

Transformation

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INSIDE

**Special Issue:
Focus on Women
in Prison, Part II**

**Working on Both
Sides of the
Domestic Violence
Issue**
- page 3

**Mothers in Prison,
Children in Crisis**
- page 7

Booknotes
- page 10

PART II: Focus on Prison Work

Criminal Justice: Moving to Prisons for Profit

Suzanne Pharr

For a very long time, I have made fun of the name "criminal justice," calling it an oxymoron, or two words in complete contradiction of each other. Today, I am beyond making fun: I can no longer call it the "criminal justice system." Witnessing the way this system works in the U.S., I am led to call it the "criminal system" or the "injustice system." It is a system that behaves in a criminal manner toward great numbers of people in this society, especially poor people. It is hard to remain quiet while this system targets poor people—and the wealthy go free.

There is a kind of hysteria in this country about crime—though only certain kinds of crime. The crimes of bankers, developers, or corporations dumping toxic wastes go almost unpunished, but legislators can get almost any anti-crime bill passed as well as big packages of funding for police and prisons to punish individuals, particularly people of color and poor people. Indeed, building prisons has become a major growth industry and is seen as a source of jobs and income for communities. We are now spending more money on building prisons than building uni-

versities. Private police forces (guards for gated communities, businesses, etc.) have grown exponentially. There has been a heightening of penalties for involvement with drugs, and an increase in the use of the death penalty. The rate of people incarcerated in the U.S. is 6 to 8 times the rates in other industrialized countries—a greater percentage than in the former Soviet Union or the old South Africa. And all of this goes on despite statistical evidence that crime has decreased.

Here are three examples of recent shameful changes in criminal policy:

- Public officials now target teenagers (especially young people of color) as "super predators," or "amoral" criminals and enemies of the people. I am appalled that there is serious discussion in Congress about trying and sentencing teenagers as adults, and there is movement toward the elimination of their basic rights such as freedom of movement, association, congregation. What does it mean when groups of three or more youth can be classified as a gang, simply because of their num-

(continued on page 2)

Women in Prison Criminal Justice

bers? The fact that U.S. children die by murder and suicide at 12 times the rate of other industrialized nations—that children are killing children—is an indication that there is something terribly wrong with U.S. adults and our systemic lack of support of children and families. (What would good support look like? Universal and equalized health care, education, and child care, jobs with livable wages, good libraries, parks, and after-school programs.)

- Congress has expanded the use of the death penalty, and many states are using it with relish. Arkansas executed three men in a single day last year, and the state of Texas is heading for the Guinness Book of Records for the most killed in the death chamber. In fact, a recent NY Times article reported that the high frequency has had a numbing effect on local citizens who pay less and less attention to the executions.

- Greater numbers of women are now being incarcerated for non-violent crimes: hot checks, petty theft, drugs, prostitution, accomplices to men's crimes. In the majority of their cases, their crime is trying to survive poverty. In Little Rock, they are jailed in a "Community Punishment Center." They are separated from their children and families, and they return to them as "punished" individuals, not rehabilitated and trained to contribute to the work force and their community.

Not only do I feel ashamed of our treatment of people in "the land of the free," but I worry about the future. On the one hand, corporate globalization has eliminated good-paying jobs here and created the greatest disparity between the rich and the poor since the last century, job training programs and services are being eliminated, and welfare is being re-

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pealed. At the same time, in the last decade, we have had a doubling of the numbers of people incarcerated (to 1.63 million or 615 for every 100,000 persons) along with the rapid development of prisons which are now privatized and being managed by corporations that are not accountable to voters. There are now 124 private prisons open which have 74,000 beds and the private prison industry is growing at an annual rate of 35%. As corporations take over the prison industry, more and more prisoners are required to work for businesses to pay for their care. The number of prisoners em-

ployed grew from 31,000 in 1980 to 75,000 workers in 1995 who produced \$1 billion dollars of goods and services. Companies such as TWA, Microsoft, Eddie Bauer, and JC Penney's have prison businesses where prisoners take reservations and clothing orders, package computer parts, and make uniforms. The majority of prisoners are employed by state and federal programs making everything from office furniture to military uniforms. Prisoners work for wages similar to what businesses pay Third World workers, are prevented from organizing, and are not protected by OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) standards.

Where can this lead as more people lose jobs from downsizing and 4 million welfare recipients are put on the street without job possibilities as welfare cutbacks are implemented? I worry that prisons will increasingly become warehouses for holding and controlling the people our economic system considers to be throw-aways.

I fear a future where the only hope for poor people to find work in this country will be within prison walls, working for the profit of private companies. We have fought long and hard to dismantle systems of slavery: what we currently call criminal justice is moving us again to the inhumane and immoral practice of using imprisoned humans for the profit of those who do not consider them fully human. ■

Working on Both Sides of the Domestic Violence Issue

Janet Perkins

All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house." She let out her breath. "I loves Harpo," she says. "God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me."

This is a quote from the book, *The Color Purple*, by Alice Walker. The speaker is Sophia, who is expressing her anger and frustration to Miss Celie, her mother-in-law, about how her husband Harpo is very determined to make her be submissive to him.

In a conversation with his father, Harpo questions what he has to do to make Sophia mind. "I tell her one thing, she do another. Never do what I say. Always backtalk." In response to his son's comment the father asks, "You ever hit her?" Looking down at his hands and somewhat embarrassed, Harpo admits he has never hit Sophia, which his father replies, "Well how you spect to make her mind? Wives is like children. You have to let 'em know

who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating."

These scenes are too familiar

The decision to offer weekly classes to incarcerated men was based on many factors.

for many of us. Women talking to other women about their experiences of being abused. Men advising other men on how to "handle their women."

So many women have been subjected to being beaten, raped and emotionally abused all of their lives. We know that a woman is more likely to be attacked in her own home by a rela-

tive than on city streets by a stranger. In the above scenario, Sophia speaks of having to fight all of her life. Many women never fight back, because they fear the severity of the beating if they try to defend themselves. And we know, if a woman attempts to flee the abusive situation she risks being killed or killing her abuser.

The Women's Project has a long history of working on the issue of domestic violence. In the early 80s the Women's Project, along with other women in northwest Arkansas, worked tirelessly to create safe space for women and their children. The first battered women's shelters grew out of this effort. More importantly the old guard rules were challenged and no longer did women have to suffer the abuse they were experiencing in silence and shame. No longer could the issue of domestic violence be denied and seen as an insignificant problem, because now it had a public face which was demonstrated by the numbers of women and children that sought refuge in shelters. As many of us know, even today shelters operate at capacity, or near capacity most of the time, which speaks to the fact that much more work is needed to eliminate violence in the lives of women and children.

As many other organizations and individuals joined in the effort to work on behalf of battered

A Participant's Reaction to the Men's Domestic Violence Class at Tucker

I've been going to the Domestic Violence classes for a while now. And I would like to thank Ms. Janet Perkins and Ms. Felicia Davidson for taking the time to bring the Domestic Violence class to the men in the pre-release program. I also would like to thank Ms. Beulah Hampton for allowing me to be part of the pre-release and domestic violence classes. In being the oldest person in the classes, I'd like to say that I've learned a great deal about myself as a person.

In one of the classes we talked about wearing masks. I thought of all the years I wore the mask of violence. Though I really didn't like to be violent, I had to be because of the life I was living. You see, when I was coming up it was a lot harder than it is

now. And from my beliefs, I formed a mask of violence to shield myself from my own fears, from that which I could not understand at the time. Though I've never beat on my woman, I've learned through our classes my verbal abuse was just as bad as if I had beat her. However I've learned through the domestic violence classes to stop and think about others' feelings, to talk things over in a civil manner and to compromise to both our benefits while growing together and becoming more aware of each other. These are just some of the things I am learning while growing mentally. And it goes without saying: It's time to wake up, my brothers and sisters, and stop the violence against one another!

J. Branam

women and their children by developing shelters, domestic violence coalitions, support groups and affecting public policy, the Women's Project moved our focus on domestic violence to working with women who are incarcerated.

The Women's Project began working with women who are incarcerated at the Arkansas Department of Correction Women's Unit through the Pre-Release Program, which focused on assisting women to make the transition from prison back into the community. Our role was to provide two classes per month to offer information on building employment skills. In these classes, many of the women shared their experiences with incest, rape, physical and emotional violence. A closer examination of physical and sexual abuse experienced by women who are incarcerated, revealed that over 85% of these women had experienced violence as children or as an adult. According to a national report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, an estimated 41% of women in prison reported that they had been previously sexually or physically abused. It became very apparent that classes which dealt with sexual and physical abuse were needed for incarcerated women.

In 1989, Women's Project former staff member, Kerry Lobel

Women in Prison Domestic Violence

initiated the first classes for incarcerated women on Understanding Domestic Violence and Abuse Against Women. Today we continue our work with incarcerated women, giving them information and support that will hopefully enhance their lives and prepare them to move back into the community to live a life that is free of violence.

As we continue to evaluate our work and question where we should focus our efforts, we expanded our involvement on domestic violence in the prison to incarcerated men. The decision to offer weekly classes to incarcerated men was based on many factors.

We are seeing this growing movement among men to be re-

sponsible and take their rightful places in the family and in the community. Those who advocate for the reestablishment of family values encourage men to go back in their homes, be real men, and be the heads of their households. A lot of the information I have read has this nostalgic flavor, romanticizing yesterday as a standard by which our families should

The Male Illusion: Another Participant's Reaction to the Domestic Violence Class for Men

The male's perspective of domestic violence somewhat differs from the female's. We, as men, fail to acknowledge the part we play in this social disease that affects the whole family.

Domestic violence from a male's perspective has a number of starting points: verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and physical abuse. The use of verbal confrontation and then the more aggressive behavior we justify as acknowledging our manhood. Funny how we can justify the means by which we create fear and pain in those we say we love. We found out that 87% of the men in each class didn't understand or would not acknowledge their responsibility for the problem.

One of the biggest problems is that some men refuse to accept ownership of the problem and therefore the problem is carried over into the next relationship. We want to be in command—or total control might be a better word.

By making the females feel at fault, we delude ourselves into believing we're okay. "It is not my fault. It is not me." I've learned and tried to convey that we must take the real meaning of what manhood is and hold onto it: that when confronted with crisis we must learn to communicate our feelings and at the same time, elevate our loved ones. That we as men must respect the rights and opinions of our women and listen. If domestic violence is to stop, we as

men must stand up and be true men again by stop treating our wives or loved ones as if they were objects to answer our every little want. When we as men start to protect the most precious beings—our women—then and only then will the problems of domestic violence, child abuse, spouse abuse, rape, family abuse, dysfunctional relationships, and drug use by children cease to exist.

Thank you Women's Project for all of the great work you are doing for family, community and society.

Odel Holman
Pre-Release Counselor and
Inmate, Tucker Unit

Women in Prison Domestic Violence

be governed today.

It is very hard to argue with the fact that men should be responsible, contribute to the financial stability of their families and be involved in strengthening their homes and communities. But very little of the philosophy and teachings of most of these movements for men suggest that they are scrutinizing how they have devalued and dehumanized women. Very little suggests that men are evaluating how they have misused their power to control and dominate women. I have not seen where they are promoting that men understand, regret, apologize and stop attempting to beat women into humbly submitting to men's rules, desires and needs.

Large numbers of men are joining these movements across the country, which indicates that men are searching for those places to have contact with other men and to grow. But has this need to bond and network with other men been born out of their fear that they have lost control of women?

The weekly sessions we are now offering to incarcerated men is an effort to give them an opportunity to be involved in discussions which are directed toward understanding the dynamics of domestic violence and their role as men in ending violence in the lives of women and children.

I'm not going to tell you that all the information that Felicia

Davidson and I present in these sessions is accepted without resistance.

One group of men participates in the sessions for a month. Without fail, at the beginning of each

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children.**

monthly session, one man will be brave enough to open his mouth to say, "Well what about how women beat up men," to which we reply that 99% of those who are beaten each year are women, 98% of those arrested on domestic violence charges are men and each year over 1 million women seek medical treatment for injuries inflicted by husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends.

During these sessions we utilize videos which describe the violence women have experienced and how this has affected their lives and the lives of their children. One powerful video inter-

views women who are incarcerated for killing their abusers, which has a profound impact and sparks very good discussions.

We acknowledge that men and women experience the world differently, and we may never agree on some things, but one point we continue to keep up front in our classes is that violence does not have to be the cornerstone of our relationships. Violence hurts and too often kills women and does irreversible harm to children. Men are damaged by their violent acts and the community suffers.

Often when Felicia and I leave the prison after working with both the women and the men, we know that some of the information we are presenting is being absorbed and processed. We are painfully aware that much more work must be done to bring an end to domestic violence but our dream is that the women will leave prison with a better understanding of their self-worth and recognize that they are valuable human beings who deserve to be treated with respect. Hopefully we have planted seeds in the minds of the men that will help them to understand how they participate in and support domestic violence, and their role in ending abuse.

Currently this is our work on ending domestic violence, but we will continue to strengthen our work and move to those places where we see we are needed. ■

Women in Prison Mothers in Prison

Mothers in Prison, Children in Crisis

Susan Phillips

The Mothers in Prison, Children in Crisis campaign is in its third year. More than 350 groups in 36 states are involved in the effort to get people to understand the harm that is being done to children and families by our current criminal justice policies. The Women's Project has been involved because our work with the MIWATCH program and the domestic violence classes for incarcerated women have clearly demonstrated to us the harm that comes from the emphasis on punishment, not prevention.

The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world. The National Institute of Justice predicts that at the rate we're going, 1 in every 20 U.S. residents can expect to be incarcerated at some time in their life. That's not 1 in 20 of some other distant people. It's 1 in 20 of us and it's 1 in 20 of our children.

It's been said that "the United States doesn't have a crime epidemic but that what we're really facing is an 'epidemic of incarceration'." We're spending billions of dollars building prisons hoping we can lock away the so-

cial and economic injustice in this country. If the mass incarcerations of Americans was the solution to our problems, America

**It's been said "that the
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would be the safest country in the world—BUT IT IS NOT!

Sociologists and criminologists are telling us that the very policies that we intended to fight crime are destroying families and devastating entire countries and, rather than reducing crime, we are feeding the conditions that lead to crime. Nowhere is that truth more evident than in the plight of the 1.5 million children in this

country whose mothers are imprisoned. This isn't just a problem that someone else's children face. Part of those 1.5 million children are right here in Arkansas.

The greatest growth in the prison population in Arkansas has been among women. Eight out of 10 of these women are mothers. Their children are left with grandparents and aunts and uncles who have to give custody of the children over to the state in order to get any substantial help. There are 14,000 children in Arkansas who have a mother under the supervision of the courts. That's 14,000 children who, according to research studies, are 5 to 6 times more likely than other children to end up incarcerated. Without multiple means of support, we know that many of these children will end up taking their parent's place behind bars.

What have we done to prevent the future incarceration of these at-risk children?

Well, our decision-makers spent nearly \$20 million dollars on a new for-profit prison for women—a prison that can potentially hold 2/3 more women than the present women's prison. The one great truth we have learned is: If you build them, they will come. We know that from the growth of the prison industries and the burgeoning of the prison population. Wall Street investors know that and back the construction of prisons. And the stock holders who

Women in Prison Mothers in Prison

are making money from the for-profit prisons know it as well.

We could have made other decisions.

We could have decided to spend the \$20 million on drug treatment for women. Substance abuse is the number one reason that women are sent to prison, but only 3% of the money spent on substance abuse treatment in Arkansas is spent on women with children. For the same money we're spending to build a prison to incarcerate 600 women, we could have invested in drug treatment and comprehensive services for 5,800 mothers and therapeutic intervention for more than 11,000 children.

We could have decided to spend that money on child abuse prevention or battered women's shelters—options that would have addressed factors that are often precursors to women becoming incarcerated. We could have spent the money to prevent abuse or help women escape domestic violence, but we didn't. We bought a prison.

We could have decided to spend \$20 million on Drug Courts. Drug courts require first-time offenders to participate in an extensive drug treatment program while they continue to work and support their families. We could have, but we didn't. We bought a prison.

We could have decided to spend \$20 million on programs

available through the Department of Community Punishment—programs that provide substance abuse treatment while teaching mothers how to be better citizens and better parents. We could have invested in those programs, but we didn't. In fact, we cut spending for those programs because

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we decided to buy a prison.

Are prisons cost-effective punishment for most women? No. Women in this state are most often locked up for fraud, forgery and theft. Many of these crimes are related to a substance abuse problem. A report from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences finds that a woman and her two children could receive substance abuse treatment, edu-

cation, trauma counseling, and family and employment counseling for less than it costs to lock her up for one year. And when a mother goes to prison, the children often end up in foster care. We could have been humane and cost-effective, but we bought a prison.

The consequences of our decisions will not be felt only by this generation of children but they'll be felt by generations to come. We made a decision to follow the path that has taken other states to a place where they're cutting spending for education and health in order to support the prison-industrial complex.

The Mothers in Prison, Children in Crisis campaign came into being because we want something better for our children's future than prisons. But to get something better, we have to ask for something better. We have to tell people who are in decision-making positions that we want them to invest in drug courts, community-based punishment and substance abuse treatment so that there will be alternatives to sending mothers who commit non-violent crimes to prison. ■

Susan Phillips is the Parenting from Prison Community Resource Development Coordinator for the Centers for Youth and Families in Little Rock.

UPDATE

Since the last issue of *Transformation* was published, the Women's Project has extended its prison programs to include the facilities at Wrightsville and Benton. We are now providing the men incarcerated at Wrightsville with HIV/AIDS information and conducting the Understanding Domestic Abuse of Women and Children for the men incarcerated at Benton.

The Women's Project staff and representatives of other community organizations that work with the women incarcerated at the Tucker Women's Unit have met with the new warden of the private prison being constructed in Newport by the Wackenhut Corporation. This new prison is scheduled to open in January, 1998 which will mean the transfer of women from the old site in central

Arkansas to the new prison in northern Arkansas, about 2-1/2 hours from Little Rock.

A NOTE OF APPRECIATION

Since the Women's Project became involved in working with incarcerated women in the 1980s, we have benefited from the time, commitment and talents of many individuals. To those who have negotiated with prison staff, set up and taught classes, led support groups, written instructional materials, advocated for individual women inmates, transported children to visit their mothers, donated items, or gave of their time to change policies affecting incarcerated women, we say thank you!

◆ WISHLIST ◆

We appreciate those who have helped the work of the Women's Project by donating office supplies and equipment. These tax deductible gifts facilitate our work while reducing our operating expenses. To support our prison work, we have a continuing need for:

Supplies for Domestic Violence and HIV/AIDS Classes

- ✓ photocopier paper (white)
- ✓ black pens.
- ✓ folders (two pocket)
- ✓ manila file folders
- ✓ 8-1/2 x 11 inch writing pads
- ✓ double density 3.5 inch diskettes
- ✓ 1" 3-ring binders
- ✓ blank videocassettes to tape educational programs
- ✓ laser cartridges for printers

For MIWATCH Project

- ✓ personal hygiene products
- ✓ children's car seats
- ✓ used books and magazines

For Meetings and Classes

- ✓ flip chart pads
- ✓ bold tipped markers

For the Library

- ✓ \$ to purchase resource books on HIV/AIDS and domestic violence
- ✓ bookshelf

For General Office Use

- ✓ FAX paper rolls
- ✓ cleaning supplies
- ✓ paper towels, toilet paper

Mark Your Calendars

WORLD AIDS DAY

November 30, 1997
3:30 - 6:00 p.m.
Arkansas Arts
Center
MacArthur Park

WOMEN'S PROJECT HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

AND
SILENT AUCTION
Friday, Dec. 12
5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Books on Prison in our Library



***Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement & Resistance*, by Karlene Faith**

(Press Gang Publishers), challenges misconceptions of "deviant" women and investigates the many ways by which women transgress social order. ...this incisive work critically examines such topics as patterns of female crimes and punishments, institutionalized violence against incarcerated women; women loving women in prison; Hollywood's formulaic women-in-prison films; and more, all firmly grounded in a feminist analysis.

***They Always Call Us Ladies: Stories from Prison*, by Jean Harris (Charles Scribner's Sons)**. The author brings us inside the walls of the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, where she is an inmate, and reveals more about the brutal life of women in prison than we have ever seen before.

***Legal Lynching: Racism, Injustice & the Death Penalty*, by Rev. Jesse Jackson (Marlowe & Co.)** "Using real people and real evidence, (Rev. Jackson) makes a powerful argument against a reversion to barbarism and for a return to reasonableness." ...Governor Mario Cuomo

***Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row*, by Jarvis Jay Masters (Padma Publishing)** is a thoughtful, inspiring and often humorous collection of stories and personal reflections by a 35-year-old African American inmate on San Quentin's death row. Unlike most prison stories written primarily from an experience of predation and horror, this unflinching account presents the healing perspective of compassionate observation and courageous action for the good of others.

New Books in the Library

***Waterlily* by Ella Cara Deloria (Univ. of Nebraska)**. Written nearly a half century ago, but published now for the first time, *Waterlily* is a novel of the Dakotas, or Sioux. The author, herself a Sioux, sought to record and preserve traditional Sioux ways through this imaginative re-creation of life in the camp circle. It is of special value because it is told from a woman's perspective.

***Carryin' On in the Lesbian & Gay South*, edited by John Howard (New York Univ. Press)**. "This assortment of touching, hilarious, and very smart essays moves lesbian and gay history to a new place, geographically and analytically. ...the authors explore the intersecting meanings of southernness and sexuality with attention

to the widest angles of vision, and to the telling details of daily experience." ...Lisa Duggan

***Great Books for Girls* by Kathleen Odean (Ballantine Books)**. This first reference of its kind is an invaluable list of more than six hundred titles that will encourage, challenge, and ultimately nurture in girls the strong qualities our culture so often suppresses.

***Feminism and Disability* by Barbara Hillyer (Univ. of Oklahoma Press)**. "Hillyer breaks fearlessly into new territory... Her book is a major contribution to the growing dialogue between the two movements." ...Women's Review of Books

***Toward Amnesia* by Sarah Van Arsdale (Riverhead Books)**. Nominated for the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Fiction, "...Van Arsdale understands both loss and the reeducation of the heart to which loss, if we're lucky, can lead. Here's a wonderful new writer, passionate, funny, charming, and wise." ...Mark Doty, author of *My Alexandria*

***Everyday Acts Against Racism: Raising Children in A Multiracial World*, edited by Maureen T. Reddy (Seal Press)**. In this empowering book, mothers and teachers look at the effects of racism on our children and communities—and suggest practical ways to end racial divisions.



Current Projects

• Women's Watchcare Network

The Women's Watchcare Network monitors and documents biased violence, whether it be from far right groups such as the KKK or militias, the religious right, or individual acts of violence against people because of their race, gender, class, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or religion. We publish a yearly log of anecdotal evidence of this violence and use it to educate the general public, advocate with public officials to ensure civil rights protections and to work with communities to prevent violence.

• Prison Project

Through the Prison Project we provide support groups for battered women, train women to be HIV/AIDS educators, provide domestic violence education for incarcerated men, work with community organizations on advocacy for prisoners and work with United Methodist Women to provide transportation for children to visit their mothers (MIWATCH) and to provide toiletry items to women who cannot purchase them.

• Economic Justice Project

In our struggle for economic justice we work with low-income women to understand economic realities, to fight discrimination and to create employment opportunities.

• Social Justice Project

Through the Social Justice Project, we provide popular education about the oppressions, how they are linked, and develop strategies for dismantling them. We work with social change organizations to strengthen them, incubate new projects, and bring people together in Arkansas and the South to form progressive networks that support a progressive agenda that includes everyone. Through our African American Women's Institute for Social Justice, we create strategies for overcoming the barriers that hinder African American women's efforts toward power and self-determination.

• Publications and Events

Our publications and events include a newsletter, a lending library, resource manuals, statewide and regional conferences, and the production of women performers and writers. We also distribute **Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism** and **In the Time of the Right: Reflections on Liberation**, by Suzanne Pharr.

Transformation is also available as an ASCII file and on audiotape.

Transformation

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Letters to the editor are welcome.

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