



NEWSLETTER

of the

FEMINIST CAUCUS

of the American Humanist Association

JUNE 2007

From the Chair

Hello, Feminist Caucus members, as we prepare for our annual American Humanist Association conference in Portland, Oregon, June 7-10! The Feminist Caucus has a nice lineup of events, which will include our annual business meeting/strategy session from 3:00 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. on Friday and Feminist Caucus-sponsored two back-to-back workshops on Saturday titled "The U.S., UN Conventions, and American Violence," which will feature the 1988 Humanist Heroine Cleo Kocol, California NOW President Kimberly Salter, and myself.

During the conference we'll be holding a raffle for two books written by AHA's 2007 Humanist Heroine Robin Morgan. The funds from the raffle will go to the Feminist Caucus. But this is not just to raise money for the FC; it's also to promote our new Humanist Heroine and to raise interest in her work. Robin has had a huge impact on feminist thought since her book, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, broke new ground in the early 1970s.

Following Saturday evening's banquet, we'll award Robin the 2007 Humanist Heroine Award. She'll speak to us on several issues, including themes from her new book *Fighting Words: A Toolkit for Combating the Religious Right*. After the award ceremony Robin will be available to sign copies of her books.

On Friday morning between 10:30 and 11:45 I will be a panelist on a session titled "Star Trek and the Pitfalls of Humanism in Popular Culture," where I will offer a feminist analysis of Star Trek sexism and misogyny. Also on the panel will be Feminist Caucus member Scotty Michaelsen, a former Marine, who will give a view of Star Trek militarism, and Stuart Warmsley, who will look at alternate histories like Humanism while having to deal with requirements of popular entertainment.

HUMANIST HEROINES

2007 Robin Morgan 2006 Kim Gandy 2005 Amy Goodman 2004 Aileen Hernandez 2003 Kate Michelman
2002 Samantha Smoot 2001 Diana Russell 2000 Molly MacGregor 1999 Lorrie Williams 1998 Loretta F. Ross
1997 Dottie Lamm 1996 Annette Van Howe 1995 Rosemary Matson 1994 Kristin Lems 1993 Barbara G. Walker
1992 Sally Roesch Wagner 1991 Sherry Matulis 1990 Carolyn McDade 1989 Ann Simonton 1988 Cleo Kocol
1987 Fran Hosken 1986 Patricia Maginnis 1986 Ben Munson, MD 1985 Anne Nicol Gaylor 1984 Tish Sommers
1983 Christine Craft 1982 Sonia Johnson

Patricia K. Willis, CHAIR

Also attending the conference will be 1999 Humanist Heroine Lorrie Williams. It will be especially wonderful to have three Humanist Heroines at the conference and I am sure they will be happy to talk with all of you.



FC Notes

THE FEMINIST CAUCUS AT THE US SOCIAL FORUM

Just three short weeks after our AHA conference, the Feminist Caucus will have a very active and exciting presence at the first U.S. Social forum, held in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 27-July 1.

The Feminist Caucus will sponsor four workshops. In "Women's Introduction to the Social Forum: Strategies for the Next Social Forum," I'll provide a history of women's involvement in social forums - particularly the World Social Forums and the USSF - and discuss how women have been marginalized both as social forum committee members and as organizers of independent workshops at these forums.

Also speaking will be Feminist Caucus member, Scott Michaelsen who will conduct a workshop on "How to be a Good Feminist: A Talkshop for Men," where he will offer some insights into his own travels through his feminist awakenings as an example to other men who struggle with sexism and misogyny.

A workshop on the perils of US militarism, "War in Space or Life on Earth," will be led by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom member Carol Urner, along with speakers from various other peace movements. I will offer a feminist analysis of the masculinist warrior model that has gotten us into never-ending war.

Our fourth workshop, "Liberating Women from the War on Women: The Pornography of Everyday Life," will be with feminist academic Jane Caputi from Florida Atlantic University. I will help to facilitate discussion in this workshop, which will follow the previous day's presentation of Caputi's new film "The Pornography of Everyday Life."

All of these workshops are powerful in terms of topic and in terms of presenters. We will have some of the most knowledgeable speakers in the U.S. I am very pleased and impressed that the FC has been able to organize such a remarkable presence at this first US Social Forum.

Additionally, I have been extremely busy coordinating the USSF Women's Working Group's signature event for the social forum. The Women's Working Group is made up of about 100 feminist organizations from around the U.S. and this event will be the largest venue for feminists at the forum. The Court of Women will be held on June 28 from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in St. Luke's Episcopal Church, located in downtown Atlanta. (I had qualms about holding the Court in a church; however, it's a site that the USSF has reserved for various social forum events. Outside of the Civic Center, St. Luke's is the largest site in Atlanta, holding 750. The Civic Center, which holds 4,600, was not available to us. We do expect to fill St. Luke's. Moreover, knowledge of the oppression that patriarchal religion has historically foisted onto women made me squeamish, as well as the fact that many people attending the social forum are not religious. However, the church authorities have been very nice to us. They will let us hang a banner on the altar with the name of the event, The Court of Women, in large letters, as well as other accommodations we have asked for. Saint Luke's is a lovely site with stained glass windows all around: never mind the subject matter, just notice the colors.

The Court of Women will seat three judges: Teresa Ulloa Ziaurriz, who is the director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women for Mexico; Loretta Ross, longtime feminist activist and national director for SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Rights Collective; and Margaret Burnham legal scholar and attorney at Northeastern University Law School. The session topics are Violence Against Women, Hurricane Katrina/the Gulf Coast Crisis, and the U.S. Criminal [In]Justice system. Each session will have one expert witness and three survivor witnesses to testify. Nkenge Toure, executive director of Sophie's Parlour and SisterSong management circle member, is the Court's expert witness for the session dealing with

Violence Against Women; Tonya McClary, National Director of the American Friends Service Committee Criminal Justice Program, will serve as expert witness for the Criminal [In]Justice System session; and Angela Winfrey, Core Trainer/Organizer with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, is our expert witness for the Hurricane Katrina/Gulf Coast Crisis session. We will also focus on immigration as a theme that will run throughout the three sessions.

Interspersed between sessions, as well as to open and to close the Court, we will have topical performance interludes. These interludes are designed to relieve some of the tension that will no doubt build as a result of the testimonies and judges' statements and also to help set appropriate mental frameworks for the Court. Interlude performers will include South African anti-apartheid fighter Dennis Brutus, who will perform the opening interlude with a dramatic reading. Singer Elise Whit, who performs in five different languages, will sing a protest song in either French or Portuguese. Interludes will also feature an interpretive dance performance and a flutist.

The Court of Women will take its work beyond the day of the event in two ways. For two days following the social forum we will sponsor workshops and panel discussions on the session topics, which will be led by the many feminist organizations that make up the Women's Working Group. We will also begin the hard work of the Court by taking our findings and conclusions to entities such as local, state, federal, and international governments and agencies, and to other entities that will be determined beneficial to eradicating these human rights abuses.

The Court of Women is a monumental effort that will increase the knowledge level and raise the consciousness of the 750 audience witnesses as well as the participants. But our work is not confined to this one day. We will continue the struggle to make the Court a meaningful strategic player on the world stage, fighting for the incalculable number of people suffering from human rights abuses and working to bring the perpetrators to justice.

RAPE AND A HUMANIST RESPONSE by Cleo Kocol

Talking is the first step necessary to change abhorrent behavior. Rape and abuse have to be discussed and labeled for what they are. They cannot remain acts we shy away from: women pretending they hadn't happened, men taking for granted date rape, marital rape, and rape in war. Women often internalize a message of shame, as if it were their fault. Whether rape happens in war between enemy combatants, is forced upon civilians, or is used as power tools by military men against women or men of lower rank, it is a dehumanizing act. How do we combat thousands of years of thinking and actions? Ever since men discovered that birth was not a miracle, women's status has crumbled. Christianity added to this denigration by decreeing woman a second-class citizen. Now modern American men are guided, given role models by a government that deals in violence and a society that uses women as sex objects.

In my opinion, among the broader society, men and women have different beliefs about sex. While there are always exceptions -- men who treat women with respect and view sex as a part of deep affection or love, and women who view sex in the same way -- women in the greater society are told to be sexy while at the same time they are saturated with romantic images, and men in the greater society are taught to view sex as a right and a tool to be used to their advantage.

Throughout my lifetime both men and women shied away from talking about rape. When, during the Balkan war, the Serbian military set up a rape camp, I recalled with shock the fascinating, urbane, intellectual Serbian man I once knew. Had this been his thinking? At the time of the destruction of Yugoslavia I belonged to a writers group containing both men and women and I presented my thoughts in an article for discussion. Of the seven or eight people present, one -- a Methodist minister and the moderator -- said, "We all write things we want to get off our chests at some time." Without discussion the moderator

instantly went on to the next paper. I tried to object, but no one supported me.

Another example of the prevalent thinking in the United States -- which admittedly is a leader in securing women's rights -- came during the time the Taliban was abusing, torturing, killing, and seriously restricting women's rights in Afghanistan. The *Sacramento Bee*, part of the McClatchy Chain, which owns dozens of newspapers throughout the nation, periodically reported on events in Afghanistan. Articles about the horrors perpetrated against Afghani women, however, were printed in the middle pages of the *Sacramento Bee*. Yet, when the Taliban desecrated Buddhist statues the outcry and an article appeared on the front page.

Tell me why do we build shelters for abused women but do not educate young men not to abuse?

One last example: I joined the protests against Laura Bush's restrictions on political poetry. A poet against the war, I read my politically based poetry in Honolulu, and in Sacramento I joined other poets at a podium on California's Capitol steps. From the protest I went to a poetry group where the consensus was that politics had no place in poetry. Only one woman agreed with me that all subjects should be open to poetic form. I have also noticed that usually in general meetings anywhere when there are several topics on the agenda both women and men routinely put women's issues last or dismiss them with no discussion.

We need to have a Feminist Caucus representative in all American Humanist Association chapters. We need to educate men and women about what has happened and is happening to women, not only at home but also worldwide. We must steer away from puritanical thinking and address the broader issues that restrict true sex education.

The Personal is Political

THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY

The following speech was delivered by Wake Forest University student and feminist Humanist Kellie

Cavagnaro at her senior colloquium in Women's and Gender Studies graduating class April 26, 2007.

Thank you for coming to the Senior Colloquium everyone. Recently, I attended the National Women's Equality Summit in Washington, D.C., and was left with several memorable take-home messages about the reality of our actions as a community and the consequences of such. Our future is a very uncertain one, particularly as soon-to-be college graduates, and the choices we make now about the directions we will take in our lives can have substantial impact on the greater global community and the status of women and rights of all persons.

The truth about our community is that while we regulate safe, preventative emergency birth control such as Plan B -- keeping it behind the counter of most pharmacies and restricting access to minors under 18 years of age -- we fail to regulate dangerous and possibly deadly silicon breast augmentation surgeries. Meanwhile, the numbers of women and girls receiving breast augmentation and suffering severe health consequences as a result of the surgery has increased tenfold over the last ten years, and there is no minimum age requirement for the surgery.

The truth about our community is that right now the United States government is threatening the annual budget of the Federal Drug Administration's Office of Women's Health. This office is vital to the health of our community, providing for the basic safety regulations applicable to all medical care and health-related products on the market. Without this valuable government service we are in danger of exposure to major health risks from improperly tested products, such as the sever mutilation and birth defects caused by the Dalkon Shield which, back in 1976, was the catalyst for the new authority granted to the FDA to regulate product safety in the first place.

The truth about our community is that the United States ranks 37th in the world for health outcomes. We have a higher infant mortality rate in our community than many third-world countries, and we pay \$6,000 per person per year for these kinds of results.

The truth about our community is that, due to anti-choice legislation and lack of funding, it is more difficult to obtain a medically safe and appropriate abortion today than it was in 1973, the year of *Roe v. Wade*.

The truth about our community is that third-world women and women's labor efforts drive the global economy more than China and India put together. While these women mobilize our very economy, they are the last to benefit from it, and most never benefit at all.

The truth about our community is that in the last four years Congress has authorized 13 billion dollars worth of budget cuts from healthcare, community policing, and education, all so that we can increase the Pentagon's war budget. I ask everyone here today, *do we need 10,000 nuclear weapons?* No. But we're about to have more. And this year 60% of domestic spending will go to the Pentagon.

The truth about our community is that an estimated 1 in 3 women will suffer from sexual or physical abuse in her lifetime, and this is a *conservative* estimate. The rates of abuse and assault affecting the immigrant women in our community are so much higher because often these women are dependent upon abusive partners for medical coverage to tend to the injuries afflicted by their abusive, but of legal status, husbands.

These are the realities of the world we live in, and it is disturbing to see that in recent years middle and upper class women who are polled contend that the glass-ceiling concept is a thing of generations past and that women today have achieved universal equality. I invite you to listen to the reports and findings of my classmates and to open your mind to a more well-informed reality, considering your place within the community and your personal capacity to affect change in the unjust world we live in. Women today, *of our generation*, are marginalized, over-worked, under-paid, physically abused, sexually assaulted, and denied universal human rights, which many of us assume have been granted long ago. This is the truth about our community, and I would like to propose that we consider it together. Thank you.

Feminist Humanist Bios

CLEO KOCOL

I grew up in a house without religion and supported equality of rights between the sexes and races all my life. I didn't know that made me a feminist or a humanist until years later. The Women's Movement of the 1970s and early '80s gave me a handle on one part of my education. When I discovered Humanism in the late '70s I was already a radical feminist and an atheist. I had been attracted to the social concerns of churches in my mid-twenties but found I could never swallow their theology.

Humanism blended both my concerns. But feminism was still misunderstood by most people. Women were still being berated because their voices were too high. I picketed Catholic Churches in the name of abortion rights, and carried signs that said, "Tax Churches." I marched, picketed, protested, wrote, and spoke out for *Roe v. Wade* and the Equal Rights Amendment. In the late '70s I became a follower and admirer of Sonia Johnson, the woman who took on the Mormon Church, Senator Orrin Hatch, and the establishment. With other dedicated women, I committed civil disobedience three times to bring attention to women's rights, separation of church and state, and passage of the ERA. I instituted the Humanist Heroine award, of which Sonia Johnson was the first recipient.

I wrote three women's history one-woman shows, which for five years I performed throughout the United States at various venues, such as the EPA in New York City and the AHA annual meeting in Washington, D.C. I was chair of the Feminist Caucus, a member of the AHA national board, and was named Humanist Heroine in 1988. Since the 1990s I've been active with the Humanists of the Greater Sacramento Area, I've been a charter member of Atheists and Other Free Thinkers, and I founded the Humanists of Sun City, Roseville.

DR. KIMBERLY SALTER

I am a native Californian raised in an Irish/English Catholic home with 12 + years of

Catholic education. While I am grateful for the excellent education I received, I had trouble with the narrow mindedness of the Catholic religion. Through my research I understood the prophet Jesus to be about tolerance and acceptance; however, I did not find this in the Catholic Church.

During college I became involved in the anti-Vietnam War movement and the feminist (ERA) movement. Both gave me a sense of contributing something positive to the world. Over the years I have joined just about every progressive woman's organization there is.

I have been most active in the National Organization for Women (NOW), as a chapter treasurer, state board delegate, and president Orange County NOW, and as vice president of administration, treasurer, and president of California NOW. I have worked both in and outside of NOW to obtain and maintain rights for women and *all* humans.



Feminist Funnies

FROM THE CHAIN LETTER WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR
by Nora Ephron

Dear Friends,

This chain letter was started in hopes of bringing relief to tired and discouraged women. Just send a copy of this letter to five of your female friends who are equally tired and discontented. Then bundle up the man in your life, send him to the woman whose name appears at the top of the following list, and add your name to the bottom of the list. When your turn comes you will receive 15,625 men. One of them is bound to be better than the one you already have (with some exceptions). At the writing of this letter, a friend of mine had already received 184 men, all of whom were better than the sad example she started out with. An unmarried woman living with her widowed mother was able to choose between a Chippendale dancer and an Olympic swimmer. You can be lucky, too, but **DO NOT BREAK THE CHAIN!** One woman broke the chain and got her own husband back! So let's keep it going, ladies! Just add your name and address to the list below:

Laura Bush, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave, Washington, DC

(On a personal note, I broke the chain [Uh oh!] because I already have a feminist guy! PW)

Thank you for supporting The Feminist Caucus!



Dues: \$15 individual; \$25 chapter

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