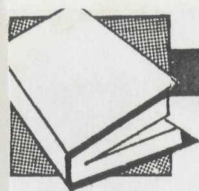




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Books



BOOK REVIEW

# RECOVERING FROM RACISM

by Carla Flanagan

No one of us made this a racist world, but all of us help to keep it that way. The July/August issue of *Peace and Freedom*, the magazine of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, is devoted to the theme of Undoing Racism. Not merely recognizing racism, itself a difficult task, is enough. We have to pledge ourselves to curing the disease of skin privilege. As WILPF recommends, we have to organize against racism. Those of us who are white need to identify the daily effects of white privilege. Whenever we ignore our racism and relax into segregated complacency, we perpetuate the oppression.

Those of us who are Lesbians experience a similar oppression, except that most of us can "pass" more easily among heterosexual women than Blacks can pass among Whites. When we are tempted to deny ourselves for safety or convenience or economic needs, we should reflect that this "passing" provides only temporary refuge. Perpetuating the illusion that Lesbians do not exist, that we are not in the board room or on the jury panel or on the team would leave society impoverished by the lack of our particular power.

Seeing ourselves in terms of our privileges is not enough. We must also see the world disentangled from its systems of dominance, and visualizing can guide our actions.

Being white is an advantage that allows me to benefit from a system where unfairness dominates. Most of the time my ignorance of cultural diversity goes unnoticed, because I am ignorant of my ignorance. This is true in respect to African American culture, Native American, Asian, Spanish American, Malaysian, or whatever, and I emphasize this now because I simply do not consider it often enough. I must remember the necessity for diversity and call for books that reflect it. Other readers, please help, and demand attention for books that present a variety of viewpoints. This month I'll recommend a number of Black women writers.

Audre Lorde is a Black Lesbian poet, mother, and educator. Her words and ideas have been enriching our language for the last two decades. In *A Burst of Light* (Firebrand, 1988, \$7.95) she writes of racism: "unity does not require that we be identical to each other" and "we do not have to become each other in order to work together." The book contains essays about Lesbian parenting, her response to sadomasochism, her identity as a Black Lesbian, and a journal update of her personal battle with cancer. (An earlier book, *The Cancer Journals*, told of her experience with

mastectomy.) Audre Lorde's work has always backed up her words, and her words are clear and powerful. Her most recent collection of poems is *Our Dead Behind Us* (Norton, 1986, \$6.95). These are learning poems, rich with self-knowledge, and powerful language:

*...I remember a promise  
I made my pen  
never to leave it  
lying  
in somebody else's blood.*

Speaking for herself, courageously specific, Audre Lorde lets her experience inform our own. My favorite of all these is "Outline," about her relationship with her life partner. Each time I read it over, there is new wonder. She ends the poem:

*...we have chosen each other  
and the edge of each other's battles  
the war is the same  
if we lose  
someday women's blood will con-  
geal  
upon a dead planet  
if we win  
there is no telling.*