overturn...

"It was only a few months ago, responding to a party invitation at the Gay Community Center, that I neglected to read the footnote: No Transvestites, No Men, and No Transsexuals. When I called the lesbian in charge she told me that I was really just a transsexual who had mutilated himself and hung up on me.

"Ideas have effects. It is clear that as transgendered men and women, we face two kinds of violence every day. One is the larger violence, that is perpetrated by a straight society on our bodies. It has taken from us people like Brandon Teena and Marsha P. Johnson. We recall that before he was shot in the back of the head Brandon was repeatedly raped by two men bent on demonstrating to his girlfriend that he was 'really a woman.' Ideas have effects.

"Unfortunately, deaths like Brandon's and Marsha's are just additional bricks in the wall, a bloody and unspeakable wall,

# BORN THAT WAY?

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR HETEROSEXUALS

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
2. When and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual?
3. Is it possible your heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of?
4. Is it possible your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex?
5. If you've never slept with a person of the same sex, is it possible that all you need is a good gay lover?
6. To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies? How did they react?
7. Why do you heterosexuals feel compelled to seduce others into your lifestyle?
8. Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality? Why can't you just be what you are and keep it quiet?
9. Would you want your children to be heterosexual knowing the problems they'd face?
10. A disproportionate majority of child molesters are heterosexuals. Do you consider it safe to expose your children to heterosexual teachers?
11. With all the societal support marriage receives, the divorce rate continues to spiral. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexuals?
12. Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex?
13. Considering the menace of over-population, how can the human race survive if everyone were heterosexual like you?
14. Could you trust a heterosexual therapist to be objective? Don't you fear s/he might be inclined to influence you in the direction of her/his leanings?
15. How can you become a whole person if you limit yourself to compulsive, exclusive heterosexuality and fail to develop your natural, healthy homosexual potential?
16. There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals. Techniques have been developed which might enable you to change, if you really want to. Have you considered trying aversion therapy?

Mary Ann Tucker, Ed.D.

Sharon Young, Ph.D.

## WHAT IS HOMOPHOBIA AND HETEROSEXISM?

### *Examples of homophobia and heterosexism:*

- Assume everyone you meet is probably heterosexual.
- Begin sentences with "I'm straight but ...".
- Use the terms lesbian, gay, or bisexual (hereafter collectively known as LesBiGay) as accusatory.
- Are outspoken about LesBiGay rights, but make sure everyone knows you are straight.
- When you hear the words lesbian or gay you immediately think of SEX and that sexuality is being 'flaunted'. When you hear the words marriage, husband, or wife, you immediately think of LOVE or you don't even notice that sexuality is being declared.
- Don't ask about your LesBiGay friends' lovers/partners although you regularly ask about the wife/girlfriend or husband/boyfriend when you run into a heterosexual friend.
- Don't confront a heterosexist remark for fear of being identified as a LesBiGay yourself.
- Kiss an old friend, but are afraid to shake hands with, hug, or kiss a LesBiGay friend.
- Feel repulsed by public displays of affection between lesbians or gay men, but accept the same affectional displays between heterosexuals.
- Assume that all lesbians are 'butch' and gay men are effeminate.
- Feel that a lesbian is just a woman who can't find a good man.
- Stereotype lesbians as 'man-haters', separatists, or radicals. Use those terms accusingly.
- Wonder which one is the 'man' in a lesbian couple and which one is the 'woman' in a gay male couple.
- Feel that LesBiGays are too outspoken about gay rights.
- Fail to be supportive when your LesBiGay friend is sad about a quarrel or breakup.
- Avoid mentioning to friends that you are involved with a women's organization because you are afraid they will think you are a lesbian.
- Expect a lesbian to change her public identity or affectional habits or mode of dress to work on feminist issues.
- Change your seat in a meeting because a LesBiGay person sits in the chair next to yours.
- Think that if a LesBiGay touches you they are making sexual advances.
- Look at a lesbian or a gay man and automatically think of their sexuality rather than seeing them as whole, complete persons.

(Source: Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Issues - Bay Area; revised by Rheua S. Stakely, Consultant and Anti-Oppression Trainer)

Rheua S. Stakely • Consultant • PO Box 1093 • Exeter NH 03833 • 603-778-8349

## Coming Out

There are two types of coming out: coming out to yourself and then coming out to others. If you are reading this, chances are you are thinking about coming out to others. Here are some tips that you may find useful.

### Why come out?

- To be true to yourself and your feelings
- To increase awareness, visibility, and acceptance of LGBTIQ people
- To educate people who assume everyone is straight
- To meet other LGBTIQ people
- To have more meaningful relationships with your family and friends based on who you really are.
- To be able to go to family celebrations with your partner
- To stop spending energy telling half truths, changing names of your dates when when you speak to your friends
- To remove the barriers between your family, your friends, and yourself
- To give your family an opportunity to know real you.

### Tips for Coming Out

Think about what you want to say and choose the time and the place carefully

Be aware of what the person you are coming out to is going through. The best time for you might not be the best time for someone else.

Present yourself honestly and remind the other person that you are the same individual you were yesterday.

Be prepared for an initially negative reaction from some people. Do not forget that it took time for you to come to terms with your sexual orientation or gender identity, and that it is important to give others the time they need.

If a person rejects you and refuses to try to work on acceptance, that's not your fault. Your self esteem should not depend on the approval of others.

Don't let anyone pressure you into "coming out". It's your life, it's your choice. You don't have to come out

Only tell someone if you have enough support to cope with their reaction – not everyone will feel happy for you. Some will try to tell you that you can change or even that you need therapy. Be prepared for any reaction.

Be prepared that once you start to tell people, others might find out pretty quickly.

Give others time to get used to the idea.

Be clear about your own feelings about being LGBTIQ. If you are having doubts or feeling depressed or guilty, it may be best to get some support first, perhaps from a counselor, or telephone support line. Believe in yourself first.

Remember that it is fine to be more out in some places than others and to come out to different people in different ways.

Explain why you are coming out so that they can understand why this is important to you.

Don't come out during an argument. Don't use your sexuality as a weapon to hurt or shock someone else.

Remember to listen to what the person you are coming out to has to say.

Mary Frances Platt

## Reclaiming femme... again

Yes, it's true: I was the type of young femme who managed the girls' basketball team in high school, just to be able to take in the sight of all those butches parading their muscles up and down the court. I found Girl Scout camp to be femme heaven and reveled in being able to explore my athletic self and still maintain my femmeness. And, to my horror, I have to admit pushing Tina away from my breasts in the back seat of a Buick while attending Mount Saint Mary Seminary.

And then there was feminism... Although I came out as a "gay" woman before reading *The Feminine Mystique*, the seventies brand of white feminism had me trimming my nails and cutting off my hair. Soon I was outfitted in farmer jeans and high tops. And still I was told by my "sisters" that I didn't "look like a dyke" (read: I didn't look butch).

I began to lead two lives — one as an outrageous, skirted, lipstick femme while I worked in and traveled with carnivals, and another as an imitation butch back home in the women's community. Eventually, I pulled the pieces of my being back together and proclaimed boldly, "I am a working-class lesbian femme."

So, I had maybe six years of reveling in unleashing my seductive femme self when, as lives go, mine changed: slowly at first and then more dramatically.

Recurring back pain and limited range of motion were finally diagnosed. Soon after came decreased mobility. No more mountain climbing. No long mall walks in search of the perfect piece of sleaze. No more standing against kitchen walls while being gloriously fucked by some handsome butch. I stopped using alcohol and drugs, became ill with what is now known as CFIDS (Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome), and began to use a three-wheeled power chair.

The more disabled I became, the more I mourned the ways my sexual femme self had manifested through the nondisabled me: cruising at the local lezzie bar, picking a dyke whose eyes refused to stray from mine,

### A Femme-Butch Reader

dancing seductively, moving all of me for all of her. Cooking: love and suggestion neatly tucked into the folds of a broccolli quiche. Serving my date in varying, sleazy clothing, removing layers as the meal and our passion progressed. And making love... feeling only pleasure as my hips rose and fell under the weight of her. Accomplishment and pride smirked across my face as her wrists finally submitted to the pressure of strong, persistent hands. These are the ways I knew to be femme, to be the essence of me.

It's been five years now since I began using a wheelchair. I am just awakening to a new reclamation of femme. Yes. I still grieve the way I was, am still often unsure how this femme with disabilities will act out her seduction scenes. I still marvel when women find passion amidst the chrome and rubber that is now a part of me.

There have been numerous dates, lovers, relationships, sexual partners, and flirtations along the way. Cindy, Jenny, Ellie, Emuna, Diane, Dorothy, Gail, June, Clove, Lenny, Cherry, Diana, Sarah I, and Sarah II. You have all reminded me in your own subtle or overt, quiet or wild ways that I am desirable, passionate, exciting, wanted.

Yes, I am an incredibly sexual being. An outrageous, loud-mouthed femme who's learning to dress, dance, cook, and seduce on wheels; finding new ways to be gloriously fucked by handsome butches and aggressive femmes. I hang out more with the sexual outlaws now — you know, the motorcycle lesbians who see wheels and chrome between your legs as something exciting, the leather women whose vision of passion and sexuality doesn't exclude fat, disabled me.

Ableism tells us that lesbians with disabilities are asexual. (When was the last time you dated a dyke who uses a wheelchair?) Fat oppression insists that thin is in and round is repulsive. At times, these voices became very loud, and my femme, she hid quietly amidst the lies.

Now my femme is rising again. The time of doubt, fear, and retreat has passed. I have found my way out of the lies and the oppression and moved into a space of loving and honoring the new femme who has emerged. This lesbian femme with disabilities is wise, wild, wet, and wanting. Watch out.

## Ableism, Accessibility and Inclusion

by Heather De Mian

54 million Americans, almost 20% of the population are people with disabilities. We are the largest marginalized minority group in the US, and the only one that anyone can join at any time in their lives.

We are also the poorest minority group boasting a 70% unemployment rate. The connotative meaning of the archaic, derogatory term "handicapped" (cap in hand; to beg) is so socially ingrained in the American mentality that Bureau of Labor Statistics does not even consider us to be employable, and does not include us in unemployment statistics.

The first self-propelled manual wheelchair was invented circa 1534. 470+ years later, almost all houses, including those funded with public taxes, are still being built with steps, narrow doors, and high environmental controls. Many cities, including Columbus, GA, have failed to maintain sidewalks and install curb ramps, relegating wheelchair users to the streets where we are often too short to be seen by traffic. Many of us cannot even begin to visit our next-door neighbor, friends and family; much less attend demonstrations held where the sidewalks are broken and unramped.

Even our civil rights statutes, like the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, still allow for segregation and legal discrimination. Separate but (sort of) equal is still our reality. New restaurants only have to make 5% of their tables accessible to people with physical disabilities. No restaurant is required to provide Braille or large print menus for customers with vision impairments. Most television programming and all first release movies are still not required to have closed or open captioning for people who Deaf or hard-of-hearing (HOH). Employers with 14 or fewer employees, as well as all State employers are completely exempt from the Federal restrictions against discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, and are granted carte blanche to exclude job applicants because they happen to use wheelchairs, take antidepressants, have a history of learning disabilities, or are related to a person with HIV.

The epitome of hatred and bigotry towards people with disabilities is embodied in our unconstitutional

incarceration without trial in nursing "homes" for the crime of having a disability, the emerging assisted suicide and euthanasia movements, as well as the more subtly reemerging eugenics movement espoused previously in the early 20th Century and Nazi Germany. In the United States social leaders like Alexander Graham Bell, whose own wife was Deaf, advocated for the sterilization of people with congenital deafness and mental disabilities. Before anyone else, more than 200,000 people with disabilities of all ages were killed by the Nazis, because they were already considered to be less than human anyway, and so started the slippery slope of those considered to be expendable "useless eaters," which snowballed to include 6,000,000 Jews, and 6,000,000 other "undesirables" including Gays, Gypsies, Catholics, and anyone else who caught the Third Reich's fancy.

Today, people with disabilities are being more subtly eliminated. As "physician assisted suicide," or physician induced death (PID) as it is known in the disability civil rights movement, is the ultimate abandonment of people with disabilities by the medical profession.

Now that you have some background illustrating the widespread oppression of people with disabilities, here are just a few practical suggestions to assist SOA demonstrators in making things a bit more accessible and inviting.

A big barrier to demonstration access for people who are Deaf/HOH is the lack of qualified Sign language interpreters for ALL the programs, as well as the break-out sessions and planning meetings. Programs and other written materials, including the Anti-Opression booklet, need to be made available in alternative formats like Braille, large print, audiotope, and computer disk. Look for physical access that would lend well to potential meeting spaces, or better yet, since non-disabled people are often unable to recognize what is and is not accessible, recruit a disabled friend to assist you in identifying accessible facilities where meetings could be held.

Collect materials and tools that can be used to build temporary ramps for the Columbus, GA sidewalks and Southgate apartments, as well as the main SOA Watch stage if possible. If you have experience in personal attendant services, or CNA duties; offer your services to assist persons with significant disabilities, especially nursing "home" inmates, in dressing, bathing, toileting,

eating, transferring, etc., so they can attend. Avoid wearing perfumes, scented products, and smoking in meeting and gathering areas, and help get others to avoid these as well so that people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Disorder, Multiple Sclerosis allergies, and asthma will feel more welcome. Is there ready access to healthy foods for diabetics and hyp glycemics? Are straws available to those with manual manual disabilities?

*School of the Americas Watch*

[http://soaw.org/new/print\\_article.php?id=607](http://soaw.org/new/print_article.php?id=607)

## The Social Movement Left Out

by *Marta Russell*

It is disheartening, to say the least, when I can still pick up a book or read a call for unity to fight for social justice which omits or does not give equal weight to the disability social movement against oppression.

Here is one recent call for forming alliances with various groups in the struggle. The groups listed are "Greens, labor, people of color, feminists, environmental activists, students and youth, supporters of a death penalty moratorium, gay/lesbian people, people of faith, peace activists, senior and community organizations."

Can we call this anything other than disablism or ableism -- ableism being defined as "any social relations, practices, and ideas that presume that all people are able-bodied"? (Chouinard and Grant, 1995)

Nondisabled activists and scholars have fervently studied and challenged the rational explanation for oppression based on identity - in particular, gender, race, and ethnicity - but excluded disability. Disability activists and scholars, on the other hand, have fervently been supplying a plethora of disability social model theorizing which doesn't seem to be read or absorbed by many of the other activists and scholars.

Knowing what less than stellar past other social movements in this country have had regarding impairment, it is necessary to confront this history so that we can all move forward.

Here I am going to rely of the work of Douglas Baynton in his essay "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History" (Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds, *THE NEW DISABILITY HISTORY: AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES*, 2001) to explain how other oppressed groups have situated disablement.

Baynton lays it out plain and simple. He writes, "Rarely have oppressed groups denied that disability is an adequate justification for social and political inequality. Thus, while disabled people can be considered one of the minority groups historically assigned

inferior status and subjected to discrimination, disability has functioned for all such groups as a sign of and



justification for inferiority." (Baynton p. 34)

The concept of inferiority is rooted in the late 19th century social creation of "normality." "The normal" was used as a means of measuring, categorizing, and managing populations. It informed hegemony, ranking order by the directive of the constructed "norm." In turn, normality established the universal, unequivocal good and right from which social, economic, and political rights were granted -- rights being a means in liberal democratic societies of mitigating oppression.

Simultaneously the concept of normality equated with a belief in western progress. Eugenics was its obvious "scientific" progeny. Under the eugenic view, perfection was attainable; by eliminating the abnormal; the defective could be eradicated from humanity. Along with the conservatives and later the Nazis, Anarchist Emma Goldman, "friend of the oppressed" and a proponent of eugenic thought wrote that unless birth control was encouraged, the state would "legally encourage the increase of paupers, syphilitics, epileptics, dipsomaniacs, cripples, criminals, and degenerates." (D.J. Kevles, *IN THE NAME OF EUGENICS*, 1985) (emphasis mine)

What was not so obvious was that both blacks and women's liberation movements did not challenge the notion that disability was a legitimate reason for social, economic and political exclusion. "Disability served not just as an argument for the inequality of women and minorities but also in arguments against those inequalities." (Baynton, p. 43)

At the Woman Suffrage Convention in 1869, for instance, Elizabeth Cady Stanton protested that women were "thrust outside the pale of political consideration with minors, paupers, lunatics, traitors, and idiots." (emphasis mine)

Baynton shows that the suffragists' arguments to refute such associations took three forms: women were not disabled therefore deserved the vote; women were being erroneously and slanderously classed with disabled people, with those who were legitimately denied suffrage; and women were not naturally or inherently disabled but were made disabled by inequality. "... suffrage would ameliorate or cure these disabilities." (Baynton p. 43, emphasis mine)

In order to socially, economically and politically dis-

credit them, nonwhite races were routinely connected to disability. For instance, a most common disability argument for slavery was that African Americans lacked sufficient intelligence to participate or compete on an equal basis in society with white people. The assertion went that the African American's weak constitution was not suited for freedom.

Racism has operated from a biological framework -- "the experts" deeming blacks mentally inferior in order to justify their social and political exclusion. In retort, the Bell Curve dissenters vehemently have refuted the notion of biological inferiority in order to assert blacks equal status as a race.

Baynton points out that "...little has been written about why these attributions [impairments] are such powerful weapons for inequality, why they were so furiously denied and condemned by their targets, and what this tells us about our attitudes towards disability." (Baynton, p. 41)

What this history tells us is that these groups (or at least advocates for these groups) believed that being labeled with a disability was the worst fate imaginable. No one wanted to be associated with "disabled."

Historically, labor associations similarly found it shameful to be injured or impaired and "equated manhood with independence (bodily and financial)." (John Williams-Searle, "Cold Charity: Manhood, Brotherhood, and the Transformation of Disability, 1870-1900," *THE NEW DISABILITY HISTORY*, 2001)

It has been close to a century since US disabled people's first known disability civil rights group formed, the League for the Physically Handicapped. Some three hundred disabled pensioners in New York engaged in civil disobedience during the Great Depression to protest their discriminatory rejection from the employment offered by the Works Progress Administration.

Much later, in 1970, came Disabled in Action (DIA) which founded and adopted the tactic of direct political protest. There were many groups of all types of impairments involved in the 25-day occupation of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) federal building in San Francisco in 1977 to have regulations issued pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 making it illegal for fed-

eral agencies, contractors, or public universities to discriminate on the basis of disability.

In 1983 came Americans Disabled for Accessible Public Transit (ADAPT), established by disability rights activists in several important cities in the USA to highlight the inaccessibility of public transit for people with mobility impairments. It quickly became known for its confrontational and often successful tactics.

Movements for blind persons, deaf persons, developmentally disabled persons and psychiatric disabilities similarly evolved, the histories all too numerous to list in this brief commentary. There have been many groupings leading up to passage of the American's with Disabilities Act in 1990 and beyond.

Yet to this day class, race, gender and sexual oppression are often alluded to in developing vision and strategy for social change in leftist circles -- disability, too often, is not.

Scanning the internet I found numerous examples of sites where ableism gets left out of the -isms. Here is just one such statement. This group is "[in] opposition to racism, sexism, homophobia, economic class oppression and all other forms of oppression and discrimination."

What are "all other forms of oppression and discrimination"? Do they mean ableism? When the left leaves us out of its analysis, or includes us in a cursory manner as "other forms of oppression" this is clearly not sufficient. It only leads to the suspicion that there is no real understanding of disability oppression.

For example, on the most basic level - which we should be well beyond by now -- some still hold their events in inaccessible locations. Michael Moore did this in Cambridge when he was promoting his new book "Stupid White Men." Don't get me wrong, I like Michael Moore but please! It is so obvious that those disabled persons who could not attend his event due to it not being physically accessible to them would include him in the category of "stupid white men."

We leftist disability activists have been silent far too long. I would go so far as to say that

the portion of the left which still excludes by not reporting, covering or identifying disability in its plat-

forms, programs, publications or web sites shows that it has not \*fully\* understood individualistic consciousness or institutionalized practices under capitalism.

Despite the fact that disabled persons to this day remain at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder being the most impoverished and degraded group of persons world-wide still segregated and institutionalized, some nondisabled persons and social movements have not accepted the idea that disability oppression really exists.

As Michael Oliver frames it when disablism does not merit inclusion "even those writers who have specifically examined oppression have internalised the dominant, individualised world view of disability and have failed to conceptualise it as social oppression." (Oliver, *Understanding Disability*, p. 133)

The dominant view that Oliver refers to is that the social and economic pain that disabled people deal with is a personal problem, an individual pathology, a personal tragedy and a personal failing. While other social movements have been granted the status of having a collective dimension and are viewed as the result of systemic social structures rather than personal shortcomings, the disability movement has largely been left out as an oppressed group.

Oliver writes "it is not disabled people who need to be examined but able-bodied society; it is not a case of educating disabled and able-bodied people for integration, but of fighting institutional disablism; it is not disability relations which should be the field for study but disablism." (Oliver, p. 142)

Radical disability theorists have posed that under capitalism impairment is socialized as a specific form of oppression -- disability. The defining feature of capitalism, commodity relations, has been a primary force behind the economic impoverishment of impaired persons. The material relation is primary and the ideology of superiority/inferiority serves the function of maintenance and perpetuation of this social relation.

Why cannot some elements on the left apply disablement to C. Wright Mills' observation that seemingly "personal troubles", are more appropriately understood as "public issues which link to the institutions of society as a whole?"

Ongoing exclusion of disability oppression unfortunately only contributes to the disabling society when what we do need is a "trajectory of change," as Michael Albert phrases it, with everyone's contributions and energies working towards global justice.

Znet now has a Disability Rights section under the "Watch" heading on its home page at <http://www.zmag.org/ZNET.htm>. There are links and articles there worth reading. Get ahead of the curve (!).

*Marta Russell can be reached at [ap888@lafn.org](mailto:ap888@lafn.org)  
<http://www.disweb.org> -- Marta Russell*

*Los Angeles, CA <http://www.disweb.org>*

## VIII. Ageism

### Young People and Activism

By *Brian Dominick*  
April 18, 1999

Young people in movement circles are often met with a great deal of admiration and little to no respect. Impressed as they are by kids' very presence at activist events and meetings, given the preoccupations and pressures of modern youth; adults rarely acknowledge the contribution of young activists beyond the sense of "diversity" the latter bring to the circle. But it's critical that adult activists recognize more than just the age of kids becoming involved with social movements (or developing their own for youth liberation). Adults must also acknowledge the significant, relatively unique impediments to becoming activists/organizers faced by young people, found both within the movement and without. Further, adults must take active care to ensure the process of fully participating in movement activity becomes as accessible as possible to people of all ages, especially kids.

Now, I realize there is an apparent dichotomy -- between adult and child -- in the way I am presenting my concerns. However, the fact is we know how we as individuals identify, how we identify others, and to what degree we look upon ourselves and those around us as "adults" vs. "children." And while there may be no one in movement circles who can be said to be purely "child" by social definitions (as opposed to bio-chronological definitions), it is true that most younger activists, at least those in their teens, live under different conditions than older activists.

Let's briefly review some of these circumstances. First and foremost, people deemed "minors" in our society are bound as property to their parents or legal guardians by laws reminiscent of those which used to govern slaves and women as property of their masters and husbands. That means what mom and dad say goes; and mom and dad typically insist on more typical forms of extracurricular activity than progressive, not to mention radical, activism.

And speaking of curriculum, we're all aware of the critique of the modern school and how it goes about "educating" North American youth; but what about the compulsory nature of education itself? Kids are forced to attend school and complete ridiculous assignments, often rendering them no more available for

organizing than people with full time jobs. Add family and other personal obligations to daily life as a young person, and the inhibitions are obvious.

Despite all of this, many more young people are becoming involved in activism, driven by a repulsion toward the society they see around them; a disgust which overpowers the factors that might otherwise prevent them from interest in movement activity.

It's sad that we have to credit the repugnant ills of society, rather than the remarkable accessibility of the Left (ahem), with turning kids on to social activism. But let us face it: the Left is decidedly inaccessible, not only to people from various class and racial backgrounds, but to people of the younger generation. Our tactics have become bland and stale, our propaganda old and tired, our energy stagnant, dwindling. How many Left publications cater explicitly to both young people and adults in a serious manner? Can you name any? How many activist meetings (and this is especially true of Canada for some reason) wind up yielding a trip to the local pub for further socializing over "a few beers" (not to mention meetings which actually take place in bars!)? Why is it that fund-raising events held in bars are widely accepted when other exclusive venues such as country clubs would be rejected without discussion?

Nearly all of the young people I've worked with in activist settings, when asked, have reported being condescended to, spoken over and ignored by adults at meetings. And it's common for them to point out that the very adults who believe young people have much to learn from their elders' experience shrug kids off, waiting for the latter to prove themselves or discover wisdom "the hard way" -- a mixed message to say the least.

Beyond this, most kids don't even get so much as a taste of the Left and decide for themselves the value of getting involved. While colleges are still fertile ground for leftist agitation, high schools have been isolated and discounted by most progressive organizers.

So too have youth activist organizations been largely alienated by adult organizers. I can no longer count how many complaints I've heard from older activists about how "kids are only involved in animal rights," incidentally the only social movement not totally dominated (rather decried or ignored!) by adult activists. Chastizing animal rights has ensured alienation

between the broad Left and the movement with perhaps the highest influx of young activists. Far from immune to traditional intergenerational misunderstanding, the Left has fallen into the role of disrespecting youth, in large part by ignoring young people's oppressions or subordinating their concerns to those of other oppressed groups like women, people of color, queers and so forth.

Ageism does exist. It is a real oppression, whether the Left admits so or not, but the speed with which it is still regularly dismissed by adult activists is to be expected. Indeed, there was a time when the bulk of the Left looked at sexism as a trifle not to be concerned with, at least until "after the revolution." The rationalizations were many, as are those of ageism. "Ageism isn't a real oppression, they'll grow out of it." I've heard that dozens of times from otherwise respectable leaders. The notion that one can "grow out of" an oppression is remarkably irrational -- it implies that ageing equals liberation. Does that mean women's liberation is a process of time instead of personal change and collective agitation?

Just as women throughout this century have not allowed patriarchal critics to discourage them from seeking forms of authentic freedom, young people have formed a movement for youth liberation, resisting some of the most tyrannical anti-youth laws and policies (remember, children are the only class in society against which it is everywhere legal -- indeed, hardly even controversial -- to discriminate against).

Further, kids are organizing autonomously for empowerment, feeling turned away or squashed by existing "multigenerational" groups and causes. I've actually found it stunning that among those who consider themselves "youth liberation activists," there are very few who only focus on age oppressions, nearly all opting for a more holistic approach to struggle. No other movement can claim such diversity of objectives.

So what should adult activists do to incorporate young people's interests and needs into organizing? The most important factor will be letting kids set a significant portion of the agenda, giving them creative control, not stifling their energy. All too often the spontaneous commitments of young activists are thwarted by older folks stuck in customary ways. Demonstrations and even direct actions have suffered from adult dominance; it's not surprising that the most innovative and

exciting actions these days are those orchestrated and carried out by young people.

It remains true, as ever, that adults have plenty of experience to offer their younger activist counterparts. It's all the more unfortunate, then, that what is usually offered is dogma, traditional methodology, unilateral conversation, tokenizing, and worse. When we think of social change, we should reflect on the subjective meaning of that term -- that is, we should acknowledge that we and our organizations and movements must themselves change, not just the world around us. Change requires new influences on a regular basis, and that requires young people. Kids aren't going to get involved in activism with adults on any wide scale until those adults make some radical changes in how they treat young people.

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*Brian Dominick, a community organizer and freelance journalist living in Syracuse, NY, has been involved in the youth liberation movement for 5 years. His homepage is at <http://www.rootmedia.org/~bad>*

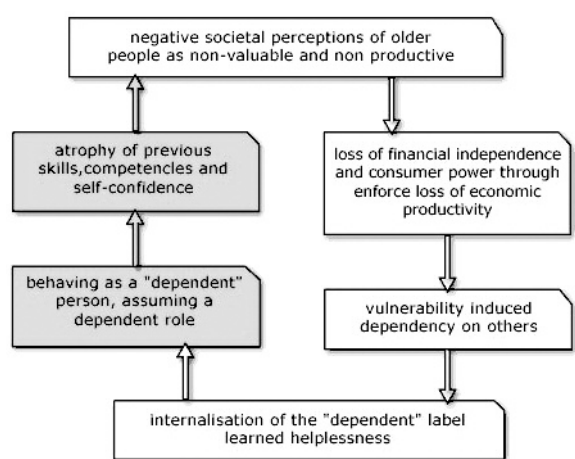
# Prejudice against older people

## How Should We Combat it?

One aspect of Ageism is prejudice against older people. It's pretty widespread, in its various forms. Ageism implies that as soon as a person can be described as old they are automatically considered:

- Of little value
- A burden on society
- Slow to accept change
- interpersonally and economically dependent
- Slow, deaf or stupid
- they generally have ill health
- are conservative politically
- alienated
- nonsexual
- and are physically separated from children

This can lead to a vicious circle of dependence, along the following lines :



The cycle of structurally induced dependence (source: adapted from Kuypers JA, Bengston VL. Perspectives on the olderfamily. In: Quinn WM, Hugston GA, eds Independent ageing. Rockville: Aspen Publications, 1984).

We can all combat this negative spiral, which drives the older person into total dependence, if we:

- Realize that older people are part of the cycle of life, and that they should not be 'compartmentalized'
- Ensure that health promotional efforts focus on healthy aging
- Give importance to the settings in which individu-

als age - these help determine their health status in old age

- Recognize gender differences in both health and ways of living
- Emphasize strategies that maintain bonding between generations

## Ageism: An Introduction

American society has been described as maintaining a stereotypic and often negative perception of older adults (Busse, 1968). This negative and/or stereotypic perception of aging and aged individuals is readily apparent in such areas as language, media, and humor. For example, such commonly used phrases as "over the hill" and "don't be an old fuddy-duddy" denote old age as a period of impotency and incompetency (Nuessel, 1982). The term used to describe this stereotypic and often negative bias against older adults is "ageism" (Butler, 1969).

Ageism can be defined as "any attitude, action, or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of age or any assignment of roles in society purely on the basis of age" (Traxler, 1980, p. 4). As an "ism", ageism reflects a prejudice in society against older adults.

Ageism, however, is different from other "isms" (sexism, racism etc.), for primarily two reasons. First, age classification is not static. An individual's age classification changes as one progresses through the life cycle. Thus, age classification is characterized by continual change, while the other classification systems traditionally used by society such as race and gender remain constant. Second, no one is exempt from at some point achieving the status of old, and therefore, unless they die at an early age, experiencing ageism. The later is an important distinction as ageism can thus affect the individual on two levels. First, the individual may be ageist with respect to others. That is s/he may stereotype other people on the basis of age. Second, the individual may be ageist with respect to self. Thus, ageist attitudes may affect the self concept.

Much research has been conducted concerning ageism. However, the empirical evidence is inconclusive. Some research demonstrates the existence of ageist attitudes (Golde & Kogan, 1959; Kastenbaum & Durkee, 1964a, 1964b; Tuckman & Lorge, 1953) and other research does not (Brubaker & Powers, 1976;

Schonfield, 1985). This discrepancy is most likely the result of methodological differences and, in particular, methodological errors. A brief discussion of the major methodological errors or problems found in ageism research may be helpful in clarifying this point.

The first major problem is that the majority of ageism research suffers from a mono-method bias. In other words, each study used only one method to operationally define the ageism construct. Methods commonly used have included sentence completion (Golde & Kogan, 1959), semantic differential (Kogan & Wallach, 1961; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969), Likert scales (Kilty & Feld, 1976), and adjective checklists (Aaronson, 1966). The problem inherent in the use of a mono-method is that any effect found may be an artifact of the method employed rather than the construct under study. Thus, a researcher should employ more than one method to look for consistency in the results.

Another problem, according to Kogan (1979) is the use of within-subjects designs in ageism research. In other words, a subject will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding both younger and older adults. Kogan asserts that by using this methodology, age is pushed to the foreground of a subject's mind. The subject thus becomes aware that the researcher is looking for age differences. Therefore, age differences are found.

The use of primarily younger populations to study ageism represents another problem with ageism research. The majority of ageism research uses children, adolescents, or young adults as subjects and examines their perception of older adults. Only a few studies have examined the perceptions of the population whom the construct affects most - older adults. Those studies which have used an older subject population have unfortunately used primarily institutionalized individuals as subjects (Kastenbaum & Durkee, 1964a; Tuckman & Lavell, 1957). Therefore, they do not represent the vast majority of older adults.

Another problem with much of ageism research is that it only examines the negative stereotypes of old age. More recent studies have suggested that while attitudes toward the aged are increasingly positive, they are still stereotypic (Austin, 1985). Therefore, ageism has been expanded to include positive stereotypic images. However, these are rarely studied (Brubaker & Powers, 1976).

Two additional problems are primarily theoretical in nature. First, ageism research rarely examines or attempts to understand the causes of ageism. Thus, while much theoretical work has been conducted concerning the factors contributing to ageism, little empirical research has been conducted in this area. Second, ageism research rarely examines the interaction between ageism and other "isms". As many individuals are in a position to experience more than one prejudice, the interaction between these prejudices needs to be examined.

## IX. Sexism

### Sexism and Misogyny: Who Takes the Rap?

#### Misogyny, gangsta rap, and The Piano

By bell hooks

For the past several months white mainstream media has been calling me to hear my views on gangsta rap. Whether major television networks, or small independent radio shows, they seek me out for the black and feminist "take" on the issue. After I have my say, I am never called back, never invited to do the television shows or the radio spots. I suspect they call, confident that when we talk they will hear the hardcore "feminist" trash of gangsta rap. When they encounter instead the hardcore feminist critique of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, they lose interest.

To white dominated mass media, the controversy over gangsta rap makes great spectacle. Besides the exploitation of these issues to attract audiences, a central motivation for highlighting gangsta rap continues to be the sensationalist drama of demonizing black youth culture in general and the contributions of young black men in particular. It is a contemporary remake of "Birth of a Nation" only this time we are encouraged to believe it is not just vulnerable white womanhood that risks destruction by black hands but everyone. When I counter this demonization of black males by insisting that gangsta rap does not appear in a cultural vacuum, but, rather, is expressive of the cultural crossing, mixings, and engagement of black youth culture with the values, attitudes, and concerns of the white majority, some folks stop listening.

The sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As the crudest and most brutal expression of sexism, misogynistic attitudes tend to be portrayed by the dominant culture as an expression of male deviance. In reality they are part of a sexist continuum, necessary for the maintenance of patriarchal social order. While patriarchy and sexism continue to be the political and cultural norm in our society, feminist movement has created a climate where crude expressions of male domination are called into question, especially if they are made by men in power. It is useful to think of misogyny as a field that must be labored in

and maintained both to sustain patriarchy but also to serve as an ideological anti-feminist backlash. And what better group to labor on this "plantation" than young black men.

To see gangsta rap as a reflection of dominant values in our culture rather than as an aberrant "pathological" standpoint does not mean that a rigorous feminist critique of the sexist and misogyny expressed in this music is not needed. Without a doubt black males, young and old, must be held politically accountable for their sexism. Yet this critique must always be contextualized or we risk making it appear that the behaviors this thinking supports and condones,--rape, male violence against women, etc.-- is a black male thing. And this is what is happening. Young black males are forced to take the "heat" for encouraging, via their music, the hatred of and violence against women that is a central core of patriarchy.

Witness the recent piece by Brent Staples in the "New York Times" titled "The Politics of Gangster Rap: A Music Celebrating Murder and Misogyny." Defining the turf Staples writes: "For those who haven't caught up, gangster rap is that wildly successful music in which all women are 'bitches' and 'whores' and young men kill each other for sport." No mention of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy in this piece, not a word about the cultural context that would need to exist for young males to be socialized to think differently about gender. Staples assumes that black males are writing their lyrics off in the "jungle," away from the impact of mainstream socialization and desire. At no point in his piece does he ask why huge audiences, especially young white male consumers, are so turned on by this music, by the misogyny and sexism, by the brutality? Where is the anger and rage at females expressed in this music coming from, the glorification of all acts of violence? These are the difficult questions that Staples feels no need to answer.

One cannot answer them honestly without placing accountability on larger structures of domination and the individuals (often white, usually male but not always) who are hierarchically placed to maintain and perpetuate the values that uphold these exploitative and oppressive systems. That means taking a critical looking at the politics of hedonistic consumerism, the values of the men and women who produce gangsta rap.



It would mean considering the seduction of young black males who find that they can make more money producing lyrics that promote violence, sexism, and misogyny than with any other content. How many disenfranchised black males would not surrender to expressing virulent forms of sexism, if they knew the rewards would be unprecedented material power and fame?

More than anything gangsta rap celebrates the world of the "material," the dog-eat-dog world where you do what you gotta do to make it. In this world view killing is necessary for survival. Significantly, the logic here is a crude expression of the logic of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. In his new book "Sexy Dressing, Etc." privileged white male law professor Duncan Kennedy gives what he calls "a set of general characterizations of U. S. culture" explaining that, "It is individual (cowboys), material (gangsters) and philistine." Using this general description of mainstream culture would lead us to place "gangsta rap" not on the margins of what this nation is about, but at the center. Rather than being viewed as a subversion or disruption of the norm we would need to see it as an embodiment of the norm.

That viewpoint was graphically highlighted in the film "Menace To Society" which dramatized not only young black males killing for sport, but also mass audiences voyeuristically watching and, in many cases, "enjoying" the kill. Significantly, at one point in the movie we see that the young black males have learned their "gangsta" values from watching television and movies--shows where white male gangsters are center stage. This scene undermines any notion of "essentialist" blackness that would have viewers believe the gangsterism these young black males embraced emerged from some unique black cultural experience.

When I interviewed rap artist Ice Cube for "Spin" magazine last year, he talked about the importance of respecting black women and communication across gender. He spoke against male violence against women, even as he lapsed into a justification for anti-woman rap lyrics by insisting on the madonna/whore split where some females "carry" themselves in a manner that determines how they will be treated. When this interview was published, it was cut to nothing. It was a mass media set-up. Folks (mostly white and male) had thought if the hardcore feminist talked with the hardened black man, sparks would fly; there would be a

knock-down drag out spectacle. When Brother Cube and I talked to each other with respect about the political, spiritual, and emotional self-determination of black people, it did not make good copy. Clearly folks at the magazine did not get the darky show they were looking for.

After this conversation, and talking with rappers and folks who listen to rap, it became clear that while black male sexism is a serious problem in our communities and in black music, some of the more misogynist lyrics were there to stir up controversy and appeal to audiences. Nowhere is this more evident than in Snoop Doggy Dogg's record "Doggystyle". A black male music and cultural critic called me to ask if I had checked this image out; to share that for one of the first times in his music buying life he felt he was seeing an image so offensive in its sexism and misogyny that he did not want to take that image home. That image (complete with doghouse, beware the dog sign, with a naked black female head in a doghouse, naked butt sticking out) was reproduced, "uncritically," in the November 29, 1993 issue of "Time" magazine. The positive music review of this album, written by Christopher John Farley, is titled "Gangsta Rap, Doggystyle" makes no mention of sexism and misogyny, makes no reference to the cover. I wonder if a naked white female body had been inside the doghouse, presumably waiting to be fucked from behind, if "Time" would have reproduced an image of the cover along with their review. When I see the pornographic cartoon that graces the cover of "Doggystyle," I do not think simply about the sexism and misogyny of young black men, I think about the sexist and misogynist politics of the powerful white adult men and women (and folks of color) who helped produce and market this album.

In her book "Misogynies" Joan Smith shares her sense that while most folks are willing to acknowledge unfair treatment of women, discrimination on the basis of gender, they are usually reluctant to admit that hatred of women is encouraged because it helps maintain the structure of male dominance. Smith suggests: "Misogyny wears many guises, reveals itself in different forms which are dictated by class, wealth, education, race, religion and other factors, but its chief characteristic is its pervasiveness." This point reverberated in my mind when I saw Jane Campion's widely acclaimed film "The Piano" which I saw in the midst of mass

media focus on sexism and misogyny in "gangsta rap." I had been told by many friends in the art world that this was "an incredible film, a truly compelling love story etc." Their responses were echoed by numerous positive reviews. No one speaking about this film mentions misogyny and sexism or white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

The 19th century world of the white invasion of New Zealand is utterly romanticized in this film (complete with docile happy darkies--Maori natives--who appear to have not a care in the world). And when the film suggests they care about white colonizers digging up the graves of their dead ancestors, it is the sympathetic poor white male who comes to the rescue. Just as the conquest of natives and lands is glamorized in this film, so is the conquest of femininity, personified by white womanhood, by the pale speechless corpse-like Scotswoman, Ada, who journeys into this dark wilderness because her father has arranged for her to marry the white colonizer Stewart. Although mute, Ada expresses her artistic ability, the intensity of her vision and feelings through piano playing. This passion attracts Baines, the illiterate white settler who wears the facial tattoos of the Maori--an act of appropriation that makes him (like the traditional figure of Tarzan) appear both dangerous and romantic. He is Norman Mailer's "white negro," seducing Ada by promising to return the piano that Stewart has exchanged with him for land. The film leads us to believe that Ada's passionate piano playing has been a substitution for repressed eroticism. When she learns to let herself go sexually, she ceases to need the piano. We watch the passionate climax of Baines seduction as she willingly seeks him sexually. And we watch her husband Stewart in the role of voyeur, standing with dog outside the cabin where they fuck, voyeuristically consuming their pleasure. Rather than being turned off by her love for Baines, it appears to excite Stewart's passion; he longs to possess her all the more. Unable to win her back from Baines, he expresses his rage, rooted in misogyny and sexism, by physically attacking her and chopping off her finger with an ax. This act of male violence takes place with Ada's daughter, Flora, as a witness. Though traumatized by the violence she witnesses, she is still about to follow the white male patriarch's orders and take the bloody finger to Baines, along with the message that each time he sees Ada she will suffer physical mutilation.

Violence against land, natives, and women in this film, unlike that of gangsta rap, is portrayed uncritically, as though it is "natural," the inevitable climax of conflicting passions. The outcome of this violence is positive. Ultimately, the film suggests Stewart's rage was only an expression of irrational sexual jealousy, that he comes to his senses and is able to see "reason." In keeping with male exchange of women, he gives Ada and Flora to Baines. They leave the wilderness. On the voyage home Ada demands that her piano be thrown overboard because it is "soiled," tainted with horrible memories. Surrendering it she lets go of her longing to display passion through artistic expression. A nuclear family now, Baines, Ada, and Flora resettle and live happily-ever-after. Suddenly, patriarchal order is restored. Ada becomes a modest wife, wearing a veil over her mouth so that no one will see her lips struggling to speak words. Flora has no memory of trauma and is a happy child turning somersaults. Baines is in charge, even making Ada a new finger.

"The Piano" seduces and excites audiences with its uncritical portrayal of sexism and misogyny. Reviewers and audiences alike seem to assume that Campion's gender, as well as her breaking of traditional boundaries that inhibit the advancement of women in film, indicate that her work expresses a feminist standpoint. And, indeed, she does employ feminist "tropes," even as her work betrays feminist visions of female actualization, celebrates and eroticizes male domination. In Smith's discussion of misogyny she emphasizes that woman-hating is not solely the province of men: "We are all exposed to the prevailing ideology of our culture, and some women learn early on that they can prosper by aping the misogyny of men; these are the women who win provisional favor by denigrating other women, by playing on male prejudices, and by acting the 'man's woman'." Since this is not a documentary film that needs to remain faithful to the ethos of its historical setting, why is it that Campion does not resolve Ada's conflicts by providing us with an imaginary landscape where a woman can express passionate artistic commitment and find fulfillment in a passionate relationship? This would be no more far-fetched than her cinematic portrayal of Ada's miraculous transformation from muteness into speech. Ultimately, Campion's "The Piano" advances the sexist assumption that heterosexual women will give up artistic practice to find "true love." That "positive" surrender is encouraged by the "romantic" portrayal of sexism and misogyny.

While I do not think that young black male rappers have been rushing in droves to see "The Piano", there is a bond between those folks involved with high culture who celebrate and condone the sexist ideas and values upheld in this film and those who celebrate and condone "gangsta rap." Certainly Kennedy's description of the United States as a "cowboy, gangster, philistine" culture would also accurately describe the culture evoked in "The Piano". Popular movies that are seen by young black males, for example "Indecent Proposal, MadDog and Glory, True Romance", and "One False Move", all eroticize male domination expressed via the exchange of women, as well as the subjugation of other men, through brutal violence.

Contrary to a racist white imagination which assumes that most young black males, especially those who are poor, live in a self-created cultural vacuum, uninfluenced by mainstream, cultural values, it is the application of those values, largely learned through passive uncritical consumption of mass media, that is revealed in "gangsta rap." Brent Staples is willing to challenge the notion that "urban primitivism is romantic" when it suggests that black males become "real men" by displaying the will to do violence, yet he remains resolutely silent about that world of privileged white culture that has historically romanticized primitivism, and eroticized male violence. Contemporary films like "Reservoir Dogs" and "The Bad Lieutenant" celebrate urban primitivism and many less well done films ("Trespass, Rising Sun") create and/or exploit the cultural demand for depictions of hardcore blacks who are willing to kill for sport.

To take "gangsta rap" to task for its sexism and misogyny while critically accepting and perpetuating those expressions of that ideology which reflect bourgeois standards (no rawness, no vulgarity) is not to call for a transformation of the culture of patriarchy. Ironically, many black male ministers, themselves sexist and misogynist, are leading the attacks against gangsta rap. Like the mainstream world that supports white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, they are most concerned with calling attention to the vulgar obscene portrayals of women to advance the cause of censorship. For them, rethinking and challenging sexism, both in the dominant culture and in black life, is not the issue.

Mainstream white culture is not concerned about black male sexism and misogyny, particularly when it is unleashed against black women and children. It is con-

cerned when young white consumers utilize black popular culture to disrupt bourgeois values. Whether it be the young white boy who expresses his rage at his mother by aping black male vernacular speech (a true story) or the masses of young white males (and middle class men of color) seeking to throw off the constraints of bourgeois bondage who actively assert in their domestic households via acts of aggression their rejection of the call to be "civilized." These are the audiences who feel such a desperate need for gangsta rap. It is much easier to attack gangsta rap than to confront the culture that produces that need.

Gangsta rap is part of the anti-feminist backlash that is the rage right now. When young black males labor in the plantations of misogyny and sexism to produce gangsta rap, their right to speak this violence and be materially rewarded is extended to them by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Far from being an expression of their "manhood," it is an expression of their own subjugation and humiliation by more powerful, less visible forces of patriarchal gangsterism. They give voice to the brutal raw anger and rage against women that it is taboo for "civilized" adult men to speak. No wonder then that they have the task of tutoring the young, teaching them to eroticize and enjoy the brutal expressions of that rage (teaching them language and acts) before they learn to cloak it in middle-class decorum or Robert Bly style reclaimings of lost manhood. The tragedy for young black males is that they are so easily dunned by a vision of manhood that can only lead to their destruction.

Feminist critiques of the sexism and misogyny in gangsta rap, and in all aspects of popular culture, must continue to be bold and fierce. Black females must not be duped into supporting shit that hurts us under the guise of standing beside our men. If black men are betraying us through acts of male violence, we save ourselves and the race by resisting. Yet, our feminist critiques of black male sexism fail as meaningful political intervention if they seek to demonize black males, and do not recognize that our revolutionary work is to transform white supremacist capitalist patriarchy in the multiple areas of our lives where it is made manifest, whether in gangsta rap, the black church, or the Clinton administration.

END ZMAGAZINE FEBRUARY 1994

# Going To Places That Scare Me:

## Personal Reflections On Challenging Male Supremacy

by Chris Crass

### Part I: "How can I be sexist? I'm an anarchist!"

"What do you mean I'm sexist?" I was shocked. I wasn't a jock, I didn't hate women, I wasn't an evil person. "But how can I be a sexist, I'm an anarchist?" I was anxious, nervous, and my defenses were up. I believed in liberation, for fighting against capitalism and the state. There were those who defended and benefited from injustice and then there's us, right? I was 19 and it was 1993, four years after I got into politics.

Nilou, holding my hand, patiently explained, "I'm not saying you're an evil person, I'm saying that you're sexist and sexism happens in a lot of subtle and blatant ways. You cut me off when I'm talking. You pay more attention to what men say. The other day when I was sitting at the coffee shop with you and Mike, it was like the two of you were having a conversation and I was just there to watch. I tried to jump in and say something, but you both just looked at me and then went back to your conversation. Men in the group make eye contact with each other and act like women aren't even there. The study group has become a forum for men in the group to go on and on about this book and that book, like they know everything and just need to teach the rest of us. For a long time I thought maybe it was just me, maybe what I had to say wasn't as useful or exciting. Maybe I needed to change my approach, maybe I was just overreacting, maybe it's just in my head and I need to get over it. But then I saw how the same thing was happening to other women in the group, over and over again. I'm not blaming you for all of this, but you're a big part of this group and you're part of this dynamic." This conversation changed my life and its challenge is one I continue to struggle with in this essay.

This is an essay for other white, middle class, raised male who identify themselves as male, left/anarchist organizers struggling to build movements for liberation. I want to focus on my own experience of dealing with issues of sexism and anti-sexism from an emotion-

al and psychological centered perspective. I'm choosing this focus because it is personally challenging, it has proved effective in working with men against sexism and because of consistent feedback from women who I organize with not to ignore these aspects of the work. Rona Fernandez of the Youth Empowerment Center in Oakland writes, "Encourage men/gender privileged folks to examine the role of emotions (or lack thereof) in their experience of privilege. I'm saying this because I think men/gender privileged folks also suffer under the system of patriarchy and one of the most dehumanizing ways they suffer is in their inability/difficulty in expressing feelings." Clare Bayard of Anti-Racism for Global Justice puts it pointedly in addressing gender privileged activist men, "It took years of study and hard work to develop your political analysis, why do you think emotional understanding should just come to you, it requires work as well."

This essay looks to the leadership of women, women of color in particular, who write about and organize against patriarchy in society and sexism in the movement. The work of Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ella Baker, Patricia Hill Collins, Elizabeth 'Betita' Martinez, bell hooks and so many others who provide the political foundations, visions and strategies for the work gender privileged white men need to do. Additionally, there are more and more gender privileged men in the movement working to challenge male supremacy. There are thousands of us who recognize that patriarchy exists, that we have privileges as a result, that sexism undermines movement, that women, transgendered folks and genderqueer people have explained it over and over again and said "you all need to talk with each other, challenge each other and figure out what you're all going to do." And yet there are far more white men in the movement who agree sexism exists in society, perhaps in the movement, but deny their personal involvement in it.

Lisa Sousa, who is part of the San Francisco Independent Media Center and AK Press, told me that in recent discussions she's had in groups about sexism and gender, she's heard the following responses from men: "we are all oppressed", "we should be talking about class", "you are just using gender as a way to attack such and such". When she raised the issue that women leave the majority male group soon after join-

ing, the responses included: "men leave our group too, women are not leaving more, people leave its a fact in volunteer organizations", "we just need to recruit more women, if women leave, there's more where they came from".

These comments are so familiar and while it is tempting to distance myself from the men who made them, it's important that I remember when I made those comments. As a person who believes in movement building and collective liberation, it's important for me to connect with the people I'm organizing with. As a person with privilege organizing others with privilege, that means learning to love myself enough to be able to see myself in people who I would much rather denounce and distance myself from. It also means being honest about my own experiences.

When I think back to that conversation with Nilou and her explaining how sexism operated. I remember trying not to shutdown and I tried to listen.

The word "But" repeated over and over again in my mind, followed by "it was a misunderstanding, I didn't mean it that way, I didn't know you felt like that, I wasn't trying to do that, I would love to see you participate more, I don't understand, no one said they didn't want to hear what you have to say, we all believe in equality, I love you and would never do anything to hurt you, it was circumstances not sexism, I don't know what to do." Looking back ten years later, it's amazing to me how often that same list of "buts" comes running to mind. I'm more like those 'other' men that I'd like to admit.

Nilou spent hours and hours talking with me about sexism. It was tremendously difficult. My politics were shaped by a clearly defined dualistic framework of good and bad. If it was true that I was sexist, then my previous sense of self was in question and my framework needed to shift. Looking back, this was a profoundly important moment in my growth, at the time it felt like shit.

Two weeks later, at our anarchist study group meeting, Nilou raised her hand. "Sexism is happening in this group." She listed the examples she had told me. The defensive reaction that I experienced was now amplified by the 5 other men in the room. Other women started speaking up. They too had experienced these dynamics and they were tired of taking it. The men

were shocked and defensive; we began listing all the reasons why claims of sexism were simply misunderstandings, misperceptions. With genuine sincerity we said, "But we all want revolution."

After the meeting, the woman who had been in the group the longest sat me down. April had been part of the United Anarchist Front for well over a year and she too gave me example after example of sexist behavior. Men in the group didn't trust her to handle responsibilities, even if they were newer. She wasn't looked to for information about the group, nor were her opinions asked for on political questions. Others joined our conversation and men continued to challenge the assertion of sexism. April put forward an example that she had just clearly explained to me and men denied it as a misunderstanding. A few minutes later, I restated the exact same example given by April and this time it was met with begrudging agreement from other men that perhaps in this case it was sexist. April called it out immediately, I hadn't even fully realized what happened. I looked at April as she broke it down. April's words coming from my mouth were heard and taken seriously. There it is. I didn't really want to believe that sexism was happening, but now I saw it. I felt horrible, like a kick to the stomach. Nilou and April desperately trying to get us to agree that there was a problem. How could this be happening when I hadn't intended it to? I was scared to say anything.

Two months later, I was sitting in a men's caucus silently. We didn't know what to talk about. More specifically, we were scared, nervous, dismissive and didn't put energy into creating a useful discussion about sexism. Nilou and April had suggested we spend a day talking about sexism and we'd start with caucuses. "What are the women talking about", we asked ourselves. When the group re-united the discussion quickly turned into women defending themselves, defending their understandings of their own experiences. I felt horrible and struggled to believe what I was hearing. I felt completely clueless about how to move in a useful way.

Several people of all genders left early in tears, disillusioned and overwhelmed by powerlessness. My Mom had observed part of our discussion and asked to speak. "You're all taking on enormous issues and these issues are hard. It makes me happy to see you all at such young ages seriously talk about it. It shows that you really believe in what you're fighting for and it's a con-

versation that doesn't happen in one day." I could feel the heaviness in the room as we looked at each other, many with tears in their eyes. It was clear that challenging sexism was far more than learning how to make eye contact with women in group discussions, it was challenging a system of power that operates on the political, economic, social, cultural, psychological level and my internalized superiority was but the tip of an iceberg built on exploitation and oppression.

## **Part II: "What historical class am I in?"**

"Do you know what class you're in?" Being a white, middle class, male taking Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies classes for all seven years that I was in school, I was asked that question a lot. In a Black Women's history class, someone offered to help me figure out where I needed to go.

I understood why people asked me and I understood that the question wasn't just about class as in a room, but class as in a social category in a white supremacist, patriarchal, heterosexist, capitalist society hell bent on maintaining control. I knew what class I was coming from and I knew that my relationship to Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies was complicated. I knew some people didn't want me in those classes and I knew that my very presence made others feel uncomfortable. And many of the teachers and some of the students told me that they were glad I was there. It helped me see how complex these struggles are and that there aren't easy answers.

I went to community college for four years and then San Francisco State for three. The majority of my teachers were women and people of color. I had grown up in a generally segregated community and had few role models, authority figures, mentors or teachers who were people of color.

What I read and studied in college - women of color feminism, Black liberation struggle, Chicano/a history, colonialism from the perspective of American Indian history, labor history and organizing, queer theory, anti-racism from the perspective of immigrant and refugee women - had a profound impact on me. However, having people of color and women of color in particular grade me, instruct me and guide me was incredibly important to my development on psychological levels that I wasn't necessarily aware of at the time. Having people of color and women with

progressive/left/radical politics leading my educational development was a subversive shifting of the power relationships that wasn't mentioned on the syllabus but was central to my studies.

Learning in majority women and people of color settings also had a deep impact, because it was the first time that I had ever been in situations where I was a numerical minority on the basis of race or gender. Suddenly race and gender weren't just issues amongst many, they were central aspects of how others experienced, viewed and understood the world. The question I sometimes thought silently to myself, "why do you always have to talk about race and gender", was flipped on it's head; "how can you not think about race and gender all the time?"

Over time I developed a strategy for school. I'd stay pretty quiet for the first month or so of class, pushing myself to really listen. In the first week of class I'd say something to clearly identify myself as opposed to white supremacy and patriarchy (sometimes capitalism) as systems of oppressions that I benefit from, so people knew where I was coming from. This was generally met with shock, excitement and a sign of relief. I participated in dialogue more as I tried to develop trust through listening and being open to the information, histories and stories. While this strategy incorporated anti-sexist goals, it was also about presenting myself in a certain way.

The other part of the strategy was to participate and raise questions and other perspectives in my Western Civics, Political Science and other white, male dominated classes. People of color and women I worked with were clear that this was something they felt I had a responsibility to do. "They expect it from us and dismiss us as angry, emotional, stuck in victim mode. You need to use your privilege to get heard by white people and men." The goal wasn't to necessarily change the perspective of the Professor but to open up space for critical dialogue about race, class and gender with the other students who were mostly white and often mostly male. This was extremely useful learning as well, because frequently I came across as cold, angry, self-righteous or unsure of myself, none of which were particularly helpful. If my goal is to yell at men and white people to alleviate my own guilt and shame for being white and male, then perhaps that's a useful tactic. If my goal is to actually work with folks to embrace anti-racism and feminism, then I needed to be more com-

plex and real with myself.

I grew up believing that I was a lone individual on a linear path of progression with no past. History was a set of dates and events that, while interesting to learn, had little or no relationship to my life. I was just a person, doing my own thing. Then I started to learn that being white, male, middle class, able-bodied, mostly heterosexual and a citizen of the United States meant that not only did I have privileges, but that I was rooted in history. I was a part of social categories - white, male, hetero, middle class. These are all groups that have history and are shaped by history. Part of being in those groups means being deemed normal, the standard which all others are judged. My images of just being "my own person" were now joined by images of slave ships, indigenous communities burned to the ground, families destroyed, violence against women, white ruling class men using white poor men to colonize white women, peoples of color and the Earth.

I remember sitting in an African American women's history class, one of two white people, one of two men, the other 15 people Black women and I'm the only white man. We were studying slavery, Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching campaign and the systematic raping of enslaved African women by white male slave owners - millions of rapes, sanctioned and protected by law. Simultaneously hundreds of Black men were lynched by white men who claimed to be protecting white women from Black male rapists. I sat there with my head down and I could feel history in my nauseated stomach and in my eyes filling with tears. Who were those white men and how did they feel about themselves? I was scared to look into the faces of the Black women in that room. "While there is mixing of races because of love," the Professor said, "our people are so many shades of Black because of generation after generation of institutionalized rape." Who am I and how do I feel about myself?

### **Part III: "this struggle is my struggle"**

"I haven't the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfill, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power." - Robin Morgan from the introduction of *Sisterhood is Powerful*

"Face your fear/ the fear is you/ you cannot run/ you cannot hide/ the fear is you/ in the end, what have you

done/ can it be true that the damage you bring is greater then the good you make/ face your fear/ embrace your fear/ the pain inside is the truth inside/ let it out/ let it out/ when the socialization is gone/ what is left/ the fear is more real then the hope you create/ where will you go/ what will you do/ let it all go cuz it's already you/ can I move forward/ can I move forward/ open it all up/ you know it's all true/ the hope is you" -white boy emo-hardcore

I have and do go through periods of hating myself, feeling guilty, afraid. I know in my heart that I had a role in liberation struggle and I know through practice that there was useful work that I could do, but still the question haunts me, "Am I just fooling myself?" That is, am I fooling myself to believe that I am more useful then problematic. To be clear, I think Robin Morgan's quote is useful to struggle with, but not to get stuck on. I grew up believing that I was entitled to everything. I could go anywhere and do anything and wherever I went I would be wanted/needed.

Patriarchy and heterosexism also taught me, in subtle and blatant ways, that I was entitled to women's bodies, that I was entitled to take up space and put my ideas and thoughts out there whenever I wanted to, without consideration for others. This is a very different process of socialization than most other people in this society who are told to shut up, keep it to themselves, hide who they really are, get out of the way and to never forget how lucky they are to be allowed here to begin with. I think it's healthy to not assume you're always needed, to learn to share space and power and to work with others to realize the role that you in fact can and should play. What is unhealthy is how rare it is for gender privileged men to talk with each other about these issues and support each other through the process.

Laura Close, an organizer with Students for Unity in Portland, discussed this in her essay, "Men in the Movement". She writes, "Every day young men wake up and decide to get involved in activism. Often they encounter language and discussions about their male privilege that alienate and silence them without anyone actually supporting them to decolonize their minds. Consider what it would be like for ally men to take our younger/newer guys out to coffee and talk about his own experiences as a guy in the movement. Talk about what you've learned! Consider what it would mean for men to cheer on other men who are making progress

towards becoming allies." She put out a challenge for men to mentor other men engaging in anti-sexist work.

I knew she was right, but the idea of really doing it made me nervous. Sure, I had plenty of close gender privileged friends, but to make a political commitment to develop relationships with other men and open up with them about my own struggles with sexism seemed terrifying. Terrifying because I could handle denouncing patriarchy and calling out other men from time to time, but to be honest about my own sexism, to connect political analysis/practice to my own emotional/psychological process, to be vulnerable?

Pause. Vulnerable to what? Remember when I said that in Women's Studies classes I would identify myself as opposed to patriarchy, white supremacy and sometimes capitalism? The level of consciousness of feminism, let alone political commitment to it amongst most gender privileged men in college was so low that just reading one feminist book and saying "I recognize that sexism exists" meant I was way advanced. While the level of consciousness and commitment is generally higher in activist circles, it's not that much higher. I have had two major struggles going on most of my political life - genuinely wanting to be down for the cause and feeling a deep level of fear that I wasn't coming anywhere close to that commitment. It's far easier for me to make declarations against patriarchy in classrooms, political meetings and in writing then it is to practice feminist politics in my personal relationships with friends, family and partners. This is particularly difficult when political men, like myself, make so little time to talk with each other about this.

What am I afraid to admit? That I struggle everyday to really listen to voices I identify as women's. I know my mind wanders quicker. I know that my instant reaction is take men's opinions more seriously. I know that when I walk into rooms full of activists I instantly scan the room and divide people into hierarchies of status (how long they've been active, what groups they've been part of, what they've written and where it's been published, who are their friends). I position myself against them and feel the most competitive with men. With those I identify as women, the same status hierarchies are tallied, but sexual desirability enters my hetero mindset. What is healthy sexual attraction and desire and how does it relate to and survive my training to systematically sexualize women around me? This gets amplified by the day-to-day reality that this society

presents women as voiceless bodies to serve hetero-male desire, we know that. But what does it mean for how I communicate with my partners who are women and who I organize with? How does it translate into how I make love, want love, express love, conceptualize love? I'm not talking about whether or not I go down on my partner or say I love you, I'm talking about whether or not I truly value equality in our relationships over getting off on a regular basis.

The fact that my partners have provided far more emotional and financial support then I have for them. I'm talking about having almost never zoned out on what a gender privileged man is saying because I thought about him sexually.

I've repeatedly found myself zoned out thinking about sex while listening to women speak who are organizers, leaders, visionaries, my friends, my comrades. I'm all about crushes, healthy sexual desire and pro-sex politics, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about power, entitlement and women's leadership marginalized by hetero male desire. I wish I didn't get defensive on a regular basis, but I do. I get frustrated and shut down conversations about how power operates between my partner and I. I get defensive about how the world interacts with us and how that influences our dynamics. I know that there are times when I say, "ok, I'll think more about it" when really I'm thinking, "leave me alone".

This isn't a confessional so that I will be forgiven. This is an on-going struggle to be honest about how deeply shaped I am by patriarchy and these systems of oppression. Patriarchy tears me up. I have so many fears about whether or not I'm capable of being in healthy loving relationships. Fears about whether or not I can be genuinely honest and connected with myself so that I can then open up and share with others. Fears about organizing to genuinely build and share power with others. The scars of patriarchy are on every single person I interact with and when I push myself to see it, to really look and take the time to think about it, I'm filled with sadness and rage. bell hooks, in her book *All About Love*, writes that love is impossible where the will to dominate exists. Can I genuinely love? I want to believe. I want to believe in a political practice for gendered privileged men forged in opposition to patriarchy.

I do believe that as we struggle against oppression, as



we practice our commitments, we actualize and express our humanity. There are moments, experiences and events when I see patriarchy challenged by all genders and it shows what we can do. I believe that this is our lives' work and that at its core it's a fight for our lives. And in this fight we realize that even in the face of these systems of oppression, our love, beauty, creativity, passion, dignity and power grows. We can do this.

### **post script: "we must walk to make the struggle real"**

While it's necessary to get into the hard emotional and psychological issues, there is also an endless supply of concrete steps we can take to challenge male supremacy.

An organizer working on Palestinian Liberation wrote me saying, "some things gender privileged people can do: offer to take notes in meetings, make phone calls, find meeting locations, do childcare, make copies and other less glamorous work. Encourage women and gender oppressed people in the group to take on roles men often dominate (e.g. tactical, mc-ing and event, media spokespeople). Ask specific women if they want to do it and explain why you think they would be good (don't tokenize). Pay attention to who you listen to and check yourself on power-tripping."

She is one of hundreds of thousands of women and gender oppressed people who has outlined clear, concrete action steps that people with gender privilege can take to challenge sexism and work for liberation. There is an abundant supply of work to be done. The larger issue for me has been, "what will it take for me to actually do that work, to actually prioritize it and follow through on it?" In addition to men talking with each other as discussed above, we also need to hold each other accountable to follow through. There are a lot of heavy emotional issues that come up in doing this work and it's critical that we help keep each other from getting lost and help each other take concrete steps forward. Asking ourselves, "how does our work support the leadership of women?" "How am I working to share power in my organizing?" "How am I making myself open to hearing feedback from gender oppressed people about my work?" Each of these questions generates next steps to make it happen. Examining and challenging privilege is a necessary aspect of our work, but it's not enough. Men working with other men to challenge male supremacy is just one of many, many strategies needed to develop

women-led, multiracial, anti-racist, feminist, queer and trans liberationist, working class based, anti-capitalist movements for collective liberation. We know that sexism will work to undermine movement building. The question is, what work will we do to help build movement and in the process expand our ability to love ourselves and others.

Much love to the editorial crew on this essay: Clare Bayard, Rachel Luft, J.C. Callender, Nilou Mostoufi, April Sullivan, Michelle O'Brien, Elizabeth 'Betita' Martinez, Sharon Martinas, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Rahula Janowski and Chris Dixon.

### Further Reading

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*

bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*

Paul Kivel, *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence that Tears Our Lives Apart*

Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: women in the international division of labour*

Barbara Smith, *The Truth that Never Hurts: writings on race, gender and freedom*

# X. Internalized Oppression

## Beyond Victimization

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Linda Frye Burnham - Editor  
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Artists, their organizations and their community coalitions are truly on the front lines in the battle for American culture.

Attacks on freedom of artistic expression continue, fostering not only cuts in funding but internal struggles and self-censorship. In addition, the mandate to undo racism and other forms of oppression creates a constant struggle for clarity and compassion among people of different backgrounds.

We all have great despair about this immeasurable gulf of ignorance, fear and anger that seems to divide humanity along so many lines, pitting us against each other. It is heart-breaking, it is infuriating, it is terrifying. And in the face of such overwhelming irrationality it is not surprising that we sometimes allow this despair to become our guiding force, adopting a reactive, victim stance. While this is completely understandable, I believe it is a mistake.

We need to be heard and acknowledged for what we have been through in dealing with oppression: how we have survived, and how we are still battling for our lives, our work and our communities. But there are ways this battle can also trap us and limit us, ultimately reinforcing our own internalized oppression. I believe we must hold out for a concept of identity that goes beyond victimization, that is not defined solely by oppression.

Every liberation movement, social transformation project or progressive change effort, regardless of its identity or cause, inevitably runs head-on into that most confusing, insidious and destructive obstacle--internalized oppression. And while we fight against various forms of institutionalized oppression, it is internalized oppression which actually does the most long-term damage to people.

Anyone who has been hurt by oppressive treatment will eventually internalize it, with a variety of resulting reactions. Internalized oppression is an umbrella term for our response to all the identity-specific ways we

have been hurt and still carry the effects of that hurt: internalized sexism, internalized racism, internalized gay oppression, internalized anti-Semitism, internalized classism, etc. We can live our whole lives in rigid response to our oppression, operating by knee-jerk reaction rather than by thoughtful, intelligent, compassionate process.

ONE OPPRESSION that virtually every human encounters regardless of class, gender, race or ethnicity, is the oppression of children. It is our first experience of systematic invalidation, disempowerment and mistreatment. If we had not first been subjected to such treatment as young people and internalized it, we never would have tolerated the ensuing sexism, racism or classism heaped upon us. We would have had no doubts about our intelligence, self-worth, power, beauty, creativity, connection and honest pride as human beings. It is the primer coat of internalized oppression that makes us vulnerable to all the other layers of oppression we face later on.

It is extremely difficult to engage our most exquisitely complex and elegant thinking processes when we are being attacked, disrespected, hated, ridiculed, threatened or excluded.

Sometimes we have survived by defiance, by digging in our heels and attacking back, adopting the oppressor's techniques and strategies, and going full tilt in the opposite direction. The phenomenon of "pecking order" is classic internalized oppression--a victimized person seeking out someone else upon whom to repeat the mistreatment.

Other examples of internalized oppression include self-hate, in which we become simultaneous victimizer and victim. We survive by becoming invisible, silent, compliant, by isolating ourselves, by "agreeing" with our oppression or by identifying with the oppressor group and denying our own identity. In the grips of internalized oppression, it will appear as if we have but two choices: victimize someone else, or be a victim. There is no judgment on anyone for having internalized oppression--it is virtually inescapable.

LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE our internalized oppression and see that our humanity is separate and distinct from it is a huge step toward building alliances

between individuals and groups. To see it for what it is--a collection of painful responses--means we are less likely to get confused about each other and about ourselves.

The core of internalized oppression is the emotional pain from our experiences of being oppressed. Wrapped around that pain is a layer of isolation that keeps it all glued together. And this is where we each must look to begin unraveling our internalized oppression. One way to identify it is to look at all the ways we mistreat ourselves, all the ways we mistreat others, and all the ways we allow ourselves to be mistreated.

When we treat each other as if we are enemies we are buying into our internalized oppression, allowing the oppression to define us and accepting the victim role as if it were our inherent nature. It is not other humans who are the enemy. It is the oppression we have all been slimed with. Yes it does affect us deeply, but we are far more than the sum of our mistreatments. Eliminating internalized oppression is key to clarity and effectiveness in making social transformation possible.

Dan Kwong is a Los Angeles-based performance artist, writer, teacher and community activist who tours internationally with his solo multimedia performances. His work focuses on creating models for moving through internalized oppression, the use of storytelling as an act of self-empowerment, and developing the ability to distinguish between humans and their conditioning.

1/10/03

## **Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People**

By Maria P.P. Root

### **I HAVE THE RIGHT...**

Not to justify my existence in this world.

Not to keep the races separate within me.

Not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical ambiguity.

Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.

### **I HAVE THE RIGHT...**

To identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify.

To identify myself differently from how my parents identify me.

To identify myself differently from my brothers and sisters.

To identify myself differently in different situations.

### **I HAVE THE RIGHT...**

To create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial.

To change my identity over my lifetime -- and more than once.

To have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people.

To freely choose whom I befriend and love.

FROM: THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK: WEITMAN 65  
BY: RADICAL 9 OF COLOR

EDS: MORAGA, ANZALDUA  
1983

## When I Was Growing Up

Nellie Wong

I know now that once I longed to be white.  
How? you ask.  
Let me tell you the ways.

when I was growing up, people told me  
I was dark and I believed my own darkness  
in the mirror, in my soul, my own narrow vision

when I was growing up, my sisters  
with fair skin got praised  
for their beauty, and in the dark  
I fell further, crushed between high walls

when I was growing up, I read magazines  
and saw movies, blonde movie stars, white skin,  
sensuous lips and to be elevated, to become  
a woman, a desirable woman, I began to wear  
imaginary pale skin

when I was growing up, I was proud  
of my English, my grammar, my spelling  
fitting into the group of smart children  
smart Chinese children, fitting in,  
belonging, getting in line

when I was growing up and went to high school,  
I discovered the rich white girls, a few yellow girls,  
their imported cotton dresses, their cashmere sweaters,  
their curly hair and I thought that I too should have  
what these lucky girls had

when I was growing up, I hungered  
for American food, American styles,  
coded: white and even to me, a child  
born of Chinese parents, being Chinese  
was feeling foreign, was limiting,  
was unAmerican

when I was growing up and a white man wanted  
to take me out, I thought I was special,  
an exotic gardenia, anxious to fit  
the stereotype of an oriental chick

when I was growing up, I felt ashamed  
of some yellow men, their small bones,  
their frail bodies, their spitting  
on the streets, their coughing,  
their lying in sunless rooms,  
shooting themselves in the arms

when I was growing up, people would ask  
if I were Filipino, Polynesian, Portuguese.  
They named all colors except white, the shell  
of my soul, but not my dark, rough skin

when I was growing up, I felt  
dirty. I thought that god  
made white people clean  
and no matter how much I bathed,  
I could not change. I could not shed  
my skin in the gray water

when I was growing up, I swore  
I would run away to purple mountains,  
houses by the sea with nothing over  
my head, with space to breathe,  
uncongested with yellow people in an area  
called Chinatown, in an area I later learned  
was a ghetto, one of many hearts  
of Asian America

I know now that once I longed to be white.  
How many more ways? you ask.  
Haven't I told you enough?

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2017 Mission Street, 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94110

Telephone: 415-225-7296, Fax: 415-255-7498

[www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org)