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INSIDE

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Michael Battle on spiritual leadership and violence

Jennifer Harvey on white supremacy

A troupe of young Detroiters explore love, hate and hope

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on the cover

On The Dock, 1865

A group of former
 slaves on a riverfront
 dock in Virginia

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A group of Detroit-area teenagers rehearsing a play about “love, hate and rhythm.” Their troupe, Mosaic Youth Theater, tackles the big subjects, the hard ones. The company’s play “Crossing 8 Mile” was about the divide between black Detroit and its white suburbs. (See story on page 26.)

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LETTERS

The church and family violence prevention

Family violence (domestic violence and child abuse) is among the most pervasive public health problems in our society. Violence in the family devastates homes, leaving in its wake fear, depression, rage and, in turn, more violence. Children who witness family violence are at increased risk for perpetrating violence in their own lives, continuing the cycle of violence. Making matters worse, 50 percent of these children are abused themselves.

Children often make sense of the horror by blaming themselves. This internalization can manifest itself in low self-esteem, poor academic performance, conduct disorders, drug use, risky sexual behavior and violence. Each year in the U.S., Child Protective Services substantiates abuse involving over one million children. Beyond this, another two million children are exposed to family violence.

How are we church people serving as peacemakers to prevent this? For only by reducing abuse in the home can we reduce social problems outside the home. Gangs, drugs, delinquent behavior have their roots in family violence. Often, however, when this issue is raised, many imagine that we are talking about other people, people of a different ethnicity, economic level, religious outlook, background, orientation or status. This blindness has allowed family violence to become rooted in every congregation and every community.

Compounding the blindness has been silence. Is family violence addressed in our church programs or in our church protocol? What if an elder or a pastor or a youth worker is a perpetrator? What if a church member comes forward for help? Do we provide awareness and prevention training to our staff? Have we developed systems to help victims? Have we preached from the pulpit on family violence? Have we provided resources to our church members? Is the church recognized as a community leader in the fight against family violence?

The Episcopal Church Publishing Company, publisher of *The Witness* magazine and related website projects, seeks to give voice to a liberation Gospel of peace and justice and to promote the concrete activism that flows from such a Christianity. Founded in 1917 by Irving Peake Johnson, an Episcopal Church bishop, *The Witness* claims a special mission to Episcopalians and other Anglicans worldwide, while affirming strong partnership with progressives of other faith traditions.

Manuscripts: Writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Manuscripts will not be returned.

Sadly, the church is often viewed more as a perpetrator than a partner in prevention. Considering our deafness, blindness and muteness on the issue, it is not surprising that victims of family violence have ranked clergy least among those who provided help.

We are called to spread the message of the gospel of peace. Evangelism is not a matter of words, but actions. To spread the good news is to increase the peace of Jesus Christ in our homes, in our churches, in our communities. Respecting the message of Christ demands internal evangelism within our religious community so that we can effectively work beyond our church walls.

We must pray that Jesus give sight to the blind, sound to the deaf and voice to the mute, for we are that body in need. Let us work for healing within, so that we can be peacemakers without.

*Matthew Herbst, Assistant Minister
Pacific Beach United Methodist Church
San Diego, CA*

Powerful themes

Thanks SO MUCH for such powerful theme-related issues. I really like the theme aspect as well as the ones you choose.

*Christine Weber-Kearney
Portland, OR*

Claiming the blessing

Recently Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Southern Pines, N.C., was prominently featured in the *The Pilot* newspaper for its "Blessing of the animals" ceremony.

In the next issue the editors bestowed a "Birdie" on the clergy for doing this. O what flummery!

Yes, for hundreds and hundreds of years, we have been blessing animals, houses, icons, altar furnishings, clerical vestments and many "things."

But when will the Church bless ALL PEOPLE? WHEN?!!

*Blaine Paxton Hall
Pinehurst, NC*

Reparations is not about money

by *Ethan Flad*

Last year, the UN World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) was held in Durban, South Africa. Mainstream media coverage focused on a walkout by the U.S. and Israeli delegations over alleged anti-Jewish prejudice at the WCAR. That high-profile incident overshadowed months of hard efforts toward developing international agreements on racism and related discrimination (see *TW*, 11/01).

One topic that seemed to lose out in the WCAR hullabaloo was reparations. Reparations means to “repair” or “make whole,” or to return a victim as closely as possible to the state he or she was in before the wrong occurred. In Durban, the central focus of reparations was addressing the legacy of hundreds of years of slavery of Africans by white colonial powers and the countless other resources that had been stolen from that continent. Wealthy European and North American countries were challenged to financially compensate African nations and individual descendants of slavery. Some reparations activists estimated the money due ran into the trillions of U.S. dollars.

Recent polls indicate that a majority of African Americans call for some form of financial restitution, but more than 80 percent of white Americans oppose that concept. During a trip to North Carolina, a white man once asked me, “I wasn’t alive when slavery was around. Why should I have to pay?” Columbia University’s Manning Marable wrote recently, “White Americans who are alive today are not guilty of enslaving anyone, in the legal definition of the term. Most white Americans below the age of 50 played no role in directly supporting Jim Crow segregation and are not guilty of overt acts to block the integration of public accommodations and schools. But white Americans, as a group, continue to be the direct beneficiaries of the legal apparatuses of white supremacy, carried out by the full weight of America’s legal, political and economic institutions. The consequences of state-sponsored racial inequality created a mountain of historically constructed, accumulated disadvantage for African Americans as a group.” Clearly, we need to look at

racism systemically — it’s not just about achieving “reconciliation,” a popular word in our church these days.

Is money the “bottom line” in the call for reparations? Not exactly. Dudley Thompson, Jamaica’s former foreign minister, said in Durban, “Reparations is not about asking for money. You can’t pay me for your raping my grandmother. You cannot compensate me for lynching my father. What we demand is the restitution of our human dignity, the restoration of full equality, politically, socially and economically, between the oppressors and the oppressed.”

So how do we move forward? Several possibilities come to mind. The main concern for most reparations activists is for people to honestly research and discuss our collective history. Our church, for instance, can use “celebrations” — like the anniversary of the Jamestown Covenant — as learning opportunities about what truly happened to native peoples here. Personally, we can identify how prejudice and privilege frame our own lineage. I’ve always been extremely proud of my extended family, a group deeply committed to education and social justice. But as I look deeper into our history on this continent, I realize that my ancestors — like Ethan Allen, the Revolutionary War hero for whom I am named — lived throughout New England on land they had stolen from indigenous peoples. My sense of pride of being the descendant of people who had helped to “free” this country from British colonial rule is sobered by our obvious participation in the genocide of those who were already living here.

As we continue to seek right relationship with one another, we also can look at current realities — the ways people of color are not fed, not treated safely, not offered good healthcare or shelter; the interrelationship of racism and the prison industry. South Africa is but one nation attempting to develop a new national consciousness of “wholeness” and speaking truth to its violent past. These issues and more are addressed in this special look at reparations — a new entry point that may help us face the racism that still frames our world. ●

CLASSIFIEDS

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As we went to press...

This news digest was prepared from news and wire reports by *Witness* news editor, Pat McCaughan.

People of faith join swelling protests as war talk continues

From the nation's capital to San Francisco, demonstrators staged peaceful marches on Oct. 26 in protest of the Bush administration's plan to proceed with an invasion against Iraq. The demonstrators were angered by the ongoing war talk, in spite of widespread opposition throughout the nation, and by the United Nations and U.S. Allies. The numbers of protesters in Washington, D.C. reportedly swelled to more than 100,000, while in San Francisco, tens of thousands turned out, requesting that the billions of dollars that would be spent on war with Iraq be used instead on domestic social programs. Groups of faith-based peace activists carried banners and signs expressing their opposition to war. Similar efforts, organized by the Progressive Religious Partnership and other local faith groups, were held in 13 cities across the country on Oct. 24.

Earlier in the week, about 40 peace activists had gathered at St. Alban's Parish chapel on the grounds of the National Cathedral to pray for peace, especially that the U.S. not begin a war with Iraq.

As the Oct. 26 protestors took to the streets, two 16-year-old delegates to the annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine put forward a last-minute resolution opposing unilateral war with Iraq. Wiley Todd and Sam Rector, high school juniors, crafted and presented the controversial statement, working through a cumbersome legislative process with what observers called a "rerespectful patience." The two young men were elected delegates from the Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist in Thomaston, Me., and were the only teens serving as delegates in the entire convention of 67 congregations. In presenting the resolution, Todd, with Rector by his side, called the delegates to "walk the walk they'd talked" in their prayers for peace during worship. Debate ensued, reflecting a wide division of views and the vote was so close as to require a recount. At the recount, the resolution passed the convention decisively.

Interfaith leaders adopt peace resolution in South Africa

Leaders from seven major religions and 21 African countries have adopted a historic declaration committing themselves to working for peace on the African continent. The great variety of delegates to the Interfaith Peace Summit — among them South Africa's Chief Rabbi, Cyril Harris, Benin's High Priest of Voodoo, Houna Agbessi Daagbo Hounon and Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation — underlined the summit's achievement in forging a common dedication to peace.

Archaeologists debate significance of James' burial box

Religion scholars and archaeologists are debating what appears to be the oldest archaeological reference to Jesus. The reference — found in an inscription on a burial box, or ossuary — is actually made to James, who in New Testament accounts is referred to as Jesus' brother. The inscription reads: "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus," and is, according to the Washington, D.C.-based *Biblical Archaeology Review*, "the first-ever archaeological discovery to corroborate biblical references to Jesus. The small limestone box, the color of sand, nearly 2,000 years old, is 10-in. by 20-in. by 12-in. and is inscribed in the Aramaic language spoken by Jews in Jerusalem in the 1st century A.D. Andre Lemaire, one of the world's foremost scholars of ancient scripts, announced that "it seems very probable that this [box] is the ossuary of the James in the New Testament." Lemaire said that if the container is authentic, it would emphasize the fact that early Christians still thought of themselves as essentially Jewish.



Methodist Wellstone tireless advocate for the poor

Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minnesota) was killed in a private plane crash in Minnesota on Oct. 25, along with seven others, including his wife and daughter. He is remembered for his passionate embrace of peace and justice issues. A Methodist, Wellstone was remembered in church circles as a tireless worker for the poor, said Robert Edgar, a United Methodist clergyman, former U.S. congressman and head of the National Council of Churches (NCC) staff. Edgar said he and Wellstone had worked together on children's issues, health care, the environment and poverty.

"Even in what turned out to be the last days of his life, Sen. Wellstone, despite a close political race for re-election, preserved his integrity in voting against the 'Use of Force' resolution to enable U.S. action against Iraq,"

Edgar said. "At the time we cited his courage and selflessness in placing conscience above self-interest."

Wellstone had also been concerned with availability of employment and was supportive of job training programs. A leader in the fight for affordable health care, he had recently led efforts opposing the extension of drug patents that increases costs and decreases availability to consumers. The Minnesota senator worked with the church on farm issues, women's issues, peace issues, environmental issues and campaign finance reform. "Making life better for poor people was one of his main goals," said Jaydee Hanson, an executive with the United Methodist Church's international agency for advocacy and social action. Hanson added. "He was also forthright in ways a lot of politicians aren't."



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Iraq under sanctions and preparing for war

by David Smith-Ferri

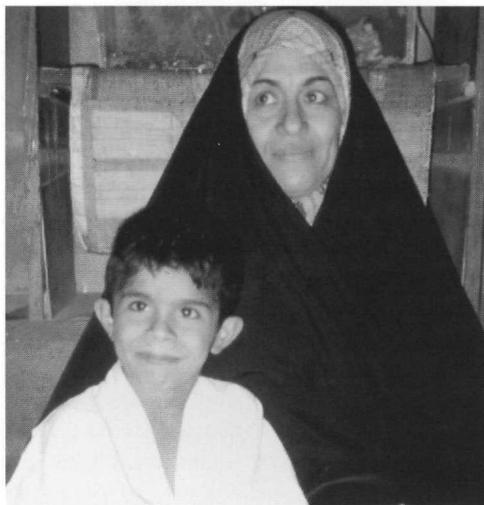
On September 19th, I left our 10-year-old daughter Rachael and traveled to Iraq. In the week leading up to this trip, afraid that bombs would fall on me in Iraq, Rachael became increasingly distressed, taking longer and longer to fall asleep at night, waking up from nightmares or just to be comforted, and finally on the last evening, faced with my imminent departure, breaking down completely in heart-rending sobs that lasted two hours. This turmoil disturbed the clarity I had held about the purpose and rightness of this trip. Every instinct in my body told me that it was wrong to create this level of distress in my daughter. And I did not know what to say to comfort her.

This experience with Rachael has become one of the lenses through which I view my encounters in Iraq. It helps me understand the distress that Iraqi parents feel today, with the threat of war looming larger and larger. The people I spoke with in Iraq are frightened, angry and aggrieved. Typically, they expressed their feelings by talking about their concern for their children. Children inside Iraq cannot be isolated from talk of an impending invasion. "At school, children repeat what they hear at home," explains Salah Dinar, a music store owner, "and now in the morning my eight-year-old son asks, 'Daddy, is today the day we are going to die?'"

Nadra, a school teacher in Baghdad, reports that many families have chosen not to enroll their children in school this fall, preferring instead to put money for registration and supplies toward preparation in the event of a war. The parents of other Iraqi children are removing their children from school because of poverty and the need to put their children to work, begging or shining shoes. Other families have sent their children to live in uncertain circumstances

in Jordan or Syria, thinking they will at least be safe from U.S. bombs. In Jordan I was told, "You will find more and more Iraqi children begging on the streets of Amman and Damascus." I learned that non-governmental organizations in Jordan are quietly preparing for an influx of Iraqi refugees.

The brutal policy of economic sanctions has not only taken hundreds of thousands of lives, but robbed the living of their future. Iraqi men are leaving their marriages as unemployment has stripped their lives of



Zainab Fartous and her son, Mustafa, who was injured in a January 25, 1999, bombing by U.S. warplanes patrolling the southern no-fly zone. Doctors in Iraq, unable to remove all the shrapnel from Mustafa's back, are concerned that the remaining shrapnel will migrate into his spinal column as he grows.

meaning, leaving an increasing number of women as single heads of households. Women, desperate to care for themselves and their children, are turning to prostitution. Young people in Iraq today are dropping out of school, dropping out of society. What is the point of an education in a society where trained engineers are driving taxis or working odd jobs? They are choosing not to get married because their economic future is so bleak. For over a decade, malnutrition on a massive scale has poisoned the lives of Iraqi children, stunting their bodies, shrinking their minds.

If the threat of war alone is causing hard-

ship and pain in Iraq, what might an actual invasion mean to people there? Consider that most of Iraq's 24 million citizens depend heavily on a monthly food ration distributed by the government and monitored by the UN Oil-For-Food Program. For some families, the Spartan contents of the ration — flour, sugar, rice, lentils, cooking oil, tea, soap — comprises their entire income. Because this food is imported, distribution begins at the ports, and continues overland through an elaborate countrywide system. According to Tourben Due, head of the UN World Food Program in Iraq (WFP), disruption of this system, especially if it occurs over a period of months, will imperil people. An aerial assault targeting civilian infrastructure such as roads, bridges and the electrical grid could provoke a humanitarian catastrophe. Indeed, a UNICEF statement released in February of this year concludes that "chaos would be the immediate effect" of an interruption of food distribution. "Very rapid intervention [in the midst of chaos] would be required to avoid a further deterioration of malnutrition and even famine on a large scale."

Zainab Fartous, an English teacher and mother of four with a quick smile and lively eyes, knows firsthand the grave consequences of war. She is the center of gravity in an extended family of 25 people, all living under one roof in the al-Jumeriyah neighborhood of Basra. I had to step through a crowd of children to enter her home, where she greeted me with, "Welcome! Welcome. This is your home." There is no furniture. For two hours, we sat on the floor. Children came and went. The talk was cheerful, mostly about a group of Americans whom we both know and who lived in the neighborhood for two months in the summer of 2000. Stories were told. The concrete walls amplified our laughter and the voices of children. Throughout, Zainab was a gracious hostess — arranging for tea and pillows, smiling, answering questions — and an attentive mother, playing, comforting, responding. Then, in one private and unexpected moment, she dropped her guard. Turning an intense, wide-eyed face toward

David Smith-Ferri

me, she asked, "What is the mood in the U.S.? Do you think they will attack?" My response eclipses the light in her face.

On January 25, 1999, a U.S. warplane fired a guided missile that exploded in Zainab's neighborhood, killing five children including her 7-year-old son, Heider, and permanently injuring her other son, Mustafa. The block she lives on is now referred to as "Missile Street," because so many houses were damaged or destroyed in the explosion. An Air Force spokesperson informed me later that year that the "missile went off course." The "problem," he added quickly, "has been corrected." But Zainab knows well that if there is war, other bombs will stray, other children will die.

I asked Zainab, "What do you need?" "We need clothes for the children, especially coats for winter, and shoes. We need food and medicine." Daily life under sanctions in Iraq remains a battle for survival which war will only intensify. By shutting down the Iraqi oil economy, sanctions destroyed the professional jobs that it supported, and decimated the once large Iraqi middle class.

As a school teacher, Zainab earns less than \$5/month, an almost meaningless sum. Prior to sanctions, Zainab's family lived a comfortable middle-class existence in their own home. Now, packed into a dreary concrete building with her extended family, she is not only burdened by the discomforts and fears of extreme poverty, but prevented from being the mother and person she wants to be. "If I had the means," she told me, "I would move out of this house right now. I need the space to be with my children." She paused and sighed. "And to be with myself."

When I left for Iraq, I felt an unexpected sense of relief, to be free from the noise of war-talk, the din of voices arguing in favor of an invasion of Iraq. But this trip to Iraq has shaken me deeply. It is disturbing in the extreme to acknowledge that families who so recently welcomed me into their homes and shared tea and hospitality with me, may soon be ringed and fired upon; that children I played soccer with two weeks ago may not live through the winter because war may cut off their food supply.

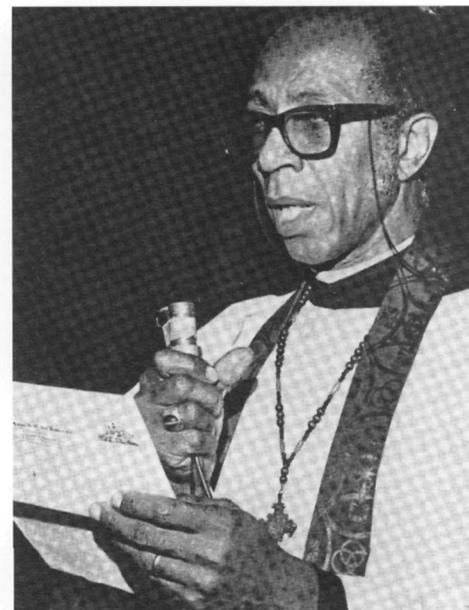
Back home once again and subject to the inescapable warmongering, it occurs to me that people in the U.S. are also under psychological warfare. In the wake of the terror of September 11th, Americans are understandably anxious and unsure about our safety. The impulse to do whatever we can to prevent more terror is a good and intelligent impulse. But what will make us more secure?

Bereaved Families' Forum sets up hotline

by Robert Hirschfield

Three members of the Bereaved Families' Forum (BFF), representing nearly 400 Israeli and Palestinian families whose relatives have been killed by Israeli soldiers, Jewish settlers, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Fatah militants, addressed a large crowd at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York this past October to pitch the group's new toll-free hotline, where Israelis are given Palestinians to speak to, and Palestinians Israelis. (Over 22,000 callers have so far used the hot line.) Each BFF speaker told of personal loss because of the conflict. Amiram Goldin's son, Omri, a soldier, was blown up by a suicide bomber on a bus in the Galilee. Yitzhak Frankenthal's son, Arik, also a soldier, was kidnapped and killed by Hamas militants in 1995. Dr. Rahib Essawi lost her brother to an Israeli bomb in Southern Lebanon ("they had to collect him from all over the place") and her mother to an Israeli soldier's bullet on the West Bank.

The three spoke of the more than 1,000 coffins draped in Israeli and Palestinian flags that have been displayed in Tel Aviv, Washington and New York. They spoke of the blood that nine Israelis gave to the Arab Red Crescent, and nine Palestinians gave to the Red Star of David. Frankenthal told a heckler, "I am angry. We were unable to make peace with the Palestinians, so my son was killed."



Paul Washington greeting those assembled for the ordination of the first women priests at the Church of the Advocate in 1974.

Philadelphia's 'voice of the oppressed' dies at 81

Paul Washington, a leader in movements for justice in the church and society over many decades, died Oct. 9, 2002. Washington, who served as rector of Philadelphia's Church of the Advocate from 1962 until 1987, was "the soul and conscience of the city and the nation, for not only African Americans but also all the marginalized," columnist Accl Moore wrote in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Other tributes referred to Washington as the "voice of the oppressed," a "steadfast acolyte of Christian liberalism," and "one of the giants of Spirit-rooted activism for peace and justice of this past generation."

Washington opened the Church of the Advocate to meetings of the Black Panthers, Vietnam war resisters and other radical groups. At the 1969 Special General Convention of the Episcopal Church, he led a walk-out in protest of the church's footdragging on the issue of black activist demands for reparations payments from the churches. In 1974, he welcomed the "Philadelphia 11" to the

Church of the Advocate for the first ordination of women to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church.

"This is not the church of 'the comfortable pew,'" Washington wrote in his 1994 memoir, *The Autobiography of Father Paul M. Washington* (with David Gracie, Temple University Press). "In fact, the Advocate, like its Lord, has been 'numbered among the transgressors.'" To illustrate his point, Washington quotes from a 1968 memo to the director of the FBI: "The Rev. Paul M. Washington, Rector of the Church of the Advocate, has made his church's facilities available to Negro extremists and has associated with them at his church. He has also been quoted in the Negro press as being against the Vietnam War, and desirous that the funds being expended on that conflict be used to solve the problems of the ghetto."

Washington also spoke out on homelessness, gay and lesbian concerns, and a range of international justice issues. In 1980, while Americans were being held hostage in Iran, he defied a U.S. travel ban to take part in a conference there, then returned to ask for a U.S. apology for past interference in that country. More recently, he wrote about the Palestinian issue for *The Witness*.

When Washington served on a panel investigating the city of Philadelphia's 1985 bombing of MOVE headquarters, he was "unflinching in his criticism of police tactics and of the conduct of his longtime friend, then-Mayor W. Wilson Goode," an obituary in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported (10/9/02).

Washington, born in Charleston, S.C., in 1921 and raised a Baptist, became an Episcopalian while in college. He graduated from Lincoln University and Philadelphia Divinity School, and was ordained a priest in 1947. After serving at Philadelphia's Church of the Crucifixion, he spent six years teaching at a college in Liberia. He became vicar of St. Cyprian in Elmwood in 1954, then rector of the Church of the Advocate in 1962.

Washington wrote that the "crowning glory" of his Advocate ministry was the invitation from his former parishioner Barbara Harris to preach at her consecration as the first woman bishop in the Anglican Communion. Harris officiated at Washington's Oct. 14 memorial service. — *Witness staff* ●

The three Anglican dioceses whose request to join the U.S. Episcopal Church will be considered at the U.S. church's 2003 General Convention: Cuba and Puerto Rico to return, and Venezuela to join for the first time.

Diocese in the Province of the Anglican Church of the Central American Region which has never been part of the U.S. Episcopal Church: Costa Rica (El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama left the Episcopal Church in 1997 to join with Costa Rica in creating the new province, which has 13,409 members.)

Supreme interpreter of the resolutions of General Convention of the Episcopal Church: The General Convention (The U.S. Episcopal Church has no supreme court. The two courts for the trial of a bishop have authority to interpret only those canons related to the trial. Executive Council is empowered to act on behalf of General Convention between conventions.)

Number of black priests in the 2.4 million-member U.S. Episcopal Church: c.600

Number of black priests in the 60 million-member U.S. Roman Catholic Church: c.350

Percent of black priests born outside the U.S.: 36.6

Percent of black priests born outside the U.S. who were born in the Caribbean: 54.5

Percent of black priests born outside the U.S. who were born in Africa: 22.3

Number of black bishops in the U.S. Episcopal Church: 24

Number of black bishops in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church: 13

Last month Louie's Index posed this question:

Who are the female diocesan bishops eligible to be nominated for a full term as Presiding Bishop if elected at the 2006 General Convention?

Here's the answer:

Katharine Jefferts Schori (Nevada), Chilton Knudsen (Maine), Catherine Waynick (Indianapolis), Geralyn Wolf (Rhode Island).

Witness contributing editor Louie Crew, founder of Integrity and a longtime Episcopal Church leader (he currently sits on the Episcopal Church's Executive Council and the Diocese of Newark's deputation to General Convention 2003) is a well-known collector and disseminator of statistics and little-known facts about the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion. His website is www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew.

The siren song of violence

By Michael Battle

THE GREATEST religious challenge in the 21st century is the maintenance of what has become an amalgamation of spiritual and political leadership, especially as displayed in the life and thought of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In my previous work on Tutu, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Pilgrim Press) and *The Wisdom of Desmond Tutu* (Westminster/John-Knox), I have shown that at the heart of Tutu's thought are his Anglican ecclesiology (common prayer) and African concept of *ubuntu* (i.e., communitarian identity), both of which inform how he appeals for South Africa to move beyond the theological constructions of apartheid. Movement beyond insidious apartheid was ultimately done through forgiveness. This was (and is) being done in light of an ecclesial *ubuntu* that disallows recourse to radical, interpretative schemes of black political discourse in order to save white people from the effects of black rage. Such rage would only further patterns of violence and abuse, thereby locking a nation in perpetual turmoil — such nations are too plentiful. In short, I argued in my book that Tutu's gift to South Africa (and to the world) is in how Christian orthopraxy is narrated in a context of conflicting racial identities in a manner that makes their lives intelligible to each other.

Now that major spiritual leaders in South Africa are dead, retiring or moving to more reflective stages in their lives, a tear rips between spiritual leadership per se and spiritual leadership that also addresses political life. Such ripped fabric has always existed in the U.S. My immediate concern here, however, is that much of the world has depended terribly on the spiritual-political voice of Tutu to articulate why forgiveness (what he calls “restorative justice”) is better than retributive justice. From my concern the frightening question is raised: What will

happen when the world is faced with political crises, while perhaps having little recourse to major public, spiritual leaders like Tutu? The reason this question becomes crucial is that Tutu has offered us navigation skills by which to refuse the false dichotomy between the spiritual and the political.

Tutu adheres theologically to a metanarrative of God's forgiveness in which conflicting racial identities are expressed and defined in the reconciling concept of *imago dei* revealed through Jesus Christ, who manifests the plentitude of relational personhood. Tutu's role as national confessor operates from a distinctively theological model of forgiveness in which human identity depends on a Trinitarian image of God, namely, the flourishing relation of Persons. Not to forgive assumes there is no such image of God among humanity. For Tutu, more specifically, not to forgive assumes no future at all (hence the title of his latest book: *No Future without Forgiveness*).

Naturally, the question is now raised: If there is only forgiveness, can there ever be justice? This question faced Tutu every day of his chairing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Tutu's response is in the synergy that always must exist between forgiveness and repentance. In other words, to forgive at all in the tragic circumstances of apartheid demanded a complete turn around (repentance) of power and oppression. To truly be able to forgive in the circumstances of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission meant that South Africa was at the point in their nation's story when those who were victims had won the war. And most of all, it was at the point in the story when the protagonist would proclaim that there would never be the creation of such victims again. And to this day, South Africa has constructed the most inclusive national constitution that exists on this planet — vowing never to oppress any category of people again. So, yes — there can be justice and forgiveness. This leads me back to where I

began — with a search for future spiritual-political leaders. There will be many more circumstances when the victims win again, but will there be only the bloodcurdling scream for revenge ringing in our ears — thereby perpetuating cycles of abuse and oppression? Will there be only John Wayne-type Texas presidents who only understand solutions through the barrel of a gun?

As I prepare my latest book, *A Christian Spirituality of Nonviolence* (forthcoming in spring 2003, Mercer University Press), my dream is that we will all learn from Tutu, Gandhi, and ultimately from Jesus how to stop the redundant cycles of abuse — those siren songs of violence.

The privilege of peaceful death

by Samia Houry

AS I SAT IN THE HOSPITAL accompanying my husband during his second chemotherapy session, I was reading in the paper about the sniper who has been terrorizing the Washington area, and I was not surprised that the residents of the area were petrified to move around. Yet I could not help but wonder about all the violent movies and even cartoons that are shown on TV and somehow end up being stories in real life. How many movies we see on TV about snipers, gangs breaking into banks and shooting to kill anybody blocking their run-away, crooks murdering old rich women at home, children kidnapped for money and people taken as hostages. The themes are endless. One does not need imagination to be a criminal these days, or a “terrorist” for that matter, thanks to the writers of such trash which reaches us also in the Middle East as part of globalization. Of course the good guys end up winning at the end and the criminal is caught, but in the process so much is learnt, and in meticulous detail, which enables potential criminals to get free lessons, and end up being in

the limelight, due to the media coverage of violent stories. Nice and humanitarian stories never hit the front pages or even get covered by the media. No wonder oppressed people resort to violence to get their story heard. I seriously started thinking that my next e-mail should really be to Mr. Bush so that he will deal with this domestic problem rather than waste his energy on a war very far away from home.

In the meantime my daughter came in to see us. She signaled to me in a way that only women can understand, and we both left the room. Whatever she wanted to tell me, I knew she did not want her father to know. She broke the sad news of the shooting to death of Shaden Abu-Hijleh as she sat embroidering in her enclosed verandah at home. Her husband and son were also at home. An Israeli army jeep simply stopped in front of their house and without any provocation started shooting. Luckily the men were spared, but for slight injuries. Shaden was the maternal grandmother of our granddaughter Zeina. A couple of days later the mother-in-law of my brother, over 90 years old, passed away in her sleep and a second cousin of ours, almost as old, passed away peacefully at an old-age home. What a blessing, I thought; it is indeed a privilege to die in bed these days. The brutality of the occupation has made peaceful death to Palestinians indeed a privilege. But very often, the Israelis themselves have not been spared, because they refuse to accept the fact that their living and dying in peace cannot be realized as long as they are depriving a whole population of their basic right to exist and live in freedom. ●

**We are indeed the world.
Only if we have reason to fear
what is in our hearts need we
fear for the planet.
Teach yourself peace.
Pass it on. — Alice Walker**

Here's a Christmas Child for You

by Blaine Paxton Hall

I

At church we have this Christmas tradition of providing gifts for the Children's Home. Paper ornaments, on each a name is written, dangle lifelessly from the branches of the Parish Hall Christmas tree. We are given scrupulous instructions: "A sweater, slippers or anything with the Panthers logo. Toiletries, as long as they don't contain alcohol, are okay." A very benign and generic gift. We each pluck a child hanging from the tree and next Sunday return its gift to place underneath. Then all the gifts are delivered and yearly the Priest praises our 100% participation. Our cheeks smile; our sanctimonious sighing swells the air.

II

This has been going on for many seasons: I remember the church groups bringing gifts and eats; parading through my Home. Some would put on programs with singing and skits; some groups would preach and try to convert us.

And now I must tell you a difficult thing: we didn't like any of it. We felt like freaks in a sideshow as the tourists tramped through clucking and muttering under their breath: "Oh ain't it awful, Oh what a shame such nice healthy intelligent good-looking kids have to live in a Home." Some of us demonstrated our rage by misbehaving.

That rascal Bud would scratch his armpits, hop around on his haunches and growl "Ooo Ooo, Ooo," in his deepest pubescent voice. The tourists were horrified but we laughed ourselves silly. How else to deny that we were sad and lonely; hurt and afraid?

III

Some of the kids, their spirits long since broken by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or under the fist of some adult, were quiet and withdrawn to the church groups and to everything else. We knew the church folk

came to save their conscience, to cleanse their wealth. Are you really surprised we knew this? Soon the church groups no longer came to gape at us; they had their gifts delivered to the Home instead.

IV

Now I will tell you church people what I would have wanted for Christmas. Would you bring me to your house for a home-cooked meal? Nothing fancy; some hot, creamy, saucy food like mashed potatoes and gravy will do. Would you have me eat with your family—just a normal meal with a typical family? I promise I'd behave— I'd be too intimidated by your abundance, too awed by your lightness of life. Would you share your richness of family with me; discussing the day's events, the news? And during the natural course of conversation, would you inquire as to my interests, favorite classes, college plans; what I might do with my life?

Because in so doing you'd be suggesting my potential, that I should apply, that I might even get accepted, that I might have a future. I'd hear my heart pound NoNo, NoNo, NoNo. I'd be taken aback by you so easily suggesting these things to me because I am so lonely and so afraid and I don't have the confidence to dream. Yes! Yes, Martin Luther King, but it takes at least some small measure of confidence to dream. It takes some hope to dream.

V

It takes some hope to dream.

VI

Where will I get this; how can I get this? Would you have me gather with your family 'round the piano after supper, join in the carol singing? Invite me to play; I'd give anything to have access to a piano. I want to learn, I want to play. Would you show me your favorite books, the artful pictures; read me a poem? And at the close of the evening would you ask me for a photo of myself? So that you could hold me in your heart not just at Christmastime, but all the year around.

REPARATIONS

INDIGE

Racism remains a sensitive subject for most people — it provokes guilt, anger and the fear of "opening old wounds." But we ignore racism to our peril.

Recently, the Episcopal Church's Peace & Justice Ministries staff spoke with *The Witness* about the church's anti-racism ministry. Jayne Oasin, our national social justice officer, commented, "The most important thing to highlight is that anti-racism work is ongoing and unfinished. And we need to broaden the discussion beyond 'how I treat the next black person or Latino that I see' to institutional concerns." Yet in much of the church, anti-racism work is anything but ongoing. The executive officer of a leading liberal Episcopal diocese recently said, "Racism? We did that workshop a couple years ago."

Does this sound familiar?

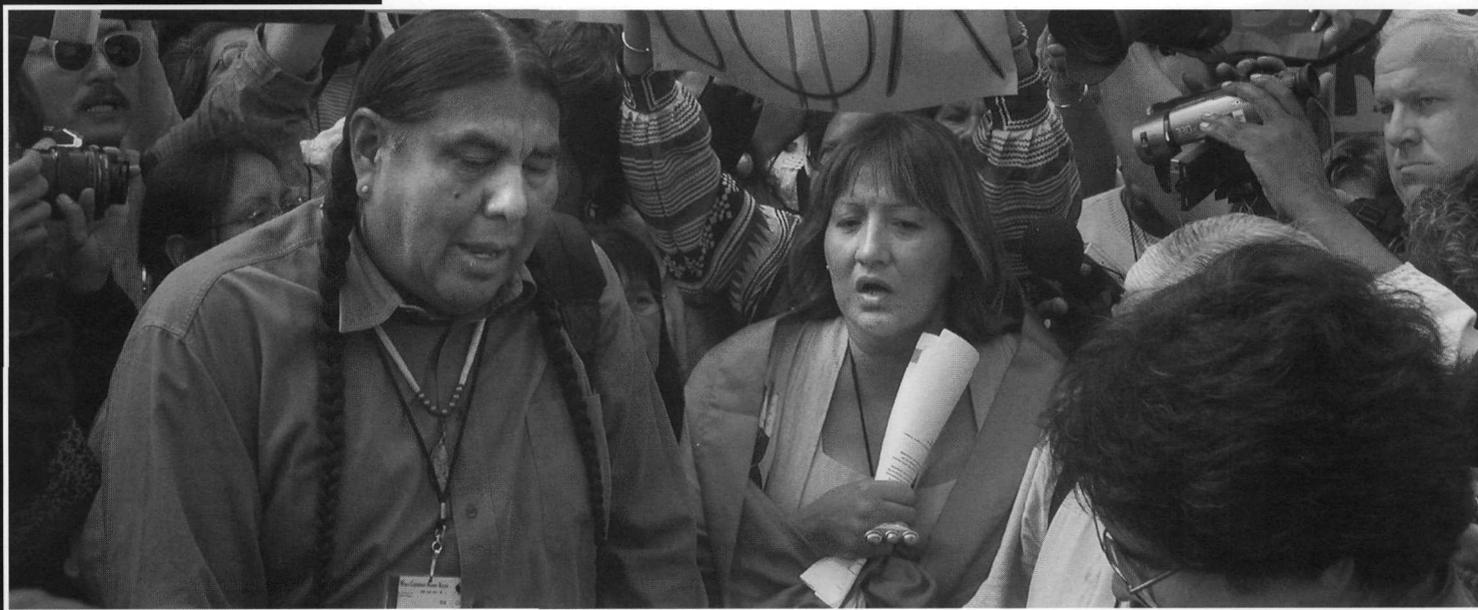
While reparations may sound like a divisive concept, it actually seeks to

repair the brokenness that already exists in our communities. Randall Robinson's landmark book, *The Debt* (see review by Bertie Ray on www.thewitness.org), discusses why we need to restore "the dignity of every human being," as the Episcopal baptismal covenant directs. The reparations movement also offers concrete steps to address the racism in our midst — things we can do now, individually and institutionally, to make the family whole.



*Southern Cotton Field (c. 1850).
An overseer riding past cotton
pickers in the southern U.S.*

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS



Tom Goldtooth, coordinator of the Indigenous Environmental Network, leads an indigenous protest at the UN World Conference Against Racism (September 2001).

Ethan Flad

Indigenous rights and reparations: an interview with Alberto Saldamando

by Ethan Flad

Alberto Saldamando (Zapoteca/Chicano) is General Counsel of the International Indian Treaties Council (IITC), an organization founded in 1974 at a gathering of over 5,000 indigenous people from throughout the world. Interviewed in the IITC office in San Francisco's historic Mission District, Saldamando spoke highly of the historic solidarity of the mainline Christian justice and peace workers in the struggle for the sovereignty and self-determination of indigenous peoples. "I have nothing but love and respect for the World Council of Churches," he said, referring especially to the WCC's Geneva office and the work of Bob Scott and Eugenio Pomo. "They have been long-standing allies, not just recent supporters of our work." At the same time, he mentioned the resistance of some major Christian communities, such as the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, to indigenous rights. "And increasingly, right-wing evangelicals are even becoming violent" in oppressing indigenous communities, he noted. Much of Saldamando's work deals with getting grassroots indigenous participation into high-level

international forums, such as the UN's Commission for Human Rights.

Ethan Flad: What are the Treaties Council's priority projects these days?

Alberto Saldamando: We deal with everything, all kinds of human rights. Since last year, we've been very active on the right to food and nutrition and other related subjects. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a subsidiary organ of the UN, named us as the focal NGO (non-governmental organization) for the Indigenous Peoples' World Food Consultation in Guatemala, where we had indigenous peoples from all over the world coming to discuss the right to food. A few years ago, our work was primarily centered on political rights, resulting in the report we did on torture and the report on arbitrary detentions and disappearances. Our first complaint had to do with arbitrary detention — a case of an Indian who was in prison in Mexico. But since then, we've had a broader view of human rights. And essentially, even in questions of development and

globalization, we continue to take a human rights perspective. Generally, the position is that you can't have development that violates human rights. Otherwise, it's unsustainable by definition.

Ethan Flad: There's been so much negative reflection on the UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, last year by people in the NGO community. I remember being there, with just a couple days left, and attending a big rally that the indigenous people's caucus held. The caucus wanted to strike out all references in the UN documents to indigenous peoples. Were there any positive aspects for you from the Durban conference?

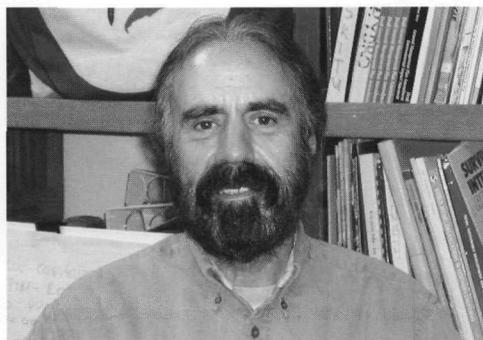
Alberto Saldamando: I think that on a political level, from the states' perspective, it was doomed to fail. Because I don't think that the North — that includes Europe, the U.S., Australia and New Zealand — has any willingness to really grapple with the problem of racism. What killed it, and what was bound to kill it, was what killed the first two world conferences on racism and two [UN] "decades to struggle against racism" — the references to Israel. From an NGO perspective, particularly for a human rights worker, as I am, it's very difficult to say that condemnation of Israel for its human rights abuses is anti-Semitic. It really is very difficult to swallow. But that's essentially the position that Europe and the U.S. took: that any condemnation of the state of Israel was anti-Semitism. And that's essentially the position that the Commissioner on Human Rights was taking.

Ethan Flad: Mary Robinson?

Alberto Saldamando: Right, Robinson's position was, "Don't mention any countries. We aren't going to focus on any one country." The condition of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories is even worse now than it was then — there are gross and massive violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention. You can't ignore it, there's just massive violations of human rights by Israel. But the position was that if you condemn the state of Israel, you're automatically an anti-Semite. That was also the politics within the NGO

community — there were Jewish NGOs who struggled with the proposition that Israel could do wrong, but there were also Palestinian NGOs and their supporters who felt that the only reason to be there was to beat Israel on the head or beat the Jewish NGOs on the head. And so that kind of politics really played itself out pretty radically.

We were successful, however, in applying a strategy whereby every group could fashion its own portion of the resolution we produced. So indigenous peoples had writers, Afro-descen-



Alberto Saldamando

dents had writers, the Romany had writers. It was all their language. The Dalits, for the first time in history, were recognized as an oppressed minority. In their own words they described their own situation. That was the whole objective, to have the victims speak with their own voice. I don't like the word "victim," you know, but that was what it was about. It was about those most oppressed being able to express that oppression in their own voice, in their own way, the way they saw it themselves. I still don't think that's a mistake. I do think that that declaration we produced states what the oppressed feel about racism and how they perceive their oppression, and the solutions they see for it. And so I think it's a very positive document. However, because of the politics, primarily the politics around Israel, people have generally tended to disregard it.

Ethan Flad: In the mainstream media coverage of the WCAR, in addition to the Palestine/Israel conflict, the other issue that was deemed controversial was reparations, particularly from the U.S. and Global North perspective. How did you see that debate being

played out?

Alberto Saldamando: The reparations issue was very controversial because the African states took it up. Certainly, one can describe colonialism in Africa as a massive violation of human rights — continuing to this day, as a matter of fact. Certainly the aftermath of colonialism has not in any way been ameliorated. The data on the condition of African peoples now is worse than it was before, not just with AIDS, but with malnutrition and hunger.

Conversely, the U.S. governmental delegation was actually quite small. I think they intended to walk out even before they went there. So there were various aspects to the problem of reparations that never really got sorted out. Declarations at world conferences are not legally binding, but the U.S. takes them very seriously because they have this very legalistic approach. So their idea is not to propose an ideal. Certainly a world summit on anything should at least pose the broadest aspiration of humankind. Whether or not anybody's going to listen is another matter. But at least they should say those things; they should say the things that really are the ideal.

The United Kingdom also took that legalistic approach, as did France. And certainly, as colonizing powers, they have a great deal to be ashamed about. I think they saw the African position as an economic threat. If we say on an ideal basis that victims of racism should be compensated, that means we owe Kenya, say, 16 billion dollars and Belgium owes the Congo a trillion dollars for everything that they've ripped off. So they took that legalistic position to say, well, wait a minute, let's let bygones be bygones. Let's have a forward-looking declaration. Which is what Mary Robinson kept saying.

Our position was, as was probably the position of the African states, you can't really face the future until you know your past. You can't pretend the past wasn't there. Let's talk about what you did and let's find out how you're going to pay for it in blunt terms. That was the issue of reparations that put the kibosh on things. Colonizing powers are not willing to recognize historical injustices and historical exploitations because they don't

want to pay for them now.

Then there was the issue of a state owing reparations to the citizens within it that have suffered, and continue to suffer, racism. That's another issue. Africa supported those efforts as well. African states may be poor, but they do exert a growing influence in the UN. I think they're becoming real hip to a lot of things, including the fact that most of their citizens are indigenous, and that there's a value to preserving those cultures and those languages and those ways of life — that it's good for people to try to preserve the environment, that there is a value in the forest with animals in it just for its own sake.

Ethan Flad: So you see that happening at the executive level of many of these governments in Africa?

Alberto Saldamando: To a degree. The U.S. entered into the TRIPS agreement (the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights), which requires states under the World Trade Organization (WTO) to adopt their own systems of intellectual property protection. It doesn't have to be the U.S. model of patents, but it has to be some form of protection. The African states, a couple of years ago, appointed a working group on indigenous peoples for Africa, which is big progress for us. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) wrote model legislation that is supposed to be consistent both with the WTO TRIPS agreement and the UN Convention on Bio-diversity, in which they declare as immoral and illegal the patenting of life forms and in which they provide for the free and informed consent of local communities to bio-prospecting with substantial benefit sharing, if they do agree. But it declares the local and traditional communities to be the owners of the bio-diversity. The OAU asked the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), another subsidiary organization of the UN, to comment on this model legislation. Now the Secretary General of WIPO is pushing African states not to adopt it.

So it does seem to me that African governments are in fact attempting to address the issue of development more and more in keeping with the interests of their own constituents, which does not necessarily mean

the generation of dollars, but perhaps looking toward a different form of development. I think that more and more African countries are coming around to the proposition that perhaps their interests do not coincide with developed countries', and that perhaps they can develop their own systems that more coincide with the interests of their own constituents. So I have a great hope for Africa.

Africans also understand racism at all different levels. One of the primary works on racism is Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, which is a contemporary description of racism that is still very appropriate today.

So right now, different African countries are taking a different view toward indigenous peoples. In some African countries, though, "indigenous" is a bad word. They don't want to be called indigenous, because that means non-citizen, and somehow that is a bad thing. But there are NGOs beginning to focus more on the preservation of language and traditional culture. Once they start using their languages, and valuing their languages, then they're valuing that culture's whole way of looking at the world. I think that's going to lend a great deal toward indigenous peoples from other parts of the world having more friends. We're not there yet. But I think that there is a growing influence of indigenous people at the UN.

Ethan Flad: In addition to language, one of the other areas that is a hot topic in Africa, and I would expect would be important for the Treaties Council, is land. Certainly land being returned to peoples is one context of the debate.

Alberto Saldamando: Oh, certainly. There's also a realization, I think, on the international level, that people providing for their means of subsistence is preferable to having them unemployed and underemployed in an urban area that only requires a greater infrastructure. And that it is possible to be self-sufficient in food on the micro level like that. I'm not aware of any African states adopting land reform as policy, however.

I know land reform is a bigger issue in Asia, particularly in the Malaysian archipelago — in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines. There the cry for land is astounding.

Those people are indigenous peoples who have a connection to the land. They've been producing their own means of subsistence for thousands of years. India's the same way. They've had small-scale farmers for millennia, producing food. So Asia, I think, is more attuned to land reform on that level. Whether or not they can comply with the demands for land is another matter.

In Latin America, land reform will always be an issue. Indigenous lands are just not recognized. They do have some communal lands still, but for the most part, the land has been privatized.

Reparations, in the context of the World Conference Against Racism, is one issue. I think land reform can be looked at as an independent issue, independent of reparations. And there are national dialogues with regard to what appropriate land reform is. It's becoming more of an issue as industrialized agriculture takes hold. It's going to be going to transnational corporations that are more and more going to exploit the hell out of indigenous land, to the detriment of the indigenous peoples there. So the issue of land reform is not exaggerated. Certainly that kind of colonialism still has very deep roots in racism. But I think it's more and more going to become a strong political struggle. I think maybe that's one of the difficulties of racism, because in many respects, racism is so tied to economic and social systems, that in order to get at it you'd have to take those systems apart. And I don't think states are ready for that.

I think the critical distinction, at least under international law, as I see it, is that indigenous peoples have a historical connection to the land. And that historical connection defines their identity as indigenous peoples. The Macaw, for example, in Washington State, their culture is built around whales, whale hunting. The plains people, the Lakota, are buffalo people. The Mayans, the Mexican Indians, are people of the corn. It's those relationships with means of subsistence and production and the land that produces it. Their sacred sites are there. I mean, the Vatican could be built in south central Los Angeles and it would still be a holy place. But you can't move Big Mountain. ●

WHITES AND

A call 'to do our first works over'

by Jennifer Harvey

MOVEMENTS FOR REPARATIONS for the enslavement of people of African descent in the U.S. have acquired a strength and visibility in recent years such that New York City Councilman Charles Baron has been emboldened to state, "Reparations is the defining issue of the twenty-first century."

These movements are not new. Calls for reparations have rung since the abolition of slavery. (It was in 1865 that the idea of "40 acres and a mule," a reparative concept more a part of national mythology and rhetoric than an actual measure in history, began to circulate.) Yet, while they are not new, the increasing prominence of reparations campaigns brings to the forefront of national racial consciousness the urgency of the relationship of white people to notions of race, repentance, repair and reconciliation.

While many legal steps have been taken since abolition to address persistent racial injustice in the U.S., none of these have manifested in reparations. Equal in length to the history of struggle for reparations has been the seemingly insurmountable difficulty of getting the U.S. government, or white Americans, to hear and respond to such demands.

Surveys suggest that up to 67 percent of whites acknowledge that discrimination against blacks continues, but an August 2002 *Village Voice* poll of New Yorkers showed that 62 percent of those polled say that not even an apology for slavery is due. Meanwhile, 62 percent of African Americans continue to believe that blacks are owed reparations. How can whites agree there is a problem and so easily dismiss solutions? And, how can white Christians, many of whom desire racial reconciliation, hope to achieve it when such disparate understanding of the legacy of slavery exists among racial groups?

Amidst this social landscape, movements to repair the damage of slavery's legacy persist and they continue to gain the kind of momentum that suggests



An End To Slavery 1874

Cartoon showing a member of the White League and a member of the Ku Klux Klan joining hands over a terrorized black family.

REPARATIONS

they may well be one of the most significant political struggles of this millennium. There is much at stake here in how white folks understand repentance, repair and reconciliation — all notions contained in the concept of reparations. I believe that there is, in fact, nothing less at stake than our humanity. The issue of reparations asks us — and asks those of us who are Christians most pointedly: Are we willing to be human, and to seek wholeness and healing, rather than remaining complicit in a massive social evil, the vestiges of which are alive and well among oppressed and benefactor alike?

Answering this question may involve us in a process of moral and spiritual transformation.

What is race?

Race in U.S.–American life is at once so self-evident and so complex that the starting place for engaging reparations may be to be as clear as possible about what “race” is. When we recognize race we typically do so by noticing a person’s skin “color.” We might notice other bodily features that seem to indicate race. From there we might assume cultural traditions, geographical origins, economic status or any number of other things. Whether our assumptions are correct or not, these various indicators come together loosely to suggest racial identity.

Because we can, or think we can, recognize race by such visible indications, we might assume that race just is: that it exists on its own, an autonomous, self-obvious category. Common wisdom has long held that race is a fact of nature, a scientific or biological category that distinguishes among groups of people. But for years now science has been clear that race has no biological basis. A scientist will not find between one white person and every other white person any biological similarity that is greater than the similarity between that white person and an African-American person.

The truth is, race is not something that just is. It is not a fact of nature nor a scientific reality; race is a social reality. It is something that came to be, and comes to be over and over again, through laws, economic practices, the education and criminal justice systems, and an infinite number of other social phenomena. It is created through corporate and individual human activity.

Say a person walks down the street very late one night. If that person has physical features generally recognized as “white,” a passing police officer might slow down to make sure that person is not lost. Another person walking down that same street, whose features are recognized as “black,” might find this same police officer slows down and asks him for identification, or interrogates her based on the assumption that, out alone at night, she must be engaged in illicit activity.

Race is very real. It is just that the bodily characteristics by which we tend to recognize it are not significant in and of themselves. They become significant only as they are given some kind of meaning in the social realm — as this happens race becomes a (social) reality. In the above example, race exists at the juncture between certain bodily features and the activity of racial profiling; profiling one person for protection, the other for harassment.

As we begin to recognize that race is not a fixed and static fact of nature, but is a contested, changing social reality, the meanings that it has been given through the kinds of human activities that have gone into (and go into) creating it can come into view as well. This recognition is crucial to understanding the relationship between white folks and reparations.

Race and meaning

Throughout U.S. history the meanings of race have varied. Communities of color have given race meaning in the process of creating unique and rich cultural traditions, and forging communities of resistance. But this meaning-creation has taken place amidst significant oppressive forces which also make race real and give it meaning. As social institutions in the U.S. have historically engaged in biased practices, race has been given oppressive material content and meanings. Race means, for example, that you are more than twice as likely to be in prison if you are a black man than if you are white and eight times more likely if you are a black woman than white [www.epinet.org]. If you are a white drug user you are, generally, more likely to be in a drug treatment facility than in prison.

That material realities have given meaning to race is precisely why calls for reparations for an evil that legally ended 137 years ago continue to have currency in our national

racial landscape. How human features — skin color, especially — were given meaning from 1619 to 1865 and what those meanings were is the crux of the matter in thinking about reparations.

Among those of us who are white, to think about race in this way enables us to view, concretely, what it has meant and means to be white. It pushes us to ask how legal, economic and education systems and institutions have given whiteness meaning. Answers to these questions have implications that are both economic-material and moral-spiritual.

James Baldwin famously wrote in *Essence* magazine in 1984: “America became white — the people who, as they claim, ‘settled’ the country became white — because of the necessity of denying the Black presence and justifying the Black subjugation. ... White men — from Norway, for example, where they were Norwegians — became white by slaughtering the cattle, poisoning the wells, torching the houses, massacring Native Americans, raping Black women.”

Baldwin’s words are not to be taken figuratively. His charge is not merely that white people have committed atrocious crimes in U.S.–American history. His charge is that, quite literally, people who arrived in this land, nationalities intact, became white colonists and, later, became white U.S.–Americans through engagement in particular kinds of behavior and practices.

Race did not exist when those who colonized this land now known as the United States encountered the indigenous peoples who lived here. Whatever visible differences may have been noted — whether in dress, bodily attributes, skin pigmentation or cultural expression — these were given religious meaning. The primary category of difference was Christian or heathen: Christian meant “entitled beneficiaries of this pristine land and resources,” heathen meant “evil and worthy of genocide.”

Race: an economic institution

When Africans were first wrenched from their homelands and brought here to be slaves, race still did not exist (the first per-

manent African settlers arrived in 1619). The primary difference was that distinguishing owner and servant. This was a status defined strictly in legal terms and might invoke the difference between a European owner and either an African or a European servant. Pre-race, persons from different geographic regions, with different skin tones, might occupy the same servant category (and at that time servitude was not lifelong).

By the mid-1600s, however, race had begun to emerge and its creation was inextricably bound with the legalization of lifelong chattel slavery as an institution. In 1640 for the first time the word “Negro” was used in a court document; specifically, to

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demarcate the difference in status between a person of African descent, who had dark skin and was made a slave for life, and two Europeans, who had light skin and were to be held as indentured servants for three years each.

From that point forward, lifelong enslavement quickly came to be the norm for people of African descent. Indentured servitude phased out in the face of the obvious economic benefit of holding a lifelong (African) slave versus a temporary (European) servant. Freedom became the norm for people of European descent. The difference between owner/servant became the difference between free/slave — now a legal definition that relied upon and referenced bodies. The definition named skin color —

white/black — as the line demarcating the difference between these two “kinds” of people. Race, thus, came to be. (A similar process took place in relationship to Native Americans, by which “red” became a racial category — in this case the meaning given race was not “slave” but involved other kinds of violence and dehumanization.)

The color line became more deeply entrenched as chattel slavery became more institutionalized — first officially so in Massachusetts in 1641. The colonies’ and, eventually, the U.S.’ economic system was built through and entirely dependent upon this institution for the next 224 years. Slavery did not involve only the large southern cotton plantation. Even after northern states abolished slavery, it was the basis of the national economy. The labor of four million Africans and their descendents generated wealth in the South as it fueled the shipping yards and factories of the North.

The unpaid labor poured into this nation’s economy through slavery is only one piece of what was a vast and horrific historical experience. Still, that figure alone is staggering in its estimation: Sam Anderson, co-chair of the N.Y. Metro Chapter of the Black Radical Congress, puts a low estimate of these wages at \$97.1 trillion.

In addition to being granted freedom at the price of others being kept in shackles, being (becoming) white in this racial system meant benefiting from the enslavement of those who were (became) black. Not all benefited in the same way and an important part of this history is how race has been used to prevent impoverished and working-class whites from allying with impoverished blacks. But all those who became white received some direct benefit. For some this came through owning slaves, for others it was a stake in corporations that insured slaves or earned interest on slave owners’ assets. For some it was the freedom to access a job as a paid laborer. For all it was insulation from the systemic terrors legally inflicted and enforced upon black people.

A multitude of concrete legal and economic benefits were acquired by those who became white through these historic and

social processes. These benefits included not only the legacy of wealth, but also education, health, housing and virtually any other aspect of life in which social institutions impact human well-being. To the significant extent that the color line has remained an organizing principle of U.S.–American life, even as its functions have changed (i.e., slavery became “separate but equal”), those benefits have been passed down from generation to generation. They continue to accrue to those of us who occupy the social category “white.”

Whites and the redressing of ‘unjust enrichment’

Reparations activists call this phenomena “unjust enrichment.” Legal scholar Cheryl Harris calls it “whiteness as property.” (By recounting the poignant story of how her African-American grandmother “passed” as white in order to gain employment at a “whites only” workplace in the 1930s, Harris makes clear that the economic access that a particular skin hue provided demonstrates there is a property value in whiteness.)

To the extent that unjust material realities have remained unredressed, the legacies of slavery remain with us in the present. While the mass horror that was slavery can never be undone, attempts at true racial justice must take place through the same means by which race came to be in the first place.

This discussion pulls in a particular way on those of us who have been and who are white in this landscape. Writing specifically about white responses to calls for reparations in 1969, theologian William Stringfellow was insistent about the brokenness in which we remain if we fail to take this history seriously. He wrote, “[I]t does not take a psychiatrist to discern that the denial of inherited, corporate guilt is a symptom of it. That, of course, points further still to the fact that corporate guilt is a pathological state, a condition of profound disorientation, and even a kind of moral insanity.”

Stringfellow’s words touch the deeply moral and spiritual call to white folks that

reparations embodies. Any benefits that have come to us through the history of race have led to our dehumanization and moral malformation. The ethical realities that constituted the genesis of race will continue to bear down on our lives spiritually and morally until we make a choice to turn and face that history. This state might tempt us to the paralysis of despair, but movements for reparations offer us a different option.

So, what might happen if we each undertook an examination of our family’s economic and social origins and history in this nation? What if we chose to explore, in concrete terms, the past role of our church or denomination in issues of race, unjust enrichment, white supremacy? Might it be that the moral and spiritual impact of such activities would open possibilities for concrete response and redress that we could not even begin to imagine from the place in which we now sit? Might a first step of opening ourselves to understanding more deeply the history of race be an act of justice seeking hope that could help us to locate a new path — one that moves toward true racial justice — a path so many of us agree that we need?

Metanoia — to repent — means to change direction, to turn from the brokenness of sin and evil and to choose a radically different life way — a way of life. It is in the context of the life-giving call of repentance that movements for reparations invite those of us who are white to journey into moral sanity and re-formation. Reparations calls us to choose to be human and to be made whole: first, by issuing the challenge to stalwartly face the history we have inherited and in which our lives are embedded; then, by offering tools with which to refuse the malforming ease of perpetuating those legacies which have come to us from the past. They invite us, instead, to change direction by repairing the harm that has been done, and in the process create a different present and future. The challenge of reparations is the hard journey of moral and spiritual transformation: a call to white people — as Baldwin would put it — “to do our first works over.” ●

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From the editors of *Sojourners* magazine

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A NEW SYSTEM

The church's response to the call for reparations can begin with resistance to the prison-industrial complex

by Rima Veseliv

Slavery is being practiced by the system under the cover of law. ... Slavery 400 years ago, slavery today; it's the same thing, but with a new name. They're making millions and millions of dollars enslaving blacks, poor whites and others – people who don't even know they're being railroaded.

— Ruchell Magee (a political prisoner)

WITH THE CALL for reparations sounding from the black intellectual left voice of American politics, a crisis within the African-American community has been exposed. Poverty rates remain high, the quality of education and health care remains low, and the underground economy functions as one of few financial options within destitute neighborhoods. Aggressive police forces continue to racially profile people of color and minimum drug laws instituted by state lawmakers across the country have resulted in a prison-industrial complex that now incarcerates more than two million people. Fifty-one percent of inmates are African Americans and most are convicted of non-violent crimes. With states and corporations profiting from the labor of inmates, another system of slavery has been put into place – this time behind prison bars.

Reparations, therefore, is both a call for financial compensation for four hundred years of historical slavery and a call for response against the new system under which slavery now operates. The mass of people caught up within the prison system has become fodder for profit, and the prison industry is aptly termed “slavery” within black political circles. Denied rights, bargaining power and visibility,

inmates within the prison-industrial complex work for the state or corporations in a country that instituted the Thirteenth Amendment, which outlawed slavery but did not outlaw forced labor for convicts. (The amendment reads: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment of crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”)

State politicians use prisons as a growth industry, instituting legislation that upholds minimum drug law sentences, therefore providing jobs for small-town communities as well as an extensive labor pool for both state and corporate entities. In a *New York Times* article written in August 2001, journalist David Rohde wrote: “New York’s sprawling 70-facility, \$2.4-billion-a-year prison system pours hundreds of millions of dollars into the upstate economy each year. ... Corrections officers’ salaries start at \$33,000 and rise to \$48,000 in 20 years.”

Corporations such as Westinghouse, Sprint, MCI, Smith Barney, American Express, General Electric and Corrections Corporation of America use prison labor, paying inmates anywhere from 23 to 65 cents per hour. Prison laborers are unable to have union protection, bargaining power, rights to organize or strike, file a grievance of complaint, circulate an employee petition or newsletter or call meetings.

How do Christians who call themselves the Body of Christ respond?
As a young African-American woman who has come into the Episcopal Church



OF SLAVERY

after years in movement politics, this question stands before me, as visible in its urgency as the computer I type upon. Episcopal liturgy brings all of us into a spiritual realm that calls us to recognize the invisible of our society, an inner space in which we are reminded of Christ's anguish and passion for the outcast of his times. The reality of suffering that Christ entered and made visible compels the church, as the Body of Christ, into a political movement that seeks to manifest the very actions of Christ in the work of repairing and restitution. God is found not only at the altar, but as the radical Anglican theologian William Stringfellow writes, also in the profane, difficult, violent world which is inseparable from sacramental worship. Stringfellow's theology, which he calls "the theology of the Incarnation," begins with Christ's presence in an unredeemed world. Stringfellow writes that "When a congregation gathers in sacramental worship, the members of the Body are offering the world to God, not for his sake, not for their own sake, but for the sake of the world, and the members then and there celebrate God's presence in the world, and on behalf of the world, even though that world does not yet discern his presence."

The response of the church in the movement for reparations begins with the recognition of the invisible within our society: misunderstood, denied, perceived as a threat to the status quo. The Body of Christ is compelled to reach out to every person rejected by society, those whom Christ himself sought out and loved, healed and repaired. The repara-

tions movement is essentially founded upon the same actions of healing and repairing the overwhelming violence done to people of African descent. And thus the reparations movement is essentially a religious movement, in which the church as the visible Body of Christ is able to have an essential and critical voice. The boldness of Christians during the abolitionist movement and the civil rights movement paved the way for modern-day boldness and moral critique of slavery within the reparations movement. Those whom Christ called his disciples to reach out to and recognize in our times are found behind bars, degraded and dehumanized, exploited for profit, invisible, voiceless. They are precisely the ones that the church is called to free.

Freedom must occur on a multitude of levels. The sophisticated political analysis grounding the reparations movement reveals the interlocking systems of oppression that maintain this system of slavery behind prison bars. In present times, whole communities are devastated by the drug trade and minimum drug law sentences. Thus the cycle of devastation begun with chattel slavery continues. A study done by Harvard professor Lawrence Bobo found that in 1998 there was less than ten cents in a black household for every one dollar in a white household.

This fight against financial destitution and modern-day slavery is our civil rights movement, and it is intimately connected with the movement for reparations. In pragmatic, concrete ways, Christians can rally against racist minimum drug laws and growth-industry

prison building, oppose legislators who stake their campaigns on aggressive community policing, and form networks with organizations committed to direct care of inmates. Thus there exists a multitude of means by which churches can support the political campaign begun by the black left.

Reparations for communities

Individuals who oppose the reparations movement point out the difficulty of providing reparations to individuals. Yet the connections between historical slavery, racism, poverty and current levels of incarceration cannot be ignored. Thus while the government may logically argue against reparations for individuals, clearly reparations for communities of African Americans living in impoverished neighborhoods will support schools, health care facilities, housing, job training, and employment opportunities.

While calling for investment into low-income communities, Christians are taking a stand against the poverty fueling the drug trade, which directly feeds the prison-industrial complex. Far beyond duty, becoming part of this movement is essentially how we understand our identity as the Body of Christ. As we take part in the Eucharist, we become part of one another and become part of the risen Christ, who in breaking bread, disappeared from the sight of his followers. We are Christ's followers today, and as we live Christ's absence into presence, we too are the Body called upon to repair and heal by rallying against slavery and supporting the call for reparations. ●

MORAL ARGUMENTS

The credibility of South Africa's TRC is at stake

by Michael Lapsley, S.S.M., and Karin Chubb

THE TRUTH and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) came into being in 1995 as part of a negotiated settlement to ensure a peaceful transition to democracy in South Africa. It was a moral response to the evil of apartheid. South Africa's Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of May 1995 gave a mandate to the TRC to, *inter alia*, make recommendations for reparations to

victims of human rights violations. In October 1998 the TRC presented its Final Report to then-President Nelson Mandela. However, at that time the amnesty hearings had not been completed, so the "final report" was not complete. The still-awaited codicil includes an amnesty report, a brief paragraph about each person declared to be a victim, and final comments on the amnesty report. The TRC Final Report's recommendations on Reparations and Rehabilitation had five components:

- Urgent interim reparations. These included limited financial assistance of approximately 2,500 rand (the South African rand is currently trading about 11 to 1 on the U.S. dollar) each for those in urgent need. These have been paid out.

- Individual reparation grants in the form of financial grants to individual victims. Each victim of a gross human rights violation should receive a financial grant of between 17 to 23,000 rand per year for six years.

- Symbolic reparation/ legal and administrative measures. These could include national days of remembering and reconciliation, the erection of memorials and monuments, and the development of museums.

- Community rehabilitation programs. Services and activities aimed at promoting the healing and recovery of individuals and communities affected by human rights violations.

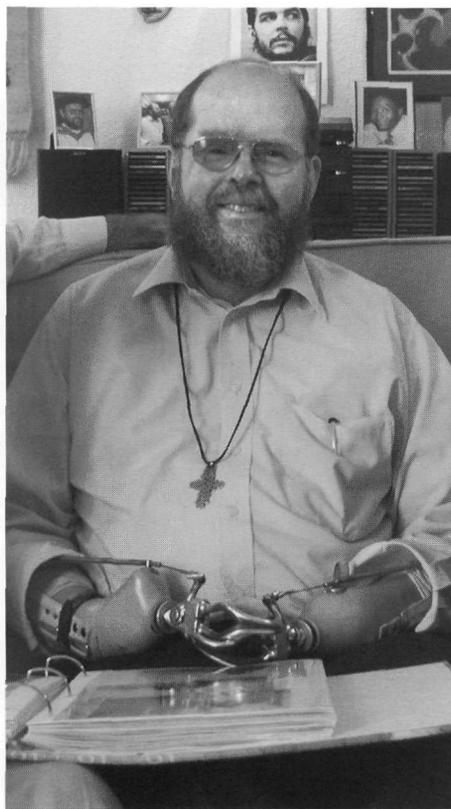
- Institutional reforms. Legal, administrative and institutional measures

designed to prevent the recurrence of human rights abuses.

The integrity of the entire TRC and, particularly, its credibility as a moral force hinges on the reparations issue. The Act itself allows only for restorative justice and prevents other forms of justice once amnesty has been granted. Normally, when people use the word "justice" they mean "retribution." In the case of the TRC, those granted amnesty will not experience retributive justice, as they may not be criminally or civilly prosecuted — the Act takes away the individual victims' normal rights to pursue justice through the courts and to achieve such reparations or at least such satisfaction as may be possible in the criminal justice system.

However, their victims or the victims' relatives will regain a measure of their dignity through the ways in which the TRC has respectfully acknowledged the truth of what happened to them and the wrong that was done to them — and through the different forms of reparation which have been recommended. Under the Act, the victims and survivors have to trust that the moral commitment made by the State when it established the TRC will indeed be honored by the implementation of a comprehensive and effective reparations policy.

It is important, in the light of subsequent events and arguments put forward by the government to justify its delays on reparations, to understand that victims and survivors came forward on an individual basis. The government has spoken



Ethos Photo

Michael Lapsley, S.S.M.

FOR REPARATIONS

against individual reparations on the grounds that many millions of South Africans were victims of apartheid. Relatives of victims, survivors and perpetrators appeared before the TRC as individuals. To recognize the individuality of the one by granting him (we do not know of any women applicants) amnesty for human rights violations (HRV) and not of the other — by relegating their legitimate individual claims to a nebulous group identity — surely undermines the law on which the Commission is founded. If this is upheld, it will have tragic consequences in terms of trust in the law.

Why were victims and survivors prepared to trust the TRC?

In some cases, deep misgivings and hostility were expressed and some families and survivors refused to come forward to testify before the TRC. They did not want the perpetrators to have the chance to apply for amnesty and thus escape the legal consequences of their actions.

AZAPO (The Azanian People's Organization) and others went to the Constitutional Court to argue that the granting of amnesty would violate the constitutional right to justice. Although the case was dismissed, Judge Didcott pointed out that "Reparations are usually payable by States, and there is no reason to doubt that the postscript envisages our own State shouldering the national responsibility for those. It therefore does not contemplate that the State will go scot-free. On the contrary, I believe, an actual commitment on the point is implicit in its terms, a commitment in

principle to the assumption by the State of the burden" (Azanian People's Organization and others v. President of the Republic of South Africa and others [SA] 671 1996).

However, many more chose to tell their stories before the Commission and they thus accepted the possibility that those who were guilty of inflicting gross human rights violations might be granted amnesty — in return for nothing more than telling the whole truth.

Why were people who had already suffered so much then ready to trust the TRC process to such an extent? One reason is the human need to tell the story and to have its truth acknowledged by the wider society. Another is the hope of finally hearing the whole truth in the amnesty procedures. But yet another reason must surely lie in the nature of the new state itself. Here, at last, the democratic government was in power that they had longed for and in whose cause so many of their loved ones had suffered and died. Here, at last, was a government that would restore justice that had so long been denied to most of this country's people.

Apartheid's legacy: a damaged society

The establishment of the TRC was one important force in the moral reconstruction of a damaged society. It was one major pillar of the "bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights ..." (Final Report vol.1, ch.5, p.103).

It is important to see that while the apartheid system benefited some and deprived the majority, it also damaged the moral fiber and integrity of the entire nation.

Not common guilt but common responsibility

The TRC dealt with all who came before it on an equal basis. Both perpetrators and victims from all sides of the conflict had the right to appear as individuals. The perpetrators had the benefit of legal counsels to argue their case. The victims had the recognition of being heard — and the prospect of reparations. The balance is a crucial one for the moral legitimacy of the TRC and there is a consequent moral responsibility by the State and by the nation as a whole.

The breadth of the hearings in both the HRV and the Amnesty Committees makes it impossible to shift responsibility for all violations onto a few major criminals. While the broader oppression of apartheid was not a focus of the TRC, it did become clear through the public hearings that evil was done on a broad scale — and in the future, no South African can ever claim not to know.

This raises the issue of guilt and acknowledgment. The German philosopher Karl Jaspers defines moral guilt as wide-ranging and including criminal, political and military actions as well as indifference and passivity (*The Question of German Guilt*, New York, The Dial Press). He goes on to suggest that it is only the acceptance of culpability which provides the opportunities for a new

national beginning. In terms of the moral trajectory of the TRC, this shifts the responsibility of acknowledgment to the nation as a whole. We are required to accept responsibility for the history of which we are a part.

In a surprising application to the TRC's Amnesty Committee, a group of young black people applied for amnesty for "apathy." In their application they argued "that we as individuals can and should be held accountable by history for our lack of necessary action in times of crisis, that none of us did all of what we could have done to make a difference in the anti-apartheid struggle, that in exercising apathy rather than commitment we allow(ed) others to sacrifice their lives for the sake of our freedom and an increase in the standard of living" (copy of the original application).

Whether the TRC will make a lasting contribution toward moral reconstruction and renewal in South Africa hinges on two factors: the acceptance of responsibility for the past, especially by those who benefited from apartheid, and the formulation and implementation of an effective reparations policy. According to the laws the government itself has passed, the latter is the responsibility of the State.

One of the failures of the TRC process was that, on the whole, the white community did not engage with it. A clear reparations policy formulated and administered by the State but involving all sectors of civil society would open constructive ways in which we could, indeed, "take responsibility for our history."

What if the State fails?

It must be stressed that all who testified before it also understood that within the TRC process there was the obligation to recommend reparations. Expectations were raised by commissioners themselves in many of the HRV hearings, when victims were asked what they would like the TRC to do for them. Unfortunately, many victims and survivors did not and do not realize that the obligation for reparations does not rest with the TRC but with the State. The TRC has been criticized and even vilified for not

achieving something which, from the outset, it was neither empowered nor designed to accomplish.

If there are no effective reparations, the question will be asked as to who benefited from the TRC. Apart from the staff of the commission and highly paid lawyers, it is mainly the perpetrators who will have benefited. From the beginning, the amnesty provisions created the suspicion that the TRC would favor perpetrators rather than victims — on all sides of the past conflicts. Already, the treatment of perpetrators has deepened the anger and pain of victims. Many feel that the condition of proportionality has not been taken into account sufficiently, or that the truth as they saw it or knew it had not been told. Credible and satisfactory reparations would help to address that anger now. If there are no reparations, or if there continue to be only minimal tokens, the judgment of history will indeed be that the TRC was a perpetrator-friendly exercise.

Enormous damage would be done, at all levels, to the trust in a new democracy and to any faith in the rule of law.

If the State fails, comparisons will be made between a defense budget of 32 billion rand and an individual reparations budget estimated at 5 billion. Under apartheid, defense and security spending overrode all other concerns. Are we heading down that road again?

If the State fails, there will be disastrous longer-term consequences. The TRC will have left not so much a legacy of reconciliation but a community of embittered and angry people. The inversion of justice and moral order which we inherited from the apartheid era would continue. It would be a moral tragedy for all South Africans if the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were to go down in history as a perpetrator-friendly exercise.

We can do no better than to quote from the moral argument put forward in the Reparation and Rehabilitation Policy of the TRC's Final Report:

"If we are to transcend the past and build national unity and reconciliation, we must

ensure that those whose rights have been violated are acknowledged through access to reparation and rehabilitation. While such measures can never bring back the dead, nor adequately compensate for pain and suffering, they can and must improve the quality of life of the victims of human rights violations and/or their dependants. (...) Without adequate reparation and rehabilitation measures, there can be no healing and reconciliation" (Final Report vol.5, chapter 5, pp.174, 175).

In November of 1998, the recommendations for Final Reparations were made to the State. By September of 2002 the South African Government had not yet stated its response and intended course of action with regard to implementing Final Reparations. The government appears to be waiting for the release of the codicil, which has been delayed until January 2003 due to a court challenge by political opposition leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi. ●

MORE INFORMATION

One way that people around the world can support the campaign for reparations in South Africa is to write to our government. Letters urging the implementation of reparations should be sent to:

TRC PRESIDENT'S FUND FOR REPARATIONS

c/o Mr. F. Hoosen
Department of Justice
Private Bag X81
Pretoria 0001, South Africa

More information about the reparations issue can be obtained from

THE INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

www.ijr.org.za

THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF VIOLENCE AND RECONCILIATION

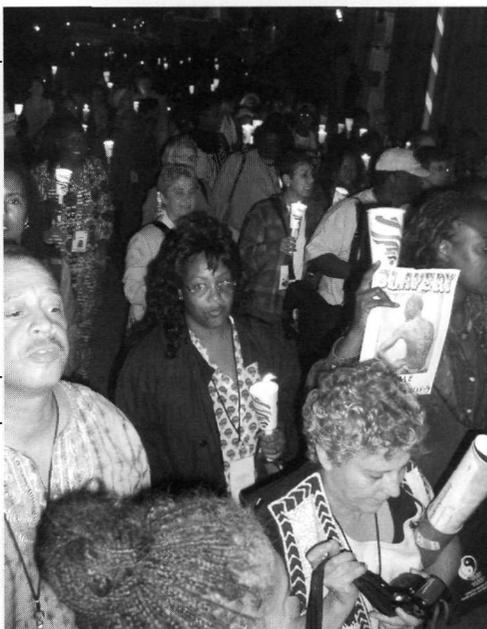
www.csvr.org.za

THE HOME TO ALL CAMPAIGN

www.hometoall.org.za

THE MOVEMENT FOR REPARATIONS

The movement for reparations in the U.S. to repair the damage of slavery's legacy has grown considerably over the past two years. The highest profile effort has been a series of class action lawsuits filed across the nation in the past year, and a group of prominent African-American lawyers, scholars and artists, led by Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree, is in the process of launching several more. These lawsuits target corporations whose wealth was acquired, in part, through profit from the slave trade (suits against Aetna, Fleet Boston, and CSX Railroads are already in litigation).



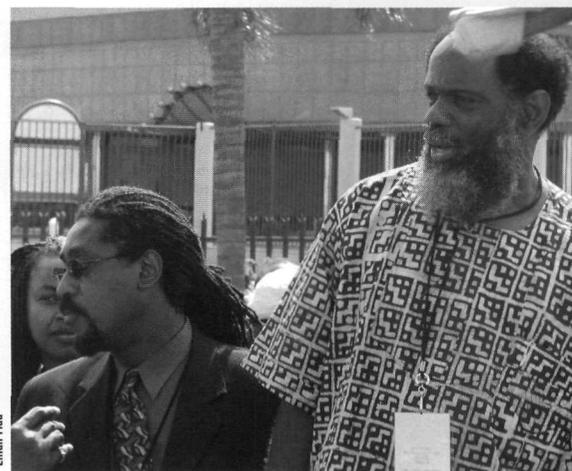
A candlelight vigil for reparations in Durban, South Africa (September 2001)

Voices for reparations are resounding in legislative halls, too. The Chicago City Council, which already passed a resolution calling for federal payment of reparations, is now considering an ordinance that would mandate companies to disclose whether they profited from slave labor before they are eligible for city contracts. At the national level, U.S. Representative John Conyers (D-MI) has introduced a bill every year since 1989 calling for Congressional hearings on the nature

and impact of slavery and post-slavery discrimination. And on August 17, 2002, the "Millions for Reparations March" was held in Washington D.C. The march was sponsored by the Durban 400 — a coalition formed in late 2001 after the UN World Conference Against Racism — and publicity flyers read "You Owe Us!"

The reparations movement has also visibly grown in religious communities. Several mainline U.S. Protestant denominations have recently made statements about racism and reparations. Examples include:

- In July 2001, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ (UCC) passed a resolution calling individual churches, conferences and associations to be educated about the historical evils of the slave trade and its legacy. It addressed "the pernicious and self-perpetuating distrust and fear that continues to feed the sin of racism and its fruits of inequality and injustice," and called for the creation of educational materials.
- In October 2002, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) further called on the U.S. government to issue a national apology to people of African descent for slavery.
- In 2001, the Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry (an interfaith coalition in Tulsa, Okla.), addressed the sensitive topic of a deadly race riot in 1921 which destroyed the city's Greenwood neighborhood, an African-American community. The Ministry has initiated reparation payments to the 131 survivors of the riot, distributing a total of just over \$28,000. The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) contributed \$20,000 of the sum.
- In 2002, the Presbyterian Church (USA) passed a resolution creating two task forces to study reparations. The first will review "reparations for African Americans, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and others who have experienced significantly disparate treatment." The



Ethan Flad

An impromptu press conference at the UN World Conference Against Racism calls for reparations for people of African descent.

second will specifically address the disenfranchisement of African Americans. Both are to prepare reports by 2004.

- Two resolutions are being proposed to the Episcopal Church's 74th General Convention in Minneapolis, Minn., in July 2003. One, from the Diocese of California, calls for the church to formally support Rep. Conyers' bill in Congress (known as HR-40, see above). The second would issue a formal apology for the church's role in supporting the institution of slavery, and would set aside a percentage of the church's national budget as dedicated scholarship monies for the education of the descendants of slaves.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

THE BLACK RADICAL CONGRESS is a key organization in the U.S. reparations movement. Contact the BRC to find out how to get involved. www.blackradicalcongress.org

Compiled by Jennifer Harvey and Ethan Flad

THEATER ABOUT LOVE

Mosaic Youth Theater — a place, unlike school, where it's okay to be different: loud, or gay or talented

by Jane Slaughter



Members of the Mosaic Youth Theater troupe in performance.

Jim West

IN AN ECHO-FILLED BUILDING near the Detroit River, on the grounds of a fort last in use in the War of 1812, a group of teenagers is rehearsing a play about “love, hate and rhythm.” Although their troupe, Mosaic Youth Theater, bills itself as “multi-cultural,” most of the kids are African American; a few are white.

Mosaic tackles the big subjects, the hard ones. The company's play “Crossing 8 Mile” was about the divide between black Detroit and its white suburbs. Last year's “2001 Hastings Street” was set in Detroit's famed Black

Bottom community in the 1940s, when segregation colored everything — or did it? This year's “HeartBEAT” looks at love and hate (and rhythm) in all their dimensions, from teenage crushes to societal prejudice.

To warm up, director Andrew Strickland gets the kids moving: “Gentlemen, you are the Titanic. Ladies, you are an iceberg.” The kids climb on each other's backs, lie on the floor, belly to someone else's shins. Both during the exercises and when they're just standing around talking, their normal teenage exuberance and desire to show off is increased by

their theatricality and lack of inhibition.

Andrew gives feedback: “You need to follow through till I say ‘freeze.’ Don't fall apart into silliness. You do great work — you're too good not to tie it up with a bow. You grab the audience from the beginning — you need to take the same skills and apply them all the way through to the end.”

To sharpen their audition skills, each member must perform a monologue from Shakespeare. “Want is at the basis of every human action,” Andrew coaches them. “You don't do a monologue ‘happy’ or ‘sad.’ That's the wrong question. You ask, ‘What does my character want?’” What Andrew wants is a modern translation for each line.

Blending the modern and the classic is what Mosaic does. “Crossing Eight Mile,” based on “A Comedy of Errors,” was performed in 17th-century *commedia dell'arte* style, in exaggerated white masks. “HeartBEAT” is very loosely based on one of Aristophanes' plays. “What Fools These Mortals Be!” was, of course, a version of “A Midsummer Night's Dream.”

But every play gives the viewer an up-close and sometimes painfully personal look at what it's like to be a teenager, a black Detroit teenager in particular. Each cast member writes, anonymously, about events and feelings from their own lives. These stories are used in creating the plays. The love and the hate are so vivid, so specific, that the director sometimes takes pains to tell the audience, before a performance, that none of the

HATE AND HOPE

actors is playing his or her own story.

For some kids, Mosaic is a lifeline, a place, unlike school, where it's okay to be different: loud, or gay or talented. For others, it's a place to get the strokes that are in short supply at home. For all of them, it's a chance to learn what it means to be a professional. And, somehow, it's the act of putting on a play — becoming at the same time a fictional character and someone whom others can absolutely rely upon — that allows kids who've had nothing to believe in themselves. At Mosaic, the kids are encouraged to pursue their art after high school, but they're also told to always have a back-up plan, which begins with college.

A hundred artists — actors, singers and technicians — make up the Mosaic ensemble. They have performed all over the U.S., including at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. They have played in London and Singapore and were the U.S. representatives to the World Festival of Children's Theatre in Copenhagen. Actors interviewed for this story were Kizzmett Pringle, 16, Detroit; Lamar Davidson, 16, Detroit; Iman Milner, 14, Detroit; Shavonne Coleman, 16, Detroit; Jaazmine Parker, 16, Detroit; Carmen Phillips, 16, Lathrup Village; Lynniesha Ray, 15, Detroit; Ciarah Mosely, 12, Detroit; Jeffrey McCants, 17, Detroit; Jonathan Black, 14, Farmington Hills; Timothy Candela, 19, Detroit; Gabriel Doss, 14, Detroit.

I asked the actors whether being part of Mosaic had changed their lives.

Jeffrey: Going to a school like mine you deal with black males who want to be thugs, but they're really not, and females who want to act like they got attitudes all the time. Coming here, I don't have to deal with that. I don't like the whole thug thing.

Lynniesha: Because they're on all the time.

Jeffrey: Right. They act like they don't want to be in class and they don't want to be in school, and it's like, where you gonna get to after that? But here you got people with goals, who want to go to college, who want to succeed. So that's definitely changed my life.

Carmen: Me at the beginning of my first year of Mosaic and me at the end of my first year of Mosaic were two different things. Before Mosaic, I didn't really come into the city for

anything. I live in Lathrup Village, bordering Birmingham. I mean, Shavonne's my girl now, but when I first came to Mosaic, I was like, "They're listening to what? And why are their shoes not tied? And what on earth is going on? And get me out of here."

For me, Mosaic opened my eyes. Like, now I listen to 105.9 [rap] instead of DRQ [pop]. I wish I could give that experience to everyone, just to let somebody else — not just a different racial culture, but a different culture than what you're used to, change who you are a little bit. Not change you, just make you better.

Jaazmine: Being at Mosaic made me grow up, because I was used to having everything my way or being the best at everything. Then when you get put into a group where everybody is the best at what they do, you have no choice but to grow up.

Timothy: It helps me in finding out who I am, helped me work on my character — my character in life, not just my character on stage.

Kizzmett: It's given me the opportunity to meet people I wouldn't have met. One of my better friends, he's a caucasian. In any other situation I might not have become so close to him and now I am, and for that, Mosaic just brings a joy into my life.

Jon: I used to have pretty much no friends at school. I always seemed to be the strange kid, the dramatic kid that no one would want to be around. Once I got here, everyone else was dramatic, so I just fit right in for once in my life. I can now feel more comfortable interacting with people at my school even though they aren't the same as me.

In "HeartBEAT" I was the character Hephaestus; the Roman name is Vulcan. I had no emotion through the entire show. You're a god, you're regal. But I could feel all this hate and the love from the other people on stage, although it was really just their energy, but I could feel it bouncing off of me and not being able to absorb any of it because it would affect my character. I sort of had to bounce it all off.

It reminded me that sometimes you can do that — if someone is giving you hate, you can just bounce it off. It's not the same as ignoring it, because you realize that you're gonna have to deal with it, but you're just not letting it get to you.

When the cast prepared for “2001 Hastings Street,” they were assigned to interview Detroiters who had been teenagers during the 1940s, when African Americans were a minority of the city’s population. The play juxtaposes the daily humiliations of segregation with the sense of worth and place that came from living in a cohesive community.

Lynniesha: We had a lot of blunt stories about racism. I had a monologue in the play about working at an army factory and a white manager followed me, he’d tell me to lift this crate. He said, “Don’t you know you colored girls are mules for us white people?” Me personally, I’ve never really experienced harsh racism, but I was like “Ohhhh, okay, I didn’t know it was like that.” Once you get a big dump on you for the first time, it’s like “Ohhh-kay, so now you put something in my mouth that I just had a nice taste of.”

Gabriel: There was basically two parts of town, which was Black Bottom and Hastings St., which was majority African American. And the rest of Detroit was majority caucasian-populated back then. We came to the realization that even though there was so much segregation back then, in the group that we were portraying, the Y-Gs [a community youth group] — it wasn’t necessarily racism all the time. Because while they were still teenagers they had friends that were of other races. The YGs had black and white participants. They all got along. But as the play progressed they did get into some issues about “You can’t go on this side of town,” or “You *can* go in the theater, but you have to sit in the balcony.”

I say it got more intense as they became adults, because when I interviewed the people, they were like, “Yeah, before we got arrested by the police, or before we had this experience, we were best of friends, but a lot of stuff changed when we got older.”

Jaazmine: One thing I noticed was that there was a difference between races, but more so than the different races there was a distinction between classes. It didn’t matter if you were poor, all the poor kids hung together. The majority of all the poor kids might have been African American, but it’s like, you live with me, you live around me,

we’re just alike except our skin color is different, so I’m going to embrace you.

Lamar: It was different the way they obeyed their parents and people who were older than them. I think now there’s a lot of disrespect for adults in the fashion that, “She’s not my mama” or “He’s not my mama” and “I’m not going to listen to them because they’re not my mama.” But back then, hey, if you did something wrong, not only were you going to get a whipping when you got home, but the people who you come across in your daily fashion will whip you too. And I think that’s how they came together as a family.

Kizzmet: When we first got the script and we saw how racism was, it made me appreciate everything that my grandparents and their grandparents went through so I could be friends with this person and I could eat at the same facility with this person. It opened my eyes to all the struggles that came before me and how blessed I am now.

The kids know that much has changed in regard to racism, but then, they wonder, how much?

Lynniesha: I’m in an activity at school called forensics. It’s the Scholastic Forensics Association. To go to a suburban area of white schools — it’s gorgeous, they have so much stuff that we don’t have.

Still, my school, DSA, is known for having the best team in the state because we have a lot of really good drama and speech kids. I remember somebody saying, “Oh, you know DSA always wins because they do those black pieces.” I’m like, “Why can’t you see the concept of the piece more so than the color behind it?” Excellent work is excellent work regardless. That sort of shocked me.

Kizzmet: I wouldn’t let myself go to a historically black college and only let myself be exposed to what I already know, which is African Americans. But on the other hand, any other college that I go to is going to be predominantly white and I’m going to find racism.

My parents were telling me that when I go into the work world it’s going to be that way, too. I’m going to have to deal with racism. Probably not as blunt as it was back then, but it’s going to be there.

I have to realize that I live in a white

world. Specifically, with the field that I want to go into, engineering, that’s a white male world. That’s just the way it is. Things are not going to change.

Jeffrey: As far as racism goes, you see it every day. I may live in a mostly black community, but I can go to a white-owned store, or any store, and they’re afraid of black people. They’re afraid that I might try and steal something. I went to a video store once, and this wasn’t even a white guy, it was an Arab, and he came out of his hole, his bulletproof protection, just to make sure I didn’t steal anything, and then told me to get out. It’s not even white people anymore, it’s everybody.

Ciarah: Same thing about people of your own color — in my school, they talk about me because I’m a little bit darker than the rest of the people. They say “Oh you darky” and all the rest of this crap. We go to an African-centered school, and it makes absolutely no sense. They always talking about girls: “Oh, I want me a light-skinned girl with long hair.” There’s so much self-hatred in them, and culture hatred.

Shavonne: With “Crossing 8 Mile,” we confronted the stereotypes. It was a lot of stereotypes that I didn’t realize were stereotypes, I just thought them to be true. There was the funny ones like “black people like chicken.” Or all people from the suburbs talk a certain way. All people from the city wear baggy clothes, even the girls. Or everyone in the suburbs was named Becky. The play helped me realize that I was stereotyping and it helped open me up.

Jaazmine: This was used as one of the monologues in “HeartBEAT”: I remember the whole time I was growing up, I always said I was either going to go to medical school or into law. The school that I used to go to, a really suburban Christian school, my teachers and my principals all the time used to sit me down: “Well, it’s nice to have high dreams, but I really don’t think you’re going to accomplish that, so maybe you should aim a little lower, like what about nursing school?” They used to come to me: “Oh, you’re so outgoing — have you ever thought about going into entertainment? That seems like it would suit you perfectly.”

When I was little I was educated on things like the minstrel show, and I felt that was

how they displayed African Americans in the school I was at. You weren't good enough to be in their academic games. African Americans were good enough to be in their choirs and to be put up on stage to sing and act stupid and entertain the audience. And I really, really did not agree with that.

We got no kind of education about different African Americans. Black History Month was like "What?" in our school. Every year in our heritage book we had this very small paragraph that said there were slaves, Abraham Lincoln freed them, couple years later Martin Luther King came along and said you weren't free and then he got shot. And that was it.

In 'HeartBEAT,' an African American girl talks about her brother's 'racial profiling' of Arab Americans.

Lamar: I think after September 11 there was a lot of hypocrisy going on. Blacks were always being profiled — say you walk in a store, the manager's always looking at you because they think you're going to steal something. After September 11 the Arabs were getting profiled, and I think blacks forgot what it was like to actually go through it. They were like "Oh, watch her, watch him, they're Arabic," instead of how it felt to be profiled when you were black.

Iman: I don't think it's right to say, "Well, this one person did it so everybody is like that." Because there are Arab people that live around me, and I go to their houses and eat with them. I'm not like, "Oh, just because you're an Arab you must be related to Osama bin Laden." I wouldn't want to be treated like that. And that's what everybody has worked so hard for — to not be treated that way.

Shavonne: One thing I noticed after September 11 is that everybody all of a sudden wanted to be careful about racial profiling. There was a lot of stuff on the news about "They're our brothers" — they had all those commercials. I really appreciated the fact that everybody was so careful to try not to racial profile, but at the same time I kept thinking, well, when it was the blacks were getting racial profiled, I didn't see those commercials on the air talking about "They're our brothers." That struck me more than anything.

Jaazmine: I was watching the news and

they're saying not to do it. They're saying, "Arab Americans, that's how they are, don't act negatively toward them, because that's their culture." But at the same time, they're saying, "African Americans, the reason why this is happening to you — stop wearing the baggy jeans, stop having the tinted windows in your car, stop wearing your hats on backwards and stop this and stop this."

My thing is the freedom of expression. The way they're saying that African Americans should stop doing this and they won't get racially profiled, I think that's actually invading one of our civil rights, freedom of speech and freedom of expression. It's making them the victim. You're telling somebody to change who they are in order to accommodate you.

I asked whether, in a play about love and hate, there were rivalries among the cast members, jealousies or even hate. Or racism.

Iman: There are rivalries, but they're not big deals. It's always a sense of family. In a family there's certain uncles that you don't like being around and certain cousins that you're like, "Please don't come over to my house this weekend because I really cannot stand you sometimes." And that's how it is at Mosaic; you never hate them, you're just like, I don't want to be bothered with this person today.

Kizzmet: The few caucasian people that we have in Mosaic, we joke around and we're like, "Hey, what up, cracker?" It's taking something negative and changing it to a positive. The fact that we can do that with each other, I think it's a good thing. Of course you wouldn't go in public and say that, but while we're here ...

Tim: I don't think that there's people our age that look at color as much as our parents do. It gets old — that's all I have to say about racism. It gets old and it gets really disgusting.

Jaazmine: There's a bit of rivalry, but you know if anything goes wrong, they have your back, and that's a wonderful feeling. I remember during previews, there's a scene where we're all standing together and we were supposed to be frozen. I was rocking back on my heels, and I felt two people behind me, and one of them said, "I got you,

don't worry about it. Just lean back on me and I have you." That is the best thing in the world, to know that somebody has your back — physically, mentally and everything else. Me and this person might not be the best of friends, but I know they have my back if something goes down.

Jeffrey: If you be in Mosaic you cannot hate anybody. I'm serious — you will quit and it will be a better company without you. I know a lot of people who have conformed. The biggest thing is homosexuality. It's not an issue, it's just a difference. Like I say, at my school, for example, with the thugs, it's all about being a man and if you're gay you ain't a man. If you are going to be in Mosaic with that mentality, you will not last.

You will not last in this company if you do not like white people. Our director is white. You cannot be in this company without being okay with a lot of things. It is too many different religions, so you can't be, "I'm Christian and my way is right. And I will conform you to my religion." You can't do that.

Jaazmine: One thing that people have always told me that you want to be judged on is nothing on your outside but the quality of the person you are. Like Dr. Martin Luther King said, the quality of your content. He had a dream of that, and to me Mosaic really is his dream. Because when you walk through these doors, I don't know anywhere else that it's like that — you aren't looked upon as what race you are or your gender or your sexual preference or the way you look, how long your hair is, what shade of skin you have, or anything else, your size, nothing. You are based on the quality of your content. Here you're not even based on how smart you are or where you come from; you're based on your talent, and not even so much your talent — how well you use your talent. Everybody still talks about Dr. King's dream, but to me Mosaic is living his dream.

You asked how can we bring the races together. Anybody that wants to see how people can coexist together from all different cultures, different backgrounds, bring them to Mosaic, because we are living proof of the fact that it can happen. There was nobody forcing us to do it, we had to do it on our own.

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