BREAKTHROUGH

SUMMER 1995

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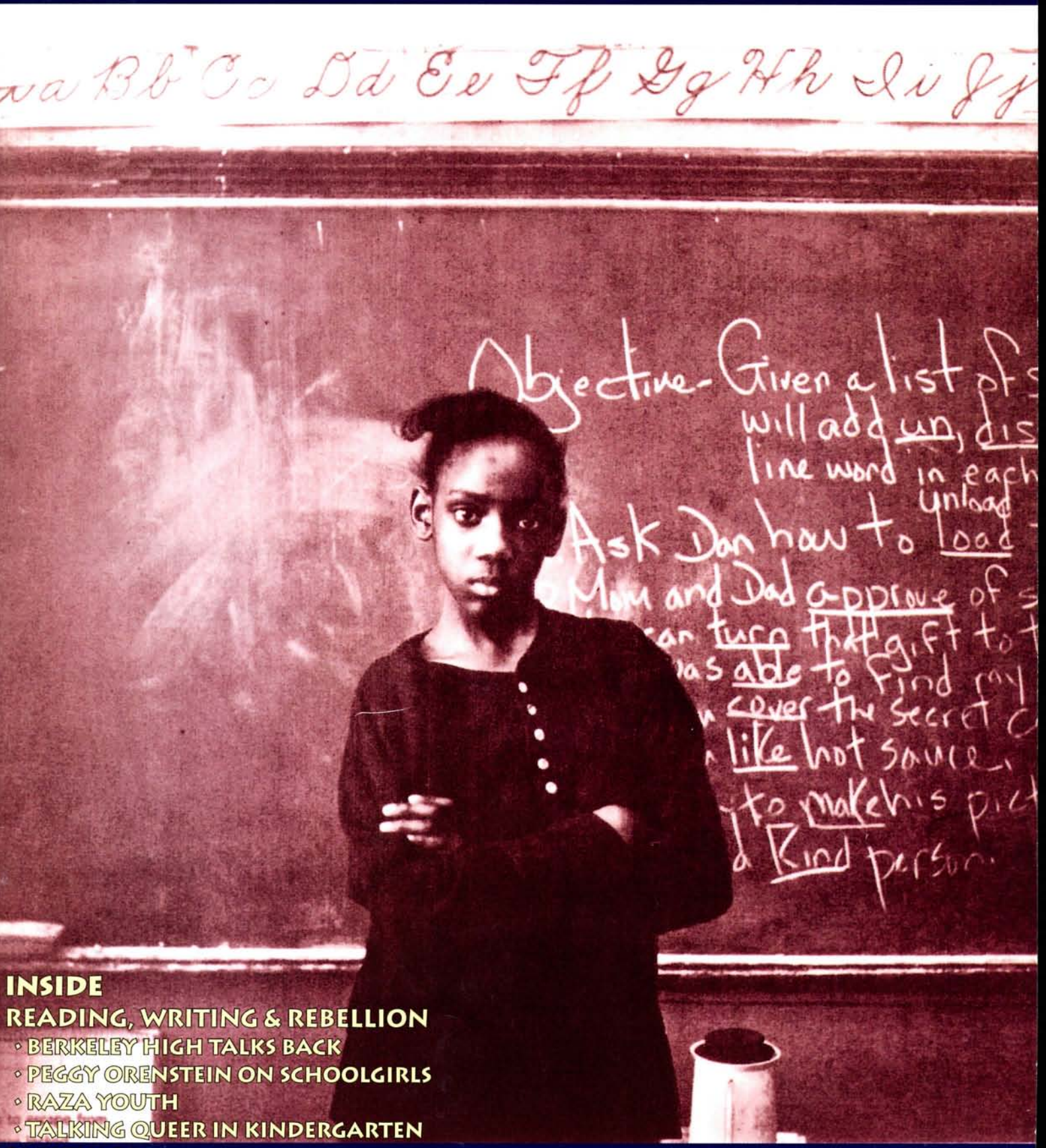

INSIDE

SUMMER 1995 **BREAKTHROUGH** VOL. 19, NO.1

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Front cover
"Percenda" ©1995 by Ruth Morgan. Born in New York City, Ruth Morgan received her BA in sociology from San Francisco State University. Solo exhibitions of her work have been mounted in the University Art Museum, UC Berkeley, and the Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego. Her work has been shown nationally and internationally, including at La Troisieme Triennial Internationale de la Photographie, Charleroi, Belgium; the Photographic Resource Center, Boston; and the Houston Foto-Fest. Her photographs are in the permanent collections of the de Menil Foundation Collection; La Musée de la Photographie, Charleroi, Belgium; the Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego; and the S.F. Museum of Modern Art. She was recently selected for the Market Street Transit Project in San Francisco.

Back cover
Untitled work by Bridget Maria Goodman, a young native San Franciscan, painter, designer, poet, and mother. Her philosophy: art is something which cannot be taught; it is shared and it is studied. Both her written and illustrative works have been published. Contact her c/o *Breakthrough* at the San Francisco address.

contract with a vengeance

Many liberal commentators have noted that the Republican Contract with America heralds a return to the past. But which past? The sitcom of 1950s white suburbia? The harsh class divisions of the 1890s, with its poor laws, Jim Crow Laws, repression of workers' rights, and apartheid for Native Americans? But no matter which era is selected for comparison, these commentators focus on the new *domestic* social contract, and see the right as essentially isolationist, as home front militants.

Fewer observers have recognized the Contract as a scheme to reassert the United States as the biggest bully on the block—to strong-arm *the world* for its lunch money. Here the apt comparison is the 1920s and early 30s—not in the U.S., but in Germany, when the incipient Nazi movement seized on German shame and rage as a defeated imperialist aggressor. The Contract, like *Mein Kampf*, is a ruthless scheme to restore the wounded bully's ability to play a unique and commanding role in the world, at the expense of feeding, housing, clothing, and educating a growing number people—of color—at home.

The *domestic* thrust of the Contract is the Republican right's intent to forge an unencumbered federal government and a phalanx of unfettered business and banking barons. To accomplish this, the right has resurrected the 19th century doctrine of Social Darwinism, or survival of the fittest—the Republicans call it "personal responsibility." By Social Darwinist teaching (or Gumpism, slightly revised), you get what you deserve, and vice versa, from the box of chocolates of life. So the Contract requires strict time limits on appeals in criminal cases, and swift implementation of the death penalty, as well as federal funds to help states prosecute death penalty cases. The Contract allows warrantless search and seizure by police, sets mandatory sentences for crimes, and authorizes funding grants for prison construction to states that send "an increased percentage of convicted violent offenders...to prison." If you go to prison, you deserve to suffer; "frivolous" lawsuits by prisoners will be banned—suits for improved prison conditions are specifically cited. Over four pages of the Contract deal with the speedy and irreversible deportation of "illegal aliens" convicted of any of a number of crimes.

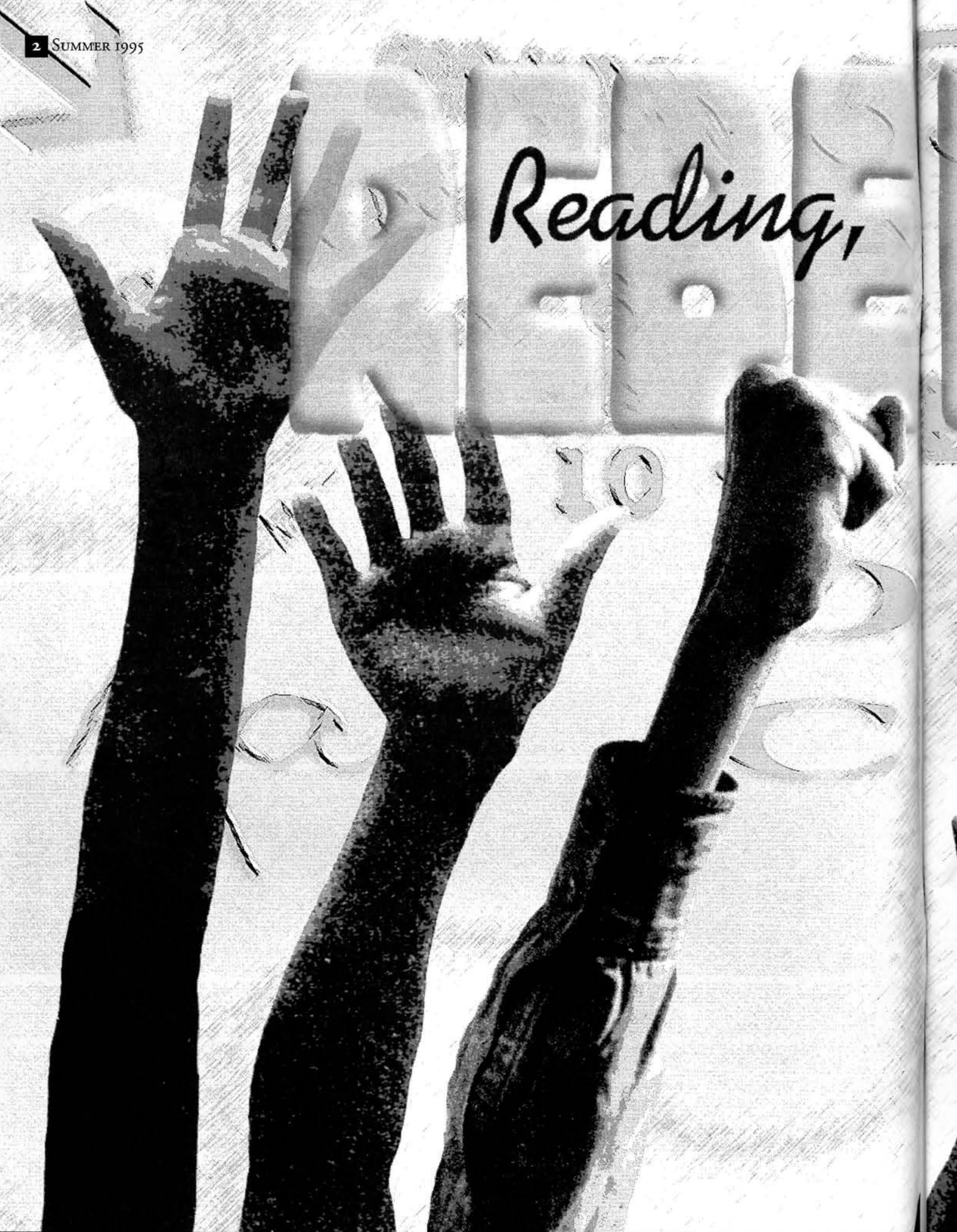
In regard to welfare, the Contract is explicitly cruel: it aims to deny welfare to teenage mothers (understood as predominantly Black), and *use the savings to take their children away from them!*

Meanwhile, to empower business the Contract and other legislation calls for a rollback of environmental and consumer protection, worker health and safety regulations. At the same time, it wants to cut taxes on capital gains (the profit from selling a factory, for example) by 50 percent and compensate property owners for the dollar impact on their holdings of whatever environmental or other federal regulations remain on the books after Republican hatchets have swung. Mass deprivation—with a sharp racist edge—and subsidies to the privileged: these are the terms of the Contract.

Most of these provisions center on what government should *not* do: not tax, not pay, not interfere with business. But there is one thing that the Contract calls for government *to do* most vigorously: arm. "The Contract," notes the *Village Voice*, "seeks to have welfare cutbacks finance capital-gains tax cuts and increased military expenditure." "Providing for the common defense is the first duty of our government," says the Contract. The Contract calls on the federal government "to stop putting American troops under UN command [a tip of the hat to the neo-Nazis], to stop raiding the defense budget to finance social programs...and to stop gutting Ronald Reagan's vision of protecting American against nuclear or chemical attack...from terrorist states such as North Korea, Iran, and Libya." The Contract calls for new defensive missile systems, and for the U.S. to build a strong NATO alliance with European countries, emphasizing that "NATO military planning includes joint operations outside of NATO jurisdiction," i.e., *a license to invade anywhere.* These Republicans are no more isolationist than Teddy Roosevelt was.

So the old-style brand of imperialism may not be finished after all. It is commonplace these days to view capital as international, without national allegiance, unfazed by the vicissitudes of any nation's policies toward business, whether stringent or loose. The Contract shows that, despite the current "spectre" of globalization of capital, power is and will be decidedly national. Says Harry Magdoff: "there never has been a time when...national [economic institutions] ceased to struggle each for its own preferment and advantage." Capital is still nationally based. Nations are owned—and increasingly, as many well-known sets of statistics attest, owned by fewer and fewer people. (In the U.S. the top one percent of the population owns 38 percent of the wealth, and the top 20 percent owns just about all of it—85 percent.)

The Contract *with* America is a contract *on* the world. So people of color, immigrants, women, and the poor pose a problem for corporate power, making it hard for the one percent to increase their holdings and their freedom of action. What's at stake is not just the family and the community, but the planet. ❑


Reading,

Education is supposedly valued in all cultures. Yet if you take a close look at public policy and financing in the U.S. today, you will conclude just the opposite. Education is more strapped for funds than ever. At the same time, prison construction skyrockets. We live in a society more committed to incarceration than to learning.

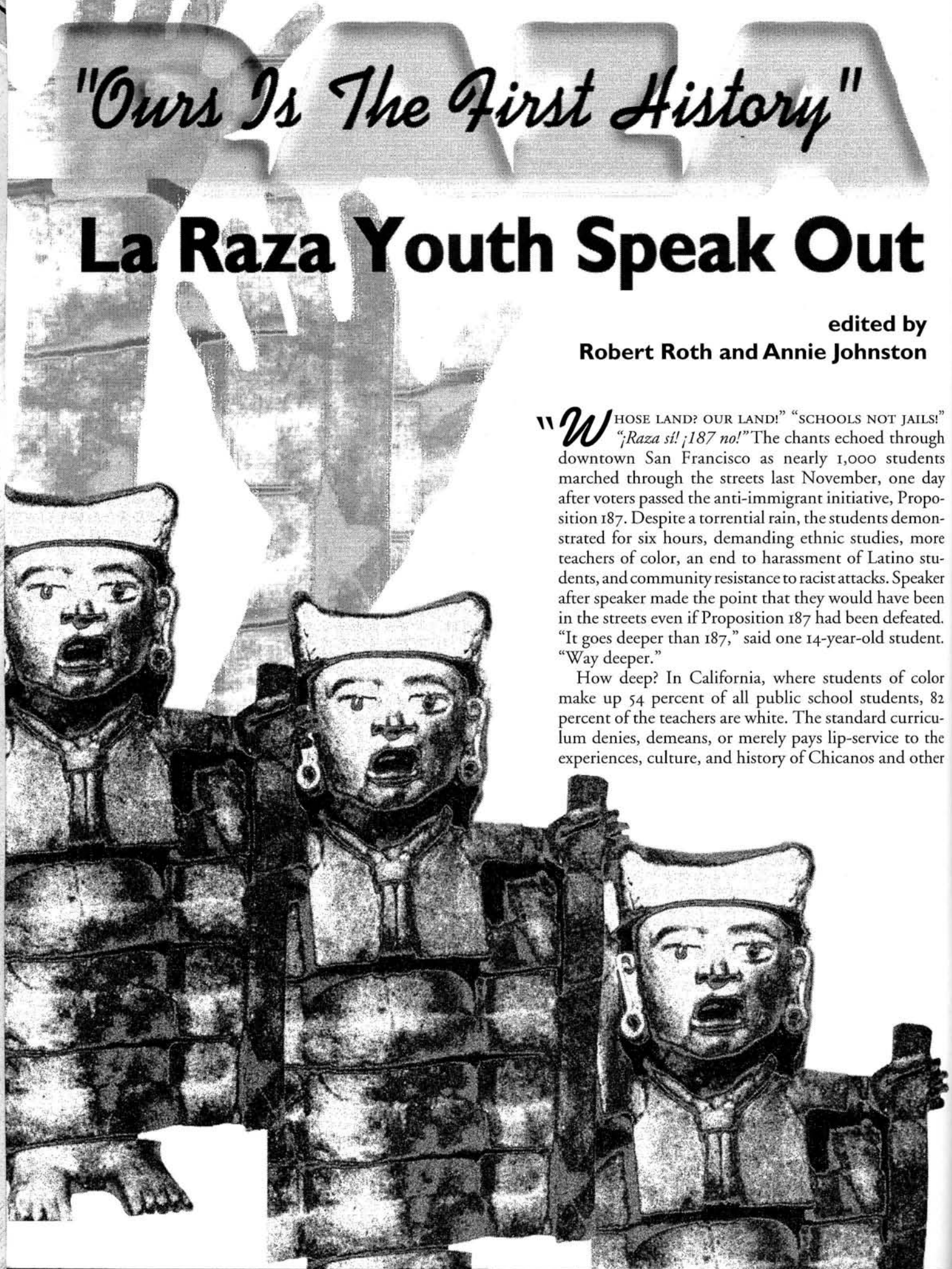
Education remains a battleground on which every major social issue is fought out. Just as African slaves taught each other to read—even under penalty of death—students of color are organizing today in high schools and colleges, and Black and Latino communities continue to demand control of their schools. In the face of an upsurge against feminism, two studies have come out confirming the judgment of many women that they never quite got an equal chance in school—and that their daughters are equally "at risk." While school districts are being threatened with Congressional retribution if they even mention homosexuality, lesbians and gay men are developing gay-positive curricula and going into the schools themselves to work with parents and teachers. Progressive educators are debating what it takes to have real anti-racist education which empowers their students.

This issue of Breakthrough *offers five articles on education: Chicano youth speak eloquently of their struggle to challenge racism and reshape curriculum; teachers at Berkeley High respond to* School Colors, *PBS's sensationalistic documentary about "racial separatism" at their school; Peggy Orenstein reflects on the issues of gender inequity raised in her book,* SchoolGirls; *we examine the efforts by Chicago's Puerto Rican community to reform Roberto Clemente High School; and we focus on homophobia in the schools and some attempts to challenge it.*

"Ours Is The First History"

La Raza Youth Speak Out

edited by
Robert Roth and Annie Johnston



"WHOSE LAND? OUR LAND!" "SCHOOLS NOT JAILS!" *"¡Raza sí! ¡187 no!"* The chants echoed through downtown San Francisco as nearly 1,000 students marched through the streets last November, one day after voters passed the anti-immigrant initiative, Proposition 187. Despite a torrential rain, the students demonstrated for six hours, demanding ethnic studies, more teachers of color, an end to harassment of Latino students, and community resistance to racist attacks. Speaker after speaker made the point that they would have been in the streets even if Proposition 187 had been defeated. "It goes deeper than 187," said one 14-year-old student. "Way deeper."

How deep? In California, where students of color make up 54 percent of all public school students, 82 percent of the teachers are white. The standard curriculum denies, demeans, or merely pays lip-service to the experiences, culture, and history of Chicanos and other

Latino students. According to a 1985 study, for every 100 Latinos who enter kindergarten only 55 graduate from high school, just 25 enter college, only 7 finish college, 4 go on to graduate school, and only 2 receive an advanced degree. In the ten years since 1985, the situation has gotten even worse. Over 50 percent of Latino males now drop out of high school before graduating, and the overall high school completion rate for Latino students has dropped 10 percentage points.

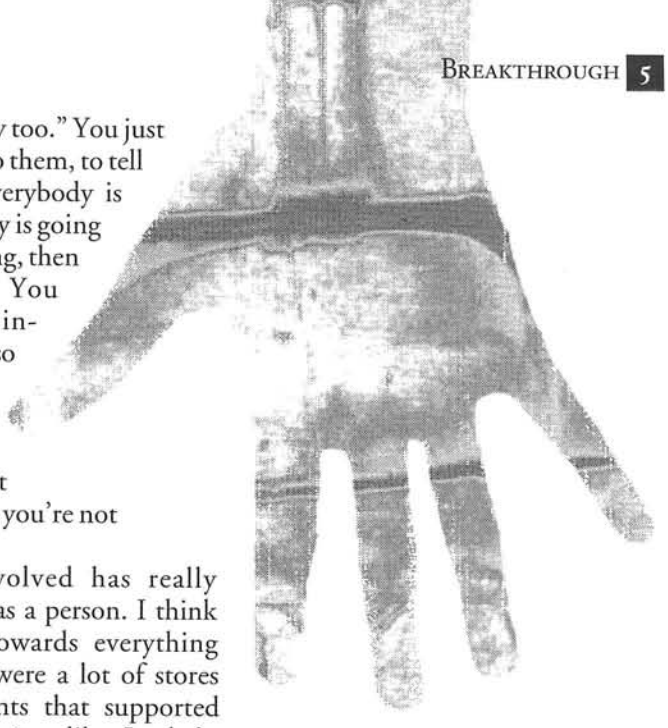
The school walkouts and other actions reflect a surge in pride, consciousness, and organizing among Raza youth. A key part of this process is the Student Empowerment Programs, a youth-led network initiated by activists from the Chicano Moratorium Coalition. Last November youth organizers coordinated walkouts and demonstrations in 14 cities, from Sacramento to Salinas. At weekly meetings in the San Francisco Bay Area, students come together to educate and train each other, discuss all aspects of their work, meet with activists from other movements, and develop long-range plans and strategies.

Breakthrough is pleased to present a series of discussions with youth organizers from the Bay Area. We talked to middle school, high school, and college students, and veteran organizers from the Chicano Moratorium Coalition. We asked them why they got involved, how the work has changed them, what their goals are, where the work is going. Their answers speak for themselves.

KAREN, 15

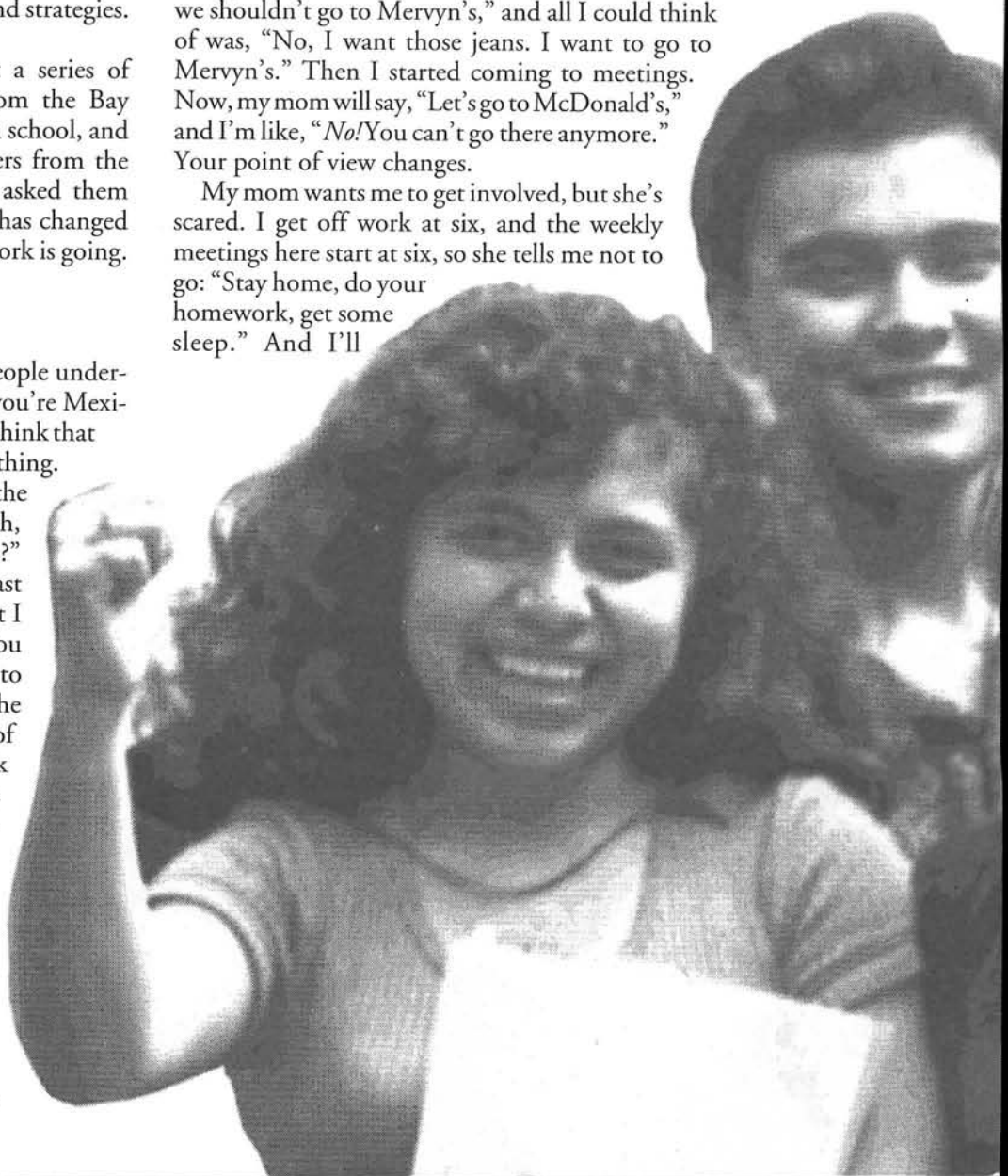
As a Chicana, I think that a lot of people underestimate me. They think that because you're Mexican or Chicana that you're lower. They think that you're not going to be able to do anything. Teachers are surprised. I think it's the worst for the girls. People are like, "Oh, you are a girl. What are you trying to do?" When I was passing out flyers for the last walkout, I gave them to some guys that I don't even know, and they were like, "You really think people are going to listen to you?" I just said, "Well, yeah, here's the flyer." They listen to me, I think. A lot of people respect you more. They think that you are trying to make a difference. You're walking down the street, and somebody will tell you, "Hi," and you don't even know who they are. But they know you.

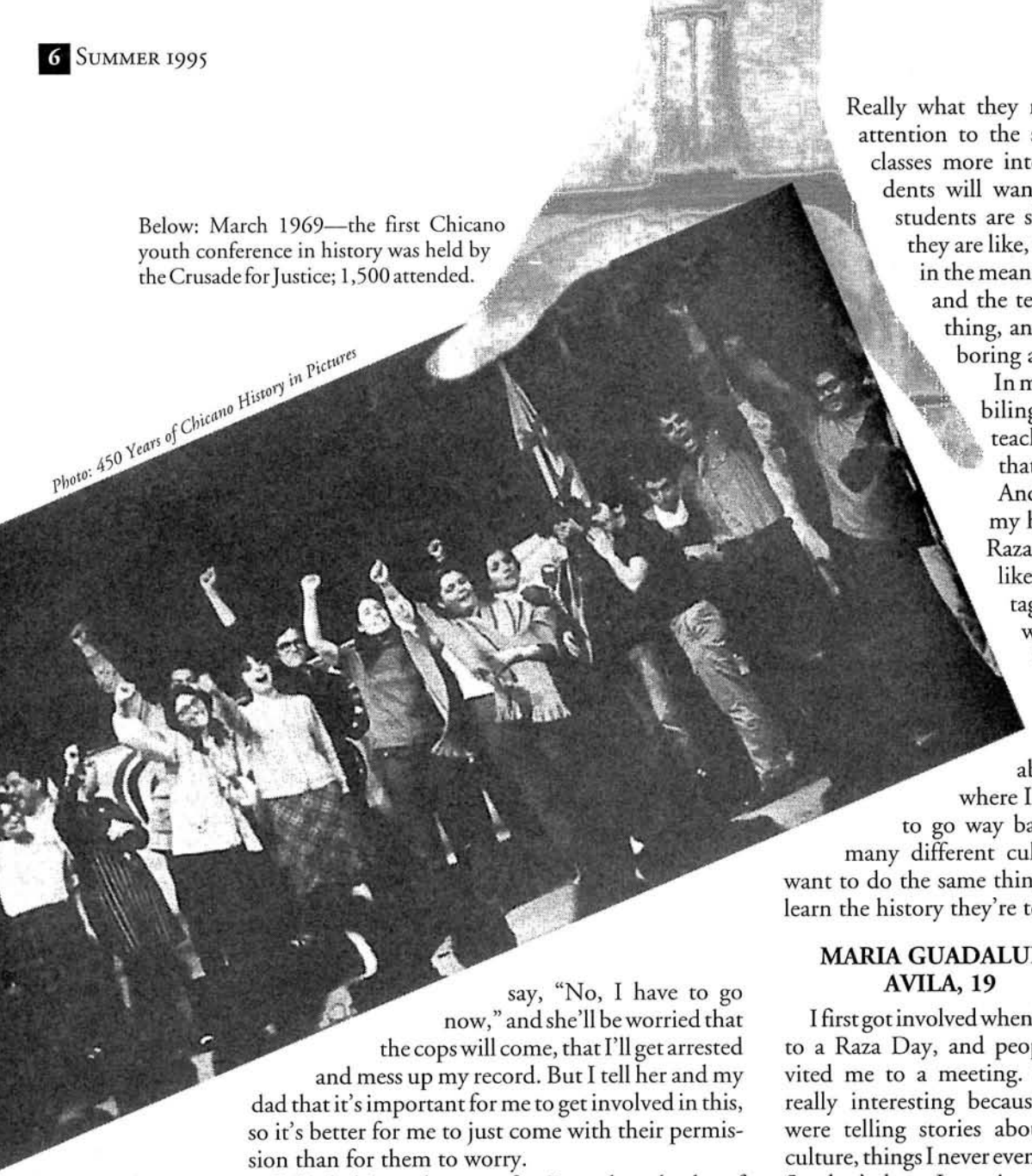
If a girl doesn't want to talk at the meetings, you go up to them. You're like, "What's wrong? Is there anything wrong with you? Why don't you want to talk?" Sometimes they'll say, "Well, I'm shy," and you're like, "Well, once I was shy too." You just have to talk to them, to tell them that everybody is shy. If nobody is going to say anything, then why come? You should get involved more, so that you can be heard. Otherwise, if you just sit there, it's like you're not here.



Being involved has really changed me as a person. I think differently towards everything now. There were a lot of stores and restaurants that supported Proposition 187—like Lucky's, Mervyn's, McDonald's. My mom would say, "No, we shouldn't go to Mervyn's," and all I could think of was, "No, I want those jeans. I want to go to Mervyn's." Then I started coming to meetings. Now, my mom will say, "Let's go to McDonald's," and I'm like, "*No!* You can't go there anymore." Your point of view changes.

My mom wants me to get involved, but she's scared. I get off work at six, and the weekly meetings here start at six, so she tells me not to go: "Stay home, do your homework, get some sleep." And I'll





Below: March 1969—the first Chicano youth conference in history was held by the Crusade for Justice; 1,500 attended.

Photo: 450 Years of Chicano History in Pictures

Really what they need to do is pay more attention to the students. And make the classes more interesting so that the students will want to learn. A lot of the students are sitting at their desks and they are like, okay, I want to learn, but in the meantime 15 minutes passes by, and the teacher isn't teaching anything, and the classroom seems so boring and out of hand.

In my elementary school I had bilingual teachers who were teaching me Spanish, but after that I've had only English. And I have had nothing about my history. Nothing. For my Raza, being a Chicana, I would like to learn about my heritage. I want to learn how to write good in Spanish. I know how to speak Spanish, but I only know how to write a little. I definitely want to learn about my history, about where I really come from. I want to go way back. I think people from many different cultures feel this way. We want to do the same thing. We don't want to just learn the history they're teaching us now.

say, "No, I have to go now," and she'll be worried that the cops will come, that I'll get arrested and mess up my record. But I tell her and my dad that it's important for me to get involved in this, so it's better for me to just come with their permission than for them to worry.

I think this work can go far. Even though a lot of people say that the racism has stopped, it hasn't. My friend is one of the only Latina girls that work at this Taco Bell and they discriminate against her. The racism hasn't stopped. I think that everybody has to get involved and when that happens everything will change. You can't just be saying, "Oh! I hate this, I hate that," and then you don't try to change anything. So you have to get involved.

ALEJANDRINA RENTERIA, 17

I think we have to be heard, to stand up for what we believe, that's what my thoughts are. In my school the classes are very crowded, and the teachers don't have a lot of patience. Sometimes I just feel that the teachers are not cooperating with the class. Like they will give their lessons, but then they'll get tired of this or that and start sending people to the back of the room or out of the classroom on referrals.

MARIA GUADALUPE AVILA, 19

I first got involved when I came to a Raza Day, and people invited me to a meeting. It was really interesting because they were telling stories about our culture, things I never even knew. So that's how I got interested, because there were so many things that they were explaining to us that we never learned in school. I decided to be in the education group. What we do is teach ourselves about our culture and then make a plan to get Chicano studies in all our high schools. We need to get curriculum from places that already have Chicano studies and start it up in new

places where they don't have it.

I'm going to graduate this year, and I've been thinking more about going to college, because I want to help out more. I would be the only one from my family, the first to go to a university. I want to do more things for La Raza. I want to help people get Latino clubs in all the schools. I've got younger brothers and sisters, and they don't have Latino clubs or Chicano studies at their schools. I'm trying to get a Latino club into my brother's school, because they don't have nothing there. In that school, all they have is riots and fighting—and it's all against each other, like Salvadorans against Mexicans. So they really need to put a Raza club together.

I would like to see this thing get bigger, not only in the Bay Area but all over California and throughout the U.S. I think if we come together we can get what we want. We can get more rights, and less discrimination. If we come together, we can get all this accomplished.

MIGUEL, 13

My brother first started bringing me to meetings two or three months ago. He wanted me to get involved with Chicano studies and learning more about my history, so he started bringing me here, and that's where I learned all this stuff.

Really, I was involved before. Just last year, when I was in the sixth grade, I was talking to sixth graders, and fourth and fifth in my elementary school. I was talking about grapes. I went around to different classes and told them to stop buying grapes, because of the pesticides that they are putting on the grapes that's killing the farmworkers and their children. Their children have been born with cancer and missing parts of their body.

I believe I changed some people's minds. It felt good. Because when I did that it was like, if I could do this, I could do more. And I felt special; I just felt special those days when I was doing that.

There are a lot of things that need to change. First, there's the grapes and what's still happening to the farm workers. And there's that three-strikes law that just passed; that's wrong too. And especially Proposition 187, because they are trying to kick out all the immigrants from the schools and send them back to Mexico.

MARCOS, 21

I am a third-year student at UC Berkeley. I grew up in Orange County after I came here from Central America.

I first became active because of what was going on in my country, Guatemala. It does not take a genius to know what's going on there; I think the people on the street pretty much have a grasp on the situation. So I had that consciousness with me already when I came to this country. But definitely the things that

have happened since I have been here have had a big impact. Growing up in an area like Orange County, books like *500 Years of Chicano History* are banned. There was no interest on the part of many teachers in anything outside of what they had been taught—the same stuff about the greatness of Lincoln, about Washington, about the founding of this country, all from a very conservative perspective.

I started getting involved just this last summer. Two years ago, a couple of Chicanos at the university started meeting with some organizers from the

community. They came up with ideas and strategies for how to start doing some of the protests that would get us attention and the clout to bring about changes. They had this big march, this walkout on the 16th of September. There were about 3,000 people that were walking around Berkeley that day, and I helped out. I helped with the security, but I did not know what it really was for. The march was around the time of the quincentennial of Columbus's invasion. But other than that, I didn't know what it was all about. Then last spring, I started getting more involved with the people that were actually organizing, and they told me about these meetings. I started hearing some of their goals, which I didn't know even when I was walking out for them a while back. It sounded like something good to me, so I started coming to meetings over the summer, and I have been coming pretty consistently ever since.

We need to raise our consciousness of who we are. Dispel, get rid of those myths that we were given that we were just a bunch of savages before our Spanish side came over and civilized us. I think that fundamental change will lead us to rethink who we are, and once we rethink who we are and take pride in who we truly are, we can stand on firmer ground.

I always wanted to do this work, but I did not know it was possible. I didn't know it could be done. I didn't know that you could walk out 3,000 or 5,000 students. I did not know that kind of thing was remotely possible. I thought that was the 60s, and that was where it ended. So when it was happening in Berkeley, I took part in it gladly, because I thought here is my chance to be involved with something that is making a change. When we tell somebody that we organized 13,000 students to walk out at various times, and we coordinated these walkouts on the same day, they sit there with their mouths hanging open, not believing what is being said. But then you just got to show them the newspaper articles, the evidence that it has been done.

A lot of the students are waking up to the fact that they have power, even though their parents do not feel empowered at all. A lot of the parents feel like they are here as visitors, which is the same colonized mentality that tells us we were not here before, that civilization was just given to us, so we are not part of the political process here.

I think there is a real possibility for growth in this work. Most people tend to see the present in really negative terms—you know, that nothing is possible, especially with the current administration and the new Congress, and that any alternative to what has been going on is just impossible. I think that is a mistake, and I think that within 10 to 15 years, we are going to see a complete swing around in the way things are happening. It is small projects like we're doing here that are going to, like Malcolm X said, wake people up to their humanity.

BENICIO SILVA, 21
UC BERKELEY STUDENT

I was born in Indio, but I grew up in the small town of Thermal in Coachella Valley, a very agricultural area. One day I was sitting in my counselor's office at the high school. That's where I hung out a lot, because he was Chicano and helped us out a lot, and I got close to him. He asked me, "Did you know that we have our own history?" He pointed out that people have to learn the basic things, like the Aztecs, the zoot suit riots, the farmworkers, the pyramids, and all that. So I was kind of interested, so the next day I went to the library and I just looked up stuff on Mexican Americans. I began to read about all of these things and the different injustices, the very negative things that have happened to our people. I was very angry that we did not have anything about Chicanos in history classes. I mean, there was this new text book and it had a couple of pages and a picture of a mural.

We were looking at this video about the farmworkers tonight, and I was thinking about how, where we grew up on a ranch, they would spray the fields with pesticides every Sunday in the summer. It makes me think about the people that have to get up in the morning, every morning before the crack of dawn, and work all day and then come home, and their kids are going through this culture shock at school, learning to be ashamed of themselves, and they carry that shame for the rest of their lives. It manifests itself in drinking, in drugs, in addictions, and they carry it on to their families when they get married.

People talk about reform, but it's a manipulation, it's this whole thing with the American dream: all you have to do is learn the language, go to school, get an education, vote and you will get what you want. People get fooled. Really, we have to dismantle the system. I heard this man on a rap album. He said, we cannot walk both roads. We have been trying to balance when we try to walk both ways, but we can't because that means we've got to compromise, and it means that ultimately you get lost to what is called mainstream America, and you get lost in the shuffle. We don't want that. In the long run, we don't want that. In the long run, you're training the students to recognize that they are, for example, indigenous; for example, they have certain rights; for example, they are from here; and also to hook up with other peoples who are here, who have been victimized. I think that is the whole basis, because if you focus on just one people and we ignore everyone else, then we can't do it, because in our traditions we are taught that we are all one people, and that we all of us have the job to take care of the land, the Mother Earth.

I want to walk the spiritual path, walk the right road, and that is very hard. I have always fallen back, and then I have had to kind of start again. Some-

times, a student will say, "I remember when you came and talked to my school and you said this or that and that's why I'm at this meeting." They give me positive feedback. I think it has helped me, because I learned that I have some potential in myself, and I improved my speaking skills and different things. You learn, you grow, you learn, you move on, and you always question what is next. It's hard, and you don't know what the plan is, and you don't know what the hell is going to happen, and you don't know if there is going to be a war or if it is going to be peaceful. There's beautiful moments, you know, when we have met and done ceremonies, and sometimes it's real beautiful to see the students. Sometimes I think about them because, like, they will be on the street, and you know, you stop and think about what they are going through every day. They are my space. So it's a personal thing too.

ADRIANA MONTES, CHICANO MORATORIUM ORGANIZER

What I see as a long-term goal or vision is to be able to have a lot of these young people network with each other and have organizing skills when they need it. You see all of these laws targeting Raza, and I think it's going to be the responsibility of the young people to be able to organize people, to fight these different laws that are coming up—like the immigration laws and the English-only laws. I mean that is what I want to see: young people being able to network, to have those skills, and to learn their traditions. Back in the 80s we learned about spirituality from older organizers in the Chicano Moratorium. It was fairly new to me, but they taught me a lot, and I want to see all these younger people be able to go back to their old traditions and become harmonious with Mother Earth.

We need to change what the young people are learning, their education. We had meetings with the students, and they said that if we could change the educational system, it would affect a lot of things, like issues in the community, gangs, how they see themselves. They are not really taught their history, their culture, how rich it is. They are always taught the negative part of it. You know, you teach little kids that they are savages or whatever and it really affects how they think of themselves. Even if we have our own schools and our own curriculum, it has to be institutionalized in the schools, where everybody has to learn it.

GABRIEL HERNANDEZ, CHICANO MORATORIUM ORGANIZER

You know, we have been taught to organize by thinking about seven generations. Many people think this means that the seven generations starts now and then you go seven generations ahead. But seven generations doesn't mean that. It means you start with your great grandparents, your parents, yourself as a child, and then you go to you as a parent, then as a grandparent, and as a great grandparent. Those are the seven generations. Okay. So what does that mean? You, as a child today, the decisions that you make not only are going to affect the future, but they are going to affect the past. What we do in 1995 affects how the Chicanos of the 1960s are looked at. Decisions we make now affect how our children see us when we get older. The young people don't yet put their decisions into this context. They try and make decisions based on what is happening now. You know, that's like a lot of organizing that I've seen for the last 15 years, and I don't like it. People have an event that they've got to do. They build up for that event, do the event, stop, and then they go, "Okay, now what do we do?" But what's the long-term plan? How does this meeting flow into the next one? How does this walkout feed into the next ceremony, into the next action?

It would be naive to organize these young people to stand up, to walk, to run, to defend themselves thinking that shit is going to happen nicely. We are kidding ourselves if we think that people are going to say, "Oh, you people belong here, you are right, you are indigenous to these lands, and you have aboriginal rights to tell us how things should be." Chicanos and brown people in the Southwest hit too close to home. Zapatistas are all right because they are way the hell down there in Chiapas. Okay, but if we had Zapatistas on the border, if that whole movement begins to hook up with what is happening in the Southwest, then I think that we would have a problem, and all these people would not scream, "Viva Los Zapatistas"—they would be saying, "Kill those fucking Mexicans." It's cool to be able to say, "We are the Zapatista Solidarity Group," because it is over there. But those people over there in the mountains are no different from the students walking in the streets here. How do we teach the young people to make those con-

nections, and how do we teach the people in this society to support them?

We teach that you have to understand and talk about other people's struggles. Don't organize in a vacuum. Build coalitions. We talk about the four sacred colors—not just brown. We were not the only ones displaced, and we also understand what it must feel like to be brought here against your own will. This isn't about a multicultural agenda. Multicultural is the new name for melting pot. You know: put Cesar Chavez in a book. Tell us that we're all in the same boat. No! So it's not about multicultural agendas. But it is about recognizing where we do have the same struggle. One time a new person said "mayate"—a derogatory term in Spanish meaning black bug— when referring to Black people. The mood in the room was so heavy you could tell he wanted to take it right back. We know that those ideas exist in our community and that we have to work to change it. How do you deal with this? How do you take that person from "mayate" to "sacred Black people"? That's our responsibility.

Sure, we have big issues over homophobia and sexism. And we have to talk about them, not hide from them. The leadership of each of our committees is supposed to be 50-50, men and women. Well, some of the women felt that I was always calling on the men to run the committee meetings. And they called me on that. We have a big problem around how the young women are treated within their families. Many parents will let their sons go out to meetings, but never their daughters. And we've had to really confront parents about who their daughters are. "This is a leader. When you keep her home, you're not just hurting her, you're hurting 40 other people."

I went to Fresno after the election—you know, when Proposition 187 passed. And I raised the issue of homophobia there, in a meeting of 2,000 people. In Fresno, Proposition 187 won, even though the majority of the people are brown. I mean, you have all these counties in Northern California that voted up to 70 percent against 187, and many of these counties have few brown people. And in San Francisco, where 187 was beaten the worst, white lesbians were leading the work, doing not just talking. And I said this in Fresno, made a point of saying it. We have to talk about these things.

The organizing is an exercise. Right now the young people believe that the fight is over the educational system because that is where they thought they could be most effective. So that is what we did. We said, "Okay, that's the playing field. We will do it, we will organize around educational issues, and we will go after the educational power structure." But it is also an exercise. It is an exercise in learning how to mobilize, it is an exercise in learning how to develop structured organization, it is an exercise in dealing with the dynamics of sexism and homophobia, it is an exercise in communicating from city to city and still being able to make decisions. It is an exercise in learning how a small group of 30 people can mobilize 1,000 people—and then how a group of 500 people can move 50,000 people.

At this point, it is nothing more than skill building. Learning to think strategically. What are the consequences of actions? What are the consequences of not doing things? What are the consequences of doing a walkout versus boycotting the CLAS tests (statewide learning assessment test), versus just doing internal organizing to make sure that the internal structure is tight? The thinking is that at some point in the future, if enough people have the skills to mobilize and make strategic decision, to understand all these things, something is going to trigger that group to say, "Fuck this." If they load up the trains and line them all up and say, "Okay, everybody that is brown, report your ass down to the station with your documents to prove that we shouldn't ship you home." If that happens, who is going to sit there and stop that? Who is going to be organized in this day and age? Who is going to stop that? And that is what we are organizing to do, or at least that is my vision of the organizing. To get enough young people from an indigenous perspective, a spiritual perspective, to make those critical decisions, to know how and to see what is coming and to be ready for it when it happens.

RAQUEL, 20

I went through the system in the Oakland public schools. You see that things are messed up, but you don't know what to do to help. It's hard to see the problem, and people have the attitude that that's just the way things are. But I knew that there was much more to it than that. Once I was at UC Berkeley I began taking classes I never knew existed: Chicano studies, Native American studies, the history background that was never really available in high school. Racism was always talked about in Black and white in high school. We learned about slavery and such, but not about my own people. Taking these classes pushes me to become involved in CHALE (Chicanos and Latinos for Empowerment) and MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicanos en Aztlan).

CHALE is a program where we go to the high schools twice a week and talk to the youth. We don't just tutor them; we talk to them about how the teachers are treating them. A lot of them are the students labeled "at risk"—the ones they think are the troublemakers. There are often many unfair ways that they are being treated. But just pushing the administrators and advocating for these students is limited. CHALE is the consciousness-raising part of it, and it leads students from both the high school and the university to enter the organizing because you are consciously dealing with how the education system treats you.

So in the summer I began to go to meetings at the union hall. We began to tell the students about our experiences and about other ways of dealing with frustrations at school.

Going to meetings is a learning process. Sooner or later it is up to us to start running them. That has really, really helped me in being able to talk more. I used to be really quiet. I didn't say anything. I didn't know how to express myself or say things. It really developed my ability to say things because I had to. I'm more secure about myself and what I think now. I feel a lot stronger from inside. It feels like I have a voice and it counts.

Just the same way that we wake up to knowing how messed up things are as Raza students, I went through the same process in waking up to women's issues. Certain patterns in male-female relationships are just taken for granted. People say that's just the way things are. I've woken up to that too. For example, say a woman is in a relationship with someone and they both work together organizing. But then when they break up, the man won't speak to her; he won't even call her by her name. That shows me that we are seen as sexual objects first. They won't even look at you. Nothing else matters but that. We have respect as long as we are in relationships with them. Once that is lost the respect is gone too.

There are two types of sexism. The up-in-your-face type and the unconscious type. It's the unconscious type that gets in your face every day. Like at meetings. In the organizing there is a 50-50 rule where male and female have to be represented and there are male and female chairs. If someone has

questions they will always go up to the male chair. The committees are always referred to as the guy's committee—not the education committee. When we are in the conferences, meeting people, or we go somewhere to speak, they will always shake the guy's hand, but they'll never address me. They act like I don't exist. They assume that it is the guy who does the real work.

I've also woken up to how women treat women. It's the same thing as how Raza treats Raza. It seems that women are taught to be a certain way, there is a certain role that women are supposed to be in, and if a woman breaks out of that they'll get criticized not just by the men but by the women. Like if you're not monogamous or if you dress a certain way, they'll say you are slutty or you're not supposed to expose yourself.

We've tried to have female and male talking circles, but it's always the women who talk about it. The guys feel that it's a women's thing. The guys aren't going to talk about sexism or even about how they treat each other unless the women organize it. We have to force those issues. It gets very emotional—all that stuff really builds up. It's just like racism. It has to be dealt with. It has the same priority. If it's not dealt with then it's just going to break us up, just like it did when there was a Chicano movement and a Chicana movement. At UCB there are all these Raza women forming the same committees that MEChA has. Instead of talking to the men and forcing them to deal with these things, they are creating their own movement.

The female tutors sometimes can't tutor the male students because either they feel intimidated or because the guys start asking, "Do you have a boyfriend?" That's what they see in us first. So, in addition to the workshops we do with the high school students, I think we should do gender issues workshops. I don't think it should wait until people get to college. Plus, if Raza groups on campus have to do a workshop on it, it's another way of forcing the issue.

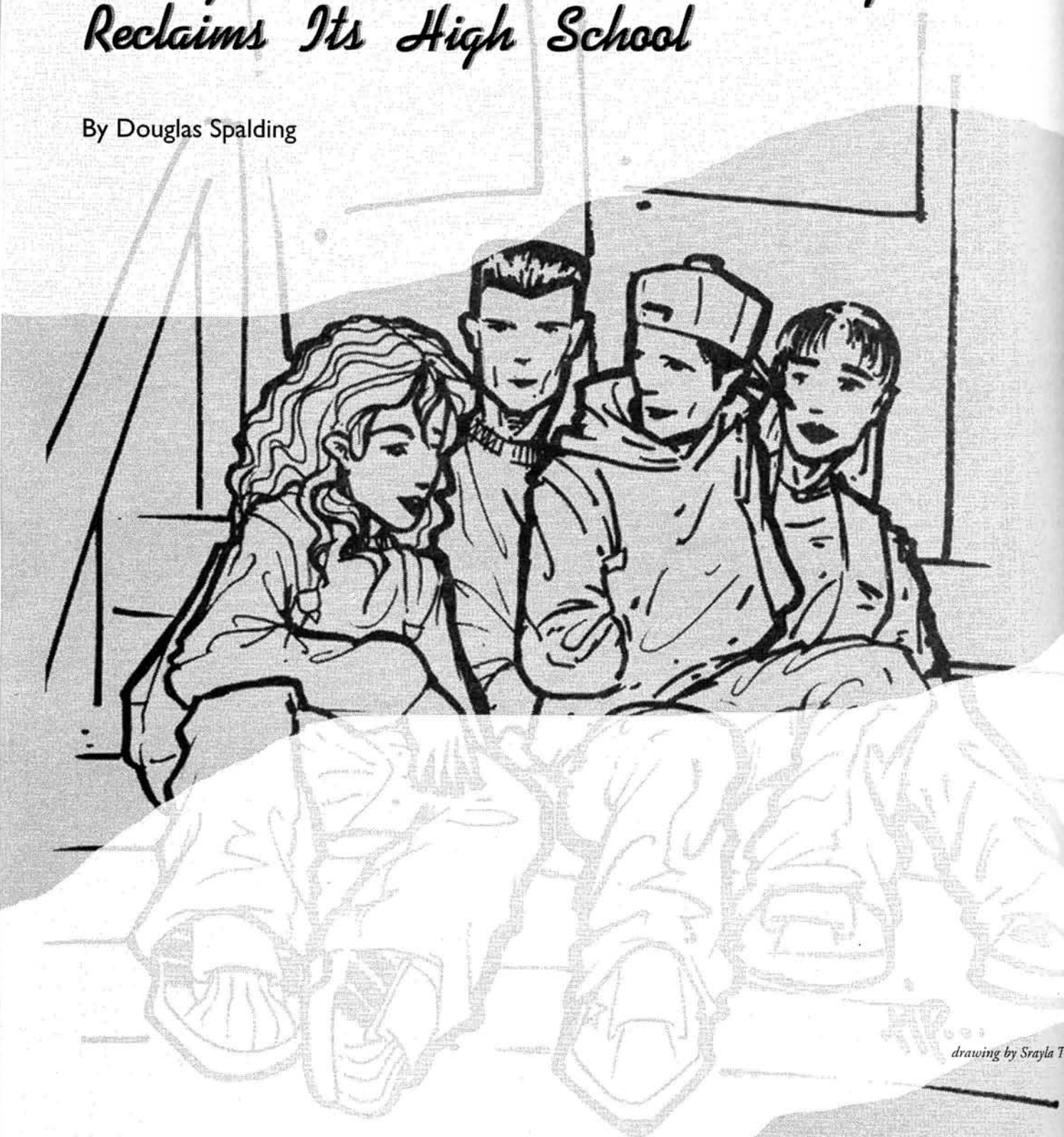
I'd like to see people recognize us as indigenous to this land. That's the base of it. I don't think Raza studies will be seen as legitimate or important unless we're seen as the people of this land. The purpose is to get ethnic studies as a requirement in the high schools, just like world history and U.S. history. It doesn't work when teachers say they will incorporate it into the curriculum because they'll just think it's something they are being forced to include. It should be *the* history, the first history. U.S. history comes second. ❑

For more information or to send donations, contact the Chicano Moratorium Coalition, P. O. Box 2031, Berkeley, CA 94702, (510) 893-3181, ext. 120.

Clemente!

Chicago's Puerto Rican Community Reclaims Its High School

By Douglas Spalding



drawing by Srayla Tip

THE BUILDING THAT HOUSES CHICAGO'S Clemente High School is seven stories of brown steel and dark glass, as cold and uninviting as the winter day I arrive there. I pass through the unremarkable lobby and up the escalator, and—Clemente comes alive with color. Murals cover the walls celebrating womanhood, Puerto Rico en Chicago, Kwanzaa, Emperadores Aztecas, Puerto Rican prisoner of war Carmen Valentín (who taught at Clemente more than 20 years ago), and the Pittsburgh Pirates' great Roberto Clemente himself.

This is the high school some have disparaged as Illinois' worst. But not Clemente's students. They talk about their desire to learn, and fiercely defend the honor of Clemente. Margie Santiago, 15, tells me: "The school is not as bad as what you hear. You've got to come see it for yourself." Ismera Martinez realizes, "The only chance I have to go to college is to get a principal's scholarship, which I can get at Clemente if I try hard enough." Margie concludes: "You find out Clemente's like all high schools. The thing is it has different activities"—like Son del Barrio, the only high school salsa band in the U.S. But, fairly, Clemente cannot be compared to other high schools. Clemente represents a unique model for school reform in the U.S. Clemente's program addresses the real problems that underlie students' poor academic performance, such as institutional racism, gangs, and pregnancy. Its success is a product of vision, dedication, innovation, and struggle.

It started as a campaign, ultimately successful, to rid what was then Tuley High of a racist principal. During the late 1960s Chicago's West Town community demanded that schools be more responsive to their needs, with more Puerto Rican teachers, a Latin American studies program, and better opportunities to enter college. At that time, among those who gained their first experience in community organizing were Oscar López, Lucy Rodríguez, Alberto Rodríguez, Haydeé Beltrán, Ricardo Jimenez, Alicia Rodríguez, and Carmen Valentín (all now serving long prison sentences on the charge of seditious conspiracy against the United States; see Write Through the Walls, p. 56). Carmen Valentín, a Tuley teacher and counselor, was eventually fired by the Board of Education for inciting students. But the movement achieved many goals. The principal was forced out, Latin American history was installed, and a parent-led Community Advisory Council was instituted. The changes lasted nearly two years before the Chicago Board of Education eliminated the council and appointed a new principal the council had rejected. Mud Carson, a Daley Democrat, was just the principal to keep radical politics out of Tuley. For the next 20 years it was back to business as usual.

In 1990 the Chicago *Sun-Times* identified Clemente as one of the poorest schools in Chicago, with 74 percent of its students living in poverty-level homes, nearly 60 percent of sophomores scoring at the lowest reading level, and more than 70 percent of students dropping out. Moreover, 30 percent of students fell into the "limited English" classification.

Meanwhile a new crisis had developed. An interview with Clemente's white librarian and two white teachers was published in the *Chicago Reader* (a weekly magazine) blaming the problems at Clemente on the students' cultural background. The article incensed the Puerto Rican community, who demanded (and won) the resignation of the teachers involved, and drafted a document, *Hope in the Crisis*, a four-point program that became the blueprint for transforming the failed school into the Roberto Clemente Community Academy High School. *Hope* called for:

1. A bilingual and multicultural curriculum that will empower youth;
2. A program emphasizing self-discipline, centered on peer conflict mediation;
3. Giving students, parents, and teachers a direct role in formulating school policy through a body called the Local School Council (LSC);
4. Building an effective community support service.

Hope claimed that "students can act responsibly...to chart their own struggles." When a community is unified, *Hope* insisted, there's the real possibility of changing the course of the school.

During this same period, the Chicago Board of Education enacted sweeping educational reforms, establishing Local School Councils and giving these bodies power to select principals and govern money allocated to the school. The LSC gave the community a tool for transforming the school.

Power for school reform lies in the hands of the LSC and its ability to determine Clemente's budgets. The council has operated with a near consensus. In addition to the LSC, a broader organization of parents, community members, and teachers holds open meetings once a month to discuss what's going on at the school. Many of their ideas are brought to the LSC for approval and then implemented.

The LSC has devised some innovative programs for parental involvement. In March 1994, they established the Parent Mentor Program, recruiting 50 parents to work at the school. Each mentor focuses on five students among those having the most difficulty in school. "We talk to them. We find out the problems they've got, why they cut classes, or didn't come to school," explains parent and mentor Jose Rivera. Mentors have the difficult task of breaking down the profound alienation found in many of these students. "But kids have 10 times as much respect for parents as they do for teachers," observes Cindy Rodríguez, LSC chair.

Is the program effective? Parent Anna Rodríguez notes that mentored students do cut less. But problems run deep. "You

have to motivate these students all the time in order for them to do their work," explains Alma Figueroa. "We can talk to them a little, but not the whole time. For this program to work out, we have to involve not just parents, but teachers—everybody."

Mentor parents receive training in working with adolescents and in non-violent conflict resolution. The conflicts can be violent. "Sometimes you can't even talk to the student—they don't want to hear it," Anna states. "How about this guy [a gang member] gets mad at me and hits me. 'Let him hit you,' they say." The program is new, and this discussion reveals how the parents are trying to feel their way into their mentor roles. They identify several pet peeves: teachers who bar their doors, leaving students to wander the hallways; the extreme attitudes of some students; the need for stricter rules and more severe consequences for student misbehavior; their desire for metal detectors and more police protection. Yet, when asked what makes Clemente different, these parents respond unanimously: power in the school. Despite the shortcomings, they are confident the school is headed in the right direction.

Parents can also earn a Clemente high school diploma; last year 12 parents earned standard diplomas by participating in the Adult Education component of the High School Without Walls program developed by Clemente. Participants attended evening classes at the nearby Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center.

The centerpiece of High School Without Walls is the Satellite program, which served some 60 students in 1993–94 at the Cultural Center and at the Pedro Albizu Campos Museum of Puerto Rican History and Culture. The program is intended to help students in danger of dropping out of Clemente. Satellite students acknowledge they "messed-up"—by cutting, earning low grades and few credits, being troublemakers, and getting in fights. "Initially they're apathetic, they see no future in school," explains Irma Romero, a teacher's aide. Some students need a safe place to go to school, outside the boundaries of gang turf. Others need to be away from the distractions presented by their friends at Clemente. Classes meet for half a day, combining core subjects. Satellite teachers, as well as teaching multiple subjects, must act as counselors and social workers.

I talk to Satellite students in Marcos Vilar's classroom. They express a definite sense of needing to take control over their lives. "It's your life. If you want to be responsible, it's your own life and your own future," William Torres, in his second year, says matter-of-factly. Joanne Monterroso adds, "If you want to be another drop-out statistic, then that's on you." At Josephina High, a girls' school Joanne attended last year, "Some teachers really do nothing. They just write homework on the board and don't pay attention to you. If you fail, you fail. That's how it was. Clemente focuses more on the student. In here, Marcos comes to us, he says 'Do you understand? Are you lost?' If we ask for help he comes to us, 'cause we're a small class."

"We get more work done, in less time," William explains. Suhey Arroyo proposes putting on a talk show. "Students would come down and be in the audience," enthuses Margie Santiago. "I want to be the host. We're gonna talk about men!" Joanne blurts. This crew relishes discussion, on every topic—"from AIDS to Puerto Rican people to stuff from the movies. We learn more by discussing, ya hear!" exclaims William. Joanne describes a typical scene: "After we see a movie, we get all hyped-up talking about it. We start arguing, having discussion. When Marcos brings up racism too much, then we start arguing with him. We know it's real, but do we have to see and hear it too? Damn!" Teacher aide Irma Romero observes, "They are motivated by their 'Puerto Rican-ness.' We expect critical thinking; we want students to realize and act upon reality."

Students are encouraged to talk about their own problems as well. "We bring our problems to school sometimes and become frustrated, sad, mad, you know," Joanne remarks. William clarifies: "We talk about it, then just calm down. The rest of us don't laugh to make them feel bad. We try to relate, saying, 'Oh yeah, I've had that problem.'" Adrianna Gonzalez, another Satellite teacher explains, "Part of their success is putting them in touch with humanness. Their life on the streets can be so degrading."

The Satellite clearly reaches students who were otherwise failing. Successful Satellite students are encouraged to try regular courses for additional credit. A computer class has motivated William to think of going into business. "I want to own my own companies, invest in things," he says. Suhey just wants to go to college. Margie does outreach for an AIDS and STD prevention program through VIDA/SIDA, a health clinic in West Town. Marcos is helping Joanne get a plan together for graduation, which "includes night school, summer school, and more night school," she cheerfully recounts. "We think this program is great. Every high school should have one," Joanne decrees. More than a third of the Satellite participants from last year returned to the regular high school program this year.

Violence remains a central issue in the community. In late January, literally dozens of students (and a few outsiders) were sent out of the school to avert a turf war between the Cobras and Disciples, two gangs that operate in the area. Three Clemente students had been hit in a drive-by shooting over the weekend; one died. "He was here the first time this

all photos: Douglas Spalding

alternative program opened up," Joanne reminisces. Older students report that things have calmed down considerably in the hallways during the last two years. Marcos Vilar recalls when kids were thrown through glass windows a few years ago: "At any moment anything could happen," he says. "And it did." Both the number and severity of violent incidents inside the school have decreased. Clemente has emphasized peer mediation and the presence of parents, instead of the approach favored in most high schools—installing metal detectors and beefing up security. Significantly, Clemente has dedicated a room and an adult supervisor to peer mediation. Five parents are assigned to help with mediation. Currently 25 students, trained in conflict resolution and non-violent problem solving, conduct mediation aimed at sitting down the feuding parties, then working towards a contract acceptable to both sides. "Mediation concerns the creation of a better learning environment," reflects

sophomore Marisa Moyet, the student representative to the LSC.

But conflict can play a positive role in learning. Bilingual coordinator Carmen Marquez-Rivera has students role-play demonstrations in her classes. I watch groups of students stage mock protests over everything from abortion to burgers in the cafeteria. "Before Clemente's reform, I would never have taught my students about protest. But Chicago is a highly political city and there are issues they need to know." Last December two sophomores organized a contingent of 15 students to participate in a Human Rights Day march to support the Puerto Rican prisoners. And students understood all too well the insult of an American flag hung on a construction elevator during the erection of Bandera Borinquén, a massive steel sculpture representing the Puerto Rican flag that arches over Division Street. Outraged, students immediately wanted to take action to remove the offending flag. Finally, on an icy afternoon, one student scaled the structure, cheered wildly by fellow students both on the street and thronging the west windows of the Clemente building. Although the young man didn't quite make it to the top, the action brought hope and pride to the student body. Still, Vilar worries that students have been lulled into a false sense of security. There are more Puerto Rican teachers now, but what may have been lost is the general consciousness among students of the need for political activism. Assistant Principal Eduardo Negron tells me, "The curriculum still needs work to become better, a living curriculum."

Cultural activism is high, though. Clemente's salsa band, Son del Barrio, symbolizes the innovation found at Clemente. Son del Barrio creates and plays original compositions, based in the music of Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil. In the absence of a music teacher, Marcos Vilar serves as advisor and sometimes fills in on bass. Vilar describes the mix: "One thing they've learned is to be creative, to experiment, to discover what it is that they can do that no one else has done before. We mix things, try things—we might sound goofy, then all of us will laugh, we'll have fun, and then we'll go on to something else." Son del Barrio functions despite a variety of difficulties, most acutely a shortage of human and other resources. Though they received help from a few outside musicians, no consistency was established as these players came and went. Still, the band cut a CD last spring.

Some 60 students have participated in the band over two years. The band usually has 10-12 players, plus extra students who hang around, help out, play in the practice sessions and wait to join. Son del Barrio entered a rebuilding period with the graduation of five members of the "CD group." Now, for the first time, the band is comprised exclusively of students. They not only learn about music, but how to cooperate. Operating as an after-school program, Son del Barrio "is a very open thing," says Vilar. "Everyone has the opportunity to be a part. That feeling of being welcome is hard to find anywhere in the world."

Clemente may be magical in certain regards, but it's far from perfect. Promising results of the reform abound: the number of students passing all their classes shot up by a third (to nearly half); several students have earned degrees through the Satellite; and, as part of staff development, 20 teachers earned masters degrees in Multicultural Education through Northern Illinois University. Of course, Clemente has its share of problems as well: gangs, drugs, some lousy teachers, to name a few. Perhaps it can manage or will even resolve some of these issues—if given a chance.

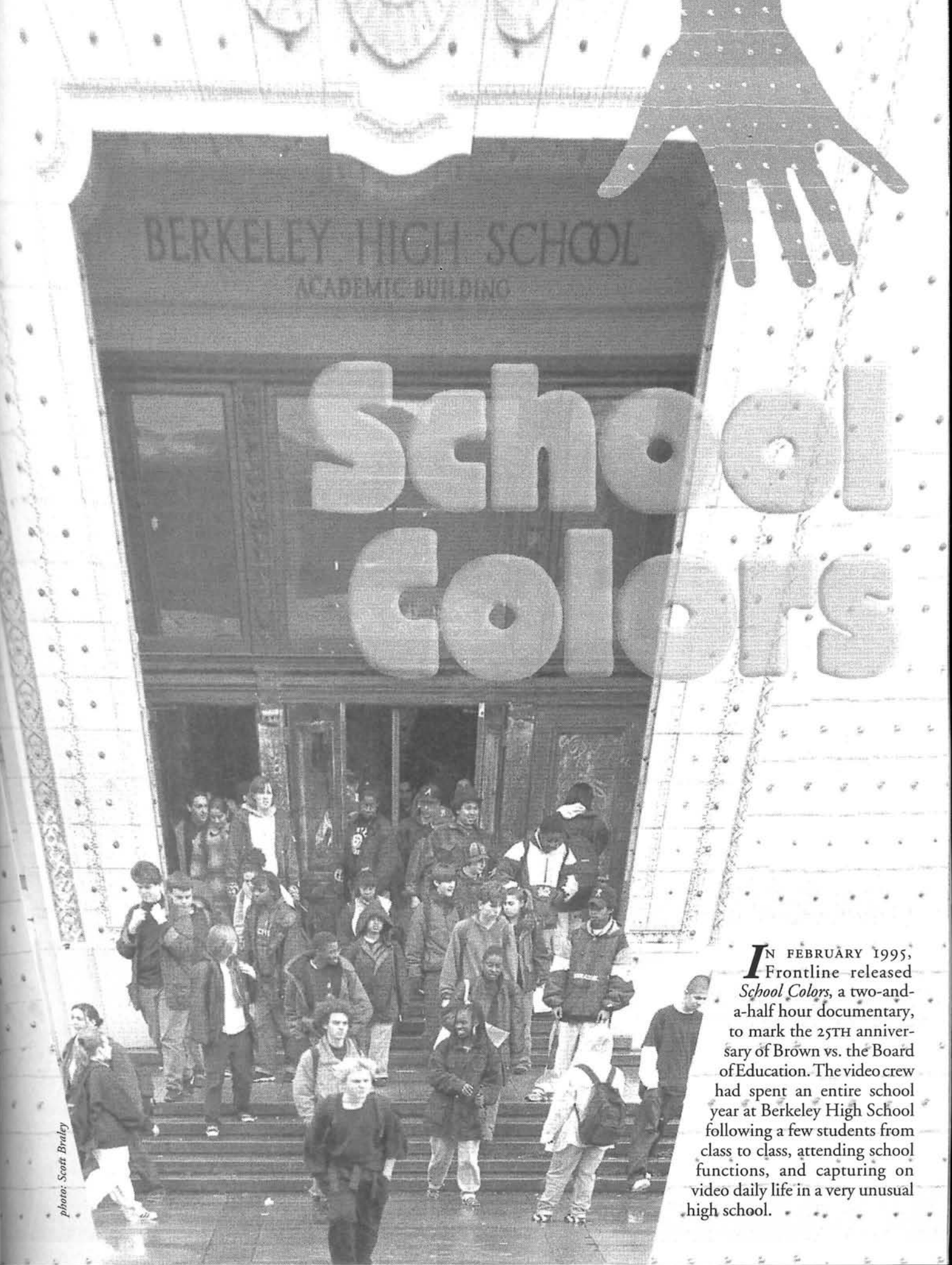
Sitting at a table in the Borinkén Bakery, Jose Lopez cautions, "All it is, is a space. It allows us to do certain things. The political space may not always be there. What if the Republicans decide to abolish the LSC? Then we'll be out again."

Lopez knows: he's a veteran of this 20-year struggle and director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. Along with conservativism's national ascendancy, general support for reform efforts is evaporating. Moreover, Chicago teachers anticipate an extended, three- to six-month strike next year based on Governor Edgar's meager budget. Marcos Vilar underlines the drive towards privatization and community control by the Republicans who now dominate all branches of state government. Illinois Republicans plan to reduce federal and state money available to Chicago schools next year.

The community's involvement at Clemente has made possible dramatic and often successful changes. "We have enemies at the Board of Education," Vilar muses, "because the work we do makes them work harder." The Chicago Board of Education forced the Satellite program back on campus last fall, citing liability issues. (Having hopefully cleared that hurdle, the Satellite returns to its two off-campus sites this spring.) Irma Romero places the Clemente effort in the larger political drama: "I see myself contributing to the community. Clemente is like an anchor to stop the gentrification process" that threatens to overrun West Town with yuppies and artists.

Will the new Clemente ultimately accomplish its mission? Or will the school become an interesting oddity among restructuring attempts? How does reform work, and what kinds of change are worthwhile? Go visit Clemente. Ask the people who work there and hear the voices of its next graduates. ❑

Douglas Spalding teaches ninth-grade conceptual physics at Balboa High School in San Francisco. He is a member of Prairie Fire Organizing Committee.



School Colors

photo: Scott Braley

In February 1995, Frontline released *School Colors*, a two-and-a-half hour documentary, to mark the 25th anniversary of Brown vs. the Board of Education. The video crew had spent an entire school year at Berkeley High School following a few students from class to class, attending school functions, and capturing on video daily life in a very unusual high school.

They tried to assess the results of desegregation in the first high school in the nation to voluntarily desegregate. The result? A program that emphasized a climate of racial separation and tension and that reported many conflicts among students, teachers, administrators, and parents. What it didn't do was give viewers a full picture of what was going on within the diverse high school population.

Breakthrough decided to focus on this portrayal of the state of racial issues in education because we believe that racism is, indeed, probably the single most important issue in education today. As a common ground for discussion, therefore, this documentary is valuable. We interviewed three teachers at Berkeley High School—Hodari Davis, Regina Segura, and Annie Johnston—for the following review.

HODARI DAVIS

Prominently featured in the film, Hodari Davis has taught at Berkeley High for three years in the African-American Studies and History Departments and has just completed his masters degree. Since School Colors *has been shown, Davis has been relegated to teaching ninth-grade required classes, eliminating him from the African-American Studies program.*

The goal of *School Colors* was to entertain. It was sensationalized, aiming to capture attention. They wanted to prove that integration hadn't worked. Using BHS as their prime example, they went about proving just that point. By putting together little sound bites, they carefully orchestrated the response they wanted to foster, and it worked.

For example, in a class they were filming, I posed integration as a white supremacist construct. The class was very diverse, 60 percent female, with seven to ten Black students, one Chicano/Latino student, one white, and five Asian students. They had an incredible metaphysical discussion looking at the psychology of it. The students were super intelligent and extremely articulate. But the filmmakers chose not to show the real character of the discussion where the students ripped on integration and segregation, because it was exactly the opposite of what they were trying to prove.

Desegregation was a noble purpose. It was principled in its attempts to emphasize human rights and to get all human beings considered equal people. In the context of its goals and ambitions, what it aspired to be was beautiful. But I don't believe that integration took into account the extreme and extraordinary significance of how colonized people are in America. I am speaking specifically of people who are powerless in America, and have their destinies controlled by other people. Black people in America have a colonized mentality. This comes from many factors: the legacy of slavery, the treatment of Black people by whites, the intense fear and ignorance that Black people have about white people which combines with an intense admiration that Black people have for white culture.

Integration, in many ways, meant that Black people abandoned the Black community. We left our stores, our mom and pop restaurants and Black people ate at Denny's even though they are known to diss Black people. The Montgomery buses were boycotted instead of buying our own bus companies. We didn't have any more power when we got to the front of the bus.

Most integration at BHS is for show. They say some of the classes are heterogeneous, but who is in control of that? I grew up in public schools. My experience was like this one in that Black students lived in the Black community and white students lived in the white community. But there weren't many Black teachers on the faculty—only one or two. All the coaches were white. So, of course, was the principal. There were a lot of Black students in the freshman and sophomore year, but you didn't graduate with those you came in with. In the upper division honors classes I would be one of the only Black people in the class. I didn't have any majority Black classes in high school. There were majority Black classes but they were all low division. BHS has many more Black faculty than average. But only the African-American Studies Department offers academically challenging classes that are a majority Black.

Public school education is for the public. Yet the "integrated" schools agenda is set up by a rich, powerful section of the public. What Black students value most at BHS is the African-American Studies Department, or elements of it, more than any other program of the school. The only other competition is the Athletic Department.

Cultural pluralism is a critical issue for public schools. Schools need to stop placing such an emphasis on the concept of the melting pot. It is one of the things responsible for American hypocrisy. BHS is the only school making a real attempt to break that down. It would be a real shame if those people who are out to destroy cultural pluralism gain control.

I think Black male students need all Black male schools. They need schools where there is a lot of discipline, and a lot of training and emphasis on physical, mental, and emotional growth and development, with mentors and teachers who focus on Black male growth and development. There also need to be Black female academies, which need to be operated in that same framework. They should be separated, but come together in different functions.

Black males need intensive attention, to be pulled aside. They really need it for the benefit of the Black community. If they are not pulled aside the whole community is in jeopardy. Too many brothers killing each other or winding up dead of all sorts of things, from AIDS to murder to drugs. The Black male experience is quite different from what white males have to deal with in this society. America has to stop acting as if everything is all equal, because it is not equal. If America is going to continue to be a separatist country that is going to claim to be integrationist it is going to continue doing damage.

People can't understand the difference between separation and segregation. People separate themselves everyday. When white students abandon inner-city schools for private schools no one complains about separation. No one yells about integration.

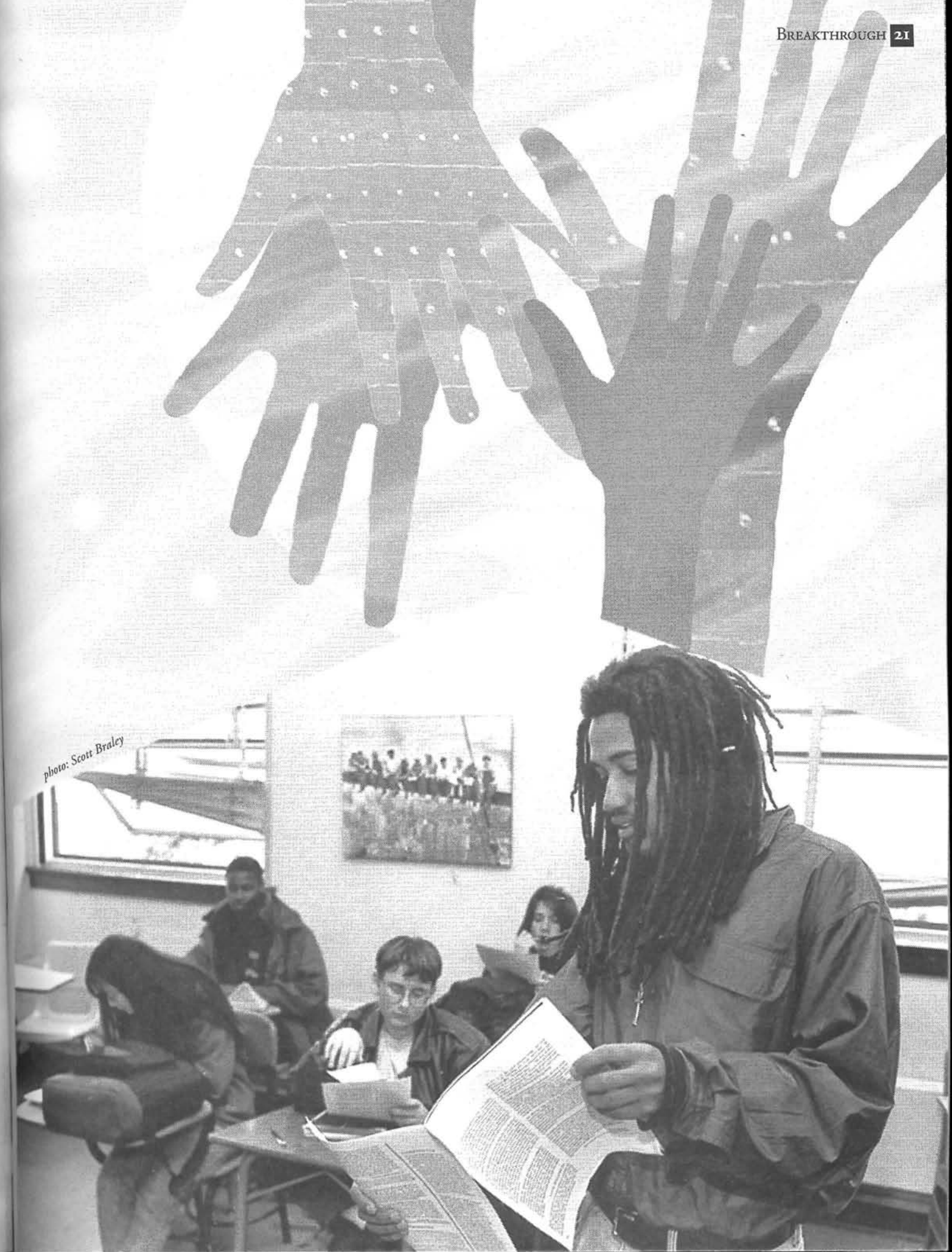


photo: Scott Braley

photo: Scott Braley

Regina Segura, back row, second from left, pictured with students in Berkeley High's Chicano/ Latina Mentor Program.

REGINA SEGURA

Regina Segura is the director of the Chicano Studies Program at Berkeley High, which she helped to build. She has organized parents and students to challenge the lack of inclusiveness in the curriculum, the lack of Chicano/Latino teachers, and the lack of resources and programs to deal with a 75 percent dropout rate among Chicano/ Latino students who make up 10 percent of the student body.

The show was a very negative portrayal of race relations, basically showing that integration is not working in a district well known for its commitment to integration. I think the lack of integration at BHS reflects what is going on in the larger society. In fact, what is going on at BHS is further along than in many other places. The irony is that the video showed that students were really aware of race issues, and they were conscious of their commitment to their own people. The students were very articulate, yet they weren't allowed to explore both the positive as well as the negative sides of the situation. The students feel that they are living with each other in the school. Whether that is happening on an equal basis is an issue.

I, too, was interviewed several times. But my comments were contrary to the overall message, so they were edited out as well.

There's been a lot of talk devoted to separate programs like

Chicano and African-American studies. People continually ask why they're necessary for our students' education. Ideally these issues, the ones that relate to our students' own heritage, would be integrated into the curriculum. If there were teachers and administrators from those backgrounds, they would be there, and there would be less need for creating separate spaces. But neither the teachers nor the administrators are there in significant numbers.

There are so many studies that show that if people feel good about themselves, if they can identify with others who have made significant contributions to society, then it becomes more possible for them to imagine themselves doing similar things.

But there are also other reasons to have classes specific to certain ethnicities and experiences. It is very important to have a place to learn about who you are. You cannot respect others if you do not respect yourself. And it's very hard to respect this country when you learn that the land you are standing on was taken from your people by force and that even that fact is relegated to a couple of paragraphs in a textbook. It is an insult to the students' intelligence to think they are just going to accept the ignoring of that history.

Students need to understand their history not in a romanticized way but in a way that really looks at the issues and struggles of the past and which can then help them understand the parallels which are going on today. Some classes need to address the specific needs of this population, like Spanish for native speakers. Other classes should really be interesting to people of all ethnicities because the issues and history concern us all. We set up schools to meet institutional needs, not our children's needs—otherwise we would not set up 45-minute blocks separating English, history, and art. Instead we would look at the whole integrated picture—like how does war inspire literature, affect children's art, and impact common people. We would also connect to their whole lives, to their parents and their community.

Students trudge through school and finally the last bell rings and *freedom!* Outside of school they are more grounded, responsible, and less defensive. They put on armor when they come to school, to protect themselves from their peers, the faculty, and the whole daily barrage. School is like a fingernail scratching a chalkboard. They flee this place in all kinds of ways. They do whatever it takes to get into a different environment. They lead such schizophrenic lives between what goes on at home and what happens at school.

Kids rebel because they feel trapped, and then they get punished for inappropriate behavior. Some consciously try to find other options, but many don't know how. Independent study is the most common route for white students. Black and Latino students tend to get sent to East Campus or get pushed out of school altogether.

Why are they so alienated from school? Simple: it's a place that tells them they are stupid. In class after class they face low teacher expectation. For instance, there's the issue of tracking. Let me tell you a story of my own life. One of my friends went to take an IQ test to see if she could get into the gifted and talented track. She dragged me along to the library for the test. I took it and got my score a few weeks later. She went off to be in the gifted and talented group and I missed being "bright" by 3 points. I was devastated. I was not gifted. I got really turned off from school. I got much more creative, but I was always impressed by the evaluation that said I wasn't as bright as she. Testing is really a complex process; so many things go into the results—whether they ate breakfast, whether they're under stress, whether they got any sleep the night before.

There is no way you can pick up the many different talents that these kids have. We are doing a huge disservice to our society by not allowing these kids to develop their talents. It is ridiculous to tell any kid that they are not smart when you know nothing about them. They know they have been labeled, and they resent it. What a different society we would have if we were really looking to tap into and develop their talents and all their different types of intelligences. We would work both with them individually and with their families to bring out their strengths.

Instead the high school is really very alienating to parents. It is not very welcoming, from the physical structure to the initial contact, which is usually when your kid is in trouble. Even trying to find information or talk to someone is very difficult. The school gives lip service to parent involvement, but it doesn't really respect so many of the parents.

Parent involvement is an essential aspect of a successful school. Lack of representational parent input is immediately noticeable. Schools have to strive to include parents that are traditionally marginalized, such as those whose first language is not English. They must take the time to do presentations to these parents regarding graduation requirements, the structure of the school, resources available, etc. They must find ways to empower these parents within the school governing structures.

That's what we've been trying to do with our Chicano studies program. We're empowering the parents as well as the students. Although Chicano/Latinos are less than 10 percent of the student body, they have had tremendous impact when they've focused on the high dropout rate, the unacceptable D-F rate, and gang-related issues. With the support of these parents, the Committee for Chicano/Latino Academic and Social Success at BHS was able to create and incorporate a wide variety of academic classes and many additional support programs and student organizations that could address these dismal statistics and problems in a proactive fashion.

These efforts were not included in the PBS documentary, and, more importantly, are not at all as valued within the overall school community as they ought to be. In order for our schools to truly meet the needs of the students and

communities we serve, such programs should be hailed, honored, and held up as examples rather than shunted to the side and ignored.

ANNIE JOHNSTON

Annie Johnston has taught for four years in the History Department at BHS. She has focused on detracking and integrating the ninth-grade world history and English curriculums, creating alternative programs within the school, and working with clubs around multicultural, women's, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues.

Throughout the video there echoed a rather plaintive wail—"Why can't we all just eat lunch together?" As if that would solve anything! Many students were insulted by the implication that if they do not socialize together they are somehow promoting segregation. "Nam and I are best buddies in class," said Leticia. "We like working together. But our scenes are really different. We respect and learn from each other a lot, and we like working together. But that doesn't mean we have to eat lunch together."

Traditionally, many people believed that equal access to education would be the motive force for change in racial power dynamics. But where large numbers of white students attend public schools there are generally few students of color, and vice versa. Berkeley High is unusual in that it serves such a diverse set of communities. Tracking is the typical answer for such a situation—the upper-class students receive a high track college-bound education, and the majority of Black and Chicano/Latino students are stuck in lower tracks and slowly pushed out. While the PBS filmmakers addressed tracking, they largely argued that separate programs for different groups within the student body promote racial tension. They confused programs designed to counteract the impact of racism, like African-American studies, with segregation.

A few students' experiences were highlighted as if they were representative. But the vast majority of students at BHS felt misrepresented. Black students were appalled that some of the few classes in which they felt truly comfortable and respected (African-American studies classes) were presented as separatist and therefore segregationist, while their own negative experiences as the only Black students in upper track classes were wholly ignored.

Tracking takes place within schools and between schools. Schools are funded by property taxes, which means a community with high property values requires only a 2 or 3 percent tax to raise a very high per student appropriation. But communities with low property values must tax themselves at a rate of 8–10 percent and still achieve a lower per student appropriation. Very few states, like California, take all the property taxes for schools and deliver them through the state to districts based on average daily attendance. But even with this leveling, individual districts like Berkeley can raise extra money through local bond issues.

The truth is that without the resources of the largely white middle class in Berkeley, BHS would offer many fewer options. With more power and determined to ensure that their children follow in their footsteps, this community is usually the voice teachers and administration listen to most. And so did PBS. To keep those upper-middle-class parents and resources, BHS is committed to maintaining its high tracks. Yet as a liberal bastion, it must at least attempt to meet the needs of Black, Chicano/Latino, immigrant, and other marginalized students who fill the lower tracks.

Berkeley High's programs that empower students of color are truly unique. The African-American Studies Department and Chicano Studies Program were fought for and created by students, parents, and teachers. While they create a critical safe haven and an educational resource for the communities they serve, they also open up tremendous possibilities to white students, providing access to teachers, discussions, materials, and world views rarely accessible in any other format.

I teach ninth-grade untracked world history classes at BHS, and I watch children struggle to learn about and with each other. Knowing so little of each other's realities and cultures, it is not easy. But without this practical, hands-on experience of each other, how will they begin to understand other perspectives? American society is segregated, and the experiences of children of color differ vastly from those of white middle-class children. There are few places our children can learn about the realities beyond their own communities in a daily and personal way besides the public schools.

It is ironic that in an era in which integration of the schools is no longer even considered an achievable goal, even by the Supreme Court (who just ruled that court-ordered busing to achieve integration should cease), Frontline would come out with a documentary arguing that it won't work anyway. It is strange that so much public air time would be devoted to showing the difficulties of urban education today, as if schools exist in a vacuum. The real question is not whether kids get along but how we are going to really educate our children. PBS ignored successful examples of school reform as it did community control. In fact, if PBS had explored how the African-American Studies and Chicano Studies programs had been started—by parent and student activism—and their impact on the students who utilize them—overwhelmingly positive—we would have a positive example of communities forcing that institution to deal with their children's needs. ❑

Gender and Self-esteem
Interview with Peggy Orenstein

by Sally Thomas and Judith Mirkinson

photo: cover art from SchoolGirls

***Peggy Orenstein** is the author of* SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap, *in association with the American Association of University Women (Doubleday, 1994, $23.50 hardback).*

In 1991, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) issued the report, "Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America," summarizing the results of its survey of 3,000 boys and girls between the ages of 9 and 15. Its assertions—that

girls' self-esteem plummets at adolescence, and that boys get preferential treatment in the classroom—hit the headlines. Peggy Orenstein, a San Francisco Bay Area-based journalist and former editor at Mother Jones, *took notice. Her book,* SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap, *published in September 1994, gives a human face to the AAUW's statistical study. For a year, Orenstein attended classes at two middle schools in northern California and followed a group of teenage girls from the schools through their day-to-day lives. She chose two schools on opposite ends of the economic scale: the suburban "Weston" Middle School, attended by mostly white middle-class students, and the urban "Audubon" Middle School, with mostly low-income students of color.*

What did she find? That girls—especially the white and Latina girls—did indeed suffer from a lack of self-esteem. Her classroom observations also confirmed the AAUW study, finding that even well-meaning teachers favored boys, for example by calling on them more often. Orenstein found that, at the critical stage of adolescence, even smart, articulate girls held back, lacking the confidence to speak up in class.

The African-American girls Orenstein got to know, on the other hand, while frequently lacking confidence in their academic abilities, did not fall short on self-esteem. Orenstein speculates that the cultural and historical role of strong, independent African-American women helps young girls feel positive about themselves. Yet girls of all ethnic backgrounds struggled with their developing sexuality and unequal relationships with boys.

Breakthrough *met with Peggy Orenstein in January 1995 to discuss her observations and experiences in the classrooms and in writing the book.*

Breakthrough: *Could you explain why you think self-esteem is such an important issue for girls, and why you worried in the beginning that focusing on self-esteem might imply that obtaining personal happiness was more important than creating social change?*

Peggy Orenstein: I wrestled with that a lot. I still wrestle with it, because I think the notion of self-esteem is so perverted—what it means and who defines it. But you have to examine where kids get their ideas of what is important and what makes them feel good about themselves.

It was hard for me to define what self-esteem meant for me, because I don't feel I have a great deal of it myself. I tried to understand why, for women in particular, a kind of impostor syndrome develops. What people say to me is, you know, lots of women do just fine—and they do. But even if you are politically minded and advanced, you can still have this feeling, because of early training or the culture's view of women, that what you have achieved is false and that you can never be satisfied with your accomplishments. And your failures are over-generalized and cut more deeply. Too many women fall into that and end up depressed and suicidal. What I was seeing with girls was that beauty was so important for their self-esteem. So, if they were beautiful, they felt great about themselves. In that case, what good is self-esteem?

SchoolsGirls is an exploration of not only the lives of a handful of girls, but also my own, and the forces that shaped me and that continue to shape me. I really want it to be read that way. I hope women will think about their own lives and understand why they can't raise their hand in a meeting now or that kind of thing. I keep saying that because I am fighting the way that the book has been perceived by the press, which is that it is for parents of eighth-grade girls. It is great for parents of eighth-grade girls, but it is actually written for a much broader audience.

BT: *One of the things an African-American girl said on that program about Berkeley High,* School Colors—*and I wonder if this relates to the impact of racism on the self-esteem of African-American girls—is that when she walks into a classroom she has to prove herself before she gets taken seriously. To me, that is very related to self-esteem, especially for girls—the idea that you have to be willing to prove yourself.*

PO: That's part of the reason, for African-American girls, that their sense of themselves academically drops. Black girls, according to the stats, initiate more contact with their teachers than anyone, and they get rebuffed more than anyone. So, unlike white girls, they're talking, but no one's listening. In a lot of communities, school is where Black girls (*and* boys) really have their first and main interactions with the dominant culture: usually the teachers, the administrators, the counselors are white, and they don't live in the communities where they teach.

There's a lot of cultural conflict that happens, the kids get alienated, they start seeing success as "acting white." And teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, often have lower expectations for African-American kids, which become a self-fulfilling prophecy. There's a guy at Stanford named Claude Steele who's doing groundbreaking research in that area.

There was a girl at Weston, an African-American

girl, who sort of summed it up for me. We were sitting around one day talking about why there had never been a woman president. One of the girls, who was white, said, "I think women are too emotional to be president: if there was a war they'd just fall apart." Another white girl said, "I think guys wouldn't vote for a woman president." Then Sandy, this African-American girl, said with a big smile, "I'm going to be the first woman and the first Black president!" Still smiling she added, "And I'm going to be assassinated!" I was dumbstruck. Still smiling, she said, "Yeah, you think they'd let a Black woman be president? They'd kill me for sure, but what a way to go!"

I thought, there you have it: her sense of her potential, her awareness of the limits society places on her. I think it's significant, too, that this was about being president. The great American myth, the basis of the dream, is that every little *boy* can grow up and be president—it's not true, of course, but that's the myth. And girls know it's not for them.

BT: What were the things that struck you the most about the differences and similarities between the white girls and the African-American and Latina girls?

PO: Well, the differences are so huge. I would get so depressed when I went to the schools with the low-income kids. I was so disheartened by the way we do not provide those kids with what they need and then we blame them for it.

It was interesting that the girls in the middle-class school were very curious about the girls in the low-income school, but the reverse was not true. The low-income girls just could not have cared less about the suburban white girls, but the suburban white girls were always talking about how the low-income girls were all very violent. They worried about me going there. They would ask me if those kids were bad and if they were all in gangs and that kind of thing. That was unfortunate, because you can see that as they grow up, they are just going to keep splitting. There is no common ground for those two populations to meet at all, even at 13.

The body image thing was a big difference and I was fascinated by that, especially with the African-American girls. I talk in the book about one of the girls, Dashelle, a very big African-American girl who pulls herself up by the bootstraps and starts doing really well in school. I kept thinking if she were a white girl living in the suburbs, just the fact that she is big—she would call it fat, if she were living in the suburbs—would probably be enough to devastate her and her intelligence. She would just be sitting there thinking, "I am fat, I am fat, I am fat." For Dashelle, bigness was strength and power. She called it being healthy and sort of looked at me like I was from Mars when I suggested that it might be a problem.

I think that suburban white girls—and I think

the same is true of adults—do not see what they have to learn from girls like Dashelle: the lessons of strength, power, self-sufficiency, and assertiveness. I think some of those girls at Audubon should be leading seminars for the girls at Weston.

BT: What about sex?
PO: Girls in both schools were wrestling with issues about sexuality and victimization. It is really perverse: we don't want girls to be victims and yet we tell them there is no healthy way to express their sexuality. It is difficult for girls to assert themselves. I have been going around the country a lot, promoting my book. There are always a couple of middle-school or high-school girls who come to readings. I wrote a whole chapter in the book on sex, but talking to them has made me wish I'd written about it even more.

BT: An open discussion of sexuality is still socially taboo—even though sex is so dominant in the media, the movies, advertising—everywhere we look. A lot of people think that adolescent girls are too young to be talking and thinking about sex (we only have to remember the firing of Joycelyn Elders for her endorsement of masturbation). What do you think?
PO: I had not really expected to write about sex, because these girls are 13 and I thought it would happen later; same with body image. Silly me. Because 13 is when they are forming their ideas about sexuality. When I was a girl, there was room for experimentation—you could do the base thing, you could kiss and then you could progress to second base. But the older girls were telling me that now you go from kissing to intercourse and there is not much in-between. The emphasis on intercourse has totally gotten out of hand. Sex is always so hard to talk about. I tried, when I was going around the country, to really make this a strong part of the talk, but people really act funny when you talk about girls and sex. I think the whole issue of girls' sexual desire, whether you are talking about it with parents or you are talking about it in sex education curricula, is just taboo. We don't want kids, particularly girls, to experience sexual pleasure. And that is terribly unhealthy for a society.

I expected that that part of my book would be attacked. I expected to be hung out to dry on that and in fact, it has been completely ignored. It has never been brought up, except, in my favorite review, which was the review in the *LA Weekly*.

BT: Girls are becoming sexualized so early. You want young girls to feel comfortable

Peggy Orenstein

photo: Sally Thomas

about their bodies, but you wonder how that will be possible given the distorted images that surround them.

PO: What has happened is this increasing sexualization of women's bodies in the MTV way. I can't believe that I am always attacking MTV—I feel like Tipper Gore! But I look at MTV, which is supposed to be representing hip, right? It is supposed to be cool, it is supposed to be counter-cultural, it rocks the vote, it has all these positive messages, and yet, overwhelmingly what you see are these misogynist, oversexualized, objectified images of women over and over and over. So misogyny gets mixed in as being part of progressive politics. What it develops for women is a sexuality that is constantly looking at how men see them. That is constantly objectifying themselves and asking not "Do I desire?" but "Am I desirable?" That is how girls learn to see sex. And so it is completely disconnected from their own feelings; it is completely disconnected from their own self.

BT: What about child abuse and incest? Did you see any evidence of that? Were teachers or administrators talking about it?

PO: Yeah, absolutely. It was in both schools. There were a lot of problems with older boys in families sexually abusing step sisters. I didn't end up writing about this, but there was one class where a child protection services worker came to talk. The kids were stunned to learn that in California, you can only hit a kid with an open hand. These kids said things like, "You mean you can't whip a kid with a belt? You mean they could put my dad in jail for that?" But then she started talking about sexual abuse, and several kids started reacting in weird ways. At a certain point one girl took a pocket mirror out of her bag and just started staring in it. She started putting on lipstick over and over like she was trying to stare herself right through the mirror. It was really clear that there were kids in that class who were sexually abused.

BT: It has become very popular for critics of feminism to say that feminists are actually promoting the victimization of women and girls. In fact, Christina Hoff Sommers (author of Who Stole Feminism?) wrote recently in the Wall Street Journal that "A politicized AAUW has effectively used its own advocacy research to promote the myth of a pervasive demoralizing bias against schoolgirls. It has created a cult of the persecuted girl-child among feminist writers." What do you make of this new strategy of attack against feminism? Is there any validity to the claim? How do we address the oppression of women—pervasive and ugly as it can be—without creating the expectation among girls and women that we are destined to be oppressed and violated?

PO: Crying PC is a way to shut people up and I think that that is all it is. I think that it is always really important to acknowledge and celebrate women's progress and the wonderful things that we have won through the women's movement, but to ignore areas where there has not been progress and to ignore that there is so much left to fight for is foolhardy. At worse, it is just propaganda for the right. I think Christina Hoff Sommers is nothing but propaganda for the right and you see it in who has been celebrating her book: the *National Review* and Rush Limbaugh.

BT: In SchoolGirls, you tell the story of Becca, whose mother felt extremely oppressed by her husband, and yet she didn't leave the relationship. As a result, Becca lost all hope for the possibility of an equal, happy relationship with a man. Critics might say that Becca's hopelessness was brought on by feminism, harping on the oppression of women by men.

PO: What Becca didn't have was a sense of an ability to fight back against some of these things, which is what girls need. It's not to be told that this stuff doesn't exist, so just ignore it and you can succeed anyway, but if faced with oppression, you can fight back.

BT: Some critics say that you and the AAUW are exaggerating gender discrimination in the schools. What do you have to say in response?

PO: One of the things that has been really great is how warmly my book has been received—it has gotten almost zero negative press. Sommers attacked me in the *Wall Street Journal* and said that really the problem in schools is that boys cannot read and are dropping out. I thought, first of all, how unfortunate that somebody has to see this as an either/or. If we talk about girls' problems, then we are somehow denying or dismissing that boys have problems.

That is really not the case. A lot of the kinds of problems that people attribute to boys, when you look at it closer, are not really male problems—like dropping out. Whereas something like twice as many boys as girls who drop out go back and get GEDs, girls are much more likely to end up in poverty. So in fact, girls who drop out are going to drop further. Just think, about 50 percent of Latina girls have been dropping out. So there are gender issues, which does not mean that male dropping out is not a big problem, but you had better look at the reasons and the differences for girls, too.

BT: What was most shocking to you?

PO: I was shocked by how the boys felt they could touch the girls any way they wanted. I was surprised by how much more intense and how much more dominating the boys were, how much more their comments were geared towards dominating, than they were when we were young. I was shocked by the ways girls struggled with their sexuality, although, I guess I shouldn't have been. And I was really shocked that the body image stuff—the obsession with body image and thinness and the kind of dangerous attitudes towards food and eating—was affecting younger girls. That was something that I hoped would recede and it just seems to be getting stronger.

BT: What can people do to change this situation? Teaching about women's issues is just one part of it.

PO: I think it has to be a community process. It can't be just up to teachers, it can't be just up to administrators, it can't be just up to the government. I think legislation is the least of helpful things, in a way. Not that it should not be there. I think one of the really great things in the last chapter is when the kids get into chronicling sexual harassment in their school. It was really interesting to watch, because it got both boys and girls really engaged and concerned about how they could be active participants in reforming their school.

A real problem is that when teachers are being trained there are no mandatory courses for them on any of this. I think that when teachers are learning to be teachers, they need to be required to look at gender discrimination issues. Otherwise, it kind of depends on them to be aware—maybe they have read a book on it, maybe they haven't, maybe they know where to go to get math and science curricula that are more gender fair and culturally fair, maybe they don't.

BT: What about single-sex education? Sometimes I think if I could send my daughters to a single-sex school it would be really great for them.

PO: I have mixed feelings about it. Some women who have gone to single-sex schools say that it was the greatest experience of their lives. Then other women say, "My life was ruined because of single-sex schools; those girls were so mean." But there is a lot of research that shows that girls who go to all-girls' schools are more likely to go into non-traditional fields, that they are more likely to be leaders in the corporate world.

But there are problems. My interest when I was writing *SchoolGirls* was that if you do not change the way that the boys look at this stuff, then it is hard to change things. The value of coeducation is that you can encourage boys to examine some of this stuff, and just for a minute consider themselves not in the middle of the universe. That is a valuable lesson for them. While it can be great for individual girls to be at all-girls' schools, it does not really, in the end, help in a kind of global way.

BT: Do you feel hopeful that things will change?

PO: I wrote *SchoolGirls* in the Year of the Woman, so it seemed a lot more hopeful at that time. As with all progressive political issues right now, you just have to keep pushing. It is not just about education, it is about how we are raising our girls, it is about supporting girls' clubs and all of the different places outside of school where girls are also being educated and where there are a lot of other kind of opportunities. Programs that are helping pregnant and parenting girls. It is a hard time not to feel hopeless, but at the same time it seems like people who have kind of been sitting on their butts for a long time are getting active and that is exciting. ❑

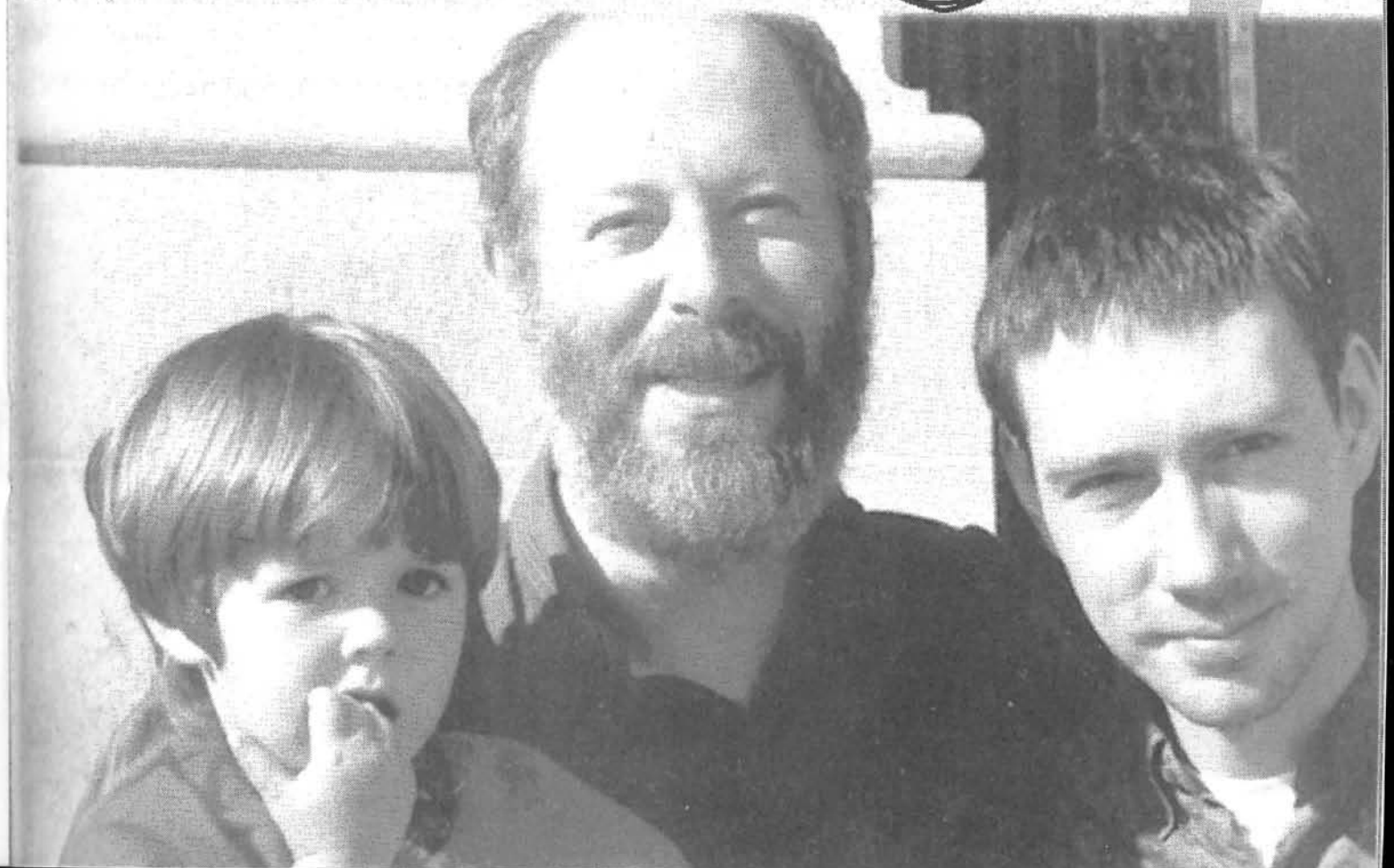
Talking Queer In Kindergarten

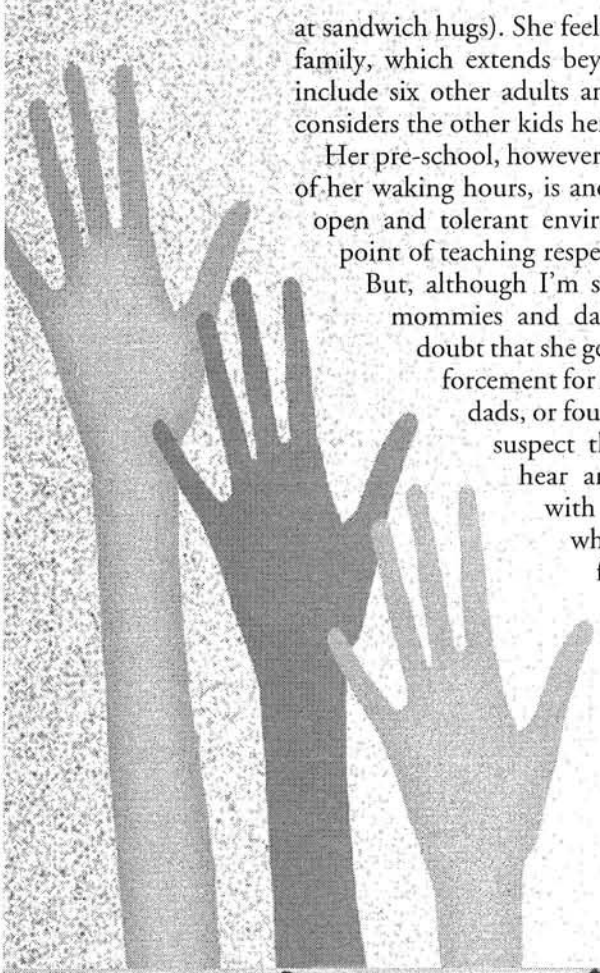
by Camomile deQuelquechose

It would be easier for me to be open about my lesbian parents, my lesbian moms, if teachers would talk to kids about lesbian and gay parents. And they would tell them that they're not bad. Or that lesbian and gay people and straight people are equal. And that they shouldn't tease other people who decide to "come out of the closet"about their parents.

—Eleanor Gerber-Siff, age 8

MY DAUGHTER SARAH WILL SOON BE FOUR. She knows I'm gay, and that gay means, as she puts it, "who love men who love men." She hangs out in bed with my partner and me (we're very good





at sandwich hugs). She feels comfortable about her family, which extends beyond the three of us to include six other adults and four other kids. She considers the other kids her brothers and sisters.

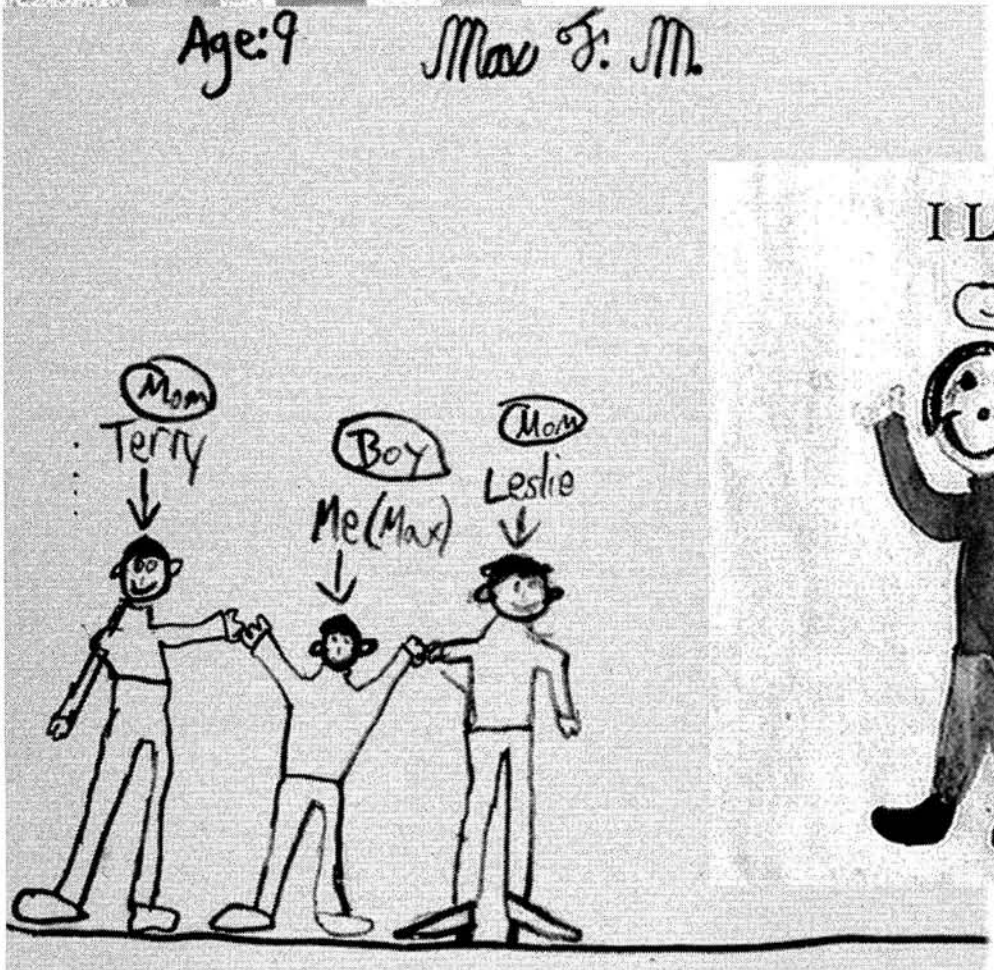
Her pre-school, however, where she spends most of her waking hours, is another matter. It's a very open and tolerant environment. They make a point of teaching respect for cultural diversity. But, although I'm sure a lot of talk about mommies and daddies goes on there, I doubt that she gets much conscious reinforcement for having a gay dad, or two dads, or four moms and four dads. I suspect that the only time kids hear anything about families with lesbian or gay parents is when Sarah brings in a book from home.

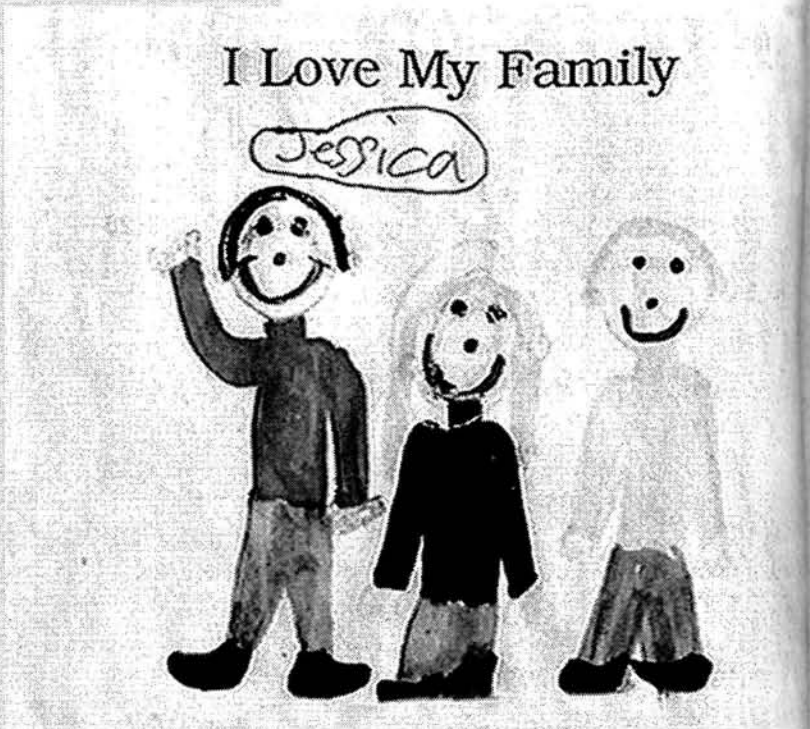
And I worry about what's going to happen as she gets older. Why? Take a look at the books in any elementary school classroom or library. No doubt they have the complete works of the Berenstain Bears (which for some reason most children adore). These books offer an unrepentant heterosexual nuclear family (albeit a bear family) in which gender roles are rigid enough to win them an award from the Traditional Values Coalition. Papa Bear is strong and (he thinks) smart, if in reality an inept doofus. Mama bear cooks and cleans, and is generally responsible for keeping the house together, physically and emotionally. She's a MOM with a capital "M." Brother bear has a tree house, sister bear always wears a bow in her hair. There's always some moral struggle going on, but it's always within a narrow "acceptable"—read *straight*—context. Clearly, neither Sarah nor any of her friends are going to get any new ideas from this source.

Every school has these books.

FOR ANOTHER REALITY CHECK, SPEND SOME TIME on the playground of your local elementary school, and listen. It won't be long before you hear boys calling each other "faggot," and insulting girls as "lesbian." In recent years, the term "gay" has become a universal put-down. A game called Smear the Queer is also popular: One kid suddenly attacks another, knocking him to the ground, and then runs away shouting "Fag."

Homophobia starts early, often as early as first grade. Some teachers don't see anything wrong with it. Others are themselves uncomfortable discussing





left: drawing by Max Forman-Mullin
below: drawing by Jessica Wirth

the subject, so they ignore it. Still others think it's an important issue to deal with but are unsure of how to approach it. So they limit their response to a simple "I don't want to hear you using those words" without explaining the words or why they're hurtful. Not surprisingly, this isn't very effective.

Up through second grade, most kids don't even know what the words mean. Maybe they're aware that they have something to do with sex, which is generally considered disgusting. And then again, maybe not. Lenore Gordon, an elementary school teacher, wrote in an article in *Rethinking Schools* that "one ten-year-old who frequently called others 'faggot' told me that the word meant 'female dog.' A twelve-year old said that a lesbian is a 'Spanish Jew.'" But even young kids know that words like "faggot" and "dyke" are insulting and can hurt people's feelings. That's why they use them.

By the time kids get into third or fourth grade, they have learned to focus anti-gay insults on schoolmates who cross the gender boundaries of accepted behavior. In some instances it may boil down to the old standards: boys being called sissies if they cry or like dolls. Girls being made fun of if they don't meet the current "femme" standards. Other times it's more subtle. Tomboys, while not wholeheartedly approved of, are tolerated. Girls can earn a certain measure of respect by being tough and hanging with the guys. Boys and even fathers are learning that it's good to show emotion and some degree of emotional vulnerability. But when does this cross the line and become a weakness? In their heart of hearts they might not care or even have some leanings in that direction. But the social pressure is enormous. How many times do boys tell each other not to play with girls? Or call other guys gay when they can't throw the ball? Their "crime" quite precisely: "They're acting like girls." It's clear that, while schools may have a few books about girls who drive trucks or are into sports, the basic assumptions about who girls are, who boys are, and who they ought to be, are not being challenged.

MANY TEACHERS WOULD LIKE TO FIND A WAY to break down these rigid gender lines, to treat girls and boys more equally. But it's a daunting task. Whether it's academics or behavior, sports or play, the assumptions of what is girl behavior and what is "natural" for boys are deeply entrenched. Even teachers who want to be better see nothing wrong with encouraging the boys in competitive sports while the girls are left out to play other games. Boys who don't like sports either go along and "evolve" or get left out as well. Within the classroom traditional behavior goes on as well (see interview with Peggy Orenstein on p. 25).

Then too, part of the impact of the backlash against feminism is the re-assertion of the importance of recognizing the *difference* between boys and girls. Studies abound. Now they're talking about the differences between male and female brains. Obviously, there are physiological differences. And I'm sure hormones have some effect on how boys and girls behave. But why should they be treated as though they were two different species? Why should there be a rigid line? Born on one side, you're expected to act like a girl; on the other, like a boy.

There shouldn't. This atmosphere is damaging to kids. Like school tracking, it limits who they imagine they can be, what they believe they can accomplish. Along with history, English, and—if they're lucky—math and science, most girls learn to think of themselves as intellectually inferior, physically inferior, and dependent on men. Boys, on the other hand, are taught to view themselves as smart and capable—not such a bad thing in and of itself—and to get what they want through aggression and intimidation.

CONFRONTING THESE ASSUMPTIONS IS AN important part of raising a generation of people who can lift the U.S. out of the fascist morass it is sinking into. People who aren't willing to let discrimination and oppression of any type go unchallenged. People who believe deeply in a just and equitable society, a society that demonstrates concern for all of its members.

But to confront gender roles requires constant vigilance. It's not the kind of thing you can expect to change by developing a two-day lesson plan on the subject. If kids are going to internalize a different way of looking at gender, their assumptions have to be challenged time and time again. Teachers need to mobilize kids to take responsibility themselves to expose discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.

This is equally true for dealing with homophobia. It's not that teachers go around constantly extolling the virtues of being straight. They don't have to. Maintaining silence about homosexuality is all that's necessary. Because being straight is "normal." It's assumed. Being lesbian or gay is deviant. Disgusting. Taboo. Kids get a relentless diet of images of neatly packaged heterosexual couples, dads in charge, moms doing the laundry and sweeping the floor. Not so for two women or two men who love each other. They get the silent treatment. The message sinks in: lesbians and gay men are not a fit topic of conversation. Or worse: taunting and harassing gay people is acceptable behavior.

Some teachers say dealing with homophobia isn't an issue for them: they don't have any kids with gay or lesbian parents in their classes. But how do they know? A lot of parents stay in the closet when dealing with their kids' schools. They're afraid of the reactions their kids will have to deal with. Besides, most kids have a lesbian or gay family member tucked

away somewhere. If not a parent, then an aunt or uncle, an older brother or sister, a cousin. And whether kids have gay people in their lives or not, it's a safe bet that they're exposed to, or participate in, anti-gay teasing on a daily basis. And that teasing can be used to undermine any close, affectionate relationship between two boys or two girls—relationships we should be encouraging our kids to develop just as we encourage relationships between boys and girls.

Furthermore, some percentage of kids—let's call it 10 percent for the sake of argument—are themselves gay or lesbian. For some kids, these feelings don't begin to stir until they get older. But even at the tender age of five or six, and certainly by eight or nine, many of them are aware that they're "different." Some don't fit their assigned gender roles. Others have begun to feel physically attracted to people of the same sex. Without ever having mentioned these feelings to anyone, nor anyone having said anything explicit, these kids already know there's something wrong with who they are. They feel isolated, confused. They hate themselves.

Listen, for example, to this 14-year-old boy from Berkeley, California, reflecting back on his second- and third-grade years: "I always knew that I was gay. When I was eight or nine I would steal my mother's *Playgirl* magazines and look at the pictures of men. I also remember seeing heterosexual couples and knowing I wasn't like that. I would get very depressed about not being like other kids. Many times I would take a kitchen knife and press it against my chest, wondering if I should push it all the way in."

For kids like this one, as well as kids whose parents are lesbian or gay, hearing open discussion about homosexuality, hearing their family's or their personal feelings reflected, named, and validated is important. They need to know that there is nothing wrong with being gay or lesbian. And they need to feel that school is a safe place to talk about it.

MOREOVER, ALL KIDS NEED TO LEARN TO respect gay and lesbian people, to see them as equals. It's part of learning to appreciate human diversity, and to reject all kinds of discrimination. This is not a moral or religious debate, although it's often couched as one by anti-gay crusaders. It may not be obvious when teachers see kids running around on the playground calling each other gay what is being set in place. But it becomes frighteningly clear when the kids reach adolescence and hormones start to run amok. When kids aren't presented with any positive images of lesbians and gay men, and when their homophobic slurs go unchallenged, they grow up thinking that there's nothing particularly wrong with teasing gay people, discriminating against gay people, harassing gay people, or beating the shit out of gay people.

Adolescence is hard for everyone. For lesbian and gay youth, it's hell. According to a 1989 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "suicide is the leading cause of death among gay male, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual youth." Not automobile accidents. Not drug overdoses. Suicide. This study found that "gay youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than other young people" and that as many as 30 percent of all youth suicides are committed by lesbians and gays.

WHY DO YOUNG LESBIANS AND GAY MEN WANT to kill themselves? Because they're miserable. They hate their lives. They're isolated. They have no self-esteem. No positive images, no role models to identify with. Their families reject them. (According to studies on the subject, some half of all lesbian and gay youth are rejected by their parents; one-fourth are kicked out of their homes or choose to leave because of their parents' attitudes. Many of them end up on the street, selling themselves to survive, at risk for HIV infection.) Friends turn their backs on them. They're verbally harassed and physically attacked by family members, peers in school, even strangers. And they see no way out. This is the harvest of the seeds planted on the kindergarten playground.

Unfortunately, the study was suppressed by the Bush administration. A few thousand copies were printed, it got no significant publicity, and then it quietly vanished. Five years later, you're lucky if you can find it in a library. Its recommendations, nothing more than an application of basic common sense, would have been politically inexpedient for a Republican president to implement (not that Clinton has done anything about it, either). The report urged frank, open, and positive discussion of homosexuality in the classroom, and gay-positive counseling for lesbian and gay students. It said that kids needed to be taught that there's nothing wrong with being lesbian or gay. Simple, straightforward. Political dynamite.

It's not going to get any easier. Not with the present crew in charge in Congress. Last year, even before the Republicans took out their Contract on America, Senator Jesse Helms sponsored an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that would have pulled federal funding from any school that "promoted" or "encouraged" homosexuality. Interpretation: talk about gay people in the classroom, in a positive—or even neutral—way, fail to say something negative, no federal funds. And it gets worse. The amendment would also have

denied funding to a school if a counselor told a gay student to feel good about himself, or referred a young lesbian to a gay-positive community service.

This language was actually approved by the Senate. A Democratic-majority Senate. It was subsequently superseded by an amendment offered by Senator Edward Kennedy, denying funding to any school that openly discussed explicit sexuality, whether gay or straight. But given the current Republican control of Congress, the original Helms language—or worse—will probably sail through in 1995. By then, Clinton won't even feel a twinge of guilt when he signs it into law. Similar efforts are in progress at the state and local level around the country.

One of the arguments put forth by the right wing is that talking about homosexuality means talking about sex. Really? Does talking about a man and a woman being married mean talking about sex? Not necessarily. There is plenty that can be said about gay and lesbian relationships without having to get into what homosexuals do in bed. Love, affection, taking care of each other, and, yes, raising children, are perfectly tame topics that can be broached just as easily with two men or two women as the protagonists as they can with a straight couple.

And then again, why not talk to young kids about sex? They see the billboards adorned with nearly naked men and w o m e n — w o m e n, mostly. They sneak a peek at the steamy MTV videos their older brothers and sisters are watching. U.S. society is flooded with (heterosexual) soft-porn imagery. Tune in to Oprah or Rikki Lake and sex is all they're talking about. It's not like kids are sheltered from discussion of sex. But what they hear is sensationalized, over-hyped. What they need is—you should pardon the expression—some straight talk about the subject.

But no, says the right wing. That's off limits. They fly into a rage when Joycelyn Elders says it's okay to tell kids who masturbate that kids masturbate. Maybe if schools had better sex education programs, AIDS wouldn't be spreading so rapidly among young adults. Maybe if kids understood birth control, more 14-year-old-girls could put off becoming parents until they were ready. And maybe if kids were told that sexual attraction to people of the same sex is natural, they wouldn't feel the need to jump in front of a speeding car, or put a gun to their head because they could find no other way to suppress their feelings.

It's going to be an uphill battle. But the Lesbian and Gay Parents Association (LGPA) project I've been involved with for the last year has me encouraged about the possibilities. The LGPA has developed an anti-homophobia training for elementary school teachers and educators. Its centerpiece is a 10-minute video of interviews with kids, ages 7–11, who have lesbian and gay parents. The kids talk about loving their families, feeling good about having two moms or two dads. But they also talk about being teased, about feeling isolated, about teachers' silence on the subject and lack of support, and about wanting to see things change. What I realized, while interviewing kids for the video, was that these young children have to go through much of the same

see TALKING QUEER, p40

MINDS AT WORK

Journeys in the South Bronx

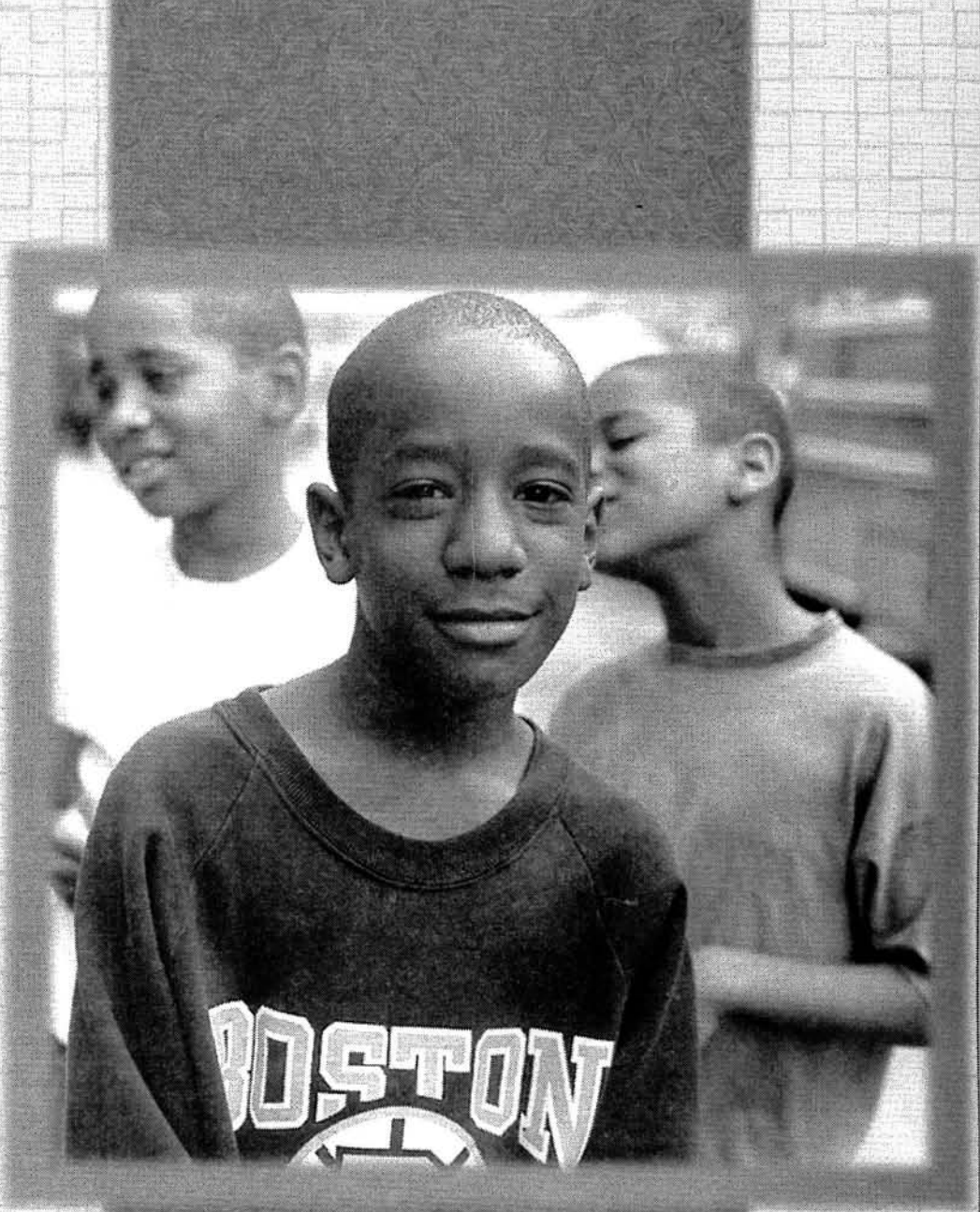
Minds At Work: Journeys in the South Bronx is a testament to children caught in the crossfire of urban poverty and violence. A collection of words and images constructed from young peoples' own experiences, this exhibit captures their spirit and vitality in the face of overwhelming odds. A project of Community Works, *Minds at Work* took place in School Districts 8 and 9 in the South Bronx with children in dropout prevention programs, many of whom have been part of the shelter system. Literary workshops were conducted by writer-in-residence Letitia Guillory. Through this artist's mentoring process, students created a powerful collage of poems and creative writing that eloquently convey their thoughts and ideas—both positive and negative—and their dreams for themselves and their communities. Using these writings as a base, Community Works commissioned photographer Ruth Morgan to document the students in the school, at play, and in their homes and communities. This project is part of Community Works' commitment to provide public forums for school children in New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area, where they can raise their voices and be heard by the larger community. Community Works is a non-profit organization dedicated to

I was born in 1985
My birthday is on April 11
I am smart. I am good in class.
I am nice to others.
When I grow up I want to be a lawyer.
I have to go to college
When I grow up
I want to move to New Jersey
and go to college.
That's my dream for when I grow up.

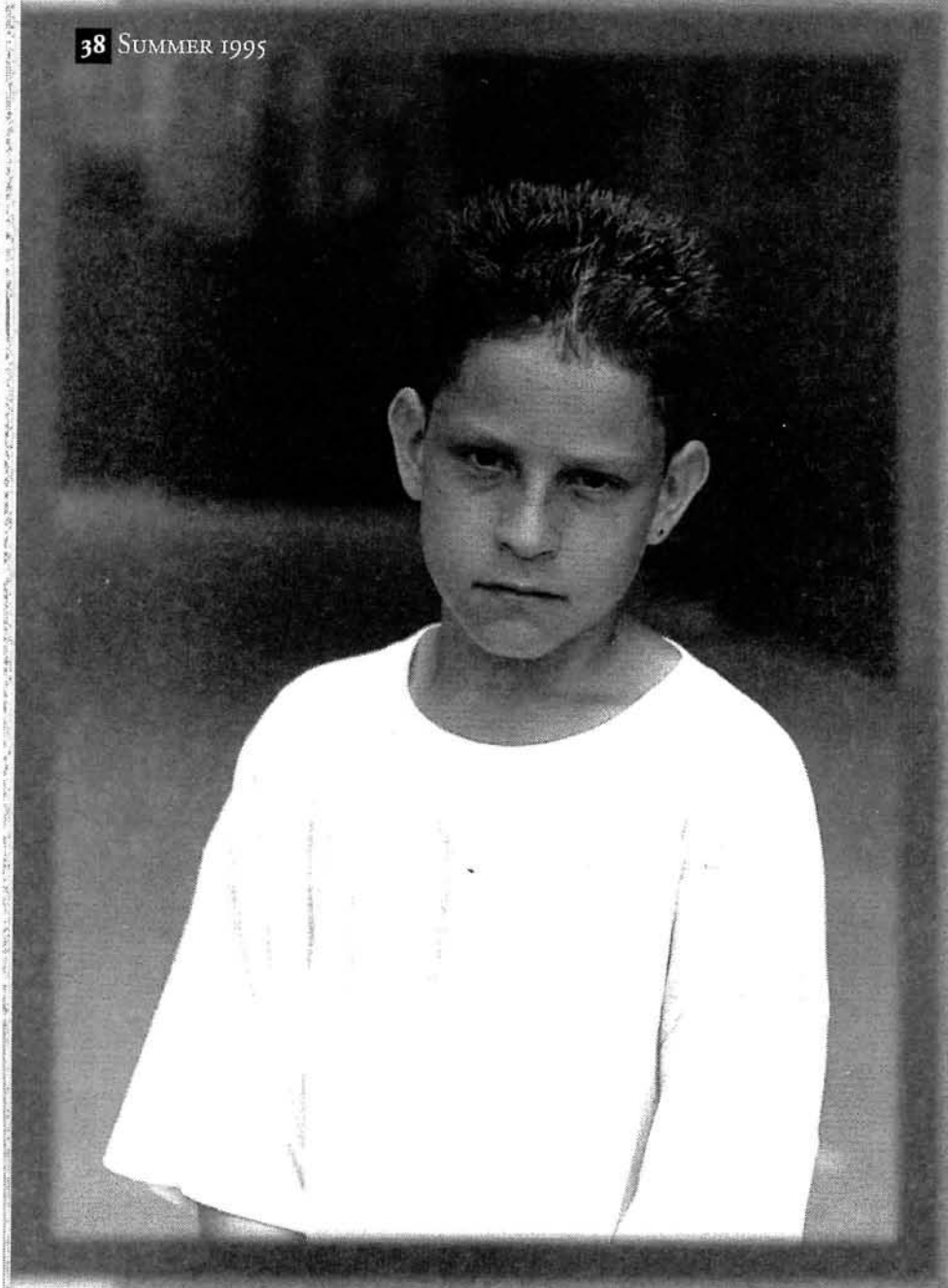
Rosalys

using the arts to forge links between diverse cultures and neighborhoods, improve educational attainment, foster strong communities, and extend the benefits of the arts to under-served individuals, especially public school students. Community Works seeks to provide the tools for improving communications and understanding, and encouraging social responsibility, a respect for diversity, and self empowerment. Community Works annually serves over 100,000 students and special groups.

To learn more about Community Works programs contact: Community Works, 38 W. 70TH Street, New York, NY 10023, (212) 724-3037; or Ruth Morgan at Community Works, 1605 Bonita Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709, (510) 845-3332.



I am
boy
cool
good and bad
nice
brother
hot
My name is Tyrell L. Wright
and I like to write a lot
of poems. And when I grow
up, I want to be an artist,
I like to draw.



My name is Percenda Townsend
I am 11 years old.
I live in an apartment.
I was born may 31, 1985
it was on a tuesday.
I am mean.
I am nice.
I am beautiful.
I have a dolly.

(Percenda's photo is shown on the cover)

Shelter

It's like a prison
can not do nothing
can't go outside
can't go in the hall way
can't do nothing.

Robert Moore

I am a bad kid to everybody. But
inside I'm a gentle one...
smart and kind...
I love to paint and play instruments.

Jamie Molina

Subways are so dirty...
The wall and floors
People, they just throw
the garbage on the floor.
I don't like subways.
But, even though I don't like the subways,
I have to ride on them.
When the trains come, the floor shakes and moves.
You can see the lights and feel the winds...
and then Hurray... the subway is here!

Jamie Molina

My dream is to be a
Singer and
I love to sing
My mother believes
I could be a singer, too.
I will sing nice.
I will be famous
I will be soft and loud.

Taisha Castro

MINDS AT WORK

The streets.
The streets of
New York
dirty, crooked, long
and noisy.
Different
from the streets of my family
that live in South Carolina.
But,
I'm still used to my street.
My crooked, street.
My apartment on Brook Ave.
I remember my other ave...
Gerard Ave...
And the apartment I used to live at...
with my father...

Candace Kline

I am Joy Marie Colon.
I'm 14. I live in a shelter. I'm tall and got shiny light brown reddish hair.
But I dye it red.
Nothing is cool about being a teenager.
Well something's Yeah.
That depends on the way you look at it.
I go out sometimes, but nothing cool.
The only thing that happens is, you get older, not younger.
And life gets tougher. And one thing, whatever happens in life keep your head up no matter what.

TALKING QUEER, from p35

internal struggle that older lesbian and gay kids and young adults do. They have to juggle pride in their families and fear of discovery. They have to figure out who to confide in and who to hide it from. When to come out, and when to be in the closet.

We've held the training at a half dozen schools in San Francisco so far. The response has been overwhelming. Teachers often cry when they watch the video. At each school we've been to, teachers have thanked us for coming to talk to them, and for providing them with tools for dealing with homophobia in the classroom.

And we've seen things change. One fourth-grade boy, within the week after parents did a training at his school, came home and told stories about two different name-calling incidents that his teacher responded to more seriously than ever before. In one case she demanded that a kid apologize for an anti-gay remark. In the other, she sent a student to the principal for a chat.

At this same school, another teacher took the initiative to develop a lesson on love for Valentine's Day, including discussion of lesbian and gay relationships in her presentation. Even more exciting, a group of teachers there has volunteered to work with lesbian and gay parents whose kids attend the school to develop curriculum ideas for grades K–5.

I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. "YEAH, BUT you're in San Francisco. What about the rest of the country?" First of all, don't kid yourself about Baghdad by the Bay. It's not like every elementary school teacher in the city is just waiting for the opportunity to tell kindergartners about queers. At a recent meeting of school representatives, for example, where the LGPA gave a presentation on our project, one teacher asked, "Are you going to present the other side? Are you going to talk about the disease theory [of homosexuality]?" And even the city official responsible for developing gay-positive curriculum for the city's elementary schools—himself a gay parent—doesn't think the words "lesbian" and "gay" belong in the classroom until second grade.

And secondly, don't assume that this can't be done elsewhere. One public-school principal in Atlanta, who recently saw the video, responded by saying, "Teachers shouldn't have to learn about this from the kids. This should be part of the curriculum." And she scheduled a training for her school's staff. We've barely begun to promote the project, and already we've gotten requests for materials from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Vermont, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Texas, South Carolina, and Florida.

What we're trying to figure out now is how to broaden our organizing efforts. First of all, we're looking for ways to build alliances with community-based groups of parents working to reform the schools, particularly people of color. Clearly, our issues are not the only ones that are crying to be addressed by the public schools. There's the whole issue of public education in general, which demands that we address racism and how this society educates children of color. For all the talk of multicultural education, public schools remain racist both structurally and in terms of what is generally taught in the classroom.

There are, however, concrete ways to make changes. In one school, the lesbian and gay parents group has approached the Latino Parents Alliance to offer support to the work they are doing to oppose Proposition 187 (a vicious anti-immigration law passed in California in 1994 that, if upheld by the courts, will deny public education to children of undocumented immigrants). This is only one example. For white gay and lesbian parents concerned about what our children are being taught, and about how public schools serve the entire community, we need to view issues of racism as being every bit as important as our own. If we have any hope of building an alliance with other communities, we will have to demonstrate that concern through action.

At the same time, we are keenly aware that this is a dangerous time for ourselves, our children, and our families. We have fought hard for the right to raise children as open gay men and lesbians. But that right is far from secure. We aren't about to see it taken away. We will continue to fight to create a safe environment for our kids, and for lesbian and gay youth. There are many people, even within the progressive movement, who are uncomfortable with issues of lesbian and gay liberation, who perhaps think that queers make unfit parents, or who don't want their children to hear about homosexuality in school. They're wrong. It's that simple.

We aren't going back in the closet. And we're going to do everything we can to make sure that our kids don't have to either.

We're here. We're queer. We're parents. Get used to it. ❑

Camomile deQuelquechose is a member of the Breakthrough *editorial board and, in case you couldn't tell, a gay dad.*

The LGPA's training packet, "Overcoming Homophobia in the Elementary Classroom," can be purchased from LGPA, c/o 6705 California Street #1, San Francisco, CA 94121. Phone (415) 387-9886. The packet, which includes the video, discussion notes, and handouts for teachers, is available for $25 to individuals, $50 to institutions.

photo: Penny Tweedie

East Timor

an Island Prison

by Pam Sexton

TELL MY SON that for nothing on this earth should he return to Timor.

I would rather die without seeing him again than to know he had returned to this hell. The luck of Timor is to be born in tears, to live in tears and to die in tears. It would be more appropriate to say that one does not cry because one does not have any more tears to shed. Is the world going to continue to pretend to ignore the drama of Timor? Let there be at least a little respect for the suffering of so many innocent people!

—letter from an East Timorese, 1978

IN NOVEMBER 1994, PRESIDENT CLINTON traveled to Indonesia to participate in the informal summit of the newly formed Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation alliance. Clinton's arrival date in Indonesia marked the third anniversary of the bloody Santa Cruz Massacre in Dili, where 271 Timorese were gunned down by Indonesian military (the Indonesian government insists the death toll was only 50). Anticipating world attention on the economic summit, 29 East Timorese students scaled an eight-foot high fence around the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta. They stood inside the Embassy compound armed with only a list of demands, including the withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor and the immediate release of the rebel leader Xanana Gusmao.

This latest escalation in the Timorese people's fight for independence came 19 years after Indonesia illegally invaded the small island nation. Since the invasion, an estimated 200,000 East Timorese—roughly one-third of the population—have been killed, the greatest genocide relative to population since the Holocaust. In the case of East Timor, genocide has meant not only mass killings but also destruction of entire villages, detention and torture of anyone defying Indonesian rule, official policies of starvation and forced sterilization, and government-sponsored migration of large numbers of Indonesians to East Timor.

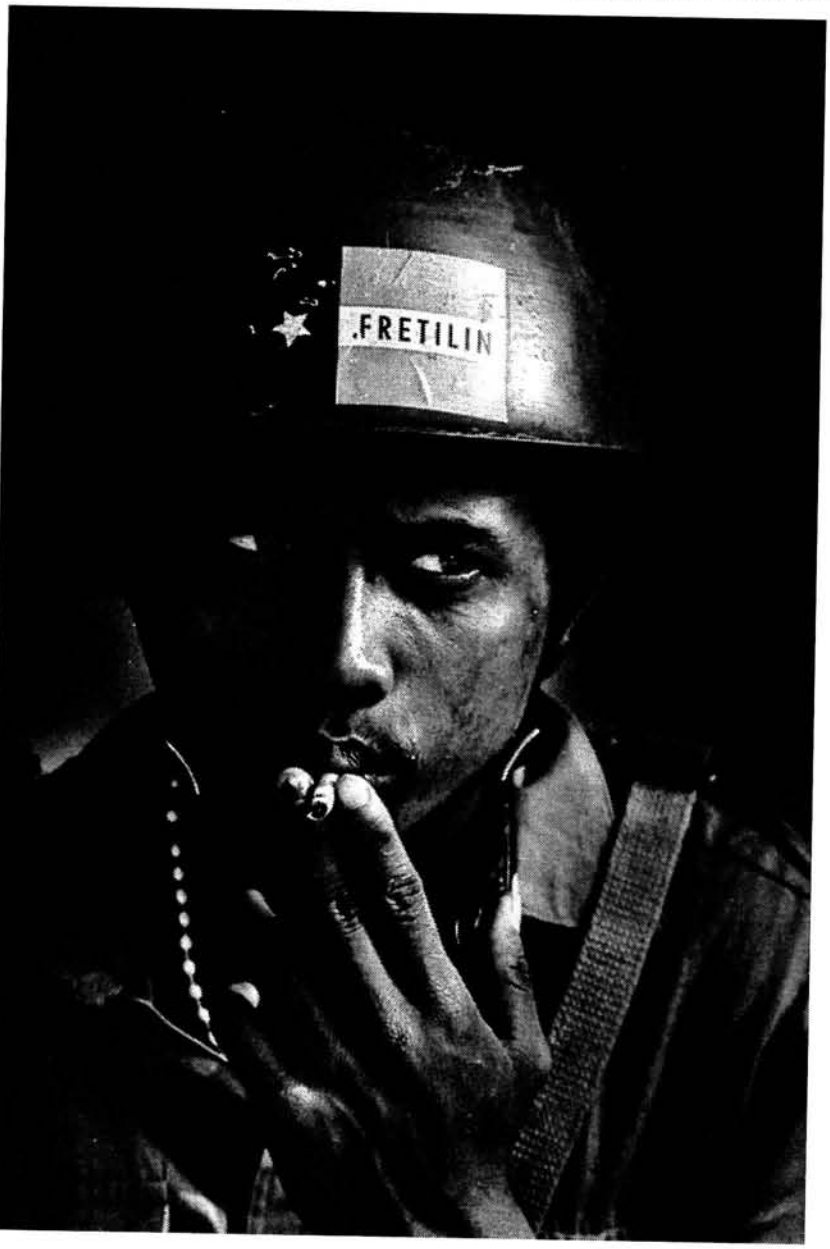


photo:Penny Tweedie

CLINTON TIMID ON TIMOR

At the same time as the students occupied the U.S. Embassy grounds, over two dozen other East Timorese demonstrators were arrested in Jakarta. In Dili, the capital of East Timor, hundreds of East Timorese participated in anti-occupation demonstrations, riots broke out, and arrests were made. These demonstrations have continued as Portugal and Indonesia meet in Geneva at UN–sponsored "East Timor Talks." There have been numerous UN resolutions calling for the withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor—but they have had little if any effect.

The students also demanded a public statement from President Clinton on the occupation of East Timor. Consistently cautious of any disruption in economic ties, Clinton has refused to seriously consider human rights or the illegal occupation and genocide in East Timor in making his economic deal with Indonesia. Echoing his granting of Most Favored Nation status to China, Clinton issued a very soft statement on how economic ties with Indonesia would take human rights into account. Since this statement, however, 12 East Timorese have been killed, at least 24 have been detained by the Indonesian military, and no efforts have been made to stop the governmental policies of repression and terror. U.S. policy has not changed.

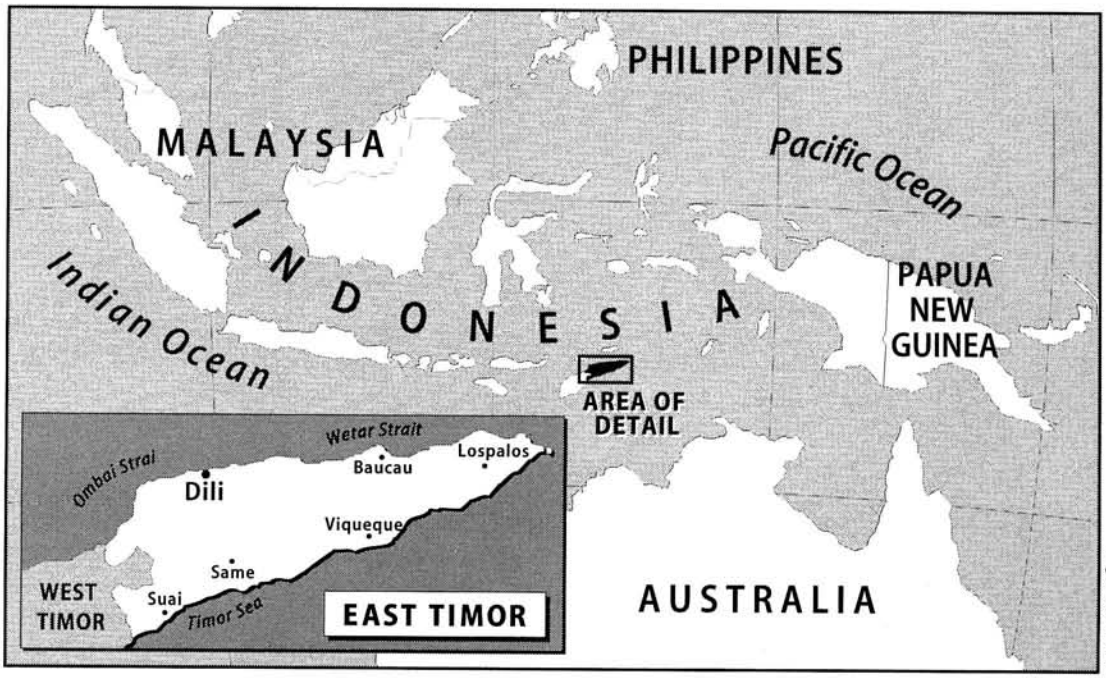
THE INVASION

The diverse people of East Timor are mostly small-scale tribal farmers. From the late sixteenth century until 1974, East Timor, located approximately 300 miles north of Darwin, Australia, was a Portuguese colony. In April 1974, a military coup in Portugal toppled the fascist Caetano/Salazar regime, and the new Portuguese government decided to withdraw from all of its colonies, including East Timor. During the decolonization period, various political groups emerged in East Timor. Fretilin (National Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) gained widespread popular support and won many local elections.

Indonesian propaganda constantly labeled Fretilin as a radical "communist" group, a line which the U.S. media has often parroted. Most observers, however, viewed Fretilin's social reform program as

"moderate, based principally on the establishment of agrarian cooperatives and mass education," in the words of Australian journalist Jill Joliffe. The astonishing success of Fretilin's literacy campaigns was described in congressional testimony by two American anthropologists, Shepard Forman and Elizabeth Traube, who were living in the mountains of East Timor among the Makassi and Mambai tribes. Traube and Forman reported that Fretilin was adept at winning the trust of the various tribal leaders, and that the Front was able to educate, politicize, and mobilize masses of people. By the early part of 1975, cooperatives had been set up throughout the country. This, coupled with Fretilin's successful literacy campaigns, aroused the hostility and fear of the repressive Indonesian government. By July 1975, election results from local councils announced that Fretilin had won approximately 60 percent of the popular vote. This was a landslide victory over Fretilin's nearest rival, the UDT, which gained 20 percent of the vote, while the Indonesian-backed APODETI party garnered less than 5 percent.

For Indonesia, the prospect of an independent, successfully developing, left-leaning East Timor was unacceptable. Indonesia feared that a successful East Timor would be an inspiration to separatist elements within Indonesia, for example in Aceh and West Papua. East Timor also held a great untapped resource of land, labor, and oil. With the go-ahead from the United States, Indonesia began an extensive destabilization campaign, eventually provoking civil war in August 1975. In less than a month, Fretilin easily defeated the Indonesia-supported opposition. An estimated 300 people were killed in the fighting. By this time, Indonesia was launching military incursions into East Timor from its bases in West Timor (West Timor, like the rest of Indonesia, had been a Dutch colony until 1945). Indonesian naval vessels started to bomb coastal towns and villages. Fretilin called upon Portugal, whose colonial administrators had fled East Timor when the brief civil war broke out, to return to East Timor to finish the decolonization process. Portugal never returned. When it became obvious to the Timorese that their pleas were not going to be answered, Fretilin, on November 28, 1975, declared East Timor an independent state.



map: Camomile

On December 7, 1975, a week after Fretilin declared the independence of East Timor, and only hours after U.S. President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger left Jakarta after meeting with Indonesian rulers, the invasion of East Timor began. The invasion started with full-force Indonesian military attacks along the border, which included aerial and naval bombardment and the occupation of border towns. Within days, most of the population of Dili, East Timor's capital, had been killed. Many eyewitnesses described how the Indonesians lined people up along the wharf and shot them so that the victims would fall into the ocean, while other Timorese were forced to count off the bodies as they fell. Indonesian soldiers would then shoot at the bodies in the water to make certain there were no survivors. In the countryside, entire villages were brutally slaughtered. In the villages of Aileu and Remexio, everyone over the age of three was killed. Between 50,000 and 80,000 East Timorese, including many ethnic Chinese, were killed in the first three months of the invasion. Most of the Timorese civilians fled into the mountains with Fretilin.

Constancio Pinto, the U.S. representative of the National Council of Maubere Resistance (CNRM), the Timorese resistance movement, recently toured the U.S. He described his experiences after the invasion:

"I was 12 years old when the Indonesian military invaded my country. I fled to the mountains with my family and, for three years, hid in the jungle. We had little food, no medicine, and no weapons to defend ourselves with, but we were not alone. Thousands of East Timorese families had fled, like us, into the mountains to escape the terror of the invasion;

photo:Penny Tweedie

others fled to Australia or Portugal as refugees. During those years in the mountains, I saw people dying all around me. Many were killed by the Indonesian military; others died more slowly through starvation and disease. Many people I knew were interrogated, tortured—and then they disappeared. It is hard for me to describe those years, but I can still see the Skyhawks and Bronco AV10 aircraft, all manufactured in the U.S., that the Indonesians used in their attempts to eliminate us."

Despite strong and effective resistance from Fretilin, by the end of 1979 Indonesia had control of the majority of the country. Continuous large-scale ground assaults were combined with a deliberate policy of starvation through a scorched earth campaign and the destruction of the agricultural system. Complete villages were destroyed and tribes decimated. Many Timorese, forced out of the mountains, were placed in concentration camps modeled on the strategic hamlets used by the U.S. in Vietnam. Famine and disease spread throughout the camps and throughout the entire island. Though the U.S. and many Western nations knew of the widespread famine and disease, delivery of any relief assistance was prevented until hundreds of thousands were dead.

In 1980, Indonesia began implementation of a World Bank-funded "family planning" program aimed at controlling population growth by disseminating advice on contraception via provincial and local clinics. While Indonesia's ruler Suharto received world praise and the UN's Fund for Population Activities Prize in 1989 for his government's family planning program, Timorese refugees describe an inhumane and unjust program of forced sterilization, lies, and institutional abuse of the contraceptive Depo-Provera. According to refugees, the primary purpose of health clinics and hospitals in East Timor is to function as population control centers. Meanwhile, the Timorese have the highest infant mortality rate in the world, and 70 percent of Timorese children suffer from malnutrition. While the Timorese population is being reduced, it is being systematically replaced by an increasing Indonesian population through job creation and migration.

GENOCIDE MADE IN THE U.S.A.

When Indonesia declared itself an independent republic in 1945, it was led by a strong anti-imperialist leader, President Sukarno. In fact the first conference of the Non-Aligned Movement was held in 1954 in Bogor, Indonesia. In 1994, in this same city, the U.S. was invited to join in the development of an Asian free market. The radical shift in alignment came in the mid–1960s with a U.S.–backed coup that both introduced into power the present military dictatorship of President Suharto and unleashed a reign of terror and massacre of the Indone-

sian people in 1965 and 1966. The terror campaign resulted in the murder of almost half a million people and the crushing of the PKI, the Indonesian Communist party.

When Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975, 90 percent of the weapons used were U.S.-made. Indonesian forces had originally planned to invade East Timor on December 5, but they decided to postpone the invasion until they were clear on what the U.S. position would be. With a green light from the U.S., the invasion began. Since 1975, the United States has provided Indonesia with well over $1.5 billion in weapons and military aid.

Philip Liechty, a CIA operations officer in the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta in 1975, describes the details of U.S. complicity with the invasion and occupation of East Timor: "Suharto was given the green light to do what he did. There was discussion in the embassy and in traffic with the State Department about the problems that would be created for us if the public and Congress became aware of the level and type of military assistance that was going to Indonesia at that time. It was covered under the justification that it was 'for training purposes'; but there was concern that this might wear thin after a while, so the decision was taken to get the stuff flowing from San Francisco as fast as possible, to get it on the high seas before someone pulled the chain. As long as the Indonesians continued to certify that they were only using the equipment for training, then we could get it through the bureaucracy."

Aside from economic interests, the U.S. viewed East Timor, and the deepwater straits that are a part of East Timor's territorial waters, as a strategic military point. Control of East Timor and its surrounding waters was essential to defend the U.S. interests in the region—particularly at a time when Soviet expansion in Asia and worldwide was viewed as a threat.

IMET (International Military Education and Training) has been provided to Indonesia throughout the occupation of East Timor. Just as the U.S. trained death squads in Central America, so Indonesian officers are trained at army bases and prestigious institutions in the U.S. After the 1991 Santa Cruz Massacre, after 17 years of U.S.–trained repression and torture, and with a great deal of pressure from groups like the East Timor Action Network, a proposal to cut IMET training to Indonesia was finally drafted in Congress. Refuting President Bush's contention that IMET "instills in Indonesian soldiers humanitarian ideals and democratic standards," Congress cut off U.S. funding for the training. In reality, however, the cutoff means little, as Indonesia now simply pays for what it used to get free.

The U.S. has consistently lied about the situation in East Timor and in Indonesia, and continually claims that the situation is "improving." The Agency for International Development and the U.S.–controlled World Bank have provided significant amounts of money to help the occupation. Not only has the U.S. never signed on to any of the eight UN resolutions calling for the withdrawal of Indonesia from East Timor, it has repeatedly blocked any effective international resistance to the occupation. One U.S. congressman openly said a couple of years after the invasion, "It is in all of our interests to bury the issue of East Timor quickly and completely."

VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAINS

But while Indonesian generals continue to study at prestigious U.S. institutions like Harvard and UC Berkeley, Timorese guerrilla fighters head to the mountains to lead the resistance. Though both the U.S. and Indonesia had hoped for "an effective and quick" Indonesian victory, the Timorese resistance movement has remained strong over the past two decades. Constancio Pinto described his time in the mountains: "When I was 15 years old I went to the front line as a guerrilla fighter. At that time Indonesians controlled all the food-producing areas and people were starving in the mountains. We were fighting to protect and feed them—as well as for our right to self-determination." Constancio reported that today there are probably no more than 800 guerrillas under arms, yet four Indonesian battalions do nothing but pursue them. The small number of guerrillas is due to a limited number of guns. "If 50 guerrillas are killed by the Indonesian military," he said, "a hundred fighters will be ready to replace them."

The CNRM demands that the UN take a strong stand on the ongoing human-rights violations in East Timor at the new "Timor Talks" between Portugal and Indonesia, which began in Geneva in January. Though Portugal has never recognized East Timor as an independent state, it agrees with the CNRM that East Timor is an occupied, non-self-governing territory. The CNRM wants to be included in negotiations with Indonesia and Portugal and has called for free elections, under UN sponsorship, to determine East Timor's future status. Constancio described the CNRM strategy: "We East Timorese know that we can never win a military victory against the might of Indonesia. We are but half a million people against 180 million Indonesians. Our victory must be a political one based on international law and justice. There can be no peace in East Timor until our right to self-determination is recognized and acted upon."

The CNRM and the East Timorese people know that time is of utmost importance. As the Indonesian government moves more Indonesians (mostly landless peasants from Java) into East Timor, as massacres continue, and as Indonesia presses its indoctrination of East Timorese youth, the possibility of self-determination, of a truly free election, grows more and more remote. The East Timorese continue to resist and refuse to let their struggle be upstaged by p.r. shots of Clinton playing the sax with his Asian buddies, like President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines, or brushed under the carpet as an economic deal is struck that surely will not benefit the East Timorese. ❑

Pam Sexton, a San Francisco teacher and activist, lived and worked in Indonesia from 1990 to 1992. She is a member of the East Timor Action Network.

SUPPORT EAST TIMOR

THE EAST TIMOR ACTION NETWORK (ETAN) is a decentralized, grassroots organization with chapters throughout the U.S. ETAN is part of an international network of organizations in solidarity with the people of East Timor. Since its founding in 1991, ETAN has worked to expand public awareness of the plight of the Timorese, to effect changes in U.S. policies towards East Timor, and to support the East Timorese struggle for self-determination.

Indonesia has responded to the growing international support for the East Timorese by undertaking a $24 million public relations campaign and calling upon powerful political allies in the State Department and Congress. Indonesia has also enlisted the help of numerous major U.S. corporations doing business in Indonesia, such as Exxon, which recently signed a deal worth $40 billion to exploit Indonesia's oil.

The recent congressional elections may also negatively impact the situation as several supporters of East Timor lost their seats. We must take action now!

You can help the East Timorese:

- Educate yourself and others about East Timor. Sponsor a house meeting or invite ETAN to talk to your organization, school, or community group.
- Find a venue for the showing of John Pilger's 1994 documentary film on East Timor. The film is up-to-date and provides an important overview of the present situation, but has not been met with open arms by any large-scale distributors.
- Pressure your legislative representatives to introduce and support proposed legislation to reverse U.S. support for the occupation.
- Become an active member of ETAN or send a supporting donation to ETAN:

ETAN/U.S.
Box 1182, White Plains, NY 10602
Phone (914) 428-7299
email: cscheiner@igc.apc.org

ETAN/San Francisco Bay Area
Box 210547, San Francisco, CA 94121
Phone (415) 285-1971

The Waste Makers

Studies by and for the Environmental Justice Movement

review by Mickey Ellinger

photo: Jim West/Impact Visuals

Intel Inside New Mexico, Southwest Organizing Project, 1994, 60 pp., $10.00. Available from SWOP at 211 10th St. SW, Albuquerque, NM 87102; phone (505) 247-8832; fax (505) 247-9972.

Toxic Empire: The WMX Corporation, Hazardous Waste, and Global Strategies for Environmental Justice, by Josh Karliner with the Political Ecology Group, 1994, 32 pp., $1.50. Available from the PEG, 519 Castro St., Box 111, San Francisco CA 94114; phone (415) 641-7835; e-mail peg@econet.apc.org.

L.A.'s Lethal Air: New Strategies for Policy, Organizing, and Action, by Eric Mann with the WATCHDOG Organizing Committee, 1991, 80 pp., $15.00. Available from the Labor/Community Strategy Center, 14540 Haynes St., Suite 200, Van Nuys, CA 91411; phone (818) 781-4800.

EXPERTS WRITING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS often overwhelm the reader with esoteric analysis and scientific debate. It's easy to conclude that the situation is so disastrous and so complex that nothing can be done by ordinary people. On the other hand, popular writing on the environment tends to reduce the causes of and cures for pollution to individual actions, promoting the delusion that there are 50 simple things "you" can do to save the earth. These three studies, by groups fighting for environmental justice, take a useful third approach. While the chemical causes of pollution may be complex, the polluters are identifiable, powerful institutions (corporations, the military) that can be fought by activism at many levels, and have in some cases already been forced to respond. These studies are the kind of practical research that grew out of campaigns by communities fighting transnational polluters—research that has helped win some

significant victories and has broadened environmental activism to include issues of race, class, and gender.

Intel Corporation (lately famous as the manufacturer of the ill-fated Pentium chip in the very plant under discussion in the SWOP study) is a classic example of high-tech transnational corporate polluters. The WMX Corporation, target of *Toxic Empire*, is the world's largest waste disposal company and influences waste production and disposal worldwide. Los Angeles is the scene of the best-known crimes against clean air in the U.S., and the Mann/WATCHDOG study reveals how it got that way and what activists can do about it.

These studies were written and published by activist organizations. They march and picket, lobby government officials at local, regional, and national levels, file or support lawsuits, and organize internationally. Each of these studies offers anti-racist, anti-corporate environmental justice activists a wealth of information and analysis on which to base campaigns.

The publication of *Intel Inside New Mexico* is part of an ongoing campaign by the Southwest Organizing Project against the giant chipmaker's plan to build a huge new fabrication plant outside Albuquerque. Behind its smokeless facade, the semiconductor industry is a major polluter. It uses dozens of toxic chemicals, especially solvents, to make chips, and cleans the chips with vast quantities of water. It takes more than 2,000 gallons of water to produce a single silicon wafer (the plant Intel wants to build in arid New Mexico will produce 5,000 wafers per week). The toxic chemicals are harmful to workers in the plant, who are mostly women of color—for instance, studies have shown a miscarriage rate double the average. Intel also pollutes the groundwater. Its first plants were in California's Silicon Valley, south of San Francisco, where local residents still face 60 years of cleanup on former Intel plants, three of the most contaminated Superfund sites in the country. Intel's plan to relocate in New Mexico (where water is scarce and precious, and water rights have long been a basis of the struggle over indigenous land claims) is a textbook case of what the environmental justice movement calls environmental racism. Promising jobs in an impoverished, mostly Chicano and Native American community, Intel has managed to circumvent the permit process and extort tax incentives and hundreds of millions of dollars in construction bonds from compliant county and state governments. SWOP wants Intel to be fully accountable to the community in which it is based.

"While each one of us must take responsibility for our individual actions, it is a handful of powerful corporate executives who must assume the lion's share of responsibility for the environmental dangers to public health."

—L.A's Lethal Air

Toxic Empire grew out of a campaign to prevent the WMX corporation from building a toxic waste incinerator in the small Latino farmworker town of Kettleman City in California's Central Valley. The people of Kettleman organized El Pueblo Para El Aire y Agua Limpio (People for Clean Air and Water) and fought the giant corporation for five years. First they got help from California Rural Legal Assistance (an activist law collective originally organized to help the United Farm Workers), which filed a civil rights suit charging the company with environmental racism and demanding all hearings and documents be made available in Spanish and in terms accessible to the people who would be affected by the incinerator. In 1992 a San Francisco-based support campaign called Push Back the Poison, initiated by the Political Ecology Group and Greenpeace, joined El Pueblo in exposing the company's plans. WMX withdrew the proposal in Fall 1993.

L.A.'s Lethal Air delineates the causes of L.A.'s air pollution crisis. As well as serving organizers who are fighting to clean up the air, the authors also mean to offer principles for activists in other areas. For example:

> There is a widespread view, encouraged by corporate propagandists, that "all of us" are responsible for the environmental crisis, and thus, "all of us" should work together to clean it up. But while each one of us must take responsibility for our individual actions, it is a handful of powerful corporate executives who presently determine the life choices of the vast majority, and who must assume the lion's share of responsibility for the environmental dangers to public health and the threat to the planet's long-term viability.

They go on to name the major corporate polluters in Los Angeles County, a list that looks like the top of the Fortune 500: General Motors, Douglas Aircraft, Dow Chemical, Chevron. The study specifies the kind of pollution the corporations cause, how they poison communities of color, and how those communities have organized to respond.

Throughout the country, polluting factories are overwhelmingly located, and dump their toxic garbage, in communities of color. They employ people of color in health-endangering production processes. For instance, SWOP surveyed electronics industry workers in Albuquerque (all people of color) and found that they were routinely exposed to unlabeled chemicals in badly ventilated work areas with little or no safety education or protective equipment. In Kettleman City, the WMX toxic waste incinerator

photo: Kirk Condyles/Impact Visuals

would have made the small town, already the site of a toxic waste landfill, the disposal site for toxic waste from all over the western U.S. In Los Angeles the worst air quality is in industrial communities like Wilmington and San Pedro, where 4 of the county's top 20 polluters are located—Texaco, Shell, Ultramar, and Unocal—and where the population is about 90 percent Latino. In Los Angeles 71 percent of African Americans and 50 percent of Latinos reside in areas with the most polluted air, in comparison to only 34 percent of whites.

LOCAL ACTION

The studies help us understand the environmental justice movement and how people organize to resist the poisoning of their communities. From El Pueblo in Kettleman City, to the Mothers of East L.A., to the Southwest Organizing Project in Albuquerque, it is clear that environmental justice grows out of strong local organizing, often by powerful women community leaders. The effort is complex—they have had to mobilize their poor communities, resist intimidation and bribery by the polluters (WMX promised a youth center to impoverished Kettleman City and delivered Christmas baskets), build local leadership, and work with progressive groups outside their communities (lawyers, environmentalists, etc.) while keeping control of their movements. But they have won significant victories: for instance, campaigns have stopped toxic-waste incineration all over the country.

Both SWOP and the Labor/Community Strategy Center have explicit organizing strategies outlined in their studies. Although they vary in significant details, they both rely on communities confronting polluters directly and on pressuring government bodies.

These strong local struggles are trying to find a larger organizational form. So far regional networks have been the most viable, with some national meetings and networking; but no single national environmental justice organization has yet emerged.

GLOBAL THINKING

The international perspective of these studies is especially strong and useful. The major polluters in the United States are the U.S. government, especially the military, and large transnational corporations. Yet many struggles remain local, tied to a particular pollution site. This means that a local victory can be won without being decisive because a major corporation can easily move its dirty operations somewhere else that is less well organized to resist.

Toxic Empire in particular documents this trend in the global toxic-garbage industry: WMX has been investing heavily in Eastern Europe, whose legacy of decades of terrible industrial pollution makes any kind of clean-up technology welcome, and in Asia, where corporation-friendly governments welcome industry, including clean-up technology that might be spurned in other places.

SWOP's study was published in collaboration with the Electronics Industry Good Neighbor Campaign, a joint project of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice and the Campaign for Responsible Technology. The project focuses on environmental conditions along the U.S.–Mexico border, where *maquiladoras*, especially electronic industries, have played a major destructive role in the health of workers and communities.

Internationalist concerns are at the very top of the Labor/Community Strategy Center's program, which includes restricting capital flight and opposing U.S. firms dumping toxics in poor countries. These studies help build ties among activists fighting the same enemy (WMX, for example, is being fought in dozens of places all over the world). They also can engage students and progressive activists outside the targeted communities, exposing the ways environmental racism attacks both the environment and human rights. ❑

Mickey Ellinger is a member of Prairie Fire Organizing Committee. She worked on the writing and production of Toxic Empire.

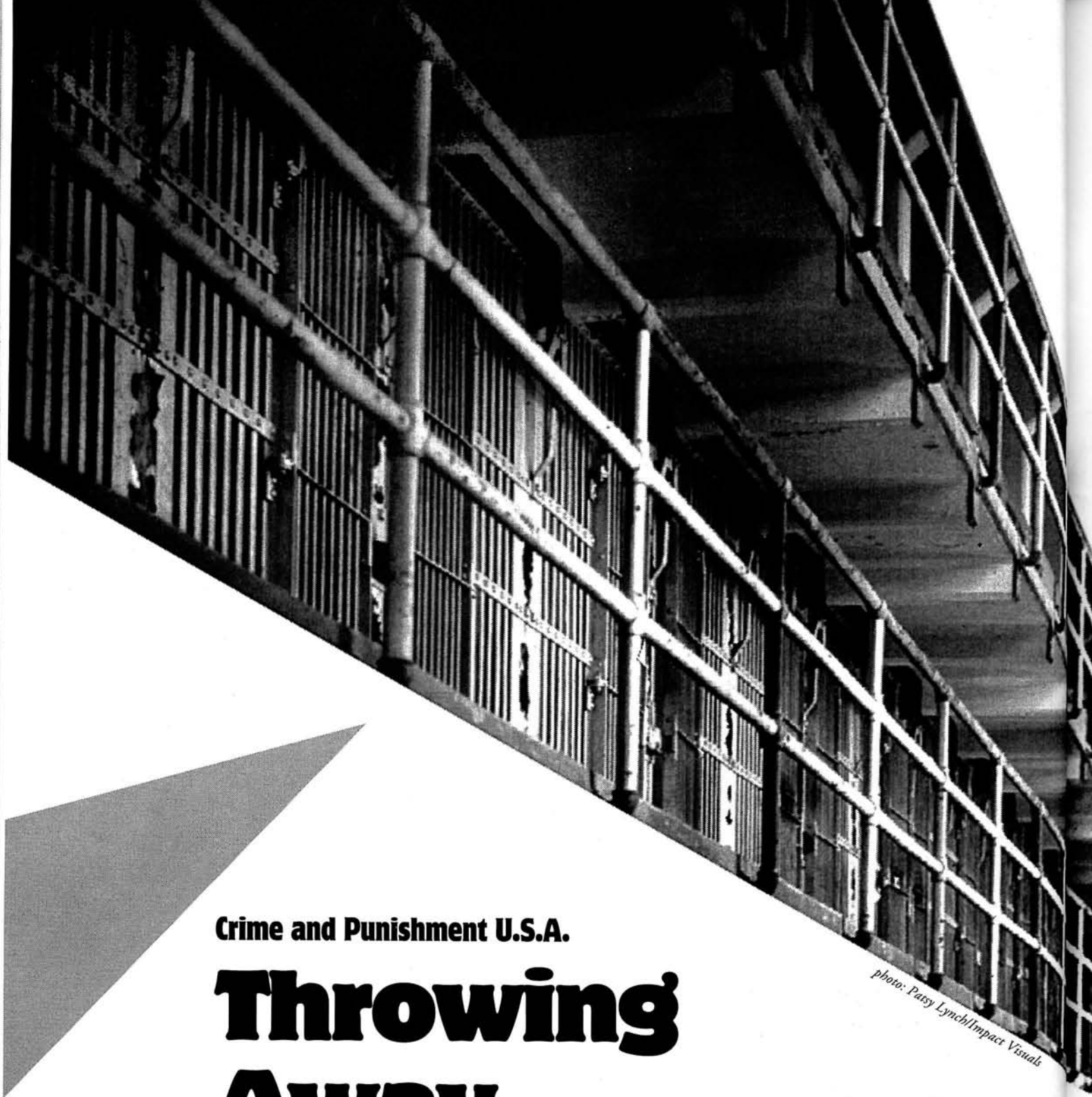


photo: Patsy Lynch/Impact Visuals

Crime and Punishment U.S.A.

Throwing Away the Key

by Charles King

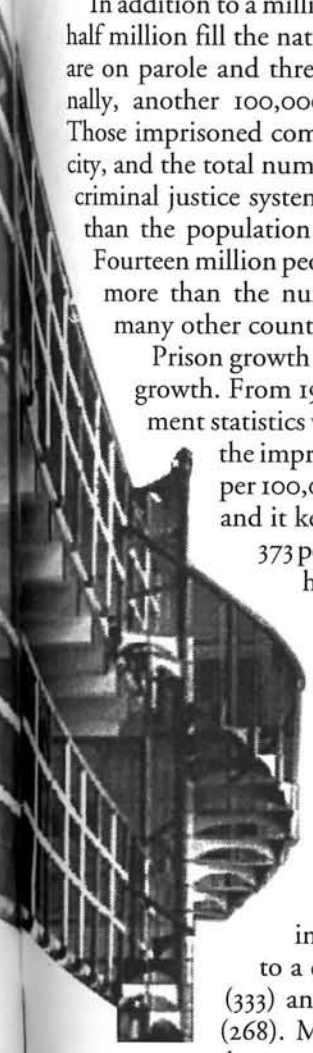
The least controversial observation that one can make about American criminal justice today is that it is remarkably ineffective, absurdly expensive, grossly inhumane, and riddled with discrimination. The beating of Rodney King was a reminder of the ruthlessness and racism that characterize many big city police departments. But the other aspects of the justice system, especially sentencing practices and prison conditions, are every bit as harsh and unfair.

—David J. Rothman, "The Crime of Punishment"

IN JUNE 1994, THE U.S. SENT ITS MILLIONTH human being to prison, years sooner than would have been thought possible just five years ago. Yet as the number incarcerated continues to grow, there is still no correlation between imprisonment and crime prevention. In fact the opposite could be said to be true.

In addition to a million people in prison, another half million fill the nation's jails. Another 600,000 are on parole and three million on probation. Finally, another 100,000 are in juvenile facilities. Those imprisoned comprise the ninth largest U.S. city, and the total number under the control of the criminal justice system is almost two times larger than the population of Chicago, or Nicaragua. Fourteen million people were arrested last year—more than the number who live in Cuba or many other countries.

Prison growth has far outpaced population growth. From 1925 (when official imprisonment statistics were first organized) to 1971, the imprisonment rate was about 100 per 100,000. In 1972, it began to soar and it keeps soaring: the rate is now 373 per 100,000, almost four times higher than it was in 1972.



THE NUMBERS RACKET

In 1991 Marc Mauer of the Sentencing Project, an independent organization based in Washington, DC, reported that the U.S. had the highest incarceration rate (prisons and jails) in the world (426) compared to a distant second South Africa (333) and third-place Soviet Union (268). More recent studies indicate that post-Soviet Russia has overtaken the U.S. as the country with the highest imprisonment rate in the world, but the U.S. is widening its lead over the also-rans: by 1992 the U.S. had an incarceration rate of 519 compared to South Africa's rate of 368 (see Table 1). Furthermore, in 1990 the incarceration rate for Black men in the U.S. was 3,109 compared to 729 for Black men in South Africa. In 1992 this differential had also increased: the rates were, respectively, 3,822 and 851. Thus, in 1990 the incarceration rate for Black men in the U.S. was 4.3 times greater than the rate for Black men in South Africa. Two years later that ratio had increased to 4.5.

To comprehend the racial nature of U.S. imprisonment, consider Table 2, derived from publications of the Bureau of Justice Statistics. We can see from the table that Black people are 8.5 times and Hispanics 3.9 times more likely to go to prison than whites.

Further examination of these statistics reveals the depth of their horror. Let's, for example, bring it down to neighborhood scale. Then we see that for every 1,000 Black people, 15 are in prison on any

Table 1

Incarceration Rates by Country 1992–1993

Netherlands	49	Australia	91
Denmark	66	England/Wales	93
Sweden	69	Portugal	93
Belgium	71	Mexico	97
Germany	80	Canada	116
Italy	80	Thailand	159
Brazil	84	South Africa	368
France	84	United States	519
Switzerland	85	Russia	558

Incarceration rates per 100,000 population. From Marc Mauer, *Americans Behind Bars: The International Use of Incarceration, 1992–1993*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project, 1994.

Table 2

U.S. Incarceration Rates by Nationality June 1994

Nationality	Rate per 100,000 Pop.	Rate Compared to Whites
White	176	1.0
Latino	686	3.9
Black	1489	8.5
Overall	373	2.1

given day. Using census data we can calculate related figures: on any given day in 1994, 3 percent of all Black men were in prison; 6 percent of all Black men aged 18–44; 7.6 percent of all Black men aged 25–29.

Figure 1

UCR Crime Rates 1973–1992
(per 100,000 population)

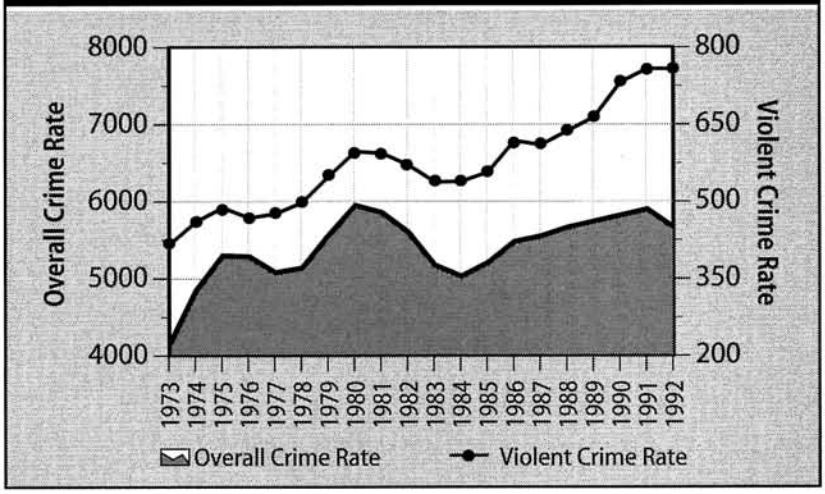
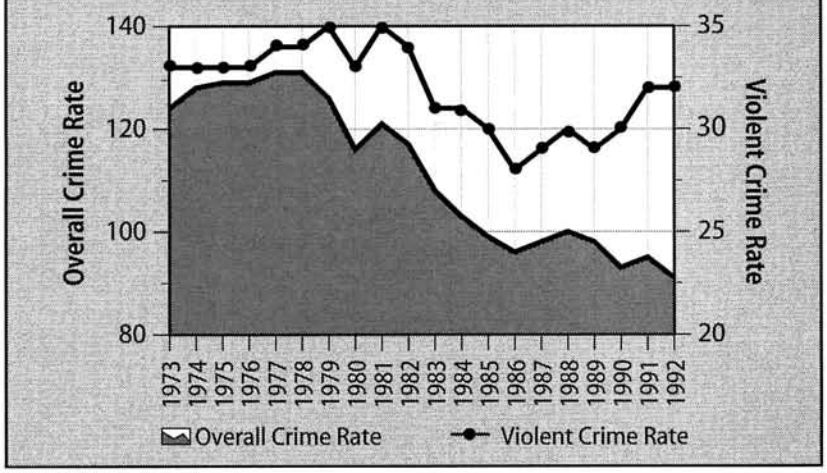


Figure 2

NCVS Crime Rates 1973–1992
(per 1,000 population)



We can also consider some other research findings:

- In 1992 there were more Black men in prison (583,000) than in college (537,000).
- One out of every four Black men will go to prison in his lifetime.
- Thirty percent of Black men aged 20–29 in Chicago were arrested in 1993.
- Forty-two percent of Black men aged 18–35 in Washington, DC, were under some form of criminal justice control in 1992.
- Fifty-six percent of Black men aged 18–35 in Baltimore were under some type of criminal justice control in 1992.

A new crime bill has just been passed by Congress. The effects of this bill will dwarf the horrific numbers cited above. In addition to adding scores of new crimes punishable by the death penalty, the goals of the new "crime initiative" involve placing 100,000 more police on the streets, increasing conviction rates, increasing the proportion of convictions resulting in imprisonment, requiring those imprisoned to serve at least 85 percent of their sentences ("truth in sentencing"), and incarcerating "three-time losers" for the rest of their lives.

Political scientists and criminologists have begun to estimate the impact this bill will have on imprisonment. John Irwin and James Austin, two criminologists who often prepare publications for the prestigious National Council on Crime and Delinquency, have estimated in their recent book *It's About Time* that the crime bill's package of laws would result in over 9 times as many people being imprisoned.

Thus, if we multiply by 9 the 6 percent noted above, we see that well over half of all Black men aged 18–44 will be in prison on any given day if all projected aspects of the new crime initiative are implemented. As Irwin and Austin note: "[The bill] would mean that most of the nation's 5.5 million black males aged 18–39 would be incarcerated."

Although some of this remains speculative, the numbers, no matter how they're calculated, remain staggering. Never before has any society at any time used imprisonment in this fashion. The impact that this will have on the Black community is difficult to fathom.

DEBT TO SOCIETY

Much has been written about the financing of the criminal justice system. Let's look at just a few figures. Criminal justice funding has increased sevenfold over the past 20 years, from $10 billion to $74 billion a year, with $25 billion spent for incarceration. This, however, is spare change compared to what may follow, depending upon which aspects of the new crime bill are implemented. For example, it has been estimated that the three-time loser provision itself will cost $5.7 billion annually and require an additional $21 billion in prison construction costs. Estimates for the total crime bill package run as high as an extra $351 billion over the next ten years.

What does this mean in real terms? It costs much more to send a person to prison for a year than it does to send a person to Harvard. It costs more to send a person to prison than it would to support a family of four. In fact, 300,000 families of four or 1.2 million people could live for what it will cost to implement the new three-time loser laws. While hunger is

surging in the U.S., the Bread for the World Institute has noted that $10 billion—less than two years of costs of the three-time loser law—would be enough to expand the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) food program to assure that there were no longer hungry people in this category in the U.S. Or consider this: according to a report from the American Bar Association, all the state taxes of 18 taxpayers in Delaware are required to keep one person in prison for a year; and the money spent to build a prison in Wisconsin would pay for 11,000 children to attend Head Start.

CRIME IN NUMBERS

What is crime? This is not as simple a question as it appears. What is considered criminal behavior is up for debate in any society. For example, there is street crime that breaks the law and that sometimes results in imprisonment. But most crime does not result in imprisonment, nor is it even considered crime. Domestic violence, or the battering of women, is almost never seen as a crime—even though it is estimated that 12 million women a year in the U.S. are battered by their mates. Waging war is considered tragic, but not criminal. Denying people health care, food, or housing also isn't criminal. I make these points to emphasize that whatever the relationship between crime and imprisonment, the causing of human injury and suffering is no consistent factor.

There are two main ways that street crime is measured in the U.S. The first is with the Uniform Crime Report (UCR; see Figure 1). This is computed by adding together the major crimes that are reported to the police who in turn report to the FBI, who publish the findings. The other measure of crime comes from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS; see Figure 2). About 20 years ago it became clear that only a proportion of crimes are reported to the police and that if we wanted to know about all crime, we would have to conduct scientifically sound surveys of the population and ask people if they had been victims of crime. This is what the NCVS does.

Since the UCR and the NCVS measure crime in different ways, they present different views of crime. For example, the UCR only contains crimes that are reported to the police, by some estimates only 40 percent of the total. (In 1992 there were about 13 million crimes reported by the UCR and 34 million by the NCVS .) On the other hand, the NCVS does not include murder (since its victims can't report it) nor crimes for which there is no reporting victim, like most drug-related crimes.

Let's look first at murder since this is the easiest to measure and thus is the crime we know most about. About 22,000 people were murdered in the U.S. last year. As Figure 3 shows, the murder rate in the U.S. was 9.4 per 100,000 population in 1973 and 9.3 in 1993—almost no change at all in 20 years.

Figure 2 shows crime that is measured by the NCVS. As you can see, since 1973, when the NCVS was initiated, the index of all NCVS crimes has decreased rather steadily while the violent crime index has stayed constant. Figure 1 shows crime that is measured by the UCR, also since 1973. Here an uneven pattern of increases and decreases is present for all crimes while violent crimes increased steadily and dramatically.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Is there a relationship between crime and imprisonment? Virtually everyone, from criminologists to wardens to social scientists to specially appointed task forces, all answer the question the same way: no. Unfortunately this topic can't be analyzed in detail in this brief article. I would thus like to sketch just some of the arguments which illustrate this non-relationship.

Figure 3

U.S. Murder Rate 1930–1995*
(per 100,000 population)

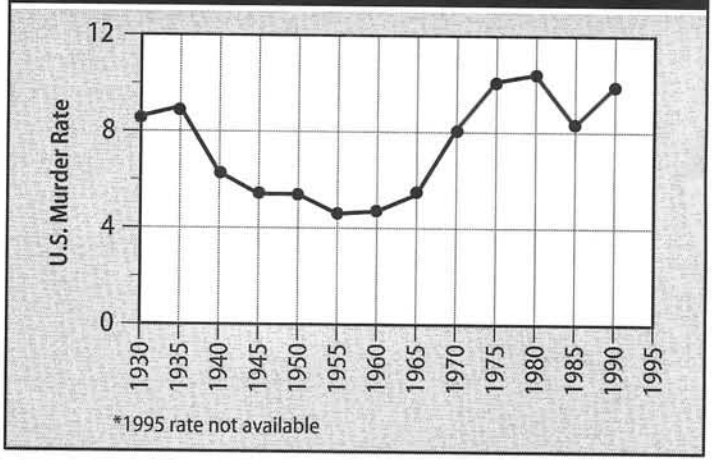
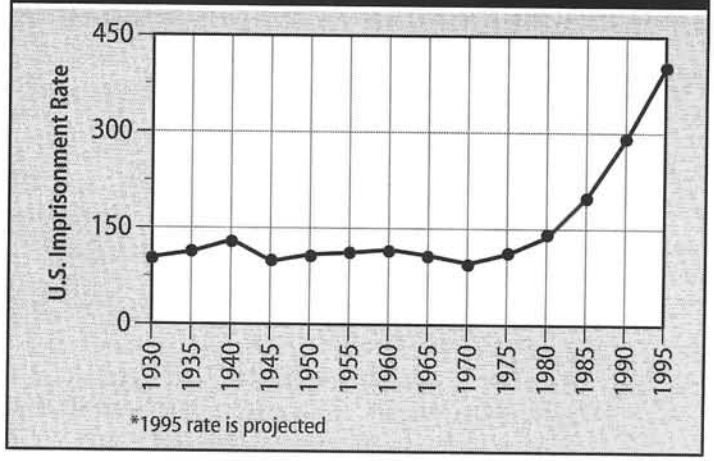


Figure 4

U.S. Imprisonment Rate 1935–1995*
(per 100,000 population)



1. Let's consider the data already presented. We can see that over the past 20 years one measure of crime (the NCVS) has decreased by 26 percent and the other measure (the UCR) has increased about 47 percent. The imprisonment rate has increased by 200 percent. In addition, consider the fact that the UCR decreased from 1980 to 1985 and then increased about the same amount between 1985 and 1990. These changes took place while imprisonment rates spiraled equally upward during both of these intervals (Figure 4). When all of this is added together, it is clear that putting enormous numbers of people into prison has not reduced the crime rate. Table 3, based on a recent report from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, presents a nice summary of these data.

Table 3

Increases in U.S. Correctional Populations 1980–1990

Population	1980	1990	Percent Increase
Probation	1,118,097	2,670,234	139
Jails	163,994	403,019	146
Prisons	329,821	771,243	134
Parole	220,438	531,403	141
Total	1.8 million	4.4 million	139
UCR Index Crimes	13.4 million	14.5 million	8

2. Consider the funnel effect, which demonstrates why most crimes don't even come into contact with the criminal justice system. Joan Petersilia, former president of the American Society of Criminology and an employee of the conservative Rand Corporation, in an article entitled "Building More Prison Cells Won't Make a Safer Society" notes, "Of the approximately 34 million serious felonies in 1990, 31 million never entered the criminal justice system because they were either unreported or unsolved." Thus, she continues, only 10 percent of all crime ever entered the courts, about half of these resulted in convictions, and about a third of these resulted in imprisonment—less than 2 percent of the total amount of crime.

3. Almost 70 percent of all murders are committed by people known to the victim. In addition, virtually all murder is committed in fits of passion that most experts agree are unlikely to be repeated. I am not saying that murderers should not be incarcerated. I am saying that incarceration will not prevent murders. Similarly, it has been demonstrated over and over that the death penalty does not deter murder. These observations are illustrated by comparing the murder rate with the incarceration rate, which shows that the murder rate rose and then remained more or less constant, through periods of less imprisonment and periods of massive imprisonment, through periods of the use of the death penalty and through periods when the death penalty was not used.

4. Consider the question of supply. There is virtually an unlimited supply of people who will commit crimes associated with drugs. As soon as one person is removed from the labor market, another replaces him or her. Imprisonment will never be able to dent this supply.

5. Virtually all experts agree that prisons cause people to become more deeply embedded in a life of crime. Recidivism rates are over 50 percent within three years after release from prison in most states.

6. The following comments are by "experts" in the field whom one would expect to be supportive of imprisonment. Thus their denials of the impact of imprisonment on crime merit attention:

From the Correctional Association of New York: "The state's new policies have been staggeringly expensive, have threatened a crisis of safety and manageability in the prison system, and have failed to reduce the rate of crime or even stop its increase. After almost ten years of getting tough the citizens of New York are more likely to be victims of crime today than in 1971. Moreover, the largest rise in crime came at the end of the decade, during 1980–81, well after the introduction of more severe sentencing practices."

The director of corrections of Alabama: "We're on a train that has to be turned around. It doesn't make any sense to pump millions and millions into corrections and have no effect on the crime rate."

Finally, Robert Gangi, current director of the Correction Association of New York: "Building more prisons to address crime is like building more graveyards to address a fatal disease."

One last study on this topic should be mentioned. Justice Fellowship, the organization founded by Chuck Colson, commissioned a special report to determine how much prisons deterred crime. Their findings were so non-supportive of prisons that they were reduced to this sarcastic attack:

"Incarceration rates are such a poor predictor of crime rates that researchers would find proximity [of states] to Canada more reliable. Eight of the 12 states that border on Canada rank in the bottom 20 in overall crime rates. Even alphabetical order is more reliable [than incarceration rates] when predicting crime rates: Three states among the first 15 alphabetically rank in the bottom two-fifths of crime rates."

ADDING IT UP

We've examined imprisonment, crime, and the non-relationship between the two. We've seen that:

1. Mass incarceration started in 1972.

2. The criminal justice system spends many billions of dollars caging millions of people.

3. The cages are filled with people of color, most of them Black.

4. The system does not prevent crime.

5. The system does not rehabilitate people.

Why then does the U.S. insist on more prisons? If not crime prevention, or even punishment, what purpose could a system like this have? I would suggest that a system with these characteristics functions foremost to control people of color. Remember what events preceded the growth in imprisonment that started in 1972: the launching of the FBI's COINTEL program; the assassination of dozens of Black liberation leaders and the imprisoning of hundreds more; the assassination of George Jackson in August 1971, and the Attica rebellion in September. In 1972 the nation's first control unit was opened, in a wing of the U.S. penitentiary at Marion.

Every serious analysis of the history of incarceration reveals the same historical thrust: prisons and other systems of punishment are for social control, not crime control. In 1939, in *Punishment and Social Structures*, Rusche and Kirchheimer concluded that the modalities of imprisonment throughout history were simply reflections of the economic systems that existed at given times. These modalities bore no relation to crime prevention, but rather to relations of production. Forty years later, in *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault showed the evolution of state punishment as having little to do with crime and everything to do with the exertion of the state to maintain its power. "The prison," says Foucault, "and no doubt punishment in general, is not intended to eliminate offences, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them... [to provide] them with a general 'economy.'" This is an economy in which the demands that communities of color make on American society are subject to the most rigid control, through mass incarceration.

The state, therefore, wants us to want prisons. Exaggerated statistics and powerful images of mindless, random criminality—perpetrated by Black men—bombard us from the media. Progressive people are not immune. For instance, we in the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown have often proposed the slogan "Not One More Cell," only to be opposed by other progressive people. Crime, they say, is a serious problem, and we have to offer some solutions.

But (the statistics readily show) prison solves nothing, can't, and won't—ever. It seems to me that a function of progressive struggle is to unlock the grip of racist ideology, and throw away *that* key. If this is correct, then fighting to uncover the real purpose of the "criminal" "justice" system is meaningful work. ❑

Charles King is a member of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown in Chicago.

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WRITE THROUGH THE WALLS

The U.S. government says there are no political prisoners or POWs in this country. Yet the partial list below shows this claim is a complete lie. We urge you to write them and to send literature. These women and men represent the best of the movement. Make their struggle yours. "The Real Dragon" sponsors a continuing book drive to political prisoners and POWs. For more information or to send contributions write: POB 3294, Berkeley, CA 94703-9901.

Puerto Rican Prisoners of War

Alejandrina Torres #92152-024
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Lucy Rodríguez #88973-024
Carmen Valentín #88974-024
FCI Dublin
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William Phillips Africa #AM-4984
RFD 3
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Edward Goodman Africa #AM-4974
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Ellis 1 Unit
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Mexican Political Prisoners

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Cuban Political Prisoners

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Bruce Friedrich
Brian Terrell
Fr. Frank Cordero
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