



Feminist Platform

8th Day Center for Justice

Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Racial Justice	4
Economic Justice	6
Eco-Justice	8
Reproductive Justice	10
Gender-Based Violence	13
Peace & Security	15
Political Participation	19
LGBTQ Inclusivity & Equality	21
Migration	23
Role of Religion in Politics	26
Conclusion	28
Contributors	29

FEMINISM(S) Defined

Angela Davis

"Feminism involves so much more than gender equality and it involves so much more than gender. Feminism must involve consciousness of capitalism (I mean the feminism I relate to, and there are multiple feminisms, right).

So it has to involve a consciousness of capitalism and racism and colonialism and post-colonialities, and ability and more genders than we can even imagine and more sexualities than we ever thought we could name.

Feminism has helped us to recognize a range of connections among discourses and institutions and identities and ideologies, that we often tend to consider separately.

It has helped us to develop epistemological and organizing strategies that take us beyond the categories of 'women' and 'gender'.

Feminist methodologies impel us to explore connections that are not always apparent. They drive us to inhabit contradictions and discover what is productive in these contradictions. Feminism insists on methods of thought and action that urge us to think things together that appear to be separate and to disaggregate things that appear to naturally belong together."

Introduction

The genesis of 8th Day Center for Justice's *2016 Feminist Platform* is the result of 40 years of promoting women's rights as human rights in both society and church: publishing *Cleaning Up Sexist Language* in the 1970s and its subsequent three revisions now entitled *Creating Just Language*, which focus on inclusive language; developing the *Faithful Dissent in the Church* Educational Process in the late 1990s; and writing and performing *The Conscience Monologues*, a play to lift up women's voices, to name a few. 8th Day Staff participation at the historic 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995, resulting in the Beijing Platform of Action for women's rights, was a seminal event for the Center's efforts to raise consciousness on feminist issues.

The Beijing Platform of Action formulates clear demands and has become a benchmark for women's rights groups worldwide. It is used as a litmus test for gender justice at the annual U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) where, every five years, the Platform is reviewed and updated. At the 2015 CSW gathering, the Nordic women's movement's document *New Action on Women's Rights* was introduced. This document frames well the crisis that women face to this day across the globe. The introduction states:

All over the world, women's rights are questioned and restricted with reference to traditions, religions and cultures. Principles of universal rights and democracy are called into question. Economic, environmental, and political crises have repeatedly been shown to have the most negative impact on women, especially poor women, while women have been excluded from decision-making that led to the crisis.

In the United States today the push back of women's political, religious, economic, and cultural rights is no less a crisis. Women's right to economic development, full participation in democratic decision-making nationally and internationally in both church and society, equal pay, paid sick leave, predictable scheduling, and the right to health and decisions over one's own body are among the issues that demand our attention. And what better time to raise our voices than now, during an election year.

In developing 8th Day's Feminist Platform, the Women in Church and Society Committee invited writers/activists/experts on various topics to address the themes of racial justice, economic justice, ecojustice, reproductive justice, gender-based violence, peace and security, political participation, LGBTQ inclusivity and equality, migration, and the role of religion in politics. In each area our readers are invited to recognize the role of intersectionality within and among the issues – how the implications are different depending on age, gender, race, ableism, orientation, and economics.

The *Feminist Platform* is meant to be used as a starting point for dialogue on the critical issues confronting Earth's people and the planet itself in these times. Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of such an interchange when he wrote:

Introduction, continued

Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. It assumes that there is room in the heart for the person's point of view, opinion, and proposal. To dialogue entails a cordial reception, not a prior condemnation. In order to dialogue, it is necessary to know how to lower the defenses, open the doors of the house, and offer human warmth.¹

In this light our desire is that 8th Day Center's Feminist Platform will be used as an essential educational resource for such dialogue leading up to the 2016 elections and beyond. May we live into the future with hope.

Due to the depth and complexity of the issues addressed in the pages that follow, there is no way that one document could fully cover all angles that are at play. We welcome feedback and dialogue about perspectives and ideas that were not included.

Reflection Questions

1. How does this feminist lens shape my understanding of the issues? How do political leaders and our country's policies measure up? What areas are non-negotiable for me?
2. What issues affect people in my community? Where do I find my own life experience in the platform?
3. What challenges me? How can I further reflect upon and sort through these challenges? Does something in me need to change?
4. How am I being called to engage in action on these issues?

¹ On Heaven and Earth, Sudamericana, 2011

Started by black women, two of whom identify as queer, the #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) movement has become the platform upon which the national outcry for justice stands. Initially a response to the Trayvon Martin murder, #BLM now situates itself at the epicenter of the call for racial justice. Activists, scholars, and artists have adopted the platform both nationally and globally. Key figures within the movement have positioned the issue of black lives and racial justice at the center of the presidential campaign. The focus has been mainly on the issue of police brutality toward communities of color, but is this where racial justice begins and ends? With the policing of black bodies?

An alternate perspective on the issue of racial justice, through an intersectional lens, illustrates the complexity of racial injustice.

Alexander Weheliye, professor of African American Studies at Northwestern University, speaks of race in these terms: "Overall, I construe race, racialization, and racial identities as ongoing sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west."¹ Integral to the notion of race or racialization or racial justice is the question of humanity.

To establish racial justice, we must take the time to understand the genocidal and dehumanizing implications of racial categorizations. Racial justice in turn is defined as "the proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all."² In order to achieve racial justice, one may first have to begin by interrogating the perpetual use of the word 'race'.

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Because the issues of race, racism, racialization, and racial justice pivot on the point of humanization, our political leaders must utilize the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to guide their policy drafting process, in pursuit of racial justice. As manifest through cultural and social institutions, the exclusion of nonwhite bodies, philosophies, psychologies, and perspectives has produced a cultural amnesia with regard to the nonwhite world. One way to traverse this divide is to transform the education system.

If policy makers created legislation that required racially diverse, balanced, and holistic curriculum to be taught in our schools, we may begin to address some of the cultural amnesia that fuels racism. For example, the notion that Black American History could be reduced to one month is absolutely absurd. Black identity is a fundamental component of American history. Further, relegating the focus on Black Americans to one month is a strategy of othering that unconsciously

1 Weheliye, 2014, p. 3

2 Citizens Uprooting Racism (CURB)

nurtures xenophobic attitudes, racial prejudice, and bias. In order to achieve racial justice, we must create policies, practices, and collective rituals that function to repair the moral and ethical fabric of our beings, and legislation that promotes the re-humanization of the collective.

Yet, policy alone cannot achieve racialized justice. Racism is a toxic mold that corrodes the conscience. Race in effect has erected a barrier of division within our collective and individual psyches. In order to create dialogue that begins to chip away at the internalized constructs of race,

“When women have the experience of both sexism and racism, they have unique and important understandings of what racial justice means and how it can be achieved.”

the representation of women who are not white must be greatly increased in both public and private sectors. When women have the experience of both sexism and racism, they have unique and important understandings of what racial justice means and how it can be achieved. Women must not be prevented from voicing their experience of the racism and sexism that is a reflection and result of historical oppression.

Article 26, section 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”³ As it stands, ontological weight remains situated in the west—Western thought, European philosophies—to the exclusion of all others. By creating policies to promote the inclusion of other ethnic groups, contributions, and perspectives, our policy makers could facilitate a process by which we administer education directed to the full development of individuals, cultivating a deep respect for human rights.

Racial justice cannot be achieved unless policy makers adopt what scholar and Black studies professor George Lipsitz calls a “love-driven politics”. When asked what he means by the phrase, he told a story of affluent free people of color who reached back to the south to build schools for poor whites in the early twentieth century. He spoke of Martin Luther King’s example of unconditional love. He championed the capacity to empathize with the “other” and repositioned this as the driving force in political discussion and negotiation. Empathy is the road back from dehumanization, and racial justice cannot be achieved without it.

Policy Recommendations

- The utilization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to guide policy drafting processes, rather than racist precedent.
- The passage of legislation which calls for racially diverse, balanced and holistic curriculum to be taught in schools.
- An end to the exclusion of non-white women in both public and private sectors: education, media, government, etc.
- Create a politics driven by love through increased dialogue around the pervasive injustices of the racism which was intentionally created to oppress and exploit non-white persons.

³ United Nations, 1948

As Director of Equal Opportunity Policy at Women Employed, I am well aware of the economic challenges that women face in the U.S. Women make up almost half of all workers in America, and they are the primary or co-breadwinners in two-thirds of families, but millions of women are still earning low wages and facing unfair working conditions. More needs to be done to address the barriers that prevent women from having a realistic chance for economic stability and advancement.

Congress should prioritize five policy issues that will help women as they continue to work towards economic justice: fair pay, pregnant workers fairness, paid sick leave, paid family and medical leave, and predictable scheduling.

Fair Pay: Fifty-two years after the Equal Pay Act became law, women today make only 79 cents for every dollar earned by men, and it's even worse for women of color. The Paycheck Fairness Act is needed to close this gap.

Most women are concentrated in jobs long thought of as “women’s work” – clerical, hospitality, health care, retail, food service, and housekeeping – occupations that are on the lowest end of the pay scale. The federal minimum wage is currently \$7.25 an hour. If it had kept pace with inflation it would be \$11 an hour today. The tipped subminimum wage, set at an abysmal \$2.13 at the federal level, should be eliminated. Women comprise two-thirds of all tipped workers, and the low subminimum wage forces them to depend on unstable, tip-based income. Servers and other tipped workers should not have to rely on the kindness of strangers in order to earn a living. The Raise the Wage Act would increase the minimum wage, index it to inflation, and phase out the tipped subminimum wage.

Pregnant Workers Fairness: Too many pregnant working women are pushed out of their jobs because employers refuse to provide temporary work accommodations that would allow them to continue working and maintain a healthy pregnancy. No woman should be forced to choose between a healthy pregnancy and providing for her family. The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act would ensure that no pregnant worker would be fired, forced into leave, or forced to quit because her employer refuses to provide her with a temporary job accommodation.

Paid Sick Leave: More than 70 percent of low-wage workers in the private sector do not have paid sick leave. Paid sick days enable workers to stay home when they or a family member are ill. Workers without paid sick time have two choices: come to work sick or stay home and miss a day’s pay, with the fear of being fired. Congress should pass the Healthy Families Act, which would entitle workers to earn at least seven, job-protected paid sick days a year.

Paid Family and Medical Leave: The U.S. is one of three countries that do not have a paid

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Economic Justice, continued

maternity leave policy. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) only applies to employers with 50 or more employees and provides only unpaid leave to care for a new child, for their own serious illness, or that of a family member. Since millions of Americans cannot afford to take unpaid leave, the family act would provide all workers with up to 12 weeks of partial income for medical leave.

Predictable Scheduling: Finally, women need stable scheduling. The same women who earn low wages in the retail, food service, and housekeeping industries are also vulnerable to unpredictable scheduling practices. Nearly 40 percent of retail workers report that they don't receive a set number

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of work hours each week, and a quarter are scheduled for on-call shifts. Irregular scheduling has an impact on family budgeting, caregiving, a second job, and the ability to pursue education. The Schedules that Work Act would provide income and scheduling stability for workers such as a right to request their schedule, advance notice of work schedules, and compensation if a worker is sent home early before working a scheduled shift or is on-call less than 24 hours before knowing if she will work.

Policymakers should focus on fair pay, and enabling women to fully participate in the U.S. economy by ensuring pregnancy fairness, paid sick time and family leave, and mandating fair scheduling practices.

These are the changes we need if women, families, and the American economy are to succeed.

Policy Recommendations

- Fair pay: End the racialized and "genderized" pay gap
- Pregnant Worker's Fairness Act: Protect pregnant workers
- Paid Sick Leave: Ensure every worker can be home sick and not lose wages
- Paid Family and Medical Leave Act: Ensure workers can take care of loved ones without risking losing pay or their job
- Predictable Scheduling: Allow workers a set schedule in every industry to ensure they can care for family, live within a reasonable budget, pursue an education, etc.

Environmental justice surfaced as environmental advocacy in the mid-seventies. By the 1980s faith denominations began writing about and calling for ethical and moral actions to address injustices faced by economically challenged communities of color who were disproportionately exposed to polluting industries. Environmental justice addresses connections between the well-being of earth and the human community with special focus upon those who are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation because of economics, race, gender, and age.

While Environmental Justice is most commonly used, Eco-Justice more aptly describes the relationship between the systemic problems facing individuals, communities, and the natural world. "Eco," whose roots rest in the Latin word *oikos*, refers to the household or home. *Oikos* implies taking care of the household, which is made up of a variety of relationships including people, creatures, eco-systems, economy, environment, food, water, air, and rules facilitating social, cultural, spiritual, and emotional well-being of all in the home, which is held in common.

Increased implications of global climate change add to the complexity of Eco-Justice. Humans and future generations cannot exist without recognizing their place as part of the natural world, and women and girls are impacted disproportionately by climate change. The majority of the poor are women, and the poor will be hit hardest by natural disaster. Women are also underrepresented in political processes which make decisions regarding environmental and climate issues.

The papal encyclical, *Laudato Si: On Care of Our Common Home*, lays out the ethical and moral implications of climate change and Eco-Justice. As Earth gasps for life, so do economically marginalized individuals, women, and children who experience lasting health and lifestyle effects of fossil fuel extraction. Implications of rising sea levels, increased heat waves, droughts, floods, storms, food insecurity, and an increase in violence. Women, children, and future generations are disproportionately affected. Life depends upon making the links between economic policy, trade, extractive industries, and energy, immigration, food and water security, war and peace, and climate change. Borrowing again from *Laudato Si*, what is needed is an "integral ecology"¹ as we address policy and laws.

"A new definition of progress must emerge. One not based upon the mythology of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) index, but one which considers the health and well-being of Earth, humans, and future generations."

A new definition of progress must emerge. One not based upon the mythology of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) index, but one which considers the health and well-being of Earth, humans, and future generations. Economic, social, cultural, and ecological concerns must all be addressed together.

1 From *Laudato Si*. Integral ecology means "everything is closely related". "today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis." "...today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis." "...we are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental." As a result, "Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature." In such an "economic ecology," the protection of the environment is then seen as "an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it."

Eco-Justice, continued

The voices and leadership of women are startlingly absent in making decisions, even though they are disproportionately affected most. Women's perspective, creativity, and on-the-ground wisdom are essential in surfacing real solutions and meaningful policy. At the UN COP21 (Conference of Parties 21) in Paris, it was a woman leader from Cartaret Islands who explained how they led their island people, who are the first climate change refugees, to a new home where they are now creating a viable future by planting trees for food and commerce. She said, "Women must not dwell in despair. They must lead."

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It was Bangladeshi women who explained their national plan to install solar panels in order to bypass fossil fuel energy and insure energy for the poorest households. It was the women of Durban South Africa, from the global south, who stated the importance of and the failures of the Paris agreement while emphasizing that "it is the best we can do at this time."

In the United States, at all levels of civil society, it is imperative for citizens to ask political leaders and those running for office, "What will you do to address climate change?" Various policy directions are essential, such as those demands listed below. What the United States does or does not do in addressing climate change has immediate implications for the entire world.

Policy Recommendations

- End neo-liberal capitalist policies which deregulate the market and allow corporations to ignore or circumvent environmental standards.
- Prevent super PACs and corporate funding of political campaigns and policies which allow corporations to do vast environmental damage.
- Reduce carbon emissions to reach the 2-1.5 degree temperature goal set in Paris.
- Keep fossil fuels in the ground.
- Increase funding for the Green Climate Fund to implement adaptation and mitigation efforts.
- Highlight real effects of fossil fuels and extractive industries.
- Promote food sovereignty.
- Increase representation of women among international decision-makers addressing climate change and its impact on women and other marginalized individuals.

"I do not believe that just because you're opposed to abortion that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed. And why would I think that you don't? Because you don't want any tax money to go there. That's not pro-life. That's pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is." Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB

Context

Women's bodies are often at the center of contentious politics in the United States. Whether the debate is focused on health insurance covering mammograms or employers covering contraception – women and their bodies seem to spark some of the most polarizing political moments in the country. This debate has socially conservative threads that overlap with religious teachings.

With all of the rigorous debate, one would hope that the United States would have developed robust policies ensuring women's safety, health, and dignity.

However, the statistics on women tell a different story:

- An average of three women die every day from intimate partner violence (National Organization for Women).
- 232,960 women were sexually assaulted in 2015 or an average of 600 every other day (National Crime Victimization Survey).
- African American Women earn 63% of what a white male earns; Latina Women – 54%, Indigenous Women – 59%; White Women – 79% (American Association of University Women (AAUW)).
- More than 18 million women live in poverty; women are primary breadwinners in more than 40% of households (AAUW).
- Women who cannot choose when to start a family are three times more likely to fall into poverty (*The Nation*).
- Families can expect to spend \$66,000 out-of-pocket on childcare between three months and six years of age – an average of \$11,000 a year (*The Nation*).

"Women in the United States face significant barriers in multiple areas of their lives and yet, almost every election cycle reduces concerns for women down to access to reproductive health services."

Women in the United States face significant barriers in multiple areas of their lives and yet, almost every election cycle reduces concerns for women down to access to reproductive health services. This is not by accident; access to reproductive health services serves as the fulcrum on which the rest of women's issues rest. In light of this, it is important to examine reproductive health as reproductive justice.

Reproductive Justice

Reproductive Justice sits at the center of wellbeing for women and girls. We cannot support women and girls having access to education, work, political office, environments free of violence, and equal

Reproductive Justice, continued

space culturally and socially to develop and thrive without supporting women's and girl's rights to reproductive justice.

- Birth control accounts for an 86% decrease in teen pregnancy (*The Nation*).
- Family planning services available through Medicaid and Title X of the U.S. Public Health Service Act help women prevent 2.2 million unintended pregnancies each year. Without these family planning services, the numbers of unintended pregnancies and abortions would be nearly two-thirds higher than they are now (Planned Parenthood).
- Women have saved \$1.4 billion in out-of-pocket costs by having the Affordable Healthcare Act cover birth control. Women without adequate or affordable healthcare are six times more likely to have unintended pregnancies (Planned Parenthood, *The Nation*).

"The statistics are clear; women and girls cannot have equality without the ability to choose when they have children during the typical three decades of fertility in a woman's life."

- The number of women who complete college is six times higher than before birth control was available (Planned Parenthood).

The statistics are clear; women and girls cannot have equality without the ability to choose when they have children during the typical three decades of fertility in a woman's life. Women and girls will not be free of physical or sexual violence as long as the culture and institutions of

power legitimize positions that argue women's and girl's bodies are different under the law than a man's body. Women and girls will be denied equality as long as advocacy normalizes the burden of child bearing as uniquely female and simultaneously denies them voice/position/power in the process.

Religious Advocacy and Policy

As a nation we are not only in a debate about morality and policy, we are also in a debate about power. The rhetoric and polarization around women's reproductive justice is so intense because power is the central issue. Religious teachings and traditions about birth control and abortion are important teachings for those who hold them. In a pluralistic society, however, they cannot be seen as normative.

A 2012 research study by the Pew Center found:

"Efforts by religious groups to influence U.S. public policy are a multimillion-dollar endeavor, with combined annual expenditures conservatively estimated at more than \$350 million. On the domestic front, the most commonly addressed issues are the relationship between church and state, the defense of civil rights and liberties for religious and other minorities, bioethics and life issues (such as abortion, capital punishment, and end-of-life issues), and family/marriage issues (such as the definition of marriage, domestic violence, and fatherhood initiatives)."¹

¹ Pew Research Center, *Lobbying for the Faithful*

\$350 million were spent and not one dollar went toward advocating for what is needed to raise a child: affordable child care, affordable health care, quality public schools, a living wage, robust public transportation systems, and investment in public commons like parks and libraries. \$350 million spent and not one dollar went to advocating that women have safe, private, affordable access to birth control which reduces the likelihood of an unintended pregnancy and therefore the need to terminate a pregnancy. The 14% of American women who do not use contraception account for 52% of unintended pregnancies. The 68% who use contraception regularly account for 5% of unintended pregnancies.²

This is not new math or news. And yet we continue to have our sexual and familial ethics and policies reduced to limiting marriage to a man and woman, limiting access to reproductive services, and limiting debate by punishing faithful members who publicly question religious teachings. Gina Messina Dysert writes, “In a time of turmoil and threat to the progression of our nation, there is greater concern for regulating women’s bodies than guns.” The time has come to stop spending \$350 million to advocate for what women should not do or have and instead focus on what women, their partners, and children need.

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Policy Recommendations

All policy recommendations are based in the understanding that race and gender intersect; outcomes and needs may look different in different communities.

- Transparent dialogue between faith leaders and the communities impacted by their political advocacy.
- Affordable child care and quality public schools for all communities.
- Affordable comprehensive health services that ensure privacy and provide complete coverage – including reproductive health services – that is not dependent on an employer’s religious beliefs. This needs to include the needs of trans and queer communities.
- Affordable housing in communities that can support all aspects of family life (strong public schools, green areas, public libraries, public transportation, etc.).
- Close the racialized and genderized wage gap.
- Comprehensive policy and programming that address the physical and sexual violence women/girls/trans/queer people face.

² Guttmacher Institute

Gender-Based Violence

Sharmili Majmudar

Gender-based violence includes, but is not limited to, rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, stalking, dating violence, sexual exploitation and harassment on the street and online. A global issue, gender-based violence is a human rights violation, a public health epidemic, and a barrier to civic, social, political, and economic participation.

An estimated one in three women worldwide has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming people significantly limits freedom and dignity. Gender-based violence should be understood as not only a legal transgression, but an ethical violation. Its impact ripples far beyond the individual victim/survivor, through families, communities, and our society at large. While the criminal justice system has been invested in as the avenue for remedies, there has been a growing movement that critiques the criminal justice system's treatment of victims/survivors and links racial justice with gender justice.

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Policies to address gender-based violence should

- increase awareness of the scope of the problem and its impact;
- improve services for survivors of violence, ensuring access to a full range of options for justice and healing;
- strengthen prevention efforts;
- and hold those who commit gender based violence accountable.

Several policy priorities can help as we work towards a more compassionate, safe, and just society for all.

Sexual Assault Survivors' Rights Act: Survivors of sexual violence across the country have found the legal system difficult to navigate. This bill, currently in the Senate, focuses on increasing the protections for victims of sexual assault by articulating a clear and specific set of rights to ensure that they are treated fairly, consistently, and effectively, regardless of county or state of residence.

Safe Educational Environments: Thanks to the ongoing work of survivors and the high profile of the documentary *The Hunting Ground*, Title IX and its enforcement have largely been discussed as an issue on college campuses – 167 higher education institutions are currently under investigation for Title IX violations. However, public education institutions including elementary and secondary schools are subject to Title IX – and too few of these institutions have ensured that they have policies and practices compliant with the federal law. No student should have to endure gender-based violations interfering with their education. Title IX enforcement must extend to elementary and secondary schools.

Economic Justice: Lack of employment and financial security are frequently cited by victims of domestic violence as major barriers to leaving abusive relationships – and abusive partners often

use control of financial resources as a way to control the victim. Addressing gender-based wage discrimination and pay inequality helps victims become economically independent and exercise choices that lead to freedom from violence.

Gender Bias in Policing: New guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) announced by Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch is designed to help law enforcement agencies prevent gender bias in their response to sexual assault and domestic violence. The DOJ guidance advises law enforcement agencies to incorporate eight principles into clear policies, robust training, and responsive accountability systems. This guidance was requested by 88 national groups and 98 state and local groups including Rape Victims Advocates. Gender bias can lead to the re-traumatization of survivors, and is a significant factor in survivor's decision-making on whether to report their assault to police. Consistently unbiased police responses to domestic violence and sexual assault are essential to creating a criminal justice system that is fair and effective for everyone.

Eliminating the Rape Kit Backlog: Survivors of sexual violence undergo the invasive and often re-traumatizing evidence collection process, also known as the rape kit, in good faith, believing that the evidence will be prioritized and processed in a timely manner. The current backlog – whether due to law enforcement not submitting kits for testing or due to inadequate testing resources leaving kits waiting over a year to be processed – is a fundamental betrayal of the trust of victims/survivors, and the public. The DOJ guidelines for rape kit backlog funding must be improved by a) standardizing the definition of “rape kit backlog” to include both untested kits at a crime lab and those stored in law enforcement facilities and b) require that funds are only used for the testing of rape kits and lab improvements directly related to rape kit testing. The SAFER Act required the DOJ to establish best practice guidelines, but progress has not been made; the DOJ must proceed with research on best practices and develops guidelines, as required by the SAFER Act.

Policy Recommendations

- Sexual Assault Survivors' Rights Act: increase the protections for victims of sexual assault.
- Safe Educational Environments: No student should have to endure gender-based violations interfering with their education. Title IX enforcement must extend to elementary and secondary schools.
- Economic Justice: Addressing gender-based wage discrimination and pay inequality helps victims become economically independent and exercise choices that lead to freedom from violence.
- Gender Bias in Policing: The DOJ guidance advises law enforcement agencies to incorporate eight gender principles into clear policies, robust training, and responsive accountability systems to prevent gender bias in policing.
- Eliminating the Rape Kit Backlog: The Department of Justice guidelines for rape kit backlog funding must be improved by a) standardizing the definition of “rape kit backlog” to include both untested kits at a crime lab and those stored in law enforcement facilities and b) require that funds are only used for the testing of rape kits and lab improvements directly related to rape kit testing.
- SAFER Act: required the DOJ to establish best practice guidelines, but progress has not been made. The DOJ must proceed with research on best practices and develop guidelines, as required by the SAFER Act.

A feminist platform on peace and security must challenge the current hyper-militarized view of security, driven by systemic racism and inequality, which has been used to justify murder and wide-scale repression of human rights by governments at all levels of human society. This alternative vision might start from what individuals, communities, nations, and our globe need to thrive together, rather than one that starts with what we need to protect.

A feminist framework centers the voices and needs of women, while being mindful of the larger structures of violence that shape the world we live in, and recognizes that gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism.¹

At the personal level, the costs of the current hyper-militarized approach to security include increasing isolation, fear, and family violence. In our communities, this securitized approach forms the basis for massive structural racism in our criminal justice systems, economic segregation, disinvestment in black and brown communities, and investment in policing and punishment. At

“A healthy community is built on high levels of trust and mutual understanding, adequate resources to meet basic needs, and healthy institutions that equally benefit all.”

the national level, this approach has led to generations of policies that oppress and destroy entire cultures and countries in the name of self-defense, and budget priorities that give far more of our shared resources to the Department of Defense instead of schools, health care, or environmental protection. Globally our focus on “security” means that our options for addressing global problems are nearly always militarist.

Our challenge is to promote non-military alternatives that start with the proposition that true, sustainable peace and security inherently addresses the needs and rights of all people. Sustainable wellbeing of individuals, communities, and nations cannot be brought about by force. A healthy community is built on high levels of trust and mutual understanding, adequate resources to meet basic needs, and healthy institutions that equally benefit all.²

Twenty-five years after the Gulf War, the U.S. is still bombing Iraq, and a devastating war in Syria further destabilizes the region. As the U.S. continued its intervention and fueled violence by transferring billions of dollars in weapons to the region, millions of people who were harmed and displaced by the fighting were left without support and help.

This seemingly endless cycle of war has been sold to the American public by demonizing the other and exaggerating threats to stoke fear. We’ve been led to believe that the only rational response to irrational and dangerous opponents is the use of overwhelming military force. What was once unacceptable is becoming acceptable. Secret prisons, tortured detainees, assassinations, targeted killing with drones, hundreds of millions of dollars wasted on weapons systems, and disinvestment

¹ <http://www.incite-national.org/page/dangerous-intersections>

² <https://sharedsecurity.wordpress.com/>

in diplomacy and communities here at home.

Instances of police violence reveal the underlying relationship between marginalized communities and the state. In the face of violence at home, local police departments receive bloated budgets to patrol poor neighborhoods, which are often communities of color, with increasingly militarized weaponry that comes at the expense of vital community services.

“The United States is the world’s leader in incarceration with 2.2 million people currently in the nation’s prisons or jails -- a 500% increase over the past thirty years.”³

“The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a system situated at the intersection of government and private interests. It uses prisons as a solution to social, political and economic problems. It includes human rights violations, the death penalty, slave labor, policing, courts, the media, political prisoners and the elimination of dissent.”⁴

The PIC is an industry with little to no transparency; the lack of transparency hides the lived experience of over 2 million lives. Those who have been incarcerated need to be the first to speak on the issue. Some of their voices are here:

Dionne: “We worked for \$15.00 a month in the State system. Most of us women needed that to buy “personals” from the commissary. Today people on the outside are fighting for a JUST wage of \$15.00 an hour...”

Patsy: “I was pregnant when I went to prison, and during my pregnancy, I was never given enough food or any extra – I had to buy it from the commissary. I was shackled in the hospital during labor until delivery; with a prison guard present; and was only with my baby half a day until a family member took her. I returned to prison the next day to school and chores immediately. Not even time to heal! No one helped me, but God...”

LaVetta: “Our needs were continuously ignored by the prison officers. Their needs were taken care of by their constant harassment and buying sexual favors by putting money on the women’s books in commissary. Most of the women were too scared to report it.”

Kim: “The clear expectation was that we were all the same; those who caused no trouble were treated no differently than those who tested limits, broke rules, or had disrespectful behavior. There was no allowance made for trying to achieve a better place spiritually, emotionally or in any form. Perhaps this is why so many women disregarded the process of trying to become better. We were all considered bad, hopeless, criminals.”

“What was once unacceptable is becoming acceptable. Secret prisons, tortured detainees, assassinations, targeted killing with drones, hundreds of millions of dollars wasted on weapons systems, and disinvestment in diplomacy and communities here at home.”

³ The Sentencing Project

⁴ Prison Culture: How the PIC Structure our World, Blog

Peace and Security, continued

Testimony from the Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project, Stateville Prison

Joseph Dole: "I was given indeterminate disciplinary segregation [solitary confinement] after being found guilty of my sole disciplinary infraction. That was 8 years ago, yet here I remain. I've been told (on more than one occasion) that I will never be allowed out of indeterminate disciplinary

"The conditions that allow violence to occur must be transformed in order to achieve justice in individual instances of violence. Therefore, Transformative Justice is both a liberating politic and an approach for securing justice."

segregation. So I will continue to endure conditions for the rest of my life which are known to cause mental illness after just 3 months... it means that I will never have physical contact with another human being for the rest of my life, including my 11 and 12 year-old daughters... Voters are not immune from blame. They elect both the legislators and judges in Illinois. They help feed a vicious cycle where they only elect tough-on-crime spewing, fear-mongering officials, so the next people running for office get elected by those claiming to be tougher on crime and prey on their fears even more."

Ricky Patterson: "As the crowds of protesters, rioters, and looters, poured into the streets after Mr. Gray's funeral service they mourned for opportunities and broken promises, yet deliberately fight for hope.

So, excuse me if I smirk as the authorities retreat with broken shields from the youth they usually target or prey on. Policing for profit has become the new Blackcodes of the 21st-century. I stress policing for profit as cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago have been found liable for violating the constitutional rights of Black citizens."

Rayon Sampson: "There are changes that need to be made. The idea of correcting and rehabilitating inmates has been lost in the politicking of conflicting interest groups. Throughout my incarceration, I have noticed a recurring phenomenon. I have seen many long-term offenders, including myself, take the initiative to rehabilitate ourselves. Despite many odds, we strive to educate and better ourselves, mentally and spiritually. Even with all these efforts, many of us feel that we have no voice in this world. Many of us feel we are not truly living, just barely existing."

Transformative Justice 101

by Generation Five

- Individual justice and collective liberation are equally important, mutually supportive, and fundamentally intertwined—the achievement of one is impossible without the achievement of the other.
- The conditions that allow violence to occur must be transformed in order to achieve justice in individual instances of violence. Therefore, Transformative Justice is both a liberating politic and an approach for securing justice.
- State and systemic responses to violence, including the criminal legal system and child welfare agencies, not only fail to advance individual and collective justice but also condone and perpetuate cycles of violence.
- Transformative Justice seeks to provide people who experience violence with immediate safety and long-term healing and reparations while holding people who commit violence accountable within and by their communities.

Foreign Policy Recommendations

by American Friends Service Committee

- Remove US military forces from Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Support a comprehensive arms embargo, including stopping the flow of weapons from countries neighboring Syria and Iraq.
- Halt training and technical assistance to all armed groups involved in the conflict.
- Call on international and regional powers to organize multilateral negotiations to achieve a ceasefire and end the conflict.
- Increase the number of refugees resettled in the U.S. in 2016-2017 to 200,000, with 100,000 spaces reserved for Syrian refugees.
- Increase humanitarian assistance, particularly to host countries neighboring Syria.

Domestic Policy Recommendations

by American Friends Service Committee

- Divestment from local, state, and federal policing and prisons and investment of those dollars and resources in marginalized communities, including healthcare, social services, public schools, and sustainable economic projects.
- Divest and eliminate profit from punishment. End all fines for minor crimes and misdemeanors, and eliminate administrative fees for probationers and parolees.
- Remove employment and voting barriers for former prisoners. For example, the Ban the Box campaign works to persuade employers to remove criminal history questions from their employment applications.
- Put an end to gender disparity in sentencing. (Often women receive an assault charge for intimate partner violence, which carries a longer sentence than domestic violence, the charge usually given to men for the same crime.)
- Encourage local, state, and federal legislators to shift to a transformative justice framework in creating a vision for rehabilitation, including alternatives to prison.

Political Participation

Rose Mary Meyer, BVM

Merriam-Webster chose the suffix "ism" as word of the year in 2015. Influencing this decision was the amount of traffic on websites including terrorism, slacktivism, sexism, racism, and capitalism. The reality of these "isms" impacts our lives.

Participation in social movements such as anti-poverty, suffragettes, civil rights, peacemaking, climate change, anti-trafficking, immigration/refugee issues, gender equity, LGBTQ issues, and racial justice can serve as antidotes to the "isms".

Grassroots participation in politics, in particular the involvement of folks most impacted by the "isms" is needed now more than ever and yet faces mounting challenges. As Pope Francis states:

"If politics must truly be at the service of the human person, it follows that it cannot be a slave to the economy and finance. Politics is, instead, an expression of our compelling need to live as one, in order to build as one the greatest common good: that of a community which sacrifices particular interests in order to share, in justice and peace, its goods, its interests, its social life."¹

"Why has economic and political power become concentrated in a few rather than the many?"

Why has economic and political power become concentrated in a few rather than the many? For example, as of early December 2015, \$176 million had been contributed to Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. This amount came from 158 families and the companies they own or control. Robert B. Reich notes: "As income and wealth have concentrated at the top, political power has moved there as well. Money and power are inextricably linked."²

The prophet Isaiah challenges us. "Look, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth; can't you see it? I'm ... setting rivers to flow in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:19). Isaiah calls us to engaging questions which lead to provocative insights, rather than a penchant for permanence of the status quo.

As grassroots folks attempt to change the "wasteland" many questions arise: How does history frame this election? Who has power in this election? What needs to be changed? Political structures already in place? Attitudes of voters? Voter preparation? Do we listen for the innuendos in candidate forums or other venues in which the candidates participate? Do we access the candidates' websites to study their position papers?

Political participation has led to changes like: extending registration time for voting, not allowing photo IDs as a voting requirement, increasing TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), providing IDs for people who are homeless, including sexual orientation in the Illinois Human Rights Act regarding freedom from unlawful discrimination, passing anti-trafficking laws, working toward

¹ Pope Francis, Address to a joint session of the United States Congress, 2015

² Robert B. Reich, *Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few*

ending the privatization of prisons, issuing TVDLs (Temporary Visitor Drivers Licenses), abolishing the death penalty. In spite of overlapping systems of oppression, changes occur when we act together for justice.

We need to create spaces for seeing, hearing, pondering, feeling in order to be rooted and grow in hope and trust, in creativity and transformation, in wonder and possibilities. We need to participate in transforming the local and global injustices that we encounter and ensure that the folks most impacted by “isms” are centered in the work. Political participation ensures a strong civil society which, in turn, provides a multiplicity of voices to hold politics and politicians accountable. No amount of money or power should erase the voice of the communities who are impacted by the consequences of the policies and laws passed in their name.

“Political participation ensures a strong civil society which, in turn, provides a multiplicity of voices to hold politics and politicians accountable.”

Policy Recommendations

- Overturn Citizens United and pass comprehensive campaign finance reform to ensure elections are not “bought” and that money is not a barrier to participating in electoral politics
- Support spaces and resources that strengthen civic society’s ability to have voice in policy and politics
- Work to dismantle structural injustices that prevent diverse participation in elected offices
- Remove voting barriers to ensure broad-based participation

LGBTQ Inclusivity and Equality

Lydia Gajdel

Lesbian: A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

Gay: A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

Bisexual: A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Queer: A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations.¹

"The LGBTQ experience is made up of varying genders, sexual orientations, races, religions, and many other identifiers, but what brings this group together is the common oppression that is faced based on sex, gender, or sexual orientation."

The LGBTQ population is a highly diverse, highly discriminated against segment of society. Although many see this group as homogenous, the reality of the diversity of LGBTQ people is profoundly heard in the need for overarching protective legislation. The LGBTQ experience is made up of varying genders, sexual orientations, races, religions, and many other identifiers, but what brings this group together is the common oppression that is faced based on sex, gender, or sexual orientation. Legislation is necessary to allow for the protection and thriving of the LGBTQ community in the following areas: broad-based nondiscrimination policies, violence and hate crimes, housing, health, and education.

Broad-Based Nondiscrimination Policies: Protections against discrimination are granted on a state-by-state basis in the United States. That means that LGBTQ persons have varying levels of protection for their employment, housing, and other basic rights based on the state in which they live. Currently, nondiscrimination acts are being struck down across the U.S. in favor of bills that provide for religious freedoms. (See Indiana and West Virginia.) The United States is in need of a federal LGBTQ Nondiscrimination Act in order to protect based on sexual orientation and gender/sexual identity.

Violence and Hate Crimes: Violence within the LGBTQ community is an ever-present threat. Transgender women of color in the United States have a life expectancy of 35 years. In 2015, over 30 transgender women were killed in the U.S. alone. Over 20% of hate crimes in 2014 were based on sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity. Violence against the LGBTQ community is a continual threat that must be taken seriously from a legislative standpoint in order to put an end to it. This means legislating the recognition of certain crimes against the LGBTQ community as hate crimes and enforcing strict punishments for all convicted.²

¹ <http://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>

² <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2015/november/latest-hate-crime-statistics-available/latest-hate-crime-statistics-available>

Housing: In the United States over 25,000 youth are homeless. Of that 25,000, roughly 40% identify as LGBTQ, which is highly disproportionate to the roughly 5% of total American youth who identify as LGBTQ. Many young people are forced out of their homes upon revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity to their guardians and are met with few resources to provide for themselves in that time of crisis. Along with safe and stable housing, homeless LGBTQ youth are in need of educational, employment, and mental health services, along with a myriad of other supports. Legislation to fund and implement programming to support LGBTQ youth is vital for the current flourishing of youth and the economic and social prosperity of the future.³

Healthcare: LGBTQ people face unique and difficult challenges as they navigate the U.S. healthcare system. Many of these challenges come from the erasure of the LGBTQ experience from mainstream healthcare. A renewed focus on the specific needs of this community would include access to mental health care services, HIV education and prevention, and support for transgender individuals.

Education: Education is vital to one's success in the United States, but is often difficult to navigate as an LGBTQ child or young adult. Most LGBTQ youth have experienced some form of bullying or harassment in schools, including verbal and physical violence, based on their gender presentation or sexual orientation. Gender inclusion is also a problem within schools when it comes to transitioning transgender students, inclusive restrooms and non-gendered spaces, and housing accommodations at the college level. Additionally, there are currently religious educational institutions that are filing Title IX exemptions in order to legally discriminate against LGBTQ students. The safety and inclusion of LGBTQ students must be taken into account in all educational legislation to ensure that education is accessible for all students in the United States.

“Legislation and policy making must account for the equal rights of all Americans, no matter the gender identity or sexual orientation.”

In conclusion, the LGBTQ population is as diverse and pervasive as its needs. Legislation and policy making must account for the equal rights of all Americans, no matter the gender identity or sexual orientation. In particular, attention must be paid to broad-based nondiscrimination policies, violence and hate crimes, housing, health, and education. In order to be successful as a whole, we must take care to provide for the needs of each individual, especially within the LGBTQ community.

Policy Recommendations

- A federal LGBTQ Nondiscrimination Act.
- Legislation that recognizes certain crimes against the LGBTQ community as hate crimes.
- Legislation to fund and implement programming to support housing services for LGBTQ youth.
- Renewed focus on the specific healthcare needs of the LGBTQ community.
- Education legislation that ensures the safety and inclusion of LGBTQ students.

³ <http://projectfiercechicago.org/problem-statement/>

I was born in 1982, at the height of the 36-year armed conflict in Guatemala. The conflict left over 200,000 dead, over 45,000 disappeared, over 440 massacres of indigenous communities, and over one-and-a-half million internally displaced persons and refugees. What is particularly important to understand about the context I was born under is that from March of 1982 until August of 1983, about 80% of all the human rights violations committed during the entire conflict would take place within this period of just 18 months under the military dictatorship of General Efraín Ríos Montt, a graduate of the U.S. Army School of the Americas (now the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). It was also during this period that my father, Jorge Alberto Rosal Paz y Paz, was disappeared, on August 12, 1983. After almost two years of an unrelenting search – in jails, hospitals, military bases, morgues, and digging up unmarked graves – my mother began receiving death threats by the G2, which was the military intelligence apparatus. While my mother wanted

“Today, the northern triangle countries of Central America are among the most dangerous countries in the world. In Guatemala alone, it is said that more people have died since the formal end of the armed conflict in 1996, than during the entire conflict itself.”

to remain in Guatemala in order to continue searching for my father alongside other women – sisters, mothers, and wives – in GAM (Mutual Support Group for families of the disappeared) in 1984, we abandoned Guatemala on May 4, 1985 and fled to the U.S., where we have resided ever since.

Despite the personal and lasting impact my father’s disappearance has had on my family, our experience mirrors many other cases during this period. In fact, our story is not unique to just Guatemala – the state practice of disappearances was implemented under the National Security Doctrine throughout all of Latin America as early as the 1960s. What is unique about our case is that it received a great deal of international attention, as my father’s case was well-documented and my mother petitioned the case of my father’s disappearance

before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR). Having demonstrated that my mother had exhausted all internal remedies, my father’s case was accepted almost immediately before the IACHR, where it remains to this day. It is also a case that has been documented by the UN-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission Report Guatemala, Memory of Silence, published in 1999. My father is still disappeared and we are still searching for justice.

The vast majority of Guatemalan refugees that fled to the U.S. were escaping the political violence, much like what is happening today. Most of the Guatemalan diaspora resides in the U.S., and we make up about 12% of the total Guatemalan population. This did not happen overnight, or by accident – our plight has been shaped in large part by intentional and harmful U.S. policies over the past 70 years. It is impossible for me to see what is happening now and not see the glaring parallels between what was happening in the 1980s. The current context has only been exacerbated by the U.S. Drug War policies that have turned Mexico into a mass grave for Mexican nationals and Central American migrants alike. Today, the northern triangle countries of Central America are among the most dangerous countries in the world. In Guatemala alone, it is said that more people have died since the formal end of the armed conflict in 1996, than during the entire conflict itself.

In neighboring Mexico, it is said that one person disappears every two hours, making Mexico the country with one of the highest numbers of disappeared persons the world has ever seen.

Less than two percent of Central American refugees received asylum in the U.S. during the 1980s due to racism and geopolitical considerations. My family was among that two percent, though our asylum case, submitted in June 1986, was marred with many obstacles, including its denial in October of that same year at the request of the U.S. State Department, as well as a deportation order despite establishing a well-founded fear of persecution.

Today, the current outlook for refugees seeking asylum is much more grim. Understanding the political context of the U.S. in the 1980s, I can say my family was simply lucky. We had support from the sanctuary movement, the broader Latin America solidarity movement, and a tenacious pro-bono immigration attorney, and we never had to fight our case from inside an immigrant detention center, as is too-often the case today. The system has become much more cynical and nefarious. Instead of allowing for due process and hearing petitions for asylum, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is carrying out violent raids that you did not see in the 1980s, to capture and deport refugees that are escaping the violence that the U.S. is propagating.

As a survivor and refugee, it is deeply troubling and infuriating that we continue to see thousands upon thousands of Central Americans fleeing their home countries as a result of U.S. intervention in the region. For Guatemala, the further militarization of the country is a direct violation of the Peace Accords. Twenty years after one of the longest conflicts in the region, Guatemala has not been able to address the root causes of the conflict. In fact, the underlying causes are still present, and have only been exacerbated by aggressive neoliberal economic policies, weak government institutions, impunity in past and present cases before the justice system, and the current war on drugs. Today, human rights defenders continue to be targets, communities who struggle to defend their land from mining and mega-development projects like hydroelectric dams are criminalized and are now political prisoners, and impunity continues to be the order of the day. Under this context, it should come as no surprise that migration to the U.S. is stronger than ever.

“As a survivor and refugee, it is deeply troubling and infuriating that we continue to see thousands upon thousands of Central Americans fleeing their home countries as a result of U.S. intervention in the region.”

Under the current proposed Alliance for Prosperity, the U.S. “solution” to the unaccompanied minors crisis we saw at the U.S./Mexico border in the summer of 2014, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras are to receive \$750 million to strengthen security, which means nothing more than the further militarization of these countries, including border security that mirrors the low-intensity warfare that is seen at the U.S./Mexico border. Important to note is that in the mainstream media, border security is praised, as overall numbers of border crossings to the U.S. have decreased. Two important points the media fail to mention are that deaths of migrants crossing have gone up, and Mexico now deports more Central Americans than the U.S. does – paid for by U.S. tax dollars.

Ultimately, we are talking about the right to migrate and the right to not migrate, which all humans

Migration, continued

have. Furthermore, all migrants have fundamental human rights that must be protected regardless of status. Despite this reality, the truth is that in the U.S., migrants are not only criminalized by the courts and state laws; they are dehumanized and have become targets of dangerous xenophobic discourse – by politicians. Some advice for the U.S.: If U.S. security policy is not delinked from a just immigration policy, we will continue to see human rights violations being committed by the

“...the truth is that in the U.S., migrants are not only criminalized by the courts and state laws; they are dehumanized and have become targets of dangerous xenophobic discourse – by politicians.”

U.S. at both a foreign and domestic policy levels. As long the U.S. continues to implement racist and imperialist policies, we can expect to see an exodus of men, women, and children fleeing to the U.S. It is unconscionable that the U.S. response to its own foreign policy disaster is to punish those who are trying to survive, yet this is what is happening, and it must stop.

Policy Recommendations

- Enact foreign policy that uses human rights as its framework instead of the imperialist ideologies that serve as the foundation for our current trade, migration, and military policies.
- No longer link security and migration policies to one another.
- Decriminalize those who are undocumented.
- Support universal human rights for migrants.

Role of Religion in Politics

8th Day Center for Justice finds political involvement essential to living out our faith-based mission of social justice; that was the driving force behind the creation of this Feminist Platform. We asked feminist theologian Mary E. Hunt to reflect on the implications of religion in politics and the importance of faith-based groups becoming politically involved.

Religion plays a surprisingly complex role in contemporary U.S. politics. That role is made all the more complicated by the many ways religions are being reshaped and improved by challenges to their exclusivist origins, especially their historical reliance on male gender superiority and white racism. For centuries religion has and continues to be used as a justification for exclusion and power-over rather than a means for achieving dignity and inclusion.

The Pope Francis phenomenon, the shrinking power of evangelicals, the rise of 'nones,' and the epidemic of Islamophobia are the most reported-on religious aspects of American culture. But many other subtle yet powerful religious dimensions are shaping the cultural landscape. There is a growing consensus that gender, racial, economic, sexual, national, and other forms of equality are consistent with and reflective of many religious principles.

"There is a growing consensus that gender, racial, economic, sexual, national, and other forms of equality are consistent with and reflective of many religious principles."

Religious understandings of sex and gender are shaping forces in American political and civil life. Feminist work in religion provides an important foundation and blueprint. If the divine is no longer envisioned exclusively as male, if religious leaders are no longer only straight white men, and if theo-ethical reflection is no longer the right of a few but the responsibility of many, then the sky is the limit for how religious imaginations can shape a just and inclusive society.

One religious innovation is the changing face of who represents a denomination or tradition at the national level. For example, in the struggle to provide affordable health care to millions of uninsured Americans, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops opposed the plan that President Barack Obama proposed. NETWORK, a Catholic social justice lobby, in concert with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and some of the leaders of the Catholic Health Association, favored it. These women-led groups prevailed and were seen by the Obama Administration and many others as the public face of Roman Catholicism. It was a new day.

Another welcome change is the rise of progressive interreligious coalitions that deal with issues like the environment (National Religious Partnership for the Environment) and reproductive justice (Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice). Made up of Christians, Jews, Muslims, and many others, these groups prove that spiritually committed people can reach beyond their own communities to find common cause on political and social matters. One reason they can be so expansive, especially when some of their root organizations are not, is because they have learned to diversify their leadership and reshape their structures resultant of feminist challenges.

Religion in Politics, continued

The relatively rapid advance in marriage equality, culminated by the 2015 Supreme Court decision, owes a great deal to the work of religious people who researched, taught, and organized in their own communities as well as in coalitions (National Religious Leadership Roundtable). Their work to explain the deep anthropological and religious roots of homophobia, heterosexism, and now

"Atheists, agnostics, and others who define as "none of the above" play crucial roles, proving that religion is but one source of inspiration. These citizens shape the culture in profound secular ways that religious people do well to notice and appreciate."

transphobia, paved the way for marriage equality and other advances in sexual social justice. Again, the feminist concepts were key to building new religious understandings.

As the percentage of people in the U.S. who define themselves as religious declines, it is notable that many social change movements have no explicit religious connections. Groups like Greenpeace, Planned Parenthood, and MoveOn.org, to name just a few, make no reference to religion and still get the job done. Online social change work requires no confession, just a willingness to participate, donate, and spread the word.

Atheists, agnostics, and others who define as "none of the above" play crucial roles, proving that religion is but one source of inspiration. These citizens shape the culture in profound secular ways that religious people do well to notice and appreciate. To effect true change, it is essential for faith-based coalitions to be in dialogue with secular groups so social change can be as inclusive a process as possible.

So let it be in 2016 and beyond.

Conclusion

8th Day Center for Justice's Women in Church and Society Committee is indebted to each of the writers who contributed so graciously their time, experience, and expertise addressing the political themes included in this Feminist Platform. Each topic offers a wealth of insight and truth-telling for personal reflection that is holy ground for future dialogue opportunities with family and friends. Thank you for tilling the soil of analysis for our readers.

The Feminist Platform endeavors to demonstrate the ways in which the many social problems of our day are further complicated by the coexistence of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Paying attention to the intersectionality – the interconnections of these facets – is essential, we believe, in addressing today's social problems. It is our hope that the Feminist Platform offers a grounding to better understand these interconnections as we dialogue with others.

Again we are reminded of Pope Francis' caution that seems apt for these times. "Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say...to dialogue entails a cordial reception, not a prior condemnation."¹

And, in this same spirit, Melissa Josephs in her piece on Economic Justice quotes from what George Lipsitz calls a "love-driven politics." He speaks of Martin Luther King's "unconditional love" that champions the capacity to empathize with the 'other' in political discussion and negotiations. It is this spirit that the Feminist Platform is offered.

Oftentimes the political arena is neither a space for "love-driven politics," nor a space that engenders hope and imagination. Instead, our best hopes and ideas are too often compromised away, negotiated down, or outright betrayed. In such an environment it can be easy to develop opinions corroded by cynicism and fear. Such mindsets keep us from challenging the status quo and failing ideologies; they keep us from dreaming the world anew.

The Feminist Platform means to be an antidote, a nourishing source that feeds hope and imagination so that we continue to struggle for what is right and just for the common good of all, including Earth itself.

If we don't enter into this struggle, who will?

1 On Heaven and Earth, Sudamericana, 2011

Contributors



Joan Brown, OSF, is a Kansas native and a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Rochester, Minnesota. She lives in Albuquerque where she is the Executive Director of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light and is part of the non-profit Partnership for Earth Spirituality. She attended the UN COP21 meeting in Paris as a Franciscan International official observer and is also an OXFAM Sister on the Planet.



Lydia Gajdel is a proud Iowa native who is a Masters of Divinity student at The University of Chicago. In her free time she likes to try new craft beers, build architectural Legos, and dig into the biggest burrito she can find.



Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., is a feminist theologian who is co-founder and co-director of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA. A Catholic active in the women-church movement and on LGBTIQ matters, she lectures and writes on theology and ethics with particular attention to liberation issues. She is an editor of *A Guide for Women in Religion: Making Your Way from A to Z* (Palgrave, 2004, 2014) and co-editor with Diann L. Neu of *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views* (SkyLight Paths, 2010).



Melissa Josephs is Director of Equal Opportunity Policy at Women Employed (WE) and has expertise in a range of workplace issues such as paid sick days, sexual harassment, fair wages, work and family, and affirmative action. A member of the WE staff since 1990, Josephs promotes passage and effective implementation of equal employment opportunity laws and regulations at the local, state and federal levels. Prior to joining Women Employed, Josephs was a community organizer at the Northwest Neighborhood Federation. Josephs has a Bachelor of Arts in English and Journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a J.D. from IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law.



Sharmili Majmudar has been Executive Director of Rape Victim Advocates since 2008, and has worked for the liberation of communities from domestic and sexual violence for over 20 years. Sharmili also serves on the Board of Directors of the Crossroads Fund, has previously served on the board of Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network, and on the national advisory committee for Transforming Silence Into Action, a gathering of advocates addressing intimate partner violence in Asian Pacific Islander LGBTQ communities. Sharmili is a recipient of a 2015 Loyola University Chicago Damen Award, which recognizes "qualities of leadership in industry, leadership in community and service to others." Sharmili earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and Psychology from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. and a Master of Social Work from Loyola University of Chicago's Graduate School of Social Work.



Amber McZeal is the Productions Manager at La Peña Cultural Center in Berkeley, CA. Amber received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Goddard College in 2013. In 2015, she received her Master's degree in Depth Psychology with Somatic specialization at Pacifica Graduate Institute and is currently a doctoral student in the Community Psychology, Liberation Psychology, and Ecological Psychology specialization. Her current body of work, Mudzimu, is a combination of original music compositions and afro-futurist mythos that is committed to expanding the discussion of trauma, life, and identity. Amber McZeal resides in Oakland, CA.



Rose Mary Meyer, BVM, grew up on a farm in northwest Missouri. Her ministries include teaching, 8th Day staff member, The Peace Museum director, parish social ministry, and the national BVM Women’s Office coordinator. She currently is director of Project IRENE, an initiative of LCWR in Illinois, advocating for systems change for women and children.



María Luisa Rosal is Field Organizer at School of the Americas Watch, a nonviolent grassroots movement that works to stand in solidarity with the people of Latin America and the Caribbean to close the US Army School of the Americas, and to change oppressive US foreign policy that the SOA represents. Born in Guatemala during the worst intensification of the internal armed conflict, she and her family fled into exile to the United States, where they received political asylum. Prior to joining the national office as the movement’s Field Organizer, María Luisa has worked on issues regarding torture, enforced disappearances, historical memory, and human rights in Guatemala. María Luisa holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia and a Master’s Degree in Human Rights and Democratization in Latin America and the Caribbean from the *Universidad Nacional de San Martín* in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



Mary Zerkel is co-coordinator of the American Friends Service Committee’s Wage Peace Campaign, which works toward the demilitarization of US foreign and domestic policy. Mary is on the steering committee of the New Priorities Network, a national network of diverse organizations working to cut the military budget and fund human needs. Mary has worked for AFSC for 19 years on a variety of issues and projects, including coordinating the internationally acclaimed Eyes Wide Open exhibit, as well as the nationally touring Cost of War and Windows and Mirrors: Reflections on the War in Afghanistan exhibits. Mary has published articles and op-eds in the Huffington Post, Truthout, Radical Teacher and Signs: The Journal of Women and Culture in Society. She is the author of *Critical Thinking for Meaningful Action*, and co-author of *Economics Education*, both published by AFSC and is the co-director of “Benaat Chicago,” a widely viewed documentary about the lives of Arab youth on the south side of Chicago.



Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project (PNAP) is a visual arts and humanities project that connects teaching artists and scholars to men at Stateville Maximum Security Prison through classes, workshops, and guest lecture.



Generation FIVE’s vision is to end the sexual abuse of children within five generations. Generation FIVE approaches all of its work within a Transformative Justice framework.



The Women in Church in Society Committee (WCSC) was started as a project of the 8th Day Center for Justice in 1999. The committee supports collaboration amongst 8th Day Staff, religious community members, and coalition partners. For seventeen years WCSC has focused on co-creating new possibilities while deconstructing social and religious constructions of gender. To this end, the Women in Church and Society Committee has created processes for discussing, analyzing, and reflecting on faithful dissent; developed a play, *Conscience Monologues*, that highlights women’s moral agency through decisions of conscience; and, most recently, the production of its *Feminist Platform* in anticipation of the 2016 election year and beyond.



8th Day Center for Justice

www.8thdaycenter.org

*Impelled by the belief that all creation is sacred and interrelated;
Imbued with the principles of nonviolence, mutuality and cooperation,
8th Day Center for Justice, a coalition founded by Catholic religious congregations,
acts as a critical alternative voice to oppressive systems and works to change those systems.*