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Funding social change since 1967

RESIST

Newsletter #231

A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority

December, 1990

Black Women: *Organizing for Empowerment in the 21st Century*

The Women's Project is a community-based organization founded in 1981 in Little Rock, Arkansas. Its 200+ members are committed to working for social and economic justice for all women, especially poor women, women of color, disabled women and lesbians. The group works on a project-by-project basis, taking on work that others may feel is too risky. For instance, for a number of years the Project organized battered women's shelters and initiated programs related to incest; now that some of this work is being done by other groups in the area, the Project has shifted its focus to battered and sexually abused women in prison. The Project's current work includes conducting a support group for 30-45 battered women in the state prison, and efforts to arrange for women on pre-release status to be admitted to the Project's 8-week non-traditional job training classes. The job-training program is another major focus of the Project's current efforts, along with a Prostitutes and AIDS project, and a project addressing homophobia and racism.

In Arkansas, a resource-poor state which consistently ranks near the bottom of every study of socio-economic well-being, Black women fare even worse than in the rest of the country. Only four in ten Black women in Arkansas graduate from



high school; 61% of Black women earn under \$6,000; and half of all Black female-headed households in the state live in poverty. It is within this context that the Women's Project sponsored a conference to bring together Black women from across the state to explore their differences and connections, and develop a working plan of action. Resist contributed to

scholarships for low-income women who attended "Black Women: Organizing for Empowerment in the 21st Century" this past June. Janet Perkins and Kelly Mitchell-Clark sent us this article about the experiences and accomplishments of the women at the conference.

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LETTERS

"I cannot and will not be a pawn in America's power plays for profits and oil in the Middle East."

—Marine Corporal Jeffrey Paterson

This is an edited version of a letter received from the Center for Constitutional Rights, which has made a commitment to supporting Jeff Paterson...

Dear Resist,

As I write to you, Corporal Jeff Paterson, 22 years old, is confined to the Marine Base at Pearl Harbor. His situation is desperate. After more than three years of exemplary service in the Marine Corps, during which he received above average ratings and a number of awards, Jeff Paterson refused on August 29th to board a Saudi-bound plane on the runway of Kaneohe (Marine Corps Air Station). Jeff made that decision because he had become a Conscientious Objector. In his words, "I seek discharge from the United States Marine Corps because I have come to believe there are no justified wars."

Now Jeff is subject to formal charges and court-martial proceedings. The Marine Corps refuses to accept his request for CO status and has confined him to the Base and restricted his access to the press because they are afraid of the effect of his opposition to making war in the Middle East.

"While the beliefs I now possess have been brewing for quite some time, it wasn't until Tuesday, Aug. 14, 1990 that I realized that if I was in a foxhole or defending a position in Saudi Arabia the next week, I would and could not fire on the "enemy." What would the consequences be to my friends behind me who assumed I would cover my share of the terrain? What if someone in my unit was killed because I was firing above the enemy's head? Could I live with a secret like that? However, at this time I honestly believe that to be my response. I do not see how this can be in the best interests of the United States Marine Corps or myself."

—Corp. Jeff Paterson

Jeff faces a possible sentence of five years in a federal prison, dishonorable discharge, and other penalties if he is found guilty. Jeff was only 19 when he enlisted in the Marines. But during the past two years, he began to read about U.S. history — he attended forums on U.S. support of murderous regimes in Central America — and little by little became active in the fight for peace everywhere.

It is not just because of Jeff's request for CO status that he is being confined. It is because Jeff is also opposed to the military buildup for war in the Middle East. He feels that it was the U.S. who created the "despicable" leader we now oppose, who helped build his military machine, who didn't object to his use of chemical weapons against Iran and his

own people, but now is ready to go to war and sacrifice lives over oil.

It is clear that the U.S. Marine Corps is afraid of Jeff Paterson. They are afraid that his opposition to all wars, and to war over oil in the Middle East in particular, might influence other soldiers as well as the great mass of the American public who would rather see a peaceful solution instead of another foreign war and loss of countless lives.

Silencing Jeff is an outrageous act against someone who is presumed innocent until proven guilty, and whose actions have been based on deeply felt conscientious objections to participating in a military exercise and on concern for the safety of other soldiers. The Center has agreed to help Jeff Paterson's defense at the impending court-martial and support his constitutional right to ask for CO status. Also involved is President Bush's disregard for the Constitution and for the War Powers Act in sending troops to the Middle East and involving the U.S. in acts of war without required Congressional approval.

This will be a costly case, and the issues are critically important for all of us at a time when we may be on the verge of war. Our first goal is to free Jeff from confinement to the Marine Base and from restrictions on his right of access to the press. This is clearly an attempt to suppress Jeff's views.

For Peace,
Patricia Maher
Executive Director
Center for Constitutional Rights

*If you would like to support the Center and Jeff Paterson, write (or send contributions to):
CCR, 656-66 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.*

Dear Resist,

Hello! Your group never ceases to amaze me. It's so wonderful to get your newsletters describing all the organizations you fund. I'm a 26-yr old activist, struggling with AIDS. Sometimes I get depressed about the future of our planet — who cares enough to do anything?

Your group proves there are plenty of people out there who care and who *do*. It's inspiring to know there is such a wide variety of committed activists out there. So thank you for your work at Resist, and thanks to all the groups you fund for the work they do. Here's a small donation. Keep those newsletters coming!

Gary Reynolds
Santa Cruz, CA

Dear Resist,

Of all the publications I read, from daily paper to monthly journal, there is none that I devour with as much enthusiasm as your newsletter. Every month (almost) I learn of activist movements all over the nation — people working for justice for gays and lesbians, Native Americans, working women and men.... As a college student so much of what I see and

hear about struggles for social change is abstract and theoretical (and my college is among the more progressive ones), so the concrete work of the people in your newsletter is always exciting and important. Resist is two years older than I am; I hope to be reading your newsletter for 23, 46, 69 more years. Keep up your vital work!

Rob Sieczkiewicz
Amherst, MA

Attn: Readers!!! We welcome your comments and suggestions about anything you read in the newsletter, or about Resist's work. Please write, and when you do, let us know if we may publish your letters. Thanks.



RachelBurger/CPF

How to RESIST



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For information and grant guidelines write to:
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Black Women:

Organizing for Empowerment in the 21st Century

Grassroots Report

JANET PERKINS and
KELLY MITCHELL-CLARK

June 1-3, 1990 was a landmark in our work at the Women's Project, when we sponsored the first Black Women's conference in Arkansas. "Black Women: Organizing for Empowerment in the 21st Century," was the first public forum for African-American women to discuss the realities of our day-to-day lives. This was our chance to name the issues, analyze the effects they are having on our lives, and work together on strategies for change.

The 1980s have been devastating for this country. The very definition of poverty has changed. Now we have working people that are homeless; others who, though employed, cannot provide the basic needs for their families. Getting a "good education" no longer paves the way to a job of one's choice and a promising future. Few of those over 65 now refer to this time in their lives as the "Golden Years," for their lives are just as uncertain and scary as in their youth.

The new decade has not begun in a way that fosters hope and trust for better days in the near future. We are facing a \$63 billion national debt. The savings and loan crisis is expected to cost each of us \$2,000. We are in a recession that is projected to worsen over the next five years. And now, with our troops in the Persian Gulf, we will feel even more of a squeeze on our pockets, and a tighter squeeze on our hearts, as we risk losing our sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, should war become a reality in the Middle East.

All Americans are asking the question, "How will we make it?" African-Americans are asking "Will we make it?" We have lost ground that it took years to gain. Laws that were implemented to protect us are being wiped away, are no longer being enforced, or are being interpreted in a manner that makes us wonder if the Courts understand the history of racism in this country.

In 1989 the unemployment rate

among African-Americans was 32.7%, compared to 12.6% for whites. In 1986, the infant mortality rate was 8.9% for white infants, 15.7% for all non-white infants, and 18% for African-American babies. Ninety-one percent of African-Americans do not receive health care for economic reasons, compared to just 5% of white Americans. (*The State of Black America, 1990, National Urban League, Inc.*)

A tremendous gap exists between the earning power of Blacks and that of whites in this country. In 1988, African-Americans had less than sixty cents to every dollar of income whites had. The disparity between males and females is even more revealing. In 1988, white males earned an average of \$465 per week; for Black males the figure was \$347 per week; white females earned \$318; and Black women, \$288. African American women made up 60% of all households supported by single women, and 725,000 Black female-headed households experienced poverty.

We have seen, and will continue to see, less affordable housing, more drug activity, higher teenage pregnancy rates, more AIDS cases, and more violence in our communities. The leading cause of death for African-Americans between the ages of 15-34 is homicide. No matter what the issue is—drugs, housing, care for the elderly, education, employment for youth, the feminization of poverty—the implications on the lives of African-Americans are very different than on any other group. These are the reasons that African-Americans are very seriously questioning whether we are going to make it.

Making A Commitment to Weather the Storm

Although many of us are feeling frustration, anger and fear about our future, we understand that we cannot become paralyzed by the conditions of our lives. We come from a history made rich by people's abilities to survive the most dehumanizing experiences. We understand that most of our lives in this country have been spent with our backs up against the wall, but somehow we have survived, and, in many cases, we accomplished what was

deemed impossible. When we study our history, we see example after example of African-Americans who have had to make the commitment and investment to ensure our survival and progress. The underground railroad, sit-ins, freedom rides, economic boycotts and marches were all strategies Blacks employed to secure their future, and our future. The changes did not come from power brokers saying "that's enough mistreatment of Blacks, we must be equal in the treatment of all people." Any measure of human dignity African-Americans are able to experience today was the result of Blacks who were willing to take risks, and many who sacrificed their lives.

The same commitments and investments must be made to weather the storm we are in now. We cannot rely on government intervention at any level to relieve the pressure on Black America. We understand that power lies within us to change and adjust our destiny. "Black Women: Organizing for Empowerment in the 21st Century," was based on this concept of people having the power and ability to address the problems that they are facing and develop positive steps toward resolution.

At the Women's Project, we believe very strongly that when people are given the opportunity to develop their skills, they are capable of discovering methods and techniques they can use to improve the quality of their lives. Since 1981, the Women's Project has provided community education and advocacy concerning violence against women, women's health, divorce and bereavement, literacy, and a range of other issues, all in an effort to assist people to organize and help themselves.

The central planners of the conference, which was held at Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, were the African-American women on the board and staff of the Women's Project. We decided it was time to take time out for ourselves, to assess and celebrate our lives, to examine the challenges before us, and to commit to struggling for the true liberation of ourselves and our people. We knew it was time for us, and us alone, to

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do the analysis and develop the strategies that would make a difference for us in the future. Although we recognize that we can't talk about improving our lives without African-American men being a significant part of that discussion, as well as white women and other women of color, we still have much internal work to do before we can work with others as whole strong human beings. This was not a conference for us to educate men and other women as to who we are as African-American women—our needs, our desires and our struggles. This was not the time for someone else to identify our roles in the communities in which we live. This was our time, to use our voices to tell our stories and to decide what has to happen to turn things around.

We were determined that this wouldn't be a conference where we would get together, dressed in our Sunday-go-to-meetin' clothes, talk in lofty terms about "sisterhood," and then go home to business as usual. Our hope was that the conference would be the beginning of real change for us in terms of how much we value our lives and the lives of others, what we expect from this world, and the steps we will take to make our expectations — of lives free of racism, sexism, poverty, violence and homophobia — a reality.

Visionary Planning

As one of our first steps in planning this conference we developed an advisory board that assisted us in shaping the event. We were determined that this conference would not be attended only by African-American women who looked alike, lived alike, and thought alike. If we wanted all African-American women's voices to be heard, we had to be sure that we were very conscientious about our outreach. The advisory board included poor and working class women, elderly and young women, middle class professional women, rural and urban women, women with disabilities, single mothers and women without children, Protestant, Catholic, Muslim and Pagan women, lesbian women, formerly battered women, women who were ex-prisoners, chemically dependent women, homeless women and prostitutes.

As a result of bringing so many different Black women together, specific information about people emerged and led to important discussions at the conference. For example, women with disabilities

talked about what their lives were like. One woman with a learning disability did a presentation at the conference, and for the first time women learned about a disability they might not have even recognized in the past. When one lesbian did a presentation, it gave other women an opportunity to hear about her life in a way we wouldn't have otherwise, and we were able to ask questions to break down myths we had heard. There's a feeling among some Black women that gays and lesbians are received warmly and openly in the African-American community, but we learned that we have been just as negligent in our treatment of gays and lesbians as any other community. We have sometimes failed to accept people in our churches, and we have expected people to only show a part of themselves, and to behave "properly" and not as whole human beings.

Visionaries always run the risk of creating ideas and plans that bring disappointment, but this was far from the case with this conference. From the first session on June 1st, it was like magic. We, the board, staff and advisory board, that had worked since August, 1989 on the plans, began to see that we were right on time with the issues we had chosen for discussion, how we had done our outreach, and the overall way we had set this conference up.

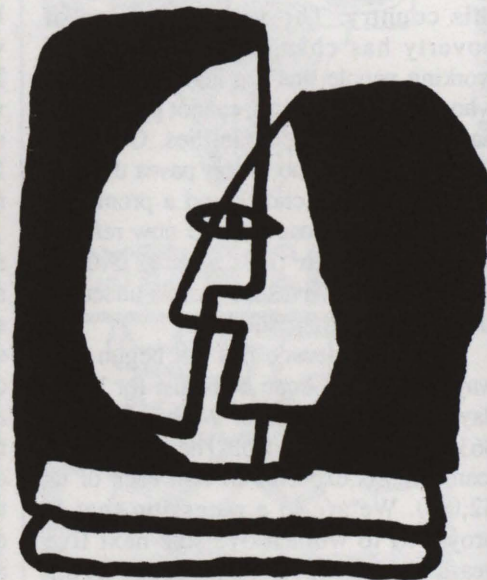
Over the three day period we discussed: "Carving a Path for Those Who Come After Us—Our Children, Our Future," "The Violence We've Come to Live With and Understanding it's Not OK" "Economic Struggles of Black Women, and Determining Our Strengths," "Internalized Oppression: Sometimes We Become Part of the Problem," and "No Matter How Different We Are, We're All Valuable." With each topic discussed, the presenters gave an analysis of the situation and stated what our responsibilities are for making change. (If you would like information about the many conference speakers and presenters, please write to us at the address at the end of this article.)

What we do to Ourselves

There is a myth that all black folks understand each other, know about each other and like each other, which is far from the truth, and is the reason we presented the latter two topics. The most damaging legacy of American racism is the destructive self-hatred that African-

Americans have internalized over the past four centuries. And of all the self-hating behavior African-Americans regularly engage in, what we do to our physical selves in the worst.

In this country, people's worth is largely measured by their material possessions and their outward appearance. For women, how we look is even more important than for men. After all, supposedly the only way we have to attract men, who provide economic sustenance, is by our physical appearance. Therefore, cultural imperialism or colonization affects African-American women much more than it affects African-American men. Most races of people believe their own features are the most pleasing, or should be, regardless of the values of outsiders. This does not hold true for people of color cultures that have been colonized by the standards of beauty of Western society.



If you are African-American, you know it is your blackness that causes whites to hate or fear you, and therefore, by changing how you look, you can lessen the oppression, or so we have believed. It seems as if the Black is Beautiful concept never fully took hold. Do you ever wonder why some African-Americans are now wearing blue and green contact lenses? Or why some African-American women have taken to dying their hair blonde? Have you questioned why most of the African-American women we see in the media are those with light brown skin and hair weaves hanging down their backs

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Our Goal is Full Equality:

The Citizen Empowerment and Community Education Project

Grassroots Report

“We have come together to work cooperatively and to assist each other in the spirit of self-help and self-determination.”

These were the somewhat modest words that the Concerned Black Citizens Committee of Blakely and Early County, Georgia used to describe their fledgling organization. But as Resist learned more of what the group had been fighting against in its first year (lack of decent housing, racism in the school system, police brutality, job discrimination, hate groups in control of city offices, and more) those words took on new meaning. This grassroots report was prepared by the Concerned Black Citizens Committee and the Center for Democratic Renewal, which has worked closely with the new organization from the beginning. For more information, contact either group (addresses at the end of the report) or see "A Matter of Live and Death in Blakely, Georgia" in The Monitor, #20, a publication of the Center for Democratic Renewal. Some of the material presented here originally appeared in the Monitor article. Resist recently provided the Concerned Black Citizens Committee with a grant toward general operating expenses.

CONCERNED BLACK CITIZENS COMMITTEE and the CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Located 180 miles south of Atlanta, Georgia, in Early County, is the town of Blakely, population 6,000. Like many other communities throughout the South, Blakely's Black citizens, who make up approximately 45% of the population, suffer disproportionately under the burden of racism, police brutality, lack of economic opportunity and an absence of political representation.

But Blakely is also different from many other towns in at least one respect: according to investigators from the Center

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Media Release
June 27, 1990

KLAN FIRE CHIEF CHARGED WITH NEGLIGENCE IN DEATHS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN

**Mayor and City Council Knew of Klan
Membership But Failed To Act**

Atlanta, GA.— Ku Klux Klan members working for the Blakely, Georgia fire department are responsible for the deaths of two African-American children, according to a class action suit filed today by members of the Concerned Black Citizens of Blakely. The lawsuit identifies Fire Chief Franklin Brown as a member of the KKK and charges that a pattern of "unequal" fire protection exists for the African-American community in Blakely.

Antavious Williams, age 6, was left to die three years ago while his house burned down around him because of the "deliberate indifference" of Chief Franklin Brown and other fire fighters, who are also members of the KKK's Kolomoki Klavern, according to the lawsuit filed in federal court in the Middle District of Georgia in Albany by Atlanta civil rights attorney Brian Spears.

Separate from the death of Antavious Williams, the legal complaint cites the death of 7-year-old Charles McCoy, asserting that the child's death was caused by fire protection services that were "deficient, tainted and affected by the racial animus" of Chief Brown and other firemen, when the McCoy child, with severe burns, was hosed down with water at the fire scene in November, 1986....

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

for Democratic Renewal (CDR), the fire chief as well as several other fire department employees of our small, rural community are members of the Invisible Empire Knights of the Ku Klux Klan; the most violent and terroristic of the approximately two-dozen Klan factions in

the U.S. These facts are known to members of the city council as well as the mayor and city attorney, yet no disciplinary action has been taken. Not only is Franklin Brown, the fire chief, a leader of the local Klan Klavern, but he has used the offices and resources of the municipality to conduct Klan business.

Brown's son Dale Brown and Dale's wife, Pam, have also been Klan officers, according to the CDR. CDR researchers estimate that there are two to three dozen Klan members in Early County.

There have been at least two fires in Blakely which have resulted in the deaths of Black children. In the Antavious Williams case it is alleged that firefighters failed to pull the child from the burning home despite repeated requests by concerned neighbors, who heard him hollering for help before he died. Chief Brown and other employees of the fire department are also alleged to have had a policy of letting homes in the Black community burn in order to "beautify the neighborhood."

In addition to this immediate, crisis situation, Black residents of Blakely are suffering a myriad of problems ranging from police brutality to overcharging by the municipal utility. Black children have been the victims of selective corporal punishment in the city's elementary and middle schools; punishment administered with a hefty 1 x 4 inch board. Sixty-two percent of the county's school children are African-American, but only 24% of the teachers are. Only four of the 23 school professionals are African-American. Although more than 45% of the town's population is Black, there has never been Black political representation on the city council - the result of "at-large" voting.

The Concerned Black Citizens Committee

The Concerned Black Citizens Committee (CBCC) is a membership organization of approximately 200 predominantly low-income Blacks living in the city of Blakely. Our goal is to establish full equality and equal treatment for all the citizens of our community. We came together in February 1990 to work cooperatively to assist each other in the

spirit of self-help and self-determination. After 300 Blakely residents signed petitions claiming unfair treatment by the city utilities, they attended a meeting to voice their complaints to the city council. Our efforts have since sparked ongoing actions to combat the racism in this city and county.

The CBCC believes that all the citizens of our community have the right to enjoy the full benefits of citizenship, including but not limited to: the right to fair representation, the right to vote, the right to decent housing, and freedom from poverty and racism. The CBCC is committed to finding solutions to these and other problems through peaceful and democratic means. Since the CBCC was formed, we have:

- Filed a major voting rights lawsuit against the city on April 30, alleging that Blakely's 100+ year-old system of at-large voting is racially discriminatory. (In the entire history of the town and County there have been no Black elected officials, ever!!) The city has offered to settle the suit, creating two majority (73%) Black districts, which would give the African American community two seats on Blakely's four-member city council. This lawsuit was filed by Milledgeville attorney Chris Coates with help from the CDR in Atlanta and the Southeast Regional Office of the ACLU.

- Filed a major civil rights lawsuit against Blakely fire chief Franklin Brown, who is a high-ranking member of the local KKK. The mayor and city council were also named in the suit, which alleges that the fire department has provided racially biased services to Blakely's Black community. The suit, which was filed June 24, 1990, also seeks monetary damages for the death of at least one Black child who perished, needlessly we believe, in 1986. Plaintiffs in the suite are Charles McCoy's mother, Sara Ann McCoy; Antavious William's estate; his mother, Hattie Williams; and members of the CBCC - Benjamin Cawthon, Wilbur Robinson and Willie Cawthon. The expenses of this lawsuit are being taken care of entirely by the CDR.

- Organized low-income public housing residents to fight corruption and mismanagement. Our efforts have stimulated the Atlanta regional office of HUD to initiate a confidential criminal investigation against the manager of public housing in Blakely.

- Focused attention on the mismanagement of the city utility in Blakely. In response to grassroots organizing by the CBCC and other public education efforts, the city was forced to respond to these charges with a special meeting in April. More than 250 people - Black and white, attended.

Education and Mobilization

The overall goal of our Citizen Empowerment and Community Education project is to educate and mobilize low and moderate income Black residents in Blakely to enable them to gain greater control over the economic and political resources of our community. There are three specific areas to be targeted: **racism, housing, and citizen involvement** in government. In addition, the CBCC is concentrating its efforts in the area of **organization building**, contracting with the CDR and other organizations that can provide important technical assistance and expertise in the area of membership recruitment and organizational development.

GROUP LAUNCHES CHARGES OF NEGLIGENCE IN DEATHS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN

Mayor and City Council Knew of Klan Membership But Failed to Act

Atlanta, Ga. — Ku Klux Klan members working for the Blakely, Ga., fire department are responsible for the deaths of two African-American children, according to a class action suit filed today by members of the Concerned Black Citizens of Blakely.

The lawsuit identifies Fire Chief Franklin Brown as a member of the KKK and charges that a pattern of "unequal" fire protection exists for the African-American community in Blakely. Antavious Williams, age 6, was left to die three years ago while his house burned down around him because of the "deliberate indifference" of Chief Charles McCoy, a victim Franklin Brown and other fire fighters, who are also members of the KKK's Kolomoiki Klavern, according to the lawsuit filed in federal court in the Middle District of Georgia in Albany by Atlanta civil rights attorney Brian Spears.

Separate from the death of Antavious Williams, the legal complaint cites



Hattie Williams and son, Antavious Williams who died in fire.



Chief Franklin Brown

SEE PAGE A2

The presence of the Ku Klux Klan in the Blakely fire department is but the tip of the iceberg when it comes to racism in our community. Virtually every political and economic institution is controlled by whites with little or no input from the Black community. However, by using this most violent, visible issue of Klan control of the fire department, the CBCC believes

that greater momentum can be achieved in the overall struggle against racism. Specifically, we are organizing against racism in these ways:

- Educating the public about the progress of the lawsuit and gaining continued visibility for the victims of unequal fire protection services.
- Organizing Black residents to engage in dialogue with, and make demands of, those white persons who control economic and political affairs in Blakely.
- Holding special seminars, meetings and revivals that will empower Blacks and enable them to overcome their fears about speaking out and becoming involved.

In the area of housing, the CBCC is focusing on three public housing sites located in Blakely, containing a total of about 159 units. The CBCC intends to build on the momentum of its existing campaign for tenants' rights by investigating and documenting allegations of mismanagement or possible criminal conduct by the Blakely Housing Authority and its executive director, William Cheek. We will work closely with HUD officials to ensure that a vigorous investigation is pursued, and we are planning organizing meetings of public housing tenants to demand fair treatment and improved services.

In addition to voter registration, the CBCC is working in several ways to achieve greater citizen participation in local government by low-income residents of Blakely. We plan to hold two "leadership training school" sessions during the coming year for selected participants—Black and white—providing them information and skills in the areas of: accountability of public officials; running effective meetings; developing action plans; and more. We also want to organize a citizens' "hearing" and invite participants to come forward and offer testimony about conditions in Blakely, highlighting the demands of low-income residents for reform. This hearing will be held prior to the March, 1991 elections that have been scheduled as part of the city's settlement of the voting rights lawsuit.

And we also hold regular, twice-monthly community meetings where issues and problems are discussed and guest speakers can provide information on tenants' rights, community organizing and other issues. Although the CBCC has made great progress during the eight

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(especially in music videos by African-American artists?) All of it comes from the same place of self-loathing, plain and simple.

These are issues we rarely talk about among ourselves. This society has never wanted us to know our features are fine. We hardly ever see positive images of ourselves as dark-skinned, broad-nosed, full-lipped, big-hipped, nappy-headed African-American women. I can barely contain my rage when I think about all the little Black girls in America who daily watch T.V. looking for images of themselves, and instead only witness Black people who look white; people who look nothing like the people in their families and neighborhoods.

The conference also provided us the space to talk about class issues that keep us from coming together to do the work we need to do. In planning the conference professional women sat on committees with welfare mothers, and had to confront their own stereotypes, which can be just as damaging as those of the dominant culture.

As we discussed internalized racism and how we are separated by differences, we came to understand that in order for us to survive as a race we had to appreciate who we are and not aspire to white standards for beauty, and white guidelines for living our lives. A recurring message from the conference is that we need each other so much. Our differences of class, economic status, skin color, sexual orientation, physical abilities, education or geographic location, cannot be stronger than our similarities; than the shared culture and history that binds us.

Over one hundred women and children attended the three day conference. Each one brought her own point of view and experience to describe what life is like as African-American women in Arkansas. We learned that in the Arkansas Delta, which has been compared to a Third World country, many women are unemployed or underemployed. Some of the participants were welfare mothers who have serious concerns that in entering the labor force they will not be able to earn enough to supplement the loss of medical and housing benefits. The majority of women at the conference were mothers who struggle daily with questions about their children's education and their survival. Some of the women had experienced rape or battering and lived in

constant fear of a violent act occurring again. The picture that was painted in three days was dismal, yet we attempted to consistently raise the question, "What can we do to make real change?"

One of the ideas that came up again and again was the need to figure out how to do leadership training among African-American women. Past attempts to do this have certainly been able to solve some of the problems that exist in our communities, but even more effective organizing could be accomplished if women had the information they needed to leverage funds, to network in their communities, and to bring church, business, social and political organizations together. Often we are most comfortable in one segment of our community, and tremendous work has been done, for example, through the church. But we need to understand the functions of all segments of the community, and learn what resources are available where.

Our Children, Our Future

In planning every phase of the conference, we wanted to make sure it would be affordable to all women; over one-third of the conference participants attended on scholarships and we provided reimbursement for transportation costs. Conference fees for the three days ranged from \$25-\$90 on a sliding scale.

We provided childcare, but we wanted to make sure that we weren't just babysitting. We employed a childcare provider that prepared an agenda of structured work and programs with an Afrocentric focus. Jane Sapp, a cultural worker originally from Georgia, is well-known for utilizing her musical abilities to help African-American youth to understand their roots and develop an appreciation for their culture. In a half day of work with 19 children ranging in age from 4 -13, she taught songs and stories that the children performed for the conference participants with style, skill and authority, as if they had been doing these performances all their lives.

Since the conference, we have worked to keep our network going and growing. In August we organized African-American women to travel to an "Undoing Racism" training in New Orleans that was presented by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. When CATS CLIMB, an organization in the Arkansas Delta, sponsored a lecture by author Haki Madhubuti on the survival of Black



America, we organized women and children who had attended the conference to go to the lecture.

It has been rewarding to see conference participants become active in the work of the Women's Project; many of these new activists had had little or no knowledge of our organization, or the work we are involved with, prior to the conference. Conference participants are now in the planning stages of developing mini-conferences based on some of the information that was presented in June. Several of the women have expressed a desire to have a newsletter which they will produce and distribute to African-American women around the state.

In December, we will have a discussion of Sharazad Ali's book, *The Blackman's Guide to Understanding Blackwomen*, which has generated an overwhelming response. Many of us feel that she has dehumanized Black women as mentally ill, out-of-control people that must be dominated by Black men. We hope to develop a statement about the book which we will forward to Ms. Ali from African-American women in Arkansas.

The conference helped the members of the Women's Project focus more clearly on the needs of African-American women, as we continue in our struggle to create change. The Project is now initiating a new program, the African-American Women's Institute for Social Change, which will support African-American women in the Arkansas Delta in developing their leadership skills and talents to address the problems they face

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Concerned Black Citizens

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months of our existence, it is absolutely imperative that we concentrate more heavily on building the organization, increasing membership and enhancing our leadership skills. Currently, our plans to accomplish this include hiring a part-time organizational consultant, producing a brochure that explains our goals and purpose, and organizing a special, two-day workshop/retreat for our board members. The retreat will focus on grassroots fundraising skills, strategic planning and other aspects of organizational development.

Some white residents of Blakely have joined in the effort to bring justice to the community. Former city council member David Griffin initially brought Franklin Brown's Klan membership to the attention of officials last November. "I thought the Klan was known for starting fires, not putting them out," said Griffin of the Klan/fire department connections. "Something must be done to right this wrong."

But the CDR and the CBCC expect community organizing to grow increasingly difficult, and we anticipate acts of retaliation and censorship from other Blakely residents. CDR board vice-chair, the Rev. Mac Charles Jones, warned those attending a June 27 Freedom Revival at Blakely's Wesley Chapel AME Church that they would face hard choices in the future.

"Some of you will want to go back to the old ways, submitting to Pharoah's new form of slavery. Some of you will not know which way to turn—the sea on one side, Pharoah's approaching army on another, mountains to your left and desert to your right. Some of you will accuse your leaders of leading you into a cul-de-sac from which there is no escape. But you can't go back....You have to move forward to freedom. If you pursue this to the end you can break the back of racism in Blakely." □

For more information, contact: The Concerned Black Citizens Committee, P.O. Box 86, Blakely, GA, 31723 or call (912) 723-3698; the Center for Democratic Renewal, P.O. Box 50469, Atlanta, Georgia, 30302-0469, or call (404) 221-0025.

We Thought You Might Be Interested...

The *Jewish Women's Call for Peace* is a handbook for Jewish women on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. This information-packed little book was written for the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and was edited by Rita Falbel, Irena Klepfisz, and Donna Nevel, with a preface by Resist board member Grace Paley.

Beginning with Arab, Israeli, and U.S. women's stories about their own experiences working toward a resolution of Middle East hostilities, and moving on to fact-filled essays about how to talk about these issues in different communities, the book provides practical and concrete suggestions for organizing. There is also a resource section that guides one through the different sectors that exist in the "American Jewish community," outlines an effective media strategy; and lists books, newsletters and organizations focused on Middle East organizing.

Although this book concentrates on the issues surrounding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, its emphasis on the personal reflection and transformation that inevitably accompanies political work on the volatile struggles in the region will be useful for everyone who wants to get involved but isn't sure where to begin. The handbook costs \$4.95 + \$1.75 shipping and is available from Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850, or call (607) 272-0000.

How You Can Help

There are many ways throughout the year that you can help Resist grow. One of the most important ways is to *tell your friends about Resist*. Encourage them to subscribe to our newsletter (any donation to Resist gets you a sub) and support our grant making program. Buy them a subscription to the newsletter, or send them a gift of a Resist t-shirt (\$9) or sweatshirt (\$15). Give us the names and addresses of friends, and let us contact them about Resist. (Let us know if we can use your name when we contact them. And don't worry, we don't make fundraising phone calls.)

Another way to support us is through work-places that have *matching grant programs*. Resist, as a non-profit, tax exempt corporation, should qualify for these programs. Find out if your employer has a matching grants program, and double the value of your gift. This past year we received matching grants from Lotus, ARCO, and Digital Equipment Corporation.

Or instead of writing us a check (which we always appreciate), you can *donate stock*. When you donate stock to Resist you avoid paying the capital gains tax, and since we're tax exempt, we don't pay it either. You could call it a win-win situation. Call us if you want more information about donating stock.



Women's demonstration for peace. Jerusalem, 1990.
Photo: Eleanor Roffman.

Black Women

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daily in their communities.

Another component to this program is cultural work with women and youth, which will give people information about their own history, traditions, and the social and political contributions made by African-Americans in their region.

When there is so much to be done, organizations run the risk of outlining an impossible agenda that accomplishes very little or nothing at all; or, worse yet, developing a plan that only offers temporary relief. As we move ahead with our agenda for the Institute we will listen

very closely to African-American women, funders, community activists, and other respected social change workers so we will not do more harm than good.

Arkansas women are making important strides to organizing on our own behalf. We are beginning to see that we have power and the ability to create for ourselves lives that we design and control. We recognize that each step will be taken with risk and courage, but the conference gave us a sense that if we can work together and continue to broaden our base, we can alleviate some of the helplessness

and hopelessness we have been feeling, and begin to make some serious changes in our communities. □

Janet Perkins and Kelly Mitchell-Clark are staff members at the Women's Project. Along with Damita Jo Marks they were the principle organizers of the conference. For more information, write The Women's Project, 2224 Main St., Little Rock, Arkansas, 72206, or call (501) 372-5113.

Grants

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struggles with questions of inclusiveness within the pro-choice community. The group is asking itself what the term "inclusive" means concretely as coalitions and alliances are formed. The Partnership Program is a place where women of color can express their own feelings, ideas and strategies in the context of their lives. The Program has conducted a survey of African-American women on the subject of teen pregnancy, and is assisting groups of women of color in setting up community dialogues around reproductive health issues.

Resist's grant went toward a booklet/brochure that the Partnership Program is using to interest other women of color in its work. The brochure discusses RCAR's work and includes essays by several women of color from different communities. The brochure logo was designed by young women of color from a high school art program.

National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2428 Ontario Rd., NW, Washington, DC. 20009.

The National Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NCASA) is an association of rape crisis centers, related organizations and individuals concerned about violence against women. Since its founding in 1978, NCASA has tracked legislation, provided technical assistance to rape crisis groups, facilitated information-sharing among centers and state level coalitions, and has held an annual conference (twelve in twelve years).

Among the Coalition's projects are work to influence federal legislation including funds for sexual assault prevention programs; a survey of services

and a national directory; and plans for a National Take Back the Night March to be held in July, 1991 in Washington, D.C.

NCASA is particularly important as spokespersons for new media, government, researchers, and other groups because of its expertise, access to data, and technical assistance and action on the issue of sexual assault. NCASA's Community Outreach Project trains workers and sends them into designated communities to raise awareness about crimes against women and children, and build support for the organization. NCASA believes this one-on-one organizing is the most effective way of reaching people with information about increasing levels of violence against women, and the lack of services in many rural and low-income urban areas, and for disabled women. Also, many people are unaware of what services are currently available in their communities. NCASA workers provide referrals and information. Resist's grant was used to print an education/outreach flyer.

Puerto Rican Women's Committee-Miriam Lopez Perez, P.O. Box 279, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

The group of women that today forms the Comité de Mujeres Puertorriqueñas-Miriam Lopez Perez began its work in 1984; the group first came together to produce a radio program for International Women's Day. The group became a more formal committee in 1987 while organizing events following the murder of Miriam Lopez Perez, a Boston resident and battered woman who had sought police protection long before she was killed by her ex-boyfriend. The Comité organized a press conference to denounce the lack of

protection for women, particularly women of color, and to break the silence which often surrounds domestic violence. The Comité's efforts have concentrated on raising awareness of violence against women in the Puerto Rican community, and calling for police accountability and protection for all women.

At the same time, the Comité beleive education about domestic violence involves empowerment of women around a range of issues including affordable housing, employment, child care and child support, legal and civil rights, and other forms of violence. Over the past three years the Comité has sponsored a number of projects and collaborated with others to achieve a visible presence of Latina women in the community. In 1989-1990 the group has organized a training program for Puerto Rican women including forums, a speakers bureau and skills-sharing; a Latina Women's Film Festival; an Encuentro of Latina women in Massachusetts; and continued development of the Puerto Rican Organizing Resource Center (a collaborative project with other Puerto Rican Groups).

Resist's grant was used to help supply a section of the Puerto Rican Organizing Resource Center's library devoted to Latina women. The Center's library includes informative materials on Puerto Rican/Latino history, politics and culture and holds books, reports, videotapes, newsletters, and records from various political groups and agencies. The Women's section fills a vacuum created by denial and distortion of Latina women's history in mainstream educational institutions. The Comité hopes the new section will help build identity and self-esteem in Puerto Rican/Latina women.

GRANTS

In each issue of Resist we highlight a few recent grants we have made to projects in a particular area. This issue features women's groups. The information in these brief reports is provided to us by the groups themselves. For more information, please write to them at the addresses provided.

Umbrella, One Prospect Ave. St. Johnsbury, Vermont, 05819

In 1976, a small group of women in this rural Vermont town called a community-wide meeting to discuss the lack of women's health services in St. Johnsbury. Out of that meeting, one of the first women's centers in Vermont was born. Since that time, Umbrella has supported a range of projects to combat sexism, violence against women, and discrimination. An early Umbrella endeavor was to offer workshops and support groups promoting self-reliance among women. In 1977 the group formed a rape crisis team, soon followed by a safehouse network for battered women and their children.

Umbrella's child care service assists women in locating quality child care, and provides advocacy for local day care providers. The group's educational component sends speakers to schools and civic groups to focus on child sexual assault prevention, violence against women, and non-traditional work for women. Support groups and resources are provided for lesbians, battered women, incest and rape survivors, and children living in violent homes.

Umbrella sees itself as an activist,

grassroots organization that functions as a catalyst for social change in the community, by demanding that institutions, organizations and agencies be responsive to the needs of women and children. In the last two years, Umbrella has initiated a Diversity Project in order to better focus on the concerns of all women in the community. The Project has developed a resource library of multi-cultural and multi-racial books, and materials and curricula for use in local schools.

Although many white women in the feminist community recognize that conscious and unconscious racism occurs in rural Vermont, Umbrella believes racism is rarely directly discussed. In order to create a feminist anti-racist presence, and to become allies for women of color in the community, the organization is planning events that provide ways for women to examine their own racism, while also expanding development of resources and support for multi-racial activities in the schools and in other community groups. Resist's grant went toward a one-day anti-racism workshop facilitated by Tia Cross, a long-time feminist and community activist.

The event was attended by both white women and women of color. Prior to the workshop, participants were sent a packet of articles and anti-racism information, and Umbrella also organized a display of books, magazines and other resources. The workshop format involved small group discussions of racism and racial differences, an examination of class and ethnicity issues among the participants, and discussion of local and state-wide

issues concerning people of color in Vermont. Umbrella members feel the day was very useful as a way to focus on racism and form the basis for further study and action projects. Publicity around the event was also valuable in alerting the broader community about the need for all Vermont residents to engage in anti-racism work.

Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, (Women of Color Partnership Project) P.O. Box 37-8654, Chicago, Illinois, 60637

The Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR) of Illinois was founded in 1975 and is an affiliate of the national RCAR. Many of its founders were active in the pre-Roe v. Wade days of the Clergy Consultation Service, which provided counseling and abortion referral. RCAR still provides this service; over time its work has expanded to include all action necessary to shape public opinion and public policies on issues related to abortion rights and other reproductive health issues.

The Women of Color Partnership Program was created by RCAR nationally in 1985 as a vehicle through which African-American, Latin American, Asian-Pacific American, Native American and all women of color, could focus their work in the reproductive choice movement. The program seeks to identify and address reproductive health concerns from the perspectives of women of color. The Program's vision statement for its work includes: broadening the agenda of the pro-choice movement to encompass a full range of comprehensive reproductive health issues such as the right to choose or not choose abortion, birth control, teen pregnancy, prenatal care, child care, and medical abuses against women of color; promoting the education of women of color around reproductive health care options; building a partnership and agenda between all women of color which incorporates our political and social organizations and our individual faith perspectives; and insuring that access to comprehensive reproductive health care options are not denied to anyone.

RCAR of Illinois feels the Women of Color Partnership Program is especially important to the organization as it

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Join the Resist Pledge Program

We'd like you to consider becoming a Resist Pledge. Pledges account for over 25% of our income. By becoming a pledge, you help guarantee Resist a fixed and dependable source of income on which we can build our grant making program. In return, we will send you a monthly pledge letter and reminder, along with your newsletter. We will keep you up-to-date on the groups we have funded, and the other work being done at Resist. So take the plunge and become a Resist Pledge! We count on you, and the groups we fund count on us.

☐ **Yes! I would like to become a Resist Pledge. I'd like to pledge \$_____ / _____ (monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, 2x a year, yearly).**

☐ **Enclosed is my pledge contribution of \$_____.**

☐ **I can't join the pledge program just now, but here's a contribution to support your work. \$_____**

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