



FALL 1981

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --- Peter Maurin

RACISM:

SEETHING

VIOLENCE



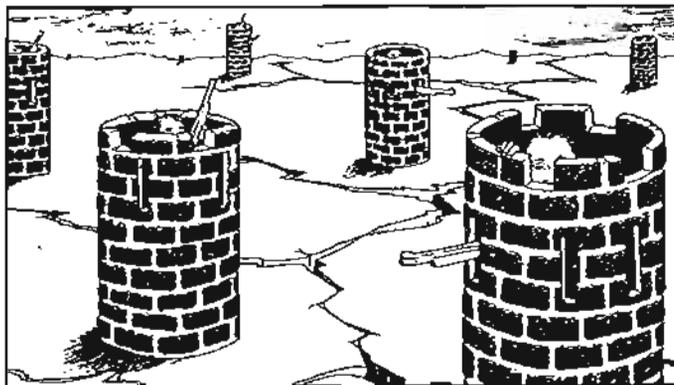
Why This Issue ?

Concern with racism is rooted deep in our Worker history. The masthead of the New York Catholic Worker has always had one black and one white figure joined around the Cross of Christ. Dorothy often travelled in order to be with people who were resisting racism, at times sharing in their danger.

Racism has not left us, despite the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties. In St. Louis, we are only now beginning the struggle to desegregate our public schools, although the Brown decision ordered desegregation "with all deliberate speed" in 1954. As a nation,

we are witnessing the dismantling of civil rights and social legislation that will make the "benign neglect" of the Nixon years look like fulsome generosity. As our government abandons human rights as a concern of foreign policy,

it is thousands of people of color who bear the consequences, both under military dictatorships abroad and in the transfer of funds from human services to the military budget at home.



And so, it is good and fitting to reflect once again on racism. It is not easy to do, as Kwasi Thornell points out in his article. It makes us depressed and angry because we feel so defeated by it.

Yet, reflection on racism is such a good teacher. The connections are made so clearly. Racism is violence, whether in the form of gas ovens, lynchings or the disproportionate number of people of color killed in wars, or in unemployment that leads to crime, housing that looks like Dresden after World War II, or children who are bitten by rats.

Lest these wounds seem too overwhelming, we need only to remember that their causes lie in our own hearts; and therefore, the solutions are also within our grasp.

"Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me
-it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks-
to break unjust fetters
and undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and break every yoke,
to share your bread with the hungry,
and shelter the homeless poor,
to clothe the one you see to be naked
and not turn from your own kin?
Then will your light shine like the dawn
and your wound be quickly healed over."

Will the Circle Ever Be Broken?

by Kwasi Thornell



"God's promise to us is that we are one people because we are 'reconciled to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.'"

This quote from a denomination's statement on racism expresses the hope of us all. It also expresses the frustration and the pain. Writing on racism is a pain. It produces anger and depression. It causes one to reflect on our own inability and apparent lack of power to change the course of racism in America. Racism, the mental and physical denial of a full and free life by white people against people of color, is a disease that has grown. It spreads like cancer and can be destroyed only when it is cut out, or it will kill the mind and the body. It is a deep cancer. It affects the victim as well as the victimizer, although the victimizer more slowly. Deeply embedded in the culture and in the institutions of this society, it is both conscious and unconscious and will not go away by wishing, ignoring or praying. It must be faced head on.

It affects the victim as well as the victimizer, although the victimizer more slowly.

My parents, their parents, their parents' parents and their parents' parents' parents all experienced racism. I have known racism and so has my ten year old child. And we each have asked, "My God, when will the circle be broken?" There are actually brief periods when we think that maybe we will be allowed to be fully Americans, when we will be included in all walks of life and allowed to live as others live. The reason we are not is that America wants everyone to be and look the same, and if you don't we will make sure that everyone knows that you are different and really keep you out.

It is hard for many whites to accept the fact that people of color do not really want to be white.

Blacks can never be whites and that's one problem. Another is that a large percentage of blacks really don't want to be white. I believe that this is hard for many whites to understand, much less believe. It is hard for many whites to accept the fact that people of color do not really want to be white. The desire to not be white is especially strong when people realize how badly the white race has treated people of color over centuries of history. Somewhere, somehow, in God's great wisdom, God created us in

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colors for a reason and we must be thankful.

There is a certain dulling pain and a flash of anger that arises when well meaning liberal types say, "I know how you feel about racism," or "isn't racism the same as sexism or discrimination against homosexuals?" No, you don't know what it is like, and it is not like other forms of discrimination. To move through life not knowing if people are responding to you based upon your color or because of what you are doing is a terrible burden to bear. To be told that you are not a human, not worthy of life's considerations, as we were told in American history, or to be ignored as a people in 1981 for the sake of political needs, is not the same as being discriminated against because of sex or sexual orientation.

“THOSE
WHO PROFESS TO
WANT FREEDOM
AND YET DEPRECIATE
AGITATION”

and those who want crops without
sowing. This struggle may be a
moral one. Or may be physical. But
it must be a struggle. Power con-
cedes nothing without a demand. It
never did, and never will.
— Frederick Douglass (1857)



To be told what you must do to be accepted in American life and to find out that the "American Dream" is still beyond your reach or can be withdrawn at any moment is more than most can live with and still have goals. A white mobster who sells women and fills the veins of children with dope can live in any neighborhood he can afford. A Black congressperson cannot.

**We have to tell him
that God created him
as he is and hope he
does not turn in anger
against God.**

The level of inclusion in this country goes in cycles. During the sixties and early seventies, there seemed to be a glimmer of hope. We seemed to have some victories that would move us to full inclusion. Jobs, schools, housing began to open to us. We were present in the media, politics and general society; and our cultural experiences were seen as valuable. Today we are in a new cycle. On every front, there are attempts to take away the small gains made. The tools for advancement and self-improvement, the stepping stones, are quickly--not gradually--being removed.

The media, T.V. and the movies portray very few Blacks. "Dallas" and "Star Wars", the two most popular shows in recent years, have no Blacks in them at all. Can you understand what it is like when we are told, "You know, we didn't even think about that!" In other words, "We didn't even think about you." Why didn't you think of us: do you know how hard it would be to go through the city of Dallas today and not see a Black person? The only Black figure in "Star Wars" is Darth Vader, and

he represents evil. I wonder what my son thinks about that. The pain is that I have to tell my son that he may be (will be) discriminated against because he is Black. Possibly, he will be hurt or killed; surely he will be ignored because he is of the "Colored race." Obviously, it is going to take a lot of work on our part to convince him that being Black is not something that is bad in itself. We have to tell him that God created him as he is and hope he does not turn in anger against God. I don't think a white person can really totally understand what this means.

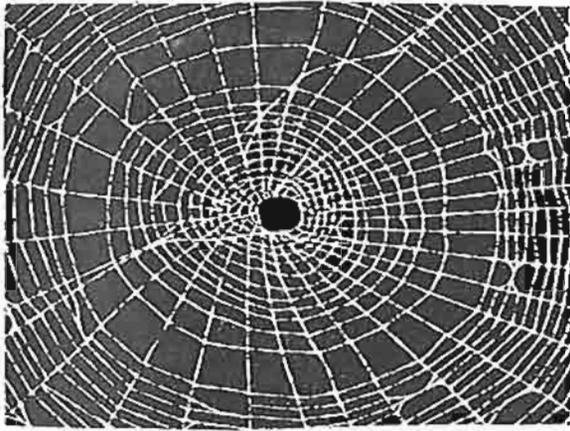
"But I didn't do it and my parents didn't create this situation." True, perhaps, but when will the circle be broken and who will break it? Somebody permitted the writers of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 to say "all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" while many of the writers held men and women in slavery, and did not free them after they had finished the document. Someone permitted the Dred Scott decision to be written, which stated that Black people had no rights that whites were bound to honor. This was written in the 1800's. Someone allowed the Reconstruction period to be reversed and the Klan to ride and kill thousands in the early 1900's. Someone permitted men to fight and die for American freedom in World Wars I, II and Korea as long as they fought and died in segregated troops.



Someone today is allowing the Klan to rise and to recruit children off public school playgrounds, allowing a call to be heard loud and clear to reverse the plan for school desegregation, and on, and on, and on. Someone allows this all to keep going on, for the circle not to be broken.

Racism has deep roots in America and around the world. Christianity means to me freedom, liberation, hope. When Christ died he died for me, too. When the Body of Christ brings us to the wholeness of reality, then the circle will be broken. Then the fires next time will burn in hope, a new day and a new creation and a new oneness. ■





Entangled in the Web of Racism

by Joe Volk

Joe Volk is the Peace Education Secretary for the American Friends Service Committee in Ann Arbor, Mi.

In 1967 on February 28th, my 22nd birthday, I sat down at my desk in Oxford, Ohio, to write a letter to Mrs. (sic) Mary Lewis. Mary Lewis lived and worked in Wilmington, Ohio. She clerked the Draft Board there. I told Mary that I had examined my conscience with respect to war. I had concluded that there were just wars; so it was okay to raise a standing army; that conscription in war or peace time was anti-democratic; that war for which she was working to raise an army was an unjust war; that as a responsible citizen in a democracy, I was compelled to oppose the Vietnam War. I told Mary that because my Draft Board had given me an occupational deferment to teach Junior High School in West Chester OH, my opposition had been limited mostly to words.

I said that two choices occurred to me: 1) return my draft cards, be ordered for induction, and refuse induction, or 2) return my draft cards, be ordered for induction and accept induction to the Army; then refuse to fight in Vietnam, if I ever was ordered to do so. I enclosed my draft cards, drove to the Post Office, by myself, and, in the dark of a cold night in much fear and trembling, dropped the envelope into the mail slot. I was sure my induction order would arrive sometime the next day.

It did not. Instead, a few weeks later, Mary Lewis wrote a brief letter: the Board had considered my letter, they suggest I apply for Conscience Objector status, when my request arrived they would act on it promptly.

I wrote a thank you letter and said that I could not apply for C. O. status because: 1) I believed in a just war theory and was willing to fight and kill, and 2) people from my hometown who were not privileged

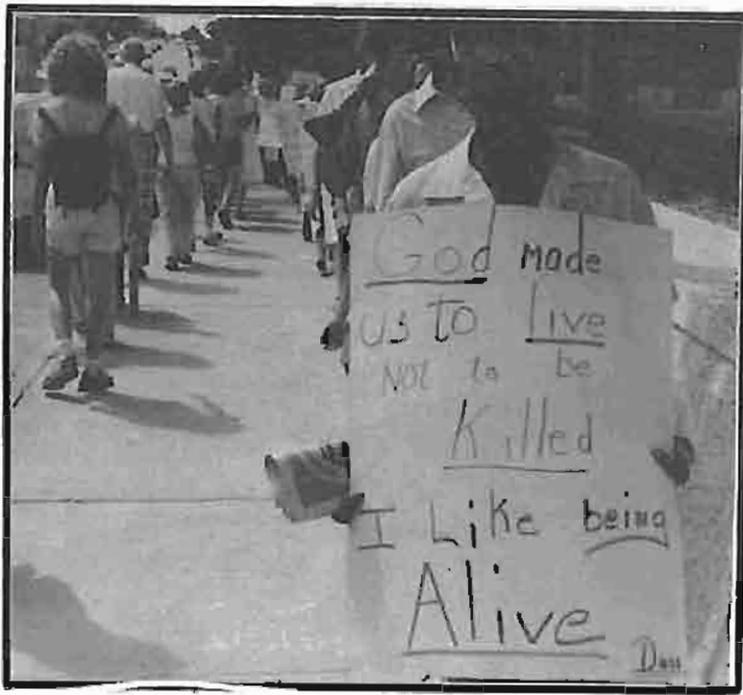
by education and employment were going to fight in Vietnam because they could not get a deferment; shouldn't I go where they had to go and, if ordered to Vietnam, do what I expected them to do? i.e. refuse and take the consequences.

My induction notice arrived shortly thereafter. What a victory I thought. I am a lower-Middle class white male privileged by education and by employment. Now I have liberated myself from the role of oppressor; I'm running with the victims.

(Of course, it's much clearer to me now, and at the time I would have spoken differently. But what I'm telling is a story about myself not a chronical.)

As you know, the story of my army experiences could be very long. To fill in the middle let me just say that in Basic Training my impression that by my own hand I had liberated myself from the oppressor class (I did not have a "class analysis" then; though I had read Hegel, a little Marx, some Marxists and Reinhold Niebuhr) was confirmed.

There I was in the barracks at Ft. Jackson, S. C. Know what? I can't remember another college graduate in my platoon. Maybe there were some, but during in-processing a Sergeant asked each of us: how many years education? When I said 16, his face turned red and his neck straightened, everyone's eyes turned to look at me. He said, "They finally got ya, huh?" and his face was nose-to-nose with mine. I said in defense, "No, I turned in my draft cards!" Unconvinced, he backed away, still trembling, and so was I. Maybe I had given up privilege but no one was buying my story. My story was just words of self-defense to that sergeant and a confession of stupidity to the victims" with whom I was running.



Months, three barracks arrests and two court-martials later, I found myself a "soldier-in-confinement" sentenced to six months at hard labor, two-thirds forfeiture of pay and reduction in grade to E-1. I also found myself in a sub-culture of the army which was guarded by Military Police but was run by the "victims". Curious, the sub-culture of us "soldiers-in-confinement" was a glimpse of the New Age for which I was struggling, towards which I was running: Blacks, Whites, Chicanos, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans; rural and citified; streetwise and "inadequate personalities"; character behavior disorders and, to the best of my knowledge one conscientious objector (I had changed my views about the just war theory by then). Oh yes, we also were "straights" and "gays" together in our common fate, that is we all had been sentenced to the stockade.

I was so angry about the war, about my being literally put in a cage, about the ridiculous reasons for putting these others in the same cage. But we all laughed, worked and played together. We looked out for each other. You want peer-counseling: I'll give you peer counseling...three of us on the back porch of a barracks surrounded by barbed-wire, rifle guards in the towers at each corner of the fence; I'm telling the homosexual couple how I arrived here and talking about how tough it is; they're telling me not-to-worry we'll get through this and they're not asking me for anything.

You want community; I'll give you community: You have to fall-in for roll call outside the barracks or you get punished. Sick? Depressed? Happy? Don't feel like it? That doesn't matter. You still have to be there.

I'm in my bunk so sick with a fever that I'm incoherent and have no idea what's going on. Two buddies (both black) carry me out and hold me up in rank: The sergeant calls my name "Volk!" I don't hear it: my buddies do it for me "E. J.", and the sergeant moves on to the next inhabitant of our community. I'm safe for the rest of the day.

My buddies tell me about it later... "It's all right," they say, after I've thanked them, "You'd do the same for us." And, it is true that if I could I would.

Eventually, we were put out of the stockade. Not because our sentences had been served but because there was no more room. We were sent to a "Special Processing Detachment". It had "shotgun guards" who carried long riot clubs, and we were "on our honor not to run away. We all just wanted to do our time; get our less-than-honorable discharge or finish our last months of active duty and go home. Most of us didn't run.

Jerome Johnson, a black man from Philadelphia and my best friend while in confinement, and I were walking one cold November day in front of the 5th Army Headquarters Building. Do you know that in the army you always have to have your hat on? and your pockets buttoned? and you may never put your hands in your pockets? Never! Neither Jim nor I had gloves; stolen by the guards while we were in the stockade. So, we walked past H.Q. keeping our hands warm in our pockets.

The First Sergeant of the Fort burst out the front door yelling. He ran across the front lawn. He was yelling at us. We stopped. He jumped in front of us. We stood there with hands in pockets; he stood there his face in my face, then in Jerome's,

"Are your hands cold, Troops!" he bellowed. I was intimidated, paralyzed, not just speechless but thoughtless. With no evidence of fright or anything out of the ordinary, Jerome just said in a normal,

conversational tone, "No, Sergeant, they're in my pocket."

The Sergeant's body seemed to deflate; he stared for a moment, then turned and walked away without another word. Jerome smiled at me. We walked on with our hands still in our pockets! This Black man and White man had stood together and made "the Army" back off.

I was astonished at myself (I had been frightened but I got through it), at Jerome (he'd done exactly the right thing; how'd he know to do that?), at the Sergeant (he was so powerful and now?). Oh, I felt so good, so free, so excited by what this "little" incident meant.

I thought: when I was in college and in the worship groups on campus, I was in a community of ideas. Now I'm in a community of risk. If we could just put the two communities together we'd have a real community of faith; a practicing community; that is, practicing the skills for liberation and survival. The possibilities made my head reel. I couldn't eat; I fell into a deep sleep in my bunk. When I woke out of my dreams, I was back in my nightmare.

A couple of months passed, Jerome was transferred to an infantry unit. He would not go with them to Vietnam; he'd already done a tour there...got medals for bravery and gallantry. In a few months, he'd go home to his wife and kid in Philadelphia. I was ordered to an infantry unit that was going to be ordered to Vietnam. I refused to go; was arrested and confined to quarters again. A wait. Then some negotiations with the commander of the Special Processing Detachment, the Fort's chaplain and G.Q. An anxious wait. What would it be like to go through the third court-martial? How many months confinement this time? Again, a white man in a minority sub-culture populated by people who either didn't believe your story or didn't respect you for it. How long to make friends? Jesus what a pain...

Then a call to the commander's office: The Army doesn't want to spend time on another trial and the stockade is full. They want to compromise. I can work in the hospital here at Fort Carson attached to the Mental Hygiene Consultation Clinic

(MHCC), if I agree to work as a social-work psychologist for the remaining 8 months of my time in the army; or I can apply for C.O. status. Yes, I am a C.O. now, but no, I won't ask for a privilege not offered to my friends with whom I've just spent time in the stockade. O.K. then, its the MHCC.



Assigned to the hospital, I entered another sub-culture in the army. This one housed in white clapboard billets, eating in the finest army mess-hall east of Washington, D. C., with weekends and evenings off and a perpetual pass to leave the Fort. More white faces here, more degrees, more rank. After so much hell it was comfortable here...like a vacation. Just eight more months.

It was a mile or two from the billets at the hospital to the Mental Hygiene Consultation Clinic where I worked days. My new buddies were great guys: Louis Ortiz from Puerto Rico (did family counseling and spoke no English!), Tom Schluter M.A. in Social Work and loved rugby, Dennis Hoyer Cherokee Indian from Oklahoma, Social Work degree. Dennis and Tom had cars. We'd ride to work after a good breakfast in the morning. We wore dress greens.

The cold rain had begun before I woke up. Cheyenne Mountain was completely obscured

by clouds. It was frigid; sort of a grim, December Colorado day. We ran to Dennis' blue VW Variant. I got in the back seat in the middle. The dusty gravel road was muddy and puddled. The windows were steaming but it was cozy with my friends inside the car. We were making jovial small talk, joking, and I was feeling a kind of contentment. I'd gotten through the worst of it. All I had to do now was wait out 8 months doing non-combatant duty at a counselling center. Dennis' headlights shown on the back of a soldier walking up ahead. He slowed down and moved over to the left so as not to splash him.

Somebody remarked as we came closer that "the grunt" (Army slang for infantryman) must be freezing because he wasn't wearing a poncho, had mud up to his knees, was soaking wet. I rubbed the condensation off the rear window; Dennis slowed nearly to a stop as we passed. The red brake light shown on the grunt's face which seemed to be staring directly at me. It was dark; he couldn't see me, but by the brake light I could see enough to know it was Jerome. His hands were still in his pockets, and his expression conveyed a message to me: "Don't you know they always ride and we walk." Chills went down my back. Then I noticed it had gone, that feeling of contentment.

I wanted to take Jerome by the collars and yell at him: don't you count me in the "they always ride". Damn it, I gave up my privilege. I'm just doing my time like you are. We're brothers. By the time the tears began falling down my cheeks, I was getting out of the car and the others didn't see. As I hurried upstairs to close myself in my office, I was practically talking outloud to Jerome: Damn it, I paid my dues, what do you expect? After what we went through couldn't you see that it was me in that car? Me. Not some thoughtless, convictionless white soldier on a gravy-train job.

Why was I taking this so personally. Of course, Jerome couldn't see that it was me; it was too dark; it was just some white guys riding in a car...I opened my office window and vomited down the side of the building. No matter what I said, Jerome was still out in the cold and I was in that warm car. O.K. maybe I wasn't

racist but that didn't make any difference did it? I ended up the same place. The Army put me there but I let them, didn't I? What looked to me like rebellion, like war resistance, like joining in the struggle for justice, looked to Jerome like me in a warm, dry place and him in a cold, wet place. Once I got through the complexity of it all, I stood face to face with the ugly truth that even in my rebellion for peace and justice, even with all my intentions and efforts to get myself into the victim's situation, in spite of my decisions and actions, the system got me back into "my" place.

The rain washed my vomit off the building; nothing could wash off my anger and disgust for my racial and class predicament. Nothing. Is this personal predicament universal? Is it what I could call "original sin"? That because of my origin (something over which I have no decision, no control), I have a flawed--maybe even hopeless--relationship with most of the other people in the world? I wondered. One thing for sure, I would always remember how it had been between Jerome and me that day when the Sergeant assaulted us. I hand't talked--not ever--with Jerome about opposing racism not about solidarity with each other. It wouldn't have meant anything...just words.

It had meant everything to stand there together, saying nothing to each other, staying, facing the sergeant with our hands in our pockets. Ever since, I've been deeply embarrassed when white people made statements about how "we" were going to oppose racism. I wish we wouldn't say it; I wish we'd just find ways to do it...again and again and again and again until our dream is realized, and then we can look back on the long period of silence and say the words "we opposed racism and now we are living together".

Those days in the stockade and then in the Special Processing Detachment gave me a glimpse of the new age, just a glimpse like a peep show that cost me a couple of court-martials, what little rank I had and 2/3s forfeiture of pay. It was worth the price of admission to see that show. On a larger social scale, I'd guess the price would be the same, and I'd guess it's the only show in town worth the price of admission. ■

Briefly Spoken.....

From all I have read and heard, the Black and white children of our area have suffered from almost totally segregated education for a long time now... Both white and Black children were denied the opportunity of coming to know and love one another.

Archbishop John May 1980

No one has yet explained to my satisfaction what business a Black lad from a Mississippi or Georgia share-cropping farm has in Asia shooting down the yellow or brown son of an impoverished rice-farmer.

Paul Robeson, 1953

I read that report. . . of the 1919 riot in Chicago, and it is as if I were reading the report of the investigating committee on the Harlem riot of '35, the report of the investigating committee on the Harlem riot of '43, the report of the McCone Commission on the Watts riot.

I must again in candor say to you members of this Commission--it is a kind of Alice in Wonderland--with the same moving picture re-shown over and over again, the same analysis, the same recommendations, and the same inaction.

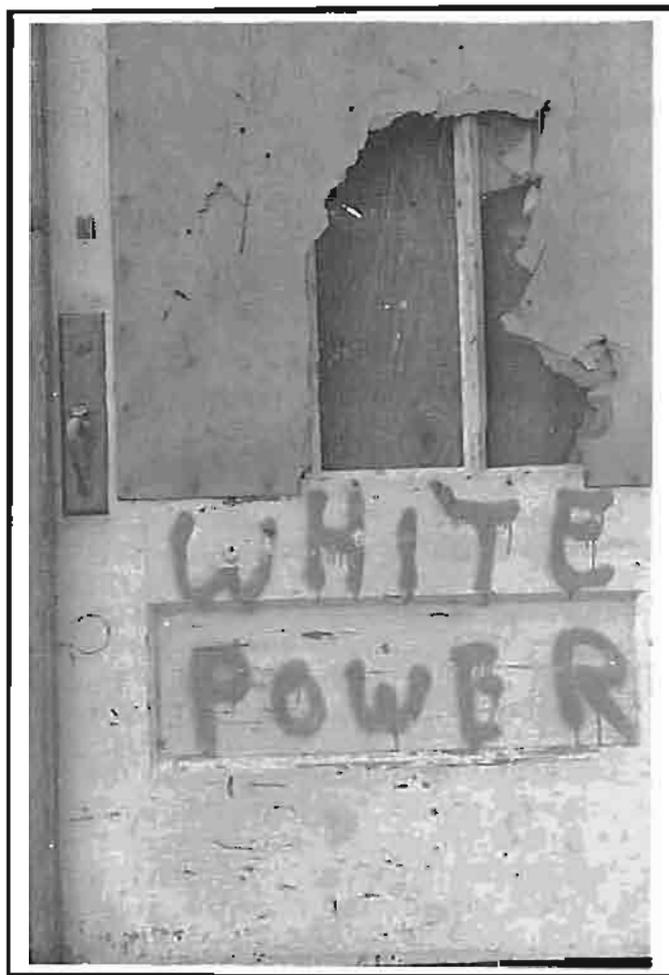
Kenneth B. Clark
testifying before the Kerner Commission

Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white--separate and unequal.
Kerner Commission Report, 1968

The climate of crisis engendered by demonstrations, protests and confrontation has given way to a mood of indifference and other issues occupy our attention.

In response to this mood, we wish to call attention to the persistent presence of racism and in particular to the relationship between racial and economic justice.

U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism
March, 1980



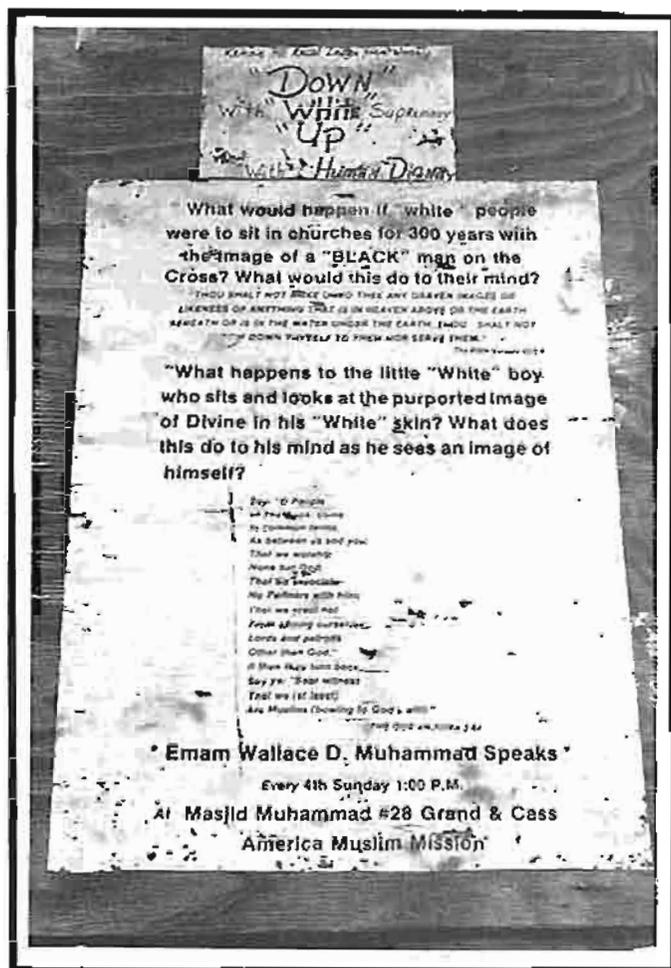
don't think it's just a matter of coincidence that military spending is sky rocketing at the precise moment that the Klans are on the upswing and the poor, epitomized by Black women and children, are being made the scapegoats for our country's woes.

A Catholic Worker

These people here, they've got all that money, and all this big house, and another one out in the country, and still they won't let that little girl just be herself. She's eight or nine, and she's got an independent spirit in her, but they're determined to get rid of it, and they will, let me tell you, and soon. The girl asks me a lot of questions. That's good. She looks out on that cemetery and she starts to wonder about things. That's good. She wonders about life, and what it's about, and what the end of things will be. That's good. But she's stopping now. That's what they want: no looking, no staring, no peeking at life. No questions; they don't want questions. They go to a church a couple of times a year, Christmas and Easter, and no one asks them any questions there. No one asks them questions any place they go. The people who are gone, who live across the street there in the cemetery, inside those tombs--they know what's important, they've discovered what's important, they've reached their destination. I'm poor, but at least I know I should ask myself every day: where's your destination and are you going there, or are you getting sidetracked?

A Black maid

Robert Coles' The Privileged Ones, p. 553



The issue of school desegregation is not just a matter of equal opportunity. It is that, but it is more. In a society still recovering from the sickness of centuries of racism, it is a positive step toward reconciliation of the races.

Archdiocesan Commission on Human Rights
Statement on School Desegregation, 1980

I think racism is basically economic: it's a handy excuse for one group to use while economically exploiting another. It legitimates the exploitation. And it's not unique to any one race; I suspect blacks would be just as happy to exploit whites, using racism as an excuse, if the tables were turned.

A Black woman in management

I am black, but lovely, daughters of
Jerusalem.

Song of Songs, 1:5

I always wondered if there was any racism involved in the decision to re-locate Japanese American citizens during World War II. German American citizens were not so treated. I wonder if it was just because the Japanese Americans looked different. I guess it was.

A Catholic Worker

Woe to you who make unjust laws and publish burdensome decrees, depriving the poor of justice, robbing the weakest of my people of their rights.

Isaiah 10:1-2

At its root, I believe racism is a refusal to accept the new life offered to us by God. We refuse because we don't want to give up our status quo. So I don't have any pity for racists, or agree that we should go slowly or molly coddle them, because I believe what is at stake is God's life in them.

A Catholic priest



Racism is a heresy. Segregation is a sin.
Joseph Cardinal Ritter

Soft Spoken

Harvesters

by Mary Ann McGivern

Hispanics, Chicanos, Chicanas, Spanish surnamed, Mexicans, Spanish speaking, Cuban refugees, migrants, farm workers, Puerto Ricans--people of color, brown people with separate cultures and experiences but often lumped together in our enactment of racist practices. Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since 1917. Most Chicanos and Chicanas have been citizens here for generations, since before the potato famine in Ireland. Most of the Cubans are political refugees. Some brown-skinned people are illegals who came here as braceros or with green cards but didn't return to their native country or else snuck across a boarder to find work.

Although St. Louis' early settlers were Spaniards, Spanish-speaking peoples form a very small percentage of our regional population, and the problems of brown people have been generally ignored. For example, 8 years ago a truck crammed with illegals crashed. Several were killed and more were seriously injured. Those not hurt were promptly deported to Mexico, probably without pay. Addie Kelly, a black woman in Immaculate Conception-St. Henry's parish who operates a nursing home, took care of a couple of workers for several months with little community support. An then they, too, were deported.

Where can they go in trouble, these soft-spoken people of color who harvest our crops across the nation, speak a foreign tongue, have a life expectancy of only forty-odd years? Most states exempt migrant worker children over 12 from school attendance, and some states exempt them all. The National Labor Relations Act exempts farm workers from the right to organize a union and only California gives them that right. Missouri doesn't have a state minimum wage, so our black and brown cotton pickers are exempt from the minimum wage.

The St. Louis community has given enormous support to the United Farm Worker movement over the past 12 years in response to information given by UFW and UFW Ministry staff about the plight of farm labor, mostly Hispanic but also



Black, Filipino and white. Giving money, boycotting, fasting, going to jail and countless hours of leafletting at local supermarkets are indicative forms of support. More recently, the Human Rights Commission of the Archdiocese has endorsed the boycott of Campbell products initiated by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, a Midwestern group in the UFW tradition.

In addition, individuals and local churches have taken in Cuban refugees as they took in Vietnamese a few years earlier, and have helped them find homes and jobs. The Archdiocese has opened the Hispanic Center at St. Charles Borromeo Church, and Fr. John Lightle and others work hard there.

Yet the ugly, many-headed hydra of racism persists. Laws, education requirements, union membership and language requirements, even some banking regulations and Church practices, benefit whites and hurt brown, Black and Asian peoples. Now that people of color make up a greater percentage of our armed forces, even the GI benefits have been eroded.

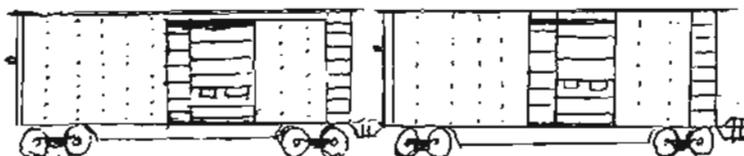
The genius of the UFW movement is that the working poor organize themselves to resist injustice. But the UFW grew from the experiences of generations of strikers, the patience of Alinsky organizers in seeking out Cesar Chavez, and Chavez's knowledge that the poor of all colors must stand together. Brown people who are not farm laborers and who have recently arrived in our multicultural but racist society don't necessarily have that knowledge or experience, much less strong leadership to challenge institutional racism.

Because whites benefit from racism and because therefore racism is a white problem, our resistance to it must be relentless. We must hear the experience of the victims and feel their suffering; we must reflect and pray; and we must take on works of mercy and works of justice that are anti-racist in order to free ourselves and our victims. ■



The Only Useful Question

by Tom Kegelman



Box cars clicking by/ counted on fingers
during trips to granma's house
They delayed dinners and that angered daddy
who knew, but would never admit
that we were ALWAYS hopelessly late
regardless of "those damn freight trains"

Some people, I discovered later,
hooked rides on freight trains
and when it became important/ to get away
separate
clear away dead images that hung in the air
suffocating
then it was important that a thing had wheels
that it touched the earth
with polished lack of friction and
that it cruised, unobstructed
between different poles of a larger universe
and was surrounded with a variety of voices
that left their truths
like spoors, sticking to the hide of a
wandering animal
and THAT IT MOVED
from here to there with undeniable progression
no confused hesitation
unh-hunh/ no questions asked
"Don't bother me I'm moving."
such ballistics are appreciated
by young men with heavy feet
and morbid expectations of
college, career, marriage and the grave.

What never happened was well rehearsed
by a slow crossing on an outbound track
one eye out for the lineman
one for an open door
gauging my speed, I would pull up alongside
leap for the ladder, grab hold and swing on
into the dark and rattling box car

Rattlers they're called
pins working loose in their sockets
releasing panels of steel
to shift and bounce
with the uneasy movement
of metal wheels over a twisting,
uncertain track
up close, at a good speed,
the noise becomes deafening

why, even at a distance, it's hard to ignore
that insistent, rhythmic rumbling of a freight train.

And when we sat in our psychotropic trances
and conjured up Sartre
in dark, fathomless doorways
bewitching telephone operators with our
existential angst
"Hello? Operator? Could you tell me if
you've ever considered suicide?"
when we talked about having a good reason
good enough, anyway, to make
some sort of a difference
to escape the dull voyage
of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
to get the hell out of whatever it was
that bound us up so tight
we couldn't feel ourselves

And when we hadn't slept for two days, then
my good friend asked me
about freight trains
and box cars
and the rattling, insistent noise they make
as they rattle through the night
and how people, lying in their beds
could keep out those sounds
what ingenious devices
considerations of morning tasks
unpaid bills/ the Christmas rush/ and
"How long has it been since we've seen
a good movie?"
did couples glance at each other
with warnings in their eyes?
or with silent pleas for comfortable lies?
"Relocation efforts," he said
"So many people homeless these days," she replied.
did they feel something?
was it like locking oneself into a room and then
listening to the scratch of fingers on the doorknob?
my friend was insistent then with his questions:
did they rage at the door and yell with voices
louder than the others,
"You must die, Jew, you must die!"?

Box cars, freight trains, rattling
along uncertain tracks
bound for inevitable ends
I can't stop hearing them
though someone said



they've been silent now
 for thirty years
 six o'clock news bristles with anecdotes
 graphs and latest developments
 I see the pictures/ I hear the words
 but when I turn away, all I hear is
 box cars, freight trains
 I can't get them out of my mind anymore
 I ask other people if they hear them, too
 "Did you notice that rattling in the background?"
 they don't think it's a useful question
 WHY IS THAT BECOMING THE ONLY USEFUL QUESTION I HAVE?
 what is that rattling? where are they taking them?
 and when it's time to say good night
 to turn out the lights
 and all is silent
 except for the distant rattle of freight trains then
 I know I cannot lie quiet in my good german bed
 it's no use
 I WILL stand in the rain with leaflets
 and banners and beat on the doors of my neighbors
 and plead with them to add more weight to their lives
 I WILL stand up in crowded auditoriums
 and ask annoying questions
 I WILL disturb the peace of mind of quiet
 box car manufacturers
 and those who load their cargo
 I WILL --

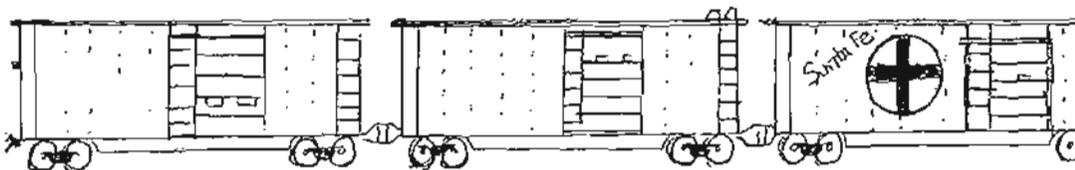


My friend had all this in mind, I think
 this was the purpose of his nagging questions
 to create in me a socially contentious
 pain in the ass
 or perhaps it had always been with me
 wasn't I looking for the ride to freedom?
 the escape from morbid expectations of
 college, career, marriage and the grave?
 didn't I want to move?
 to get somewhere else?
 well, here I am
 it's not the sort of career I described
 to my fifth grade teacher
 when she asked me, "What do you
 want to be when you grow up?"
 a paranoid insomniac who loudly insists
 that box cars are rattling down the rails
 to Armageddon
 even if I knew I wouldn't have told her
 I couldn't stand it when my teachers
 laughed at me

I can't stand it now
 when my neighbors avoid my eyes
 or when the newspapers report
 that I'm irresponsible
 or a nuisance
 or my boss says that I don't
 care enough about my job
 so he'll have to let me go
 or a judge orders psychiatric counseling

Please, your honor, It's not fun being free
 I really don't do well in jail
 and no, I won't promise to stop
 I can't
 it's a decision, you see,
 based on the movement of freight trains
 I have witnesses, your honor, detailed reports on --
 (gavel knocks)
 yes/ yes I understand/ no freight trains
 they are irrelevant
 they have no bearing on this case
 your honor? could we speed this thing up?
 I've got a train to catch

Tom Kegelman, a Worker cohort from Connecticut, where he was a member of CNVA, is a carpenter and playwright. "The Only Useful Question" is an excerpt from his play, Friends I Cannot Touch.



Our Clouded Vision

by Harry James Cargas

We live in a time in which we are urged by teachers of various traditions to take a single syllable or word or phrase and to appropriate it--to take it for our very own individual mystical or prayer symbol. One word which has particularly touched me over the past several years is perhaps worth sharing with others. That word is cloud. In my experience, cloud has important personal and ecumenical meanings.

It is, first, an important symbol as used by the anonymous English author who, in the fourteenth century, wrote the Christian mystical masterpiece, The Cloud of Unknowing. In this work the writer continually refers to the cloud that comes between the individual and God, that obscures God from us.

A more recent cloud symbol is found in the novels of Elie Wiesel who uses clouds as emblems for dead Jews who perished in the ovens of the Holocaust. (We are also reminded of the poetry of Nellie Sachs with the terrifyingly appropriate title The Chimneys, O The Chimneys.)

Ira Progoff suggests that the cloud of the anonymous mystical work is an ambiguous symbol, used at once to indicate a separation from God yet somehow implying a link as well. (Since we cannot look directly at God, the cloud somehow mediates our vision.)

The cloud as used by Wiesel does separate us from God. How can we see God when our monstrous crimes have blocked our vision of the Creator? I mean no disrespect when I say that our view of God is truly clouded by what we have done or have allowed to be done. My Holocaust research, as a Christian, is motivated by an urgency to find the meaning of Christianity in view of the Holocaust. Jews ask, "Where was God at Auschwitz?" I

must ask, "Where was Jesus at Auschwitz?" How can a people, claiming to have been motivated for nearly twenty centuries by the founder of a religion based on love of human beings, have contributed to the burning of one million children under the age of twelve? (To use but one of a variety of possible, horrid statistics.)

So the symbolic cloud must be the very reason why I increase my efforts to know God, to find out what God's message is for me, personally.

And, in a wider application, perhaps in the continued attention to the cloud symbol a new basis of unity may be found Christians and Jews. We must study the cloud carefully to try to determine its significance for us today. If we do not, Hitler will have won; Satan will have triumphed. What we do in our personal relationships, as Christians and as Jews, is that important. If Christians and Jews can build a meaningful unity, as difficult as that will be in the light of historical persecutions of Jews by Christians, then other unities will have to follow. Christians and Jews and Moslems and Hindi and Buddhists and Jains and all people will be affected by such a unity.

Then we can all begin to reflect the world of which the prophet Micah speaks. Not the world of clouds of separation but a world where, in Micah's vision,

they will hammer their swords
into ploughshares
their spears into sickles
Nation will not lift sword
against nation
there will be no more training
for war.

Racism in Schools-- an interview

by Maureen Filter

School desegregation is one of the issues in the St. Louis community that currently and consistently serves as a clear reminder of the presence of racism among us. We asked Maureen Filter, executive director of North Area Catholic Educators and Catholic Worker intimate, to talk with two local Black educators about their perceptions of the various dimensions of the problem. Joe Wiley is a counsellor at Mercy High School and member of the Human Rights Commission of the Archdiocese. Elaine Harris is a teacher and assistant administrator at Langston Middle School.

MF: How do each of you see racism as still prevalent in education in St. Louis?

JW: Racism is still around, but it's much more subtle than before. There is no outright denial to Black children of admission to predominantly white schools, only pressure to go elsewhere.

EH: Our schools still run on a dual basis and Black schools still get too little too late.

JW: It's hard for a kid to be Black in our schools. There are limited courses in Black culture. Very little Black culture around. There are still administrators and teachers who are simply unable to deal with Blacks, and the school systems fail to remove them from these situations. The attempt to understand Black children is overlooked, especially in high school counseling.

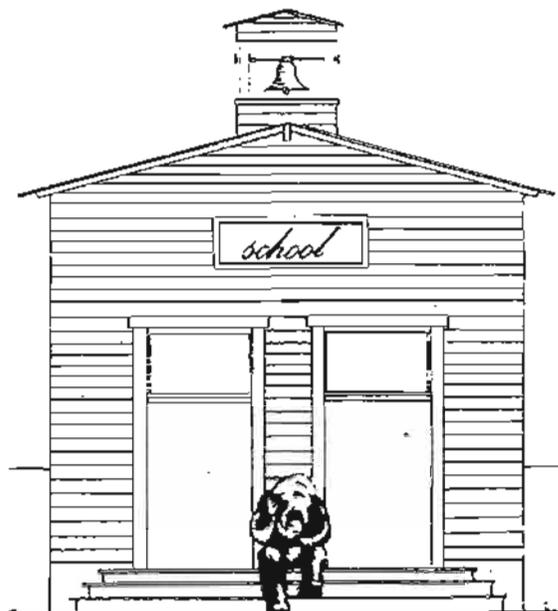
In staffing the schools, too, the great out is used--"We can't find Blacks qualified to do the job." Blacks have to be superstars before they are hired.

EH: It's like that in the magnet schools in the city. All whites who apply get in. Blacks are accepted on a very selective basis. Then the best and brightest Black teachers are funnelled into the magnet schools.

MF: What about busing?

EH: In this city Blacks are being bused to other Black schools! Integration is made much more difficult by bussing being used to mix lower income whites and lower income Blacks. The Black students find it easier to accept white students into their schools than vice versa.

White teachers coming to Black schools experience culture shock, but usually find it a good experience once rapport is established.



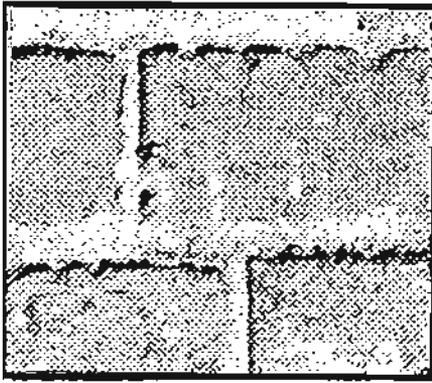
After 19 years of Blacks being within the school system, though, there still seems to be no integration within the student body. Blacks stay with Blacks. Whites stay with whites.

MF: Why do you think that is?

EH: The legislation is there, but people choose what is familiar to them, and integration is not. Folks need to be able to share life experiences, to cry together, to play together, to feel comfortable in one another's presence. I simply don't see great strides in integration happening in my lifetime!

MF: Where do you see improvement or change originating?

JW: Integration in housing will be very helpful, and time is one of those factors what helps bring change about. There also need to be changes on the administrative level and education necessary to bring them about.



From Little House

by Mary Ann McGivern

The Little House is being tuckpointed inside and out. Charlie Nesmith, Paul Sutton, Sharon Cummins and Jim Nagle repaired the roof and chimneys; and we hired contractors to tuckpoint the outside walls. The we began offering the course "Tuckpointing 101" to a select group--Little House volunteers. So far about 25 people have laid some mortar on our attic walls. If we haven't all become proficient, at least we've learned to appreciate St. Louis brickwork and Scriptural metaphors about firm foundations.

Tuckpointing is not difficult, but it is tedious. The first step is to rake out all the old loose mortar from between the bricks. Generally, the resulting gaps are half an inch deep; but where the water has leaked between the brick courses for years, the holes may go back as far as four inches. In a few places the brick itself crumbles. But the Little House walls are generally sound, and we've only had to replace a few brick fragments.

Then the brick has to be dampened thoroughly. Expert amateur tuckpointers Fran and Dick Armstrong warned us to use lots of water. The various methods of watering range from spray cans and plastic dish soap bottles to paint brushes and sturdy rags. The contractors used a hose outside.

Now one gets to the 80 pound sacks of brick mortar hauled up to the attic and mixed with water. Use a trowel to put some on a mortar board. Hold the flat side of the mortar board up to the wall--the jagged edges are for laying tile--and start stuffing mortar into the cracks. There is a tuckpointing tool to stuff with: a 3/8 or 1/4 inch square blade mounted on a handle. But we've used knives, putty knives and a bent screwdriver with some success.

Finally, one finishes the work, pressing the mortar in firmly and scraping off the excess. There is a finishing tool too, a metal bar bent like a stair step silhouette. Tom Harrig is a superb finisher. Tom Prag, on the other hand, has gained pastoral insight into why bricklayers and tuckpointers might turn to drink.

Virginia Druhe comes over from Cass House most days to do several hours of tuckpointing or whatever else is needed. Her "stick-to-itiveness" is admired and appreciated. Jane Corbett and Bill Miller have brought family and friends to work. So has Jim Nagle, who came as a guest and spent his first day here tuckpointing chimneys.

On Labor Day, about 12 people raked the north attic wall while four others laid mortar. Once the raking is done, the average novice seems to tuckpoint at the rate of 1 square foot an hour. Tuckpointing is indeed a concrete act of love, generous adherence to a task, a mark on the wall of the Little House. You tuckpointers are all bricks.

Virginia and Charlie and Elizabeth Nesmith will move in as soon as Charlie puts in hot water pipes, and the kitchen is painted. Ella lived these last 40 years in a cold-water flat; that does jolt our notion of necessities and luxuries. The Nesmith Golden Retriever, Morgan, will join our Collie-Shepherd-Mutt, Fleetwood, and Frances' orange Kitten, Prancer, and the guineas, (Paddy's Pig and MCP) and one hamster. When Jim moved to Cass House, he released the white mouse outside in a gesture of freedom.

The guinea pigs form our hope for a cottage industry, since a pet store in St. Charles is willing to buy the offspring. But we've given the first one to France's granddaughter, Susie; and the next one is promised to Lula Winston's daughter, Kisha--a baby born at Karen House and already almost 3. I guess that's why we're not rich. ■

Mary Ann McGivern, SL, lives at the Little House and has just begun a new career as a free lance writer. In this article, she is practicing the first two rules of writing: write about what you know and be specific.

From Cass House

by Sue Lauritsen

Sept. 15. With the house pretty much in full swing, we would like to encourage any of you who have a free block of time and who might like to help out in one of our many areas to please give Carol Donohue a

Our thanks to all of you who helped in many ways after we had our fire in June. It seems as though from what the fire marshal and electrician found that the fire was caused by lightning. We have so much to be thankful for; there was potential for a fire of tremendous magnitude because the area that the lightning struck was where we had our paper products stored. There was considerable electrical damage and the entire house had to be scrubbed down and all drapes and linens washed. We want to thank all of you again for your prayers and various forms of other support--we couldn't have gotten it all together without you.

Once we all sat down to discuss what all the things were needed to get ready after the fire we realized how tired all of us were so we decided to shut the house down except for a few guests who would stay and help us. So we have tried to get some much needed rest while putting the house back together for guests.

Also this summer we had three members of the community move on to other areas. Phyl and her 4 children moved to an apartment in St. Louis. Sr. Peggy moved to a parish in rural Iowa. And--last but surely not least--is the loss we are all feeling with the departure of Luanne.

Luanne has been an integral part of the St. Louis Catholic Worker Movement since the beginning in January of 1977. She has a tremendous capacity for treating each individual with the gentle personalism so vital to the vision of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Luanne will be doing an internship with NETWORK (a lobby for Christian stances on social justice issues) in Washington, DC. Her address is: 1625 16th NW, 20009.

We have once again opened our section for women and children on Sept. 1 and the soup-line and overnight hospitality for men on



call at 621-3085. We Need You!

One area we haven't been able to open up as often as we would like is giving out food boxes to those who run short of food. If you are involved in a group or know of any group to contact to do a canned food drive, we could sure use the canned goods. If you do have a drive and need to have the food picked up, please call Sue and make arrangements.

Hope this finds you and yours all in good health and at peace. We keep all of you in our prayers and Mass intentions. By the way, we have liturgy at our house on Monday and Wednesday evenings at 8pm--you are all invited. Please give us a call first to make sure we'll have it so you don't make the trip in vain.

Sue Lauritsen is a member of the Cass House Community and works at St. John's Mercy Hospital.

From Karen House

by Teka Childress



Karen House

These past summer months have literally been full of life for Karen House. Besides the addition of four new members to the Worker Community, Paul Kieselhorst, Mary Jane Antuna, Martha Donovan, and myself, a number of volunteers have come to Karen House.

Linda Hansen came from St. John's in Minn. where she teaches philosophy, to spend the summer months with us. Almost immediately after being here, she had taken the preparation of dinner into hand and served up some mighty fine meals. Even more importantly, she brought us her delightful presence. Sr. Barbara Kutchera came from Iowa for some time this summer and brought with her her lighthearted sense of humor. In addition to Linda and Barbara we had the ever-faithful support of Linda and Chuck Chiodini and Sr. Caran Hart, among many others.

Other good things have been happening. Margaret Overman, who has been living with us off and on for a little over a year, is about to leave to go to Wisconsin to live with her daughter. But, all is well because she promises to invite her Karen House family of 40 up to Wisconsin for dinner sometime. Betty Gibson, who was with us for two years, has gone out and found her own apartment and is enjoying it tremendously. Rosemary Dee, who is currently living

with us, has found a job working as a legal secretary, and Nina Rainbow Ray, at about nine and a half months, is just about ready to walk and says "Bye-Bye" about as well as any baby around. She'll probably be tagging after little Charles Kimberly before we know it.

Fall is harvest time, which brings to mind our garden, a gift of the Paraclete Fathers and Brothers. Truly, we have been reaping where we did not sow, as we were gifted with already tilled and planted soil. (It was especially welcome since our "city garden" at the corner of 17th and Madison brought in a rich harvest of Bermuda grass only!)

In addition to corn, beans, tomatoes, melons and the usual garden fare, the Paraclete garden has provided us with food for thought. In large part because of our country garden experience, our thoughts and conversations are turning toward ideas of a Catholic Worker farm or urban gardening of several vacant lots. Please pray with us as we consider these possibilities.

Teka Childress lives and works at Karen House and is a home care volunteer for the hospice at Lutheran Medical Center.

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. We welcome responses from our readers and will gladly accept contributions to help cover the cost of this publication. The people working on this issue are: Joe Angert, Clare Bussjaeger, Virginia Druke, Martha Donovan, Zack Davisson, Mary McClellan and Bill Ramsey.

THE ROUND TABLE

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