



Economic (In)Security

A north wind blew as I talked with the homeless man in Washington DC. He'd been homeless for two months, ever since his disability check had been stolen and he couldn't pay the rent on his room. He had to wait a few months and try to save money so he could pay both the rent and the deposit on a new room. In the meantime he lived as best he could on the streets. He asked why I bothered to talk to "a dirty old man like me" and I said I worked a bit with homeless people in New Hampshire. He was stunned. "You got homeless people in New Hampshire? Oh man, it's cold up there.... This is worse than I thought."

It is worse than we want to think. In 2001 in New Hampshire over 6000 people (over 1000 of whom were children) were sheltered in the state's 39 shelters and another 9000 people were turned away. This winter five "winter emergency shelters" were opened and still the existing shelters reported being full or over-full all winter every single night. This doesn't begin to give an accurate count of those who are homeless, as it does not reflect the individuals and families doubled up with family or friends.

How did we get here? In the early 1980s, as the effect of cuts in social spending set in (HUD funding was cut dramatically from 1976-1980) and unemployment soared, we began to see an increase in homelessness. The first homeless shelters were built. We thought it was temporary. At that point the face of homelessness looked more like the stereotype — mostly white males who were addicts and/or mentally ill. As the '80s continued, the face of homelessness got younger and younger. Services and housing that had been public resources were privatized and "streamlined" — leaving increasing numbers of people without assistance. A shift occurred from preventing homelessness to assisting people once they became homeless. We began to tear down public housing without building anything to replace it. Wages for low wage jobs have not come close to keeping up with the increasing cost of living. Land costs are soaring, driving up the cost of new construction. An acute shortage of housing stock is driving up both rents and single-family home costs. With increasing criminalization of homelessness through local laws against panhandling, loitering and sleeping in public places, it sometimes looks as though prisons are the new public housing. As my street friend might put it: it's a big, complicated mess.

Looking at the federal budget doesn't give any cause for hope. It was considered a victory that the food stamp program was reauthorized at existing funding levels. Now



© Helen Shub

the focus is on TANF (Transitional Assistance to Needy Families) reauthorization. Again level funding with flexibility to use funds for childcare, education and housing supports as parents move into jobs, will be a victory. Those that don't actively want to cut the program pine that "we would really like to do more, but there just isn't the money." But lack of money isn't stopping them from endorsing huge increases in defense spending. And there isn't money for tax cuts for upper income people, but there is the political will for tax cuts, so they will happen anyway. In other words, where there is the will there is a way; there just is no will for addressing poverty and its causes.

Yet, what politicians seem blissfully unaware of is growing disenchantment with business as usual. There is outrage at companies that play by their own rules at the expense of workers and at the government that rewards them with tax breaks. Federal legislation for a living wage, a Housing Trust Fund (to build new affordable housing) and a Racial Equity and Fair Treatment Bill are all showing "surprising" grassroots support. Homeless people and their allies are organizing for basic civil and economic rights. And, most hopeful of all, these groups are beginning to talk to each other.

(Cont. page 2)

An African American's Perspective on the War on Terrorism

This country might learn something from the black experience. We blacks know all too well about pain, suffering, tragedy, and feeling insecure from birth to grave. We can say that our "9/11" began more than three hundred years ago, when African families were torn apart and transported to this area of the world on slave ships. In the process, the appalling 'middle passage' sea voyage, millions of lives were sacrificed; many more millions suffered and died while the inhuman system of slavery reigned in this country for 250 years. Today, blacks must endure the terror of racism.

African Americans constitute more than 50% of the prison population in the U.S. Disproportionately, most of the prisoners on death row are African Americans. In recent years, based on evidence made available through DNA testing and other means, the governor of Illinois admitted that his state was on a course to putting innocent Americans to death. He suspended the death penalty, and Illinois is now taking the time to reinvestigate all cases of inmates on death row and reevaluate its entire justice system! This has resulted in the exoneration and release of a number of black prisoners on death row.

What does this tell us about the justice system in this country? African Americans make up less than 20% of our population. Why do we constitute more than 50% of our prison population? An all-out effort, a war against racist terrorism in *this* country, is needed. Racist terrorism is a crime against humanity and a crime against most minorities in this country, including Jews, Native American, Hispanics, Asians and others — as well as African Americans.

We also need to take a careful look at profiling. Racial profiling is wrong. It presupposes that an individual will commit or has committed a crime simply because of personal appearance. Profiling does away with our system of innocence until proven guilty. As a black man, I am profiled today, but it could be anyone tomorrow. We must not allow September 11th to cause us to move in ways that further erode our free and open society!

We shall hear more about reparations for the 200-plus years of African American enslavement in this country, reparations for descendents of slaves who were freed without a cent in their pockets — without 40 acres and a mule or even a thank you — but with only memories of pain, death and suffering. Slaves worked to lay the early economic foundations of this country. With little or no freedom of their own, African Americans fought and gave their lives for this country's independence and freedom. If we are to truly heal this nation and become a united people, Americans must look openly at this history of slavery.

The idea of reparations for past wrongs is not new. Around the world, examples of actions to make reparations include South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by the Nobel Laureate, Bishop Desmond Tutu. Canada is also paying reparations to Native Canadians (Indians) for several centuries of unjust treatment. The United States has paid \$25,000 to the surviving relatives of Japanese Americans who were detained in camps during WWII. Reparations are now being paid by the state of Florida to the survivors of Rosewood, a black town that, because of a false rumor, was burned to the ground by a lynch mob, causing hundreds of African Americans to lose their homes and some their lives. For more insight and a better understanding of the issue of reparations to African Americans for slavery in this country, I recommend Randall Robinson's book, *The Debt*.

(Cont. p. 4)



Copied from: www.southwestern.edu/~musse/inj/prisoner.jpg

(Insecurity, cont. from p. 1)

This growing movement for basic economic rights needs the active support of the faith community. There are a lot of ways to get involved. Many churches and individuals are joining in the Call to Renewal and Jobs With Justice campaigns. While those have national actions, their strength will be building local campaigns. Many communities are considering Living Wage ordinances. New affordable housing proposals face intense "not in my back yard" responses and need local advocates to voice support at planning board meetings. As political campaigns heat up, candidates need to be asked, often, about their position on these initiatives — and then be held accountable after the election. And in the meantime, most food pantries are in dire need of donations, shelters need school and personal supplies — and financial support.

Poverty-related Web sites to learn from:

www.chn.org: Campaign for Human Needs, major resource for TANF reauthorization activities

www.natprior.org: National Priorities Project. Great resource on military versus domestic spending, with resources for each state and many cities

www.ncc.org: National Council of Churches resources on poverty and the Call to Renewal

www.ufenet.org: United for a Fair Economy

www.universallivingwage.org: Universal Living Wage campaign, supporting federal and local campaigns

www.nlihc.org: National Low Income Housing Coalition
www.nationalhomeless.org: National Coalition for the Homeless

www.nhtf.org: National Housing Trust Fund

Martha Yager, Concord (NH) MM

The video *The Color of Fear*

This video is a one-and-one-half hour condensation of work done in 1993 by about 10 men who met for a weekend to try to come to a better understanding of each other's racial and ethnic backgrounds. Interactions among the members of the encounter group, which consists of Chinese-, Japanese-, Mexican- African- and European-Americans, are honest and frank. By the end of the weekend they achieve a far better comprehension of themselves, reactions among ethnic/racial groups and our country's racial issues. This film is helpful to any group that wishes to work toward a greater understanding of these issues.

Reaction to Seeing *The Color of Fear*

I found this film disturbing because it made me, a member of the white, privileged group, feel responsible for something I can do nothing about. I have no control over being born the way I am. I have no control over the way my ancestors behaved toward people of color around the world and throughout history. Nevertheless, people of color today view me as a representative of the oppressing race, even when I try to interact with them as individual human beings. This is frustrating.

I accept that I belong to the dominant culture whose individuals define our diverse society by their own values, style and appearance. Nevertheless, as a scientist I have had some glimmerings of how it feels to have a different personal style from a dominant culture. I remember being the only woman in meetings, feeling that my suggestions were neither heard nor incorporated. No one ever came to my office to chat; one man who did, stood in the doorway, saying (jokingly?) that he was afraid to, implying that I might seduce him. I became infuriated at the patronizing tone of a written evaluation that noted a lot of activity in my lab (meaning I was training lots of students), then asked why I had not produced more (meaning published more articles). Such encounters lead to rage in some, withdrawal in others, and often result in diminishing one's potential.

This is how the video helped me resolve these issues: I acknowledge that prejudice, blindness and complacency are pervasive in our white culture, perhaps in any dominant culture at a particular time and place. Such attitudes infect me and even infect people of color. It stimulated me to realize that I have a never-ending struggle to liberate myself from the tyranny of stereotyping others and making unfounded assumptions about their behavior. This is difficult because I open myself to doing this whenever I assimilate information and then extract the essence, just in order to move forward in life. If I didn't go through this process, each experience would be unlike any other—in short, I would never learn. But, here's the pinch. Between that step of gathering information and then extracting the essence, I make assumptions. If I pay attention to my assumptions about another person and try not to base my words and actions on emotional reactions, I am on the road to liberating myself from stereotyping people. The bottom line always seems to be listening and loving. Am I being naive?

Louise Luckenbill, West Falmouth/Sandwich (MA) MM

The Color of Fear Available for Showing to Groups

K and Bill Brown of the Prejudice and Poverty Committee are happy to show the video *The Color of Fear* by arrangement. However, **at least** two and one-half hours are needed: one and one-half hours to show the film and (at least) another hour to process thoughts and emotions that arise.

Please contact K (508-539-0843; kwbrown@attbi.com) if you would like this video shown to your meeting or group.

Quaker Compassion?

A number of weeks ago Cecile Mchardy came out from Cambridge where she lives to our Providence Monthly Meeting to help us gain some clarity regarding diversity among Friends. She was clear, direct and helpful. She is a Jamaican-born Buddhist who spent fifteen years or more teaching literature and religions at the University of Ghana at Legon in Ghana. She is one of the few black Buddhists in New England, has twice been a Bunting Scholar at Harvard, and takes on various grad students in advanced studies of culture and religions. She introduced herself to us as a Friendly Drag...and blew sweet flames amongst us. Later she came to help out at Moses Brown School with the same kind of agenda.

Not long after her efforts at the school she sent me a distressing e-mail. She had gone to Kendall Square moving picture theater to see the film *Kandahar*. It was cold, bright and lovely in the late morning sun, and being very early for the film, she sat outdoors. After a bit she grew cold, and since the front door of the theater was open, she went into the lobby. After a few moments she was told she must wait outside. She mentioned that it was cold, but that and the fact that she is obviously a senior citizen made no difference. In fact, the manager was called, and then the police. She went back to her apartment, where she had her lunch, called a friend, and they agreed to go see *Kandahar* at the four o'clock showing. She had the same reception, she was not allowed in to see the show, but this time there was no waiting for the police to be called....She was very distressed.

When I learned of the problem I called a Cambridge Quaker and suggested that a friendly call might be nice. "All she needs to do is call the NAACP," I was told.

Again I suggested a comforting call that would express our concern and sympathy was all that was being asked; no action was being suggested. But the NAACP was mentioned again quite firmly, with no seeming awareness that soft kind words at times of hurt and stress can be helpful to bruised spirits, to matter how brave and self-sufficient the sufferer is.

The second definition of comfort in Webster's New Universal Dictionary: *to soothe in distress or sorrow; to ease the misery of; to bring consolation or hope to.* Can't we even offer that?

What else might a friendly, anti-racist Quaker have done in this situation? Why didn't we, a mostly white organi-

(Cont. p. 7)

What's in a Name??

The issue of what we call the committee that does what “Overseer” or “Oversight” is meant to denote has me remembering several incidents in my life as a Friend.

Most vivid is the time I was on Nominating Committee for a Friends group, and we really were hoping a certain African American Friend would be willing to serve on our Overseers Committee. The Friend in question gave me and my fellow Nominating Committee person (both of us white) a long look and then, as best I can recall, thanked us for thinking of him, expressed his affection for both the organization and the committee in question, and then said there was really no way he could even consider serving on a committee with such a name.

In an instant the light came on for me, so to speak. In that moment I think I actually saw and felt how it is that a word and its connotations — emotional, spiritual, historical, and intellectual — can be SO DIFFERENT for different people. Like living on different planets, really. Like when I got my first pair of glasses at age 7 and realized that people really weren't just making up their observations about there being stars in the night sky. Needless to say, Nominating reported back to Overseers our concern, shame, sense of urgency...and the organization changed its committee name, to Ministry and Counsel if I recall correctly.

The other incident has to do with right naming itself. I would question how well the name Overseers or Oversight fits what such committees do or should do, even apart from its dual historical meaning (and to me the word's long history in the context of slavery* is at least as relevant as its (presumably) long history in the context of Quakerism). [*Historically, the “Overseer” of a plantation was the “poor white” male in charge of enforcing the owner's rule over the slaves. He would be the specific person who administered punishments such as beatings and whippings. Overseers are known for their brutality to slaves. Editor*] What does “oversight” or “overseer” connote in various contexts today? Does it bring to mind some sort of corporate board of directors or management team? A committee of therapists and physicians attending to the health of some group? A close-up or distant group of “watchers” “watching-over”? And how about the double-edged sword of “oversight” — as in our use of these words was just an oversight — so let's fix it, eh?

I'm reminded of the story about Chevrolet and its little car the Nova, which was so-named because of its presumed connotations of bright star, astronomical wonder, newness, that sort of thing. Great name, until they tried to sell it in Mexico, where “no va” means it doesn't go — what a joke. If a car manufacturer can be smart enough to realize a name has unintended bad meanings for people it cares about selling to, how much more should a religious organization be smart enough to realize AND CHANGE a name that has unintended bad consequences on a group it cares about including? [I actually don't know if Chevy marketed the Nova under a different name in

Spanish-speaking places, or just withdrew it from those markets, or just said too bad if they don't like our name, we know what it's supposed to mean.] Susan Jeffers

Susan Jeffers is a member of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting (FGC) and an aspiring web author (www.read-the-bible.org, the Peace Church Bible Study Home Page).



© Ellen Shub

(African-American Perspective, cont. from p. 2)

Friends need at this time to speak truth to power. We must speak through our elected officials, to the President and to all levels of government to let them know what is on our minds regarding global war against terrorism. There is no security for our most defenseless citizens right here at home. The widening of the war on terrorism may make some of us feel more secure, but defense budget increases will mean cutbacks and reductions in desperately needed domestic programs, causing more insecurity to the poor and to minorities. Our country's war on terrorism must include the terror felt by its own citizens. It is a terror that has been rampant for over 300 years. Why do most Americans not see it?

*James Varner, Orono (ME) MM
President of Greater Bangor Area NAACP*

Let America Be America Again

Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes (1902 - 1967) is an internationally known poet, essayist and playwright of the Harlem Renaissance. This poem, probably written in the 1930s or '40s, is as relevant today as it was then. Editor

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is
free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dream-
ers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor
tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one
above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where
Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic
wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is
free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in the "homeland of the
free.")

*Say who are you that mumbles in the
dark?
And who are you that draws your veil
across the stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and
pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's
scars.
I am the red man driven from the
land,
I am the immigrant clutching the
hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid
plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the
weak.

I am the farmer, bondsman to the

soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, worried, hungry,
mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through
the years.

Yet, I'm the one who dreamt our
basic dream
In that Old World while still a serf of
kings,
Who dreamt a dream to strong, so
brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every
furrow turned
That's made America the land it has
become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those
early seas
In search of what I meant to be my
home—
For I'm the one who left dark
Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's
grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I
came
To build a "homeland of the free."
The free?
A dream—
Still beckoning to me!

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—
The land where *everyone* is free.
The land that's mine—
The poor man's, Indian's, Negro's,
ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith
and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose
plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream
again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you
choose—
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on

the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!
An ever-living seed,
Its dream
Lies deep in the heart of me.

We, the people, must redeem
Our land, the mines, the plants, the
rivers,
The mountains and the endless
plain—
All, all stretch of these great green
states—
And make America again!



Committee on Prejudice & Poverty

Co-Clerks

Joyce McKelvey Sam Lowe
Ph: 860-423-8245 781-863-5478
Fx: 860-228-6921 chenlowe@gis.net

Newsletter Editor

K Brown

This Issue's Contributing Editors

William Brown, Sam Lowe,
Joyce McKelvey
Skip Schiel, Patricia Watson,
Rosalind W. Wiggins

A Multi-Cultural / Anti-Racism Reading List for Your Meeting's Library

In previous issues of this newsletter, The Committee on Prejudice and Poverty has suggested that Meetings develop an anti-racism section in your meeting's Library. We are continuing with that suggestion, and are making additions to our list. *Of course there are many possible titles for us to suggest*, but we have developed a list with which we think you might begin. Those titles with a bullet [•] are new suggestions with this issue.

- Dalton, Harlon, L., *Racial Healing: Confronting the Fear Between Blacks and Whites*, Anchor Books, Doubleday, New York, 1995.
- Gates, Henry and West, Cornel. *The Future of the Race*. Vintage Books, 1997.
- hooks, bell *where we stand: class matters*. Routledge Press, New York, 2000.
- Mazel, Ella (Ed.) "And don't call me a racist!". Argonaut Press, Lexington, MA, 1998.
- Salitan, Lucille and Perera, Eve Lewis (Eds.) *Virtuous Lives; Four Quaker Sisters Remember Family Life, Abolitionism and Women's Suffrage*. Continuum, New York, 1994.
- Williams, Lena, *It's the Little Things: Everyday Interactions that Anger, Annoy and Divide the Races*, A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., San Diego, 2000.

Alvarez, Julia, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, Plume / Penguin, 1991.

Baldwin, James, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Dell Publishing Co., 1976.

Churchill, Ward, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present*, City Lights Books, 1998.

Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, Vintage Books, 1984.

Cofer, Julia Ortiz, *Silent Dancing: a Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*, Arte Publico Press, Houston, 1990.

DuBois, W. E. B., *The Negro*, paperback edition, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

Hacker, Andrew, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile and Unequal*. Ballentine Books, 1995.

Kivel, Paul, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island BC, Canada, 1995.

Klein, Herbert S., *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Lester, Joan Steinau, *The Future of White Men and Other Diversity Dilemmas*, Conari Press, CA, 1994.

Robinson, Randall, 2000, *The Debt: What American Owes to Blacks*, paperback edition, Plume Press, 2001.

Weatherford, Jack, *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World*, Fawcett Columbine, NY, 1990.

West, Cornel, 1993, *Race Matters*, Vintage Books, 1994.

Woodson, Carter Godwin, 1933. *Mis-education of the Negro*. The Associated Publishers, Inc. 1933. Recent paper edition, Africa World Press, Inc., 1990

Zinn, Howard, *The People's History of the United States – 1492 to the Present*, paperback edition Harperperennial Library, 1995.

Children's Books

- Adoff, Arnold, *Black is Brown is Tan*, Harper Collins, New York, 1973.
- Dooley, Norah, *Everybody Cooks Rice*, Carolrhoda Books: Minneapolis, 1991.
- Emberly, Rebecca, *Taking a Walk: A Book in Two Languages/ Caminando: Un Libro en Dos Lenguas*, Scholastic: New York, 1990.
- Mandelbaum, Pili, *You be Me, I'll Be You*, Kane / Miller Book Publishers: New York, 1990.
- Nash, Renea, *Being a Biracial/Biethnic Teen*, The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc, New York, 1995.
- Sosé, Bonnie, *Designed by God so I must be Special*, Character Builders for Kids, Winter Park, FL, 1988 . (Available through Waldensbooks); ISBN 0-9615279-6-X (for White Version); ISBN 0-9615279-4-X (for African American Version). May be out of print?
- Williams, Karen Lynn, *When Africa Was Home*, Orchard Books: New York, 1991.

Adler, David A., *A Picture Book of Harriet Tubman*, Holiday House, New York, 1992.

Coles, Robert, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. Scholastic Inc., New York, 1995.

Hamilton, Virginia et al., *The People Could Fly; American Black Folk Tales*, Knopf, 1993.

Lester, Julius, *To Be a Slave*. Scholastic Inc., New York, 1968.

Rodriguez, Luis, J., *America Is Her Name*, Curbstone Press, Willimantic, CT, 1996.

Wesley, Valerie, *Freedom's Gifts: A Junteenth Story*, Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, New York. 1997.

My Dear Straight Friends

Privilege is invisible to the privileged – unless we open ourselves to the oppressed people walking beside us. A handsome, white, educated, healthy, wealthy, straight man from a strong and healthy family, neighborhood, and church may have a great existential challenge in understanding the concept of privilege. The very privilege that may artificially support his sense of well-being and his self-esteem is a barrier to his spiritual growth, integrity, and community life. He must understand the sources of his privilege to be whole. What are his rights and what are his privileges? What did he deserve or earn, and what was bestowed upon him by virtue of his male identity, good looks, heterosexual behavior, skin color, opportunity for education, good health, intelligence, upbringing, and community?

How might this man's life be different if the very same spirit child grew up in a body that was female, ugly, dark-skinned, sick or differently-abled, poor, male-but-effeminate (spiritually or physically), or from a dysfunctional family isolated from the community and without a church? And what if this man decides it is time to live openly as the woman he is inside? Or what if he falls in love with another man, and suddenly comes to understand that he is bisexual or gay? What happens to his privilege then?

God created him equal to all other humans. His good fortune bestowed on him all of the elements for building happiness and personal power. Perhaps he was beginning to understand his privilege and becoming more mindful of his footprint on the earth, and also giving more time and money toward peace, justice, and freedom for others. But what if he

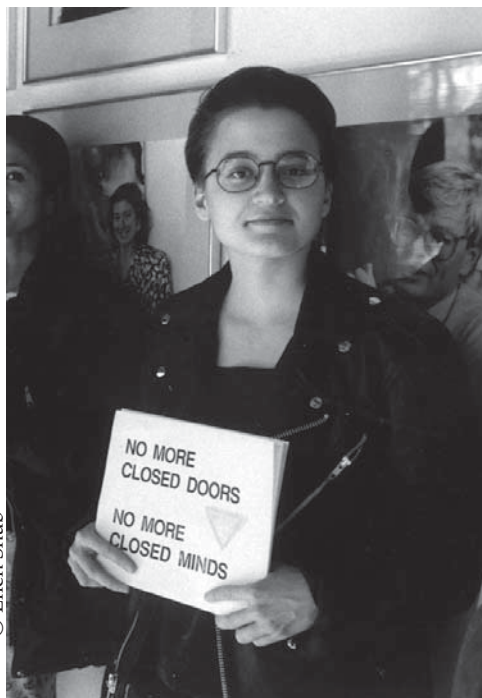
begins dressing as the woman he is inside? Or what if he begins holding hands with his male lover on the street or at work the way he once held hands with his girlfriend?

Like most or all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people who are open about our gender identity and sexual orientation he would begin to experience oppression, harassment, discrimination, or physical attack of self or property. A Quaker family of two women and their young son recently escaped from their house before it burned to the ground in a fire set by an arsonist. The fire followed a press release regarding a lawsuit brought by the couple with the help of the ACLU, asking for domestic partner benefits at a University in Montana. A substantial number of GLBT people have been and continue to be murdered for who they are and whom they love.

It is often said that *to love another person is to know the face of God* (source unknown). The Divine within us is oppressed when we are asked not to love ourselves because we are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, or not to love someone of the same sex. The Bible holds deep spiritual wisdom about love, *and* the Bible can be used as a weapon against homosexual love. Passages in the Bible that promote slavery were once used as a weapon for retaining institutionalized racism. Now passages in the Bible are used by some as weapons for retaining institutionalized heterosexism. By 1776, Quakers in America excluded slaveholders from membership in Quaker Meetings, despite passages in the Bible that support slaveholder status. Today, Quakers are struggling with heterosexism, and for some, the Bible is a part of that struggle.

My dear straight Friends, the Light of God dwells within gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, just as it dwelled in the slaves once held by Quakers. Whether gender identity and sexual orientation are innate, environmental, a choice, or a different combination of these factors for different people, they are sacred elements of each whole person. Each of us needs to be free to be who we are, and to have our loving relationships respected and supported by our community. Each of us deserves to be equal in our Meetings and equal under civil law.

Brenda Roberts Shaw
Storrs (CT) MM
brshaw1@mindspring.com



© Ellen Shub

Vigil for Gay & Lesbian Rights, Harvard University

(*Quaker Compassion, cont. from p. 3*)

zation, offer to help in a situation which seems to have been a blatant form of white racism? Do we expect the black organizations to always deal with such problems? This seems to be another example of putting responsibility on the backs of blacks when we whites are the ones causing the racism.

Rosalind W. Wiggins, Providence (RI) MM

We welcome comments, letters and articles.
Send to editor: K Brown: e-mail:
kwbrown@attbi.com, or mail: 155 James
Circle, Mashpee, MA 02649.

What Do All Those Flags Mean?

The following is an edited excerpt from the *Casco Bay Weekly*, 10/18/01 and copied from their web-site, www.cascobayweekly.com, Author, Autumn Phillips.

Is the sudden appearance of the Stars and Stripes on almost every store, home and vehicle in Portland [ME] a symbol of unity? Of sympathy? Of support for war?

Three days after the Sept. 11 terrorist strikes against the United States, Laura Davis [the associate creative director of a Portland advertising firm] undertook a massive propaganda campaign in an effort to unify citizens in southern Maine under a symbol as powerful as it is controversial — the American flag. [She printed] 12,000 color copies of the Stars and Stripes waving in the wind...[and w]ithin two days, Davis and 20 of her colleagues had distributed all the copies. "It was really a grassroots, guerilla effort," Davis said. "I can't tell you the reception we got. Everyone immediately put them up."

To Davis, the flag "represents a spirit of togetherness and freedom. It combats all the violent images I just couldn't look at anymore."

...Concern for the safety of members of Portland's Muslim community prompted the nonprofit neighborhood organization Portland West to print posters [see right] on which the American flag appears beside a green flag with a white crescent moon and star. Below the two flags are the words: "Stand Together Against Hate."

"These flags represent the United States of America and the Muslim faith," reads the poster copy. **"We have placed them together as a symbol of mourning for the people lost on September 11 and as a show of unity with the Muslim community. We ask you to put this in your window to honor the victims and their families, and to let those of the Muslim faith know they need not fear guilt by association in your home or workplace."**

"We were afraid of a backlash after these attacks," said Ethan Strimling, executive director of Portland West. "We hung this flag in our window to let Muslims know that this is a safe place."

Mary Allen Lindemann, co-owner of Coffee By Design, displayed American flags in her three Portland shops the day after the attacks. When she added a long string of flags representing countries around the world, she did so with some trepidation. "When I decided to put up the world flags, to represent that this was a world problem, I expected a negative reaction," Lindemann said. "But the response was incredibly moving. I think something positive can come out of all this.... This is the community's chance to embrace multiculturalism in Portland."

"This is not the time for individual beliefs," [one Portland resident] said. "We need to keep [the events of Sept. 11] in the papers every day, and not let this slide [A]lready many people have forgotten...."

"Quite the contrary," said [another] Portland resident.... "I am appalled by the loss of life in New York. Just because I'm not out there waving a flag doesn't mean that I've forgotten. For me, the flag represents the government, and I don't agree with what they are doing right now or what they have done in the Middle East in the past." [She] said her decision not to wave the flag has made her feel alienated. "For most people, it's a way to connect and share their grief. It's been hard to find a way to grieve on my own."

...[Another Portland resident] questions the use of the flag as a way to remember and mourn for the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks. "Flying the flag manipulates the shock, horror and grief into an expression of outrage and anger,"

he said. "People want to kick ass instead of gathering with family and friends to mourn. I haven't seen any traditional mourning — wear[ing] black armbands or black clothing...Flying the flag or draping a flag on the coffin is the military way to mourn.... Using the flag as a way of rallying support is clouding the issue. Quite frankly, I don't think the people who are flying those flags understand the system they want to defend. They are defending America's right to pil-

lage and plunder the rest of the world." [A]n activist involved with Peace Action Maine, has similar suspicions of flag-based patriotism. "I wish I could say that I don't approach the flag with fear, but I do," [he] said. "I just keep thinking of all the ethnic minorities who have been victims of that flag, who have been on the receiving end of American weapons and bombs."

"The flag means a lot of things, and there has been a lot of damage done by people wrapping themselves in the flag," ...said an activist with Veterans for Peace. "This is the kind of attitude that got us to Sept. 11...I served for this flag, but I do not agree with the way it is being used to direct us right now"...[For him] the flag is being used to assure politicians and military leaders of "a 90 percent approval rating for their war."

For [some, the flag is] about healing the wounds of the terrorist attacks and banding together as a nation.

...[or for others] it seems to be about xenophobia.

...[or] it's a call for nuclear annihilation of the enemy.

Unless one stops to ask each individual waving the flag, it's impossible to know what message he or she intends to convey. Equally inconclusive is the absence of a banner. Is that a statement, and if so, what statement?

There's obviously nothing wrong with either course, but flag-waving or its opposite isn't a clear declaration of anything. To get to that, there has to be discussion, debate and, yes, disagreement — a healthy dose of the disunity that was an integral reason why this country was founded in the first place.

