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## Minnie Bruce Pratt

### “Identity: Skin Blood Heart”

I live in a part of Washington, D.C., that white suburbanites called “the jungle” during the uprising of the sixties—perhaps still do, for all I know. When I walk the two-and-a-half blocks to H Street, N.E., to stop in at the bank, to leave my boots off at the shoe-repair-and-lock shop, I am most usually the only white person in sight. I’ve seen two other whites, women, in the year I’ve lived here. (This does not count white folks in cars, passing through. In official language, H Street, N.E., is known as the “H Street Corridor,” as in something to be passed through quickly, going from your place on the way to elsewhere.)

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When I walk three blocks in a slightly different direction, down Maryland Avenue, to go to my lover’s house, I pass yards of Black folks: the yard of the lady who keeps children, with its blue-and-red windmill, its roses of Sharon; the yard of the man who delivers vegetables, with its stacked slatted crates; the yard of the people next to the Righteous Branch Commandment Church of God (Seventh Day), with its tomatoes in the summer, its collards in the fall. In the summer, folks sit out on their porches or steps or sidewalks. When I walk by, if I lift my head and look toward them and speak, “Hey,” they may speak, say, “Hey” or “How you doin?” or perhaps just nod. In the spring I was afraid to smile when I spoke, because that might be too familiar, but by the end of summer I had walked back and forth so often, I was familiar, so sometimes we shared comments about the mean weather.

I am comforted by any of these speaking, for, to tell you the truth, they make me feel at home. I am living far from where I was born; it has been twenty years since I have lived in that place where folks, Black and white, spoke to each other when they met on the street or in the road. So when two Black men dispute country matters, calling across the corners of 8<sup>th</sup> Street—“Hey, Roland, did you ever see a hog catch a rat?”—“I seen a hog catch a *snake*.”—“How about a rat? Ever see one catch a *rat*?”—I am grateful to be living within sound of their voices, to hear a joking that reminds me, with a startled pain, of my father, putting on his tales for his friends, the white men gathered at the drugstore in the mornings.

The pain, of course, is the other side of this speaking, and the sorrow, when I have only to turn two corners to go back in the basement door of my building, to meet Mr. Boone, the janitor, who doesn't raise his eyes to mine, or his head, when we speak. He is a dark red-brown man from the Yemassee in South Carolina—that swampy land of Native American resistance and armed communities of fugitive slaves, that marshy land at the headwaters of the Combahee, once site of enormous rice plantations and location of Harriet Tubman's successful military action that freed many slaves. When we meet in the hall or on the elevator, even though I may have just heard him speaking in his own voice to another man, he 'yes-ma'ams' me in a sing-song; I hear my voice replying in the horrid cheerful accents of a white lady. And I hate my white womanhood that drags between us the long bitter history of our region.

I think how I just want to feel at home, where people know me. Instead I remember, when I meet Mr. Boone, that home was a place of forced subservience, and I know that my wish is that of an adult wanting to stay a child: to be known by others, but to know nothing, to feel no responsibility. Instead I recognize, when I walk out in my neighborhood, that each speaking-to another person has become fraught, for me, with the history of race and sex and class. As I walk I have a constant interior discussion with myself, questioning how I acknowledge the presence of another, what I know or don't know about them, and what how they acknowledge me means. It is an exhausting process, this moving from the experience of the “unknowing majority” (as Maya Angelou has called it) into consciousness. It would be a lie to say this process is comforting.

I meet a white man on Maryland Avenue at ten at night, for instance. He doesn't *look* gay, and he's younger and bigger than me. Just because he's wearing a three-piece suit doesn't mean he won't try something. What's he doing walking here, anyway? One of the new gentry taking over? Maybe that's what the Black neighbors think about me. If I speak, he'll probably assume it's about sex, not about being neighborly. I don't feel neighborly toward him, anyway. If he speaks to me, is that about sex? Or does he still think skin means kin? Or

maybe he was raised someplace where someone could say, “I know your mama,” if he didn’t behave. But he’s probably not going to think about her when he does whatever he does *here*: better be careful.

In the space of three blocks, on one evening, I can debate whether the young Black woman didn’t speak because she was tired, urban-raised, or hates white women; and ask myself why I wouldn’t speak to the young professional white woman on her way to work in the morning, but I do at night (and she doesn’t speak at all). Is this about who I think I may need for physical safety?

And I make myself speak to a young Black man; if I don’t, it will be the old racial-sexual fear. Damn the past. When I speak directly I usually get a respectful answer. Is that the response violently extorted by history, the taboo on white women? Last week the group of Black men on 10<sup>th</sup> Street started in on “Can I have some?” when Joan and I walked by. Was that because they were three? We were white? We were lesbian? Or because we didn’t speak? What about this man? He is a man. And I would speak to him in the *daytime*.

After I speak and he speaks, I think of how my small store of manners, the way I was taught to be “respectful” of others, my country-town, white-woman, rural Southern Christian manners, gave me no ideas on a past Sunday afternoon, in the northwest part of the city, on how to speak to the Latinos and Latinas socializing on the sidewalks there.

And I think of how I’m walking to visit my Jewish lover. When we walk around the neighborhood together, we look like two white women, except the ladies in my building say we look like sisters, because we’re close and they can see we love each other. But I’m blonde and blue-eyed, she dark-haired and brown-eyed; we don’t look a bit like sisters. If the white people and the Black people we meet knew she was Jewish as well as white, how would their speaking alter?

I reckon the rigid boundaries set around my experience, how I have been “protected,” by the amount of effort it takes me to walk these few blocks being as conscious as I can of myself in relation to history, to race, to culture, to gender. In this city where I am no longer of the majority by color or culture, I tell myself every day: In this *world* you aren’t the majority race or culture, and never were, whatever you were raised to think; and are you getting ready to be *in* this world?

And I answer myself back: I’m trying to learn how to live, to have the speaking-to extend beyond the moment’s word, to act so as to change the unjust circumstances that keep us from being able to speak to each other. I’m trying to get a little closer to the longed-for but unrealized world, where we each are able to live, but not by trying to make someone less than us, not by someone else’s blood or pain. Yes, that’s what I’m trying to do with my living now.

I take the moments when I speak and am spoken to, the exchange with dignity, respect, perhaps pleasure, as fragments of that world; but often the moment slips, the illusion of acceptance vanishes into the chasm of the world-as-it-is that opens up between me and another. Yesterday when I said, “Hey,” smiling to the white-headed white woman coming with difficulty down the walk, she spat at me, shout-singing, “How much is that doggy in the window?”—her disdain for the uselessness and childishness of my manners in a world where she labored down the sidewalk. Why should she give me the approval of her smile?

The stark truth spoken in public, the terror of what is said about my place on the other side of the chasm between me and another, makes me want to pretend I didn’t hear, to cover the truth up. The answer, like the impulse, comes from home: where great-great-aunt Rannie stripped naked before company, against the remonstrance of her scandalized niece. “*Ran-nie*, you’re nekkid as a jaybird!” “Yes,” said Rannie, calmly, “and the jaybird is a pretty bird.” Rannie reminds me to listen for the beauty in the stark truth that someone tells me, that which seems brutal and may terrify me. This listening is one way of finding out how to get to the new place where we all can live and speak to each other for more than a fragile moment.

If you and I met today, reader, on Maryland Avenue, would we speak? I don’t know what barriers of gender, color, culture, sexuality, might rise between us when we saw each other. Nor do I know what may come between us as I talk in these pages about the barriers that we struggle with every day; issues of morality like anti-Semitism and racism.

Here my friend Dorothy has protested: “Morality! I’d call it ethics.” She hates the word, it having been used against her often. It’s true. Her Baptists, and my Presbyterians, not to mention others we could name, have turned the word on us too much. But, Dorothy, *ethics* sounds like classical Greece to me. What if I say, not *morality* but—

I’m trying to talk about struggling against racism and anti-Semitism as issues of how to live, the right-and-wrong of it, about how to respect others and myself. It is very hard for me to know *how* to speak of this struggle because the culture I was born and raised in has taught me certain ways of being that reduce the process of change to ought-to, that reduce the issue of how to live to ought-to.

I was taught to be a *judge* of moral responsibility and of punishment only in relation to *my* ethical system; was taught to be a *martyr*, to take all the responsibility for change, and the glory, and expect others to do nothing; was taught to be a *peacemaker*, to mediate, negotiate between opposing sides because I knew the right way; was taught to be a *preacher*, to point out wrongs and tell others what to do. Nowadays, I struggle not to speak with the tones or

gestures or notions of these roles when I raise, out loud, with other women, those interior questions that I have asked myself, about my understanding of anti-Semitism and racism.

Sometimes after I have spoken of these issues, women who are like me come up to me and say:

They feel so ashamed, I spoke and they didn't, they would never be able to act so bravely, I might be able to do it but not them, ever. Or they say how can I be so self-righteous, hurt and punish others, divide women, how can I think I am better than others. Sometimes they say they are glad I have pointed out the racism or anti-Semitism, they hadn't noticed, and didn't know how or what to do about these problems.

Sometimes they say they are glad I spoke, since these problems are important, but they really don't see how any of this affects them personally. Or they may say they are so tired of hearing about these issues, and they don't see how any of this affects them personally. Or they say they are so tired of talk, why don't we just *do* something. Or who do I think I am, to speak for them as white or gentile, their experience has been different. Sometimes they say, painfully, that they have had experiences in their own lives parallel to the ones I recount, but have not been able to speak to anyone about this.

I know that, sometimes, when women make these remarks to me it is because *I* was not clear about my own struggles, fears, mistakes, responsibility, complicity, plans for actions; or because I have failed in my struggle with the old ways of being and am acting them out in my style, manner, tone, ideas. Sometimes, I believe, the remarks are made because women are handing their power and responsibility over to me, because of their own upbringing or assumptions that place me in a certain role in relation to them; and because they are not feeling their own various powers—bravery, creativity, knowledge, and ability to change.

I am struggling now to speak, but not out of any role of ought-to; I ask that you try not to place me in that role. I am trying to speak from my heart, out of need, as a woman who loves other women passionately, and wants us to be able to be together as friends in this unjust world; and as a woman who lives in relative security in the United States, and who is trying to figure out my responsibility in wider struggles against injustice.

I am speaking my small piece of truth, as best I can. My friend Barbara Deming has reminded me: We each have only a piece of the truth. So here it is: I'm putting it down for you to see if our fragments match anywhere, if our pieces, together, make another larger piece of the truth that can be part of the map we are making together to show us the way to get to the longed-for world.

Where does the need come from, the inner push to walk into change, if we are women who, by skin color, ethnicity, birth culture, are in a position of material advantage where we gain at the expense of others, of other women? A place where *we* can have a degree of safety, comfort, familiarity, just by staying put. Where is our *need* to change what we were born into? What do we have to gain?

When I try to think of this, I think of my father. When I was about eight years old, he took me up the front marble steps of the courthouse in my town. He took me inside, up the worn wooden steps, stooped under the feet of folks who had gone up and down to be judged, or to gawk at others being judged, up past the courtroom where my grandfather had leaned back in his chair and judged for over forty years, up to the attic, to some narrow steps that went to the roof, to the clock tower with a walled ledge.

What I would have seen from the top, on the streets down below around the courthouse square: the Methodist church; the grey limestone building with the county Health Department, Board of Education, Welfare Department (my mother worked there); the yellow brick Baptist church; the Gulf station; the pool hall (no women allowed); Cleveland's grocery; Ward's shoe store. Then all in a line, connected: the bank, the post office, Dr. Nicholson's office (one door for whites, one for Blacks). Then separate: the Presbyterian church; the newspaper office; the yellow brick jail, same brick as the Baptist church and as the courthouse.

What I could not have seen from the top: the sawmill, or Four Points where the white mill folks lived, or the houses of Blacks in Vener Mill Quarters.

This is what I would and would not have seen, or so I think: for I never got to the top. When he told me to go up the steps in front of him, I tried to, crawling on hands and knees, but I was terribly afraid. I couldn't, or wouldn't, do it. He let me crawl down; he was disgusted with me, I thought. I think now that he wanted to show me a place he had climbed to as a boy, a view that had been his father's and his, and would be mine. But I was not him: I had not learned to take that height, that being set apart as my own, a white girl, not a boy.

Yet I was shaped by my relation to those buildings and to the people in the buildings, by ideas of who should be working in the Board of Education, of who should be in the bank handling money, of who should have the guns and the keys to the jail, of who should be *in* the jail; and I was shaped by what I didn't see, or didn't notice, on those streets.

Not the way your town was laid out, you say? True, perhaps, but each of us carries around those growing-up places, the institutions, a sort of backdrop, a stage set. So often we act out the present against a backdrop of the past, within a frame of perception that is so familiar,

so safe, that it is terrifying to risk changing it even when we know our perceptions are distorted, limited, constricted by that old view.

So this is one gain for me as I change: I learn a way of looking at the world that is more accurate, complex, multilayered, multidimensioned, more truthful. To see the world of overlapping circles, like movement on the mill pond after a fish has jumped, instead of the courthouse square with me at the middle, even if I am on the ground. I feel the *need* to look differently because I've learned that what is presented to me as an accurate view of the world is frequently a lie: so that to look through an anthology of women's studies that has little or no work by women of color is to be up on that ledge above the town and be thinking that I see the town, without realizing how many lives have been pushed out of sight, beside unpaved roads.

I'm learning that what I think that I *know* is an accurate view of the world is frequently a lie: as when I was in a discussion about the Women's Pentagon Action with several women, four of us Christian-raised, one Jewish—my lover Joan, a photographer. Describing the march through Arlington Cemetery, one of the four mentioned the rows of crosses. I had marched for a long time through that cemetery; I nodded to myself, visualized rows of crosses. No, said Joan, they were *headstones*, with crosses or Stars of David engraved above the names. We four Christians objected; we all had seen crosses. But Joan had photographs she had taken of the march through the cemetery, laid them on the table. We saw rows and rows and rows of rectangular gravestones, and in the foreground, clearly visible, one inscribed with a name and a Star of David.

So I gain truth when I expand my constricted eye, an eye that has only let in what I have been taught to see. But there have been other constrictions: the clutch of fear around my heart when I must deal with the *fact* of folks who exist, with their own lives, in other places besides the narrow circle I was raised in. I have learned that my fear is kin to a terror that has been in my birth culture for years, for centuries—the terror of a people who have set themselves apart and *above*, who have wronged others and feel they are about to be found out and punished.

It is the terror that has been expressed in lies about dirty Jews who kill for blood, sly Arab hordes who murder, brutal Indians who massacre, animal Blacks who rise in rebellion in the middle of the night and slaughter. It is the terror that has *caused* the slaughter of all those peoples. It is the terror that was my father, with his stack of John Birch newspapers, his belief in a Catholic-Communist-Jewish-Black conspiracy. It is the desperate terror, the knowledge that something is *wrong*, which tries to end fear by attack.

When I am trying to understand myself in relation to folks different from me, when there are discussions, conflicts about anti-Semitism and racism among women, criticisms, criticism of *me*, and I

get afraid; when, for instance, in a group discussion about race and class, I say I feel we have talked too much about race, not enough about class, and a woman of color asks me in anger and pain if I don't think her skin has *something* to do with class, and I get afraid; when, for instance, I say carelessly to my Jewish lover that there were no Jews where I grew up, and she begins to ask me, How do I *know*? Do I hear what I'm saying? and I get afraid; when I feel my racing heart, breath, the tightening of my skin around me, literally defenses to protect my narrow circle, I try to say to myself:

Yes, that fear is there, but I will try to be at the edge between my fear and the outside, on the edge at my skin, listening, asking what new thing will I hear, will I see, will I let myself feel, beyond the fear. I try to say: To acknowledge the complexity of another's existence is not to deny my own. When I acknowledge what my people, what those who are like me, have done to people with less power and less safety in the world, I can make a place for things to be different, a place where I can feel grief, sorrow, not to be sorry *for* others, but to mourn, to expand my circle of self, follow my need to loosen the constrictions of fear, be a break in the cycle of fear and attack. When I can do this, that is a second gain.

To be caught within the narrow circle of the self is not just a fearful thing, it is a *lonely* thing. When I could not climb the steps that day with my father, it marked the last time I can remember us doing something together, just the two of us; thereafter I knew on some level that my place was with women, not with him, not with men; later I knew more clearly that I did not want his view of the world. I have felt this more and more strongly since my coming out as a lesbian. Yet so much has separated me from other women, ways in which my culture set me apart by race, by ethnicity, by class.

I understood abruptly one day how lonely this made me when a friend, a Black woman, spoke to me casually in our shared office; and I heard how she said my name, the drawn-out accent: so much like how my name is said at home. Yet I knew enough of her history and mine to know how much separated us: the chasm of murders, rapes, lynchings, the years of daily humiliations done by my people to hers. I went and stood in the hallway and cried, thinking of how she said my name like home, and how divided our lives were.

It is a pain I come to over and over again, the more I understand the ways in which I have been kept from other women, and how I keep myself from them. The pain, when, for instance, I realize how *habitually* I think of my culture, my ethics, my morality, as the culmination of history, as the logical extension of what has gone before; the kind of thinking represented by my use, in the past, of the



word *Judeo-Christian*, as if Jewish history and lives existed only to culminate in Christian culture, the kind of thinking that the U.S. government is using now to promote Armageddon in the Middle East; the kind of thinking that I did until recently about Native American lives and culture in my region, as if those peoples have existed only in museums, and only since white folks came to this continent; the kind of thinking that separates me from women in cultures different from mine, makes their experience less central, less important than mine.

It is painful to keep understanding this separation within myself and in the world. Sometimes this pain feels only like despair. Yet I have felt it also to be another kind of pain, where the need to be with other women can be the breaking through the shell around me, a coming through into a new place, where, with understanding and change, the loneliness won't be necessary. And when this happens, then I feel a third gain.

How do we begin to change, and then keep going, and act on this in the world? How do we *want* to be different from what we have been? Sometimes folks ask how I got started, and I must admit that I did not begin by reasoning out the gains; this came later and helped me keep going.

But I began when I jumped from my edge and outside myself, into radical change, for love—simply love—for myself and for other women. I acted on that love by becoming a lesbian, falling in love with and becoming sexual with a particular woman; and this love led me directly, but by a complicated way, to work against racism and anti-Semitism.

It is another kind of breaking through to even write this, to put these words before you. I anticipate the critical voices that say, “Your sexuality is irrelevant to the serious issues of anti-Semitism and racism”; that say, “You are being psychologizing, individualistic”; the voices that say, “You should want to work on these issues because that is the right thing to do, for justice, for general principles.” I anticipate the other, perhaps subvocal, words: “Disgusting.” “Perverted.” “Sinful.” “Unnatural.” “Not fit to live.”

I hear these voices sounding now because I have heard them before: from folks on the street, from political co-workers, from women at my job, from the man I was married to, from my mother. They are the judging, condemning voices that despise me, that see me as dangerous, that put me in danger, because of *how I love*: because of my intimate, necessary, hopeful love, for which I have been punished

and been made to suffer bitterly, *when I have disclosed it*.

I could conceal this love from you. I could hide this part of myself as some light-skinned, European-looking folks in this country have hidden parts of themselves that kept them from fitting in, assimilating, being safe in white Christian culture: hidden their religion, or the poverty or working class of their people; or their ethnicity, any connection to “undesirable” people, to Jews, or Mediterranean or Middle Eastern peoples, or Native peoples, or Asian peoples, or to any people of color.

I could pass in this way, by hiding part of myself. I fit neatly into the narrow limits of what is seen as “normal” in this country. Like most lesbians, I don’t fit the stereotype of what a lesbian looks like. Unless my hair is cut quite short and unless I am wearing the comfortable, sturdy clothes and shoes that are called “masculine,” I look quite stereotypically “American”—like a woman in a toothpaste ad.

But in this writing, I cannot hide myself, because it is how I love that has brought me to change. I have learned what it is to lose a position of safety, to be despised for *who I am*. For being a lesbian, I have lost my children, those I loved almost as myself, and I have had my pride, as Barbara Deming says, “assaulted in its depth...since one’s sexuality is so at the heart...at the heart of one.”<sup>1</sup> It was my joy at loving another woman, the risks I took by doing so, the changes this brought to me, and the losses, that broke through the bubble of skin and class privilege around me. I do not want what Barbara Deming has called “liberation by analogy.” I do not want to fight someone else’s fight because, for whatever reason, I don’t acknowledge and fight my *own* oppression.<sup>2</sup> So I speak here of how I came to my own fight, through the oppression I suffered as a lesbian and a woman; and how I came to an understanding of my connection to the struggles of other women and people different from myself.

In the fall of 1974, I moved with my husband and children to an eastern North Carolina town whose center was not a courthouse, but an antebellum market house, with an open first story of four arched brick walls, a closed brick second story, a circle of streets around it. I heard more about the market house at a dinner that welcomed my husband to his new job. In a private club overlooking the central circle, the well-to-do folks at the table, all white, chatted about history, the things sold in the past at the market house, the fruits and vegetables, the auctioned tobacco. “But not slaves,” they said.

The Black man who was serving set down the dish, and broke

through the anonymity of his red jacket. No, he said, there *had been* slaves there: men, women, children sold away from their mothers. Going to the window, he looked down on the streets and gave two minutes of facts and dates; then he finished serving, and left. The white folks smiled indulgently and changed the subject. I recognized their look, from home. I was shocked that he had dared speak to them, yet somehow felt he had done so many times before, and I knew, without letting myself know, that as he spoke there stood behind him the house slaves who had risked whipping or worse when they challenged with their words the white folks' killing ignorance.

What he told me was plain enough: This town was a place where some people had been used as livestock, cattle, chattel, slaves, capital, by other people; and this use had been justified by the physical fact of a different skin color and by the cultural fact of different ways of living. White men and their families had considered Black people to be animals with no right to their children or to a home of their own, and white people still did not admit that they had done any wrong, nor that there had *been* any wrong, in *their* town. What this man was saying was clear: Be warned; they have not changed.

By the end of dinner, I had forgotten his words. They were about the past, seemed to have nothing to do with me. Yet, after almost ten years in university towns, I was returning to the landscape of my childhood, changed into a city with buying and selling at its heart, the country club its social center rather than the church (but Blacks and Jews still not welcome), a town with a conspicuous police presence, the U.S. Army's second largest home base, with combat veterans who had trained to the chant, "Here is my prick, here is my gun, one is for killing, the other for fun."

Every day I drove around the market house, carrying my two boys between home and grammar school and day care. To me the building was an impediment to the flow of traffic, awkward, anachronistic; or sometimes in the early spring light it seemed quaint. I had no knowledge and no feeling of the sweat and blood of people's lives that had been mortared into its bricks, nor of their independent joy apart from the place.

What I *was* feeling was that I would spend the rest of my life going round and round in a pattern that I knew by heart: being a wife, a mother of two boys, a teacher of the writings of white men, dead men. I drove around the market house four times a day, traveling on the surface of my own life: circular, repetitive, like a game at the country fair, the one with yellow plastic ducks clacking after each

other on a track, they fall abruptly off the edge, into inevitable meaningless disappearance; unless, with a smack, one or two or three vanish from the middle, shot down by a smiling man with a gun.

For the first time in my life I was living in a place where I was conscious of being afraid because I was a *woman*. No one knew me by my family: there were no kindnesses because someone knew my mama or my pa, and no one was going to be nice to me because of my grandfather. I was only another woman, someone's wife, unless I was alone; then, walking down Hay Street to the library, I could be propositioned as a prostitute, or, driving at night on the Boulevard, threatened as a cunt. At home when I complained about the smiling innuendo of a gas station attendant, my husband said I should be complimented: this in a town where R & R stood for *Rape and Recreation*.

Not such a surprising realization: to understand that women are used as sexual pets, or are violently misused, are considered sexual prey. But, there it was: for the first time I felt myself to be, not theoretically, but physically and permanently, in the group of people labeled *woman*: and felt that group to be relatively powerless and at the mercy of another group, *men*.

I was not at all accustomed to thinking of myself as belonging to an *oppressed* group. The last time I had understood myself to belong to a any specific people was when I was a teenager. At the height of Black civil rights demonstrations in Alabama, and brutality by white police and citizens, I received a request from a German pen pal for my views on what was going on, and wrote what I remember now as an eloquent justification of white supremacy. I did not reflect on what repetition of Nazi history, what cries of Aryan superiority, were called up by my words. Sliding aside the polite lie that "Here we just treat everyone as individuals," I justified how we were treating folks—us, the superior class, me in the group *white*.

By the time I was midway through college, I had slipped into being unselfconscious of myself as white; this happened as I became liberal. This meant that I looked on with my philosophy class as a few students demonstrated while Gov. Lurleen Wallace (serving in place of her segregationist husband) reviewed the ROTC troops, the students getting trained to defend Alabama from "outsiders"; all the white boys saluted under the white dogwoods flowering on the Quad, while we debated the usefulness of protest. Two years later, on the night of Dr. King's death by assassination, I drove with my husband and a friend into Birmingham, curfewed after a day of violence, drove in to look

around the empty downtown streets in the spring rain, looking for I don't know what; and not finding it, went to the Tutwiler Hotel for drinks, not thinking of ourselves as white, of course, nor in any way out of place on the streets that night, because we were intellectuals, and not bigoted, not at all like James Earl Ray or any white person who did violence for racist reasons.

I slipped from thinking of myself as white, to thinking of myself as *married*, without much regard for other categories in the meantime, except for a few startling moments. I felt *gentile* (though I didn't know the word) when a Jewish man I was dating called it off because I was "too much like a girl he might marry." I was baffled by this: I thought of Jewishness as a state of being defined by Christianity, a category changeable by conversion or association with Christians; I couldn't understand why this was something he didn't seem to want to do.

Going through the negotiations to marry a Catholic-raised man, I had some longer moments of feeling *Protestant*. As debates went on between my husband-to-be and the priest who was counseling us under the new guidelines of the Vatican II, I puzzled over the need for an intricate resolution between *them*, too men, about what kind of birth control I would, or would not, use.

After the wedding, I was relieved to think I was simply myself: a nonreligious, thinking person, who happened to be married. But sometimes my life as a *woman* bulged outside the safe bounds of *wife*, as when I was shaken and terrified with two unplanned pregnancies. Walking to my graduate school classes at the University of North Carolina, I put the width of the sidewalk between me and the woman sitting at the literature table in front of the library. The pamphlets and the two-cent newsletters—*Research Triangle Women's Liberation Newsletter*, August 11, 1969—were loose on the cardboard table and were not safely *in* the library.<sup>3</sup> At the other edge of the sidewalk, I tried to separate myself from the new ideas about what it meant to be a woman. I rushed away slowly through the humid air, weighted by my unborn second child, who sat like a four-month-old rock in my stomach.

During the last months of my pregnancy, I shared a class with Elizabeth, the woman from the literature table. She analyzed men and power, fathers and sons in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*; the other students thought she was crazy; I was afraid she was. One evening, as I carried my enormous heavy belly from the seminar table to my car, she told me that she thought I was brave to stay in school, unlike so many other married women with children, and she wished me well. I thought of

how the men in my department had begun to joke that they would get stuck with me in the elevator and I'd go into labor. That evening I cried the ten miles home. She had spoken to me as a *woman*, and I'd been so lonely, without knowing it: her speaking to me changed how I thought of myself and my life.

The ideas of women's liberation came rushing toward me, arrived at the university town through the writings of feminist and lesbian-feminist groups, like The Furies of Washington, D.C.; and through individual women, like Sara Evans Boyte, who taught off-campus classes in women's history—women who had heard the ideas from New Haven, by way of Chicago, by way of white women who had worked in the civil rights movement in the South, who had learned the principles of liberation in the homes and at the sides of Black women, young and old, who were the political organizers in their communities.<sup>4</sup>

When I found myself living as a wife in the market town, where the circle of my life was becoming more and more narrow, I felt like I was being brick-walled in; then the ideas that I'd learned from Elizabeth and the other women became personal to me. I began to feel the restrictions around me as a woman, through the pressure of neighbors and country-club social friends about how I should act as a woman, through the extremity of the violence reported daily in the news: "Fourteen-year-old girl taken from car at county fair, raped at gun-point." But I still moved unthinkingly through the town as a white person born to the culture, unaware of how much this fact pushed away from me the daily limits placed on other women.

For being a woman was the constriction that I felt. I was in a place like home, but grown-up; I didn't want to be there, curfewed by night, watched by day, by some of the twenty-five thousand more men than women in the town. I felt surrounded. I wanted to go some place where I could just *be*; I was homesick with nowhere to go.

The place that I missed sometimes seemed like a memory of childhood, though it was not a childish place. It was a place of mutuality, companionship, creativity, sensuousness, easiness in the body, curiosity in what new things might be making in the world, a place of hope, safety, and love.

Like a memory of July: The slash of morning sun on my face as I walked with my cousin Anne down to the gravel pit, through the maze of small canyons with clay walls. The place where I put my face

against the clay, the sweat of cool water in the heat, the flesh of the earth. We would stay all day there, get cleanly dirty, dig clay, shape pots, retreat to the cool, then out in the heat again in a place we knew was ancient because of the fossil rocks we found, ancient and serenely a home.

It was a place I had been to with my father, who took me and my mother to the woods. Not to hunt (for he was not a hunter), but to walk, he with a double-bladed ax that he raised to trim dead branches, in silence except to name the trees (black-jack oak, sweet bay) and to say how to step (high over logs where copperheads liked to rest cool). His silence that may have been his prayer to the trees that he counted as dead board feet on weekdays at the sawmill (but he is dead now, and I will never know what went on in his mind). His silence that taught me to listen to the life rushing through the veins of the animal world.

The place that I missed was a place I had been in recently, just before my move to the market town, when, with a few other women, I had begun the talking about the forbidden that was called *consciousness-raising*: making a place where I had said the words *masturbation*, *orgasm*, out loud for the first time. In the startled silence of the other women, I felt that I had abruptly created a new world out of the stuffy room where we were meeting.

In the market town I began to try, steadily, to make a place like the memory, yet that would last longer than a morning or an evening. It was to be a place where I could live without painful and deadly violence, without domination: a place where I could live free, *liberated*, with other women. I began doing some political work, organized another consciousness-raising group. Then I fell in love with a woman, after she told the group a secret about herself. I thought I had come again to the place of intense curiosity, powerful creativity. It was March, it was April, wisteria, dogwood, pink tulip magnolia. But I began to dream my husband was trying to kill me, that I was crossing a river with my children, women on the other side, but no welcome for me with my boys.

The place I wanted to reach was not a childish place, but my understanding of it was childish. I had not admitted that the safety of much of my childhood was because Laura Cates, Black and a servant, was responsible for me; that I had the walks with my father in the woods that were “ours” because my people, only three generations back, had driven out the Creek nation who had lived there; that I was

allowed to have my children and one evening a month with women friends because I was a wife who always came home at night to her husband. Raised to believe that I could be where I wanted and have what I wanted and be who I wanted, as a grown woman I thought I could simply claim my desire, even if this was the making of a new place to live with other women. I had no understanding of the limits that I lived within; nor of how much my memory and my experience of a safe space was based on places that had been secured for me by omission, exclusion, or violence; nor that my continued safety meant submitting to those very limits.

I should have remembered, from my childhood, Viola Liuzzo, who was trying to reach the place by another way, shot down in Lowndes County, Alabama, while driving demonstrators back to their homes during the Selma-to-Montgomery march. Her death was justified by Klan leader Robert Shelton on the grounds that “She had five children by four different husbands...her husband hadn’t seen her in two, three months...she was living with two nigger men in Selma...she was a *fat* slob with crud...all over her body...she was bra-less.”<sup>5</sup> Liuzzo—Italian, white-but-not-white, gone over to the other side—damned, dead.

I didn’t die, trying to make a new life for myself out of an old life, trying to be a lover of myself and other women in a place where we were despised. I didn’t die, but by spring of the next year, by May, watching the redbud tree drop flowers like blood on the ground, I felt like I had died. I had learned that children were still taken from their mothers in that town, even from someone like me, if by my wildness, by sexual wildness, I placed myself in the wilderness with those feared by white Southern men: if I joined with “every wolf, panther, catamount and bear in the mountains of America, every crocodile in the swamps of Florida, every negro in the South, every devil in Hell.”<sup>6</sup> I had learned that I could be either a lesbian or a mother of my children, either in the wilderness or on holy ground, but not both.

I should not have been surprised at the horror of my sophisticated liberal husband; he was also an admirer of the apologists for the Old South, like the poet who named Woman and the Land as the same—beautiful, white, pure: “the Proud Lady, of the heart of the fire, / The look of snow...The sons of the fathers shall keep her, worthy of / What these have done in love.” But I was no longer pure; I had declined to be kept. I no longer qualified as sacred, eligible for the protection promised by a KKK founder, protection for



“the [white] women of the South, who were the loveliest, most noble and best women in the world...”<sup>7</sup> (I asked my father, in his extreme age, to tell me about his mother, the woman he named me for. He could only say, “She was the best woman in the world.”)

Why was I surprised when my husband threatened and did violence, threatened ugly court proceedings, my mother as a character witness for him, restricted my time and presence with the children, took them finally and moved hundreds of miles away? I was no longer “the best of women”: what did I expect? But I had expected to have that protected circle marked off for me by the men of my kind as my “home.” I had expected to have that place with my children. I expected it as my *right*. I did not understand I had been exchanging the use of my body for that place.

I learned, finally: I stepped outside the circle of protection. I said: My body, my womb, and the children of my womb are not yours to use. And I was judged with finality. Without my climbing the steps to the courtrooms of Cumberland County, I was sentenced. Without facing the judge, since my lawyer feared that “calling the attention of the court” to my lesbian identity would mean that I would never see my children again, I was declared dirty, polluted, unholy. I was not to have a home with my children again. I did not die, but the agony was as bitter as death: we were physically separated; they were seven and six, hundreds of miles away; I had held them before they were born and almost every day of their lives, and now I could not touch them. During this time I discovered that expressions I had thought to be exaggerations were true: if you are helpless with grief, you do, unthinkingly, wring your hands; you can have a need to touch someone that is like hunger, like thirst. The inner surface of my arms, my breasts, the muscles of my stomach, were raw with my need to touch my children.

I could have stolen them and run away to a place where no one knew them, no one knew me, hidden them, and tried to find work under some other name than my own. I could not justify taking them from all their kin, or their father, in this way. Instead, from this marriage I carried away my clothes, my books, some kitchen utensils, two cats. I also carried away the conviction that I had been thrust out into a place of terrible loss by laws laid down by men. In my grief, and in my ignorance of the past of others, I felt that no one had sustained such a loss before. And I did not yet understand that to come to a place of greater liberation, I had to risk old safeties. Instead, I felt that I had no place; that, as I moved through my days, I was falling through

space.

I became obsessed with justice: the shell of my privilege was broken, the shell that had given me a shape in the world, held me apart from the world, protected me from the world. I was astonished at the pain. The extent of my surprise revealed to me the degree of my protection.

I became determined to break the powers of the world: they *would* change, the powers that tried to keep me from touching my children because I touched another woman in love. Beyond five or six books on women's liberation, and the process of consciousness-raising, I had few skills and little knowledge of how to act for justice and liberation, and for myself. I had no knowledge of any woman like me who had resisted and attempted to transform our home in preceding generations. I had no knowledge of other instances of struggle, whose example might have strengthened and inspired me in mine.

For instance: I knew nothing of the nearby Lumbee Indians, descendants of the folk who came into first contact with Raleigh's English in the 1500s, who four hundred years later had been pforced into three-way segregated school system, white, Black, Native; who succeeded in the 1950s in breaking up Klan rallies and cross-burnings that had warned them to "keep their place."<sup>8</sup>

Even though I was teaching at an historically Black college, I had no understanding of the long tradition of Black culture and resistance in the town, a tradition which reached back before the Civil War, and which had produced Charles W. Chesnutt, president in the 1870s of the school where I was then teaching, author of fiction that described the market house town, political organizing by Blacks, their massacre by whites during the 1898 Wilmington elections, even the story of a white man returning to his hometown who dreamed of, and worked toward, a racially just society.<sup>9</sup>

I knew nothing of the nourishing of Jewish culture in that hostile Bible Belt town, nor of Jewish traditions of resistance. I learned only much later that one of the few townspeople who I knew to be politically progressive, Monroe Evans, was Jewish. His family had emigrated from Lithuania to escape the 1881 May Laws against Jews, the confiscation of property, the limitations on travel and on the right to have homes, the conscription of Jewish children into the czar's army, the violent pogroms. They had struggled to make a place in the town, one of two or three Jewish families, trying to maintain their identity among folk who alternately asked them how big was Noah's

ark or called them Christ-killer.<sup>10</sup>

Nor did I know of the huge rallies against the Vietnam War in the 1970s, masses of people around the market house, chanting in the streets, traffic stopped. Nor that Carson McCullers, a woman very like me, living there in the 1930s, had written of the maddening, rigid effects of military life and thinking, and of the resistances of an Army wife.<sup>11</sup>

I knew nothing, then, of the lesbians stationed at Ft. Bragg or Pope AFB, who might spend all day scrubbing out jet fuel tanks, light-headed, isolated inside a metal cavern, and then come out at night to The Other Side to dance with lovers, play pool, no matter that the CID cruised by on Russell Street writing down license plate numbers, no matter the risk of being thrown out of the Armed Services. And later I discovered Bertha Harris' novel of being a lesbian lover, with extravagant stories that might have been told in that bar, being a passing woman in the Wilmington shipyards, being lovers with a movie star who had "hair like gold electricity," hair like my lover's hair, a book that was published the year I moved to the town that outrageous Bertha had long since grown up in and left.<sup>12</sup>

I knew nothing of these or other histories of struggle for equality and justice and one's own identity in the town I was living in. Not a particularly big town, not liberal at all, not famous for anything: an almost-rural eastern North Carolina town, in a region that you, perhaps, are used to thinking of as backward. Yet it was a place with so many resistances, so much creative challenge to the powers of the world: which is true of every county, town, or city in this country, each with its own buried history of struggle, of how people try to maintain their dignity within the restrictions placed around them, and how they struggle to break those restrictions.

But as yet I knew nothing of this. I entered the struggle, adding my bit to it, as if I were the first to struggle, joining with five or six other women like me in the local National Organization for Women (NOW) chapter. For the next few years, I organized educational programs: women working in the home, out of the home, women and health, power, education, the media, the military, women and rape, women in religion, minority women, women and North Carolina law. I worked on self-defense classes for women, on establishing a rape crisis line and a shelter for women who were being beaten, on editing a local newsletter, on producing women's cultural events, on nights and nights of phone calls for the Equal Rights Amendment, on a fight with

the local clerk of court to make him admit women's independent name changes, on day care, on Black women's studies courses, and a daily women's news program at the college where I taught. I worked on a county advisory group for women's issues where we struggled with the local Democratic machine to try to get a Black woman appointed as our coordinator, where we pressed for implementation of our recommendations with county money, and were perceived as so radical that the courthouse rumor was that "Lesbians have taken over."

We wanted to change the world; we thought we knew how it needed changing. We knew we were outnumbered: in a town where the Berean Baptist Church owned a fleet of buses and shuttled hundreds of its members to every legislative meeting to oppose the ERA, the handful of us in NOW were the only folks using the words *women's liberation*. We tried everything we could think of to "reach more women."

We were doing "outreach," that disastrous method of organizing; we had gone forward to a new place, women together, and now were throwing back safety lines to other women, to pull them in as if they were drowning, to save them. I understood then how desperately I needed to have a place that was mine with other women, where I felt hopeful, a home to replace the one I had lost. But because of my need, I did not push myself to look at what might separate me from other women. I relied on the hopefulness of all women together; I did not think that perhaps some women would not want to be "saved" by me. What I felt, deep down, was hope that they would join me in *my* place, which would be the way I wanted it. I didn't want to have to *limit* myself.

I didn't understand what a limited, narrow space, and how short-lasting, it would be, if only *my* imagination and knowledge and abilities were to go into the making and extending of it. I didn't understand how much I was still inside the restrictions of my culture in my vision of how the world could be. But I, and the other women I worked with, limited the effectiveness of our struggle for that place by our own racism and anti-Semitism.

With a minimal understanding of history, we knew that, because of civil rights work, Black women in town were probably organized and might be potential allies. So our first community forum had one panel out of six designated with the topic Minority Women, and five of the twenty speakers for the day were Black women. This was in a day's activities which were planned, the speakers chosen, the

location selected, and the publicity arranged, by three professional white women, me included, who had not *personally* contacted a single Black women's organization, much less considered trying to co-plan or co-sponsor with such a group. We had no notion of the doubts that Black women in that town might have about our endeavor. Neither did we consult our commonsense to discover that "minority women" in Fayetteville included substantial numbers of Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Korean, and Japanese women, as well as Lumbee women and Latinas. Attendance at the forum was overwhelmingly white; but we questioned our publicity, instead of our perspective on power.

Similarly, our thinking about allies from the civil rights movement of the sixties did not include the possibility that there might be Jewish women in town who had worked in that struggle, who might be interested in our work. Well-schooled by my past in how Jews (and Communists) were the source of "outsider trouble," the old theory that if Jews are present and visible, they must be in control, I did not turn this teaching around to question if the significant participation of Jews in civil rights work might not have had something to do with their own history of oppression. In fact, I didn't think of Jews as being *in* the town, even though I drove past a large and modern synagogue on Morganton Road every time I went to the grocery store. I did not think of Jews as *living* in the South. Blacks were definitely Southern *and* American even though they'd come from Africa (the continent a blur to me), even though I'd heard men at home mouthing off about "Send them back." But a Black woman had raised me, Black women and men had come in and out of my kinfolks' houses, cooking, cleaning; I knew that they existed. I had no place for Jews in the map of my thoughts, except that they had lived before Christ in an almost-mythical Israel, and afterwards in Germany until they were killed, and that those in this country were foreigners, even if they were here. They were always foreign, their place was always somewhere else.

So, I drove past the synagogue, and when we scheduled a discussion on religion, the two women who spoke were a professor of religion and a Methodist minister. No representation was requested from the women of the local Jewish congregation, since *religion* meant denominations of Christianity. We held the session on a Saturday because, after all, Sunday was when folks went to church, or just took it easy. We had no grasp that there might be some Jewish women who would want to come, but not be able since their Sabbath was sundown Friday to sundown Saturday night.

My sense of the history of the town was as distorted as my per-

spective on its demographics, or its geography, or its theology. When we were organizing a day's program on rape, I was concerned that Black women know and come, so I drove up and down Murchison Road to post flyers, ignoring my uneasiness, the training of years of warnings about which parts of a town were safe for me and which were not. I could have paused to trace that uneasiness to a fear of Black men, but I did not; nor did I wonder about the history of white women in relation to Black men, or white men to Black women, or *then* question what the feelings, not to mention the experience, of Black women in relation to rape might be, compared to mine. I stapled posters to telephone poles; I politely asked permission to place them in windows of Black-owned businesses, without ever thinking the word *lynching*, or wondering about how sexual violence was used racially by white men to keep Blacks and white women from joining forces.

Nor when we were struggling so hard with ERA ratification, during miserable nights in a doctor's borrowed office, calling strangers' names listed on file cards; during the crisis when one of our key local representatives had a religious renewal and became a born-again Christian just before the vote; during none of the three votes, over six years, did I examine the long complicated relation between the struggle for women's suffrage and Black suffrage through Constitutional amendments. I did not learn that white women's suffrage leaders, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, had failed to take the long view required of coalition work in their disappointment over the Fifteenth Amendment being passed for male, rather than universal, suffrage. They had refused to make the reciprocal actions that would have pushed for post-Civil War voting rights enforcement for Black men in the South, so necessary for the success of revolutionary Reconstruction governments, and therefore, ultimately, for the establishment of legislatures favorable to Black and white women's suffrage.<sup>13</sup> I did not learn of the deliberate segregationist tactics, used by Susan B. Anthony, of refusing to organize Black women in the South for fear of alienating Southern white women from the suffrage movement.<sup>14</sup> Nor did I speculate over what could have happened had there been more support by Southern white women of voting rights for Blacks in the 1960s: would Black legislators have been elected, more favorable to the ratification of the ERA? I puzzled over why Black women were not more active in the ERA campaign without figuring out how *women's rights* had been a code for *white* women's rights.

When we worked to establish a battered women's shelter, even a temporary place where a woman could come be safe from male vio-

lence, I didn't wonder if it would be experienced as a "white woman's home," or if a Thai woman with her own language needs, a Jewish woman with her own food needs, a Black woman with her need to be with another woman of color that night, if any of these women or others might feel so dubious of their safety with *us* that they would choose not to come.

And even as we worked in all these ways to try to change the world, to make it safer (we thought) for all women, I did not reflect on how hesitant I was to mention my lesbian identity except to a trusted few women. I did not feel safe with many of my political coworkers: I had lost my children; I could still lose my job; and I could lose my place in this fragile new space for women I thought we were making. After all, our answer to attacks on the ERA "because it would legalize homosexual marriages" was to say that this just wouldn't happen. *I* didn't answer that there was nothing wrong with lesbians or gay men wanting public recognition of our relationships.

I was, in fact, not seeking liberation as my particular, complex self. I was working desperately to make a new place where I could live safely with other women, while denying publicly a basic part of myself; while not seeing the subtle and overt pressures on other women to also deny their different aspects, in order to exist in the outside world, and in order to come to our place. In newspaper interviews I spoke obliquely of conscious choices, alternatives, possibilities. But I did not yet understand with my heart Lillian Smith's statement that "our right to be different is, in a deep sense, the most precious right we human beings have."<sup>15</sup>

By 1979 I was watching the second wave of the women's movement, which had swept through this Southern town about ten years later than the rest of the country, be increasingly directed into electoral politics and social services, and less and less into grassroots women's work. I knew that I felt painfully isolated as a lesbian, but I did not analyze this in the context of our tiny movement's failure to deal with issues of difference, nor did it occur to me, as Bettina Aptheker has said of women in the first wave of feminism, that "...in the context of American politics, the neglect of or acquiescence in racism would inevitably force...women into a more conservative and politically ineffectual mold."<sup>16</sup>

Instead, I withdrew from our struggling projects. In the evenings I didn't go to meetings but wrote poetry or read, stayed at home; it was so peaceful in my three-room apartment. At night I would burn candles on the mantelpiece, no sounds but the blapping of

my typewriter, or maybe the rain on the porch roof outside, fresh smells coming through the screen door. I did not have my children, but I had these rooms, a job, a lover, work I was making. I thought I had the beginnings of a place for myself.

But that year in November my idea of what kind of work it would take to keep my bit of space safe, my very idea of that space, my narrow conception, was shattered. In writing of the change in her own culture-bound perceptions, Joanna Russ speaks of “that soundless blow, which changes forever one’s map of the world.”<sup>17</sup> For me the blow was literal: the sound was rifle fire. In broad daylight, in Greensboro, North Carolina, about fifty miles from where I lived, Klansmen and Nazis drove into an anti-Klan demonstration, shouting “Nigger! Kike! Commie bastard!” They opened fire, killed five people: four white men, two of them Jews; one Black woman; all of them labor union organizers affiliated with the Communist Workers Party. The next day I saw in the newspaper an interview with Nancy Matthews, wife of one of the Klansmen. She said, “I knew he was a Klan member, but I don’t know what he did when he left home. I was surprised and shocked...”<sup>18</sup> But the Klansmen defended their getting out of their cars at the rally, rifles in hand, by saying they saw the car holding some Klanswomen being attacked and were “rushing to their rescue.”<sup>19</sup>

And I thought: I identify with the demonstrators; I am on *their* side; I’ve felt that danger. Yet in what way am I any different from the Klansman’s wife? Am I not surprised and shocked that this could happen? Yet it did, and there must be a history behind it. Do I have any notion, *any*, of what white men have been doing outside “home,” outside the circle of my limited white experience? I have my theory of how I lost my home because I am a woman, a lesbian, and that I am at risk because of who I am: then how do I explain the killing of Jews, Communists, a Black woman, the killing justified in the name of “protecting white women”?

I set out to find what had been done, what was being done in my name. I took Nancy Matthews’ words seriously, and began by asking what had happened outside my home, outside the circle of what I knew of me and my people where I grew up. I asked my mother: she recounted Klan activity in my Alabama home town in the 1920s, marches, cross burnings, a white woman beaten for “immorality,” but she didn’t know what they did to Blacks. Our family not implicated, but the contrary, she was proud to say: my grandfather the judge stood up to the Klan, political death in that era, by refusing to prosecute Black men who acted in self-defense.



I read Black history: Ida B. Wells' records show that Black men were lynched in my home county, and one in my home town, for allegedly raping white women, in 1893, shortly after my grandfather opened his law practice there.<sup>20</sup> I wondered what he did then—anything? And my grandmother, for whom I was named. What did she do? What did she think? I gathered family letters and documents. They told me explicitly what had never been said by my kin: that on both the maternal and paternal sides of my family, we had owned slaves—twelve to fifteen people, on small “family-sized” farms; that what place and money my family had got by the mid-nineteenth century, we had stolen from the work and lives of others; and that the very ground the crops grew in was stolen. I saw the government document that bountied 160 acres to my great-grandfather Williams for fighting the Seminoles in the Creek Wars, driving them from their homes in South Georgia. Bounty: a bonus for “good work.” I read transcripts of legal proceedings from after the Civil War, from testimony about the counties my folks had lived in, and where I had grown up: the voices of Black men and women came to me out of the grave, to tell of homes broken into or burned, beatings, rapes, murders by white men in retaliation for attempts to secure Black suffrage and a redistribution of land, voices telling of the attacks by men determined to keep control in the name of white Christian civilization.

These voices came to me: and I thought of my children and the grief and anger, the shame and failure I felt because I had not been able to fight for them, and have a home for me and them, against the man my husband, and the legal men, and this town, with its market house center where, within some people's memory, families *had* been sold apart from one another. The voices came: and I thought of my small but comfortable apartment, my modestly well-paying job at a Black college, gotten with my segregated-university education, gotten with the confidence and financial help of my family who had held onto a secure place for three and four generations.

During the time that I was first feeling all this information, again I lived in a kind of vertigo, a sensation of my body having no fixed place to be; the earth having opened, I was falling through space. I had had my home with other women, only to find that the very ground I was building on was the grave of people my kin had killed, and that my foundation, my birth culture, was mortared with blood.

Until this time, I had felt my expanding consciousness of oppression as painful but ultimately positive: I was breaking through to an understanding of my life as a woman, as a way to my *own* liberation. The cracking and heaving and buckling in my life was the process of freeing myself. I had felt keenly the pain of being punished for who I was, and had felt passionately the need for justice, for things to be set right. After Greensboro, I groped toward an understanding of injustice done to others, injustice done outside my narrow circle of being, and to folks *not* like me. I began to grasp, through my own experience, something of what the injustice might be like, began to imagine the extent of pain, anger, desire for change.

But I did not feel that my new understanding simply moved me into a place where I joined others to struggle *with* them against common injustices. Because I was implicated in the doing of some of these injustices, myself and my people, I felt in a struggle with myself, *against* myself. This breaking through did not feel like liberation but like destruction.

It felt like the catastrophic ending of a story from my childhood, one of Edgar Allen Poe's stories that I read late at night: The walls of a house split, zigzag, along a once barely noticeable crack, and the house of Usher crumbles with "a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters." A woman is the reason for the fall of that place of "feudal antiquity"; she is the owner's twin sister who dies and is buried in a chamber deep under the house. The brother, who suffers from a continual and inexplicable terror, "the grim phantasm FEAR," becomes terrified; his friend reads a romance to soothe him, a crude tale of a knight who conquers by slaying a dragon; the sounds in the story, of ripping wood, grating clanging brass, piercing shrieks, begin to be heard in the very room where the two men are seated. In horror the brother reveals that he had buried his sister alive, but he *had dared not speak*; the sounds are "the rending of her coffin and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison..." At that moment, the doors rush open; the lady stands before them, bloody in white robes, and then falls upon her brother in violent death-agonies, bearing him to the ground a corpse, shattering the house over them.

Read by me a hundred years after it was written in the 1840s, a time of intensifying Southern justification of slavery, Poe's description of the dread, nervousness, and fear of the brother, pacing through the house from "whence for many years, he had not ventured forth," could have been a description of my anxiety-ridden father, trapped inside a belief in white supremacy, a need to enforce the purity

of (white) women, the fear his world would crumble if anyone, including himself, questioned these taboos out loud.

And the entombment of the lady was my “protection”: the physical, spiritual, sexual containment which men of my culture have used to keep “their women” pure, our wombs to be kept sacred ground, not polluted by the dirty sex of another race; our minds, spirits and actions to be Christian, not “common,” but gentlewomanly, genteel, gentile; thereby ensuring that children born of us are the sons of their fathers, are “well-born,” of “good” blood, skin, family; and that children raised by us will be “well-raised,” not veering into wild actions, wayward behavior.

It was this protection that I felt one evening during the height of the civil rights demonstrations in Alabama, as the walls that had contained so many were cracking, when my father called me to his chair in the living room. He showed me a newspaper clipping, from some right-wing paper, about Martin Luther King, Jr., and told me that the article was about how King had sexually abused, used, young Black teenage girls. I believe he asked me what I thought of this; I can only guess that he wanted me to feel that my danger, my physical, sexual danger, would result from the release of others from containment, through the civil rights work of those like Dr. King. I felt frightened and profoundly endangered. Years away from knowing about FBI disinformation campaigns against the civil rights movement, I could only fear. It was the first, the only time, my father spoke of sex, in any way, to me.

I had romanticized “protection” in the hot thunderstormy summers of my adolescence as I read Tennyson’s poetry, kings and queens, knights and ladies. But protection during the actual Crusades of 1095 to 1270 C.E.\* had meant metal chastity belts locked around the genitals of their wives by Christian European knights, who traveled to Jerusalem to free the holy places from “the pollution and filth of the unclean,” from the Islamic Persians, who, when Jerusalem was taken in 1099, were beheaded, tortured, burned in flames, while the Jews of the city were herded into a synagogue and burned alive by the Crusaders.<sup>21</sup>

In the United States, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan have offered such “safety”: in 1867 “as an institution of Chivalry” for the purpose of “protecting the homes and women of the South”;<sup>22</sup> and in 1923 as “swift avenger of Innocence despoiled” and preservers of the

\*C.E. or Common Era, is an alternative to A.D., or Anno Domini, “in the year of the Lord.”

“sanctity of the home”;<sup>23</sup> and in 1964 as working with “sincere Christian devotion” to stop “mongrelization of the white race by Blacks and Jews”;<sup>24</sup> and in 1980 as defenders of the family and white civilization who in Klan rituals “advance to the next step of knightly honor,” are baptized, and vow that they are white America citizens, not Jews.<sup>25</sup> Within this protection, the role of women, as described by California Klan Corps member Dorraine Metzger, is to have “lots of babies to help the white race along...at least two or three babies because the minorities are just going crazy...babies, babies everywhere.”<sup>26</sup> What this “chivalric” behavior has meant, historically, is the systematic rape of Black women;<sup>27</sup> the torture, mutilation, and killing of Black men (over one thousand lynched between 1900 and 1915, many on the pretext of having raped a white woman);<sup>28</sup> the death of Leo Frank, a Jew accused of being the “perverted” murderer of a young white girl, falsely convicted and then lynched by the Knights of Mary Phagan, the beginning of a modern national Klan fifteen million strong at its heights in the 1920s.<sup>29</sup> This KKK “knightly honor” has also meant the harassment and attempted intimidation of any of “their women” who rejected the “protection”: white women who came South to teach Blacks during Reconstruction,<sup>30</sup> and who asserted their sexual autonomy during the 1920s;<sup>31</sup> white woman who spoke out against segregation, racism, anti-Semitism from the 1940s to the 1960s;<sup>32</sup> who asserted economic autonomy by fighting to work in the mines in the 1970s;<sup>33</sup> white women who were openly lesbian at the International Women’s Year Conference;<sup>34</sup> and those who are now doing anti-Klan organizing as open lesbians.<sup>35</sup>

It is this threatening “protection” that white Christian men in the U.S. are now offering to white Christian women. In his 1984 State of the Union address President Reagan linked his election to a “crusade for renewal...a spiritual revival” in America, denounced the “tragedy of abortion,” stated that “families stand at the center of our society,” and announced that this country has “brought peace where there was only bloodshed.”<sup>36</sup> All this was in language that paralleled the words of Jerry Falwell’s 1984 State of the Union address in which the Moral Majority leader preached a “moral awakening” for the country and condemned the “decadence” of abortion and gay rights.<sup>37</sup> All this in a year when abortion clinics are being bombed by a group called the Army of God;<sup>38</sup> when the Klansmen and Nazis indicted in the Greensboro massacre have been acquitted by an all-white jury because the U.S. Justice Department prosecution allowed them to plead that they were “patriotic citizens just like the Germans,” who

were also fighting against Communists;<sup>39</sup> when each U.S. citizen under the Reagan budget will pay \$555 more to the military and \$88 less to poor children and their mothers;<sup>40</sup> when a group of white farm wives visiting Washington, D.C. from the Midwest had U.S. policy in the Caribbean and Central America (including the invasion of Grenada) officially explained to them as a way to prevent “a Brown Horde...a massive wave of immigration,” if “Communist takeovers” occur in the region.<sup>41</sup>

If I have begun to understand that I am entrapped *as* a woman, not just by the sexual fears of the men of my group, but also by their racial and religious terrors; if I have begun to understand that when they condemn me as a lesbian and a free woman for being “dirty,” “unholy,” “perverted,” “immoral,” it is a judgment they have called down on people of color and Jews throughout history, as the men of my culture have shifted their justification for hatred according to their desires of the moment; if I have begun to understand something of the deep connection between my oppression and that of other folks; what is it that keeps me from acting, sometimes even from speaking out? Why do I *dare not speak* against anti-Semitism, against racism? What is it that keeps me from rejecting this “protection” at every level?

The image from my childhood, from Poe’s story, returns to me: the woman who escapes with superhuman effort from a coffin whose lid is fastened down by screws, from a vault with iron doors of immense weight. She may free herself, but then she dies violently, carrying home and kin with her, a catastrophe that she seems to cause, though what she is doing is fighting to live. Melodramatic; yet twenty years after I first read the story, when I began to admit to myself how I had been buried by my culture, confined in heart and body—and how this was connected to my sex, my race, my class, my religion, my “morality”—when I began to push through all this, I felt like my life was cracking around me, that my world was crumbling.

I think this is what happens, to a more or less extreme degree, every time we expand our limited being: it is upheaval, not catastrophe, more like a snake shedding its skin than like death. The old constriction is sloughed off with difficulty, but there is an expansion: not a change in basic shape, but an expansion, some growth, some reward for struggle and curiosity. Yet, if we are women who have gained privilege by our white skin or our Christian culture, but who are trying to free ourselves *as* women in a more complex way, we can experience this change as loss. Because it is: the old lies and ways of living—habitual, familiar, comfortable, fitting us like our

skin—*were* ours.

Our fear of the losses can keep us from changing. What is it, exactly, that we are afraid to lose?

As I try to strip away the layers of deceit that I have been taught, it is hard not to be afraid that these are like wrappings of a shroud and that what I will ultimately come to in myself is a disintegrating, rotting nothing: that the values I have at my core, from my culture, will only be those of negativity, exclusion, fear, death. And my feeling is based in the reality that the group identity of my culture has been defined often not by positive qualities, but by negative characteristics, by the *absence of*: the reality created by signs that say *No Dogs, Negroes, Or Jews*. We have gotten our jobs, bought our houses, borne and educated our children by the negatives: no niggers, no kikes, no wops, no dagoes, no spics, no A-rabs, no gooks, no queers.

We have learned this early, and so well. Every spring, almost, when I was in grammar school, our field trip would be an expedition to Moundville State Park, where part of our education was to file into a building erected over a “prehistoric” burial ground of indigenous people; to stand overlooking the excavated clay, dug out so that small canyons ran between each body, bundles of people’s bones, separating each from each, as if water had eroded the earth, except it was the hands of a probably white, probably Christian archaeologist from the university, meticulously breaking into the sacred ground. Floodlights exposed people curled or stretched in the final vulnerability of death, while we stood in the safe darkness of the balconies, looking down.

It has taken a long time for me to understand that this place was sacred not because it had been set aside for death, but because it was a place where spiritual and physical life returned to life—bones and bodies as seeds in the fertile darkness of the earth. It took me so long because so much in my culture is based on the principle that we are *not* all connected to each other; that folk who seem different should be excluded, or killed, and their living culture treated as dead objects.

No wonder, then, that if we have been raised up this way, when we begin to struggle with the reality of our anti-Semitism and racism, we may simply want to leave our culture behind, disassociate ourselves from it. In order to feel positively about ourselves, we may end up wanting not to be ourselves, and may start pretending to be someone else. This may happen especially when we start learning about the strong traditions of resistance and affirmation sustained for centuries by the very folks our folks were trying to kill.

Without a knowledge of this struggle for social justice in our

own culture, we may end up clothing our naked, negative selves with something from the positive traditions of identity which have helped folks to survive our people. We may justify this “cultural impersonation”<sup>42</sup> by our admiration and our need for heroines, as did one woman at an evening of shared spirituality which I attended: a Euro-American woman, very fair-haired and fair-complexioned, renamed herself in a ritual during which she took three women’s names, each from a different Native American culture; she explicitly stated that the names represented powers and gifts she desired—those of healing, leadership, love—qualities she felt she was lacking. We may also justify taking the identity of another as our own by stating a shared victimization, as I have heard from some Christian-raised women when they have mentioned that they have “always felt like a Jew” because of how they experienced exclusion and pain in their lives; sometimes they have then used this feeling to justify a conversion to Judaism, since they are “really Jewish” anyway.

Sometimes the impersonation comes because we are afraid we’ll be divided from someone we love if we are ourselves. This can take very subtle forms: as when I wrote a poem for my lover, whom I’d been dealing with about issues of Jewish-gentile differences. Anxious, without admitting it to myself, about the separation that opened at times between us, I blurred our difference in the poem by using images and phrases from Jewish women’s spiritual tradition as if they were from *my own*, using them to imply that she and I were in the same affirming tradition.

Sometimes we don’t pretend to *be* the other, but we take something made by the other and use it for our own: as I did for years when I listened to African-American church songs, hymns, gospels, and spirituals, the songs of suffering, endurance, and triumph. Always I would cry, baffled as to why I was so moved; I understood myself only after I read a passage in Mary Boykin Chestnut’s diary in which she described weeping bitterly at a slave prayer meeting where a Black lay preacher shouted “like a trumpet.” She said, “I would very much have liked to shout too.”<sup>43</sup> Then I understood that I was using Black people to weep for me, to express *my* sorrow at my responsibility, and that of my people, for their oppression; and I was mourning because I felt they had something I didn’t, a closeness, a hope, that I and my folks had lost because we had tried to shut other people out of our hearts and lives.

Finally I understood that I could feel sorrow during their music, and yet not confuse their sorrow with mine, or use their

resistance for mine. *I needed to do my own work*: express my sorrow and my responsibility myself, in my own words, by my own actions. I could hear their songs like a trumpet to me—a startling, an awakening, a reminder, a challenge—as were the struggles and resistance of other folk, but not take them as replacement for my own work.

In groups of white women I sometimes hear a statement like this: “We have to work on our own racism; after all, white people are responsible, so we shouldn’t expect women of color to help us, or to show us where we are wrong, or tell us what to do.” And I believe a similar generalization may sometimes be made about anti-Semitism: “Christian-raised women should take responsibility, and not expect Jewish women to explain our mistakes.” I agree with both of these statements, but I think we will act on them only when we know and *feel* them as part of a positive process of recreating ourselves, of making a self that is not the negative, the oppressor.

I believe that we don’t want to be like the U.S. government, stealing Native American land for national parks and test-bomb sites; nor like Boy Scouts who group by ancient tribal place names to practice dimly understood dances later performed at shopping malls. If we don’t want to perpetuate the Euro-American tradition of theft, of *taking* from others, in large and small ways, I believe we must remember our relation to other women in the context of a national history in which we can tour the U.S. Capitol, with its elaborate murals about freedom and its statues to liberty, but if we ask about the builders, we will *not* be told: “The building was the work of hired-out slaves.”<sup>44</sup> We must think about our relation to other women and their work if we can attend a celebration of International Women’s Day, and hear accounts of the brave women organizing in New York’s garment district, how their work was the foundation for our work, but we are *not* told: “Sixty-five percent of the women in the striking shirtwaist-makers, of the ‘Uprising of the 20,000’ were Jewish women.”<sup>45</sup>

When we begin to understand that we have benefited from the lives and work of others, when we begin to understand how false much of our sense of self-importance has been, we do experience a loss: our self-respect. To regain it, we need to find new ways to be in the world, those very actions a way of creating a positive self.

Part of this process, for me, has been to acknowledge to myself that there are things that I *do not know*—an admission hard on my pride, and harder to do than it sounds—and try to fill up the emptiness



of my ignorance about the lives of Jewish women and women of color. It has also been important for me to acknowledge to myself that most of my learning has been based on the work of these women, that I would never have grasped the limits on my understanding and action if I had not read the work of North American Indian women: Leslie Silko, Joy Harjo, the anthology *A Gathering of Spirit*, edited by Beth Brant; the work of Black women: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith; the work of Jewish women: Muriel Rukeyser, Ruth Seid, Anzia Yezierska, the lesbian anthology *Nice Jewish Girls*, edited by Evelyn Torton Beck; and the work of Asian-American women, Latinas, and other women of color in such collections as *The Third Woman*, edited by Dexter Fisher, *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*, edited by Alma Gomez, Cherrie Moraga and Mariana Romo-Carmona, and *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga.<sup>46</sup>

Partly I have regained my self-respect by rejecting false self-importance and by acknowledging the foundation of liberation effort in this country in the work of women, and men, who my folks have tried to hold down. For me this has meant not just reading their poetry, fiction, essays, but learning about the long history of political organizing in the U.S. by men and women trying to break the economic and cultural grip a Euro-American system has on their lives. But my hardest struggle has been to admit and honor their daily, constant work when this means their correction of *my* ignorance, resistance to *my* prejudice. Then I have to struggle to remember that I don't rule the world with my thoughts and actions like some judge in a tilt-back chair; and that by *listening* to criticisms, not talking back but listening, I may learn how I might have been acting or thinking like one of the old powers-that-be.

For me, to be quite exact, honoring this work means saying that I began to reexamine my relation as a white woman to safety, white men, and Black people, after I told as a *joke*, a ludicrous event, the story of the Klan marching in my home town: and a Black woman who was a fellow-teacher said abruptly to me, "Why are you laughing? It isn't funny." So, also, I began to reexamine my relation to the first people who lived in this country because a Shawnee woman, with family origins in the South, criticized my *use* of the Choctaw people's experience as parallel to the experience of the white women of my family: she asked, "Who of your relatives did what to who of mine?" I started to examine my grasp of the complexities of my anti-Semitism

when I spoke angrily about the disrespect of Arab male students, from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, toward me as a female teacher, while *also* saying I resented their loudness, their groupiness, the money that enabled them to take over our financially shaky Black college, while my Black students, men and women, were working night jobs to survive: and a Jewish woman, my lover, who was listening to all this, said quietly, “But your last comments are anti-Arab.”

And when a month ago I walked into my corner grocery, D.C. Supermarket, 8<sup>th</sup> and F Streets, N.E., with a branch of budding forsythia in my hand, and the owners, men and women I had termed vaguely “Oriental,” became excited, made me spell *forsythia*, wrote it in Korean characters on a piece of scratch paper so they would remember the name in English; and said it was a flower from *their* country, their country, pronouncing the name in Korean carefully for my untrained ears. Then I had to think again about what I understood was *mine* and what was *somebody else’s*. I had to think about what I didn’t understand about immigration and capitalism, and how I had taken without thinking, like picking a flower, the work and culture of Asian folk, without even being able to distinguish between the many different peoples.

As I’ve worked at stripping away layer after layer of my false identity, notions of skin, blood, heart based in racism and anti-Semitism, another way I’ve tried to regain my self-respect, to keep from feeling completely naked and ashamed of who I am, is to look at what I have carried with me from my culture that could help me in the process. As I have learned about the actual history, and present, of my culture, I didn’t stop loving my family or my home, but it was hard to figure out what from there I could be proud and grateful to have, since much of what I *had* learned had been based on false pride. Yet buried under the layers, I discovered some strengths:

I found a sense of connection to history, people, and place, through my family’s rootedness in the South; and a comparative and skeptical way of thinking, from my Presbyterian variety of Protestantism, which emphasized doubt and analysis. I saw that I had been using these skills all along as I tried to figure out my personal responsibility in a racist and anti-Semitic culture.

I found that my mother had given me hope, through the constancy of her regard for her mother and sisters and women friends, and through her stubbornness in the undertaking and completing of work. I found that my father had given me his manners, the “Pratts’

beautiful manners,” which could demonstrate respectfulness to others, if I paid attention; and he had given me the memory of his sorrow and pain, disclosing to me his heart that still felt wrongs. Somehow, my heart had learned that from his.

In my looking I also discovered a tradition of white Christian-raised women in the South, who had worked actively for social justice since at least 1849, the year a white woman in Bucktown, Maryland, hid Harriet Tubman during her escape from slavery, in her house on the Underground Railroad.<sup>47</sup> From the 1840s to the 1860s, Sarah and Angelina Grimké of South Carolina, living in the North, had organized both for the abolition of slavery and for women’s rights, linking the two struggles. Angelina had written:

*True, we have not felt the slaveholder’s lash; true, we have not had our hands manacled, but our hearts have been crushed.... I want to be identified with the negro; until he gets his rights, we shall never have ours.*<sup>48</sup>

In 1836 in her *Appeal to the Christian Women of Southern States*, she said:

*I know you do not make the laws, but...if you really suppose you can do nothing to overthrow slavery, you are greatly mistaken.... 1<sup>st</sup>. You can read on this subject. 2d. You can pray over this subject. 3d. You can speak on this subject. 4<sup>th</sup>. You can act on this subject....*<sup>49</sup>

When copies of the *Appeal* reached Charleston, the sisters’ home town, the papers were publicly burned, like other abolitionist literature, by the postmaster; and the police notified the Grimké’s mother that they would prevent Angelina from ever entering the city again. In a letter to her family to explain her and her sister’s writings, Angelina said:

*It cost us more agony of soul to write these testimonies than any thing we ever did.... We wrote them to show the awful havock which arbitrary power makes in human hearts and to incite a holy indignation against an institution which degrades the oppressor as well as the oppressed.*<sup>50</sup>

From the 1920s to the 1940s, Jessie Daniel Ames of Texas led an anti-lynching campaign, gathering women like herself into the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. Begun several decades after Ida B. Wells first organized, as a Black

woman, against lynching, the ASWPL included, by the early 1940s, over 109 women's organizations, auxiliaries of major Protestant denominations, and national and regional federations of Jewish women, with a total membership of over four million. The women used a variety of methods to stop the violence done by the white men who were of their kin or their social group, including: investigative reporting for the collection and publication of facts about lynching locally; attempts to change white-run newspaper reporting of lynchings toward a less sensational and inflammatory treatment; signature campaigns to get written pledges from white sheriffs and other law enforcement officers to prevent lynchings; publication in their communities of the names of white "peace officers" who gave up prisoners to lynch mobs; mobilization of local peer pressure in the white community and face-to-face or over-the-phone confrontations with white men by the women; and direct intervention by the women to persuade a mob to stop its violence, including one ASWPL woman in Alabama who stopped the lynching of a Black man accused of raping her seven-year-old daughter.<sup>51</sup> The Association repudiated the "myth of mob chivalry"; its statement of purpose said that "...the claim of the lynchers [is] that they were acting solely in the defense of womanhood...we dare not longer permit this claim to pass unchallenged nor allow those bent upon personal revenge and savagery to commit acts of violence and lawlessness in the name of women."<sup>52</sup>

Lillian Smith of Georgia, who traced her political roots to the ASWPL, was an eloquent novelist, essayist, and speaker against the force of segregation from the 1940s to the 1960s. She edited, with Paula Snelling, the magazine *South Today*, and ran a summer camp for girls where she raised social issues like racism and nuclear war by having her campers create dramatic enactments of the struggle between justice and injustice as they saw it in their daily lives. She is the woman who wrote in "Putting Away Childish Things":

*Men who kill, riot, use foul words in the name of race  
will kill, riot, use foul words in the name of anything  
that safely provides outlet for their hate and frustrations....  
They are the "bad" people. And we? We are the people  
who dream the good dreams and let the "bad" people  
turn them into nightmares.... We need ourselves to  
become human.... When we reserve this humanity of  
ours, this precious quality of love, of tenderness, of  
imaginative identification, for people only of our skin  
color (or our family, our class), we have split our lives....<sup>53</sup>*

In the 1940's Nelle Morton of Tennessee was also actively organizing interracial college chapters of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen in the South, specifically to protest anti-Semitic and Klan activity, as well as starting Southern interracial summer camps for Black, white, Arab, and Asian students.<sup>54</sup> During the same time, Anne Braden from Alabama was moving from being a reporter on the 1945 trial of Willie McGee, a Black man accused of rape, into a lifetime of activist work. She is the woman who has said:

*I believe that no white woman reared in the South—or perhaps anywhere in this racist country—can find freedom as a woman until she deals in her own consciousness with the question of race. We grow up little girls—absorbing a hundred stereotypes about ourselves and our role in life, our secondary position, our destiny to be a helpmate to a man or men. But we also grow up white—absorbing the stereotypes of race, the picture of ourselves as somehow privileged because of the color of our skin. The two mythologies become intertwined, and there is no way to free ourselves from one without dealing with the other.<sup>55</sup>*

And in the late 1950s and early 1960s many young Southern women came out of their church experience to work in the civil rights movement, and later in the women's liberation movement: Sandra "Casey" Cason and Dorothy Dawson from Texas, Sue Thrasher and Cathy Cade from Tennessee.<sup>56</sup> In my looking I found these women who had come before me, whose presence proved to me that change is possible, and whose lives urged me toward action.

I have learned that as the process of shaping a negative self identity is long, so the process of change is long, and since the unjust world is duplicated again every day, in large and small, so I must try to recreate, every day, a new self striving for a new just world. What do we *do* to create this new self? Lillian Smith said: Do *something* to overcome our "basic ambivalence of feelings," by which we move through our way of life "like some half-dead thing, doing as little harm (and as little good) as possible, playing around the edges of great life issues."<sup>57</sup>

There *are* lists of "Things To Do"—Smith published one herself in 1943.<sup>58</sup> We can learn something from such a list, but most of it is common sense: we already know that work against anti-Semitism

and racism can range from stopping offensive jokes, to letters to the editor, to educational workshops, to changing the law, to writing poetry, to demonstrations in the street, to a restructuring of the economy. But because knowing what to do in a situation that you suspect may be racist or anti-Semitic involves judgment, and ethics, and feelings in the heart of a new kind than we were raised with, we will only be able to act effectively if we gather up, not just information, but the threads of life that connect us to others.

Even though we may have begun to feel the pull of the ties that connect us to women different from ourselves, we may not have the confidence to follow that connection toward a new world. For, as Bernice Johnson Reagon says: “We aren’t from our base acculturated to be women people, capable of crossing our first people boundaries—Black, White, Indian...”<sup>59</sup> When we discover truths about our home culture, we may fear we are losing our self: our self-respect, our self-importance. But when we begin to act on our new knowledge, when we begin to cross our “first people boundaries,” and ally ourselves publicly with “the others,” then we may fear that we will lose the people who are our family, our kin, be rejected by “our own kind.”

If we come from backgrounds where anti-Semitism and racism were overt and acceptable, then our deep fear may be that action against these hatreds will be, as Lillian Smith says, “a betrayal of childhood love for our parents—for most of us have never learned to separate this love from the ‘right’ and the ‘wrong’ which our parents taught us.”<sup>60</sup> If we betray them, then they will repudiate us. But even if we are from liberal backgrounds, I believe we know, also on a deep level, that we can go “too far.”

If we ally ourselves with the “other” group, in a direct, personal, or public way, even if it is an issue of justice, and if this threatens our folks’ self-interest, or definition of self, then there is the risk of our being “thrown out” by them. It is a real fear. We know the stories: the white Southern women whose family rejected her when she began civil rights work; the woman whose mother didn’t speak to her for seven years after she married a Black man; the woman whose parents disowned her after she became a lesbian and wouldn’t see her for twenty years.

This is a fear that can cause us to be hesitant in making fundamental changes or taking drastic actions that differ from how we were raised. We don’t want to lose the love of the first people who

knew us; we don't want to be standing outside the circle of home, with nowhere to go.

Sometimes it is possible to make a fundamental change and still reenter the familiar circle: when this happens it can seem like the future, not the present, like a new world happening. I have been there for a day, in that place, as a grown woman with my mother when she welcomed me at home with the woman who, as a lesbian, as a Jew, as my lover, I feared she might treat as an enemy. But she made a place for us, fed us in the kitchen, family not company, noon dinner. As she cooked butterbeans, she told us stories: how she'd talked to the tortoise she'd found while weeding in the daylilies: "I spoke to him. I said, 'Mr. Tortoise, now where are you going to?' but he still didn't answer me." We talked of none of our differences that day.

But when we act on our beliefs close to home, there is also the possibility of upheaval in that familiar place. Then we may again dread destruction: as when I told my mother, last August, that I had gone on the March on Washington for Jobs, Peace, and Freedom, the twentieth anniversary of the march led by Dr. King. I hadn't gone to Selma in the sixties, thirty miles from my home: where white police drove marchers who were heading toward Montgomery back up the bridge arched like a hill, high over the cold water of the Alabama River, drove them like cattle back into town. I had not marched in Selma, so I made a beginning at the anniversary march.

Walking as a lesbian, with a group of Third World and white lesbians, with the thousands, with the half-million people streaming slowly between the monumental government buildings, past the hot marble walls, I affirmed to myself that I finally was grasping the interconnectedness of me and "the others."

My act seemed more symbolic than challenging; nevertheless, what I had done quite safely in Washington was wrong to my mother: "Some day you will understand that what you all are doing is wrong." From her conversation, and later letters, I learned that the "you" doing wrong included not just the marchers, mostly African Americans, but also myself, Joan, lesbians, feminists, and Jews who named themselves Zionists because, according to my father, such Jews were "trying to control the world." She loved me and felt much pain, and shame: I was going the wrong way. I had walked away, and seemed to have turned my back on home.

The profound differences in our beliefs opened like a chasm between us, and I couldn't help but fear a separation more sharp than the old love between us was strong. (And yes, Mama, even here I risk

it again, in this writing, which I have hesitated over so long, out of that fear: I say I do love you, and I am compelled *by my own life* to strive for a different place than the one we have lived in.)

I believe that as we begin to act, to try to do something about anti-Semitism or racism, it is not just kin we fear losing, but friends who are our family now. If we define ourselves as feminist, we may have worked hard to gather together women friends who will be a replacement for our blood-kin, from whom we are separated by the disruptive economics of our culture. Over the last ten years we have been building a women's community: festivals, yearly conferences, political organizations, land groups, businesses, magazines, newspapers. But if we are from families and a culture that enforced, either overtly or subtly, separation by skin and blood, I believe we need to look seriously at what limitations we have placed in this new world on who we feel close to, who we feel comfortable with, who we feel "safe" with. We can ask ourselves what we are doing *actively* to make our lives and work different from that of women who say they joined the Klan because it gives them a family closeness, a "white family," like "sisters," Klanswomen who support the Equal Rights Amendment, and express sympathy with the women's movement that has helped them gain confidence to work outside the home, start their own businesses, be more independent.<sup>61</sup>

I believe we can question what pressures we may put on women in our communities to be *like us*, to assimilate to our culture, be like our family, so we can feel comfortable, "at home." In what ways do we press women to talk like us, think like us, fight like us: the Arab woman who is told by Anglo friends that she fights "too angrily," the Black woman who is thought to be "too loud" by white women at a party. How does what we do differ from the obliteration practiced by the rest of the dominant culture?

When women differ from us by ethnicity, by "blood," but are white-skinned, how much does our desire for them to be like us have to do with our thinking racially in either-or-categories—either you are white, or you are not—and how much does that have to do with our desire to ignore the history of rape by white men, the forced assimilation caused by rape? How much does avoiding the complexities of women's existences have to do with our not wanting to ask: Who, actually, is *in* our family? What are the possible connections by blood? And what have been the intimate daily connections, like mine to the Black woman who raised me, that we have been taught not to honor with the responsibility of family?



When we begin to ask ourselves in what ways we have re-created in our new world, our women's world, a replica of our segregated culture-bound homes, then we also raise other questions: What will happen if we challenge the racism or anti-Semitism here? Will this mean destruction of our work?

We hear the objections made by women like ourselves, in many different kinds of women's gatherings, when issues of diversity have been raised: from academic feminists at the 1981 National Women's Studies Conference who feared a "loss of unity...a disintegration," because the focus for all workshops was "Women Respond to Racism"; from women activists at an organizing conference who asked why we had to talk about homophobia and racism, couldn't we "just be women together"; from lesbians at a cultural conference who didn't want "divisive issues" raised during one of the few times they had "to be together as lesbians"; from women who felt that bringing up anti-Semitism was just adding another troublesome item on a list of political correctness.

We hear these objections, and we know how much they echo our own. We ask: What if I say I need this to change? Will I be the next one unwelcome here? Then comes the fear of nowhere to go: no old home with family; no new one with women like ourselves; and no place with folks who have been systematically excluded by ours. And with our fear comes the question: Can I maintain my principles against my need for the love and presence of others like me? It is lonely to be separated from others because of injustice, but it is also lonely to break with our own in opposition to that injustice.

But the fear of loss of community because issues of diversity are raised is like the fear of loss of self when we discover the connections between racism and anti-Semitism and our life as women: if we can go to the other side of this fear, we can see where there are also gains. Every time we speak or act we will likely find out more about how we need to go on changing, and meet other women who also want their lives to be the creation of a more just, more loving world.

Every year for the past five years I have gone South to a lesbian writers' conference, driving between red clay banks, past walls of kudzu. It is a small gathering, maybe sixty to eighty women, sometimes two or three Black women, a few Jewish women, the rest of us white, Christian-raised, of different classes. Every year we struggle over the same ground: over when, and how, and even whether, issues

of racism and anti-Semitism and other matters of difference will be faced in that brief, four-day community—which *is*, objectors point out, about *writing*; which *is*, those of us on the other side say, about *life*. I have learned from the going back and back to the same place, and to the same people often, since many of us return every year, what a struggle it is to change my habits of a lifetime, and the beliefs of centuries we all inherited. I have learned from trying to explain *exactly* how issues which seem to be about “other” people are connected to my life as a lesbian. I get tired of trying to do this, and I get scared doing this, but every year it is a place also of great hope for me because of what I learn there.

I learned to think more clearly about the context of “safe” women’s space, when I researched the land where our gathering was located, to make specific the connection between our women’s world and the surrounding countryside. When I discovered it was land taken from the Creeks by the State of Georgia with the collusion of a man who was also a slave trader, and that it had been, in the 1960s, a regional Klan organizing site, I could comment that as lesbians we shared these enemies, men who even today wished us dead because of who we were. What I also learned was that these facts alone merely discouraged and depressed women who were already struggling with daily small-town repression as women and as lesbians, and that I needed to figure out positive reasons for our dealing with racial and cultural difference.

From this conference, I learned how *structural* racism and anti-Semitism are, not just in male-dominated national government, but in a women’s organization when it is started by a non-diverse group. If the diversity is not in the planning sessions, a shift later, in how and what decisions are made, is exceedingly difficult. I learned that this didn’t stop us from struggling with the issues of difference anyway. I learned that there are ways of creating songs, rituals, stories, poems, not to escape, but to carry us forward with some hope in the struggle, so that we do not become suicidal with self-criticism.

I learned something of how the process of criticism has been shaped, for women like me, by Christianity. When I objected, strongly, to a woman’s writing which I felt to be racist, another woman told me later that she didn’t listen to my explanation, because I had reminded her of her self-righteous grandmother, who used to be sweet to her in private, and then, when they got to church, would expose all her sins publicly before the congregation.

I learned from this that I had to be more clear about why I was

personally hurt by something that was anti-Semitic or racist, so that I wasn't criticizing another woman like me in a way that seemed to be I'm-good-and-you're-bad. In this particular case, I realized that my fumbling comments had been that the writer's description of a Black woman (from a historical novel) was stereotypical, based on "jungle animal" metaphors: I had criticized the *words* as racist. But my actual distress came because the Black woman was graphically portrayed in the act of being an erotic slave to a white woman; I realized that the reading of the passage out loud had intrigued me, sexually, and that then I felt angry and ashamed because I was being drawn into, and was participating in, the degradation of a Black woman. And though I didn't understand this at all at the moment, I was able to figure it out in the process of trying to explain my objection to other women, who were upset that I had voiced my criticism.

From this experience and others, I also learned that unless a method or a time for criticism is structured into a gathering, I am on my own responsibility to comment on something I feel is insulting. When and how to do so is usually confusing, and I've learned that speaking-up is often seen as inappropriate or disruptive or threatening to the unity of the group, even when I have felt that the insulting comment or act is what has really been disruptive. And I have learned that folks may criticize the style, timing, and appropriateness of a challenge to racism or anti-Semitism to avoid examining the questionable act or comment.

When I passively witness the repetition of the old ways of doing things, and do nothing, I feel my rigid circle close around me, tightening, painful: I feel myself closing into a narrow world, away from the friendships and the creative possibilities of a place where diverse women live. In my inertia and ignorance, I do not always speak or act. When I do, there is fear, but also the exhilaration of going forward toward that place.

If we push our work against racism and anti-Semitism beyond our "home," beyond our women's groups, what fears make us hesitate to act, what gains come from acting? Last fall I went home to speak publicly, outside my women's community, about my struggles to free myself as a woman, as a lesbian, and about the connection of this to my struggle to reject what I had been taught as a white person and as a Christian. As I prepared for the trip, I began to have nightmares; and what I feared was this:

On the night before my birthday, I slept and thought I heard

someone walking through my apartment. I wanted it to be my lover, but it was my father, walking unsteadily, old, carrying something heavy, a box, a heavy box, which he put down by my desk. He came through the darkness, smoking a cigarette, glints of red sparks, and sat down on my bed, wanting to rest: he was so tired. I flung my hands out angrily, told him to go, back to my mother; but crying, because my heart ached: he was my father and so tired. He left, and when I looked, the floor was a field of sandy dirt, with a diagonal track dragged through it, and rows of tiny green seed just sprouting.

The box was still there, with what I feared: my responsibility for what the men of my culture have done, in my name, my responsibility to try to change what my father had done, without even knowing what his secrets were. I was angry. Why should I be left with this? I didn't want it; I'd done my best for years to reject it; I wanted no part of what was in it—the benefits of my privilege, the restrictions, the injustice, the pain, the broken urgings of the heart, the unknown horrors.

And yet it is mine: I am my father's daughter in the present, living in a world he and my folks helped to create. A month after I dreamed this, he died. I honor the grief of his life by striving to change much of what he believed in; and my own grief by acknowledging that I saw him caught in the grip of racial, sexual, cultural fears that I am still trying to understand in myself.

The second fear came in a dream on the same night: I was in a car parked near a barn in the country, at night, at home, near a field that could have been the green seeds grown to corn. A young white man drove his tractor past me, then walked toward me; he could have been any of the boys I went to high school with. He had a shotgun in his hands and he *looked* at me: he knew *who* I was, not just by my family, but as the kind of person I was, and he knew I was no longer on his side. He aimed the gun and fired; I felt a hot shock in my head: death.

It was the first time I'd had this dream, but other women dealing with similar issues in their lives have since told me of having such nightmares. It is, in its most extreme form, the fear that can make us hesitate to act: the fear that if we challenge the men of our culture, if we break with them by saying publicly, *Do not do your violent work in our names*, then we will be punished.

But this is a dream of their inventing, where all the power lies in *their* hands. It is a dream based in their fear, and if we let ourselves

be ruled by that fear, we are acquiescing in the lies taught us about who we are as women: the lies that say we are isolated, helpless, can not work with other women to widen the place of change.

Instead of this nightmare, I prefer to think of this possibility: In the early 1960s, as men in White Citizen Councils in the South planned severe economic reprisals against political Blacks, they counted on “their women” to agree to fire the Black maids and cooks working for their families. What if all the white women had refused? Had understood their place at the edge between the force of containment and the power of liberation? And had chosen to stand with the other women?

Instead, I prefer to remember that when I went South last fall I *was* with such women who were making that choice: A gathering of workers from battered women’s shelters, the Southern Coalition Against Domestic Violence, met to work intensely at finding the connections between racial and cultural hatreds and woman-hating, as part of their work of making shelters into places where women could be safe from male violence, and also safe in their own complex identities.

We are offered some false gains to keep us from making the choice to stand with women different from ourselves. One is a material security equal to the men of our culture, if we side with *them* as we move outside the home, into the larger world. To draw us toward them, we are offered, not the nightmare image of the slaughtered woman, but images like the one that, as a girl, I saw flashed on the screen in a darkened theatre: a beautiful young white woman is weeping because her past affluence is gone, her plantations and her slaves; her family is without food, the garden trampled. But she digs her hands into the red clay and vows: “I’m never going to be hungry again. No, nor any of my folks. If I have to steal or kill—as God is my witness, I’m never going to be hungry again.” She goes on to become financially secure, using white men for protection when necessary, using everyone she can during the social revolution of Emancipation and Reconstruction.

When I was a child, Scarlett O’Hara was a heroine as a woman within the myth of my land; today she is to me a person ready to take what is offered to her as a woman who is white, a lady of the culture, with no caring about where the land came from and who has worked it, willing to leave all others behind except her immediate family, in order to seize a narrow place of safety that she foolishly thinks is secure: the place of equality with white men.

That this is foolish security is evidenced by the number of women in poverty in this country, white women as well as women of color, a number increasing every year.<sup>62</sup> Anne Braden points out that historically the struggle for economic and social justice for the most disadvantaged group, which in the U.S. are African Americans once held in slavery, has substantially benefited all other folk who were not in control of land and money; she likens this to a shift in the foundation stone of a house that causes all else to move.<sup>63</sup>

Today the economic foundation of this country is resting on the backs of women of color here and in Third World countries: they are harvesting the eggplants and lettuce for Safeway, they are typing secretarial work sent by New York firms to the West Indies by satellite.<sup>64</sup> The real gain in our material security as white women would come most surely if we did not limit our economic struggle to salaries of equal or comparable worth to white men in the U.S., but if we expanded this struggle to a restructuring of this country's economy so that we do not live off the lives and work of Third World women.

A second false gain that we, if we are privileged women, are being offered now is more "protection": this time not just in our "sacred homes," but protection of us living in the U.S. from the "powers of evil" in the rest of the world. The foreign policy of the Republican administration is being influenced by evangelical Christian beliefs that hold the U.S. has a divine calling to "protect the free world" from godless, "perverted" Communism, and from "domination" by any world leaders whose religion is not within a narrow "Judeo-Christian" tradition.<sup>65</sup> This apocalyptic thinking interprets all world events as enacting Biblical prophecies, especially those in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelations, which predict, evangelicals think, a struggle between the "forces of good and evil," culminating in the battle of Armageddon in Israel.

Christian evangelical theology believes that the forces of "good" *will* win such a battle in order to bring the second coming of Christ, the destruction of the present world, and the creation of a new heaven and earth.<sup>66</sup> Thus, theology-shaped U.S. foreign policy has supported Israel, but *not* because Jews who have been expelled from or killed in other countries for thousands of years need a place to be, as Jews. Instead, President Reagan has said, as have Christian evangelicals, that Israel is important to the U.S. as the only "base for democracy" in the Middle East, as a place that the Christian forces of good can *use* in their battle with the "evil empire" of communism.<sup>67</sup>

In fact, in evangelical theology, the establishment of the state of Israel, the growth of an "Arab-Moslem confederacy," the rise of

“red” Russia and China, are seen as important only as preparation for the second coming of Christ; the Christian messiah will come again only when Arabs and Jews in the Middle East “fight a battle into which all the world’s nations will be drawn”—Armageddon.<sup>68</sup> All non-Christians will suffer horribly in these “end-days,” which are described as specifically a time of “purification” for Jews. *Christian* believers will escape this holocaust, which some of them think might be a “limited” nuclear war, because they will be caught up into heaven in “the Rapture,” and return to earth only after Christ’s coming has prevented the destruction of the planet. Such “Christian” believers, in their Arab-hating and their Jew-hating (disguised as Jew-loving, the right-wing Friends of Israel) have no motivation to work for peace in the Middle East, no interest in the needs of both Palestinians and Jews for safe homes, but only an interest in continuing the long history of imperialist nations in pitting the two peoples against each other. As the leader of one of those “Christian” nations, Reagan has said, to Jerry Falwell, that he believes “We’re heading very fast for Armageddon.”<sup>69</sup>

The U.S. economy is being mobilized to enact a Christian morality play, with U.S. soldiers, or forces in the pay of the U.S., acting as an Army of God, fighting “anti-Communist” interventions throughout the world, in the Caribbean and in Central America, as well as in the Middle East. In the statements of the men running this country, I hear echoes of the condemnation, by my folks, of the civil rights movement of Black people, as impoverished Third World people fighting for economic and political freedom are condemned as “communists” and “Godless.” Under these comments are the old racist beliefs: that people of color are “uncivilized,” “immoral,” “dirty,” “naturally evil,” “need to be controlled.” Meanwhile, Third World countries, like Nicaragua, that need to use limited resources for literacy and health campaigns, for building a self-sufficient economy, instead must spend enormous sums of money for arms to defend against a U.S. that is reenacting the Crusades, trying to “save” the Western hemisphere.

And the people at home supposedly protected by these actions are suffering also. To fund the military build-up, cuts have been made in health programs, educational programs, job training programs, with disproportionately severe effects on all women and children, and on people of color, while about ninety-five hundred jobs for all women are lost for every one billion dollars shifted from civilian to military spending; and 63 percent of the current U.S. budget goes to pay for preparation for war and for the debt of past wars.<sup>70</sup> The Children’s Defense Fund has said, “One third of President Reagan’s proposed military increase could lift every single American child out of

poverty.”<sup>71</sup> Again, it seems that if we are women who want a place for ourselves and for other women, and our children, in a just, peaceful, free world, we need to be saying: *Not in my name.*

From where I live I can walk down Maryland Avenue to the Capitol; it’s just a few blocks. Nowadays the oak trees are blooming and there is a green pool of fallen pollen under each tree. There are concrete barricades all around the Capitol building now; around the White House, too. After the U.S. invaded Grenada last fall, October of 1983, the barricades went up; they are supposed to prevent “terrorist attacks.” Sometimes, when I’m down near the White House, I veer around the barricades and stand at the fence, just to talk out loud through the railings, toward the powers that are behind the guards and the ground-to-air missiles buried in the lawn. I say, “Shame!” I say, “I repudiate your actions done in my name.”

From the White House, along the Mall, up to the Capitol, all the buildings are on a monumental scale, but the Capitol dome could be the courthouse in my home town, just larger and better lit at night: the same men running things. It is hard not to feel discouraged, hard to hold on to the power of change. Nevertheless, as I walk around my neighborhood, I hang on to these bits of possibility:

I got hopeful, after the invasion of Grenada and the bombing of U.S. Marines who were occupying Lebanon, when I talked to my oldest son on the phone; he asked me, urgently, what I thought of these events. He said that he, himself, was “ashamed” of the United States, that we were “acting like a bully”; he dreaded war, his generation being called up to fight. We ended up talking about the draft, about the possibilities of resistance.

Going down to the Air & Space Museum, at the Mall, to leaflet against U.S. invasions in Central America with my small action group, gave me hope, and that we are planning a gay and lesbian protest of the North Carolina Klan/Nazi acquittals, down in front of the Justice Department. And I get hope from being in a consciousness-raising group of white women, Christian-raised and Jewish, who meet to try to grasp the impact of racism on our lives, in this town that is now our home town, and within the communities of women we belong to. We try to help each other think of ways to change, actions to take.

And I get hopeful when I think that with this kind of work there is the possibility of friendship, and love, between me and the many other women from whom I have been separated by my culture, and by my own beliefs and actions, for so long. For years, I have had a



recurring dream: Sleeping, I dream I am reconciled to a woman from whom I have been parted—my mother, the Black woman who raised me, my first woman lover, a Jewish woman friend. In the dream we embrace, with the sweetness that can come when all is made right. I catch a glimpse of this possibility in my dream. It appears in waking life with my friends sometimes, with my lover. Not an easy reconciliation, but one that may come when I continue the struggle with myself and the world I was born into.

## Notes

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1. Barbara Deming, *We Are All Part of One Another*, ed. Jane Meyerding (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1984), p. 326. Other works by Barbara Deming that have helped me include *Prison Notes* (New York: Grossman, 1966); *Revolution and Equilibrium* (New York: Grossman, 1971); *We Cannot Live Without Our Lives* (New York: Grossman/Viking, 1974); and *Remembering Who We Are* (Pagoda Publications, 1981). *Prison Notes* was reissued as *Prisons That Could Not Hold* with an additional essay, and photographs by Joan E. Biren, on Deming's civil disobedience in connection with the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1985).
2. Deming, "Confronting One's Own Oppression," in *We Are All Part of One Another*, p. 237.
3. In publication from 1969, except for a one-year lapse, this newsletter went through many transformations and became *Feminary* magazine, a lesbian-feminist magazine "for the South." It was edited by a Durham, North Carolina, collective

of women, which, in its last year there, included Cris South, Eleanor Holland, Helen Langa, Raymina Y. Mays, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Mab Segrest, and Aida Wakil. In 1984 it was transferred to a collective of women in San Francisco; the last issue of *Feminary* was published in the summer of 1985.

4. Sara Evans, "Southern White Women in a Southern Black Movement," in *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 23-59.
5. Patsy Sims, *The Klan* (New York: Stein and Day, 1978), pp. 108-109.
6. Susan Laurence Davis, *Authentic History of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865-1877* (New York: S. L. Davis, 1924), p. 121.
7. Mrs. S. E. F. (Laura Martin) Rose, *The Ku Klux Klan or Invisible Empire* (n.p.: 1913), p. 22.
8. John Stewart, *KKK Menace: The Cross Against People* (Durham, North Carolina: John Stewart, 1980), p. 30.
9. Works by Charles Waddell Chesnut include *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), set in Fayetteville, North Carolina; *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), set in Wilmington, North Carolina; and *The Colonel's Dream* (1905).
10. Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Atheneum, 1980), pp. 73, 79-84.
11. Carson McCullers published *Reflections in a Golden Eye* in 1941.
12. Bertha Harris' *Lover* was published in 1976 (Plainfield, Vermont: Daughters, Inc.). More information and creative discussion of Southern lesbian writers can be found in Mab Segrest's articles, "Southern Women Writing: Toward a Literature of Wholeness," in *Feminary*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1979); and "Lines I Dare Write: Lesbian Writing in the South," in *Southern Exposure*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1981), both collected in Segrest's *My Mama's Dead Squirrel: Lesbian Essays on Southern Culture* (Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1985).

13. Bettina Aptheker, "Abolitionism, Woman's Rights and the Battle Over the Fifteenth Amendment," in *Women's Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex, and Class in American History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), p. 32.
14. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 230.
15. Lillian Smith, *The Winner Names the Age*, ed. Michelle Cliff (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 154.
16. Aptheker, p. 50.
17. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), p. 137.
18. "Death Suspects 16 to 60," Fayetteville (N.C.) *Observer*, November 6, 1979, p. A1.
19. "Klan/Nazi Defendants Claim Self-Defense," (Durham) *North Carolina Anvil*, October 31, 1980, p. 10.
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22. Rose, p. 1.
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24. Sims, p. 243.
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28. *The Chronological History of the Negro in American*, comp. Peter M. and Mort N. Bergman (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 376.
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30. *Testimony Taken By the Joint Select Committee to Inquire Into the Conditions of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States* (Washington, D.C., 1872), vols. 8-10.
31. Henry P. Frey, *The Modern Ku Klux Klan* (Boston: Small and Maynard, 1922) pp. 189, 191.
32. Anthony P. Dunbar, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929-1959* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), pp. 230, 241.
33. Letter from Mary Weidler, American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama, Birmingham, September 26, 1979.
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35. Conversation about National Anti-Klan Network organizing in North Carolina with E. Holland, Washington, D.C., April 30, 1984.
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37. Letter from the Moral Majority, Inc., February 9, 1984.
38. "More Abortion Clinics Firebombed," *off our backs*, May 1984, p. 3.
39. "Green Light to Get Reds," *The Guardian*, April 25, 1984, p. 18.
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  45. Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in American* (New York: New American Library, 1975), pp. 140-141.
  46. *This Bridge Called My Back* has an extensive bibliography of writing by and about women of color; it appeared in its second edition in 1984 Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. *Cuentos* and *Home Girls* were also published by Kitchen Table Press. *A Gathering of Spirit* was originally published as a special issue of *Sinister Wisdom* magazine and then reprinted by Firebrand Books. *Third Woman* was published in 1980 by Houghton-Mifflin. *Nice Jewish Girls* was reprinted by Beacon Press in 1989. A more recent comprehensive anthology of writings by women of color is *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa, published by Aunt Lute Foundation in 1990. Specific books by the authors I named that have helped me are: Leslie Marmon Silko's novel, *Ceremony* (New York: New American Library, 1977); Joy Harjo's poems, *She Had Some Horses* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1983); Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Holt Rinehart, 1970) and *Song of Solomon* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Alice Walker's novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970); stories, *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982); and essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984); Audre Lorde's essays, *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, New York: The Crossing Press, 1984); Muriel Rukeyser's poems in a collected edition by McGraw-Hill in 1982; *Wasteland*, a novel by Ruth Seid [Jo Sinclair] (New York: Harper, 1946); Anzia Yezierska's autobiography, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (New York: Persea, 1950).
  47. Aptheker, p. 35.
  48. Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina* (New York: Schocken, 1971), p. 353.

49. Lerner, p. 139.
50. Lerner, p. 267.
51. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 175, 223-253.
52. Jessie Daniel Ames, *The Changing Character of Lynching, 1931-1941* (Atlanta, Georgia: Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 1941), p. 64.
53. Lillian Smith, in *From the Mountain: Selections from ...South Today*, eds. Helen White and Redding S. Suggs, Jr. (Memphis, Tennessee: Memphis State University Press, 1972), pp. 131, 136-137.
54. Dunbar, p.230.
55. Anne Braden, *Free Thomas Wanley: A Letter to White Southern Women* (Louisville, Kentucky: Southern Conference Educational Fund, 1972).
56. Evans, pp. 33-36.
57. Smith, "Addressed to Intelligent White Southerners," in *From the Mountain*, pp. 116-117.
58. Smith, pp. 116-131.
59. Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," in *Home Girls*, p. 361.
60. Smith, "Putting Away Childish Things," in *From the Mountain*, p. 135.
61. Bonnie Wolf, unpublished paper, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981, p. 17. For other discussions about femaleness and white Christian culture, from the point of view of white women, see Maureen Brady, "An Exploration of Class and Race Dynamics in the Writing of *Folly*," in *13<sup>th</sup> Moon*, vol. 17, no. 1-2, pp. 145-151; Pamela Culbreth, "A Personal Reading of *This Bridge Called My Back*," in *Sinister Wisdom* 21(Fall 1982), pp. 15-28; Andrea Dworkin, *Right-Wing Women* (New York: Perigee, 1983); Nadine Gordimer, "Living in the Interregnum," *New*

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62. "The International Feminization of Poverty," *off our backs*, August/September 1983, p. 5.
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65. Robert Zwier, *Born Again Politics: The New Christian Right in America* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), pp. 42, 45.
66. Hal Lindsey, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam, 1981), pp. 9-16.
67. "Does Reagan Expect A Nuclear Apocalypse?" *Washington Post*, April 8, 1984, p. C4.
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69. "Does Reagan Expect...?" p. C4.
70. "Your Income Tax at Work," *The Washington Peace Center Newsletter*, March 1984, pp. 1, 5. In this article, figures are from *The Budget of the U.S. Government-FY 1985*; percentages were computed *after* amounts for Social Security were removed.
71. "Less for Kids," p. 6.
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