

Sister Outsider:
Essays and Speeches
Audre Lorde, Crossing Press (1984)
Notes by Namisa (2022)

Coding Key (October 2022)

Harnessing the Power of Difference

Learning from History

Language, Teaching, and Action for Change

Poetry, Art, Love, Joy, and Wholeness as Illumination

Harnessing Anger, Pain, and Fear

Confronting Whiteness

Feeling as a Way of Knowing

Freedom Dreaming and Revolutionary Mindset

Intersectional Feminism

Honing Theory and Practice

Notes

Poetry is Not a Luxury

Poetry as illuminating light/force p.36

Ideas v. feelings as a source of power p.37

Altering auras -- I feel therefore I can be free: "The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us -- the poet -- whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free." p. 38

Structural barriers to feelings as power, importance of dreaming: "within living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were expected to kneel to thought as women were expected to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets. And there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power. They surface in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. Those dreams are made reliable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare." p. 39

"there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt" [in various contexts] p. 39

The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action

In the face of inevitable death, silence does not protect you p. 41

Truth, language, expression, education, and survival: "For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth." p. 43

Fear of scrutiny/death as a perspective: "And it is never without fear -- of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. It is very good for establishing perspective.

Listening to women: "And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives." p. 43

Work and speak when afraid; respect needs and language over fear: "We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.

The fact that we are hear and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. and there are so many silences to be broken." p. 44

Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving

Definitions of racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia p. 45

"Racism: *The belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance.*

Sexism: *The belief in the inherent superiority of one sex and thereby the right to dominance.*

Heterosexism: *The belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving and thereby its right to dominance.*

Homophobia: *The fear of feelings of love for members of one's own sex and therefore the hatred of those feelings in others."*

Root of the above: "The above forms of human blindness stem from the same root -- an inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic human force, one which is enriching rather than threatening to the defined self, when there are shared goals." p. 45

Only those unclear of their own definition see others as a threat p. 46

Zero-sum attitude toward self-definition; seeing affirmation as a threat: "The supposition that one sex needs the other's acquiescence in order to exist prevents both from moving together as self-defined persons toward a common goal." p. 51

Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power

Oppression corrupts/distorts deep spiritual power of feeling to perpetuate itself p. 53

Erotic v. pornography (opposites): "pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.

The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves." p. 54

Life's work, excellence v. mediocrity, intentionality v. demanding the impossible p. 54

Definition of erotic: "The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects -- born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony." p. 55

Dismissal of erotic knowledge leads to a false dichotomy between the spiritual and the political: "understanding is a hand-maiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born." p. 56

Joy and importance of self-connection: "That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling. And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called *marriage*, nor *god*, nor *an afterlife*."

This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe." p. 57

"The fear of our desires deepens them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance." p. 58

"The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of oppression as women." p. 58

Simultaneously pursuing erotic fulfillment and looking away creates distortions -- pornography, obscenity, the abuse of feeling p. 59

Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface

Picking the correct definition of success, not absorbing standards of the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy p. 63

Need for intersectionality p. 64

An Open Letter to Mary Daly

Engagement v. exploitation and misrepresentation, appropriation of words p. 69

Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist's Response

Give strength to children by being willing to self-observe, being *honest* about life experiences: "I give the most strength to my children by being willing to look within myself, and by being honest with them about what I find there, without expecting a response beyond their years. In this way they begin to learn to look beyond their own fears." p. 72

Self-definition as both power and vulnerability, transposing others' experiences p. 73

Love (self-definition) and survival (letting go) p. 74

Evaluate, measure, and *express* power dynamics: "attempt to evaluate and measure over and over again our feelings concerning power, our own and others'. And we explore with care those areas concerning how it is used and expressed between us and between us and the children, openly and otherwise." p. 79

An Interview: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich

'Keep yourself' through feeling, not talk p. 81

Walter de la Mare's "The Listeners" p. 82

"[Thinking] was a very mysterious process for me. And it was one I had come to suspect because I had seen so many errors committed in its name, and I had come not to respect it. On the other hand, I was also afraid of it because there were inescapable conclusions or convictions I had come to about my own life, my own feelings, that defied thought. And I wasn't going to let them go...But I couldn't analyze or understand them because they didn't make the kind of sense I had been taught to expect through understanding. There were things I knew and couldn't say. And I couldn't understand them." p. 88

On how writing connects with teaching: "I know teaching is a survival technique. It is for me and I think it is in general; the only way real learning happens. Because I myself was learning something I needed to continue living. And I was examining it and teaching it at the same time I was learning it. I was teaching it to myself aloud." p. 88

The importance of grammar in poetry, that structure can be "freeing as well as restrictive." Importance of learning, and "once we know it we can choose to discard it or use it, but you can't know if it has useful or destructive power until you have a handle on it. It's like fear: once you put your hand on it, you can use it or push it away." p. 95

White v. Black labor, permeation of racism into the education system p. 96

Safety and visibility are not mutually exclusive: "One thing has always kept me going -- and it's not really courage or bravery, unless that's what courage or bravery is made of -- is a sense that there are so many ways in which I'm vulnerable and cannot help but be vulnerable, I'm not going to be more vulnerable by putting weapons of silence in my enemies' hands. Being an open lesbian in the Black community is not easy, although being closeted is even harder." p. 99

Mutual vulnerability of oppressed people can be weaponized: "When a people share a common oppression, certain kinds of skills and joint defenses are developed. And if you survive you survive because those skills and defenses have worked. When you come into conflict over other existing differences, there is a vulnerability to each other which is desperate and very deep. And that is what happens between Black men and women because we have certain weapons we have perfected together

that white women and men have not shared. I said this to someone, and she said, very rightly, the same thing exists within the Jewish community between Jewish men and Jewish women. I think the oppression is different, but the same mechanism of vulnerability exist. When you share a common oppression you have certain additional weapons against each other because you've forged them in secret together against a common enemy. it's a fear that I'm still not free of and that I remember all the time when I deal with other Black women: the fear of the ex-comrade." p. 99-100

On the stereotype of white patriarchal "thinking" v. Black matriarchal "feeling" expressed in "Poetry Is Not a Luxury": "if you're traveling a road that begins nowhere and ends nowhere, the ownership of that road is meaningless...Leaving rationality to the white man is like leaving him a piece of that road that begins nowhere and ends nowhere...The Black mother who is the poet exists in every one of us. Now when males or patriarchal thinkers (whether male or female) reject that combination, then we're truncated. Rationality is not unnecessary. It serves the chaos of knowledge. It serves feeling. It serves to get from this place to that place. But if you don't honor those places, then the road is meaningless. Too often, that's what happens with the worship of rationality and that circular, academic, analytic thinking. But ultimately, I don't see feel/think as a dichotomy I see them as a choice of ways and combinations.

Adrienne: Which we are constantly making. We don't make it once and for all. We constantly have to be making it, depending on where we are, over and over.

Audre: But I do think that we have been taught to think, to codify information in certain old ways, to learn, to understand in certain ways. The possible shapes of what has not been before exist only in that back place, where we keep those unnamed, untamed longings for something different and beyond what is now called possible, and to which our understanding can only build roads, But we have been taught to deny those fruitful areas of ourselves. I personally believe that the Black mother exist more in women; yet she is the name for a humanity that men are not without. But they have taken a position against that piece of themselves, and it is a world position, a position throughout time. And I've said this to you before, Adrienne, I feel that we're evolving. In terms of a species...

Adrienne: That women are evolving...

Audre: That the human race is evolving through women. That it's not by accident that there are more and more women -- this sounds crazy doesn't it -- women being born, women surviving...and we've got to take that promise of new power seriously, or we'll make the same mistakes all over again. Unless we learn the lessons of the Black mother in each of us, whether we are Black or not ...I believe this power exists in men also but they choose not to deal with it; which is, as I learned, their right. hopefully this choice can be affected, but I don't know. I don't believe this shift from conquering problems to experiencing life is a one-generational shot or a single investment. I believe it's a whole signature which you try to set in motion and have some input into. But I'm not saying that women don't think or analyze. Or that white does not feel. I'm saying that we must never close our eyes to the terror, to the chaos which is Black which is creative which is female which is dark which is rejected which is messy which is...

Adrienne: Sinister...

Audre: Sinister, smelly, erotic, confused, upsetting...

Adrienne: I think we have to keep using and affirming a vocabulary that has been used negatively and pejoratively. And I assume that's the statement you're making in that sentence, that you make over and over in your poetry. And it's nothing as simplistic as saying "Black is beautiful," either. p. 101-102

Push-back against "Uses of the Erotic" as antifeminist, "reducing us once again to the unseen, the unusable. That in writing it I am returning us to a place of total intuition without insight.

Adrienne: And yet, in that essay you're talking about work and power, about two of the most political things that exist.

Audre: Yes, but...the erotic has been used against us, even the word itself, so often, that we have been taught to suspect what is deepest in ourselves, and that is the way we learn to testify against ourselves, against our feelings." p. 102

Insidiousness of self-rejection: "The way you get people to testify against themselves is not to have police tactics and oppressive techniques. What you do is to build it in so people learn to distrust everything in themselves that has not been sanctioned, to reject what is most creative in themselves to begin with, so you don't even need to stamp it out." p.102

Countering old power with new constructions: "we cannot fight old power in old power terms only. The only way we can do it is by creating another whole structure that touches every aspect of our existence, at the same time as we are resisting." p. 102-103

Documentation v. perception: "documentation does not help one perceive. At best it only analyzes the perception. At worst, it provides a screen by which to avoid concentrating on the core revelation, following it down to how it feels. Again, knowledge and understanding. They can function in concert, but they don't replace each other. But I'm not rejecting your need for documentation." p. 104

"How much of this truth can I bear to see
and still live
unblinded?

How much of this pain
can I use?" p. 106, quote from "Need: A Choral of Black Women's Voices" in Chosen Poems p. 115

Taking a position against white male power, with respect to being on the jury who acquitted a white officer who shot a Black child: "how do you take a position against them? How do you reach down into threatening difference without being killed or killing? How do you deal with things you believe, live them not as theory, not even as emotion, but right on the line of action and effect and change?...putting yourself on the line is like killing a piece of yourself, in the sense that you have to kill, end, destroy something familiar and dependable, so that something new can come, in our selves in our world. And that sense of writing at the edge, out of urgency, not because you choose it but because you have to, that sense of survival -- that's what the poem is out of, as well as the pain of my spiritual son's death

over and over. Once you live any piece of your vision it opens you to a constant onslaught. Of necessities, of horrors, but of wonders too, of possibilities." p. 107

Creating the representation you need: "In the hospital I kept thinking, let's see, there's got to be someone somewhere, a Black lesbian feminist with cancer, how'd she handle it? Then I realized, hey, honey, you are it, for now. I read all of those books and then I realized, no one can tell me how to do it. I have to pick and choose, see what feels right." p. 108

Circling back to knowledge and understanding, for a purpose: "What understanding begins to do is make knowledge available for use, and that's the urgency, that's the push, that's the drive. I don't know how I wrote the long prose piece I have just finished, but I just knew that I had to do it.

Adrienne: That you had to understand what you knew and also make it available to others.

Audre: That's right. Inseparable process now. But for me, I had to know I knew it first -- I had to feel." p. 109

The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House

Creative power of interdependency and difference: "Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to at where there are no carters.

Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged." p. 112

Being oppressed but "acceptable" and embracing oppressive structures for support: "Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support...The failure of academic feminists to recognize difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower." p. 112

Stretching across the gap of the oppressors' ignorance: "Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women of Color to educate white women -- in the face of tremendous resistance -- as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought." p. 113

Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference

A lifetime pursuit: "It is a lifetime pursuit for each one of us to extract these distortions from our living at the same time as we recognize, reclaim, and define those differences upon which they are imposed." p. 115

Mythical norms: "Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows "that is not me." In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing. By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist." p. 116

Passing knowledge and ability to listen, avoid repetition: "We find ourselves having to repeat and relearn the same old lessons over and over that our mothers did because we do not pass on what we have learned, or because we are unable to listen." p. 117

Violence woven into fabric of Black women's lives, white women turning their backs on reason p. 119

Against fragmentation, opening/processing the whole self: "My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living." p. 120-121

On the marginalization of Black lesbians: "But part of this need to misname and ignore Black lesbians comes from a very real fear that openly women-identified Black women who are no longer dependent upon men for their self-definition may well reorder our whole concept of social relationships." p. 121

Isolating one area of difference as a mechanism of social control, solutions: "As a tool of social control, women have been encouraged to recognize only one area of human difference as legitimate, those difference which exist between women and men. And we have learned to deal across those differences with the urgency of all oppressed subordinates. All of us have had to learn to live or work or coexist with men, from our fathers on. We have recognized and negotiated these differences, even when this recognition only continued the old dominant/subordinate mode of human relationship, where the oppressed must recognize the masters' difference in order to survive.

But our future survival is predicated upon our ability to relate within equality. As women, we must root our internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change. Now we must recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each others' difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles.

The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion.

For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

As Paulo Freire shows so well in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships.

Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival." p. 122-123

The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism

Anger, guilt, and defensiveness in responding to racism: "I have used learning to express anger for my growth. But for corrective surgery, not guilt. Guilt and defensiveness are bricks in a way against which we all flounder; they serve none of our futures." p. 124

Anger, information, and energy translated into *action* is strength: "I have seen situations where white women hear a racist remark, resent what has been said, become filled with fury, and remain silent because they are afraid. That unexpressed anger lies within them like an undetonated device, usually to be hurled at the first woman of Color who talks about racism.

But anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies.

Anger is loaded with information and energy." p. 127

Oppression as props of profit: "We operate in the teeth of a system for which racism and sexism are primary, established, and necessary props of profit." p. 128

Anger v. hatred: "And while we scrutinize the often painful face of each other's anger, please remember that it is not our anger which makes me caution you to lock your doors at night and not to wander the streets of Hartford alone. It is the hatred which lurks in those streets, that urge to destroy us all if we truly work for change rather than merely indulge in academic rhetoric.

This hatred and our anger are very different. Hatred is the fury of those who do not share our goals, and its object is death and destruction. Anger is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change." p. 129

Symphony v. cacophony: "Women of Color in America have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silence, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service. And I say symphony rather than cacophony because we have had to learn to orchestrate those furies so that they do not tear us apart." p. 129

Harnessing the power of anger, guilt: "It is not the anger of other women that will destroy us but our refusals to stand still to listen to its rhythms, to learn within it, to move beyond the manner of presentation to the substance, to tap that anger as an important source of empowerment.

I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor answering anger; for to do so insults and trivializes all our efforts. Guilt is not a response to anger; it is response to one's own actions or lack of action. If it leads to change then it can be useful since it is then no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness." p. 130

Guilt as objectification: "To turn aside from the anger of Black women with excuses or the pretexts of intimidation is to award no one power -- it is merely another way of preserving racial blindness, the power of unaddressed privilege, unbreached, intact. Guilt is only another form of objectification. Oppressed peoples are always being asked to stretch a little more, to bridge the gap between blindness and humanity. Black women are expected to use our anger only in the service of other people's salvation of learning. But that time is over. My anger has meant pain to me but it has also meant survival, and before I give it up I'm going to be sure that there is something at least as powerful to replace it on the road to clarity.

What woman here is so enamored of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman's face? What woman's terms of oppression have become precious and necessary to her as a ticket into the fold of the righteous, away from the cold winds of self-scrutiny?" p. 132

Learning from the 60s

No new ideas: "There are no new ideas, just new ways of giving those ideas we cherish breath and power in our own living." p. 134

Confronting internal oppression: "We must move against not only those forces which dehumanize us from the outside, but also against those oppressive values which we have been forced to take into ourselves. Through examining the combination of our triumphs and errors, we can examine the dangers of an incomplete vision. Not to condemn that vision but to alter it, construct templates for possible futures, and focus our rage for change upon our enemies rather than upon each other." p. 135

Political correctness as shackles, Black people are not a monolith: "We were poised for attack, not always in the most effective places. When we disagreed with one another about the solution to particular problem, we were often far more vicious to each other than to the originators of our common problem. Historically, difference had been used so cruelly against us that as a people we were reluctant to tolerate any diversion from what was externally defined as Blackness. In the 60s, political correctness became not a guideline for living, but a new set of shackles. A small and vocal part of the Black community lost sight of the fact that unity does not mean unanimity -- Black people are not some standardly digestible quantity. In order to work together we do not have to become a mix of indistinguishable particles resembling a vat of homogenized chocolate milk. Unity implies the coming together of elements which are, to begin with, varied and diverse in their particular natures. Our persistence in examining the tensions with diversity encourages growth toward our common goal. So often we either ignore the past or romanticize it, render the reason for unity useless or mythic. We forget that the necessary ingredient needed to make the past work for the future is our energy in the present, metabolizing one into the other. Continuity does not happen automatically, nor is it a passive process." p. 136

Single-issue struggle, stronger/wiser than the sum of our errors: "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives. Malcolm knew this. Martin Luther King, Jr. knew this. Our struggles are particular, but we are not alone. We are not perfect, but we are stronger and wiser than the sum of our errors." p. 138

Learning from the past, humanness: "We do not have to romanticize our past in order to be aware of how it seeds our present. We do not have to suffer the waste of an amnesia that robs us of the lessons of the past rather than permit us to read them with pride as well as deep understanding.

We know what it is to be lied to, and we know how important it is not to lie to ourselves.

We are powerful because we have survived, and that is what it is all about -- survival and growth.

Within each of us there is some piece of humanness that knows we are not being served by the machine which orchestrates crisis after crisis and is grinding all our futures into dust." p. 139

Call for intersectionality p. 139

Being aware of the labor that creates sustains us and creates convenience in our lives p. 139

Today us, tomorrow the rest: "We are Lesbians and gay men who, as the most obvious target of the New Right, are threatened with castration, imprisonment, and death in the streets. And we know that our erasure only paves the way for erasure of other people of Color, of the old, of the poor, of all of those who do not fit that mythic dehumanizing norm." p. 140

Collective liberation and revolution: "Can any one of us here still afford to believe that efforts to reclaim the future can be private or individual? Can any one here still afford to believe that the pursuit of liberation can be the sole and particular province of any one particular race, or sex, or age, or religion, or sexuality, or class?"

Revolution is not a one-time event. It is becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a genuine change in established, outgrown responses; for instance, it is learning to address each other's differences with respect." p. 140-141

Can't afford to wait for change: "Each one of us must look clearly and closely at the genuine particulars (conditions) of his or her life and decide where action and energy is needed and where it can be effective. Change is the immediate responsibility of each of us, wherever and however we are standing, in whatever arena we choose...if we wait to put our future into the hands of some new messiah, what will happen when those leaders are shot, or discredited, or tried for murder, or called homosexual, or otherwise disempowered?" p. 141

Militancy, security, and passivity; tokenism in the university setting: "To refuse to participate in the shaping of our future is to give it up. Do not be misled into passivity either by false security (they don't mean me) or by despair (there's nothing we can do). Each of us must find our work and do it. Militancy no longer means guns at high noon, if it ever did. It means actively working for change, sometimes in the absence of any surety that change is coming. It means doing the unromantic and tedious work necessary to forge meaningful coalitions, and it means recognizing which coalitions are possible and which coalitions are not. It means knowing that coalition, like unity, means the coming together of whole, self-actualized human beings, focused and believing, not fragmented autonomous marching to a prescribed step. It means fighting despair.

And in the university, that is certainly no easy task, for each one of you by virtue of your being here will be deluged by opportunities to misname yourselves, to forget who you are, to forget where your real interests lie. Make no mistake, you will be courted; and nothing neutralizes creativity quicker than tokenism, that false sense of security fed by a myth of individual solutions." p. 141-142

"We must allow each other our differences at the same time as we recognize our sameness." p. 142

Despair and history: "If our history has taught us anything, it is that action for change directed only against the external conditions of our oppressions is not enough. In order to be whole, we must recognize the despair oppression plants within each of us -- that thin persistent voice that says our efforts are useless, it will never change, so why bother, accept it. And we must fight that inserted piece of self-destruction that lives and flourishes like a poison inside of us, unexamined until it makes use turn upon ourselves in each other. But we can put our finger down upon that loathing buried deep within each one of us and see who it encourages us to despise, and we can lessen its potency by the knowledge of our real connectedness, arcing across our differences.

Hopefully, we can learn from the 60s that we cannot afford to do our enemies' work by destroying each other." p. 142

Who's listening: "How are you practicing what you preach -- whatever you preach, and who exactly is listening? As Malcolm stressed, we are not responsible for our oppression, but we must be responsible for our own liberation. It is not going to be easy, but we have what we have learned and what we have been given that is useful. We have the power those who came before us have given us, to move beyond the place where they were standing. We have the trees, and water, and sun, and our children. Malcolm X does not live in the dry texts of his words as we read them; he lives in the energy we generate and use to move along the visions we share with him. We are making the future as well as bonding to survive the enormous pressures of the present, and that is what it means to be a part of history." p. 144

Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger

Training anger: "How to train that anger with accuracy rather than deny it has been one of the major tasks of my life." p. 145

Fear and acceptance: "To search for power within myself means I must be willing to move through being afraid to whatever lies beyond. If I look at my most vulnerable places and acknowledge the pain I have felt, I can remove the source of that pain from my enemies' arsenals. My history cannot be used to feather my enemies' arrows then, and that lessens their power over me. Nothing I accept about myself can be used against me to diminish me. I am who I am, doing what I came to do, acting upon you like a drug or a chisel to remind you of your me-ness, as I discover you in myself." p. 146-147

Internal distortions: "It is easier to deal with the external manifestations of racism and sexism than it is to deal with the results of those distortions internalized within our consciousness of ourselves and one another." p. 147

Historical power of Black women p. 151

Definition of anger, hatred: "Anger -- a passion of displeasure that may be excessive or misplaced but not necessarily harmful. Hatred -- an emotional habit or attitude of mind in which aversion is coupled with ill will. Anger, used, does not destroy. Hatred does." p. 152

Anger as an incomplete source of change: "anger, like guilt, is an incomplete form of human knowledge. More useful than hatred, but still limited. Anger is useful to help clarify our differences, but in the long run, strength that is bred by anger alone is a blind force which cannot create the future. It can only demolish the past. Such strength does not focus upon what lies ahead, but upon what lies behind, upon what created it -- hatred. And hatred is a deathwish for the hatred, not a lifewish for anything else." p. 152

Letters from Black Feminists by Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith p. 153

Wisdom and influence, I Ching: "When one cannot influence a situation it is an act of wisdom to withdraw." p. 156

This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color by Moraga and Anzaldua, p. 160

Poetry and chaos: "It is sometimes both the curse and the blessing of the poet to perceive without yet being able to order those perceptions, and that is another name for Chaos.

But of course it is out of Chaos that new worlds are born." p. 162

Myths of Self Protection: "There are myths of self-protection that hold us separate from each other and breed harshness and cruelty where we most need softness and understanding.

1. That courtesy or politeness require our not noticing each other directly, only with the most covert of evaluating glances. At all costs, we must avoid the image of our fear...that distance between us makes me less you, makes you less me. ...

2. That because we sometimes rise to each other's defense against outsiders, we do not need to look at devaluation and dismissal among ourselves. Support against outsiders is very different from cherishing each other. ...

3. That perfection is possible, a correct expectation from ourselves and each other, and the only terms of acceptance, humanness." p. 169

Privilege of feeling/processing; pain v. suffering: "Sometimes it feels as if I were to experience all the collective hatred that I have had directed at me as a Black woman, admit its implications into my consciousness, I might die of the bleak and horrible weight. Is that why a sister once said to me, "white people feel, Black people do"?"

It is true that in America white people, by and large, have more time and space to afford the luxury of scrutinizing their emotions. Black people in this country have always had to attend closely to the hard and continuous work of survival in the most material and immediate plans. But is a temptation to move from this fact to the belief that Black people do not need to examine our feelings; or that they are unimportant, since they have so often been used to stereotype and infantilize us; or that these

feelings are not vital to our survival; or, worse, that there is some acquired virtue in not feeling them deeply. That is carrying a timebomb wired to our emotions.

There is a distinction I am beginning to make in my living between *pain* and *suffering*. Pain is an event, an experience that must be recognized, named, and then used in some way in order for the experience to change, to be transformed into something else, strength or knowledge or action.

Suffering, on the other hand, is the nightmare reliving of unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain. When I live through pain without recognizing it, self-consciously, I rob myself of the power that can come from *using* that pain, the power to fuel some movement beyond it. I condemn myself to reliving that pain over and over and over whenever something close triggers it. And that is suffering, a seemingly inescapable cycle." p. 171-172

Theory and self-worth: "Theorizing about self-worth is ineffective. So is pretending. ... I can afford to look at myself directly, risk the pain of experiencing who I am not, and learn to savor the sweetness of who I am. I can make friends with all the different pieces of me, liked and disliked." p. 174

Love, bridges, and truth: "we can practice being gentle with ourselves by being gentle with each other. We can practice being gentle with each other by being gentle with that piece of ourselves that is hardest to hold, by giving more to the brave bruised girlchild within each of us, by expecting a little less from her gargantuan efforts to excel. We can love her in the light as well as in the darkness, quiet her frenzy toward perfection and encourage her attentions toward fulfillment. Maybe then we will come to appreciate more how much she has taught us, and how much she is doing to keep this world revolving toward some livable future.

It would be ridiculous to believe that this process is not length and difficult. It is suicidal to believe it is not possible. As we arm ourselves with ourselves and each other, we can stand toe to toe inside that rigorous loving and begin to speak the impossible -- or what has always seemed like the impossible -- to one another. The first step toward genuine change. Eventually, if we speak the truth to each other, it will become unavoidable to ourselves." p. 175

Grenada Revisited: An Interim Report

Monroe Doctrine, p. 181

PSYOPS (the psychological operations unit of the US occupation forces), p. 182

Military solutions/historical context: "The action in Grenada served many purposes for the United States, provided the grounds for many tests. A major one was addressed to the concern long expressed by the Pentagon as to whether or not Black American soldiers could be gotten to fire upon other Black people. This becomes a vital question as the U.S. military-industrial complex executes increasingly military solutions to this country's precarious position in the Third World, where the U.S. either ignores or stands upon the wrong side of virtually every single struggle for liberation by oppressed peoples." p. 183

Socialism/doublethink: "Even many Black americans, threatened by some spectre of a socialism that is mythic and undefined at best, have bought the government line of "them" against "us." But which one of us as a Black american has ever taken the time to examine this threat of socialism for any reality nearly as destructive as racism is within all of our lives? With the constant manipulation of the media, many Black americans are honestly confused, defending "our" invasion of Black Grenada under a mistaken mirage of patriotism.

Nineteen eight-four is upon us, and doublethink has come home to scramble our brains and blanket our protest." p. 184

Grenada as a naked warning to African-americans: "We did it to them down there and we will not hesitate to do it to you. Internment camps. Interrogation booths. Isolation cells hastily built by U.S. occupation forces." etc., p. 184-185

Gains of the revolution in Grenada, p. 186-187