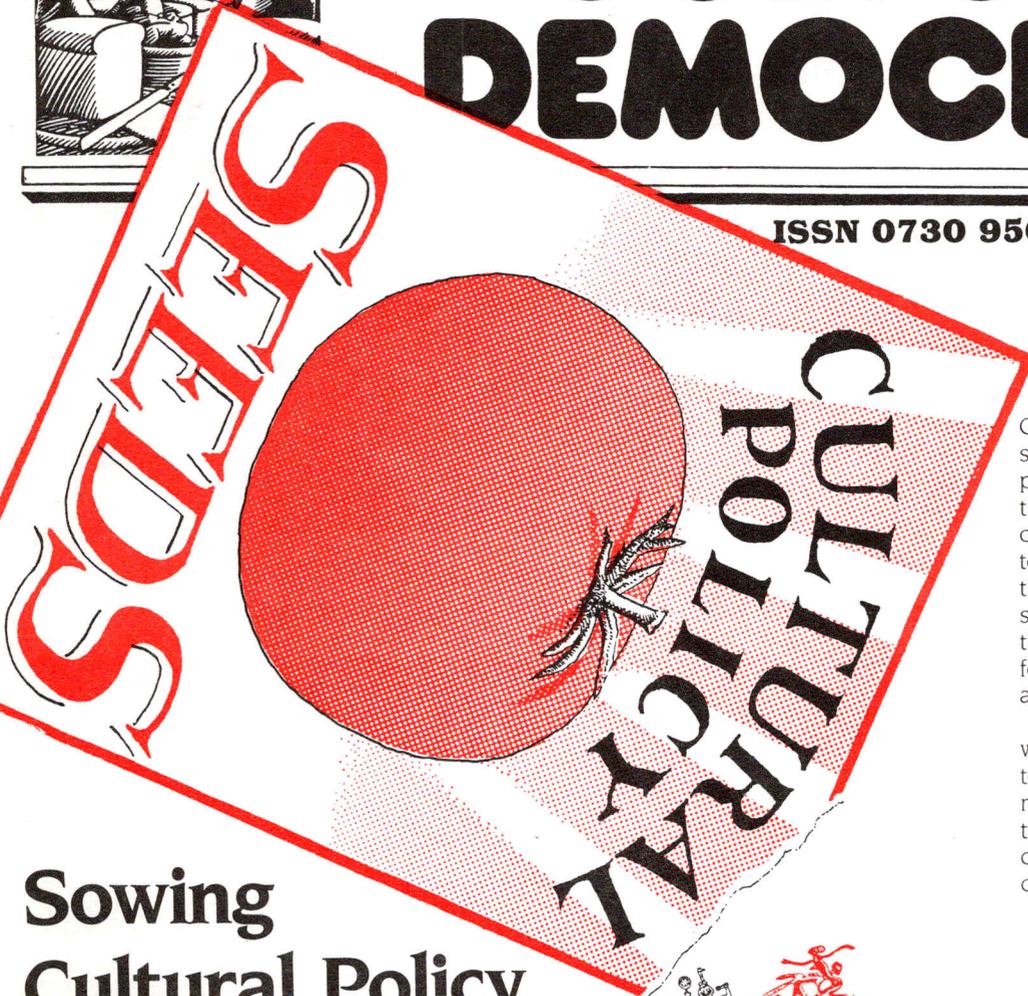




# CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

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Cultural Rights. ACD members recognize that sound policy will always begin with the stories people use to describe their reality. We share the recognition that no policy can ever be completed because having claimed the right to our own self-determination we understand that we must always be open to the unfolding stories of ourselves and others. We celebrate the multiplicity of cultures. We seek to create fertile conditions for self-definition, renewal and growth of communities and individuals.

Let us begin with the assumption that we will survive and that we will have the strength to make a culture which meets basic human needs and much more. Cultural Policy is a way to think about the kind of culture we want to create. Help plant the seeds of individual and community growth. Join us. Imagine. Action.

## Sowing Cultural Policy

When we gathered for **ImaginAction**, the 10th Anniversary Conference of the Alliance for Cultural Democracy, we began by each telling a story about our lives connected to an object we had brought from home.

Sula Rose Shepard held up a small wooden bead, like those beaded into her hair, and told this story:

This is a wooden bead. It came from a plant hanger of my grandmother's, who is dead now. I was going through her things just recently, and I took the plant hanger to remember my grandmother by. She could grow anything. She — and my mother too — had incredible gardens. My grandmother's tomatoes were works of art, red, juicy, full of life and the most wonderful flavor. When she gathered abundance from her garden and fixed us a meal, that too, was art. Anytime you fix a meal with love, for those you love — that's art. Now the immediate reason I choose this bead around which to tell my story is that I was reading Alice Walker's story about her mother's garden and that reminded me of my grandmother.

Another reason I chose this bead is that earlier this week, discovering I was coming to Boston to this ACD conference, a colleague

asked me what I was going to do here. I said, "I'm on a panel discussing cultural policy." He said, "What's cultural policy?" Thinking of this bead, I told that colleague, "When the grandmother of my grandmother's grandmother was brought to this country, she was told: 'Do not speak your language! Do not practice your religion! Do not wear your native dress! Do not braid your hair with beads!' Now that's Cultural Policy."

Sula's story reminds us that cultural policy is important because stated or implicit, it effects our personal and spiritual survival. All too often today's cultural policies seem to be designed to keep us from remembering who we are, how we came to be, and who we have the potential to become.

Members of the Alliance for Cultural Democracy are now engaged in writing a Bill of



Illustration by Bill Crook

# CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY means that culture is an essential human need and that each person and community has the right to a culture or cultures of their choice; that all communities should have equitable access to the material resources of the commonwealth for their cultural expression; that cultural values and policies should be decided in public debate with the guaranteed participation of all communities; that the government does not have the right to favor one culture over another.

THE ALLIANCE FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY supports community cultural participation. We believe in cultural pluralism, and understand the necessity to integrate the struggles for cultural, political, and economic democracy in the United States. The most important initiatives for cultural democracy take place on a grassroots level in communities, neighborhoods, and among activist artists and other progressive cultural workers.

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# ImaginAction

Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard

"Imagine Action." Awakening social imagination is the most important goal of cultural democracy and the force most vital to bringing it about.

Our friend Charles Frederick is fond of saying that cultural democracy is about a new imagination of the human subject in history. This is its essence: to grasp the idea is to imagine the real completion and fulfillment of democracy. Political and economic democracy are important, essential — but unless an understanding of human cultures animates these principles, they are lifeless and dry. Cultural democracy means taking culture seriously, not as an embellishment to the real forces which are thought to drive society, but as the arena in which we determine the meaning of our lives, our work, our relationships, our reasons for living and for risking our lives.

Cultural democracy embodies the goal of transforming consciousness and society so that we come to see cultures as part of our commonwealth, to be shared and protected. It proposes a rich, respectful conception of human possibility, not reducing people to mere voters and candidates, or consumers and producers — but seeing everyone as a creator of culture. It envisions a social structure that treats cultures even-handedly, making the project of creating social meanings one in which everyone may take part, distributing cultural resources evenly, and preventing the establishment of official cultures. It calls for decentralizing cultural production and policy-making, and transforming media from one-way streets to public thoroughfares in which information and resources can move in many directions.

All radical movements have the same task of encouraging a new form of social imagination. Forging this new imagination means two things: first, attaining a critical consciousness that sees the organization of our dominant culture for what it is — a structure and system of meanings which serve to ratify the status quo; and second, believing enough in human possibility to conceive of new cultures, new meanings and new structures which we can work to bring about.

The political movements which gained strength in the Sixties — civil rights, anti-draft organizing, Black Liberation, Gay Liberation, Women's Liberation — didn't use the label cultural democracy, but in large part that is what they were about. Black activists of the period realized absolutely that culture was an inseparable part of the struggle for freedom. The slogan "Black is beautiful" wasn't just a lucky shot. It signified that it was just as important to root out pernicious ideas about beauty and value as it was to change laws. The women's movement knew that to challenge the oppression of women it was necessary to transform language, using words which embodied a new social equality instead of old ideas about men's and women's proper place.

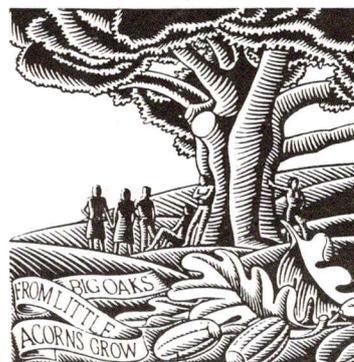


Illustration by Clifford Harper

Cultural democracy didn't spring from the ether, fully formed. It has been present in U.S. history all along: in Native American insistence on self-determination, despite many European's deluded certainty that native people were meant to be subjugated and destroyed; in the utopianism and Enlightenment ideals of some of our Constitution's authors; in the abolitionist movement led by former slaves and their supporters; and in the populist traditions of mutual help and radical democracy. When the America-firsters and the Ku Klux Klan gained power early in this century, and the idea of the melting pot took roots, progressive people like Horace Kallen of the New School for Social Research put forth competing theories of cultural democracy. W.E.B. DuBois, the great Pan-Africanist, scholar and civil rights leader, articulated a vision of cultural democracy that inspired generations.

Taking a long view of history, we can see that despite obstacles and discouraging setbacks, cultural democracy is a global trend. The novelist Carlos Fuentes has said, "As our terrible century comes to an end, we clearly perceive that everywhere ideologies die and cultures reappear as the true harbingers of a more complete and conscious way of life."

The number of independent nations on the planet has doubled in our century. People everywhere struggle for emancipation. Democracy is a powerful idea insurgent in every country in the world, insurgent even in those countries that claim democratic status for themselves. Reagan's regime provides a rather extreme example of hypocrisy in democratic clothing. Real democracy exists in our country, but at the moment it is practiced outside the halls of government.

In every society, it is the same: democracy is always in the process of becoming, and

(Continued on page 3)

# ImaginAction

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never completely accomplished, because its very nature is dialectical. Real democracy is about the free play of different imaginations, in dialogue and in action. It can only come about when the human tools of critical thinking and social imagination prevail. And they are gaining ground every day. It is a paradox, but even the viciousness of right-wing reaction to democratic struggles demonstrates their real strength.

The struggle for cultural democracy will take place at every point on the map of human existence. The question for those of us who live in the United States is this: How can we join and help to advance the movement for democracy? As cultural workers, how can we help to bring about a situation in which social imagination abounds and democratic action becomes possible?

As cultural workers, we must begin in our own location, with the mastery of the current cultural landscape: How is it constructed, by whom, and for what purposes? Where do we stand within it?

We need to know how the system got this way, to compare it with the way things have been done in other times and places, and consider the dozens of alternatives that have been put forward. We need to bring critical consciousness and social imagination to our own circumstances.

This can be very enlightening. It reveals how the act of social imagining has been devalued by the dominant culture, reduced to another form of specialization. It illuminates the insidiousness of racism, our most pressing and devastating cultural problem. It demonstrates the incredible success of the myth that the current configuration of cultural industries and agencies is right, natural, and inevitable; of the lie that it gives people what they want.

We must start by envisioning our own practice transformed. How would our work change? How would our projects and approaches change if awakening social imagination were the acknowledged goal? Are we practicing democracy within our own organizations?

Real democracy is easier to preach than to practice. Social organization in the United States is dominated by corporations and government agencies: hierarchical, segmented, and ultimately autocratic. In the absence of democratic models, it is easy for any organization to fall into these patterns. Small-scale organizations are the building blocks of cultural democracy; democracy must be practiced in our own backyards to be practicable on a global scale.

*Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard are consultants and writers from Ukiah, California, who have just finished work on a soon to be published book entitled Cultural Democracy.*

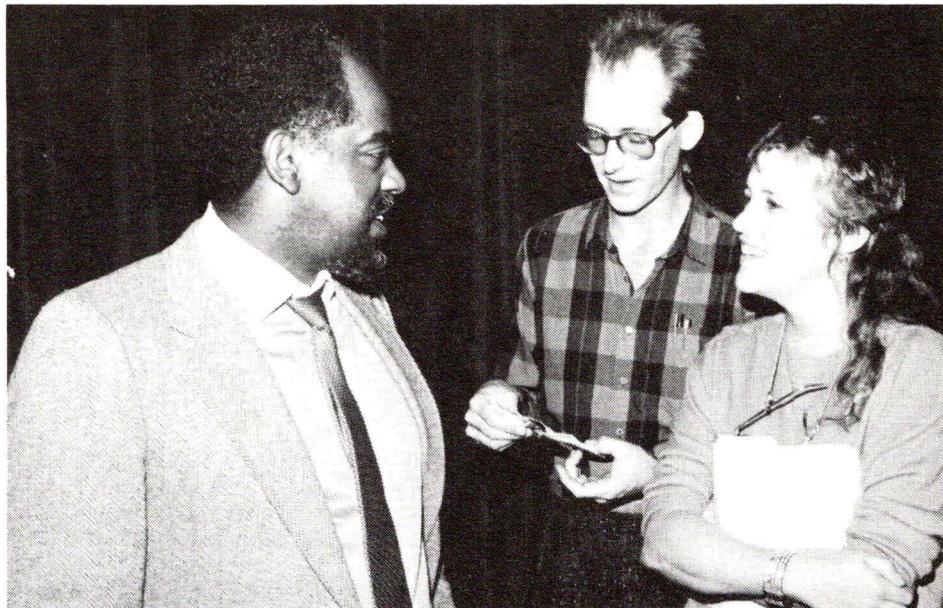


Photo by Sal Salerno

Barry Gaither, Don Adams, Arlene Goldbard

## Whose Culture Is It Anyhow?

Barry Gaither

"Whose culture is it anyhow?" Now if you pose that question, I think several things follow from it. One thing that follows from it is that human culture, insofar as that describes human creative activity, has to have a community. It doesn't exist without the fact of community. So community is the fundamental matrix from which culture arises, and community is the fundamental audience to whom culture addresses itself. There is a reciprocal relationship within a community where it both creates, sustains and takes back, re-works and gives again. That process is a self-validating process.

The cultural experience of a community, of a group of people, of a cultural system, depends on no outsider to confirm it. It validates itself because it grows out of and it responds to the real world of the people who are its constituency. An institutional structure, lacking such a dynamic involvement with its community, is an illegitimate structure and ill at ease where it is. So all of us involved in shaping institutions in the context of communities are necessarily involved in a dialogue with that community at large, not merely with the particular artists interested in the particular discipline of the particular kind of institution that we are shaping.

"Who says it's good?" This question also has its point of reference in the genesis of cultural expression. I would argue that every culture which has a vital creative process going on within it, also has an inner dynamic which generates a criticism appropriate to itself. And it is important to respect this quality because there is a certain tendency to think in what is often called "universal" terms about culture. But culture is in fact temporal, value-based and

specific. We are here at one point in time and we start out initially only in one place. We learn to see the world from an experience which is uniquely our own experience, formed in a socialization that is peculiar to a place.

Unless we can appreciate that the criticism of our cultural product has to grow out of the genesis of that product itself, we run the risk of de-valuing the cultural creation which we should in fact be honing and polishing to its finest expression. To say that the creative life is self-validating is not one and the same as to say that it is at its finest. It is one and the same as to say that it is the raw material from which the finest can be made. And the only voice we can ever find that will speak eloquently about our own experience is ultimately our own voice. The only criticism that can finally really be true for our experience is one that comes from that experience.

"Where is the center?" This one comes up because I find myself from time to time in arguments around this question of the mainstream. I'm not sympathetic to the notion that there is a mainstream. I think that everybody ought to take the position that any stream they're in is the main one because that's the only one in which they can drown. From that basis, a mainstream is not a meaningful concept because the intention of it is to set up categories of who is the real standard and who are the standardless. And if you accept the premise that a culture can generate its own criticism, it also can generate its own standard, and it is a priori its own mainstream. We must all do battle whenever the effort is made to slot us to some sub-place.

(Continued on page 4)

# Whose Culture

(Continued from page 3)

This also applies to the use of the term "community." As you know, very often, at least in this country, "community" is used as a code word to say that it's not good, that it's somehow different from "downtown." Community is set up as community over against downtown which is the same quality of misrepresentation as mainstream against some other kind of stream. Whatever is in fact downtown, is at best just another community, and at worst not better than the raw material of all of the communities in the aggregate. We have to think of ourselves in such a positive way, always.

"Why bother about it?" I think we are called upon each in an individual way to make our work a confirmation of humanity. We live in a world of people and issues. We live in a world of conflict. We live in a world where death is

never very far away. We live in a world of suffering. We have, without going far from our experience on any given day, the opportunity to encounter how broken the human spirit can be in the midst of wealth, or, in the opposite, how whole the human spirit sometimes is in the presence of poverty.

We are called upon to battle to remove conditions that make less possible human fulfillment. So we must battle poverty, but we must also strengthen the inner spirit because the inner spirit will continue to be a place, a reservoir from which imagination, will, and vision can come, unless the spirit itself is broken. So one of the things that the artist is called upon to do, is to confirm our humanity and help us to grasp the humane issues of our life and times and to do that through the exercise of creativity — to help us constantly find other ways to talk about what it is that weaves us together and that makes us believe that tomorrow can be better than today, and that today at least should have learned a lesson from

yesterday.

I think that those are the several little tidbits that I wanted to throw into this discussion. My final one is that I think we also have a lovely problem which is incapable of resolution, but which is very good for us and which is a nice point on which to close. As an artist you have some existential obligation to make use of your ability to be free from within. As a member of a community (and values are communal items), you have also an obligation to be in a dialogue. So we are posed always with the most interesting problem of how to at once exercise our existential freedom and belong in positive ways to the communities which make life meaningful. I leave that as a problem to which I suggest no solution, but with which I suggest we all will have a marvelous time of engagement.

Barry Gaither is the Director of the Museum of the Center for Afro-American Artists located in Roxbury, MA.

## Self-Image in Action

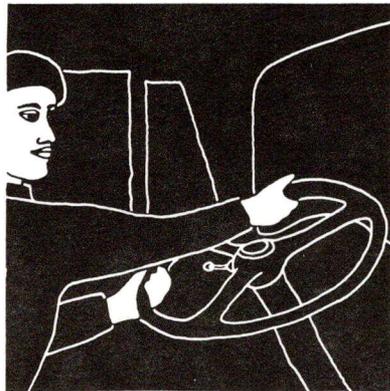


Illustration by Lincoln Cushing

Mel King

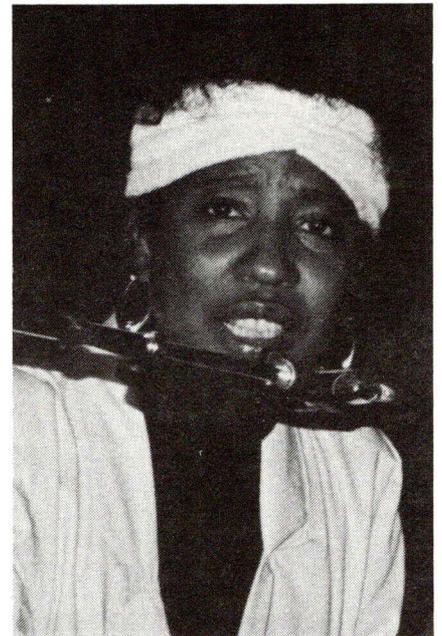
I do not believe that people who do not feel good about themselves and who do not love themselves can build any kind of multi-cultural or multi-racial community or group. When I can recognize potential in myself, I can see the possibilities in others. It is when I respect them. The relationships that we establish come about because we see that there is something of mutual benefit that we can achieve in the relationship. That only comes when we start with some belief in what we have to offer and contribute ourselves. When we are talking about cultural democracy and the role of culture in planning and developing, it has to start with self-definition. It is through that that we have a process of empowerment. Self-definition leads to self-determination which leads to liberation.

One person who is as responsible for our being in this room this morning as anyone is for me the model of self-definition, Rosa Parks. In Montgomery, Alabama, she said that she was somebody. That she counted. That she was deserving. She defined herself. When you define yourself in that way, that means that you have to act that way and insist that you be treated in that way. Her self-definition leads to self-determination and that is the process of liberation. My frame of reference is around one's self-image as the vehicle for the start of being in action.

Mel King is an author (Chain of Change), community activist, and recent Boston mayoral candidate.

## These are Not Hard Times: These are Critical Times

Jane Sapp



Jane Sapp

Photo by Sal Salerno

The role of the artist for me is to be the catalyst through which people come together. In church when a certain person would get up to lead a song, you would kind of think, "O.K. Look out. Get back. We're getting ready to have an experience that's going to put us together and is going to bind our spirits." People were able to feel a sense of commonality. People were able to feel that they were not isolated, but that there were other people around them who also shared the same kinds of problems and the same kinds of experiences.

Before coming to Highlander, I worked for nine years in the black-belt area of Alabama and Mississippi. I worked in a community college. While we thought that we were moving in such radical and innovative ways educationally, we found we were not reaching our students. The reason we were not reaching our students and that community was because we had not dealt with the culture of that community. We had made certain kinds of assumptions.

I thought, "I'm black, so therefore, I know this community," but I didn't know that community. I was playing music with my students,

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

and saying I would be using gospel music as a way of reaching these students and helping them understand all kinds of things. Everybody was looking at me as if to say, "I don't know what you're talking about." It occurred to me, "I'm on the wrong track here. I made a supposition that is not on target." What I decided to do was to figure out what was happening culturally in that community. The first thing I discovered musically, which was a very profound discovery, was that was an area in which gospel music was not that popular. And we think gospel music is everywhere in the black community. Well, it was there, but it was not the thing that moved and touched that community in terms of the religious music that it was hearing.

Their musical tradition was the quartet. While we tend to lump all that stuff together, it's a whole different ballgame to talk about gospel. You've got to know how to play the piano, and there weren't that many piano teachers around in that area, so there wasn't anybody that really played the piano. You don't have gospel unless you have some keyboard. And you don't have gospel unless you have large groups of people singing. And there were not large groups of people. There were these small quartet groups. So I can understand why when I tried to form a choir, and said, "We're gonna sing and we're gonna use these kinds of harmonies," everybody looked at me kind of like, "What are you talking about?"

Once I was able to understand that, I was able to understand that there was basketweaving, that there was a very strong quilting tradition, and that there was a whole underground set of activities that had nothing to do with the mainstream activities going on in that area. The people were exchanging and relating to each other on another level? For those of us working at that institution, it became clear that if we were going to talk about continuing social change and social development in that area, that we could not move unless we first dealt with the cultural question.

So a program was started, which I called the Community Based Cultural Education Program, which used everybody in that community, old people and young people. We had blues musicians and bootleggers and clubs and people who did all kinds of stuff. Besides bringing those people into the school to speak to the classes, we ran a festival in which you had the church community and the blues community sitting down together for the first time. In Pickens County, Alabama, a blues musician, a former sharecropper, has decided that people in that community need to be made aware by black people in that community that their conditions are so hard pressed that it is time for a change, and that what they can use most around Pickens County, is what they know best, and that's themselves and their own experiences and their own culture. He's going door-to-door singing the blues, getting people writing new blues lyrics about Pickens County and their experiences there.

*Jane Sapp is a singer, songwriter, educator at Highlander Center, New Market, Tennessee.*



Photo by Esther Parada

## Jefferson Meets Tolstoy

**Dudley Cocke**

There is tremendous hope born of a people's revolution. In his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, in a paragraph subsequently deleted by his fellow Congressmen, Thomas Jefferson argued for the abolition of slavery. He characterized its practice as, "a cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur death in their transportation hither." What a tremendous disappointment that among all the revolutionary idealism of the birthing of our nation such a tragic compromise was made by the Declaration's editors.

It was this, and subsequent less tragic, but profound, compromises to the founding spirit of the country that worried Jefferson as he grew old. Jefferson worried more and more about the wrong fork in the road that he feared the nation had taken. The right fork to his mind, relied on the will and consent of the majority of the ordinary people, not the ascendancy of a new ruling class. The right road was wide, paved with a broad-based economy of small businesses and farms. The wrong road was narrow, the result of a trickle-down economy controlled by large banking institutions and monied corporations.

He advocated decentralized government which encouraged debate and public involvement. He feared the Federalists' efforts to consolidate political power, believing that such a centralized government presumed the people could not be trusted, that in fact they must

be manipulated in order that their best interests, and those of the nation, be served.

In his book, *What Is Art?*, published in 1896 after 19 years of writing and re-writing, Leo Tolstoy listed some of the effects of bad art. With a slight change here or there, he could be listing the effects of bad government as Jefferson understood it. Bad art, Tolstoy said, keeps the privileged from questioning their privilege. It encourages the people to hold beauty above morality and to put pleasure before truth. And it promotes the worst of feelings, like chauvinism and vanity. He contended that the philosophical science of aesthetics was created in the 1700's from the need of the privileged to justify their pleasure apart from considerations of the common good.

Tolstoy believed that good art, like Jefferson's idea of the American Revolution, should embody the highest perceptions and ideals of its age. In the 20th century, he identified these ideals of humility, compassion and love, and believed that our art should help draw humankind together: "The subject matter of the art of the future," he wrote, "will be either feelings drawing men toward union, or such as already unite them; and the forms of art will be such as will be open to everyone."

*Dudley Cocke is the director of Roadside Theater. Roadside Theater is a part of the rural arts and educational organization, Appalshop. Started in 1969, Appalshop (a contraction of Appalachian Workshop) makes non-commercial films, records (June Appal Recordings), books, radio and television programs, and theater about Appalachia.*

# Imagining A Bill of Cultural Rights

**Mark Miller:** A Bill of Cultural Rights is a way to imagine action. It's a way to provide vision and direction, not just for this organization, but for similar organizations everywhere and for all individuals who want to take on the struggle that ACD has taken on. A Bill of Cultural Rights is a way to engage us all simultaneously both in conflict and in cooperation.

We need to be thinking bigger and bigger, not smaller and smaller. This morning we heard a very eloquent statement by Susan McCarn that she has heard us speaking with smaller and lower voices for some time now. I think it's time to speak in larger voices, eloquent voices, passionate voices again.

Working for cultural democracy provides an alternative to such things as armed nationalism. After all, armed nationalism usually is a manifestation of fear. It can be a manifestation of oppression, of economic and social injustice as well, but it can also be a reflection of peoples' fear that their culture will be subsumed by or somehow overridden by another culture. If we can establish tenets of cultural democracy, then we begin moving toward a social situation in which we can eliminate that fear to some extent and thus begin to eliminate the necessity for people to arm themselves.

I would argue that what we're really talking about is a Declaration, more than a Bill of Rights. A Bill of Rights implies something nailed down, something that has been in a political sense almost won and is then codified. We're not in that position. We're in a position where we are declaring to people what we are about and what cultural democracy means. Whatever we do should always be aimed at inspiring action. The times demand action and I would suggest that working on this declaration is a way to initiate action.

**Maryo Ewell:** I work for state government and I value that. I didn't start thinking about a declaration of cultural rights as being something of any particular value in my life until about 6 or 7 years ago when I realized the tremendous responsibility I had working on a state arts council. As a people we're a very diverse lot. We need to publicly recongize our diversity. I think this bill has a role to play with our sister national arts and cultural organizations. I can see handing it to them and challenging them in their own ways and with their own membership to debate it and ideally to adopt it.

**Arlene Goldbard:** The concept of Negritude was articulated by the Francophone Africans Leopold Senghor and Aime Cesaire at the beginning of this century. This concept recognized that there are cultural differences and not a hierarchy of cultures. That's an example of an idea that came from artists to the whole society and was an umbrella for everybody, not just the artists, to stand under. They didn't issue a statement saying black artists in Africa aren't getting enough money and should get more grants. They said we have something to say about the human subject in history, the nature of culture itself, and we believe if we

can express this in a compelling way other peoples' notions of the meaning of culture will change and we'll have that umbrella.

**Don Adams:** There has always been a lot of opposition to talking about cultural democracy which to me was a great surprise — growing up in rural South Dakota I thought, "This is such a wonderful idea — who would oppose it?" Once I started working in a larger pond, I found out there are a lot of people who oppose it: the people who are getting the money now, the people who like the culture the way it is, and so forth. These are obviously the people who are in power in our culture. So there will be a lot of opposition. An effective way to counter this opposition is to do it through work. When At the Foot of the Mountain Theatre in Minneapolis does *Ashes, Ashes We All Fall Down*, they are talking without polemics about the official cultural policy that is being conducted by our Department of Defense.

**Lina Newhouser:** What is a vision for a world in which cultural democracy would flourish? In thinking about cultural policy, the only way that it has any meaning for me is if I can say in my own community, "This is what would change: this is how things could be different."

Coming from a rural area, a significant thing is the fact that an entire culture is being destroyed because people are being forced off their land. If we as cultural workers are really concerned about playing an important role in relation to this problem, we need to know more about why this is happening. We need to know more about people who are not us and cultures that are not us, but we also need to know our own experiences. Like those farmers being driven off their land, artists in New York City know a lot about cultural policy and displacement. Places where artists have settled have been made chic and suddenly the artists couldn't afford to live there anymore. To me that is a related cultural policy question. Who can live in places? What kind of housing is available to people? Who controls those questions?

**Sula Rose Sheperd:** In the process of drawing up this document and responding today, please keep in mind "imagine action." Do not let pass any moment that you can take an action that relates to defining your cultural policy and taking a stand. We're presented with chances to take action all the time. You don't just have to wait for this great document to come and check off on it. You can start instituting changes in the cultural policy of your town life and of the agencies in which you work. Your action will lead to my feeling that I am counted and that I have a place underneath the umbrella of your cultural policy statement and of your organization.

**Bernie Jones:** I hear people expressing values of community, values of appreciation for diversity, values of participation, values of accessibility to experiences, values that place a high regard on human life. They are the kinds of values that can help us re-establish the commonwealth.

**Olivia Gude:** I am thinking of the difficulty and the importance phrasing a cultural policy in a way which calls up dramatic images of the comprehensiveness and newness we want this policy to suggest. A simple example I can give is drawn from a talk given by James Hillman, the Jungian analyst. He suggests that the area which is really repressed is that which you don't even think about anymore. He said, "Look at the ceiling." And I invite you to look at the ceiling in this room. We live in a culture where it is considered completely normal and reasonable to be in room with an ugly suspended ceiling — a ceiling made this way solely to hide a collection of duct work and electricity which has been stuck in at any old place. What does it do to our hearts and our spirits to be under this ceiling as opposed to being under Gothic arches, or woven ceilings or skylights?

To me it is important to remember that something which is so pervasive as the kind of generic architecture that we are in now could be different. I believe this kind of image needs to be in our cultural policy or else it may not mean anything because people will neither grasp our vision, nor be encouraged to imagine their own new visions.

**Charles Frederick:** It's clear to me that in order to have effective action there must be an effective reflection. I think that an effective reflection is itself an action. When we are organizing, we are organizing knowledge in order to, at the same time, organize people.

The history of the different peoples in this country and what has happened to us is very little known. I think that in our immediate experience we know many instances of how the culture in its present system of domination oppresses us all. We need to remember the full depth of that oppression in order to respect how much needs to be regained and how much has been taken away — to remember, for example, that only a hundred years ago, which is a very short time in any peoples' history, people were enslaved in this country. We must take the time to convince people of the significance of that in creating a culture. Otherwise, we may be moving to a kind of action without really having done a primary work of ours as cultural workers, which is to give people the richness of history which is both always a lament and a celebration.

**Sue Dorfman:** I want to share a story about how the African National Congress' Freedom Charter was formed. Back in the early 1950s, a group of activists — black, white, some people of color, Indians — wanted to figure out what a free, democratic South Africa would look like. They sent runners throughout the entire country. They went to the villages and they went to the towns. They asked, "If you could imagine a free South Africa what would it be?" From that they put together a document. We need to go back to our communities and say, "We work with you. We're part of you. You are part of our work. What would you like to see that would be a cultural policy? What would you like to see happen?"

**Don Adams:** I want to underline something

very important in what you are saying. As an organizer, I am a Feirean. I don't think you can create a document and just sort of deposit it in someone and expect them to buy into it. I think people change their consciousness from the inside out and I think that in the process of organizing, it is important to engage people in their own terms, on their own issues, rather than try to sell them a bill of goods or a bill of rights.

**Man who had to leave to catch a train:** We have to be very aware both of our human vulnerability and our ability to amaze each other. We have to admit that we are very loving, very passionate people who are very tired of loving life and having to be always on the verge of seeing it mutilated. I think a lot of us are driven to despair by the levels of suffering in this society and this tends to short circuit a potentially miraculous human design. We have to demystify a lot of the myths of creativity, of what it means to be creative. Maybe it's simply the ability or the freedom, the psychic, the spiritual, the courageous freedom, to invest in the future without being incredibly destroyed by the myth of the artistic junkie or the government junkie, or the priesthood junkie. . . . I would love to see in your platform a very deep awareness of our psychosocial nature.

**Debby Langerman:** Whatever we do in the building of culture we need to include in it somehow a respect for the environment, for the physical globe that we are all living upon. In our making of culture, in our discussion of a Bill of Cultural Rights, we must preserve the land or the air or the water or whatever resources we use in a state that will allow cultural rights to continue for future generations.

**Batya Weinbaum:** We focused on human culture, but I feel that a cultural democracy understands that the culture that people make is part of a larger culture, and we should respect the autonomous culture of the plants and the trees and the whole living organism. Consciousness of the sound environment should be included because it's nearly impossible at present to live in cities because of the degree of sound pollution there. Part of the controlling of the dominant culture is to make us oblivious to the degree of blocking out of sound we have to do to survive in the dominant mass culture. We need to include something about people's soundmaking rights which incorporates understanding and consciousness of the effect of the sound environment that we are forced to live in. Why can't telephones ring with a bird call?

**Henry Gates:** My experience as a therapist may offer another perspective on this. We need to always remind ourselves that art is not just an object, it's a process. The actual element of life that it has to do with is the element of play. It's a developmental notion that can't be overlooked because we are involved not only in the developing of the human being, but also of the society. Health is a thing which is almost entirely overlooked so far in our manifesto. The way in which the middle class is struggling with itself is around the element of health versus illness. We realize that with all the over-eating and over-stimulation that we are stressed. Art has something specific to say — that is, art is very direct and very

simple when it's at its best, and somehow manages to work through a relaxation modality to make us whole beings again.

**Dave Callahan:** I've heard some talk of the rights of a community to determine its own course, but I would call people's attention to the rights of self-determination of the individual. The basic police power in the United States has escalated tremendously in the last several years. As a community organizer for psychiatric inmates, I find that it's said that one out of seven people are mentally ill — so that's a pretty big part of our community who supposedly don't have the authorized version of reality. It used to be one out of ten. I see that ACD is confronting the whole concept that anyone has the authorized version of reality.

**Ricardo Levins Morales:** The essence of the Bill of Cultural Rights to me is to come up with a positive vision that so often is missing from our organizing. What I would like to see us doing is to start from the assumption that we are going to live and from the assumption that we and our children are going to have the capacity to create a humane society with room for all of us to not only survive, but to flourish. What will that world look like? Ask everybody who we can get to that question. For many people just asking the question of them can be an extremely liberating experience in a country where despair is a major epidemic.

**Dennis Friedler:** This morning I was struck by the way that social change gets defined in terms of self that is very individualistic. Self-determination becomes individual determination. I get very upset when we start talking in those terms because when we think about individual entities then we do tend to leave out wider things like the environment and the social context.

Democracy is a very culturally imbued term. It's very interesting to look at the history of democracy and how democracy has been used. One of the ways that the English colonial system worked at destroying tribal cultures was to also introduce English forms of government. Somehow there is this idea, that you just have to give things the right process or the right form. I think that process and form without a political belief system are very easily distorted. For example, I met some people a couple of years ago who were teaching bio-feedback in a military base. They had a whole New Age way of looking at things — they even had a little meditation tent set up. They helped people creatively design better weapons.

**Kaye McDuffie:** As cultural workers we have a responsibility to our communities. Part of that responsibility is to empower our communities to think critically, to make decisions that allow them to promote and preserve their own concept of culture.

Sometimes it seems we get caught up in the semantics of an idea of democracy that we can never take time to define — then we wimp out to the extent that we can never teach our communities to be empowered and we will never have to account for ourselves. We think we don't have the right to impose anything so we can't ever construct anything to even go back to our communities with for them to analyze. If as artists we are asking these same communities to support us and make sure there is a more appropriate allocation of art

dollars so that we can do our work which is to give something back to them, and in fact what we are giving back to them is not a framework to analyze and to take control and be empowered, I don't feel that we have the right to ask for that other kind of allocation and support.

**Tom Motko:** Cultural democracy, cultural policy, cultural worker. I have a sense of what they mean. But one of my disciplines for this weekend was to keep in mind the people that I work with in North Powder, Oregon. And I asked myself, "Does this play in North Powder?" And, no, it doesn't play in North Powder. These words don't mean anything without a lot of explanation, changing the words so they come to mean something and then going back to the words should be an extended educational process.

**Wen-ti Tsen:** I think one of the main things about culture is that it changes and that we as cultural workers (and I'm using that term consciously) are people who are able to motivate a kind of change. So that if we have some form like a compass for direction of that change, I think it's useful. Such analysis is important for the action to take place.

**Norm Stockwell:** One of the things that came out of our local Midwestern conference, which included a diverse constituency of rural and urban residents, was the concern that this Bill of Cultural Rights not be just one more document that would tell people in rural areas, Native Americans, and other people of color, what they were allowed to do. We came out with the notion that the Bill of Cultural Rights needed to be something that spoke not as "freedom from," but as "freedom to" — that positive vision that was mentioned earlier.

**Guenevere Reed-Tacle:** I have a problem with the world "culture" because it puts us in an elitist position — it originates from the same root as the word "cult." Let's just deal with the basics — it's just we, the way we are, the way life is shared, how we share that consciousness that we require.

**Doug Paterson:** One of the things I think we are involved in is trying to come up with a fresh and insightful way of looking at our condition as human beings. We are involved in making our lives. All people are involved in creating the culture around us. It's a fairly fresh notion of democracy — the understanding that people are responsible for the language, dress, and cultural forms and the ceilings above them, and that by itself maybe is sufficiently a liberating idea to allow people to feel how powerful we all are.

**Bernie Jones:** We have to be wary of analysis paralysis. The best way to deal with the sorts of questions that have come out in this conference is to work them out in joint action — by people working together with tolerance, with a lot of patience, and with a lot of trust of one another. That very process of struggling with our contradictions and with our differences, but not letting that stop us from acting on the best knowledge and intentions that we have at the moment, I think that kind of policy can lead us toward cultural democracy.

*A bibliography, "Suggested Readings on Cultural Policy and Cultural Democracy," is available for 50 cents from Adams/Goldbard, 618 Walnut, Ukiah, CA 95482.*



**Ricardo Levins Morales**, newly-elected ACD board member, writes on behalf of the Northland Poster Collective: The NCP is calling on artists (and others) to submit posters for our 1987 Labor Poster Catalog. This catalog will include posters dealing with labor history, working people, farmers, homeworkers, slaves, U.S. and worldwide working culture. Posters that we accept, we'll buy quantities of or arrange to sell them on consignment. Leads on existing posters that would fit our theme are welcome. Deadline is May 1, 1987. We'll also consider postcards and labor art books for inclusion. Anyone interested in helping us contact artists, labor historians, unions, find mailing lists or raise money for this project is also encouraged to contact us! Write NPC, 127 N. Washington Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55401 or call 612/322-0776.

**Radio DJ** at small community-oriented station in southern Maine eagerly seeking material for weekly program of music from a diversity of cultures and of politically conscious music. Any artist who can willingly spare a promotional recording is appreciatively implored to send it to:

Katherine Rhoda  
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 University of Southern Maine  
 37 College Ave.  
 Gorham, ME 04038

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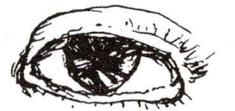
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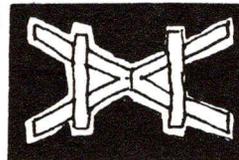
**Directory of Innovative Media Projects** provides a listing and description of several community media and public access projects free for the asking. Available for one dollar for shipping and handling from:

Richard Sheridan  
 Media Distribution Co-op  
 1745 Louisiana Street  
 Lawrence, Kansas 66044



**Voices of Dissent  
 Celebrating American  
 Artists of Vision  
 April 1-30, 1987**

As a response to the 200th anniversary celebration of the U.S. Constitution, the Painted Bride Art Center, along with community and cultural organizations and interested individuals throughout the Philadelphia area, will be sponsoring performances, exhibits, parades, demonstrations, and discussions which explore and celebrate the tradition of American cultural dissent. ACD President Deborah Langerman will be a featured speaker on cultural policy. The organizers of "Voices of Dissent" believe that the project will be a unique opportunity for people working in the arts and those who care about them to get together and respond to the current conservative political climate in a way which is uniquely cultural. They invite other groups and individuals to contribute their ideas, energy, and artistic work to the project. Sponsored by The Painted Bride Arts Center. Coordinated by Big Small Theater, 230 Vine St., Philadelphia, PA 19106 (215/925-9914).



**Deborah Langerman**, newly elected ACD President, envisions an organizational resource network whereby ACD members could be cross-listed by skill and area of artistic activity so that those people who share an interest could be hooked up with one another. Does somebody out there have the time and capability to make this vision a reality (imagination, remember)? Also, Deb wants some ideas on national actions that could be made locally specific (e.g., Shadow Project) as a way of making ACD more visible over the next year. Send your ideas and offers of assistance to Deborah Langerman, 308 West Washington, Urbana, IL 61801.



**The Country Teacher** is a new national newsletter for teachers working in small rural schools. Points of intersection with ACD include: rural arts, identifying and transmitting rural values, articulating a rural curriculum, and focusing on teachers as cultural workers and community leaders. To receive a copy of Issue #1, send a SASE to:

David Leo-Nyquist  
 P.O. Box 609  
 Miranda, CA 95553



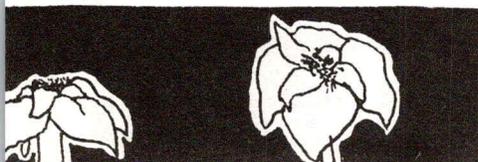


## Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America

It is historically discernable that the arts take a beating in a pre-war period. Part of this is that artists intuit that something is going on which requires direct statement in response. Another is that the aura of generalized threat that pervades a society revving its war engines is a poison for artistic inspiration. One gets cut off from the muse, unable to hear his/her own music. The amused artist turns to satire, a realm of endeavor that emphasizes the audience. This leaves the artist standing opposite the juggernaut flexing its terminal muscles, a lonely, dangerous, and vulnerable place to be. And finally, in a pre-war situation, life just becomes harder; not economic, biologic life, but soul-life. Social interaction, conversation, and sleeping well at night become more difficult.

We are writing to propose an Artists Call Newsletter to build connections between the numerous communities here and in Canada. We want to re-activate contact between activist artists as a means of encouragement and support; to provide a forum for ideas, project exchange, and a place to document our actions. We want to mobilize the vigor and momentum that we know is out there toward change in the United States policy in Central America. We hope to establish a wider range of creative anti-intervention projects that will in turn attract the participation of all activist artists. Send ideas, insights, documentation, reports, poems, drawings, cartoons, photos, posters, and short stories. We see ourselves as a clearinghouse rather than as an editorial board, and for the time being we will try to print everything that comes in, though we may have to do some cutting and synopsising. Submissions shouldn't be longer than 3 double-spaced typewritten pages. And please don't send original artwork; we can't be responsible for it. SASE guarantees you get back what you want to get back. We'd like to publish quarterly, but we're open to opinions about that, about format, and direction. Artists Call, 339 Lafayette St., New York, New York 10012 (217/242-3900).

**Bill Short and Willa Seidenberg** are calling for contact with any Vietnam veterans who protested the Vietnamese War while on active duty. The purpose is to do publishable oral histories and photo portraits. Bill or Willa can be reached at 116 School, Somerville, MA 02143 (617/628-8366).



**Radical Teacher** magazine is looking for articles and other contributions (such as photography, poetry, etc.) for an issue on "The Arts and Radical Teaching," including such topics as:

- how to do music, visual arts, theater, dance, etc., in schools promote public awareness?
- political curricula in the arts in K-12 and colleges.
- the arts and political multicultural education.
- the arts and radical education outside the schools (e.g., street theater).

Send one-page proposals to Radical Teacher, P.O. Box 102, Kendall Square Post Office, Cambridge, MA 02142.

### The Bay Area Center for Art & Technology

is sponsoring a combined video production and distribution project which will ultimately serve as proof that TV doesn't have to be controlled by corporations and the wealthy. At the present time, TV is a one-way medium which denies creative access to the majority of consumers. Viewing is a largely isolated act, with each individual or small group sitting passively in their living rooms. Video doesn't have to be so limited. First of all, it is a potentially interactive medium. People could be producing live shows of themselves creating history; that is to say, doing whatever they have deemed worthy of historical record, and recording it themselves.

Individuals associated with the Bay Area Center for Art & Technology have access to prime-time weeknight slots on public access cable TV in several Bay Area communities and other U.S. cities; additionally, we are informally linked to the national Deep Dish TV network, which is in its early stages of existence. If you can donate time, resources or money to this project, please contact the Bay Area Center for Art & Technology at 415/495-6823, or write BACAT, 37 Clementine St., San Francisco, CA 94105. Donations are tax deductible.

### Performing and Fine Artists for World Peace

is proud to announce the creation of the Performing and Fine Artists for World Peace. We wish to establish a network of dedicated performing and fine artists who believe that peace can be a reality if we all strive to see it come to fruition. The artist in any society has the responsibility of creating, through their medium, uplifting and enlightening works. We believe that there is no greater field for the creative artist to express in than peace. For further information contact:

Performing and Fine Artists  
for World Peace  
P.O. Box 261  
Lihue Kua'i, Hawaii 96766  
808/822-7787

**Mary Ostenso** offers us some news from the Southeast Region: "Concerts in the Country," Bethesda, MD, presented a large outdoor piece in October called "Creations," based on traditional creation myths from around the world and current scientific thinking. A video is now being made of it, and the piece will be re-presented next summer. Contact person: Marianne Ross, 301/229-6690, 301/972-1161.

Black Arts/White Arts Judy Byron of Washington, D.C., reports that since their presentation at the ACD Conference they are now spending time on internal dynamics and will focus on another presentation in the spring or fall.

David Sawyer, a Washington, D.C. organizer and activist, reminds us that the UN has declared 1987 as International Year of the Homeless. David is focusing on Health Care for the Homeless. Question: If you wanted to send someone marching, what would you say? Answer: March Forth! Hence, March 4th has been declared Progressive Day, a day of respect, reflection, activity, and celebration to mark progress people have made in the movement. Around the time of Ben Franklin, March 4th had been Inauguration Day. Last year David Sawyer decided to take the day for ourselves and start a tradition. Contact David at 4545 Conn. Ave. NW, Apt. 109, Washington, D.C. 20008 (202/362-7722).

**Networker Annie Silverman** calls our attention to a book of music and politics — *File Under Popular* by Chris Cutler.

Contents include: *Necessity and Choice in Musical Forms* — a radical analysis of musical forms and their development, with particular emphasis on their means of production and reproduction and on their relationship with the ideology and expressive needs of particular social classes; *What is Popular Music?* — written for the International Association for the Study of Popular Music's conference in 1983; five critical essays on *Sun Ra*, *The Residents*, *Phil Ochs*, *'Progressive Music in the UK'*, and *'Progressive music - Progressive politics?'* 244pp Illustrated. This is not an 'academic' book, but it does take its subject seriously and was written for musicians and interested parties who want to think about popular music in its totality, as well as listen to it and 'like' it.

Priced at £ 5.95 plus postage, *File Under Popular* can be obtained directly from November Books at 583 Wandsworth Road, London SW8, U.K.



# Doing Multi-Cultural Work!

**Elaine Koury:** I direct *Boston Youth Theatre*, which works with inner city teenagers of all races and cultural backgrounds that are here in the Boston area. We do original shows based on input from the kids' own lives and experiences. We produce shows here in the community and tour around the state. We also work in the public schools with *Boston Youth Theatre*.

The biggest problem for us is, "The Lie" — the lie that it is a reasonable thing to do to categorize people. I think it is not a reasonable thing to do. I think it is not an accurate thing to do. Personally, I know it's a lie. Look at me! I defy you to categorize me in terms of race or culture. You can't do it because I've got a little of this and a little of that. As a person who has a little of this and a little of that, I know what the lie is. So, the biggest problem is the perception that so many people have that it's okay to categorize people at all. What *Boston Youth Theatre* does is recognize that every human being is different and the same as every other one. That simple truth seems to confound people just terribly.

We audition all over the city. When we audition, we do not audition in one place. Chances are real good that if you audition in Chinatown, you're going to pick up some Chinese kids. If you audition in Charlestown, you're going to pick up some white kids. If you audition in Roxbury, you're going to pick up some black kids. If you have downtown auditions, to which you invite suburban kids, you're going to pick up some suburban kids. So the first thing we do is to look for people from different places. When you pick them in different places, you wind up with different kinds of people.

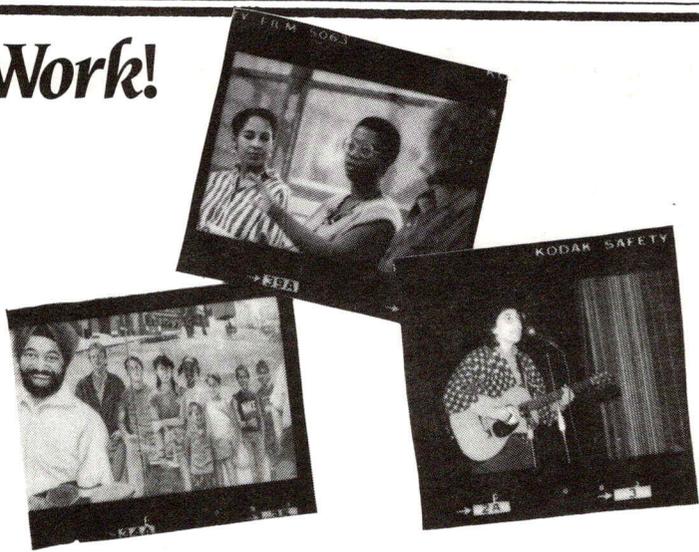
The next thing we do is set our own rules. When those kids walk in to *Boston Youth Theatre*, they have to leave those other rules at the door. We make it real clear that they have to audition to get into *Boston Youth Theatre*, and once they're in, they're ours. And once they're ours, they have to play by our rules. So we set up our own rules. We work by them. We tell the kids from the very beginning that they do not have to like one another. Nobody has the right to tell you who to like, but you do have to work with one another. And we have the right to tell them who to work with because we're running this particular show.

Those are the strategies that have worked the best for us. What happens then is that you wind up on stage with a bunch of kids who look and sound real different, and who are obviously from different classes and backgrounds. They become a living demonstration. There it is folks — living proof that people can get along if they only just do it.

**Jorge Arce:** Besides being a performer and director, I am connected to the Puerto Rican community. I was in Puerto Rico working with communities, doing professional theatre, singing with groups, and touring around. Three years ago, I moved to Boston. Being in the Roxbury area, and knowing that there was a Hispanic community there, I found that most people from Hispanic communities, and from other countries that have come here to study, develop a style of life that doesn't have to do directly with their own ethnic groups. So what we have here is a multi-cultural problem.

After two years of studying, I decided to go back to the community to work. I started at Roxbury's *Alianza Hispana*. I found myself on an island. I found that the Hispanic community is a small island in a big sea. The big sea is the Boston, Massachusetts area. The racism that is here is a class problem. Our community did not have an opportunity to get out of our own circle. So part of my job was to help them to know their own problems and to try to take them out of their circle. I have tried to get them to know other problems and to identify with other groups. Besides writing theatre, I'm getting casts to perform, I'm getting them to know more about their abilities and their skills. We have the opportunity through outreach programs to get them to go to concerts, to listen to other groups, to see theatre at the Boston Conservatory, or to see a concert at the Commons. We want them to be more in contact with the Boston Youth Theatre in the future.

Besides this activity, we successfully organized a multi-cultural fes-

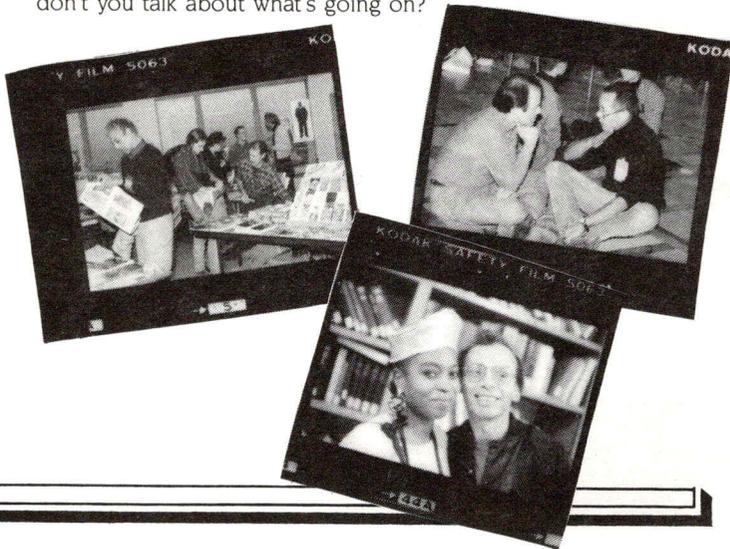


tival this past summer. We invited other groups, like Asian and black community groups to participate with us. It was a real success. I hope that we can, in this discussion, bring our knowledge of artists in class struggle to bear on this question.

**Rebecca Rice:** I am here as a member of *Black Artists/White Artists*. Washington, D.C. is the nation's capitol, but in some very real ways it is the racist capital of the world. I spent 15 years of my life working with another company called the *Living Stage Theatre Company* in Washington, D.C. We traveled around to virtually every neighborhood in the DC./Maryland/Virginia area. It gave me a pretty broad scope on what was happening in the D.C. community. That company itself was also inter-racial, not multi-racial. It was mostly black and white.

I experienced a tremendous amount of frustration in doing that. I left the company two years ago and formed my own company called the *Human Bridge Theatre*. Shortly after that, that company began its first project which was called "This is the House." It is a play about violence against women, focusing on the economic and racial differences that also divide women and allow violence to be acted upon us. Then Liz Lerman, with the *Dance Exchange*, approached me and several other artists in the D.C. area to form a group to specifically deal with racism, and how it was affecting our work as artists, and how it manifests itself in the community.

When *Black Artists/White Artists* came together, what was different for me was the commitment to deal with it in a interpersonal way as well as a historical/cultural direction. We had no commitment to go on and no commitment to do anything in terms of a project. I had been involved in so many projects in which you are sitting in the room where everybody's talking and everybody's having a good time. Yet when you go out in the bathroom or in the hallway another person, usually of your race, will approach you and say, "Look, you know, why are these white people doing such and such a thing?" And I'd say, "Why don't you say that when we are in the room? Why don't you talk about what's going on?"



Photos by Bill Short, Dennis Fieldler, Angel Moreno, Sal Salerno, Jubilee Arts Team

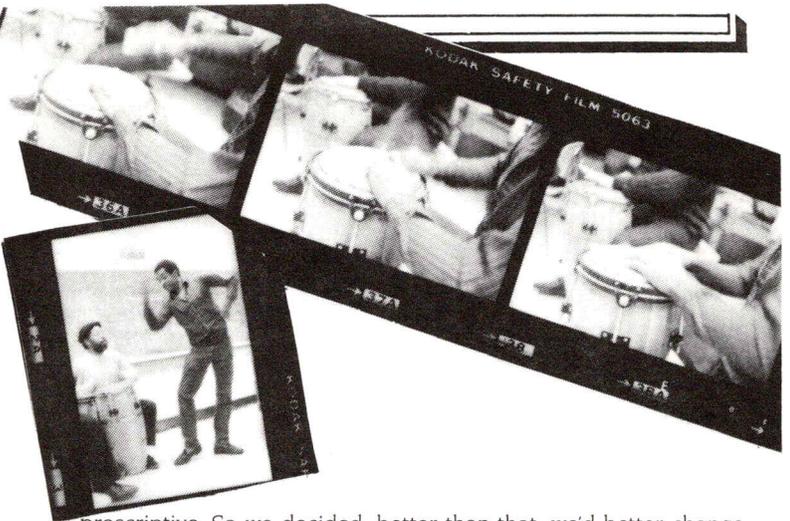
Once, suddenly, the Latino people dropped out. They just didn't come to the next meeting. Then you'd call and say "Where were you?", and some issue would come up and they no longer had a commitment to be there. I started talking to people and finding out that there were absolutely areas that we were not entering into together. Things that black people will not say to white people, things that white people will not say to black people and every other race are involved. So what became important to me was to be in a group where we could begin to open the doors on some of those closets. So *Black Artists/White Artists* wasn't about a project. The very first year we were together, we did a project. Yet, at the end of it, all we realized was how much we hadn't done. How much we had not covered with each other.

We could not let ourselves off the hook by saying, "Hey, we did a project." Then I felt that as a black person I couldn't let the white people in that group walk away feeling like they had dealt with their racism because they did a project with me, that they could put that down on their resume, and go away and take some credit that they just shouldn't take. I knew there were things I hadn't said. I knew there were areas we had not dealt with. So we entered into our second year with no commitment towards any project, but just a commitment to each other.

We agreed to come in and take one whole meeting session and talk about one thing. Everything that we hold as prejudices, stereotypes, whatever, and we are absolutely accountable to each other not to leave things in the back. That has brought up issues within the group. As soon as you set a goal, everything starts to splinter because people say, "I don't know if I can do that. I don't know if I can share that." So our process is to go back amongst ourselves, go through those dynamics, and share what's happening to us. Then we can feel that organically we have done something with ourselves on the issue of racism and that we have not skirted it by doing superficial acts that make us feel as though we have done something that we have, in fact, not done.

Right now we are in our second year, and most of the original members are still in the group. That, to me, is continually surprising and phenomenal, because what I have experienced more often in doing multi-cultural work is how people drop out and just cannot continue for a lot of personal reasons that they refuse to be accountable for.

Photos by Bill Short, Dennis Fieldler, Angel Moreno, Sal Salerno, Jubilee Arts Team



prescriptive. So we decided, better than that, we'd better change who we were. So we began doing work cross-generationally and cross-culturally. This was more difficult than it sounds.

There was a hard beginning. We worked first with black women in town as playwrights through the readings of their shows. Letting them produce their own shows. Here's an example of that racism that creeps out. One of the women had a guy come in to produce her show, who was a great con artist. If she had been a white woman and he had been a white man, I would have said, "Buddy, get out of here." But because she was a black woman and he was a black man, I thought, "We have our own cultural things, and wouldn't it be racist of me to interfere?" So, I didn't. That caused a lot of problems, because I allowed this guy to do that.

We began to do anti-racism workshops for the white women on staff because that seemed to be where the root of the problem was. We defined racism strictly as a white problem. We all have our prejudices. Prejudice is making judgements about someone for some external quality that has nothing to do with their individuality, but racism is backed up by institutions. Racism is institutionalized all over this country, all over the world; the colonial culture. We, as white women, had to look at the privileges that we have gained off of this system of racism. So a person of color, by that definition is not racist. They may be prejudiced. They may even be jerks, sometimes. But they are not racist by definition. Just as a woman is not sexist by definition, because the power structure supports the sexism of male oppression of women.

When we actually got concrete and succeeded in this work was when we did a program in 1984 called *Broadcloth*. It was a staged reading series of six new scripts. We diligently looked for scripts by women of color. We refused to take any thing less than normal standards. One of them wasn't chosen until the week before we went on. The reason for that was partially because why would women of color send scripts to this white women's theatre. We didn't quite get that then. We had three dynamic scripts. We had Hispanic women, black women, white women, Native American women working on these six plays over the period of a week. We had such a good time. What became clear was that everybody was concerned and passionately devoted as writers, directors, and actors to the work.

Well, that lit a lightbulb for us and we realized that the work has to be the common thing that we share. The women of color in that organization encouraged us. We all felt so smart, and then the challenge came back to us immediately, "How come this is a special event? How come this doesn't happen in the ordinary course of things? What's the celebration?" We have subsequently produced as a full production one of the scripts in that early series, called *Going to Seed*, by a black writer from Chicago named Nancy Rawls. Last year, we brought in *Spiderwoman Theatre*, the native American feminist theatre from New York City. These three Cuna-Rappahanock sisters in their 40's, 50's and 60's were absolutely outrageous. They came to Minneapolis, auditioned regional performers, and cast a group of Asian, African, Hispanic, native, and Jewish women. Seven women representing different cultures in Minneapolis. The piece was called, typical *Spiderwoman* title, "Neurotic, Erotic, Exotics." It was

(Continued on page 12)



**Phyllis Jane Rose:** *At the Foot of the Mountain*, (AFOM), is a 13-year-old women's theatre. We're not a collective. We were a collective for the first several years, but that became a little bit suicidal. For the first eight years of our lives, we were a white women's theatre. After we noticed that, which took awhile, we thought we ought to say that. We were criticized for it.

The big theatre in our part of the country is the *Guthrie*. We could easily kvetch about why doesn't the *Guthrie* say it does white male upper class plays. Then we'd know what we're seeing at least. Then we wouldn't call them universal. So we found ourselves with that mirror saying that we were a women's theatre, and yet we were basically white women between the ages of 20 and 40. We worried about marketing ourselves as a white women's theatre because it sounded

done with only one professional performer because among those groups there is not much training available and the people who were willing to work hard on the personal material for the show were the people who did not have training.

The piece was very successful. What was a failure was that *Spiderwoman* could only stay until after opening week. So I was their stand-in. I was put in charge by them to keep the show running. That was a real mistake, partially because I'm white and the cast was mostly women of color and partially because most of the women in the show did not have theatre experience. Therefore, when a direction came, it wasn't taken as a theatre direction, but was the word from the white boss. So it got very confusing and it was very difficult at times. *Spiderwoman* came back, was re-directed, and we sorted all that out and carried on.

It is not an easy chore unlearning racism. We all have the hope that we will continue to unlearn it. It is a behavior that is bred into each and every one of us who are privileged off of it. We all experience the sorrow of it whether we are people of color or not people of color.



## Panel Discussion

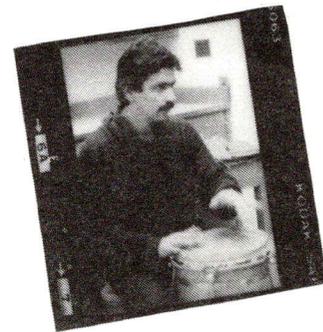
**Rebecca:** I would like to support what you said, Phyllis, about the issue that racism is largely a problem white people have. That was something we talked about immediately in *Black Artists/White Artists*. We found that for most white people, racism is not an issue. That it isn't something that it is necessary for you to deal with.

**Phyllis:** Yes, that's part of our privilege. The woman who is one of the facilitators in the anti-racism workshop is taking a class on immigration at the University of Minnesota. The course is called "Immigration," and in fact, the course is about Eastern European immigration. Yet it is not called that. She says the instructor is even a little bit ashamed that that is how it was structured. The assumption is that ethnicity is a way that white people can be approached, because we have Polish, and we have Czech, and British and Welsh and Irish. Yet traditional ethnicity courses do not notice that among African-Americans there are also endless ethnicities and cultures. The quilt of racism is an excuse for non-activity. We've just got to keep prodding each other about that.

**Elaine:** I would like to disagree with the idea that racism is a white problem, that only white people can be racist. I think racism is not a problem that belongs to any particular category, because I don't think there is any particular category. I think racism is a perception problem, and anybody who perceives other people in those categories has racist perceptions. I think as artists, it is our job to envision something other than what the society has envisioned for us and then to work towards that vision.

**Rebecca:** I spent a lot of years working with young people for precisely that reason, for I found that it was with young people that you could manifest that vision. Even though they grow up with the prejudices that we try so hard to imbue them with, they have a way of throwing it off. I do agree that racism is a perception. Part of what has happened though is that we have institutionalized that perception so that what we have are whole systems set up with that perception as their founding image.

I've been doing this project with *Black Artists/White Artists* for two years, and one of our members just said recently, "God, white people are stupid." But this was a white man saying it. What he was saying was that there was so much that he didn't know. From what I see there is so much that white people do not know about black



experience or any non-white experience. The vice versa is also true. There are a lot of things that black people do not know about white people because we do not put ourselves in a circumstance where we can intimately share that information. We reinforce our own barriers, instead of setting up processes and circumstances where we can relinquish some of the control.

**Jorge:** Racism is not just a human perception. It's more than that — it's a class problem. It is one of the ways that a society like this can keep controlling our lives. If people are not together, they are easy to be controlled. Racism, like competition, works that way. It comes from a broader problem, a complex problem. It comes from the slaves being subjected to being mastered by people who wanted to have more money.

**Elaine:** I'm not in disagreement about that. It's a political problem based on our acceptance of what our society has set up as the categories to put people in. Classes are just other categories. Race has its categories. Age has its categories. Class. Language. It goes on and on, how many categories there are. I'm not saying racism does not exist. It exists. It can hurt you bad. But it isn't one person's problem, it's everybody's problem.

We need as artists, as humans, to take control of our situations and our own house. Clean up our own room, as it were, affect our own little corner, and make that right. By making that right, you set an example for the person with the room next door. If everybody starts to clean up their room. . . .

**Jorge:** I disagree a little because I don't take class as a category aside, as another category like racism. Racism is a category inside class struggle. So we have to consider it from the position of being in a class struggle. Where are we coming from, and where are we going to? We need to realize that we come from a class definition, from a class structure.

**Question:** Those of you who have worked in ensembles with many different cultural backgrounds, how do you deal with different artis-



Photos by Bill Short, Dennis Fieldler, Angel Moreno, Sal Salerno, Jubilee Arts Team

tic vocabularies, movement styles, musical styles, language, etc. when you're sharing? And how do you deal with the language that comes out of that?

**Rebecca:** I'll start answering by saying it depends on who's running the show. If the project was initiated by white people, then there is a vision right away for what is going to be happening with that project that comes out of a white dynamic. What I think is powerful about what *At the Foot of the Mountain* has done, is to abdicate that. When Liz Lerman started *Black Artists/White Artists*, she immediately abdicated her leadership within the group in order to allow the different statements that were present in the group to be made. The first step is simply to allow them to exist. That is something that sounds overly simplistic, but is probably the most difficult thing to do. If there is a pre-existing vision rather than allowing the vision to arise out of the people who are present there, you have a problem.

**Elaine:** What we do is simply incorporate them all. Any *Boston Youth Theatre* show you see might have five different styles of dance, and any number of different styles of speech. They're just all up there.

**Question:** What about artists from one category (whether or not they exist) speaking in the voice of a people from other categories? Specifically, I'm a member of a company which does not have a Guatemalan in its ranks, and is in the process of trying to create a play about a Guatemalan man because we feel some connection to those people separate and apart from the fact that we are not Guatemalan.

**Elaine:** My advice to you would be to do a play about your feelings about casting across color or culture. Those are the ones you know. I think it makes sense. If you're doing a play that deals with how a person has been discriminated against, because of being put in a specific category, I think it's real hard to find somebody who hasn't

Photos by Bill Short, Dennis Fieldler, Angel Moreno, Sal Salerno, Jubilee Arts Team



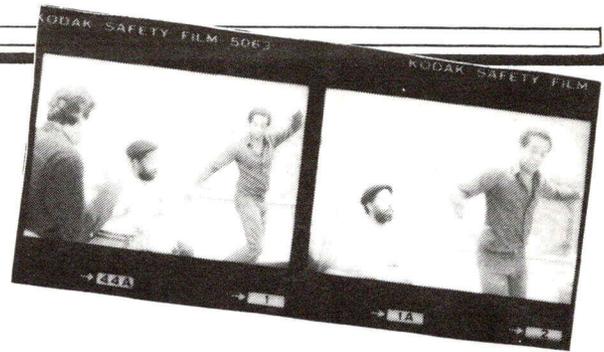
had those experiences to make that realistic. I'd say do with what you know and learn about what you don't rather than trying to make up what you don't and present it to other people.

**Rebecca:** I think you should work with a Guatemalan, if for no other reason than for how enriching and powerful it would be for you to work with a Guatemalan artist so that you can really learn. When you open that door for that Guatemalan artist to come in, she or he can grow and do anything within their artistic vision. As long as those doors are closed, your empathy means nothing.

**Question:** As you've been talking, I've been thinking that authenticity is a criterion in the kind of work that you've been talking about doing and it is not a criterion in the commercial field and in regional theatres. I would be willing to say, not a criterion, period. Would any of you care to comment on it?

**Phyllis:** The piece we did last year called "Neurotic, Erotic, Exotics" got reviewed by the person who was representing the National Endowment for the Arts for our annual grant — which we did not get last year. The criticism of it was that it wasn't professional. When you're dealing with new material, there's always that stage of awkwardness. It's like being an adolescent.

The primary thing is to say it, to be public. The second thing is technique, style, all that stuff, the polish. That piece got two kinds of reactions. On the one hand, it got raves, which were absolutely inappropriate because it was not the greatest piece of theatre ever seen. My sense of those rave reviews is guilt, white guys with guilt. On the other hand, it was critiqued on the superficial level, the technical level, and then not seen for what it was at all. So ironically, in terms of its authenticity, which was complex, it was missed both times.



## Assumptions Underlying Anti-Racism Workshops

held at *At the Foot of the Mountain Theatre*

as facilitated by  
Nancy Okerlund and Ellen O'Neill

- Racism is prejudice with power; the dominant white culture is the owner and beneficiary of institutional power.
- Racism is a white problem; anti-racism work involves understanding white culture.
- Racism is a system that operates on automatic pilot; no one can escape it.
- Racism is learned and can be unlearned.
- Critical to unlearning racism is recovering accurate information about one's own ethnicity and cultural heritage (no one is "just regular" or "just plain" or "just normal").
- White people and people of color have different roles to play in dismantling the system of racism; each of these roles deserves respect.
- Unlearning racism is a process of healing and empowerment for all.
- We have everything within us to dismantle the system of racism and create a new system which is healthy, loving, and respectful.

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# WHAT SPORT

The President on his front porch throwing snowballs at Homeless People in Lafayette Park.

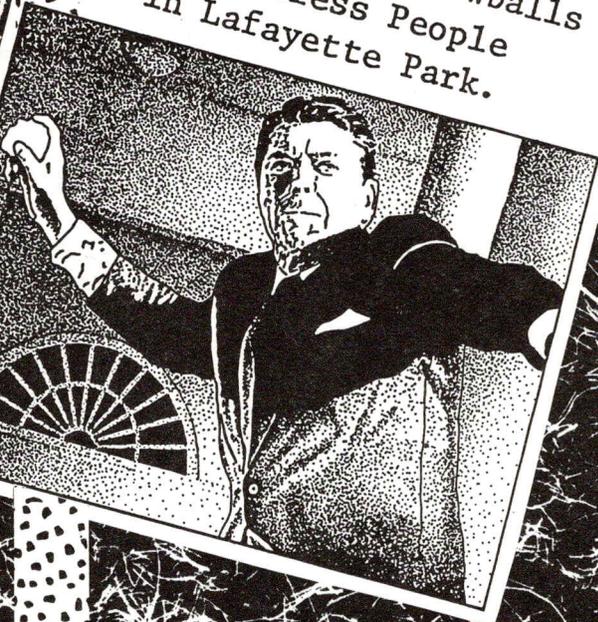
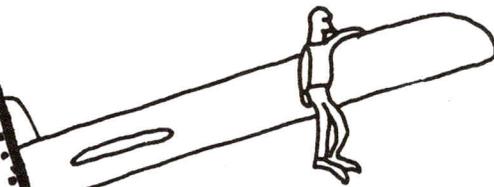


Illustration by Chuck Sevard

# My Vacation



Last year I took a Cruise to the Bahamas

Illustration by Paul Borgerson

# Another Standard for Cultural Democracy

Photo by Dennis Fieldler



Sylvia King, Brendan Jackson, Jubilee Community Arts

## Sylvia King and Karen Merkel

We come as a group of seven from three organizations. Each organization has between 6 to 9 working members. They are comprised of artists from different backgrounds — videomakers, designers, performers, community educationalists, and community workers. We form teams and work collectively with different community groups ranging from neighborhood groups to campaign groups to groups who are just wanting to work on some kind of celebration.

Our three organizations have one thing in common which is that we are well-funded. We hear many ACD voices very clearly around the issue of not getting funding for your activities. We are very, very fortunate, and we are aware of this privilege. It doesn't come without problems. It has distorted as well as paid for our activity.

One of the things that happened was that having won this money for community arts there were then arguments about whether the community/political artists should define the terms: what community, whose community, what art, whose art? No definitions were ever reached. Of course, the funders weren't going to go and give us money unless they knew what it was for. They like to have their categories and sub-categories for it all. So they began to define the terms for us and that has dogged us for the last decade.

Well, we noticed this in our workplace and we thought *Another Standard* needs to begin to reclaim the field. We need to get our terms back. We need terms like "cultural democracy," but we didn't want to be just reactive. We thought that it was very important that we had proposals — we wanted to take a propositional stance about what those terms meant.

In the 1980s, three significant events had happened in Britain. One was our race riots. They weren't just race riots. They were youth

riots. They were riots of people who were unemployed. They were class riots. They happened all up and down the country. Two is the activity of the women of Greenham Common. It has brought women of very diverse political persuasions together around that perimeter fence. And three, the miner's strike which lasted for one year and involved communities up and down the country for the whole year.

Thatcher noticed these developments and now we have a Public Order Bill. We believe this is as a direct result of these mass movements which were both literal movements of people and, if you like, metaphorical movements of people. The Public Order Bill means that we may no longer assemble as a mass group of people unless we seek 24 hours notice and permission from the police. We may no longer have a vigil outside any public place or any commercial building if that vigil is deemed as coercive. What that means is we can't have an anti-apartheid vigil outside a store stopping people from buying South African produce. If someone is suspected of causing a riot they can be subjected to life imprisonment. The police now may arrest us without evidence, witness or victim.

These are very serious infringements of British citizens' freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of movement. The agenda is mapped out and it's being controlled. The Trade Union Reforms mean that you may not stand outside any workplace but your own with more than fifteen people. This is a direct result of the miner's strike. If we begin to reform around the edge we will not proceed very far. What we need to be doing is influencing the national agenda.

*Another Standard's* Culture & Democracy: The Manifesto says that everyone has the right to participate in the production and the distribution of culture. Mel King referred to it when he was talking about self-definition, about the

ability to define yourself and your communities. We need to tie up the economic and the political arguments with the cultural arguments. Often people think the cultural component is a separate thing — that art is not central to these very important political and economic things that we ought to be getting on with. But it is absolutely central. Karen mentioned the way a lot of our values are transmitted through the media. Our values are being transmitted by a very few people, by a ruling class. We must get hold of the means to distribute and produce our own culture. The important thing about the Manifesto for *Another Standard* is that it's made a clear statement — it's gotten off the fence and said this is where we are. So whilst we were struggling in writing our Manifesto to work with the tension of being accused of not being inclusive enough, it simply doesn't do for us anymore to work with everyone of every political persuasion.

In actual fact, there have been some really wonderful things going on in Britain. During the period of the Thatcher administration, the Left actually organized very successful entry tactics. So up and down the country at the local level we have more socialist administrations than we have had for many, many years. This has meant that people like us (like your British friends here) have actually been engaged in making cultural policies. This has meant that funding has gone to gay groups and to black groups. There have been senior citizens' festivals that have been literally over the river from the Houses of Parliament. So we've had a great deal of popular activity, and for the first time we have found we haven't been in the position of having to ask people to join our movement all the time.

There has been an ongoing public forum for discussion. Crucially, we have been able to enter some kind of debate. We're usually marginalized, but, nevertheless, we haven't had to subvert every discussion about art. We can use the broader term, culture.

We think that a global look at what's going on is really important. We can work in our own backyards. We can try and tidy up here and there, but we can't forget the kind of colonial and international influence, the multi-national companies' influence, that is going on all over. We must make these kind of links. We must begin to form alliances across national boundaries. The issues are the same. We must begin to join together to address them.

*Sylvia King is a member of Jubilee Community Arts and a singer and performer. Karen Merkel is a member of Cultural Partnerships and a freelance researcher. Karen Merkel and Sylvia King are both members of Another Standard which is a democratic membership organization embracing a wide range of U.K. cultural activists.*

*Culture & Democracy: The Manifesto is published by Comedia Publishing Group. It is available in the United States from Cultural Correspondence, 505 West End Ave., 15C, New York, New York 10024 for \$3.50 plus \$1.50 postage and handling.*

# Working It Out

**ImaginAction** in Boston was much more than larger group plenaries with challenging speakers and late night dancing. The Cabaret on Saturday night showcased music and theater by ACD members. Throughout the weekend, workshops and film/video showings provided space in time for more informal and more personal exchanges. Topics were as diverse as our membership — ranging from techniques for long term planning in a not-for-profit cultural group, to a report on activist artists' work in support of Southern African liberation efforts, to a moving exploration of the culture of alcoholism and its effects on family and friends. The following reports come from a few of the 28 workshops given. Space does not allow us to include them all.

## Personalizing the Other: Opening a Dialogue on Race and Racism

*Black Artists/White Artists* (BAWA), from Washington, D.C., presented a two day/two part workshop. Racist assumptions about others is a major impediment to building a progressive movement for cultural democracy. Through personalizing each other in a temporary mural, and by using a questionnaire about racial beliefs and stereotypes, participants were encouraged to define themselves and self-critically examine their own racism. Leaders Judy Byron, Chason Gaver, Liz Lerman, Rebecca Rice, and Garth Tate told of BAWA's experience as a collective. The format of focusing discussions in meetings on racism and asking hard questions of each other was demonstrated as process for creating trust and balanced collaborations between artists of different races.

## Labor, Community and The Arts Workshop

Erica Bronstein, of the Labor Education Center, New Bedford, MA, described an arts/labor cultural event celebrating working class life. The work of painter Ralph Fasanella was the focus of an exhibition which complemented a new labor history curriculum for public schools, a labor history film series, and painting about working class life done by children. Ron Jenkins, of Emerson College, described producing a play commemorating the 1912 Bread And Roses strike in Lawrence. He and his students are doing research on the strike, conducting oral history interviews, reviewing interviews from other sources, and consulting original documents. They expect to revive the vaudeville style (songs, poems, cartoons, satire) used by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in building support for the strike. Julia Swoyer told of her work with the Iron Clad Agreement, a theatre company bringing labor and community history back to the people in a dramatic, moving, and significant way. She uses oral history interviews to gather and create text. Discussion topics included: 1) whether or not there is a working class aesthetic sensibility, 2) strategies for drawing audiences to labor events, 3) a moving report from a Welsh coal miner about community and struggle during the lost coal strike of a few years ago.

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