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Light Arises Out of Darkness: Prophetic Witness as Spiritual and Political Practice ~John Humphries~

Hartford Friends Meeting—part-time staff for the Meeting School—coordinates the Quaker Peacebuilder Camp for youth and co-leads the Spiritual Transformation Program, an 8-month program of study and reflection that seeks to nurture faithful, spirit-led activism among New England Friends—and works for the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

Excerpted from a talk by John Humphries, from the 2008 series, *Radical Witness*, delivered at Beacon Hill Friends House. A book *Radical Witness*, including this and the three other talks in the series is coming out in June 2009. See www.bhfh.org for details.

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(Editor's note: a method of coordinating and providing good process and spiritual grounding for civil disobedience is relevant to racial, social and economic justice as it reflects on how to approach, with spiritual strength and clarity, difficult issues of justice in environments where there may be opposition or even hostility)

My March 19 Story

I want to share my experience with helping organize a public witness this past March to mark five years of war and occupation in Iraq. I serve on the steering committee of an interfaith group in CT called Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice. We are an informal group, with a self-appointed steering committee of four Christian clergy, a rabbi, a Catholic

activist and me. We gathered in early January to discuss possible action plans for the spring and we decided to organize a religious witness to mark the March

anniversary. After three years of competing demonstrations, both of the state's primary peace coalitions had decided not to organize a statewide event in March. So that provided an opportunity for us to fill a void and control the tone and focus for a religious-based public witness.

One Unitarian minister was feeling strongly led to engage in civil disobedience as part of this witness.

None of the rest of us were feeling led in that direction, but we agreed to support her leading and to help seek



Federal Courthouse in New Haven, January 11, 2007, photo by Allie Perry

others who would like to join with her. The action involved an interfaith prayer vigil on the steps of a downtown Hartford church, followed by a procession to the Federal Building and stopping in front of the headquarters of a major defense contractor along the way. One of the visuals was a moveable cairn of

The action involved an interfaith prayer vigil on the steps of a downtown Hartford church, followed by a procession to the Federal Building and stopping in front of the headquarters of a major defense contractor...

stones inscribed with the names of Iraqi civilians who had died. We were also discussing the possible use of theatrical blood, and a truckload of rubble to be stacked on the sidewalk in front of the Federal Building, evoking the destruction of Iraq. We had a group of five people prepared to be arrested while blocking the entrance to the building, including two octogenarian parishioners of the Unitarian minister, a member of the

Catholic Worker community and his 17-year-old daughter.

I found myself feeling generally uneasy, but the focus of my unease seemed to be about my agreeing to take on the role of police liaison. Unlike our previous civil disobedience actions, we had decided not to communicate our plans to the police ahead of time. We spent long hours on the phone and laptops discussing how to maintain a tone and choreography that would be agitational

but not provoke an unnecessarily harsh response from the police or put unsuspecting participants at significant risk. As I continued to sit with my uneasiness, I was able to settle into a place of knowing that it might not be a bad thing to be kicked outside my comfort zone – to learn new skills and to trust in the Spirit's guidance and my nonviolence training.



Die-in at the Israeli Consulate during the violence in Gaza, January 2009, photo by Skip Schiel, teeksaphoto.org

Two days before the action, Grace happened. I was in the process of sending out the media release when I got a call from one of the ministers on the steering committee. Carolyn had worked hard to energize her congregation about this witness. She was feeling really nervous about the truck loaded with rubble. She didn't want to have something go awry during what would be, for many of her parishioners, their first experience with this sort of public witness. I shared my own uneasiness and encouraged her to contact other members of the committee. In a quick conference call,



Protestors are arrested on trespassing charges for blocking the entrance to the Federal Building on Main Street in Hartford. About 200 people gathered at a rally in downtown Hartford to protest the Iraq war on its fifth anniversary. (Shana Sureck / March 19, 2008), courtesy Hartford Courant, www.courant.com/news/custom/topnews/hcu-warprotestarrests-0319,0,6697764.story

we agreed to scrap the rubble part of the action, and there was a collective sigh of relief. Afterward, I called Carolyn to thank her for her faithfulness in listening to the Inner Voice.

The action itself went very smoothly. The religious nature of the event was clear; the tone was calm and respectful, but energized by singing. The visuals and choreography worked well, and a number of people spoke of being profoundly moved by their participation and by witnessing the civil disobedience.

I want to reflect on two aspects of my experience on that day. The first is the feeling I had of being exactly where I was supposed to be, and the second is the confidence and comfort that flowed from that. As a steering committee, we had defined who was covering key roles during each portion of the witness, but we didn't have all the details spelled out. On the one hand, it would be impossible to plan for all the details; but on the other hand, our deep trust in each other, our common grounding in the Spirit, and our long experience with organizing together gave us the faith that we would figure it out together.

All of the others had speaking responsibilities, but I

settled into the role of directing the movements of the crowd. That role hadn't been specifically assigned to me, and I did it almost without conscious thought. I just found myself thinking two or three steps ahead and giving instructions to key people about how and when to move.

As a swimmer, I can most easily relate the experience to that of being in the pool and "finding the groove" of a fast but steady pace and just being present in the moment, enjoying the thrill – both spiritual and physical – of letting my muscles do what they know how to do, almost effortlessly. In that moment, I was exactly where I was called to be; I KNEW that at a deep, spiritual level. Gone were any questions about whether I should have been among those risking arrest.

As we approached the Federal Building, the security guards at the site picked me out as "the leader." They came to check in with me about people staying on the sidewalk and other details. Then when the five people stepped into the courtyard to initiate the civil disobedience portion of the action, the chief of security came to intimidate me.

He wanted to know my name and the name of our

[Two aspects of the experiences were] the feeling I had of being exactly where I was supposed to be and the second is the confidence and comfort that flowed from that.

group. I hedged a bit, saying that there were multiple groups represented but that we had helped to bring them together. A half hour later, as my friends were being loaded into police cars, he approached me again. "I just want to make sure I get this right. What was your name again?" I paused, and found a deep calmness before replying. "Here, let me make it easy for you. Here's a copy of our press release with my name and contact information." It was a simple act, but it was a liberating moment for me. And again, the clarity of being exactly where I was called to be.

Every time I help to organize a public witness, I learn something new – about myself, about my relationship with the Spirit and my relationships with other people. It is a spiritual practice, as well as a political practice.

And it does indeed involve practice. The flow that



Arrest during the Die-in at the Israeli Consulate in Boston, January 2008
photo by Skip Schiel, teeksaphoto.org

I experienced that day grew out of a combination of practice, training and intentionality. Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice has provided the opportunity to work alongside religious leaders in developing a practice of public witness that is intentionally grounded in the Spirit. Our ability to hold each other within that grounded place even in tense situations arises from years of working together, praying together and sharing profound experiences of personal and communal transformation.

In fall 2008 Beacon Hill Friends House hosted four talks on the theme 'Radical Witness.' The speakers spoke of their own experiences in witness in areas as diverse as war tax resistance, witness for equal marriage rights and peaceful accompaniment in conflict zones as well as of the stops to radical witness we face as Friends and the faith and practices that can get us beyond those stops. At the end of the series it was clear that these 4 talks taken together would challenge and guide Friends in the search to renew our understanding of Witness for the 21st century. Beacon Hill is publishing all four talks, by John Humphries, Gina & Heidi Nortonsmith, Katherine Fisher and Sadie Forsythe (to be published in the Crier summer 2009 issue), as a book, Radical Witness, due out June 6, 2009. Available for pre-order at www.bhfh.org.

Editor's Reflections

~Skip Schiel~

Co-editor of *The Freedom & Justice Crier*—
Friends Meeting at Cambridge

At my home meeting recently I heard this message: scripture common to the Abrahamic traditions, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, all believe justice, mercy, and humility are compass points for behavior. One statement is this: *Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your lord.* (Micah 6)

Should the three be in that order, does order matter, are those the key aspirations for a soulful life?

I'm not sure. However, looking over our list of offerings in this issue of the *Crier* I notice that humility snakes thru John Humphries' talk excerpt (his gaining of courage, experiencing grace), justice is a determining factor in John Blanchard's article about employee owned businesses (the value of sharing the wealth and

Do justice, love mercy, and walk in humility.

—Micah 6

risk), and mercy pervades James Varner's account of his experience as a Black Quaker (mercy to others who sometimes act out of ignorance).

Perhaps this is an artificial set of observations. In truth, justice, mercy and humility run thru most of the pieces in this issue.

Do we need a clearer depiction of how to live a righteous life? Can we more assiduously do justice, love mercy, and walk in humility?

Letter to the editor

I write in response to the Summer 2008 issue of the *Freedom and Justice Crier*.

The conundrum of apathy, exclusion and power that has plagued western culture does I think benefit from as broad a spectrum of critique as can be garnered. I forward these two articles in hopes that you find them as interesting as I have.

The indigenous advocacy branch (CIMI- acronym for Conselho Indigenista Missionario) of the Brazilian National Conference of Bishops is part of the Forum for the Defense of Indigenous Rights, and I found these through CIMI links to R.E.L.A.M.I. (The Latin-American Ecumenical Network of Missiologists).

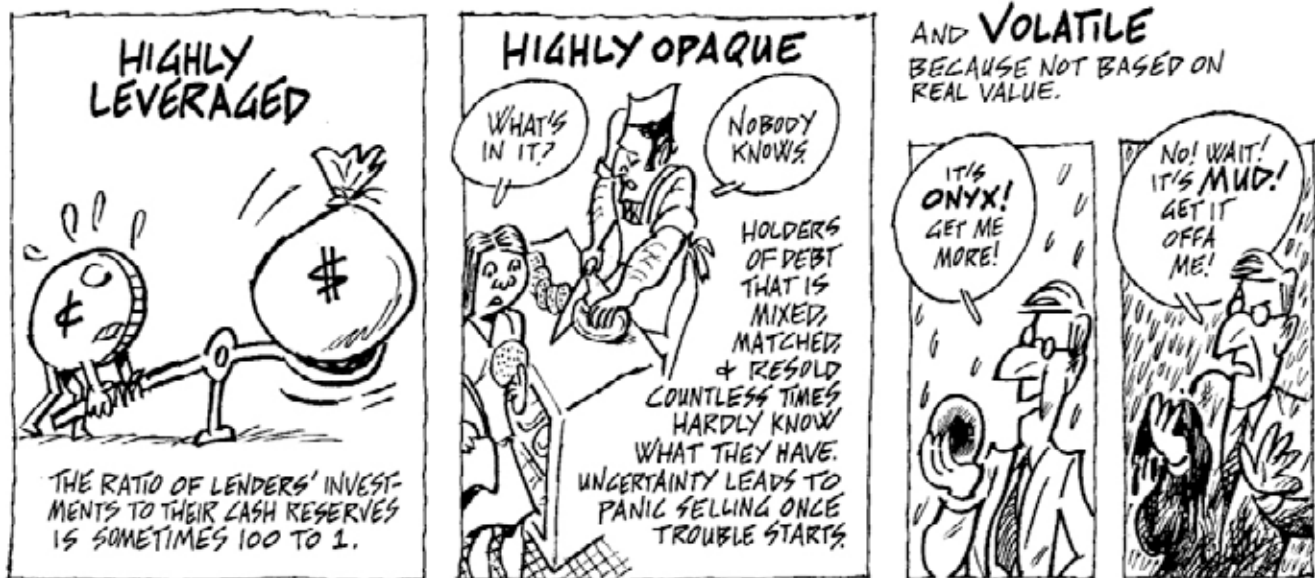
Paulo Suess wrote an article in 2000 called "Encounter and Dis-encounter in the Search for the Land of no Evil." The title refers to the Guarani spiritual centering in Yvy Marane-y - or the Search for the Land of no Evil (also Land without Evil - it's been translated both ways). Rather than being a 'utopia' as is often asserted, it is a life in balance. Suess analyzes Christian perspective in light of encounter with the Mbya Guarani. "The logic of the Feast" and "Challenges" are also attached.

Sincerely,

Meg Kidd

megkidd@webryders.net

Editor's note: please write Skip Schiel, skipschiel@gmail.com, if you wish to read the articles.



From the "Economic Meltdown Funnies." Please see back page for details.

Employee-Owned Businesses— One Key Building Block for Economic Justice

~John Blanchard~

Framingham Friends Meeting—on staff at American Friends Service Committee, New England
Regional Office for Economic Alternatives for 7 & 1/2 years—member of RSEJ

We'll be looking at the work which the ICA Group does and why worker-owned businesses are essential to create a more just and equitable economy.

The ICA Group (Industrial Cooperative Association) is a national non-profit (located in Brookline, MA) established in 1978 to promote human and economic development through the creation of model employee-owned companies and community income-generating projects. They help disadvantaged populations throughout the United States create quality jobs and build community assets through the development of community-based, social purpose enterprises. The ICA Group has a high degree of success with alternative employment agencies that move temporary workers into permanent employment. They set these up in Boston, Brooklyn, NY, Washington DC and Providence RI. In 2006 these companies served over 2,500 job seekers and entry-level workers.

In 1992 ICA established Boston Office Cleaners for 45 low income Vietnamese immigrants with very limited English language skills. They achieved this with a central marketing, billing and accounting unit with personnel who had adequate language skills, plus smaller separately franchised micro-enterprises that did the cleaning work. In December 2003 ICA helped to open an apparel manufacturing co-op named Navasew on the Navajo Reservation in Utah. Before Navasew started up, 99% of the existing employment on the reservation was in low paid service businesses. Fortunately they have an experienced apparel industry business partner that is providing training in all aspects of that industry. In their 4th year they generated 1.5 million in wages for the worker-owners (who are mostly women), which is a major economic boost for their tribal community. Home Health care agencies are another line of business which ICA has been successful in establishing. Cooperative Home Care Associates in the Bronx NYC, was the first one they helped to set up. That became both sizeable and successful in just a few years. Then Home Care Associated in Philadelphia followed and also is still doing very well. These offer a high degree of democratic participation for staff in developing policies. Also, they have a high level of in-

service training opportunities and fringe benefits for the employee-owners. A former staff member of ICA created a project for unemployed women and men in rural West Virginia—due to massive textile plants closing their doors from 1980 to the present. They work at home, making hand loomed knit products. They follow all the principles of worker ownership, even though there is no collective business entity per se.

[The Industrial Cooperative Association] helps disadvantaged populations throughout the United States create quality jobs and build community assets through the development of community based, social purpose enterprises.

ICA has an affiliate loan fund LEAF (Local Enterprise Assistance Fund) capable of providing low interest loans to make sure each start up can operate properly. ICA collaborates with a wide variety of consulting groups in order to provide specific expertise. This ensures a greater degree of success and very few projects that don't work out.



Owner-operated cleaning business

What's so important about worker owned businesses? Given the model organization that ICA uses, all employees including managers invest a certain amount of money in the business. Any new employee has to complete something like a "trial period," perhaps a year—but it may be longer depending on the nature of the business, before she or he would make "investment." If they can't provide the whole amount, the company usually would offer a plan to deduct half of their investment via monthly installments. (The amount each company requires from potential new employee-owners varies with each business; a typical figure might range from \$800-\$1500.) It is a major decision and workers do require an extended period of time to discover if they are prepared to make this commitment. Assuming the company is profitable, each employee's investment will earn dividends in the future. In addition to earnings from their investment, employees have further incentives; they have a vote and opportunity to help shape improvements or changes in policy at Annual Meetings. Also employees are elected to the Board of Directors or other committees by the whole body of employee owners. This changes the dynamics of the workplace culture and the motivation of all employees, no matter if they are the lowest skilled and least experienced, or the highest skilled in that firm.

Managers still make day-to-day decisions; however employee-owned firms generally set up clear and fair channels of communications for dealing with problems and grievances especially if it's a personnel type of problem and not a technical or marketing problem. And worker-owned firms

usually are proactive regarding on-the-job or off-site new skills training or mentoring—that may lead to higher pay and higher satisfaction. The business structure that ICA uses introduces a significant level of democratic practices into each firm. Employees in any business deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, but traditional firms vary and low-skilled workers often have to endure crude bosses too frequently. I'm convinced that the structure the ICA uses actually motivates people better than most other businesses doing comparable work.

As a Quaker trying honestly to evaluate employee owned firms, I hear and feel echoes of our familiar Friends adage "there is that of God in everyone" coming alive as part of the special nature of workplace morale and culture in employee owned businesses in ways it never could in firms owned by families, or a handful of managers or many stockholders.

How can Friends support the work ICA is doing and learn more? Check out www.ica-group.org; also www.leaffund.org

For correspondence: The ICA Group, 1 Harvard St. Suite 200, Brookline, MA 02445. LEAF is located at the same address. Individuals and Friends meetings can make loans to LEAF. I recommend very highly The Company We Keep by John Abrams, 2005. ICA has copies of this for sale. ICA's modus operandi originated with the Mondragon experiment in the Basque region of Spain. Learn about Mondragon on the web by searching for "Mondragon cooperatives in Spain/ Whole Earth Review."



Kay Mlakar, chairman and owner of the Millcraft Paper Co., runs the 88-year-old paper distribution business that her grandfather founded. One of the largest independent paper merchants in the Midwest, Millcraft has a unique three-generation history as a woman-owned business. (Gus Chan/The Plain Dealer)

My experience as a Black man in the Quaker community

~James Varner~

Orono Maine Friends Meeting—convener of the Working Party Committee of RSEJ—member of RSEJ

My name is James Varner and I am an African American. I have been a Quaker for more than 27 years after being brought up in the Baptist faith. When our family lived in Plainfield, New Jersey, my wife and children became members of the Rahway-Plainfield Meeting, which is part of New York Yearly Meeting. I soon joined them as an attender and later as a member. Presently I am a member of Orono Friends Meeting here in Maine and an active member of New England Yearly Meeting.

The Racial, Social, and Economic Justice committee (CRSEJ) asked Skip Schiel to interview me for stories about how racism has affected Friends of Color in New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM), either during sessions or in their monthly meetings, and I agreed.

I am concerned about how Friends in my Meeting and the many white Quakers in our Yearly Meeting will react to my sharing personal information regarding racism within our ranks. Will I be viewed as a person of color for whom every word must be measured lest you be considered a racist? How will the members

of my own Orono Meeting feel? I once levied the charge of racism in my own Meeting, and our Field Secretary, Jonathan Vogel-Borne, came in to mediate and help us as a Meeting for Worship to deal with the issues of racism that I felt I was experiencing?

Confronting this type of racism is uncomfortable for the victim and for the person who is perceived as a racist. Because of pain and discomfort I have often buried many of the incidents in my mind. But in all fairness to the issue, I do have a strong, forceful personality and in some instances people may honestly be reacting to my personality and not to me as a person of color.

I wrote an article a few years ago titled "My Life as a Black Quaker" for *The Crier* concerning certain incidents I had experienced during Yearly Meeting Gatherings and as a Black Quaker in the US. I read it at the Ministry and Counsel

Committee meeting, and the Working Party on Racism was formed on the spot and is still operating today. Some of the incidents of perceived racism I have experienced at New England Yearly Meeting are as follows:



Burying the N word, New England Yearly Meeting, August 2008, photo by Skip Schiel, teeksaphoto.org

- I have been asked in very challenging ways at Yearly Meeting, "Why did you become a Quaker?" Tone of voice, body language, and hand gestures say it all: Why did you, a black man, decide to be "one of us"? You may have to be in my skin and walk in my shoes to understand the implication of this particular "query."

- I have overheard racial jokes about blacks at Yearly Meeting when people did not know I was within earshot.

- I have had people tell jokes about black people in my presence, and when I pointed out that it was racist and why it was wrong, "We didn't mean it that way," would be their response.

- The most common racism I hear at New England Yearly Meeting is when I am leaving and someone comments with a



James Varner, Bangor Daily News photos by John Clarke Russ

smile, “Don’t get too much sun” or “Watch out for the sun,” which makes reference to my dark skin and getting a tan (and actually implies that being dark is something to avoid).



Vanessa Julye

- I have never been called the “N-word” at a Yearly Meeting gathering, but I have heard children say to their parents, “Look at that N-word.” Their parents will often try to hush their children up, but the effect remains.
- Several years ago when Yearly Meeting was held at Bowdoin College, I had a discussion with a man, who I’m not sure was a Quaker. He couldn’t seem to see

Meeting gatherings. At one session, I recall at least six or seven people shared the racism they or their children experienced. Some of the white people present spoke about observing mistreatment as well as the mistreatment of their children. Friends of color have also expressed their experiences with racism.

- I charged racism in the way I was treated when I became Clerk of Equalization in terms of approval for the use of the funds as opposed to previous white clerks. The former NEYM Presiding Clerk, Christopher McCandless, and John Vogel-Borne are working on a Minute to reflect on this action.

- I have been in small Quaker groups where I was talked around and through—ignored as if I was not present.

- At Yearly Meetings I have often said hello to people and gotten no response. Some people just don’t seem “Friendly.”

- (Editor’s addition: when completing a term on the Racial, Social, and Economic Justice committee and serving as co clerk, NEYM Nominating committee tried to persuade Jim to join another YM committee rather than rotating back on. One of their arguments was that the Jim had unfairly

The history and values of the Religious Society of Friends were the main reasons I became a member of our Meeting in Plainfield.

I have heard children say to their parents, “Look at that N-word.” Their parents will often try to hush their children up, but the effect remains.

My wife and children were very happy at this Meeting. She served as secretary for several years and we attended New York Yearly Meeting for many summer sessions. Granted at New York Yearly Meeting, there were more Friends of color than here in New England.

We will run a column called “Under the Rug” and we invite any readers who have experienced any sort of oppression—racial, social or economic—in any Quaker community to submit their stories to the editors.

I am concerned about how Friends in my Meeting and the many white Quakers in our Yearly Meeting will react to my sharing personal information regarding racism within our ranks.

what was wrong with calling me a “darkie.” That was the way his parents and family members referred to African Americans, and he couldn’t understand why I was “getting bent out of shape” by the expression.

- Over the years since we have had the Room for People of Color, blacks have shared how they experience racism at our Yearly

dominated the committee. Our committee unanimously objected and asked that he be allowed to return. How often does this happen with other committees?)



Tribe 1 performing at Friends General Conference gathering, July 2008, photo by Skip Schiel, teeksaphoto.org

GOOD NEWS!

Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans and the Myth of Racial Justice **By Donna McDaniel (Framingham Meeting) and Vanessa Julye (Central Philadelphia Meeting)**

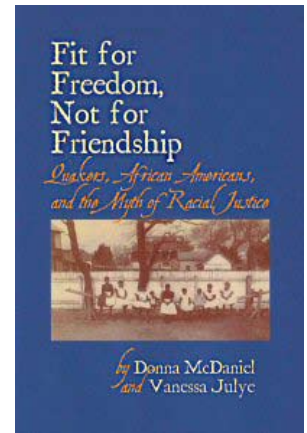
From Quaker Press of Friends General Conference

There is a common misconception that most Quakers assisted fugitive slaves and involved themselves in civil rights activism because of their belief in equality. While there were Friends committed to ending enslavement and post-enslavement injustices, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship* reveals that racism has been as insidious, complex, and pervasive among Friends as it has been generally among people of European descent. The book documents the spiritual and practical impacts of discrimination in the Religious Society of Friends in the belief that understanding the truth of our past is vital to achieving a diverse, inclusive community in the future.

Hardcover \$45.00 / paperback \$28.00 (shipping not included)

Available from QuakerBooks of FGC, 1216 Arch Street, 2B, Philadelphia PA 19107
1-800-966-4556 www.quakerbooks.org

The Crier has published episodes from the book during its evolution. Check at neym.org/PrejudiceAndPoverty/index.html



Way Opens: A Spiritual Journey

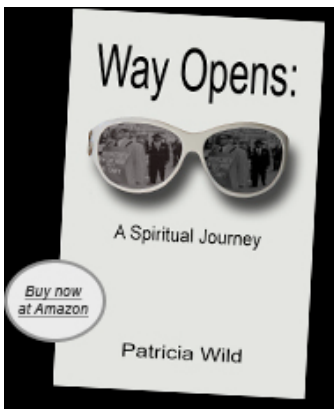
By Patricia Wild

(Friends Meeting at Cambridge)

From Amazon

www.amazon.com/Way-Opens-Spiritual-Patricia-Wild/dp/0980131529/

Eight years ago, Patricia Wild asked, "What happened to the African Americans who desegregated my high school in Lynchburg, Virginia in 1962?" That question became a quest; *Way Opens* tracks her journey. She finds Dr. Lynda Woodruff, now a college professor, and Reverend Owen Cardwell, a Baptist preacher, and learns history lessons never taught in her segregated high school. Gently guided by Lynda and Owen, her Quaker meeting, and the people she meets along the way, Patricia examines her White privilege.



Prejudice & Poverty Grant Guidelines

Our charge is to help New England Friends and their allies in the wider New England community attend closely to poverty and the many forms of prejudice, examine and remove root causes, and alleviate effects. Our grants rarely exceed \$1,000 and are usually given only once to a particular project. We favor enterprises with a large share of the design and implementation provided by diverse communities whose lives have been adversely impacted by prejudice and poverty. We look for ideas that feature cooperation between Friends' groups and people affected by poverty and prejudice. We require that projects be concordant with the Friends testimonies of peace, equality, simplicity, and community. We review applications periodically throughout the year; hence, there are no deadlines. We ask for a report within one year of making the grant and encourage ongoing contact between the project and us.

**Please mail or fax completed applications with supplementary materials to
Rachel Carey-Harper, 508-385-5443, rch@cape.com PO Box 585, Dennis, MA 02638-0585.**

Working Draft from the Ad Hoc Committee for a Justice Testimony

As members of New England Yearly Meeting, we seek leadings individually and as a group from the Spirit by attentive listening. Our committee has come together to pray over and to examine how Friends' testimonies of equality, peace, and integrity are leading us to propose a "testimony of Justice" as a written expression of our faith. Justice has a twofold meaning: one, spiritual—righteousness, the observance of the divine law; the other temporal—fairness, righteous dealing, integrity. This vision of justice is the result of seeking to live in virtue of nonviolence, compassion, redemption, and love.



International Court of Justice, The Hague, Belgium

As we seek to follow the promptings of the Spirit, we have been considering whether the understanding held by our religious forebears is sufficient to express the Truth that we are currently living. The testimonies of Friends have developed as expressions of the lived faith of Friends and Friends' Meetings since the founding of the Religious Society of Friends. As we reflect on and pray over what we are called to do and where we are led, we apprehend that our Religious Society has always sought to reflect and model the Kingdom of God that we are called to create on earth.

QUERIES

Do we need a Justice testimony in NEYM? Why and how might a Justice testimony help NEYM Friends in our spiritual and temporal practices?

What does "justice" mean to Friends? How does our Meeting respond to the need for justice?

How do Friends respond to several of the many scriptural references to justice? "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." (Amos 5:24) "True justice is the harvest reaped by peacemakers from seeds sown in the spirit of peace." (James 3:18).

If we disregard justice, what impact does it have on our spiritual lives and on our connection with the Divine?

What is the relationship between love and justice? Between living in the spirit and seeking justice? If compassion is love in action, what is justice in action?

How does oppression dehumanize and dim the Light, both in oppressor and oppressed?

The Ad Hoc Committee for a Justice Ministry will continue to work on this process. We welcome suggestions from the Working Party on Racism of Ministry and Counsel of NEYM; from the Racial, Social and Economic Justice Committee; from Monthly Meetings; from Quarterly Meeting; from individuals; and from other entities of NEYM. We actively encourage Friends to contact us:

*Hal Weaver, convener; Wellesley Monthly Meeting and The BlackQuaker Project, weaverhal@yahoo.com
Rachel Carey-Harper; Barnstable Friends Meeting, rch@cape.com*



International Court of Justice, The Hague, Belgium

*Brian Corr; Friends Meeting at Cambridge, bcorr@umich.edu
Anne Nash; Wellesley Monthly Meeting, asnash4@yahoo.com
Greg Williams; New Bedford Monthly Meeting, gctw2849@yahoo.com*

29 December 2008

“The Truly Great” **~Stephen Spender~**

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light, where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit clothed from head to foot in song.
And who hoarded from the Spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.

What is precious is never to forget
The essential delight of the blood drawn from ageless springs,
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth.
Never to deny its pleasure in the morning simple light
Nor its grave evening demand for love.
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog, the flowering of the spirit.

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields,
See how these names are feted by the waving grass
And by the streamers of white cloud
And whispers of wind in the listening sky.
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.
Born of the sun, they traveled a short while towards the sun
And left the vivid air signed with their honour.

(Thanks to Wendy Geiger)

Suggestions for learning about race and white privilege *Books can be ordered from www.quakerbooks.org.*

The Answer! January's postcard asked the name of the first African American female astronaut. It's Mae Jamison of Alabama, a scientist, chemical engineer, physician, among other accomplishments. More at: space.about.com/cs/formerastronauts/a/jemisonbio.htm.

Reading for young people: *I Want to Be Free* is a beautifully illustrated poem-like story based on Rudyard Kipling's Kim but about the escape of a young slave, while another illustrated poem focuses on Martin Luther King's wife, *Coretta Scott* (that's the name of the book). *Most Loved in All the World* tells the heart-breaking story of a mother who sends her daughter North, though she stays behind herself to help others escape.

A new generation of African American leaders: Gwen Ifill, host and moderator of two PBS programs, has written of that new generation in *Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama* featuring up and coming leaders like Newark mayor Cory Booker, Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter, Congressmen William Lacy Clay, Jr., and Kendrick Meek, and Mass. Gov. Deval Patrick, among others. The range of subjects: going beyond "identity politics," the source of this crop of leaders, and the question of whether an office-holder is "black enough."

From Framingham Monthly meeting and NEYM Working Groups on Racism. Contact: music1@charter.net
Thank you for sharing this with your meeting!

Incident at Moosup

~K Brown~

Barnstable Friends Meeting—member of RSEJ

On Oct. 19, 2007, Nashawn Williams, then 16, told police he was beaten and doused with hot coffee by a group of white boys at a bus stop in the town of Plainfield, CT. Williams said the men confronted him regarding an earlier incident in which a fellow student used a racial slur when referring to him.

Hartford Rev. Cornell Lewis said he could understand why Nashawn's mother Phyllisha Williams moved to Plainfield. There are no cars rushing up and down the street; there are no wine or beer bottles littering the sidewalks. It's a quiet New England town that could be a Norman Rockwell painting, if it weren't for the racism lurking underneath the



surface. Selectman Paul Sweet responded, "The town is trying to deal with an unfortunate situation and the authorities need to have time to investigate the matter." Sweet's comments drew the criticism of Mrs. Williams, who shouted at Sweet "When I told you there was racism in your town you told me to drive safely!" before breaking down in tears.

Less than one percent of Plainfield residents are black.

Lewis said the Williams family has since moved, not only because of the assault on Nashawn, but also because 17 white men and boys stood on her front lawn and shouted "Come out N-word. Show yourself." He said he hates to think about what would have happened if they had.

The statute of limitations expired October 19 and the case was closed. Police and prosecutors said an investigation was hampered due to a lack of reliable suspects and evidence, but critics pointed to as an example of racial inequality. The Rev. Lewis strongly questioned Plainfield Police Chief Robert Hoffman's handling of the case and characterized Plainfield as an insular, racist community more concerned with sweeping the assault under the carpet than in seeking justice.

"A lot of us worked long and hard on this, so I'm feeling despondent," he said. Plainfield resident Judy Jones said she also was disappointed the investigation ended without arrests.

"I think it would have a different outcome if the victim was white," said Jones, who is white.

Moosup is situated within 35 miles of five Friends Meetings: Providence, Smithfield and Westerly RI and Storrs and New London CT.

Queries:

What is our responsibility?

What is God asking of us in these situations?

TIMELINE

OCT. 19, 2007: NASHAWN WILLIAMS IS ASSAULTED BY A GROUP OF WHITE MEN.

NOV. 15: WILLIAMS' MOTHER, PHYLLISHA, HOLDS A PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE PLAINFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT, WHERE SHE CRITICIZES POLICE FOR NOT MAKING ARRESTS.

NOV. 17: POLICE CONDUCT A PHOTO LINEUP SESSION WITH WILLIAMS. HE DOES NOT IDENTIFY ANYONE.

DEC. 10: THE NAACP OFFERS ITS ASSISTANCE TO POLICE AND THE WILLIAMS FAMILY.

DEC. 15: THE MEN OF COLOR ORGANIZATION IN WEST HARTFORD CONDUCTS A RALLY AT PLAINFIELD TOWN HALL. GROUP LEADER THE REV. CORNELL LEWIS SAYS ORGANIZED RACIST GROUPS ARE ACTIVE IN TOWN.

FEB. 25: WILLIAMS AGAIN SITS WITH POLICE TO VIEW MUG SHOTS OF POTENTIAL ATTACKERS. WILLIAMS IDENTIFIES ONE MAN WHO POLICE LATER DETERMINE WAS NOT INVOLVED.

MARCH 11: PLAINFIELD HOLDS A COMMUNITY FORUM TO DISCUSS RACE IN TOWN.

SEPT. 2: POLICE CLOSE THE INVESTIGATION, CITING A LACK OF EVIDENCE AND NO VIABLE SUSPECTS.

SEPT. 24: LEWIS MEETS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF GOV. M. JODI RELL REGARDING THE CASE AND PETITIONS MORE ACTION.

OCT. 19: THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS EXPIRES IN THE WILLIAMS ASSAULT CASE.

Racism Is a Spiritual Issue

~Christopher Sammond~

New York Yearly Meeting general secretary

Reprinted with permission from SPARK, the newsletter of NYYM, Volume 39, Number 1, January 2008
www.nyyym.org/spark/2008.1.shtml#rsi

Racism is deeply, deeply
woven into the political,
social, and economic fabric of this
country. The wealth of this nation
is built upon the institution of
slavery.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, slavery was perceived as right and good, an appropriate part of the social order. Those who challenged it were deemed social deviants, and were viciously attacked. Even early North American Friends, who eventually rejected slavery, treated Friends of African descent with only slightly moderated versions of the racist culture that surrounded them, relegating them to the back bench in worship. Racism is part of our culture. It is the air that we breathe, the water we swim in. All of us, of all races, who have been raised in this racist culture, have internalized its messages. And becoming conscious of one's own culture is like trying to see the back of our own head. We need someone else's perspective to see it.

I served for seven years on Friends General Conference's Committee for Ministry on Racism. I learned a tremendous amount in the process. Part of what I learned was how blisteringly difficult it is for mixed-race groups to talk about race. A lot of the committee's work revolved around trying to structure such opportunities. Though we tried any number of structures designed to help Friends share their experience and feelings about racism within the Society of Friends in ways that were healing,

almost invariably, there was a significant blow-up that left some Friends feeling deeply wounded. Typically, that blow-up occurred at the interface between Friends of color sharing their experience of

[or against racism]." This response had a similar implication; "because of my past behavior, I am not like those other white people being named." Another frequent response was "The reason that we don't have

more people of color in our meetings is that our form of worship doesn't suit them. They need lots of music. "This may seem like a non sequitur, but the implication is the same: "There isn't racism in my meeting. The reason that we are all white is just because of our form of worship." Another common response, and undeniably the most damaging, was "You people are misinterpreting the actions of white folk. What you are experiencing is not



Kahlil Bendib, www.bendib.com

racism, and the white folk present, in various ways, not being able to hear that experience.

There were patterns to white folks' response to hearing about

Friends of color's experience of racism in Friends. The most common

response involved some version of "Some of my best friends are..." This response sought to illustrate a long history of being friends with people of color, the implication being that, unlike the white folk whom Friends of color had found to be racist, the speaker was not racist, due to these relationships. An analogous response was "I have worked all my life for civil rights

racism."

In all of these responses, the speakers did not receive the experience of the Friends of color. Instead, they did all they could to

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distance themselves personally from the specter of white racism. All these responses defended against taking in what the Friends of color were saying; that they frequently, even habitually, experienced racism in our Religious Society, and that it was deeply painful for them.

After these incidents, Friends of color shared how having their experience denied compounded the

hurt of the original incidents. They felt further alienated and wounded.

I must admit, there were times when the incidents related did not sound like racism to me; they sounded like some self-conscious white person putting their foot in it. It was only after years of working with the Friends of color on the

liberal Friends in this conversation about race. People of color are trying to name their experience. A lot of white folk are not able to hear that experience. We need to be able to get to a place of enough trust to have the conversations about how we do or don't experience racism in our midst. And we are not there yet.

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committee that I broached those perceptions in some one-on-one conversations. And we had some very productive exchanges. But before we could do that effectively, we had already laid a substantial foundation of trust between us.

This is the juncture where I see

community that we are not able to talk about, some of the energy that might give us greater life in the Spirit is bound up, frozen, unavailable. It is the old "elephant in the room" phenomena. For me, the issue isn't "Is there racism in the Society of Friends?" The issue is

"Are we going to have the courage to learn from one another about how we experience racism?"

We have all been wounded by racism, no matter what our racial background. I don't expect to ever be free of its subtle influences in my life. I do hope to become more and more aware of it, and to heal what I can from it. And as I do, I believe that I become closer to the person that God made me to be.

Look for a workshop from RSEJ on this theme for summer 2009 sessions.

This is why racism is a spiritual issue. If there is something in the fabric of our



Portrait and words of Bob Marley

Profile of RSEJ Committee Member & Clerk

Rachel Carey-Harper

Barnstable (Cape Cod) Friends Meeting

1. WHAT LED YOU TO SERVE ON THIS COMMITTEE?

Sometime in the 1990s my first involvement began with RSEJ, then Prejudice and Poverty. The main spiritual calling I was attempting to answer was addressing behavior rooted in sexism. I had just started



Rachel Carey Harper

the Clothesline Project with the stated intention to bear witness to violence against women. The totally needless pain, suffering and sometimes death of as much as one third of all women

(next door, around the country and world), deeply touched my heart. The fact that more money is given to animal than women's shelters speaks volumes about cultural attitudes and priorities. The question was how to be successful at spiritually effecting change.

Clarity came in a casual conversation with the Wampanoag linguist who told me there was no word in their language for rape; that it was an unknown concept before colonization. The women and culture in primary feminist leadership are Euro/ American. This led me to conclude that maybe we should instead follow the leadership of women of color. What was standing in its way was racism. So I switched my focus because all forms of discrimination are debilitating and remove us from really connecting with the Light. I rejoined the committee briefly in 2002 when I was organizing a yearlong hunger fast and other actions for Leonard Peltier, (the Native American convicted on the basis of fabricated and suppressed evidence, as well as coerced testimony, imprisoned for over 30 years).



Israeli Clothes Line Project button

2. WHAT GIFTS DO YOU BRING TO THE WORK OF THIS COMMITTEE?

As my leadings around racism matured I found support in the current RSEJ committee and decided to rejoin its efforts. The gifts I bring are a life-long commitment to Friends and experience with Quaker process. (My family was one of the founding families of Framingham Meeting; I am a George School graduate, class of '69, etc.) I also bring a personal spiritual relationship, a top priority to be of service to God that enfolds everything I do. I bring enthusiasm, creativity and courage to speak my truth. When called by Spirit, I am willing to face the struggles intrinsic in an anti-racism ministry.

3. WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE YOU ENGAGED IN RELATED TO THE MISSION AND THEMES OF THE RSEJ COMMITTEE?

The activities that I am currently engaged in that relate to the themes of this committee are shepherding our new Meeting (Barnstable Friends) through the ramifications of the above work. I encourage opening ourselves to the consequences of white privilege, including ownership of the spiritual responsibilities that this brings. This has included conducting workshops, including producing and conducting workshops and producing a project for this modeled on the AA 12 step approach. Along with keeping connected to some Clothesline Projects, I also provide spiritual and material support to the primary homeless advocate agencies on Cape Cod, to Wampanoag and to other Native peoples through American Friends Service Committee in Cambridge.



www.clotheslineproject.org

And Then There Was Light

~Gail Thomas~

Transferring her membership to Bethesda Monthly Meeting after many years in New England—serves on the FGC Religious Education Committee, Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s Working Group on Racism and the Intervisitation Committee—co-clerks The Bethesda Adult Education Committee.
Reprinted from Friends General Conference’s Resources, Autumn, 2006

“In the beginning was darkness—and it wasn’t good enough.” This heart wrenching comment on Genesis 1 burst forth from a middle aged African American man in a class on Racism and the Bible. Instinctively I knew this wasn’t true, and as a white person I had never thought of reading the text in this way; I could



The Way to Paradise Garden, by W Eugene Smith

think of nothing to say.

So much of western Christianity and Quakerism, in particular, uses images of light for good and images of dark for evil.

Quakers routinely refer to Fox’s vision of an ocean of light overcoming an ocean of darkness and a number of our songs for children rejoice in light overcoming

dark. As adults, we may rationalize that, of course, we are not referring to skin color. But then I remember another story told me by a Quaker

of African descent. She felt she had made her peace with these metaphors and was using them in her First Day School class; then one day a young African-American girl in her class asked, “Why does God hate me?” So even when we are careful, subconsciously the message that dark is bad comes though. How can we make Quaker language more welcoming to people of color?

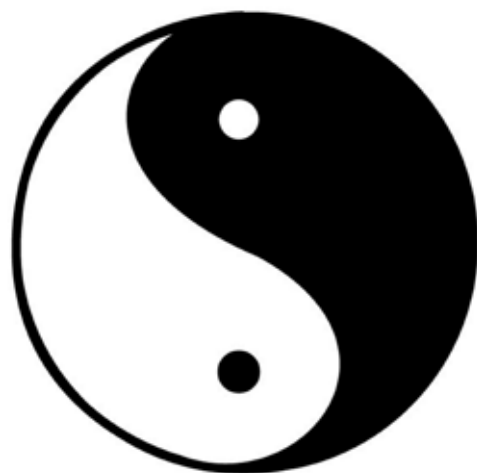
The solution, it seems to me, is not getting rid of images of light. A candle does shine in the darkness, and morning light ushers in a new day. I have had personal experiences of the Light. Expressions such as holding someone “in the light,” and “the light of Christ,” are powerful and convey truth. What we need, rather, are equally positive images of darkness. As I have had spiritual experiences of light, I have also experienced darkness; it is warm and sensual and womb-like as well as powerful and formidable. Fox’s image of the Seed works for me as one image we could use more often. A seed needs the darkness of the soil to grow as well as light. Darkness also helps us to rest, and, for me, can be a metaphor for silence, for times of transformation, for deep holding.

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We can also be more nuanced when we use words that contrast with light. Chris Ravendal in his Gospel of John class at Pendle Hill

likes to remind us that the word in John 1:5 usually translated as “dark” more accurately is the Greek word for “shadow.” It may look like a small change, but a shift in words can help break what may seem like a relentless equation of darkness with evil.

Do I have negative associations of darkness? I thought about how the Light can search my soul, but it reveals what is hidden, what I



have been ignoring or denying; I do not experience these places as dark but, rather, unexamined. If I use metaphors of darkness, it is from custom not from experience. Do I experience emotions as dark? I have

felt anger, jealousy, self-righteousness, self-pity, but, to me, these feelings are not associated with a color. The only emotion I associate with darkness is fear. Being in a dark

place without light can feel scary. But should it? Isn’t that my ego fearing the unknown, fearing a loss of control? “Even though I walk

through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me." The message of most religions is that love overcomes fear, therefore, darkness should not be scary if I have faith. The so-called "dark night of the soul" may feel like God is absent, but, again, it is part of the journey to a more secure knowing. The fear and anxiety of our ego self may call this "dark" and attach a negative charge, but it can also be seen as positive. Usually what is happening in a dark night is a deepening; the seed growing underground. A new relationship with God is forming, as in a womb, or, if painful, as in the birth channel.

I may be going too far here, but it seems to me that racism, with its making "other" of people because of their skin color goes along in many

cultures with treating women as less than men and a fear of sexuality. Most religions have positive images of light, but few see light and dark as simply ying and yan, two sides of one reality without judgment. Rather, light is usually associated with male energy and reason, while the dark, to be feared, is associated with women and emotions. Even in the Bible, as the man who is mentioned at the start of the article noted, "the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Then God creates and sees the light "was good."

We cannot change ancient metaphors or how ancient people made sense of their world. We can try to change how we use these metaphors, how often we use them,

and whether we actively search for different metaphors to convey the same reality. A Friend suggested to me a way to interpret the Biblical creation story. In the beginning was a "void," a "mishmash." The creation of light and firmament provide a rhythm and beauty to things, with the alternation of darkness and light creating the measurement of days and months and years, providing the order and structure necessary for life. Both darkness and light are necessary. Both are divine gifts. In the beginning was God, and God wove the darkness and the light into the miraculous tapestry of contrast and complement that is this cosmos, this life, and all our knowing. And it was good.

Nan Stone, beloved former member of the Committee for Racial, Social and Economic Justice

Nan, even during the last stage of her cancer, was one of our most energetic and committed members. Traveling long distances to Committee Days and retreats, she sparked our committee to engage in direct action at New England Yearly Meeting sessions in 2008, dying just a few days before the event.

From an obituary in the Village Soup:

Nan Stone, 64, died Aug. 1, 2008, as she lived, surrounded by friends, family and a large extended community, whose loving care enabled her to be at her home in Swanville, Maine.

She lived courageously with cancer for more than two-and-a-half years, maintaining an active life and positive attitude that was an inspiration to all who knew her.

Nan attended Morningside College and then Boston University School of Theology. As part of the Harvard, MIT and Radcliff campus ministry, she began her life as a committed activist working tirelessly for peace, social justice issues and environmental protection.



While active in protesting the Vietnam War, she got involved in women's consciousness raising groups and this began her feminist and gay/lesbian rights work.

Coming out as a lesbian blocked her path to ordination in the Methodist Church. This is one of the many instances where Nan's courage and determination to live her beliefs and defend the rights of all people required personal sacrifice.

In the more than 30 years that Nan lived in Waldo County, she helped initiate many needed social service and advocacy programs, including but not limited to the first volunteer hospice of Waldo County in the early 1980s, co-founding Maine Lesbian Feminists, writing community-based AIDS legislation, directing the Waldo Knox AIDS Coalition, Alzheimer's Support Group and Adult Day Care.

More at waldo.villagesoup.com/announcements/ObituaryStory.cfm?storytypeid=1&storyID=123870

Book & movie reviews

Iron Jawed Angels

Directed by Katja von Garnier, 2004
~Reviewed by Rachel Carey-Harper~

Iron Jawed Angels is a 2004 film about the American women's suffrage movement. The film follows political activist and Quaker Alice Paul as she struggles for the right to vote for women.

The film begins as Paul (Hilary Swank, who won an Academy Award for *Boys Don't Cry*) returns to the United States from England. She struggles with both government chauvinism and mainstream women's rights activists. As a result of their actions hundreds of women are arrested, though the official charge is "obstructing traffic." In one short but poignant scene they decide to reject affiliation with black women for fear the racial backlash will doom their cause. As they begin to gain traction, they are sent to Occoquan Workhouse for 60-day terms



where they suffer horrendous conditions. During this time, Paul, followed by others, stage a hunger strike during which prison authorities brutally force feed them. Prohibited from seeing visitors or lawyers, news of their treatment leaks to the media and the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution is passed by one vote. In 1970, at the age of ninety one, Alice Paul



said "Women are still voiceless . . . We have to wait until complete equality becomes a reality. When you put your hand to the plow, you can't put it down until you reach the end of the row."

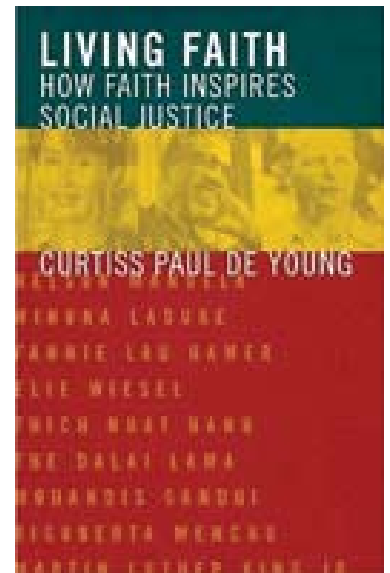
Living Faith:

How Faith Inspires Social Justice
Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Fortress Press 2007
~Reviewed by Skip Schiel~

DeYoung examines the role of religious faith in social activism by profiling three key figures as examples of faith inspired social action—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Malcolm X, and Aung San Suu Kyi. This book is suitable for a general audience as young as mature high schoolers, plus those who might need encouragement and information about "how faith inspires social justice." Also the book is useful for the general reader interested in different perspectives on either political action and/or religion.

The book uses examples, which range beyond the three key figures to include luminaries such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Alan Boesak from South Africa, Fannie Lou Hamer and Roberta Menchu—from different lands and interpretations of religion but all contemporary and compatible. It emphasizes the intricacies of faith, along with its ambiguities (especially in the case of Bonhoeffer who reluctantly agreed to join in the assassination attempt on Hitler, an act of violence).

Its main points are that faith comes in many different forms—Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism highlighted here—but all point in the same direction, toward ending oppression. Also that the struggle against oppression is arduous and dangerous and that a willingness to experience danger is a testimony to conviction. King's call for a "revolution of values" permeates the work of many activists. Whether one lives on the margins (Malcolm) or the within the margins of society (Bonhoeffer and Suu Kyi) empathizing with the marginalized is vital to effective social change. Also that faith is a powerful tool for fostering change.



Mission Accomplished:
Wicked Cartoons by America's Most Wanted Political Cartoonist
Khalil Bendib, Interlink Books, 2007
~Reviewed by Skip Schiel~

About the tragic situation of the United States, politically and socially. Most everyone over the age of about 10 years would find something valuable, edifying, and humorous in this book. It includes cartoons, Bendib's astute observational powers; his skill at rendering perspectives thru pictures and words; his courage in skewering all who act unjustly, foes of the activist community but also friends (like Palestinians); his breath of topics; and his ability to point out the follies of current leaders—and followers.

Some of his categories include New Orleans: make levee, not war!; war profiteering: ain't no bid like no-bid; empire: between Iraq and a hard place; Palestine (sic): the wall; islamophobia; labor pains; food for thought; and mother Africa. This book is refreshment for the withered soul of many activists, providing succor thru laughter and fresh interpretations aimed at the absurdities of our existence.



Resources for Activists

Hal Weaver's China Film Project (including the Black Film Project): www.chinafilmproject.org

"Traversing the Devil's Terrain," by Suzanne Shanley: www.agapecommunity.org/2007/05/17/traversing-the-devils-terrain/

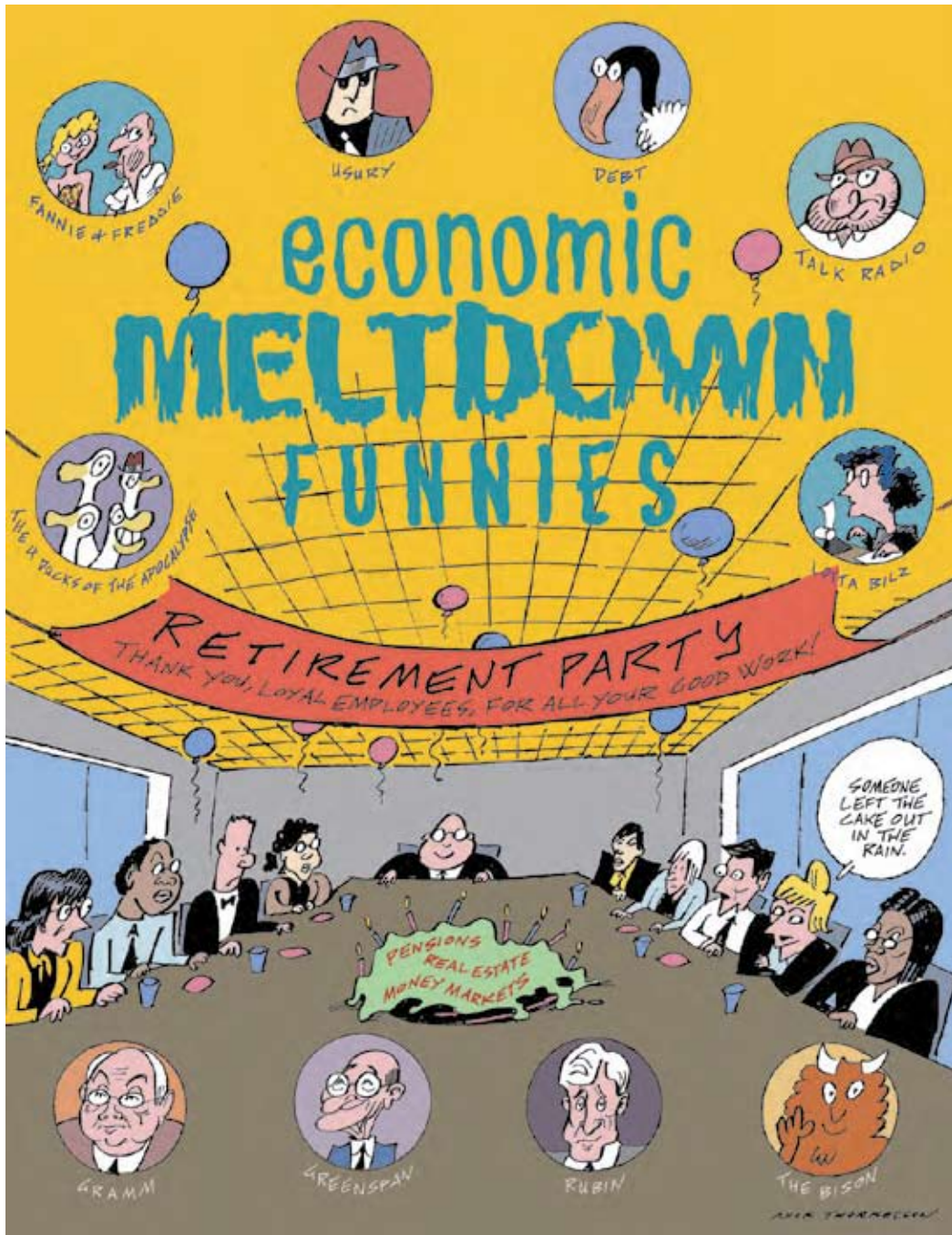
James Douglass's new book, *JFK & the Unspeakable-Why He Died & Why It Matters*: www.wunc.org/tsot/archive/sot0513c08.mp3/view

The Interfaith Coalition for Transgender Equality: www.transgenderrights.org/ICTE/

Skip Schiel's photographic witness about Palestine & Israel: teeksaphoto.org, skipschiel.wordpress.com

The Compassionate Listening Project: www.compassionatelisting.org

RSEJ workshops at NEYM summer 2009: "The Spiritual Ramifications of White Privilege," a 2 day workshop led by Rachel Carey-Harper, "What would Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. say to us about the 2008 U.S. presidential election, if he were here today?," a 1 or 2 day workshop by James Varner, "Racism, Discrimination & Reparations concerning descendants of African slaves: What is the role of NEYM in this matter?" also by James Varner—all these are pending NEYM approval



The "Economic Meltdown Funnies" is a co-production of Jobs with Justice and the Institute for Policy Studies — Program on Inequality and the Common Good.
 Text by Chuck Collins & Nick Thorkelson
 Drawings by Nick Thorkelson



Committee on Racial, Social & Economic Justice

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 Other issues on line at neym.org/PrejudiceAndPoverty/index.html