

The Cry of the Poor





The Cry of the Poor

*Cracking White Male Supremacy—
An Incendiary and Militant Proposal*



Eduard Loring

Open Door Community Press
Atlanta

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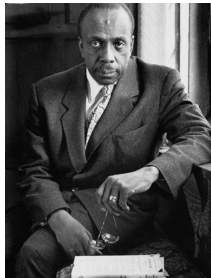
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Rev. Jefferson Rogers
and Mary Grace
Rogers

I am led to dedicate this slim and inadequate volume to Rev. Jefferson Rogers and Mary Grace Rogers, with footwashing humility that only a white man whose family and regional histories push at the centers of white hate—from slavery to lynching to Jim Crow to Ronald Reagan to Sarah Palin and the Tea Party—can know in these days of hospice care for the common good.

Rev. Rogers and Mary Grace, his wife of 66 years, have lived their lives and honed their practices in making the works and dangerous memory of Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman fire for us all. All three of them are influential parts of the Tree of Life that moved me from the “strange fruit” hanging from oaks to the hope of redemption and the fight for the establishment of equality and justice for all.



Howard Thurman

We have miles to go before we sleep. The Radical Remnant that Jeff and Mary Grace call us to join is still on the margins where we discover love and passion to fight for freedom.

Thank you both for hosting me and Murphy Davis at the Howard Thurman home. Thank you for inviting me to give the Howard Thurman Lecture Series at Stetson University in 2006. Thank you for your encouragement of this project.

With deepest reverence for the voice of this our ancestor . . .



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Foreword

By Nibs Stroupe

I have known Eduard Nuessner Loring for over 40 years. We first met in the back seat of a 1958 Ford in Nashville. Though our meeting was not the kind of debut that Jack and Diane had in the back of Jackie's car in the John Cougar Mellencamp song, it was a fruitful meeting because our friendship has grown, and we have stayed in one another's hearts ever since.

On that fall day in 1968, we were on our way to student orientation. We were students at Vanderbilt Divinity School on different levels—Ed as a doctoral student and me as an entering seminary student. I would drop out after two years and wander in the wilderness for several years. Ed would complete his doctorate in American church history there, writing his dissertation on Charles C. Jones, the Southern Presbyterian missionary to slaves in the 19th century.

I returned to seminary under Ed's influence when he was on the faculty of Columbia Theological Seminary and persuaded me to resume my seminary career there. At Columbia he officially became my teacher, mentor and brother. He was instrumental in introducing me to Caroline Leach, who would eventually become my spouse and co-pastor, and he and another friend officiated at our wedding in his back yard. Over these many years our friendship has deepened and grown, ebbed and flowed. We have been with each other in the best of times and in the worst of times. We have danced together, cried together, washed dishes together, pushed one another, learned from one another, loved one another.


I share this background as part of my privilege and honor to write




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the foreword to this fine and disturbing book. It is “fine” because it is among the best analyses in print of our current American culture. It is “disturbing” for the same reason—it is a difficult time in America. Ed reminds us of the reasons why this is so, and he also offers opportunities for us to find the way out of our wilderness. It is as if we are lost in the forest and we keep circling back to the same spot without recognizing it, calling it by many names, gaining a sense of having been here before but unable to shift our pattern of movement to find a new and fruitful path.

In “The Cry of the Poor,” Ed names this spot and locates it as the beginning of our lostness. We might call it the WMSC, not the call letters for a radio station, but rather the call letters for our alienation: the White Male Supremacy Complex.



In her recent book “The History of White People,” historian Nell Painter gives us an overview of how “whiteness” came to be seen as an essential part of American life. Ed is a historian, too, but he also wants to approach this subject from an ethical and theological point of view, as well as an experiential view. For over 30 years now, he and his beloved partner in life and ministry, Murphy Davis, have been centered in and living in ministry with homeless people and prisoners, practicing what Ed calls “foot theology,” walking the walk as well as talking the talk.



The White Male Supremacy Complex was built upon America’s original sin of slavery and racism and now permeates all of our culture. At one end is the greed seen most clearly in the recent economic devastation brought on by white men driven to get more and more. At the other end are the most visible costs of this mania: homeless people and people in prison. In the middle are the rest of us, all of whom are infected by the consumerism at the heart of the White Male Supremacy Complex.



Ed’s “Cry of the Poor” is both painful and prophetic. It is painful because he speaks so strongly and so clearly: it is both morning and night in America, morning if we are able to choose life, night if we continue to live in captivity to death. It is prophetic because Ed’s writings flow out of the 3,000-year tradition of biblical prophecy, where women and men have sought to discern God’s movement and God’s calling



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in their time. Like Micah, Ed reminds us of what God requires of us: do justice, love kindness and walk humbly. Like Amos, he bluntly calls out to us of the consequences of the White Male Supremacy Complex: “It is as if someone fled from a lion and was met by a bear, or fled into the house and rested a hand against the wall and was bitten by a snake” (Amos 5:19).

He takes on many American (and Atlanta) icons like Coca-Cola and golf and connects them to the devastation of the poor and the stripping of the humanity of us all. In our Oakhurst neighborhood that borders East Atlanta, we know that devastation firsthand: housing projects for 1,500 families, almost all African-American, were torn down in order to upgrade and sanitize East Lake Country Club and its golf course for white male corporate culture. It was all done in the name of Jesus, to help the poor people in the housing projects who were so obviously lost and unable to lead meaningful lives. No replacement housing was offered to these “misfits,” just the comfort of knowing that 10 percent of them could live in close proximity to wealthy white men who could teach them how to live their lives.





Being the fine historian that he is, Ed weaves these kinds of contemporary stories into the gloomy historical tapestry of Thomas Jefferson and slavery; Andrew Jackson and the Cherokees; James Henley Thornwell of South Carolina and the creation of the church of the Confederacy; Ben Tillman, the South Carolinian who led the destruction of Reconstruction; Princeton grad Woodrow Wilson, whose presidency re-established segregation in the federal government and who unleashed the “Red scare” of the 20th century; South Carolinian Strom Thurmond, who created the white Southern captivity of the modern Republican Party; and Ronald Reagan, who began his 1980 presidential campaign at the Neshoba County (Mississippi) Fair, the county where civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were abducted and killed in 1964. I mention South Carolina repeatedly here not because it is so much worse than other states (though it did fire the first shot of the Civil War), but because it is Ed’s birth state—he was born in and nurtured in the belly of the beast of the White Male Supremacy Complex.



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But, like Mary Magdalene and the Apostle Paul, Ed met the real Jesus along the way and has been converted from the vision of the Jesus of the White Male Supremacy Complex. His is an extraordinary journey, and I have known him long enough to know that he is not Jesus (who is?), but he comes from the same prophetic tradition that produced Jesus, and he has discovered the fundamental meaning of the gospel: Jesus' message is meant primarily for those who are poor and oppressed.



In my youth I thought that Jesus' message was for comfortable white males, but I learned quickly as an adult that Jesus intends to empower peasants and illiterates and lepers and prostitutes and other outcasts in a world that sees outcasts as nothing, in a world overwhelmed by the Roman schema of domination, violence and death. Of course the power of Jesus' message makes it meaningful and salvific for all of us, but in order to feel its power, we must hear it and see it and feel it through the lives of the poor. Only in this way can we understand that the mission of Jesus was to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable, as labor organizer Mary "Mother" Jones once put it. Jesus has come to comfort the poor and help them find a new definition of themselves as children of God; Jesus has come to afflict the comfortable and help us find a new definition of ourselves as children of God.

When Ed and Murphy began their ministry with Presbyterians and prisoners and the homeless, they were hailed as saints. It recalls Brazilian theologian Dom Helder Camara's comment that begins, "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint." But when Ed and Murphy began to ask why there are homeless people, when they began to ask why prisons in America were growing so rapidly, when they began to look for the structural, systemic causes rather than looking only at the causes related to "personal responsibility," they lost their luster and became dangerous and even toxic to the White Male Supremacy Complex. This reflects the rest of Camara's comment: "When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist."



This book is a reflection of that journey from individualism to beloved community, and it invites us to join in that journey also. It is a painful book because it is truthful about American culture and our cap-



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tivity to racism and materialism and militarism and sexism. Yet it is also a hopeful book, because Ed has experienced and offers us the belief that the truth that comes in the cry of the poor shall set us free to find God and to be found by God. May we have ears to hear and eyes to see and hearts to receive.

Nibs Stroupe is the pastor of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia. In the 1960s the Oakhurst congregation was 900 members strong, but by the time Nibs arrived in 1983, “white flight” had left fewer than 100 on its dwindling membership rolls. Under Stroupe’s leadership the church underwent an extraordinary transformation, re-inventing itself as a community that welcomes everyone. The congregation has attracted national attention, including an article in Time magazine, for its radically inclusive and egalitarian diversity. Stroupe is the author of “Where Once We Feared Enemies,” a collection of sermons; “O Lord, Hold Our Hands: How a Church Thrives in a Multicultural World” (with Caroline Leach); and “While We Run This Race: Confronting the Power of Racism in a Southern Church” (with Inez Fleming).





Acknowledgements

Will the circle be unbroken, by and by? Last night Ray Ford, Georgia death row prisoner, was exterminated by the scoundrels in the Georgia Legislature and the human-hungry administrators at the prison. We were angry, wounded, loving, loud activists even as we stood in silence at the foot of the Georgia Capitol to shed the shame of the USA.

We are thankful people, too, even in the midst of the pelican slaughter in the Gulf of Mexico and this human sacrifice to the gods of death and their ultimate penalty. We shall overcome.

Thank you, William Shealy and Calvin Brown, who died homeless on the streets of Atlanta two weeks ago. May your gifts last always at the Open Door Community.

Thank you to Jesus of Nazareth for not getting comfortable in the tomb. Thank you, Dorothy Day, for giving us the eyes to see. Thank you, Martin Luther King Jr., for leading me to the streets. Thank you to the many people who responded to this text as it appeared in the Open Door newspaper, *Hospitality* (even those of you who accused me of betraying the white man). I would not have been urged to complete this project without your feedback.

Thank you, Nelia and Calvin Kimbrough, for sharing the journey on the battlefield of White Male Supremacy. Nelia's art and Calvin's photographs are an inspiration to me.

Thank you, John Turnbull, for once again taking a text and turning it into a handsome book. May your new life in Ukraine be filled with wholeness and the gospel.

For all of us who write, there are a very special few who make the

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project possible, who are light and guides among ideas, expressions and grammar, who hold fast to the standards of excellence, clarity and truth as we know the truth.

Heather Barger and I have worked together for a decade now. She is powerfully gifted as a writer, editor, preacher and teacher. I could not, yea, would not have written this book without her. Heather, I love you. I thank you.

Into every life some sunshine must beam. David Mann, who edited the work of nine Pulitzer Prize winners during his newspaper career, including at *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in the years when it was at its peak, is my guide, teacher and the gifted editor of this book. He is patient and kind with me. He is brilliant and virtuous in his craft. Steadfast, David will not rest until we have it right. David, I love you. I thank you.

Murphy Davis suffers. Murphy Davis fills our lives with joy and tomorrow. She is my wife. She links me to life in my bone marrow. She is my woman. I am her man. And together we . . .

We were given Hannah Loring-Davis, our joy, who blended with my Neely and Susan to make our family inside the Open Door. Today Hannah is a nurse at Johns Hopkins Hospital, a fruit of her journeys of accompaniment with her mother's illness and with the broken bodies of the homeless poor in the Open Door Foot and Medical Clinics. I love you, Hannah. I thank you.

Our daughter Susan used to say at evening family prayer, "Thank you, God, for everyone in the whole wide universe."

Thanks to all.

And goodnight, Ray Ford.

Introduction

While attending Presbyterian College a while back, I was gifted with the famous quote by Heraclitus, “You cannot step into the same river twice.” I am a lover of rivers. Often as a boy did I swim in the mysterious Edisto River, later the Catawba, followed by the Yadkin. For too many decades I thought Heraclitus was wrong. For I had stepped many a time into the Edisto, and he seemed the same to me.

Then, one chilly spring evening, my appetite ablaze, the promise of magnolia blossoms scenting the slight breezes, my best friend, whom I never met, caught a bullet in his head in Memphis, Tennessee. As he fell to the concrete, it all changed for me. “I was blind, but now I see.”

My musings and rantings flow from my rivers, anguish and hope. Everything changes while everything remains the same. White racism is here to stay. The monster is wounded, even bleeds in some remote outposts, while it lives and feasts in the heart of America. Our President is Black; our hearts are hard.

I invite you, as U.S. drone planes murder the Afghan people and oil spills into the Gulf of Mexico, to read this book. Get pissed off and act. I ask you to step into the river again and get wet with new waters.

As I have put together this text from my Howard Thurman lectures at Stetson University for our newspaper, *Hospitality*, and then for this published venture, the world has changed and so have I. Murphy Davis', my girlfriend's, cancer has slowed down but requires more rounds of chemotherapy along with monthly drips of drugs. We are one joyful couple of lovers. This old woman is alive and bouncy and full of resplendent faith. I, too, have aged by calendar and the rhythm of my soul. Today my title at the Open Door Community is “Elder,” and





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I move through the soup kitchen with hoary head and star-twinkling eyes.

John the Baptist has a home in my heart and, I pray, always will. I am outraged by the United States of America, homelessness, the prison-industrial complex and the death penalty. Bitter fruits of the tree of death named White Male Supremacy. I am so thankful to my God and the leaders of my life and my beautiful community, the streets, homeless folks and prisoner friends for loving me into this outrage. I have heard the cry of the poor. I have responded. Here you have it in your hands. Please file it in your heart.

Now a new work is blowing in the wind for me. I am spending more of my life growing into a deeper inner life of prayer, healing, and acting for peace and justice. I am, in the words of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “waiting for a rebirth of wonder.” See you on the streets, in the prisons and at the Welcome Table.



Eduard N. Loring
Founder and ElderWorks
The Open Door Community
Summer 2010

1

God Is on the Side of the Poor

Listen! Jesus, the Human One, is knocking on our door. If we hear his voice, if we Open the Door, this wiry Jewish prophet, nappy of hair, black of eye, this rebel who leads against money-making religion and the masters of war of the war-making American Empire, he, I sing, will come into your home and heart. This prophet-for-others, for you and me, will teach us the arts of resistance. He invites us to join his movement of Radical Resistance. Come on. It won't be long now! Howard Thurman, African-American discipleship visionary, puts it this way: meet me "at the wall" with the disinherited ones.

Dear Readers, thank you for reading this far. Please stick with me. I need you. I thank you. I am writing on behalf of the poorest of the poor in the United States of America: the homeless ones (and families), prisoners (and families)—those abandoned by consumer capitalism because they cannot purchase cars or medical care. In my home, the Open Door Community, we live with street prostitutes, crack addicts, alcoholics, sisters and brothers dying of AIDS who have not the inner



Robert Hodgell

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resources to grasp what health care there is available. The mentally ill walk our halls, and one wonderful brother lives on our back porch.

The poorest of the poor include many white folk: ignorant of their political and economic self-interests in our democracy, the “rednecks,” the illiterate, the unemployed, who often vote Republican (and the rich laugh at their stupidity) against their basic interest for a nod toward the flag of the Confederate States of America, or for the emblazoned code words of white racism: no affirmative action for African-Americans or women (or even themselves). The lingering effects of policies begun in Colonial America to divide white and Black against their common interest continue today.

So also, the root of oppression and poverty in the United States is the belief among poor people that their interest lies with the rich and powerful instead of against them. The rich do what they want, have what they want, live in as many houses as they want and are able to make the poor want what they want. This blinds the poor to the very causes of their poverty: low wages, homelessness, disease, lack of health care, lack of money, and White Male Supremacy.

Agitator: And yet many rich folk are among the poorest of the poor. Most of the rich and powerful throughout the human saga have starved and crumbled from the inside out. Both rich mortals and nations like the USA are breaking apart as they laugh and scoff while the descendants of Noah build their ark. Listen to this song in your head's music maker:

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
“Good-morning,” and he glittered when he walked.

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And he was rich—yes, richer than a king —
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

—Edwin Arlington Robinson

An Errand From the Wilderness

White Male Supremacy is the structure of domination, greed and terror in our nation. What other deformed and dastardly values and policies could lead poor whites to remain in their poverty with false pride, licking their sores like an old hound dog after a rabbit chase in the brambles and through the canebrakes? Of all those in America who need help and love and justice the most, none limp more than the poor whites. These oppressed creatures, remembered as “poor white trash” in “Gone With the Wind,” are the main source (along with poor Blacks) for our volunteer army, stoop labor and garbage collection, and again, the silk-stocking powers will not lift them from the pit of their degradation.

But that is not all. Oh no, that is not all. In our home, in our yard, on the streets and in the jails and prisons lie or sag thousands upon thousands of the poorest of the poor, the abandoned ones: people of color; immigrants who threaten the European or African-American ethnicity of the neighborhood or city; gays and lesbians pushed out of family, community, church, mosque or synagogue; women fleeing abusive men, children fleeing abusive parents, laity fleeing abusive priests and pastors, students fleeing abusive teachers; business folk fleeing the dirty dung-doings of the business world; soldiers fleeing the idiotic



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war; poets fleeing the cages of the American mind; artists fleeing the pragmatism of the developers and stock market speculators who kill the spirit and murder the earth. They cry out. They cry out. Can you hear them? Will you listen? From what are you fleeing? Where you gonna run to? Where you gonna run to? What you gonna do when the well runs dry?

I am writing to you because the disinherited live “inside my bony ribs and under my red-valved heart” (Carl Sandburg). I live inside many abandoned ones as well. This is the gift of loving and living among folk from the streets and prisons for more than 30 years. I live among them in my home in Atlanta. These sisters and brothers of mine (and yours) are crying, yelling, even screaming. Ah, the dream to find an Open Door through which to walk into equality and abundance.

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks, he speaks to us all and with a preferential option for the poor:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all women and men are created equal.”

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the daughters and sons of former slaves and the sons and daughters of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of sisterhood and brotherhood. (Adapted for inclusive language.)

I am writing to you as one sent on an errand from the howling wilderness of White Male Supremacy into your political-spiritual wilderness to tell you the truth as I have been grasped by the stories of the lives and deaths of the poorest of the poor. I bring my testicles to this testimony. I bring my wits to this witness.

We must, as Martin King foretold us years ago, have a “revolution of values” and a new economic system in the shell of the old, if our world is to last much longer. I pray that we will tear our prison system down and, in the words of the prophet who pranced naked in the streets of Jerusalem for three years, “give liberty to captives.” Certainly give liberty to those caged for nonviolent crimes, and pay a living wage



to those compelled to work (prison slavery: see the 13th Amendment) while the state and businesses make profits “outside” the market forces of American capitalism.

Perhaps this should be a new definition of slavery: coerced to work for free against one’s will. Oops—that’s the old definition, isn’t it? Well, Lincoln kept the Union together, but neither he nor the Abolitionists nor Reconstruction nor amendments to the Constitution could end slavery. What can you do to stop it? It took a war to end chattel slavery. What’s it gonna take this time?

An Invitation Into the Darkness

Georgia, the old Confederate slaveholding state in which I am living out my adulthood, going on 40 years now, is a Strom Thurmond Republican state through and through. Yes, there are a few cracks in the walls of the rich and the poor whites, where a little light shines through, and hope for a more just way for all is alive. But “This land is your land, this land is my land” (Woody Guthrie) is not the truth unless you are rich and either white or act white.

I live in one of the most racist states in the world as well as one of the most churched and synagogued areas in the country: metro Atlanta. I live in the country with the highest incarceration rate in the world—754 of every 100,000 people are imprisoned. More than 1 out of every 100 American adults are now confined in a jail or prison. The United States has 5 percent of the world’s population and 25 percent of the world’s incarcerated population. SHAME! SHAME! SHAME!

I live in one of the most segregated cities in America, the birthplace and home of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I live in the largest Presbytery in the United States, boasting two Presbyterian seminaries: one is white and filthy rich from Coca-Cola syrup, which drips down the scholars’ chins like honey from the beard of John the Baptist. The other is African-American and very poor. (What side is God on? Which seminary does Jesus, the Human One, attend?)

Georgia, like 35 other U.S. states, kills its own citizens. Killing citizens is the taproot of state power. The flip side of the coin is the draft,

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economic or statutory, the means by which the government forces citizens to kill for the state. In death penalty cases, we are learning, upon appeal, that prosecutors have lied, withheld evidence and used forced confessions. Between 1973 and 2009 across our land, 138 wrongly convicted human beings, manifesting the *imago dei*, have been exonerated after years on death row. Hundreds of innocent folk leave jail and prison every year after DNA testing. But only after the prosecutors have “won” their cases and been re-elected. The death penalty and prison are primary screwdrivers in the White Male Supremacy toolbox.

Nota bene: The most important election in your locale is for the prosecutor. Mostly he, mostly white (or as in my county of Fulton, a Black face on a white agenda), this elective office shapes the lives of the poor more than any other. To be poor is to be a suspect, to be arrested, jailed and often sentenced. Please vote in your next election for a prosecutor who does not want to kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong. Please vote for a candidate who believes that human beings are redeemable. One who knows that prison harms, not helps. Please vote for a prosecutor who believes prisoners have a right to education and good medical care while in lockup. “Ain’t we got a right to the tree of life?” Yes, we do. Every one of us.

But I am asking you to read this not so much to learn about the innocent in our land and cages, but to invite you to take a step into the shadows and darkness. Let us, beginning with our imaginations and then moving with our bodies, embrace fear and take a courageous risk to *reduce the distance* between us and the guilty: the murderer, sex abuser, child molester, the neo-Nazi, the Ku Klux Klanner, the Willie Hortons, victims of the Republican strategist Lee Atwater, the rapist of male and female. Let us, in the name of our Constitution, but against our government, stand with and speak up for those the United States is torturing and calling terrorists without evidence. Those human beings, God’s *imago dei* on earth, in Guantanamo Bay’s torture chambers, lying chained to the floor as young women-soldiers (hardly older than the cheerleaders at the local high school Friday night football game but without the thigh flash) smear menstrual blood on Muslims to desecrate their bodies and holiness.

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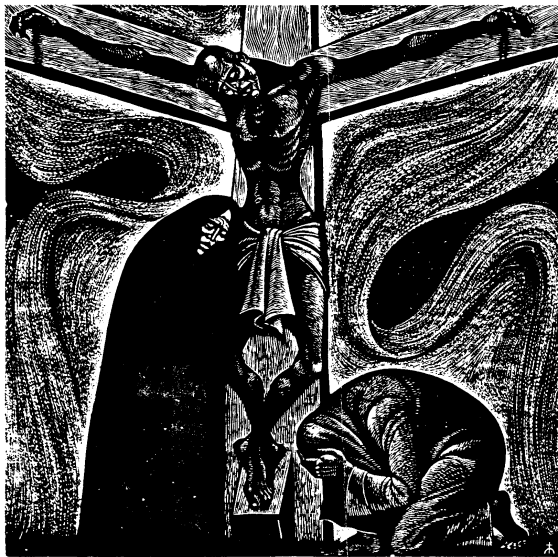
Go to the Wall

Listen, please. We turn our ears and eyes to one of the great prophets in the American Empire: Howard Thurman, deceased, but his words and vision will live as long as people care for others. "Go to the wall," he said.

Stand in solidarity with the disinherited!

I implore you, dear reader, for your sake and my sake and the sake of my grandchildren, Mia, Jack Edward and John Thomas, and your beloved friends and families: *reduce the distance*

among yourselves; reduce the distance between your life and the lives of the homeless poor and the prisoner. Begin to withdraw from and finally



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tear down the blood-lapping consumer capitalism of White Male Supremacy. Let us free the wealthy from their needless riches.

Do Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Hebrew prophets, Nelia Kimbrough, Mother Jones, Gandhi, Jesus, Emma Goldman, Dick Rustay, Malcolm X, Rachel Corrie, Dorothy Day, Ched Myers, Elaine Enns, Dan and Phil Berrigan, Liz McAlister, Pete Gathje, Tim McDonald, Jeff Dietrich and Catherine Morris mean anything to us? Is the church in the modern world, the mosque in America, the synagogue around the corner anything more than a self-serving social club? Has the Black church sold its heritage to the curators of museums and for tickets to play golf at the formerly all-white country club? Are Blacks being used by White Male Supremacist Republican evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics in the wedge issues of prayer in the public schools, abortion and homosexuality? Has the faith of the radical Jesus that filled the guts of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman been dropped for the putrid, pusillanimous, soul-stealing sop prosperity gospel that is a gospel from our modern robber barons for contemporary serfs?

Why not give Bishop Eddie Long of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church a call (770-696-9600)? Oh, he's out in his \$350,000 Bentley, or at home in his nine-bathroom mansion situated on 20 acres. He won't be in until tomorrow? Please try again. (As Long told *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: "I pastor a multimillion-dollar congregation. You've got to put me on a different scale than the little black preacher sitting over there that's supposed to be just getting by because the people are suffering.")

Or ask for Martin's daughter, Elder Bernice King. (Oh, what the Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics could learn from Black Baptists about the dignity and power of women in God's intentions for the church!) Elder King is a volunteer minister, sometimes preacher and march-against-gays-and-lesbians leader at New Birth Missionary Baptist, with its 25,000 members, much to the horror of those who accept her father's interpretation of new life and inclusive ministry. She is as homophobic as Dr. King was nonviolent. (Since this was originally written, the Rev. King has been elected president of the Southern



GO TO THE WALL

Christian Leadership Conference, the civil rights organization founded by her father and 59 other ministers in January 1957.)

Can we find crumbs under the table to begin to bake a loaf of bread for all who are hungry? Can we demolish the existing tables and rebuild a Welcome Table for all people? Can we who are dying with the earth in the midst of this ecological catastrophe hear hope banging on our back door? Banging on our hearts and minds?

If the United States of America is going to reclaim its roots and the flowering fruits of democracy, if a revolution of values is going to take place so that our vision of equality and justice for all will ring true, then now, as always, we must stand with the poorest of the poor and the guilty in our steel and abusive prison cells. What ya' say? Hardnews? Badnews? No! Not at all: this is Goodnews! We can do it!

The Radical, Poverty-Stricken, Wine-Drinking Jew

I believe. I stand in a tradition of believers and practitioners who have been persecuted, murdered and silenced for their steadfastness and lives of discipleship. We believe: Yahweh-Elohim, the God of the Exodus, takes the side of the poor against the rich for the sake of the rich, and on behalf of the liberation/redemption of the poor and disinherited of all lands.

Jesus is poor. Jesus was born in a barn, placed in the feeding trough, because there was no room in the inn. Mostly, he walked at 3 mph top speed. ("Nothing loves at speed": Michael Leunig.) Sometimes rode a donkey, never a horse. Was a powerful teacher and a risk-taking healer. Jesus was a street preacher and street teacher like the prophets of old, and John the Baptist his mentor. He had a home base in Capernaum but was a homeless wanderer as he went into the world of shame and domination for the sake of outcasts.

This Jew had a terrible reputation: drank too much wine, was angry, an outlaw, unclean, did not respect authority, had women as companions in his ragged and to-be-blood-soaked band. He taught love of enemy, nonviolence, living on enough but not more than needed. Jesus,





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the Human One, continued and intensified the long-haul battle with evil, the powers of oppression, and moral death.

Jesus, whose name in Hebrew means “the deliverer,” was cool, awesome, an artist of word and deed; he danced and watched the stars and moon at night.

He never wrote a word except on sand. Do you know why? Jesus knew that if he wrote anything, people would sit around and have Bible study instead of “doing the Word.” He knew that a whole new crop of avoiders would emerge titled “theologians,” and his movement would be right back to the beginning with a bunch of scholars and little bitty footnotes arguing about “who is my neighbor” while drinking booze at the tenure party or being a preacher and getting awards for preaching and not doing.

Any preacher worth her salt will be marginalized and spend time in jail. The alternative for those whose salt has lost its savor is to “study” the Word far from the streets in a space with central heating and air conditioning.

Jesus’ way, truth and life are so radical that even the followers of his followers couldn’t take it. Subjugating women and pushing obedience to the Empire, his followers began to write the New Testament and hold Bible study in their homes. Paul and the first generation taught in the agora and along the roads that led to Rome, the Washington, D.C., of that day. Have you ever heard of a church having a Wednesday Night Goodnews Protest at city hall or the local military recruiting office? Of course not. Why not? Ah, here we are again: White Male Supremacy in a patriarchal system.

Something New in History

So, to cut to the chase: Jesus had a message of love and justice rooted in a brand-new entity in history: the Beloved Community of God Movement (Matthew 6:33). To join, one had to renounce the way of domination and money-grabbing, renounce violence and any and all segregations, be they of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ugliness, physical challenges, beauty, skin disease or skin color, obesity/anorexia/bulimia,



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condition or color of the eyes, poverty or homelessness. (Some churches employ Iraq war soldiers, throwaways, as security/temple guards to keep the poor and homeless away from their comfort zones and magnificent structures.) Yes, anything at all that human beings and their dead gods use to separate or make superior/inferior.

Yet there is a fundamental caveat in this group of brothers and sisters who build a common life in resistance to death-dealing, who flesh out another way to live together even in the belly of the beast, even in the American Empire. That is in the Beloved Community of God, where one must choose sides: Jesus calls his members to be on the side of the poor even for the sake of the rich. Or as Kurt Salierno once said, “If you don’t have a heart for the poor, you are not a Christian at all.”

Therefore this little man from a carpenter’s home was raised up to bring abundant life in defiance of boredom, death, poverty, war, the death penalty and ignorant fools in government and religious leadership — those who study and preach but who nevertheless are all too willing to cross the line where greed guts gospel. So Rome put him to death for sedition, as the followers of the Eagle had done to John the Baptist three years earlier. Christianity is the only world faith that bases its life on two condemned and guilty martyrs. To follow John the Baptist and Jesus is to follow leaders judged “guilty” by the world’s standards. John and Jesus were martyred by the Empire in collusion with the religious elite.

Jesus was, is and will be one of the disinherited. He is “up against the wall,” in the words of Howard Thurman. Where are you? With whom are you standing? Where is your wall? How are you cracking that wall?

3

The Arc That Bends Toward Justice

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. took a faith statement by the great Abolitionist Theodore Parker and grounded his rock of hope against his stone of despair with it. “There is,” Parker and King proclaim, “an arc in the universe which bends toward justice.”

What Goodnews! No science here. No laws of history or insurance policies. No pie in the sky. The only verification comes by joining the fight for love and justice in the Beloved Community of God Movement. There you will find the “bend toward justice” in suffering and joy, and the gift will be a new life of blessedness as all things are made new.

This “bend toward justice” is the arms of Yahweh-Elohim, the God of the oppressed. This Holy One bends toward the world, bleeding for us; she chooses the poor against the rich, Black and Brown against white, people who walk to work over those who drive, Greyhound bus riders over those who fly . . . this God of the outcasts and disinherited is for us all! Loves us all. Hopes and prays for the liberation/redemption of us all and for the nations and corporations too.

What should we do? Oh, human being that I am, caught with the snake in my bloodstream and the dove in my heart!

Isaiah, old hoary-headed prophet, sings it the way of poets (he had put his clothes back on by this time):

Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open



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your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear and do not refuse to call your parents, spouse, children and friends every few days. (Isaiah 58:6–7, Good News Bible, adapted by Open Door Community)

These words are from another poet in another time and another place. Now the words are for every place and for all time, so we can feed on these visions if our hunger is for the truth that slices through the tragic dimension of our winding wanderings with light for our paths. But never, let me warn you, shall we find a road, even the one less traveled by, without the snake in our bloodstream and the dove in our heart. How can we cage the snake and set the dove free?

God judges in favor of the oppressed,
Gives food to the hungry,
Sets prisoners free,
Gives sight to the blind,
Protects immigrants who live in our land,
Helps widows and orphans
When developers take their homes and space,
And turns the ways of the rich and politicians
Upside down.

(From Psalm 146, Good News Bible, adapted
by Open Door Community)

Jesus, the Foot Washer, makes the point this way:

Jesus looked round at his disciples and said to them, “How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God!”

The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus went on to say, “My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”





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At this the disciples were completely amazed and asked one another, “Who, then, can be saved?”

Jesus looked straight at them and answered, “This is impossible for human beings, but not for God; everything is possible for God.” (Mark 10:23–27, Good News Bible)

Grace at 700 mph

We at the Open Door Community have been empowered and sustained by rich folk, white and Black, who have gotten through the “eye of the needle.” Without the generosity of several very wealthy friends and institutions, who give lovingly and generously to us and to the poor through us, I would not be sitting here writing this today. We of the Beloved Community of God Movement, and the Open Door Community in particular, are God-praising disciples and deeply thankful for those who are moneyed and give their wealth for the building of the Way of Jesus and the breaking down of White Male Supremacy.

As a testimony, let me share a vignette with you of one family that graces us out of their abundance. They were converted and transformed, went straight through the “eye of the needle,” because “everything is possible for God.”

During the final stage of the Angolan Revolution, the Portuguese were finally being driven out of the country in 1975. Portugal was built upon the sandstone of White Male Supremacy and colonialism, which go together like the Ku Klux Klan and white racism. The rich Portuguese had for centuries stolen and cruelly oppressed Black Angolans. First they stole human beings, then they stole oil, as George W. Bush hoped to do in Iraq. Is Iran next?

(When Jesus said to love your enemies, he obviously didn’t really mean it.)

When the Angolan revolutionary troops began to enter Luanda, the capital, the white businessmen, Portuguese and American, got into their planes and flew away as quickly as the iron birds would carry them. Except one. One, only one, businessman waited to make sure his workers would get out safely. The others thought he was crazy. After



all, the poor are disposable. Capitalism demands profits. To care for workers hurts the bottom line. Against the screaming to “come on, let’s get out of here,” against the warning that “you’re going to be killed,” against himself, husband, father and leading businessman in oil, cattle and land, he stood in solidarity with the poor. He was “up against the wall.” He did not board the iron bird until every one of his workers was present and accounted for. He was considered, like Jesus, a fool.

Stercoraceous matter happens. So does Grace! Aboard the iron bird, amid the clouds, at 700 mph (truth can move at only 3 mph), the Holy Spirit completed the work begun at the airport. This profit-making businessman died, but he did not fall into the aisle. He was made anew and committed his life to a life of love and solidarity with the poor. He divested most of his holdings and wealth, but he kept enough to do good. He became a teacher of English literature in a small junior college where most of the students are just beginning to learn the global language of Empire.

He and his wonderful wife have generously nourished the Open Door Community for more than 20 years. His story of transformation is an abiding source for me. Sometimes when the police are beating their billies into their leather-gloved hands, and looking like they want to crack a head hard, I remember this man’s guts and courage. I know of his love for the poor. He, a Southerner, knows that there is no such thing in all creation as “poor white trash” or a “ni--er.” He is one who rode right through “the eye of a needle” into the Beloved Community of God in solidarity with the poor and the prisoner. He is “reducing the distance.” He and his wife are guiding lights.

Listen, you white rich folk, to the Goodnews of the radical gospel: you can “go through the eye of a needle.”

An Obscene God

I am an Abolitionist. I beg those of you who are not to become one. I am also a rich, highly educated white male of racist and sexist privilege. I live in the Old Confederacy of the United States of America, which has been for 40 years now shaped by the values of the Republican Party,

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the party of white supremacy. By the political structures, cultural values and religious practices of my nation, I accrue benefits from my patriarchal and racist society every time I step among the 170 disinherited people, hungry and exhausted at 5 a.m., in my front yard on Ponce de Leon Avenue.

The followers of the god of the white South, stealing the name of Yahweh-Elohim, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, were not satisfied with the sacrilege of burning crosses. It was the rope they loved, and the gasoline can, and the castration knife. The white mob gathered for a picnic: boys, girls, women and men eating barbecue seasoned with Devil's Delight.

Today many tables have turned, and though the turntable is still playing gospel, there is a new mob. They gather not under the chinquapin oak but in many modern megachurches. Shiny preachers spouting their god's will for global capitalism, these men encourage their congregation, Black or white, to drink Coca-Cola and buy a Humvee and be a real man like a pro football player loving up on pit bulldogs.

This god was able to keep the United States Congress from ever passing an anti-lynching law. This god willed the death penalty and the torture chamber. Mars, the Roman god of war, better known, wrongly, as Jesus the Lamb of God, is powerful, and dead. He is Jim Crow. He is White Male Supremacy wearing many-colored faces today.

This obscene god is as filled with hate and fear as the Israelites of old hated and feared the Ammonites. Wonder why we committed "shock and awe" in Iraq? Why on May 1, 2003, George W. Bush proclaimed to the world, "Mission Accomplished"?

I live part of my life at Dayspring Farm. In that county the evangelical Christians recently established a Christian academy. They do not want their children defiled by the Mexicans who now live there to pick apples. To name this segregationist, fear-mongering, racist school "Christian" is a worse blasphemy than shouting "Goddamn" in the courthouse square. But the god of White Male Supremacy believes that taking their god's name in vain is a much greater sin than racism and segregation.

Earlier I said this god is dead. Nope, it is the most powerful religious force in America today. It is a lie.

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Therefore I cry out: HELP, HELP, HELP. Please join the Abolitionists who live near the center of the margins in the Beloved Community of God Movement. Let us in love, for justice, with nonviolence put this god of White Male Supremacy to everlasting sleep.

My great-grandparents owned slaves and worked them in the cotton fields in Orangeburg and Bamberg Counties of South Carolina. One of my women ancestors made love with a Black African from the Ibo tribe one hot and lazy afternoon back behind the corncrib where the jaybirds screamed and a sleepy hoot owl slowly blinked in recognition that the risk of passion is like diving for a rabbit already in the mouth of a cottonmouth moccasin. His name was Walker, hers Anna. (Walker's identity as an Ibo continues to live in our family. My mother and now my grandchildren call me "Ibo." Anna is a Hebrew name meaning "grace." Our daughter's name is Hannah, a Hebrew name meaning "graciousness." We named her, in part, for Anna.)

Daily, Anna sang about her love, after the morning sickness passed, while her slightly demented and immature husband would later, like all killer-soldiers, kill Yankees for the glory of the proslavery god whose will is to undo the Exodus story and join all the blind pharaohs of history.

This god became the god of the white South, from Pentecostals yellin' down by the riverside to the frozen, ah, but chosen Presbyterians, U.S. (i.e., the Confederate Church till April 9, 1865), who refused to embrace Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 March on Washington. This wrathful, tyrannical god, who put up signs along the roads beside ruined cornfields and snag-oak-filled bottomlands screaming "Repent or go to hell," is the same god of the Ku Klux Klan. This god burned crosses for the sake of terror as the mainline Christians, scared to death of losing Klan dirty workers, remained silent. Silence is consent. We know that silence equals death. Do you?



THE WHITE MAN COMETH

he was a handsome man
and what i want to know is
how do you like your blueeyed boy
Mister Death

— e.e. cummings, 1920

They did it “just for fun.” And to exterminate the Native Americans. (Do you know what these rich white men called our Amerindian sisters and brothers? Well, I’m not going to put such racist, rich-boy abominations in this book.) “Just for fun”—for in the end entertainment is all that is left for the hollow men and the snickering women who follow their lead. Buffalo left to rot and stink while the vultures clacked their bony beaks.

So the Native Americans began to dance; and dance they did. They believed and hoped for a resurrection, like first-century Christians waiting for Jesus to come again. They danced for their ancestors. They danced for the buffalo. They danced for their children. They danced for the white man to go to the unhappy hunting ground.

But it was the Ghost Dancer who fell to the ground. The last breath breathed. The American Indians were all but destroyed by White Male Supremacy. Gone were the braves from their home. Dead were they to the struggle for land and their way of life in the nation. But the Red Ones lived on entertaining palefaces and, often, Blacks as well. Now they lived like warriors in cowboy movies, and human oddities at state fairs and White House affairs.

Many became gamblers in their own casinos. Here people with money, who have lost the basic human gift of caring for others, come to throw away their cash while on the side streets children go hungry and unemployment runs over 50 percent. Gambling like all capitalists do, the Native Americans themselves gave up their truth for the power of the greenback dollar bill. Though Red, they dreamed white. Those who survived the last Ghost Dance, who survived the FBI’s murder of Sitting Bull, were placed in concentration camps euphemistically rendered “reservations.”



Dead Men Walking

When the tribes' power and resistance were almost obsolete, the U.S. government passed the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, extending the right to vote to Native Americans. Four years earlier women were permitted to vote, and 54 years earlier African-American men were enfranchised. Several decades passed before Amerindians were actually allowed to vote in all states.

Indian suffrage was a goal of the Progressive Movement. My grandfather, Harold Amasa Loring Sr., a member of the Indian Rights Movement, was such a suffragist. He worked with and lived among Indians as the 19th century gave way to the 20th. He recorded and wrote out the notes of Native American music while living on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota.

Danced out, beaten down, murdered, Indians hit the hard ground in utter consternation. They began to call white men "devils." This new name began flowing eastward toward Harlem, New York, and Sandersville, Georgia (birthplace of Elijah Muhammad). Sandersville is not far from Pin Point, Georgia, where in 1948 U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas was born: all Black on the outside, all White Male Supremacist on the inside.

Years earlier, before the Iron Horse stampeded 10,000 Chinese bodies, loved for labor, hated for being, the white man used all means necessary to kill or debase Native American women, children and men. For land and gold, developers and government agents ate the defeated nations alive. Lies, starvation, war and despair ripped the tribes apart. Killing and killing, the white man laughed, and the guffaws fell to the ground like vomit through the fingers of the morning after the big kill. Entertainment, like a pre-computer video game. And treaties too: pure, absolute, even limpid lies defined the pursuit of power and truth with truth dead by 1813 and Andrew Jackson loose in the South.

More than a century later, the recapitulation came from the deformed heart which had learned that killing is the means to having and killing is the means to white power. The government took the lesson

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from the success of genocide and domination and dropped the atomic bomb on Yellow people. Many white people, even unto today, call it, as Yahweh-Elohim names creation, “good.”

From the atomic bomb, consumer capitalism mushroomed upon the shores of the United States, spreading like a buffalo stampede north and south, east and west. Suddenly the veil was lifted and white emptiness and moral vacuity shone like the noonday sun to all with dark glasses to see. Everything, everyone, everywhere, everytime is for sale. Love, medical care, housing, food and justice are commodities, available only to those with cash or a line of credit. In the meantime, we whites are dying with a whimper inside and big bombs over Afghanistan outside. For our children, the most popular major at the university is business, with a preferential option in marketing.

*Gimme, Gimme, Gimme what you got
Don't really matter if it's a little or a lot
Gimme a dollar
Gimme a dime
Gimme your house
Gimme your time.*

*All we want is what you got
We don't really care, but
We hope it's a lot.*

Gimme, Gimme, Gimme what you got.

—Eduard-the-Agitator, 2000

There was one Red man in the U.S. Congress, and he was, like Black Clarence Thomas and ebony Condoleezza Rice, Southerners both, a Republican. The white man won the West but lost Vietnam and Iraq. Today, he and his lickspittle are dead men walking, hollow men talking.

An Infernal 'Yes'

The greatest tragedy of American history is slavery. All slaves belonging to one people: Black Africans. Beginning with the lust of Portuguese merchants for Black merchandise.

In the fateful year 1441, the world shook and Western culture along with the Christian Church rattled and whirled. Even today and into tomorrow, we the Radical Remnant and Progressive Movement are slowly and with great effort attempting, by little and by little, to rebuild from the shattering of the West's and the church's moral and economic foundations.

On a dying day, Antonio Gonzales kidnapped 12 Africans. He took them as a gift to his emperor, Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal, who in turn gave them to his pope, Eugenius IV. The pope said, "Thank you." And the world has never been the same.

What if? Oh, what if the Vicar of Christ had said, "NO, thank you. Set these human beings, made in the image of God, free right now." What if the pope and the church had believed that Moses and Miriam way down in Egyptland 2,500 years earlier had had something to say to folk in their day, or to us in our day? What if the gospel, which is "liberty to captives" and "goodnews to the poor," had been informing the church when the "Thank you" was spoken—for human flesh, driven from their homes like the Cherokees of North Georgia?

This white "yes" to Black slavery continues to resound with fury and domination throughout the world. The human family was and continues to be shattered. The shatterers were and are white folk, men mostly.

Ah, but neither the pope, nor later most Protestants, nor the constitutions of the democratic revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries, nor the rise of capitalism with its secular ethics and law, no not one, had the ability to say the word of freedom and equality: "No." No one, that is, except a few radicals on the margins of Empire, church and capitalism, said "no." And they were persecuted by the big church and the big state. Therefore, to talk about slavery in Europe and America is to talk about white racism: White Male Supremacy. Reiteration of a central

point of our human history: the folk who could not say “no” were and are white.

New Habits of the Heart

I am deeply anguished. I carry in my heart and in my flesh the wounds of white racism. Horrible and bitter are the fruits that continue into this night to set our teeth on edge, even as we attempt to wash the Black blood from our hands and find new hearts founded in justice, with liberty and equality for all. We the children of slaveholders and all beneficiaries of white privilege must root out the racist structures and institutions in our economy and culture. We must find love “and where there is no love, put love” (St. John of the Cross). We should be compelled to write obituaries, even attend funerals for the mainline churches and the conservative white supremacist U.S. Supreme Court.

As we tear this “filthy rotten system” (Dorothy Day) to pieces, as we join the movement for “a revolution of values” (Martin Luther King Jr.), we hope to reconstruct our church and society “in the shell of the old” (Peter Maurin), moving from affirmative action toward economic human rights (e.g., housing is a right), into reconciliation and new, mature, non-macho habits of the heart. The freedom and peace movement shall grow and radicalize as “Black and white together” sing and suffer, dance and march our way into shutting the Domination System down.

Thank you, Black and white Abolitionists; thank you, Black Liberation Movement; thank you, Harriet Tubman, Mary Grace and Jefferson Rogers, Ella Baker, Connie Curry, Ezekiel Holly, Elijah Lovejoy, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. Vincent Harding and Rev. Timothy McDonald. I love you and your marginalized, living, radical legacy with all my heart, soul and strength.

And what about you?

We are in the midst of a historical disaster. The facts and myths of slavery are at the core of our continuing calamity. Into the present hour, white racist slavery and the oppression of Black Americans is the *fundamental sin of our history*, our present, and you tell me about our future.

5

The Second Greatest Tragedy

The second greatest tragedy of our history, after slavery itself, is that no white people, no Europeans, no Jews were ever legal slaves in the American Empire. If only 50,000 of the millions and millions of Black slaves had been white instead! If only that were true, everything would be different for us and most particularly for African-Americans.

White racism was planted like the lies in the treaties that trusted white officials proffered to American Indians. The tumor of this insidious and treacherous cancer was funded, institutionalized and baptized by Christianity with a whole theological structure of justification called “Proslavery Theology.” This heresy, an abomination to the God of the Exodus, became the major thrust of the church in the slaveholding states and was taught even as far north as Princeton Theological Seminary.

God became a tyrant imaged most lovingly in the pious slavemaster who gave his slaves an extra peck of corn to celebrate the birth of the “proslavery” Jesus. This fateful, even fatal, use of religion occurred because *no white people were slaves*.

American slavery and White Male Supremacy are toxic and death-dealing—lynching by rope, burning by fire, drowning by snake-infested swamp water, castrating by rusty knife, and raping by Southern gentlemen (like Senator Strom Thurmond in the pantry of his big house) or by Yankee tutors in slave cabins, for we know boys will be boys in their lust and experimentations. Who is sweeter than an oppressed, power-

less Black girl? Or today, in the Georgia prison system, a poor Black or white girl/woman who wants to see her baby? Because the only ancestors of Strom Thurmond who knew slavery were Black, like Al Sharpton or Senator Thurmond's Black children who grew up tortured and terrorized by Jim Crow.

Our prisons are filled with Black men. We care little to minus zero about the racist "war on drugs," or the "war on poverty," or the death penalty.

A Shameful 'Strategy'

With Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt nodding, with Democrat Harry S. Truman nudging, with Democrat John Fitzgerald Kennedy proposing, with Democrat Lyndon Baines Johnson implementing Black-justice legislation, the Republican Party's "Southern strategy" came to fruition. Seeded in 1948 with Strom Thurmond's States Rights Democratic Party (popularly the "Dixiecrats"), by 1980 with Ronald Reagan it was the centerpiece of the Republican national strategy.

It appeals to rich white folk and poor white folk (and Black-faced white supremacists) whose uncritical minds lead them to believe that their interests lie on the side of their oppressors (the rich whites) and against their poor and exploited companions in poverty: people of color who are living under duress. The promise of the Republicans was to make the rich richer, the poor poorer and people of color controlled, to fill the prisons till the cell runneth over, to pass legislation reflecting, and to pack the Supreme Court with, the cultural and religious values of white supremacy.

What a terrible fate and doom for Black people in the USA. What a terrible curse for whites that no whites were slaves and that most whites — rich and poor, obese and anorexic, lonely, ice cold and head-bound religious folk, divorced but remarried, silly and serious, all afraid of the dark — think that "no white slaves" was a blessing. A blessing, hell!

Ronald Reagan, though he wasn't from the South, was the first Old South president since Jefferson Davis. Barry Goldwater in 1964 had



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carried the Olympic Torch for White Male Supremacy, but the American voter wasn't quite ready for someone so "extremist." A few more steps had to be taken before the return of the Confederates. Part of the Southern strategy, in fact, was not to front a Southerner. Hence Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, the unctuous patrician George H.W. Bush oozing oil, and then his boy, W, riding into town from Texas more like a cowboy than the filthy-rich Southern white male bushwhacker he is.

What? "Bushwhacker"? Robert Penn Warren defines the term in a poem of recollection as grandfather and grandson sit under a cedar tree:

"Guerrilla—what's that?" I said.
 "Bushwhackers, we called 'em," he said.
 "Were they on the Yankee side?"
 "Son, they didn't have any side.
 Just out to plunder and ride
 And hell-rake the pore countryside.
 Just out for themselves, so, son,
 If you happened to run across one,
 Or better, laid hand to a passel,
 No need to be squeamish, or wrestle
 Too long with your conscience. . . ."

— Robert Penn Warren, "Court-martial"

Change or Die

Today we are a people who torture suspected enemies.

Agitator: Ah, we can hear the screams of agony from tortured Muslims in Algeria in the late 1950s. And what did French torture do for their cause? It brought the French defeat and shame. Every piece of pain that the U.S. military and its mercenaries inflict by torture in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantánamo and the secret back room at your local police headquarters, every sliver of suffering, is a thrust in the dying of the American Way of Life which is death.





THE SECOND GREATEST TRAGEDY

Today we are a people who accept human beings living on the streets, accept children being eaten by rats under bridges or freezing in abandoned warehouses. We don't care. To our utter shame, we individualists blame the poor for their poverty, just as we believe the rich deserve their plunder. And you, young people of the poor, and you pale-faced commissioned officers from fancy universities, will go to Iraq and Afghanistan to kill for democracy and oil. Won't you? Why?

Girls and boys, men and women, bleed to death in Iraq and Afghanistan. Poor whites, benighted and used by the White Male Supremacy system, fly the Confederate flag from Pennsylvania to New Mexico and into Oak View, California. The Confederate flag is flown all over the United States and often in Germany when neo-Nazis gather to share venom and hate.

Why is all this going on? One determinative reason is that no whites were slaves. White superiority is not only the great lie of Adolf Hitler and the U.S. Constitution; it is pernicious and insidious today.

We whites, especially white men such as Rush Limbaugh and me, must make fundamental changes in our lives now or the historical disaster and ecological catastrophe will maim our children beyond repair. We must craft new hearts and shape new ways to be white men, inside ourselves and in the world. To undo White Male Supremacy, all of us together, Black and white, men and women, rich and poor, must house the homeless, feed the hungry, pay workers a just wage with full benefits for life, stop the war, tear down the Domination System and end the death penalty.

How? By reigniting Martin Luther King's "Poor People's Campaign" with his concomitant "revolution of values." We hear in the Cry of the Poor what Franklin Roosevelt heard in the middle-class "cry" during the Great Depression. He listened with the ears of his heart. He acted. In 1944, Roosevelt proposed to the U.S. Congress an "Economic Bill of Rights." Congress would not pass an anti-lynching law. Neither could those rich, lily-livered white men give "economic rights" to the American people. Dr. King, who was a democratic socialist, took this proposal for a fundamental change in the capitalist system a leap





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forward when he called for a “Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged” (“Why We Can’t Wait,” 1964).

If we do not make fundamental changes, we shall all die, Black, colorful and colorless together. We are like gnats on the windshield of an 18-wheeler rolling down the Interstate at 90 miles an hour toward a Super Wal-Mart, but that does not make the delivery. She went onto a bridge built by tax-cutting politicians, minions of greedy Robber Barons, over the mighty Mississippi on I-35. Screeching, screaming, squealing into the polluted furious ice-cold waters of the Mississippi River below, she and her rig plunged. Her death echoes along the banks of the Mississippi, mingled with the screams of Emmett Till on August 28, 1955, though her neck and crotch were less mutilated.

6

The Open Door Community

Twenty-five of us live together at the Open Door Community in downtown Atlanta. Some of us have been living together for 30 years; others came yesterday. We have a 26th member, Jerry Bertolini, who lives on our back porch. He bangs on the back door with hope at supertime and comes in and eats with us. He is unable to come inside to live for the same reason that a prophet cannot work for profit.

Agitator: You, too, dear reader, have a place, food, a demand for justice that you can offer the disinherited. All of us do. That is a primary fact of the tragedy of poverty, racism, sexism and militarism: we have all we need to turn toward the solution (which is love) except the guts, will, and time to get involved.

The Open Door is a community of solidarity with the disinherited. We are also a community of resistance to the wealth and domination of the mainline Confirmed Church and the American Empire. Our government is a warmongering government, from genocidal killing of American Indians and their buffaloes to this writing, as we kill in Iraq and Afghanistan for oil and George W. Bush's daddy, who lost our first Iraq war in a Desert Storm. We wage war in the name of Jesus Christ and the ideological fabrication of White Male Supremacy: Manifest Destiny. We believe we are special and blessed above others. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, we believe that we are "the last best hope



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of earth.” Or, as the slaveholding revolutionary Thomas Jefferson wrote before Lincoln, “America is the last, best hope for mankind” (sic). Or, as our disgraced White Male Supremacist former President George W. Bush said, “Our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world of justice.” Why, just ask James Byrd Jr. of Jasper, Texas, African-American, who was chained to a pickup truck and dragged to death by white racists. And compare that last quote to Adolf Hitler’s declaration that “I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator.”

What if we have been misled and lied to? What if the United States is ordinary and our nation is arrogant? What if our actual vocation among nations is to be peaceful and to use our resources to feed and disarm the world? “Food Not Bombs,” as David Christian says, should be our motto. What if we sang “This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land” instead of the war-glorifying “Star-Spangled Banner” before every ball game, as imagined by Barbara Kingsolver? Before every presidential inauguration? Before every pit bull dogfight?

Capitalism demands a war economy, which in turn demands the lives of children. Today, military recruiters have our children’s names, addresses, Social Security numbers and graduation dates or parole dates. Our high school and university administrators have cooperated with these totalitarian and police-state tactics for federal funding. Some of the young folk reading this essay are already dead meat for the American war machine. I am deeply grieved. I wish it weren’t so. I live in a community that is working to stop the economic draft and this drift toward death for us all.

“Solidarity with the disinherited” is the life we at the Open Door are called to live. We choose this way, and we practice this sparkle. The abundant life means *reducing the distance* between ourselves and the oppressed, between those who have enough, even more than enough, and the anguished poor. We live a life of suffering and joy, harsh love and demanding forgiveness, sacrifice and even persecution to get to know the God of Exodus, the Christ who comes in the stranger’s guise, and the poor who carry in their cry the keys to the Beloved Community of God.



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There is no salvation, no hope, no education in truth, power and peace for white people, most particularly white men who have medical insurance, without choosing to be WITH the outcasts, homeless and prisoners. By “with” I connote: in our bodies (where we live and with whom we eat), with our money, with our political visions and policies, on our vacations, at our churches, mosques and synagogues, *yes*, with our very blood and lives. The gospel is goodnews to the poor, irrespective of what it is to the rich and domination system of White Male Supremacy. Sings Isaiah and quotes Jesus of Nazareth:

The Sovereign Lord has filled me with her Spirit.
She has chosen me and sent me
To bring good news to the poor,
To heal the broken-hearted,
To announce release to captives
And freedom to those in prison.

(Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18, Good News Bible.
Adapted by the Open Door Community)

A Restoration of Hope

But the gospel is goodnews only when we betray our class and race privileges and join the very destiny of the disinherited, the guilty, the abandoned ones, and gays and lesbians: that is, *all human beings* whom most rich and white males look down upon. Those brothers and sisters whom the majority is “tired” of helping, loving, feeding, funding, living near, going to school with, housing, visiting while in prison. The ones, nay the millions, that is, who are wounded by our nation of great wealth and nuclear bombs.

Today we are flying in space on a multibillion-dollar trip to take the temperature of the planet Mercury. In the meantime, children and adults are shoved to the margins of no-justice on the precipice of little-compassion. Can you hear the caged bird singing? Is she singing to you and me? Goodnews for all people: there is no money shortage to end



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poverty in the United States of America today! As Dr. King said in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, “There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have the resources to get rid of it. . . . There is no deficit in human resources; the deficit is in human will.”

As feminist theologian and scholar-activist Murphy Davis—my partner in love, marriage, parenting and grandparenting—writes:

Our life’s work in the Open Door Community is to stand in solidarity with those who stand, as Howard Thurman said, “with their backs against the wall.” In particular, we live with and stand with the homeless poor of our city and with almost 100,000 souls who are caged in prisons and jails across Georgia—and specifically, the men, women and children condemned to death.

These homeless and imprisoned sisters and brothers do indeed stand with their backs against the wall.

Our effort to live in solidarity is to choose to stand with them *at that wall*: to learn of their suffering, and to give voice to their silent and unheard screams, to embody hope. For those who stand with their backs against the wall are pushed and crushed and consigned to a state of non-personhood and despair, in the face of violent domination, in the face of cruel oppression, in the face of being PUSHED, SHOVED out of public space, out of public care, out of the realm of citizenship and even personhood.

Solidarity is a calling—a genuine opportunity—for the restoration of hope, joy and the common humanity that we are all in imminent danger of losing.

And women’s wisdom as told by the mother of King Lemuel teaches all political leaders, and folk who are truly human, to:

Speak up
For people who cannot speak up for themselves.
Protect the rights
Of all people who are oppressed, homeless, hungry, prisoners.
Speak up for them,



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Do human rights,
Do justice,
Act with kindness.
Protect the rights
Of the poor and disinherited,
Those with their backs against the wall.

(Proverbs 31:8–9, Good News Bible. Adapted
by the Open Door Community)

7

Reducing the Distance

An African-American disciple whose heart was filled with spiritual mysteries, whose mind was filled with ancestral wisdom and whose feet were filled with the practice of the Abundant Life, Howard Thurman, once wrote, “A text without context is a pretext.” Or, in the words of white male activist-theologian Don Beisswenger, imprisoned in the academy for too many years but who found freedom in the federal penitentiary for following the Peacemaker across the line at the School of the Americas, “Life is just a question of hermeneutics.”

Following these mentors of mine, I wish to write about two contexts in which we live our lives, reducing the distance toward solidarity with the disinherited.

The USA, like the wounded beast in the Apocalypse, is “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world” (Martin Luther King Jr.). This country is so wealthy that the government and the billionaires don’t know how to spend their money; thus the earth, sky and sea are being polluted by phantasmagoric, narcissistic games of the rich. Example: buying tickets for spaceship delivery of their ashes to outer space. Pollution of the earth is too small a playground for them; the universe must be filled with their offal.

To narrow the context of my location of living and moving toward the final call, I spend my days and perform my acts of justice, love and sin in the Red States (also called Jesus Land) of the old Confederacy. To this day, the white South and her Black toadies like Clarence



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Thomas, Condoleezza Rice and Michael Steele are blinded and crippled by white supremacy and the ever-hateful, soul-shrinking legacies of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, “the Lost Cause” and its battle flag, along with today’s economic oppression and racial abandonment.

The symbol of White Male Supremacy and white Southern Protestantism is the Christian (sic, sick) academy or, among the wealthy, the elite private school, founded to prepare their children, already bored to death and consumed by “blank appetites” (William Faulkner), to run the rat race in the Meritocracy Marathon. Our white boys—children of the culture, school system, Christianity, video games, music and parents who work morning, noon and night—are increasingly finding sport in the flesh of our disinherited grown-ups.

Four years into this new and maniacal century, I learned through church connections of a young man from a Presbyterian youth group who had joined others to murder a white homeless man living on the margins, in the woods of their city. No reason, no purpose was found from the leaky spigot called the logic of history. Just random violence. Just entertainment. Just war against the poor and disinherited. Just the cries of the vanquished from our dirty little wars in Mexico (1846–1848), Vietnam (1954–1975) and Iraq-Afghanistan (2003 to the End of Time), come home to tell us all there is to know.

Perhaps these useless white boys were envious of a man who could stay home(less) for most of the day. Where were their fathers? There is a terrible famine and killing starvation among both Black and white young males today, a famine of father-hunger. Often this hunger is transmuted into rage, expressing itself in violence. Then again, maybe killing the homeless is just like taking part in a video game.

‘Human Animals’?

Many moons have climbed the pines and oaks, leaf green, leaf brown, and the floods of our story have continued to erode the shore and drown our cities. Then a Yellow boy, bullied by whites as a kid, and a student at one of the great football powers of the old Confederacy (a sport whose utility is in molding people to join the military or become





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spectators to support their side, right or wrong, and be satisfied with the pusillanimous press as thigh-flashing cheerleading editorial writers), picked up a couple of idols worshipped by the National Rifle Association and blew the brains out of 33 people, including himself. No mo Cho.

Seung-Hui Cho. It was on the 2007 anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter From the Birmingham Jail"—April 16—that this tortured and terrorized young man played Iraq war on a beautiful campus in the home state of Robert Edward Lee, whose statues and bones are worshipped in Dixie.

A season before Cho skipped class to blast his targets away, a news report arrived at the Open Door Community from longtime friend Mary Eastland Sinclair:

There is a national tragedy taking place in America, and it involves violence aimed at homeless people that often goes unprosecuted because it is seldom reported. In the rare cases in which it is, the public, unfortunately, usually takes little notice. According to the Washington-based National Coalition for the Homeless, the thugs are often *young white men* [emphasis added] who single out the homeless because they know their victims probably cannot or will not go to the police.

This matter came under a national spotlight last week after *three white men* [emphasis added] in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, one 17 and two 18 years of age, were charged with murder and assault in the Jan. 12 beating death of 45-year-old Norris Gaynor, *a black man whose head and chest were bashed in with baseball bats while he slept on a park bench*. [Emphasis added. Did Seung-Hui Cho read this article?] This attack, and two others that night, almost certainly would have gone unnoticed except for the fact that a security camera recorded two youths beating one of the victims. Police said this videotape led to the arrests of the three teenagers.

Dozens of destitute people across the U.S. are reported attacked each year; and many more assaults go unreported, say various agencies that provide services to the homeless. Baseball bats are de-





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scribed as a favored weapon, as well as rocks, bricks, fists and feet, pellet guns and knives.

Why the homeless are targeted is an open question. In some cases it appears to be racially based. In others, it may be because attackers just think it is a fun thing to do, or they have contempt for destitute people living on the street. In Los Angeles, two 19-year-olds were jailed last August on charges of hitting people with aluminum baseball bats while they slept. They told police they were inspired by videos depicting fights between homeless people.

These are despicable acts perpetrated by cowards, and this trend cannot be permitted to continue. Communities should devise ways to protect their most vulnerable members while prosecuting to the fullest those human animals who have turned beating the homeless into a disgusting sport.

— *The Macon Telegraph*, January 23, 2006

Lies in Our Bloodstream

Oh, how sick and sad is the ending of this historically important editorial: “. . . while prosecuting to the fullest those human animals who have turned beating the homeless into a disgusting sport.” This is the same old, same old that never works. This is Vietnam and Iraq. “Why do we kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong?” Do not call human beings “animals.” We are one. These murderers are our children, just as the homeless dead are our brothers and sisters.

We need to help, to love, and to offer these young men an alternative to death in the Domination System or the death gurney in the state courts of the American Control System. Why can't we help each other? When we kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong, our children become murderers.

King is correct: “Violence begets violence.” Or Gandhi: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth leads to a blind society.” Or the Hebrew prophet-lover: “For they sow the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind.” (Hosea 8:7, New Revised Standard Version) Or Jesus: “Those



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who live by the sword will perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52b) But the call for vengeance (“which is mine says the Lord,” Romans 12:19) deepens the wounds that lead our young men to kill and maim and hate for fun.

The states with the most dehumanized young white kids (along with Seung-Hui Cho the classmate exterminator and Michael Vick the football pit bull destroyer, both of Virginia Tech) are those states that kill killers. Here reside the theocratic Christian citizens who defend war, violence, torture and death as punishment in the name of the Prince of Peace. This is blasphemy. These are sick folk who have perverted the gospel of Jesus Christ to their own murderous means.

What is wrong with white males? What has our system of White Male Supremacy done to them? Given them the license to kill at will? What is the curse that believed-lies of superiority and supremacy let loose to course through our bloodstream? History seeps like sewage into the sump pumps of our desolation and murderous rage.

A few weeks after Mr. Norris Gaynor was beaten to death, his sister telephoned me. She wept as a sister weeps for a beloved brother, with woman-love, with compassion. “How?” she cried over and over again. “How could these kids do this? How,” she keened, “could this have happened?” Her breath became shallow and rapid. “What can we do?” she begged. In unbelief and wretchedness she put the receiver back into its cradle.

This, killing the homeless and shooting classmates, teachers and engineering professors for tenure’s sake, is a new and semi-acceptable form of lynching. What if the U.S. Congress had ever passed a law against lynching? What if we cared for young white men turned into “blank appetites” for drugs, sex and violence? What if we housed the homeless? What if we believed Robert F. Kennedy’s vision of America in 1968 just before he, too, had his brains blown to pieces?

RFK was running for president in opposition to the Vietnam War. He had donned the mantle of Martin Luther King Jr.’s preferential option for the poor. Robert Francis Kennedy wanted to take the hope and agenda of the murdered Dr. King’s Poor People’s Campaign to the White House. He too was murdered.



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The beat goes on. The poor and many prophets get killed in the streets, in the war, in the death chamber; the stock market hedged its bets and lost.

Can we read the signs of the times? Can we stop it?



8

Not Yet Gone With the Wind

Place: The Open Door Community front yard. Former Creek Nation land. Former territory of the Confederate States of America. Today, sanctuary for the disinherited.

Time: 4:30 A.M.

The front yard of the Open Door Community in Atlanta faces Ponce de Leon Avenue Northeast, a major thoroughfare getting folk in and out of the city. Some 38,000 vehicles pass our yard daily, carrying people journeying into or away from the city, which is known worldwide for mind-boggling reasons. In this chapter, this little light of mine will shine on two of them.

First: the most American and most globally successful corporation in history lives and is drying up in Atlanta. On a symbolic level, Coca-Cola is the way to view white male America. Its product is worthless. Brown sugar water for a moment of relief from life: no content, no meaning, no nutritional value.

Coca-Cola controls Atlanta politics and education. If one Pepsi machine were placed on the campus of either Emory University or Columbia Theological Seminary, the schools would fold. Coke has told each institution that if any competition comes to campus, Coke will withdraw its syrup and its money.

Monopoly, lack of choice, lack of competition and lack of institutional freedom is one of the principal findings on the seamy underside of the Atlanta mapquest. Surplus wealth comes from economic exploitation; there is no other source. That is why Jesus Christ raised so much

hell against the wealthy and the religious elite in his short lifetime. He taught, "You cannot serve God and money." (Matthew 6:24b, Good News Bible)

They killed him quick.

Second: one of the most important works of fiction in human history was conceived and written in Atlanta. It was masterfully written by a White Lady, Margaret Mitchell (1900–1949), who understood the power of the Magnolia Myths. Nary a day blows by in Atlanta, and other places in the world, when the racist, duplicitous novel "Gone With the Wind" is not studied, celebrated or seen on film as one of the most viewed and influential movies in the history of cinema.

The house in which she started putting words to paper just 20 years after the Atlanta Race Riot and Massacre of 1906 has been restored and financed by the German automobile corporation Daimler-Benz. What better deal for a European corporation than to get its name up and out in the waters of Coca-Cola and aligned with a novel of white supremacy?

The book portrays slavery as a happy time, with the darkies picking pale cotton and singing while the white folks act mannerly and tolerant of the stupid African-Americans, who are simply inferior and must be helped, cajoled and babied. The dreadful consequence of the Civil War, according to the novel and movie, is that whites suffered the most. But the most dreadful fact of American history is that no white people were slaves or counted as three-fifths of a human being. According to Mitchell, only raw power, by any means necessary, in the hands of white Southerners and a few co-opted former slaves could save and rebuild the New South, which was founded on Black backs by cheap, forced and convict slave labor.

On the truthful and realistic side, Mitchell reveals the sources of wealth accumulated by Rhett Butler: trickery and profiteering from the misery and anguish of Southerners and Yankees alike. The modern business spirit and bottom-line-profit morals had moved to Atlanta.

In "Jesus Land" (the old Confederate states), most contemporary white literary responses to "Gone With the Wind" were panegyrics. The realism and historical accuracy of the novel were outstanding achievements, reviewers wrote, while Billie Holiday moaned before



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Harlem audiences about “strange fruit” swinging in the wind down in Dixieland. In the wink of an eye, the book appeared on reading lists at white Southern institutions of “higher learning.”

Unfurling the Flag of Hate

“Gone With the Wind” was published in 1936. Maybe some bleeding-heart liberals and Black freedom fighters sensed each page sliding off the press, like a wet weasel slipping down a sewer pipe. For this tale told by a white woman is full of sound and fury, signifying everything and filling the bitter hearts of White Male Supremacy.

In 1937, a first fruit entered the Atlanta skyline: the Confederate battle flag was raised in the heart of downtown Atlanta. The bright war flag of the vanquished re-entered American history as the banner for devotees of Jim Crow segregation and the humiliation of African-Americans. It represented the mythic reality of the vast majority of white Atlantans, born when Robert Edward Lee dismounted Traveler in front of Appomattox Courthouse.

Today in Georgia we see this flag sneering at us daily: on trucks, cars, tattoos, caps, scarves, shirts, in truck stops and gift shops. A huge plaster Confederate flag besmears a wall at the OK Café in north Atlanta, a favorite restaurant among sports elites.

Appomattox Courthouse: on April 9, 1865, General Lee, manners impeccable, morals spewing venom, signed the papers put before him by General Ulysses S. Grant. These documents of surrender to the USA were sealed and sent to the commander in chief, Abraham Lincoln, one of the few fine presidents in American history.

The Civil War was over, the Confederate battle flag mostly furled except at night, when the Ku Klux Klan hid behind it and white sheets while riding through “ni--er town” terrorizing former slaves and their children. But out of the night and into the light, murderous White Male Supremacy, North and South, East and West, continued its steel-heeled boot-march across this land toward the chainless slavery and oppression of our new citizens, African-Americans. “This land is my land; this land is your land,” sang Woody Guthrie.



This hate movement used prison, chain gangs, sharecropping, poor (really poor) education, tenant farming, lynching, burning, castration, low wages, legal violence as with the Scottsboro Boys, convict leasing, unemployment, race riots, torture, rape, bullying, killing, maiming, executions, serfdom and psychological dehumanization and interiorization of inferiority, along with daily terror tactics of humiliation, to control our new fellow citizens during their journey toward liberty, equality and freedom. So little had actually “gone with the wind.”

The not-yet-gone wind blows into our yard, bending the bodies of men and women, Black, white and brown, into the ground of poverty and prison even while they wait for coffee and grits. Yes, while they wait for God and God’s people to act for justice and the death of White Male Supremacy.

A minority believed, and some on the margins hoped, that the Old South was, in fact, gone with the wind. The Confederate States of America lost the battles but won the war. After the presidential election of 1876, Lincoln’s Republican Party began its death march of betrayal and abandonment of the civil and human rights of African-Americans. Today the Republican Party is the party of White Male Supremacy, conservative Christianity and our dirty wars in Korea, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Gone with the wind? Hardly. The wind continues to drive and cry over the land, tearing our nation apart, hurling debris into the faces of all people of color, gays and lesbians, human rights activists, anti-death penalty workers, peace and justice activists, homeless boys and girls, mentally ill men and women, radical disciples of Jesus, the Human One.

Looking With New Eyes

“How can we know the dancer from the dance?” asks poet William Butler Yeats (“Among School Children,” 1928). Margaret Mitchell’s life story is not exhausted by her belief in White Male Supremacy. She loved to help Blacks and did so, not without the “cost” of crossing class and racial boundaries in Atlanta. She was a volunteer and spokesperson

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for Grady Memorial Hospital's colored clinics. For this, in 1920, she was "whitelisted" by the Junior League when she was "coming out" as a debutante. She co-operated with Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, president of Morehouse College, in providing 40 to 50 medical scholarships for Black students. She supported Atlanta Police Chief Herbert Jenkins when political pressures finally forced him to yield to the cry, "Integrate the police force now."

The writer of the most famous novel in American history, the woman who claimed that all the content of her story was history, true and accurate, will never die in discussions of White Male Supremacy. "Gone With the Wind" is to the white supremacist understanding of plantation slavery and Reconstruction what Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was to the understanding of slavery for Abraham Lincoln and the Abolitionists.

On August 11, 1949, Margaret Mitchell was struck down by a car while crossing Peachtree Street. She lay dying at Grady Memorial Hospital for several days. I wonder what she would say today as the White Male Supremacists in the Georgia Legislature attempt to defund Grady.

"Life is just a question of hermeneutics," says Don Beisswenger. In a prison epistle from a Nazi compound, Dietrich Bonhoeffer tutors us toward a re-reading of our shared stories: "There remains an experience of incomparable value . . . to see the great events of world history from below; from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled — in short, from the perspective of those who suffer . . . to look with new eyes on matters great and small." ("Letters and Papers From Prison")

The deformed spirituality of white supremacy and the political interests of the Domination System are complemented and nurtured in Atlanta and across our land by the Margaret Mitchell House & Museum. Here is a museum that, like the novel and movie, helps to keep the dreams of vanquished Confederates and their flag alive.

Those dreams are fodder for the Republican Party, rebirthed in the South by Strom Thurmond 101 years after the Battle of Gettysburg. A few months after the implementation of the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, Senator Thurmond of South Carolina left the Democratic Party

for the more racist Republicans. The Republican “Southern strategy” was born. White “rights” and corporate wealth were linked in a bed of unrighteousness. Civil rights for people of color are too much for white supremacy, unless one is a Black white supremacist like Clarence Thomas, Condoleezza Rice or Michael Steele.

The Mitchell museum also provides lectures and programs of interpretation of Southern history and literature. These are for the benefit of the upper classes. The costs are prohibitive, of course, for the poor.

Abolitionists Win Again

For an alternative interpretation, please read “The Wind Done Gone” by Alice Randall, published in 2001, which retells the story from the slaves’ point of view. Modern minions of Ku Klux Klan founder Nathan Bedford Forrest attempted to stop the publication of this novel. Many acted as though freedom of the press was a terrorist tactic.

The legal battle against publication and distribution of this woman’s words was fought to protect the lies and myths, to keep the big bucks flowing, and to keep chinks from occurring in the wall of white racism and domination. Meanwhile, rumbles of George W. Bush’s hurricanes were blowing like a wind blustering toward a torturous “homeland security” landscape. These well-mannered rich folks took off their sheets and walked in the light.

Big people, big banks, Coca-Cola, the Mitchell family, lawyers with silk socks and nylon stockings fought the publication of “The Wind Done Gone.” The ostensible reason was copyright protection, but beneath the covers lay the dying American Bill of Rights. Freedom of speech and press: NO. Freedom of artistic invention: NO. Threat to the myths and lies of Ms. Mitchell’s tale: YES. Threat to big business: OF COURSE.

Ms. Randall is an African-American. One of her forebears was likely a Confederate general. The response to her and her book establishes the truth of the insidious nature and consequences of “Gone With the Wind.” But the Abolitionists won again! The novel was published.



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Atlanta is a difficult place in which to tell the truth. It is one of the most segregated urban areas in the United States. It is a city where the business community, the mayor's office and the City Council breathe together to put the poor, especially Black men, young and old, in harm's way.

Too little has gone with the wind, and what is not yet gone blows into our yard at the Open Door. Bodies are bent earthward: men and women, Black, white and brown. Bent downward. Ground into broken bits even as they wait for coffee, grits, a welcome, a phone call. Even as they wait for God and God's people to act for justice and the death of White Male Supremacy.

At the end of our alley, on the side of a telephone power box, a message is sent to us by an unknown graffiti prophet: "Initiative comes from those who wait."

Beware.



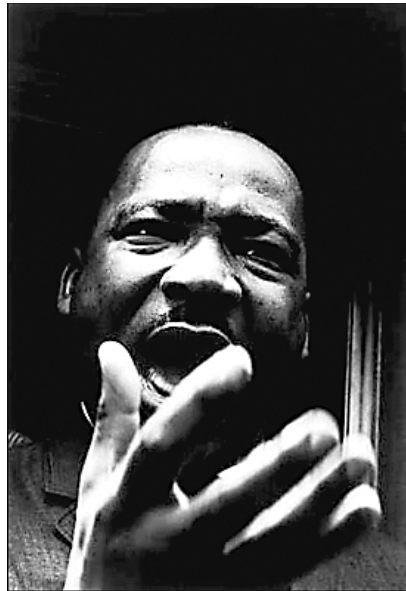
9

Reclaiming the Radical Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was seven years old when the novel “Gone With the Wind” was published, ten when the movie premiered in Atlanta. African-Americans were not allowed to attend the premiere, at Loew’s Grand Theater on Peachtree Street, where Miss Daisy had been driven in a big black limousine. (Today the Georgia-Pacific Building stands on the site.)

The purity codes (white = pure) of Jim Crow were so tight and cruel that even the Black cast was forbidden to participate in the festivities, under the threat of arrest. Had the African-American actors participated, it would have undercut the theme and social function of the film and novel.

The children of slaves and sharecroppers were, nonetheless, necessary to the scenery of the gala proclamation of the New South, as Hit-



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ler moved into Poland and Southern and Hollywood whites celebrated white supremacy's triumphs over the losses of slavery and trumping with the ace of spades the gains of Radical Reconstruction.

Young Michael King Jr., or ML as he was known, was part of the party! (Dr. King's name, along with his father's name, was changed to Martin when he was a child.) On Thursday, December 14, 1939, the night before the premiere, the choir from Ebenezer Baptist Church, co-directed by Martin's mother, Ms. Alberta Williams King, sang at the Junior League Ball. The choir members donned the rags of slavery and sang old slave songs and spirituals.

On opening night, the choir from Big Bethel A.M.E. Church stood in front of the theater while whites passed them by, smiling and clapping, as they entered the theater to see the story told in mendacious magnificence. As the choir entertained the white supremacists, Black carriage drivers dressed in the costumes of slavery days watched the white commotion. (Letter from Dr. Cliff Kuhn, September 26, 2007)

Were there echoes from the screams of the Atlanta Massacre (September 22–27, 1906) in the air? Were there any white folk who said “NO” to the hell and degradation of our African-American sisters and brothers during this season of deceitful memory? Was there any relationship between Franklin Delano Roosevelt's refusal to help the Jews in Germany and the triumph of white racism in American life?

“Gone With the Wind” ran in theaters across our land for two years before the United States entered World War II. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor by a people of yellow color, the USA joined the Allied forces. Twice the white-controlled military used the atom bomb, on August 6 and 9, 1945. Again the experiment was on people of color. African-Americans were called “ni--ers.” Now the racist forces in the U.S. military begat another name: “Japs.” Epithets of inferiority both. Gone with the wind, yes, most of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and 185,000 human beings.

A Death-Dealing 'Experiment'

The atomic experiment on the Japanese came from the same white malevolence as the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment of 1932 through 1972. While fighting Hitler and decrying his medical experiments on Jews and broken people, the United States claimed the superiority of white America over white Germany and yellow Japan.

A U.S. government-sponsored experiment tested unsuspecting African-Americans in Alabama. In a study that lasted 40 years, somewhere between 399 and 623 Black men who had syphilis were left untreated and unaware of their condition. Most were told that they had "bad blood." They were used as guinea pigs to find out how syphilis works in the human body. There were no consent forms or explanations of what was happening to these impoverished, uneducated Alabama African-Americans. On May 25, 1948, when Andrew J. Moyer was granted a patent for a method for the mass production of penicillin, these human beings were kept sick and dying for the sake of science. Some 128 of them died during the period of active medical research.

When the press and public learned of this study in the heart of Dixie in July 1972, the government immediately stopped it. On May 16, 1997, President Bill Clinton made a public apology to the eight living participants.

Adolph Hitler did not have such an opportunity with his victims. White Male Supremacy, whether in its Nazi form or the more benign American form, is death to those who are non-white and, in this land of ours, who are poor.

Did White Male Supremacy affect our war-making plans? You betcha. The film version of "Gone With the Wind" blew into town at the end of 1939. It has been blowing lies and white supremacy ever since. Is White Male Supremacy a predominant cause of America's deafness to the cry of the poor? You betcha.

Who knows what went on? Is going on? Will go on?

King knew in 1939. The Black church knew long before. W.E.B. Du Bois knew, but Booker T. Washington did not know. Frederick Douglass knew. The Ku Klux Klan knew and Woodrow Wilson knew.

The four white Atlanta newspapers that whipped up the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and Massacre knew. But the Rockefellers did not know. The Martin Luther King Campaign for Economic Justice knows. The Black power on the Atlanta City Council does not know, but Rev. Timothy McDonald knows. Bishop Eddie Long and King's daughter, Bernice King, do not know. Both the Evil One and Jesus the Jewish Messiah know. Do you?

What do they know and not know? That white supremacy did not get gone with the wind in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation, nor in 1865 with the 13th Amendment, nor with Radical Reconstruction from 1868 to 1877, nor with *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* in 1954, nor with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, nor with the 1965 Voting Rights Act, nor with the murder of 40-plus martyrs during the Civil Rights Movement. Nor on November 2, 1983, when President Ronald Reagan signed the law to honor King's birthday, nor with the Atlanta City Council outlawing asking for alms in the "Tourist Triangle," nor with Spike Lee's fine films, nor with the election of President Barack Obama. NO. White Male Supremacy has not gone with the wind, but has increasingly become embedded in invisible and visible institutional structures, and in the hearts of haters and the unsuspecting.

The Rev. Nibs Stroupe of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur must travel all over the United States of America, and even to Jamaica, to help white folk understand that their power and privilege is built upon the lives and deaths of the poor and people of color. All the while Bob Dylan sings again "The Times They Are A-Changin'" in the newness of our Barack Obama America.

The Most Important Voice We Have

The living, radical and truth-telling legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. is the most hopeful resource that "we the people" possess as we strive for a future of justice, freedom and equality. For faith and practice, for culture and politics, for art and literature, King's is the most important wisdom-voice we have from the soil of "this land is my land, this land is your land." Martin King of the "Radical Remnant" (Michael Eric

Dyson) lives and breathes through the Peace and Justice Movement and the committed scholar-activists of the 21st century. Among the many of these, Black and white, see: Ched Myers, Pete Gathje, bell hooks, Cornel West, Nibs Stroupe, Michael Eric Dyson, Jeff Dietrich and Murphy Davis. You can meet them in the streets, at rallies and at their desks, doing their homework and sharpening their social analysis. No softball here. No, this Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is no “Gone With the Wind” darkie picking white cotton for the palefaced business community.

On the other hand, for the vast majority of Americans, white and Black, and for those journalists and scholars who go to Andy Young and the rich Black entrepreneurs of the Civil Rights Movement or the Republican Party or the Prosperity Gospel for information and interpretation of King, this Black man lynched in Memphis has been castrated in Atlanta. Will Michael Steele, the first African-American chairman of the Republican National Committee, have a radical word about King for us? Let us open the door to newness as we pray for the USA to move toward democratic socialism, a prayer prayed by King during his short lifetime.

Dr. King has been transmogrified into a middle-class bourgeois hero and moneymaker for the moneyed class. His children fight each other in court for the tattered pages of his legacy. Some of the believers in White Male Supremacy are women. Some are Black women. Some are Black men. Which side are you on?

These power players for wealth and publicity have removed King far from the streets and prisons, the poor and oppressed. Like Jesus before him, King has been domesticated and made into a servant of capitalism, an economic system he disdained. When he died, King was planning his Poor People’s Campaign to take the cause of economic justice to Washington. Perhaps the powerful are preparing a “Rich People’s Campaign” to fly to Washington aboard corporate jets for just \$15 billion more to bail out the water from their sinking yachts.

10

The Radical Remnant vs. the Killers of the Dream

In Atlanta, it is against the law to ask for help. One can go to jail for asking for money or food in front of Coretta Scott's and Martin Luther King Jr.'s tomb. Dr. King, Black prophet, oft said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?" But rapacious Central Atlanta Progress and the avaricious Atlanta City Council's "most persistent and urgent question" is "how much money did you make today? What did you do today to rid our city of the poor Black and homeless ones?" Love might be an answer, but jail is the only solution, says the power elite of Atlanta's White Male Supremacy system with its many Black-as-white housekeepers.

Dr. King has been castrated with a rusty razor blade. White and Black businessmen and women, along with white and Black politicians, know the streets to power are paved with white asphalt and bang on the back doors of Coca-Cola, Central Atlanta Progress, Georgia-Pacific, Home Depot and the Republican Party. Some wink at the party of white supremacy; some join.

Now don't misunderstand me. There are great African-American leaders in Atlanta: Alice Lovelace, Vincent Fort, "Able" Mable Thomas, Rev. Timothy McDonald III, Derrick Boazman, Alicia Thomas Morgan, Rev. Ron Lister, Tyrone Brooks, Nancy Abudu and John Lewis, among others. But many, such as Rev. Andrew Young, Mayor Shirley Franklin, Bishop Eddie Long and City Council Presi-

dent Lisa Borders, have held the razor steady and emasculated our King. Why?

Because Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is not good for business, be it Black or white. Not good for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, with its steely bed life with Georgia Power. Not good for the King family to make money. Not good for capitalism, war or basing social life on fear and enemies, including gangsta rap and much in the culture of Black youths. (See a different interpretation in the writings of African-American philosopher Michael Eric Dyson.) Not good for Atlanta to build its foundation on the quicksand of image and as a safe place for tourists and business conventions far from the cry of the poor.

The *real* King, that is. The new, plastic King of consumer capitalism and White Male Supremacy is just dandy. Not only did we need to kill his flesh, but since 1968 we have worked to kill his spirit, truth and wisdom as well. A hundred million dollars for a monument to King in the center of the capital that killed him for planning to bring a massive Poor People's Campaign to D.C.? What hogwash! What a way to trash the man who died for trash collectors! To honor the prophet, that \$100,000,000 should be used as the base to rescue the poor from poverty. Shame on us who praise the prophets whom our ancestors killed. Or, as Jesus said in a mode of anger and aggression that I would never use (what about you?):

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors. You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell? (Matthew 23:29-33, New Revised Standard Version)

Martin King was a democratic socialist. He practiced and preached against war and for structural changes in the U.S. economy that would

include a “Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged.” He called for a “revolution of values” to bring America toward the vision of our Jeffersonian revolution:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men [and women] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men [and women], deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

—Thomas Jefferson,
the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

No one can claim Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and support the death penalty. No one can claim him and support the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both of which Andy Young has done. No one can claim King and join the move to push homeless people out of public places in urban America instead of housing them. No one can claim him and practice homophobia or campaign against homosexual marriage. “Civil marriage is a civil right.” No one can claim him and not vote for left-of-center candidates. No one can claim him and not work for a nonviolent revolution, American style, which is a “Poor People’s Campaign.” As King said in his “Beyond Vietnam” speech on April 4, 1967: “Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the *revolutionary spirit* and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism and militarism.” (Emphasis added)

Murder and Marketing

So dirty questions came to the White Male Supremacists. As President Lyndon Baines Johnson asked, “What can we do with this ni--er preacher?” Well, get rid of him, of course. The American Empire is Number One; we brook no serious opposition.

First, Republican J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, tried to get

King to commit suicide. Didn't work. So then he must be murdered. What better way to get the will of the rich White Male Supremacists accomplished than to use a poor white man? Works all the time. That is why there was such a revival of the Ku Klux Klan during Ronald Reagan's presidency.

One night, King went to the Mountaintop at Mason Temple in Memphis. The following evening, he opened the door of his room at the Lorraine Motel, took two steps onto the balcony, and there, with his head blown to bits in the manner of JFK's five years before, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. began his declension.

Lest we forget. Once upon a time, there was a White Male Supremacist policeman who saw the truth clearly. On the night of the bombing of Martin's and Coretta's home in Montgomery, Alabama on January 30, 1956, King left a church meeting and sped home. There he quelled an angry crowd and called for renewal of the commitment to nonviolence. He called for love and peace among the African-Americans who were walking and dying for courtesy and justice on the Montgomery buses. Late in the evening, after the crowd had gone home, this policeman turned to a reporter and said what we may yet all learn: "I will be honest with you. I was terrified. I owe my life to that ni--er preacher, and so do all the other white people who were there." (Quoted in Stephen Oates, "Let the Trumpet Sound")

The dirty question confronting the Powers and the American Domination System was and is: How do we market this man?

Today he is known for his adulterous sexual exploits, plagiarism, his vision of "Black and white together" and his "I Have a Dream" speech. Many Web sites try to confuse and refute King's message of peace and justice. Books are published that try to turn him into a White Male Supremacist. The Republicans and the Christian (sic) Right claim him as someone who is opposed to helping the poor and disinherited. Rev. Andrew Young says that if King were alive today, he would support the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Why must we crucify King's truth? Because he is a threat to the system of white power and human greed. "Save money. Besmirch King."

From Prophets to Profits

The killers of the dream lift from King's fight for equality words that will someday radicalize America's future toward justice: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." That dream is a thousand miles away. Look at what Barack Hussein Obama is going through today. Yes, this Black man is president of the USA. King died working to make this a reality. All the while, conservatives make money and build Sarah Palin-like power from their use of this dream-statement torn brutally from King's meaning and truth.

"A text without a context is a pretext," contextualizes Howard Thurman. To use King's "content of character" remark to fight affirmative action and the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, as Republicans among others have been doing for years, is propagandistic at best. That interpretation is like arguing that Supreme Court Justice John Harlan, white Southerner and lone dissenter in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision, which upheld racial segregation, was speaking for segregation when he wrote, "Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens." Goodgodalmighty.

Those who use these words of King to oppose the gains of the Civil Rights Movement are like those in the Christian Right who argue that Jesus Christ supports war and opposes human rights for gays and lesbians and statehood for Palestinians. Where we gonna run to when the ship comes in?

There are little enclaves of resisters and what Michael Eric Dyson calls the "Radical Remnant" of King's legacy and way. But King's memorials in Atlanta are capitalistic business ventures, pro-tourism, pro-wealth and prosperity at the expense of the disinherited. For the vast majority, Martin Luther King Jr. is a gelding. In fact, this loud, majestic and courageous martyr has been blended into the Domination System as icon and guarantee that White Male Supremacy is at ease in Zion. Peace will come through superior violence in war and strong police on the streets, the cultural, prison and military chaplains tell us. The hope in Atlanta is to move all poor people out of the city.

THE RADICAL REMNANT VS. THE KILLERS OF THE DREAM

You can find the real King alive and well in small places in Atlanta: the Southern Center for Human Rights, First Iconium Baptist Church, Oakhurst Presbyterian Church, WRFG (“Radio Free Georgia”), the Martin Luther King Jr. Campaign for Economic Justice, Derrick Boazman’s programming on WOAK and New Life Covenant Church, among others. But for people who are hungry, afraid of the police, homeless and abandoned in our front yard at 4:30 A.M., Martin Luther King Jr. is hidden. This radical prophet and the best hope for humankind to make it out of our present historical disaster and ecological catastrophe has been stolen from the poor and oppressed. Falsified is he, like Jesus the Human One before him.

Martin and Jesus share this fate. Before his domestication, Jesus (his name means “deliverer”) was a radical Jew who came to tear this filthy rotten system down. Jesus and Martin have the holy task to heal us and the nations. Both teach us to “study war no more.” Yet both prophets today are used by the Domination System to make war and profits and to oppress the poor and the victims of white history.

“Love is the only solution, and love comes with community,” proclaims Dorothy Day over and over again. She is correct. Here is our way out. Martin Luther King Jr. helps us get there. How?

11

Hope Against Hope, Impossible Possibilities

The cry of the poor is a call to reduce the distance among us into the solidarity of shared life for the common good. This cry calls us into the goodnews of the gospel of Jesus the Human One. The badnews is that most white people respond to the cry of the poor with a simple and inhuman question. Particularly males and male-dominated women, most Christians, most conservatives and most rich people reply this way: “Why should I give a damn?” Some folks don’t say it that way, but they live it.

Certainly not all rich folk. The Open Door Community would not exist without the generous and justice-seeking gifts and love of a multitude of wealthy people.

“Why should I give a damn? Why should they get any of my tax money? I work for mine. Why should I give a beggar a dollar? He will just get drunk. The poor are poor because they’re lazy and want a free ride. They don’t give a damn. Blacks are the sorriest. Won’t work. There’s plenty of work. That’s why there are so many illegal aliens [sic] in America today. Mexicans are taking over our schools. Blacks just bellyache about slavery and lynching and take drugs and kill each other. Hell, I didn’t have anything to do with slavery. Let them get a job like me. Give me an illegal Hispanic any day. No skin off my white ass. To hell with them.”

Agitator: Any day, anywhere, anytime, anyone, rich or poor, black, white,

brown, yellow or red, who confesses the confession of despair "I don't care" or "I don't give a damn" or "It doesn't matter to me" is a dead one walking. This confession so plenteous across the majestic land of the U.S. is the work of domination, "the blank appetite," the loss of passion and imagination. Moral death is resident, centered, active, alive and well in the unhappy bodies and public life of the United States. Why? Greed turns inward and eats the greedy alive while they grow in greed and greedily get more and love less. Oh, sisters and brothers, can't you hear the cry of the poor? Can't you see the death of America through the mirrors at the stock market? The corruption in high places? The hedge funds? Calamitous mortgages? The earth howls silently. The polar bear drowns, the hummingbird is motionless in air, the child dies under the bridge, the prisoner hangs herself with her shoelaces, the child spits at his mother, the student kills 32 classmates. Do we hear the cry of the American Indian praying at Wounded Knee?

Why care? Most folk cannot care. This is the rub. The death of compassion. This is the limit for this writing. This is the boundary line, the fence at our border for the Peace and Justice Movement, for the Discipleship Movement. Hope for the poor, for the breaking apart of White Male Supremacy, remains in our day an impossible possibility. President Obama could not address the institutional nature of White Male Supremacy or poverty in his campaign for the office. He would not be in the White House today had he done so. (See Obama's speech "A More Perfect Union," March 18, 2008.)

Dying While Entertained

Despair eats those who bellow for the end of poverty and the end of White Male Supremacy. Maimed are the lives of the victims. Unrelieved anguish, like greed, brings death of soul. This way of dying, soaked in "quiet desperation" (Thoreau), puts inordinate entertainment, from baseball to pornography, at the center of our cultural lives. Reinhold Niebuhr calls it "the *sin of triviality*."

Entertainment is a legal drug numbing us to neighbors and need. Like a diamondback rattler coiling in our hearts, numbness festers as



THE CRY OF THE POOR

the sour grapes of wrath are now embedded in our entertainment. Michael Vick, renowned, expensive former quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons, revealed a link between football entertainment and dogfighting. Battling on to the end, perhaps his pit bulldogs barked, “Give me liberty or give me death!”

Why can we not feed the hungry? House the homeless? Be kind and compassionate to one another? Provide medical care for all? Guarantee a minimum wage that is enough for “the pursuit of happiness”? What in the hell is wrong with us? When it comes to justice for poor people or White Male Supremacy, we are the same people whether the stock market is at 12,000 or 6,000. Why? Is there a way we can turn things around? Can we find hope that is a possible impossibility instead?

Goodnews: Yes, we can. Let us go, then, to the streets, prisons, courtrooms, jails and lockdown mental wards in public hospitals. Here we hear the cry of the poor for the death of injustice and murderous white supremacy.



Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .
Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”
Let us go and make our visit.



—T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

What has caused the death of compassion? The declension of Martin Luther King Jr.? The idolatrous use of Christianity for the aims of





HOPE AGAINST HOPE, IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBILITIES

empire? The padding of bank accounts while claiming that Jesus was a prosperous businessman? Why cannot the vast majority of American people care for the poor, the homeless, the hungry and the prisoner? Why do hard-core Christians and mainline Americans believe the stercoraceous lies of the American Way of Life?

FEAR. Fear has frozen our hearts. Fear has metastasized from our hearts through our bloodstream into our brains. We live on “red alert.” Strangers are enemies. The government under President George W. Bush was filled with crooks, sexual predators slinking through the chambers of Congress, and killers of the environment. Preachers and priests are out for grabs, be it money or body parts. The terrorists want to kill us; the stockbrokers want to milk us. We look in the mirror. In truth, we are afraid.

GREED. Most folk in America, the silent majority, Republican activists, shepherds who devour their own flocks, the land and the people (Ezekiel 34), are so greedy that nothing can satisfy us for long. We eat and eat and are ready to chomp and chew again in a couple of hours. We want more and more, better and better, faster and faster.

The earth is dying. History is weeping, dropping sewage from her tear ducts. If we do not want war, at least we want a war economy. Jobs, even work that kills, are among our most cherished values. The “work ethic” is the measuring rod, irrespective of the common good and the souls of workers. “Build bombs and land mines! Join the military, there is no work in your community. Become a prison guard. Design private prisons. Purchase stock in a stockade.” Death and greed eat each other all day long like a wolf chewing off its frozen leg in a steel trap. As fear demands the death penalty for the poor, greed demands a minimum wage of half of a living level.

God Bless America

If God were to bless America,
What would become of the
Warmongering Christians?
Those who birthed a heresy



THE CRY OF THE POOR



M. Eileen Lawler

to justify,
In Jesus' name, white people
Twisted into monsters,
Buying and selling girls and boys, women
And men as chattel things?
Or would the spirit of love and
Mercy heal their horrid hearts,
And out the window would
Fly their hate-stained American
Flags as the Dove of Peace
Flies in and perches
On every human heart?
"Oh Peace, oh
Peace, we shall not hurt or
Destroy on God's holy mountain,"
Would sing from every
White Christian lip in praise
And resistance to America's
Nasty battles.

HOPE AGAINST HOPE, IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBILITIES

If God were to bless America
Behind the gated gold-drenched
Concentration camps of high-hog living,
Would not the gates unfurl?
The locked doors spring wide open?
The golf courses metamorphose into
Free land for American Indians?
Would not the rich put up
WELCOME signs
Along the gates and walls?
“Something there is that does not love a wall.”
These captives released from their
Godless materialism would invite
Homeless brothers and sisters to
Join them at supper. And
Just after God’s blessings
Blasted America, they would not be
Afraid of the poor who is Jesus
The Human One.

If God were to bless America,
Would not Billy Graham practice
The way of discipleship and George W.
Bush teach the Beatitudes?
If God were to bless America,
My SUV would turn, unlike
Cinderella’s chariot, into a
MARTA bus for all to ride
Free at last.
If God were to bless America,
Thirty-five thousand captives
Would be set free (only 5,000 remaining
For violent crimes) from our crazed
Catastrophic cages and they be filled



THE CRY OF THE POOR

For one week with preachers, prosecutors,
Judges, wardens, police and bankers who
Would cry and wail, “No more death
penalty forever and ever!
Amen.”

If God were to bless America,
There would be no hunger in the land,
No homeless on the streets,
No military aid to Israel,
No child born into calamity,
No old person would die alone,
All houses in the whole wide world
would be built by Habitat for Humanity.

Therefore: Hear ye, Hear ye,
Beware, watch out, stay alert,
Sing and pray with extreme caution.
Do we really want God to bless America?
“Yes” (according to the latest WRFG Poll).

Well, then:

Step One:

“Open your homes to the homeless poor” (Isaiah 58).

Step Two:

“Turn your swords into plowshares,
Your spears into pruning hooks,
And study war no more.” (Isaiah 2:4)

Wounded by God’s Judgment

There is hurt among a minority of us who believe in Yahweh-Elohim and our partnership with God making history. This pain comes from the most blasphemous slogan current in our culture: “God Bless America.” This rotten slogan is idolatry, second only to capitalism’s moneyed theology: “In God We Trust.” From Puritans of old to theocrats today,



HOPE AGAINST HOPE, IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBILITIES

the stolen and unjust privileges of the United States are baptized as blessings from God. The truth is that they are curses from God. Big and expensive housing, for example, is not a blessing from God. It is a basic cause of homelessness, which is a sin and for which we are suffering in this land of ours. Homelessness is the crisis, rotten mortgages the result.

The belief and idolatry that God is blessing America is a fundamental cause of our fear and greed. This lie has malignant side effects. Children cannot play outside. Diabetes and cancer are raging through the population like a California wildfire. Our wealth and financial collapse, our military budget and our bombs, our traffic jams and drug culture, our medical practices and lack of medical care for all—these bleeding wounds are all evidences of God's judgment of the way of life in the United States.

Let us radicalize our lives into King's nonviolent revolution. Do justice. Love mercy. Walk as a humble, free, fully human woman or man. Hear the cry of the poor calling us to liberation and redemption from the American Empire and its Domination System.

The goodnews is that we know what it takes and how to get there. The badnews is that we are too afraid and too greedy to go. We have so little personal and political will. We care so little for each other, the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, Gaza, and children under the bridges near downtown. When did the Common Good become the Extraordinary Good? We are prisoners in our comfort zones. We are too silent. Silence = death. What can we do? How may we live?

12

Back to the Front Yard: A Mustard Seed

7A.M. The disinherited gather in our front yard as they do in places all over America, for the famine in the land of the fat is not only in Atlanta. Hunger stalks the land everywhere in all directions.

Wretchedness and compulsion are one consequence for many of the millions who have too easy access to food. They cannot be satisfied. They eat and eat and eat. As the prophet Micah speaks to America in the 21st century:



You shall eat, but not be
satisfied,
and there shall be a gnawing hunger within you;
you shall put away, but not save,
and what you save, I will hand over to the sword.

(Micah 6:14, New Revised Standard Version)



BACK TO THE FRONT YARD: A MUSTARD SEED

One dimension of our historical disaster in the land of the forever hungry, where craving and gut-gorging afflict the majority of us, is the growth of adult-onset diabetes. Hannah Loring-Davis, nurse at Johns Hopkins Hospital, assesses the results of simultaneous famine and surplus food this way:

I think that the rise in the incidence of disease related to diet and lifestyle (diabetes, hypertension and other vascular disorders, even depression, etc.) is a direct consequence of the constant over-indulgence/consumption of our culture. Indulgence and consumption have become the easiest ways to deal with our own emptiness. We use food, shopping, drugs, television and consumption in general in an attempt to fill the void that is created in the absence of deep and meaningful relationships—lives where we engage in art, culture and faith in the creation and interpretation of meaning. When we don't have meaning, we feel empty—so we consume to fill a void that cannot be filled.



Another reverberation from the land of the forever hungry is HOMELESSNESS. This is part of the famous “trickle-down theory.” Hungry people with too much to eat build or renovate their houses into humongous structures or medium-sized luxurious habitats. They store their snacks and gourmet provender in larders beside the high-protein dog and cat food.



To quote Martin Luther King Jr. again: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” God will not abide her beloved who are stalked by famine or caged by compulsive eating to remain so. Today is the day of judgment. Thus the housed are in a housing crisis.

What ya' gonna do, dear friend? House the homeless? Feed the hungry? Bust apart the White Male Supremacy power that creates this hell on earth among us all? The time is at hand. Let us go to the streets and raise holy hell. Will President Obama help the hungry? Bail out the prisoner and the poor? When?



Sanctuary for the Disinherited

Large coffee thermoses sit, wobbly and brown, near one of the maple trees in our front yard. All the coffee one can drink is passed around in a place where folk feel safe for a few hours. Our yard is a sanctuary from police, Confederate flags, neo-Nazis, white teenagers hurting the homeless for humor, and white business elites who see the future of downtown Atlanta as free from abandoned people, particularly Black men.

Not everything runs smoothly. On occasion we ask volunteers to leave—the ones, only a few, who insult by word or deed the dignity of the poor, without regret or apology to the holy ones who are grasped by the filthy fingers of famine. We return these oppressors to their Egyptland.

Usually they have no idea about what we speak. Several others seek understanding. These friends desire to undo their white racism. Most go home and later lick their wounds in public. The most difficult experience in working for freedom and equality for whites is white-on-white denial, and then confusion and anger when our heart of darkness is revealed.

Yet here is a little mustard seed of the Beloved Community. In this resting place the taste of Jewish Sabbath and Shalom is palpable. A restroom with hot water and all the toilet paper you need sits in the basement to serve you. Benches, an Adirondack chair, a telephone, gentle lights and two beautiful maple trees dance a slow fox trot to extend welcome.

Nonetheless, we accomplish so little, hardly a mustard seed at all. Not enough; hardly anything. Out of our anguished radical politics and hopeful faith springs forth the love and compassion to keep on keeping on. We beg you to do the same. “Feed the people! Stop the killing! Do it NOW!” (Julian Beck)

We are chinking the wall of domination. To some of our guests, the Open Door front yard is a holy place of shared life and love. For others, what we do only adds insult to injury. These either refuse to come to our home or they give us hell. For some of our neighbors, we are the

cause of homelessness and hunger in Atlanta. To others, volunteers and supporters, we are a point of light in the dark night of White Male Supremacist housing patterns and food distribution. We carry on, do what we can do, and wait for the crumbling of the USA's Berlin Wall.

Bounty From the Welcome Table

9:30 A.M. The food for our "soup kitchen" has been cooked and 30 to 40 gallons of coffee brewed. The Sorting Room, for donated clothes, shoes etc., has been sorted.

9:45 A.M. Time for Bible Study. Thirty chairs are filled with loving, disciplined, justice-working volunteers. We study the Word for a word toward the Way, the Truth and the Life. We reduce the distance among ourselves and the holy ones. We journey in place and imagination toward the margins, seeking solidarity, building the Beloved Community of God. We stretch to touch the mantle of the old and ancient Hebrew prophets. We follow the peasant Jew barn-born without house lust. We follow Yahweh-Elohim, the God of the oppressed. We study and strive to emulate our ancestors in the radical movement for abolition. We work to tear down the dividing walls, constructed with steel and hate, that are the White Male Supremacist system.

Once every six weeks we wash one another's feet. Our circle often includes people from the street.

Then the menu is put out for the homeless. From 11 A.M. to noon we serve 150 hungry holy ones orange juice, two boiled eggs, three slices of turkey sausage and a multivitamin, plus all-you-can-eat grits fortified with milk and cheese, coffee, peanut butter, bread, jelly and orange slices—along with all the food you can carry out in your two hands (no containers till you get to the door).

We have a phone available for anyone who wants to use it, a bathroom, a medicine cart and a clothes closet with shirts, hats, gloves, socks, sweaters and sweatshirts. Hygiene products are joyfully handed out upon request. Often we help with needs for local transportation.

Partner Ira Terrell has a "specialized work of mercy." Partner Nelia Kimbrough named this act of service "special needs." Ira takes folks

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in dire need of pants, tampons, shirts or underclothes to the clothes closet, a resource generally available to the folk who take showers at our home. Ira also guides those with holey shoes to our shoe closet. A person just released from prison is provided with a full set of clothes and a carry bag. We are blessed to welcome captives set at liberty in this city and state, thus making substantial God's promise of "liberty to captives."

Unless there is a crisis or extreme weather, one of us can slip away and talk with a person in need or evident pain. Often our friends weep from the fear and misery of the night and the day to come. Sometimes folk are overcome by having all the coffee and food they can consume. Occasionally we listen to a panegyric for toilet paper, soap and hot water in the bathroom with no threat from police and no manager coming to give a lecture that without being a consumer you cannot use the restroom: "Can't you read the sign, you lazy fool? 'Restrooms for Customers Only!'"

At noon we give a bag lunch to everyone who has arrived for brunch but did not get an "inside ticket." As many as 60 sisters and brothers receive this "meal to go." An increasing number of our guests are Latinos from the nearby "catch-out corner." A dark reflection of America as a white supremacist system infects our yard as the tensions between African-Americans and Latinos mount. As the current spate of children bullying children reflects our imperial designs in Iraq and Afghanistan, so too does the racism and prejudice of our country spread among minority groups. This is, of course, a tool to "divide and conquer"—a tool well honed by the elite, the wealthy and, fired up most unfortunately, poor whites.

Along with the bag meal we give socks, razors, vitamins, apple juice and peppermints.

Love, Anger and Thanksgiving

All our life in the Open Door Community is rhythmmed around the circle. The circle, the Eucharist Table, the crucifix nailed on the wall of the dining/worship room and the footwashing basin that Nelia will shortly



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reveal are the symbols of our life and work. At 12:20 P.M. the tables are reshaped into a long rectangle—we call it a circle. The floors are swept.

Now Nelia, Partner Gladys Rustay or Partner Dick Rustay calls the residents of the house to table: “Welcome. Come and eat.” We serve our bowls and plates. Over the next hour, those who have served the meal eat what we have served, as Partner Calvin Kimbrough likes to say.

We come to table around our shared meal and reflect upon the Works of Mercy in light of the Word of God and our experience. We study the Word of God or another writing that brings light to the Word and the Way. We listen to the cry of the poor in conversations in the yard and in our home. We share our stories of the day. We sit. We listen. We pray.

We have served and been served.

The slow pace of truth and healing (3 mph) walks on. Liberation and redemption are coming. The end of white supremacist America is on the horizon of imagination and justice for all. We have seen and heard: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream.” (Amos and King)

Our hopes and prayers are that we will learn from our work in light of the Word and that we will learn from the Word in light of our work. Our aims and purposes are a deeper spirituality, a more mature life, an agitating fire for the poor and disinherited, a more compassionate love for the Way and the earth. And, by damn: JUSTICE.

By the suffering of the hungry and the compassion that got us up and here in the first place, we are pushed by love and anger toward a radical political action: tear down this system. End prison slavery. Silence mealy-mouthed moguls lying in Mammon’s bed.

We never, no never, forget that we are serving the poorest of the poor in the midst of a historical disaster and an ecological catastrophe. One of the primary organizing questions that we bring to our Table Talk is this: What can we DO (ACT), beyond all this talk, preaching, prayer and writing, to build the Beloved Community of God, to fight hunger, to war with White Male Supremacy? How is Jesus leading us to break those values, to transform the people, institutions and policies that are the root causes of hunger and poverty? The people,





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ideas and structures that through their wealth, power and surplus create the disinherited and abandoned holy ones? How? How long? How long?

We end our meal with prayer for others and thanksgiving to our God. What else can we do?

Work and Miracles

Much more goes on in our home, from our Welcome Table, seen and unseen. We serve other meals. We take families to prisons to visit their beloved ones. We visit in jails, prisons and on death row. We provide showers to brothers on Mondays and to women by appointment. Hot showers and a full change of clothes with shoes are a dimension of our baptismal covenant and an extension of our practice of Jesus' blessed sacrament, footwashing. (Jesus did not baptize.)

Nelia directs our Art Institute With the Homeless, while Calvin blesses our lives with photography and music. Eduard—the-Agitator takes to the streets walkingtalking our political arm into action: the Martin Luther King Campaign for Economic Justice. Ira Terrell and Joan Dewitt, our nurse, are always “on call.” Chuck Harris comes and goes. Here or there, he is our comforter and discerner. He is the even keel of our little boat in a vast sea of love and hate.

David Christian embodies helpfulness and encouragement. Tony Rust is our chef. Johnny Devlin, our youngest member as of this writing, loves the poor and hungers for justice. He works at Dayspring Farm and hits the streets for justice. Tom Monahan keeps an eye on the wiring and does a million helpful works of mercy as well as “doing the door.” Barbara Schenk is our prayer warrior, with a special call to seek healing for those with cancer. Winston Robarts has redefined dishwashing and will not allow foolishness in the kitchen. “Hobo,” a.k.a. Heather Barger, repairs the breaches in the wall caused by Eduard's bumbling. Jesus laughs. Jesus weeps.

Ralph Dukes runs errands and fusses about the way the Resident Volunteers do their work. Dick and Gladys Rustay are solid rocks—strong, loving, ready, and present whenever needed. Without



Dick and Gladys, the Open Door never would have made it through the 1990s.

Murphy Davis is the editor of *Hospitality*, our monthly newspaper. She leads us in our prison work and anti-death penalty visitation and protest. She is a gentle shepherd in our daily lives. Murphy is now writing her magnum opus about her journey with cancer and her life of solidarity with the poor and death row prisoners.

We have a wonderful staff person, “Wheels,” a.k.a. Anne Wheeler, who keeps the central office in an ordered mess. Wheels’ hospitality and discipleship make this work space a warm and welcoming gathering point.

Please come for a visit with us. Come; listen for yourself to the cry of the poor. Come; watch the miracles of Jesus as cracks appear in the granite walls of the White Male Supremacist Domination System of the American Empire. Someday that baby’s gonna fall down hard just like Rome did. John the Baptist invites us to practice this truth: “It won’t be long now!”

What Ya Gonna Do?

But what about the breakfast eaters? Where did they go? They are now transformed by the powers backwards from “Christ in a stranger’s guise” to the enemy, scum to the business community, the ones to be mocked and beaten, or even murdered for sport by youth gangs. They are abused by labor pools and “pick-up” daily contractors.

Some of our guests wait until our yard is closed. They have nowhere else to go. They are afraid of the streets. When they leave, often they go to the nearby library and stay there until the security guard pushes them back onto the streets of fear and mercilessness.

Others go to work—part-time jobs or labor pools. More than 40 percent of those who eat at our home have some limited employment. They do not earn enough for room and board, much less to hope for a family life or the security of medical insurance. Yet, through the mystery and glory of the human spirit, those whose backs are against the wall maintain, survive, have faith, even hope. They continue. They

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depart. They return. Most have love and kindness in their eyes and in the works of their hands. The street community often incarnates the majesty of our humanity.

Some slide toward a crackhouse or drug corner. Enough is enough: “‘There must be some way outta here,’ said the joker to the thief.” (Bob Dylan) They are like first-class fliers on Delta, heading for a big development deal in New York City, who have to have a couple of Bloody Marys along the way. Some of our homeless friends also have a life filled with the filth of fate and need a little ease in Zion.

Women, girls really, in the broken, bruised, abused bodies of our mothers’ daughters, hit the streets from our bathroom after adjusting their makeup from the night before. “Sex tricks” is the current euphemism.

Once upon a time, a street prostitute lived with us for a few months. Her self-esteem was rooted in an oft-told tale: “I never went down on my back for no man.” These sisters of ours, several very active and beloved in our household, walk down Ponce de Leon Avenue waiting like a small rabbit for a red-tailed hawk to swoop down and devour it. They wait for bored men on their way to jobs they hate, tired from the wife and kids and the blaring TV with the same old bad news and the hot lies of what the newest medicine can do for you. They pull over as rush-hour drivers, already late, mad and mean, blare horns, shoot the finger and sit still for six seconds while my sister jumps into the front seat and puts her hand. . . . Five minutes later, if she is lucky, she gets \$20. (Are you aware that prostitution is not against the Law of Moses?)

*Agitator: So I ask you, dear reader,
What ya gonna do?
What ya gonna do?
Where ya gonna run to?
When the winds blow down hard and cruel,
When the floods rush and the rich laugh,
When the fire burns ferociously
At you
Like Katrina in the Lower Ninth Ward,*

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*Like the lives of the poor,
Like the deaths of the disinherited
With their backs up against the wall?*

*What ya gonna do?
What ya gonna do?
Where ya gonna run to?*

13

Love in Action: What Can We Do?

We as a people are cursed. We the people: African-Americans, women of all races, American Indians, Latinos, Asian-Americans, children, the poor, gays and lesbians, and white men are cursed until the far-reaching institutionalization of White Male Supremacy is torn to pieces and burned at the altar like Elijah burned Ahab's bulls (1 Kings 18:1–40). Otherwise the military budget will continue to climb at the expense of every human being on earth. Otherwise the rich will get richer, their tax cuts will cut deeper, and more children will die of starvation. Otherwise “for profit” medical care will continue its lie-based killing. But one day, we believe and trust, “it will be otherwise” (Jane Kenyon). A slow train is a-comin’. Are you on board?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has it right: We must educate and coerce a “revolution of values.” “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom,” he said. The time has come. Let’s have a massive Poor People’s Campaign first thing tomorrow morning!

As Dorothy Day says, “Love in action is harsh and dreadful when compared to love in dreams.” We must end our acceptance of what she called “this filthy rotten system.” (A sign: human beings living under bridges. Or another: white male privilege in Henry Louis Gates’ home.) Until we open the door to the disinherited in pursuit of justice, joy and the abundant life in solidarity, we are doomed. The poor and the prisoner, those on death row, and those who sleep on the ground or in shelters—these holy ones have our future in their hands (Matthew



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25:31–46). We all “gotta serve somebody” (Bob Dylan). What ya’ gonna do?

The good news is this: Many of us have been given an extraordinary gift. We hunger and thirst out of love for justice for others. The Beloved Community of God is ours! Already/not yet. We want it for all! We are a minority, a Radical Remnant. We are marginalized to be sure. We know in flesh and spirit what it means to have our backs against the wall. And we have the gift of love. “And love is the only solution.” (Dorothy Day)

Some of us got the gift from parents or grandparents. Some from the streets. I have a number of friends who have received the gift of abundant life on death row. Some were made new in Iraq and Afghanistan. They walked off the job and would kill no more. Others were in bed with their neighbor’s spouse, and suddenly the light broke forth under the sheets. Some found the Word in an abandoned building, others under a bridge. Some in high school or in a college classroom with a powerful text and a mystical mentor. Some of us have received the gift, been given the power, through the free grace of Yahweh-Elohim in Jesus Christ, wrought in the blood of God on the Empire’s cross at the scheming of the Religious Right.

This is the gift of life: the gift of hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice. We are companions on a journey, a life of reducing the distance and moving into solidarity with the disinherited who live East of Eden. Yea, all of us live East of Eden (John Steinbeck). Here the dove and the hawk are in a battle to the end. Which side are you on? Oh, which side are you on?

And what can we do to put love into action?

Here’s what we can do.

Join, or build your own, Welcome Table with Table Talk.

Among life’s most important questions of love and liberation are: With whom do you eat? Where do you eat? What do you eat? Why do you eat? Where did your food come from? The beginning of the road to maturity and a just society is eating at a Welcome Table. Here rich and



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poor, prisoner and free, people of color, women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered and white men share food and Table Talk. Establishing equality and justice is the vision of the Beloved Community. This way of eating and sharing is the concrete, visible experience of the abundant life. The Welcome Table is the beginning and the end of the “revolution of values.” In between is a mighty battle with the powers and principalities of the Domination System. The powers have already killed Jesus, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rachel Corrie and Tom Fox. Be very, very careful and courageous.

Most people do not want a Welcome Table. Or we are afraid to take a seat there. Or we do not know where to find such a table. The White Male Supremacist system does not want us to find our Welcome Table. The Koinonia Community in South Georgia was machine-gunned and dynamited in the 1950s for its Black-and-white together Welcome Table and Table Talk.

If we join together, share meals and talk about undoing White Male Supremacy, a door to justice will open in our land. I believe that today in the United States of America, living in relationship to the Welcome Table is the most loving, abundant and radical way to live. When 51 percent of us are living abundantly at table, the military budget will fall by 51 percent. Just listen to this prophet-poet:

The Holy One says,
Oh come to the water,
 all you who are thirsty;
Even though you have no money, come!
Come! Buy bread and eat!
Come on! Buy grits and coffee—
 it won't cost you anything!
Why do you spend your money
 on what does not satisfy?
I wanted a drink to satisfy me.
But one is too many. A thousand is not enough!
Why do you spend your wages
 and still you are hungry?

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Shopping didn't work either.
We bought lots of nice things,
but still we felt empty.
Listen carefully to me, says the Holy One,
and you will have really good things to eat
and the best food you ever tasted!
Pay attention, come to me, says our God;
Listen, and you will have abundant life!

(Isaiah 55:1–3, adapted by Murphy Davis)

Speak up and speak out. Shout as loud as you can at every form of domination and oppression you see, touch, smell, taste or hear. Engage!

Agitator: Once upon a time, in the hard summer of 1964, I sat at the breakfast table in a small South Carolina town. White Male Supremacy was so thick that Black blood seeped, vermilion, into the sandy soil of the South Carolina Low Country. The Dixiecrats inclined their ears to hear Emmett Till-like murmuring or whistling in the twist of honeysuckle and the climb of wisteria vines. I sat at this UnWelcome Table with my former wife, my in-laws, my aunt and uncle, and my mother and father: South Carolinians all. The frail Black woman domestic was padding in from the kitchen with another pan of biscuits that proverbially "melted in our mouths." My uncle, talking of the events that summer in Mississippi, used the epithet "ni--er." I yelled "NO!" at the top of my hearty voice. Mamie dropped the biscuits and ran back to the kitchen. My uncle started to hit me in the face and then held back. Breakfast was over.

Yes, so much was over for me at that breakfast. A shattering of our beloved table had occurred. My aunt and uncle left immediately without speaking to me. My parents were shamed. I had taken a decisive step toward reducing the distance; I pray that I will take another step today.

Years later, 40 to tell the truth, after much weeping, self-condemnation and guilt for not entering the Freedom Summer of 1964 with the courageous ones my age, I met Hollis Watkins, who had hung from a wall in Parchman Prison in 1964. I reached out and held his hand for a few moments. We

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shared eye flashes. I could feel a healing in the old, old wound. After small talk, I turned larger than I had ever been.

We have learned through suffering and death. Many of us white folks of good will now know through our loss of soul that:

Silence = Betrayal
Silence = Violence
Silence = Death

Domination works in the midst of our manners and fears. We are afraid of conflict and confrontation.

We are afraid of rejection and job loss if we speak the truth in love to power and peers. We are taught not to raise our voices, not to contradict our hosts or those in authority. And in our silence and politeness, children die. We die. Violence is accepted. We go to war based on lies, whether it is Lyndon Baines Johnson's Tonkin Gulf Resolution or George W. Bush's Weapons of Mass Destruction or Barack Obama's "surge" in Afghanistan. We are polite, respectable and complicit in the blood and anguish of the victims of our manners. No nail driven by the hammers of the powers of oppression and domination has pierced the incarnation of God's Word like manners and respectability, those demons who nest and infest our lives by bringing comfort.

Novelist Jack London writes: "It is so much easier to live placidly and complacently. Of course, to live placidly and complacently is not to live at all." So shout and have friends from your Welcome Table ready to help you bear the consequences that will dart out like fangs from places high and low, from family, friends and enemies.



Yes, shout, yell, scream when necessary at domination and White Male Supremacy. Shout at the UnWelcome Table on your campus. Yell at the next Central Atlanta Progress meeting when they tell their truth which is a lie. Moan in bookstores. Quote a dirge on the bus or subway for all to hear. Above all: DO NOT BE SILENT. SPEAK UP. ENGAGE OPPRESSION WITH YOUR VOICE AND WITH YOUR BODY. Take a seat at the Welcome Table.

**Those of us who care, those of us who give a damn,
those of us who are alive with compassion and a hunger
and thirst for justice: Stop business as usual.**

We can make a fundamental change against all injustice. We have the power and the love (do we not?) to root out the means of war against the poor, the nations and people of color. We cannot root out the causes of conflict. Conflict is a necessary consequence of the search for truth and freedom. Though ultimately lodged like a beehive in the human heart, a primary location of the rotten root is our capitalistic system and our business methods.

“The time is fulfilled, the Beloved Community is at hand” now (Mark 1:15a). President Obama has opened a door. Will we walk through it? Will he keep the door open? We have the latent power right now to bring about a revolution of values. Do we have the will? The courage? The vision? The supporters and the leaders who will follow the people? For people of faith it is a matter, in the words of Phil Berigan, of “putting our asses where our doctrines are.”

For all progressives, radicals and human hoppers, it is a matter of putting our BODIES where the revolution of values is calling us to be. We may not have the money. We may not have the votes. We do not have the guns and bullets, and would not use them anyway. But we do have our bodies, the political tool of the poor and disinherited. We do have our minds and our hearts. We do have our love and hunger to make it right for all people.

When we go to the streets together and put our bodies in the way of the traffic that crawls along killing the poor and frightening every-

one in its path, then we will be reigniting and reviving King's Poor People's Campaign. Remember? He was killed in Memphis on the way to Washington to put bodies in the street and shut down the government. We can go to the streets today. And our grandchildren will have a future of grace and justice. I work and walk for you: Mia, John Thomas and Jack Eduard.

Go to jail.

Love in action expresses itself in civil disobedience, or divine obedience as radical poet-priest Dan Berrigan names it. Love in action calls us to break unjust laws that oppress and put the lives of the disinherited in harm's way.

We are strengthened in soul and mind when we are arrested, go to jail, face the judge and do time. (See Don Beisswenger's book "Locked Up.") Spending time in jail is the most important pedagogical resource available in the United States of America for the class of "haves" (i.e., most of us) to receive an insight into politics, business schemes, domination, the war machine and, to the point, White Male Supremacy.

Civil disobedience and going to jail can inspire us to know our police departments, their spiritual dimensions and their work in the dark. If the progressives in Atlanta were regularly campaigning for poor people and facing the police, would the Atlanta police in 2006 have been able to kill a 92-year-old Black widow and plant drugs in her basement? I doubt it.

In jail we get to know jailers and, most importantly, the disinherited who spend large parts of their lives behind bars, guilty of being poor in a consumer economy. We can listen to criminals and gang members who teach us of the American Way of Life outside our usual haunts. As on the streets, so too in the jails lies a veracity and access to truth not found in the homeland-secured USA, which is constantly spending billions on cover-ups and fake advertisements.

In jails there is a liberation pedagogy that opens up the gospel in ways not available elsewhere in America. The New Testament was writ-

ten under persecution, in prison, in exile or on the margins. Without opposition to the Word in the flesh, the truth of the gospel cannot fully reach heart or mind.

From prison moving toward execution by the white supremacist Nazis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer teaches us the naked truth of “the cost of discipleship.” Martin Luther King Jr. does the same years later. On April 16, 1963, moving toward the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, King sat languishing in solitary confinement in an Alabama jailhouse. There he penned a sacred text that is now part of the American canon: “Letter From the Birmingham Jail.” Writes King as he calls all people of good will to act for love and justice:

I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

Unless we go to the streets and to jail, there will be no revolution of values, no Poor People’s Campaign, no justice, no single-payer medical care, no end to the death penalty, no end to the White Male Supremacist system. We are living and dying in the midst of a historical disaster and an ecological catastrophe. In the midst of madness and killing, there can be no justice and peace without our going to jail and going often.

We are called by the inner voice of our humanness to be one people in love and harmony. Sings poet Robert Frost:

My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes

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Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes.

—“Two Tramps in Mud Time”

“The time is at hand!” shouted John the Baptist before he lost his head. Let us hope to keep our heads, but step out in this most crucial time for “mortal stakes.” Let us go and put love into action. “Where there is no love, put love.” (St. John of the Cross) Where there is no action, put action. Sit at a Welcome Table with Table Talk. Speak up and speak out. Engage the powers and principalities. Stop business as usual. Go to jail. See ya at the front of the bus.

14

We Must Choose Our Teachers Well

We must choose our teachers, lovers, preachers, friends, rabbis, poets, imams, novelists, musicians and filmmakers carefully. If those from whom we are learning have not been to jail in solidarity with the disinherited, BEWARE. They may well be nice people and their products may have impressive footnotes in very small print, but if they have not been to jail in solidarity with the poor, or suffered some other form of costly social retribution for reducing the distance, they will betray us unknowingly, for they do not know the truth that will set us free.

It is precisely these good and well-intentioned folk who have traded love in action for respectability and comfort, unaware of what they are doing. Among these good liberals and conservatives the blockage is not what the Bible calls hardness of heart; their wound is what Jesus called blindness. (See “Binding the Strong Man” by Ched Myers, 20th-Anniversary Edition on Blind Bartimaeus.)

For those who are hungry for alternative learning, six weeks at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker in its summer program with Catherine Morris and Jeff Dietrich, seasoned jailbirds both who have learned the gospel behind bars, will give you insights and practices not available at the top or bottom schools in the usa. Jürgen Moltmann, one of the greatest and most helpful theologians to our movement, was a Nazi soldier in an Allied prison camp when he met the Crucified Messiah of Hope. His work will help you get to jail with both Jesus and Judas.

In Atlanta? Worship at First Iconium Baptist Church. Rev. Timothy McDonald, Black as coal, often jailed, will give you a message that





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will help you jump up and shout loud for the Beloved Community of God. Visit the Open Door Community, or become a Resident Volunteer here, where several of the members practice civil disobedience. These convicted criminals know the inside of both the Atlanta City Jail and the D.C. holding cells for protesters.

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for the sake of solidarity with the condemned, refused to escape from a Nazi prison when the opportunity for fleshly freedom opened the door. No “Free Dietrich” movement here.

Martin Luther King Jr. was removed from the scene for following the faith of Jesus and doing the Word as one of the greatest preachers in American history. His love in actions led him to jail. His faith led him to dream of the Welcome Table for all: “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons [and daughters] of former slaves and the [daughters and] sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of [sister- and] brotherhood.”



Dorothy Day, another of the most helpful disciples of Jesus Christ in American history, learned of jail as a Communist marching for women’s suffrage and experienced jail again as an alleged Wobblie (iww) prostitute, falsely charged. Over and over again, as a Christian who was led by the Christ of the poor to say “no” to this “filthy rotten system,” she was caged in filthy rotten jails.

Elaine Enns and Ched Myers of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries live the alternative gospel. They teach, write and practice the radical faith day by day. A session with Ched and Elaine at the Bartimaeus Institute will pole-vault you over the top of the wall and down into the streets of anguish and joy.

Georgia state Sen. Vincent Fort and former Atlanta City Councilperson Derrick Boazman, Christian leftists both, lead us in Atlanta and pay the price of arrest, courtroom drama and jail. Joe Beasley of Concerned Black Clergy is another Atlanta leader for peace and justice under the banner of the Beloved Community of God. Find such African-American leaders in your community and learn from them. If there are none in your community, move.

Again a warning: Increasingly there are African-Americans who make money and build power off their Black heritage. They join the

Republican Party and preach the gospel of prosperity. Have they been to jail? Do they live among the poor? Have they sold their birthrights for a mess of putrid pottage?

Heroes, Mentors and Criminals

Notably, one of the awesome mentors of our movement is Murphy Davis. In 1995, her journey turned a crooked corner into Cancer Alley. At times the road signs warned of an approaching “Dead End.” Erroneously thus far, God be praised. Yet, for us all, dear reader, “One day, [we] know, it will be otherwise.” (Jane Kenyon) Since 1995 Murphy has not been to jail but once, due to her daily walk with cancer care. Before that fateful year, she committed a number of gospel-inspired crimes, such as sleeping on a park bench, for which she was incarcerated. Today, at 62, without stoop or visible scars (when dressed) from her many surgeries, she remains a beautiful and magnificent woman. Murphy is my sweetheart.

Ms. Davis is now writing a seminal manuscript on illness and solidarity with the homeless and death row prisoners. Her book will bring healing to many, insights into the politics of cancer, and hopefully an end to the death penalty in the usa and China.

Don Beisswenger was in federal prison for freedom shortly after retiring from Vanderbilt Divinity School. He is a primary mentor of the Open Door Community. So is Pete Gathje of Emmaus House in Memphis, activist scholar, professor of theology and friend of the prisoner and the homeless in Memphis and Atlanta. Recently Pete was handcuffed and whisked away to jail for asking two policemen why they were beating a mentally ill man to the ground in the front yard of the Open Door.

Mike Vosburg-Casey has been a prisoner for Jesus and for his action against the School of the Americas at Fort Benning. Eric Debode, one of the founders of the Oak View Catholic Worker Community in California, knows jail for the homeless, for peace and against the abuses of the Los Angeles Police Department, notorious for its violence and corruption. And then there are Martha Scarborough of the

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Los Angeles Catholic Worker, Liz McAlister of Jonah House, Dan Berrigan, Frank Cordaro of Phil Berrigan House and Jerry Zawada of Plowshares.

These are a few of us. There are over 1,912 of us.

We invite you to visit houses of hospitality and communities of resistance, read newspapers and books from these communities, and attend conferences and lectures. Most important: Join actions of resistance and for justice for the victims of White Male Supremacy. Go to jail for peace and justice, for the love of God. Begin your journey by “visiting the prisoner”; go to jail and visit her.

Jails and prisons are a core location for the presence of God in the United States of America. Here one meets Jesus and can find life anew in word and deed, or to say it as Dorothy Day does, “love in action.” There is no salvation, no seeing and hearing the gospel, apart from solidarity on the margins, solidarity with those with their backs against the wall. (See Jon Sobrino’s “No Salvation Outside the Poor.”) Here we are born again, transformed with each encounter. Here we participate in tearing down the prison system as we know it today. If 5 percent of the prisoners in every county jail and state prison were prisoners for actions for peace and justice, the system could not stand.

We have lost our faith. The power we have for good, righteousness, a revolution of values, for an economy of sharing and justice, is simply unbelievable. Herein lies the rub. We have the people. We have the power. But the powers and Empire have a tight lid on the dynamite of peace. We pit Ella Baker against Martin Luther King Jr. instead of following either of them to the streets. Our going to the streets and jail for the sake of justice and love, for the victims of White Male Supremacy, is the only way this nation will achieve freedom and justice.

Justice and the overthrow of White Male Supremacy is a matter of faith. Tragically, we do not believe in our capacity to achieve equality, freedom and justice in the social order. We do not believe we can shut this Domination System down as the people of East Germany busted the Berlin Wall to smithereens.

Therefore . . .

WE MUST CHOOSE OUR TEACHERS WELL

Go to the streets. Go to jail. Go to public hospitals. Go to poor people's nursing homes and day centers for the mentally ill. Go to labor pools. Then go to church, synagogue or mosque. Then go to high school, college or nursing school. Then go to Radical Remnant communities and act, learn and be transformed as you are transforming.

But beware: The function of education in the usa is to separate the streets and the academy. The function of religion in America is to separate the poor and the rich, to separate the truth about capitalism and Coca-Cola from the hardball play of the gospel. We must find a way out of mainline religion and education or this nation will continue its ravenous hunger and obesity until we have eaten ourselves up and vomited ourselves out. President Obama notwithstanding. There is little truth and only softball hope apart from the streets of the disinherited, those who live with their backs against the wall.

While in and out of jail and prison, let us stand up to White Male Supremacy's macho male-ism. Be one with gays, lesbians, bisexuals, the transgendered and tender loving men of all sizes and shapes. Wear buttons and T-shirts supporting homosexuals. Hold hands in public with same-gender friends. Kiss your relatives. "Civil marriage is a civil right." Exodus: Come out of homophobic churches and synagogues. Beware of those who politely bash Queers ("Oh, I love homosexuals, just not their homosexuality"). And run from churches that refuse to ordain women and homosexuals.

Remember this: "The only solution is love, and love comes with community." (Dorothy Day) Each of us and all of us, to be fully human and free in the belly of the domination beast, must find community with others whose lives are shaped by radical Words, incendiary and militant, for peace and justice for all people. We cannot live alone. We must hold hands and circle up to the Welcome Table.

The goodnews is that there already exists a community for you. There are Catholic Worker houses all over the United States and in several cities of Europe and Africa. There are many discipleship communities, residential or gathered, Bible study groups that express their studies and prayer in radical action for the poor and for peace. Find yours. Build love, courage, passion, anger and commitment.



THE CRY OF THE POOR

If you give a damn, if you hope for others and the earth, if you love and care, you will suffer under the reign of the American Empire. You will be persecuted; it is a given of the gospel, it is the nature of love and truth. In the midst of, not apart from, shared suffering and persecution we will know the peace of God, the power of joy and the kinship of solidarity.

Phil Berrigan again: “The poor tell us who we are. The prophets tell us who we could be. So we hide the poor and kill the prophets.” Let us go to the streets. Let us go into the valley toward the mountaintop. Let White Male Supremacy be gone with the wind as we listen to and act on the cry of the poor.

t he end

Afterword

Eduard, the Agitator, Loring continues to raise the level of consciousness and awareness among the readership of *Hospitality*, those who listen to him speak and those who read his books. Born to become a rabble-rouser, Ed tells it like it is in his latest treatise, “The Cry of the Poor: Cracking White Male Supremacy.” Filled with historical facts, dates and references, it will take you on a journey toward universal love and solidarity.

There are three types of people in the world. The first group is those who don't know the truth, know that they don't know the truth, but want to know the truth. They are asleep—awaken them!

The second group is those who don't know the truth, know that they don't know the truth, yet profess to know the truth. They are fools—shun them!

The third group knows the truth, knows that they know the truth, and selflessly shares the truth in order to arouse and enlighten others—embrace them!

Ed knows the truth about the white man's attitude of pseudo-superiority and has shared that truth with us. He especially wants us to be mindful that we are all connected. Whether we are rich or poor, old or young, disabled or healthy—whether we are black, white, yellow, red or brown—we are all God's children.

Let me tell you about some people who neglected God's Law of Kinship. They neglected to “reduce the distance.”

Six humans trapped in happenstance,
In black and bitter cold,

THE CRY OF THE POOR

Each one possessed a stick of wood,
So the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs,
The first woman held hers back.
For of the faces across the fire,
She noticed one was black.

The next man looking across the way
Saw one not of his church.
He couldn't bring himself to give
The fire his stick of birch.

The third man sat in tattered clothes
And gave his coat a hitch.
Why should his log be put to use
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought
Of the wealth he had in store
And how to keep what he had earned
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The last man of this forlorn group
Did naught except for gain.
Giving only to those who gave
Was how he played the game.

The logs held tight in death's still hands
Were proof of human sin.
They didn't die from the cold without.
They died from the cold within.

—Anonymous

AFTERWORD

As young people, we are taught that one reaps what one sows. Death and destruction are what the people spoken of in this poem reaped. Love is what they lacked.

Just like in society, “the least of us” in prison must strive to crack the wall between the pseudo-superior white male correctional officers and ourselves. Whether it be overt or de facto, oppression and subjugation are walk-mates of the nearly 100,000 people in Georgia prisons and jails and the approximately 2½ million incarcerated throughout the United States.

Georgia prisoners must have name tags on all state-issued clothing. The name tag bears the prisoner’s last name, first name, middle initial, Georgia Department of Corrections number, and the date the clothing was issued. In addition, all prisoners have ID cards that are attached to our shirts or jackets with alligator clips.

Standard Operation Procedures are the administrative laws that govern the Department of Corrections’ operations, its employees’ conduct, and prisoner management. SOP II A07-0002 states, “Personal integrity is required of all employees when addressing [prisoners]. [Prisoners] are to be addressed by their last names to preserve their individual identity and ensure their personal integrity.” Yet systematically, when a pseudo-superior white male correctional officer wants to demean or belittle a prisoner, that officer, in a taunting tone, calls the prisoner “inmate.” Thus the wall thickens and becomes harder to crack.

The Open Door Community practices works of hospitality and publishes a monthly newspaper called *Hospitality*. Works of hospitality began thousands of years ago. In the early Christian era, being a Christian posed a threat to the status quo. Thus, professed Christians were in grave danger of being crucified or stoned to death.

Early Christians traveled great distances spreading the gospel. Often these men and women of God would stop at pre-determined houses for safety, food and shelter, much like the slaves did on the Underground Railroad. Ed tells us that the Open Door Community consists of “the mentally ill, prostitutes, crack addicts, ex-prisoners, alcoholics, gays, lesbians, sisters and brothers dying of AIDS who have not the resources to grasp what health care there is available,” among

THE CRY OF THE POOR

others. The community's door is always open to all (including "cracked" pseudo-superior white males) to meet us at the margin.

In order that we may live together in harmony, justice and equality, Ed admonishes us, on several occasions, to "reduce the distance" between pseudo-superior white males and ourselves. How do we reduce the distance that Ed writes about and talked about in his lecture at Stetson University? The only solution is love.

God created all humans equal with certain inalienable rights. Among those rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, yet injustice and classism permeate all segments of our society. Ed teaches us that we must begin to voice our need for change, insist on change, fight for change! Oppression and subjugation are the devil's work. If we continue to allow pseudo-superior white males to treat us, the poor and disadvantaged, as second-class citizens, lynchings and other forms of genocide against "the least of us" will again raise their ugly, ungodly heads. In the wisdom of James Baldwin, expressed in the foreword of Angela Davis' "If They Come in the Morning": "If they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night."



—Melvin E. Jones, #401754
Wheeler Correctional Facility
Alamo, Georgia

Thank you for reading this book!

If you are seeking ways to incline your ear toward the cry of the poor . . .

Come and visit us for a day, a week, or a month.

Join us as a Resident Volunteer.

Lend us a hand as we serve our friends from the streets and in prison. We need men's clothes, shoes, food, money, prayer, blankets and daily volunteers.

Let us hear from you. We can be reached at:

The Open Door Community
910 Ponce de Leon Avenue N.E.
Atlanta, GA 30306-4212
(404) 874-9652
www.opendoorcommunity.org



Other publications from the Open Door Community

The Festival of Shelters: A Celebration for Love and Justice, by Eduard Loring with Heather Bargeron (2008)

Sharing the Bread of Life: Hospitality and Resistance at the Open Door Community, by Peter R. Gathje (2006)

A Work of Hospitality: The Open Door Reader 1982–2002, edited by Peter Gathje (2002)

I Hear Hope Banging at My Back Door: Writings from Hospitality, by Eduard Loring (2000)

Christ Comes in the Stranger's Guise: A History of the Open Door Community, by Peter R. Gathje (1991)

Frances Pauley: Stories of Struggle and Triumph, edited by Murphy Davis (1990)

All these titles can be ordered from the Open Door or downloaded from our website, www.opendoorcommunity.org.

