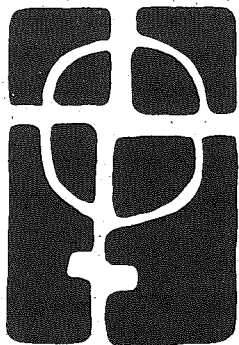


Women's Theological Center



Quarterly Newsletter

SEPTEMBER, 1991
Volume 9, No. 3

INSIDE: Reflections On

ChangeWorks
Loves Herself. Regardless.

Study/Action

Naming Barriers/
Claiming Possibilities

Review of
Struggle to be the Sun Again

Suggested fee for 4 issues:
\$10 for individuals
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1990 - 1991 Study/Action participants and facilitators.

First row, l to r: Elizabeth Bettenhausen, Hanneke Elgersma, Becky Johnson, Wilma Schnijderberg. Back row: Janice Austin, Dorie Seavey, Martha Boudakian, Catherine Durgin, KyungIn Kim, Ajuko Ueda, Loretta Williams, Aedin O'Leary. Story, page 4.

Dear Friends,

Our 1990-91 program and academic year is now over, and we have been diligently putting together programs for the upcoming year.

In this issue of the newsletter, we review some of the activities and programs which we offered in the past year. As evidenced from the articles, it was an exciting and rewarding year.

We hope that the pages of this newsletter are informative and inspiring to all of you. For some of you, this will be the first chance you have to read about the diverse programs we offer. For "old-timers", this is an opportunity to read about the WTC's on-going and steadfast attempts to live up to its mission statement:

"The WTC is women gathering from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, engaging in action-based educational and community

programs. The Center seeks to create a feminist/womanist ethic and energy for transforming oppressive religious and social structures. Through confronting injustices of race, class, gender and sexual orientation, participants are challenged to deal with the oppressions in their lives and to stand in solidarity with all oppressed peoples. The Center is rooted in women's critique of Christian traditions. It provides a participatory model for women of varying religious perspectives to address theological and spiritual issues as they define them for their own communities."

*Special thanks to
The Boston
Foundation*

Story, next issue.

ChangeWorks

ChangeWorks is an exciting new program in which we offer short evening and weekend courses on a wide variety of subjects. This past year we have offered courses dealing with such topics as the politics of ritual, fundraising, Black women's writing, surviving incest, spirituality for African American women, anti-racism training for white women, and anti-internalized racism for women of color.

Some of these courses were so extremely well received that we are offering them again. We have also lined up brand new courses for the coming year. For more information about the ChangeWorks program, please fill out and return the form on page 7, or give us a call.

Reflections by Joann Vasconcellos

As soon as I hit the sidewalk after exiting the movie theater, I threw on my dark glasses and began sobbing. The tears came spontaneously and flowed all the way home. I had just seen *Jungle Fever*. I tried to analyze my reaction. I felt hopeless that the situation of race relations would ever improve. I felt anger at yet another depiction of white working-class ethnics as ignorant and bigoted. I felt sinking despair for Angie when she returns home to an imprisoned existence. I felt uncomfortable resignation when Flipper's crack-addicted brother is killed. I felt uncomfortable uncomfatableness when a group of African-American women discussed how white women relate to African-American men. This film did much of what I expected it to do. It left me with an array of feelings and a host of questions regarding issues of race, class and gender.

The largest question that it raised is one that was addressed at the WTC's Anti-Racism Training for White Women which I attended back in

February. As white women, how do we look at issues of race separately from class and gender? Can we look at race separately from class and gender? Must we look at race separately from class and gender? *Jungle Fever's* strong point was its examination of issues of race. It did less in looking at issues of class and gender, despite the fact that these are not totally ignored.

My gut reactions to the film seem to come largely out of my place of social privilege and disadvantage. It is telling that I felt despair and anger associated with my identification as a white ethnic working-class woman. My feelings of uncomfatableness came more from my being white. I felt most white during the scene where the African-American women are having their discussion. Although I did not necessarily agree or identify with all of their characterizations of white women, I became squirmish at being the focus of their discussion.

At the WTC's Anti-Racism Training, we struggled with the exercises in which we needed to define white culture, name white people we admire, and describe what it is like to be white. Issues of class, ethnicity, sexuality and religious affiliation often cloud our identification as white

women. It was noted at the workshop and portrayed in the film that people of color have an easier time defining whiteness that do white people. Defining whiteness is an important part of anti-racism work for white women. In this defining we come to address our privilege in a concrete way. I am trying to use my uncomfatableness as a measure of my awareness of privilege, in order to define my whiteness.

I believe that feminist analysis when addressing race cannot exclude issues of class and gender. Yet it is my responsibility as a white woman not only to address race from the vantage point of how people of color are oppressed, but also how I am privileged and contribute to their oppression. This is the harder task.

It is not a task to be done in isolation. The most important parts of the Anti-Racism Training were when we struggled to name our whiteness. By working with other anti-racist white women, I understand white privilege in more of a flesh and blood way. I use that privilege every day whether consciously or not. It is only through an understanding of that privilege that I can use it in anti-racist ways that empower myself and others.

Loves Herself. Regardless



"Loves Herself. Regardless." is a program which offers African American women the opportunity to explore resources for love and political struggle. This past year, the program included one evening discussion series in town and two reflection and renewal weekends on the ocean. For more information about upcoming "Loves Herself" events, please fill out and return the form on page 7, or give us a call.

A Journey Towards Self-Discovery/Rediscovery by Beverly D. Johnson

I attended two series this year sponsored by the WTC that have had a profound effect on my life and deepened my understanding of myself. The courses were "Black Women's Writing and the Search for Self", a ChangeWorks course, and "Legacies and Inheritances", a Loves Herself. Regardless discussion series.

"Black Women's Writing and the Search for Self" was a six week course where we used African American women's literature to explore racism in America. With one exception, we used excerpts from individual works, starting with *FunnyHouse of the Negro* by Adrienne Kennedy and ending with *Praisesong for the Widow* by Paule Marshall. Our readings were springboards for discussions on racism and oppression that included: what happens when we unknowingly internalize racism and oppression, and moves beyond their effects to "wholeness". We discussed the effects of racism and oppression on the characters in our readings and then how the characters' situations and reactions related to our own lives and experiences. Sylvia Wright, our facilitator, had a plan for guiding us through our exploratory journey. She started with *FunnyHouse of the Negro*, a play which on its surface presents us with a crazy African American woman who committed suicide. On a deeper level we came to realize that since the play was

not being presented from the woman's point of view but through the eyes of others, we had only their word for what happened. We discussed how this is not unlike what happens in real life! Too often, we as African American women are not consulted about what is going on in our own lives! It is the oppressors who are publishing the events, using their perceptions instead of ours.

From *FunnyHouse* we moved along our journey. At each stop we met women in various stages of oppression, resistance and wellness. We ended with a discussion of *Praisesong for the Widow*. When we first meet Avey Johnson, the novel's main character, she is on a cruise ship with two other African American women. On the surface we get one impression -- that Avey is a middle-class widow who has had a good life and is enjoying herself. However, as the story unfolds, we find there is something decidedly wrong! Avey, grudgingly at first, begins her own journey towards self-awareness and ultimately to self-acceptance.

Through discussion of these characters, we began to look at our own lives and to talk about where we were on the road from being objects (as seen through the eyes of others) to subjects (defining ourselves). For me, talking about the characters was a way to feel comfortable with and within the group. I became increasingly more willing to share my own thoughts, feelings and frustrations about being an African American woman in a racist and oppressive society. It was a way of focusing on me and not concentrating first on my oppressors and

then on my reactions to them.

"Legacies and Inheritances" picked up where "Black Women Writers" left off. Renae Scott, our facilitator, started by asking us two questions: What is our legacy as African American women? and What have we inherited from those who came before us? That first night we also described who we are and shared our memories, both good and bad of growing up.

We then began to discuss our various roles: daughter, mother, lover, friend, etc. We discussed how racism and oppression are most effective when their victims use all their energy fighting them, thereby leaving nothing to give to those we love and those who love us. We talked about how we don't take care of ourselves, as individuals, because we are so busy fulfilling our roles. We resolved to give to ourselves first! In becoming more "self-centered", we would be putting our energies to good use and have the time to return the love of people who love us! This would also enable the ones who love us to find strength in themselves. We would then all be accountable for our survival and growth as a community!!!

Both courses were over all too soon!!!

What did I gain by attending these classes? I started a dialogue with other sisters while sharing some of my innermost secret feelings without fear of rejection. I learned that racism and oppression is most successful when we, as victims, beat up on ourselves. I learned that we, as sisters, can begin to move beyond the effects of racism and oppression by starting and continuing a dialogue amongst ourselves. That resistance, the dialogue, heals! As bell hooks, in her essay "Talking Back" says:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side is a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back" that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject -- the liberated voice.

I can hardly wait for the fall classes to begin so the dialogue can continue!

Study/Action

Study/Action is an intensive nine-month program of study, reflection and action. Participants in the program take three courses together: Social Analysis and Ethics; Liberation Spirituality; and Feminist Theology and Theory. Masters-level academic credit can be granted for this work.

The Study/Action program begins with the experience of its participants and interfaces that with each participant's work at a field site. Sites have included the Massachusetts prison for women, shelters for battered and/or homeless women, and advocacy centers for pregnant teens.

The program runs each year from September to May. Applications are accepted on a rolling admissions basis. For more detailed information, fill out and return the form on page 7, or give us a call.

Note: The illustrations accompanying this article are by Ajuko Ueda, a 1991 Study/Action graduate. These are part of her final project for the year.

If It Hadn't Been Raining by Meck Groot

"Most difficult, most productive."

"Challenging, painful, clarifying, frustrating, soul-searching."

"Growth producing. . . resulted in the garden of my life being all dug up."

"Paradigm smashing; generative, energizing and exhausting."

"Revolutionary."

"I buried a lot of dead stuff, and coaxed new life out of it."

These are a few of the ways in which WTC Study/Action graduates of the

past seven years responded when asked in a questionnaire how they would describe their year in the program.

Martha Boudakian, one of the graduates of 1990-91 Study/Action program, names her experience of this year "a journey to myself and beyond". She writes:

September 7th, 1990. First day of Study/Action orientation. I stood outside Emmanuel College in blazing afternoon sunlight and took a deep breath. Release. "After I enter that room, my life will never be the same," I thought to myself. I was right; profound change was about to stir in my life -- but I had yet to learn the magic word:

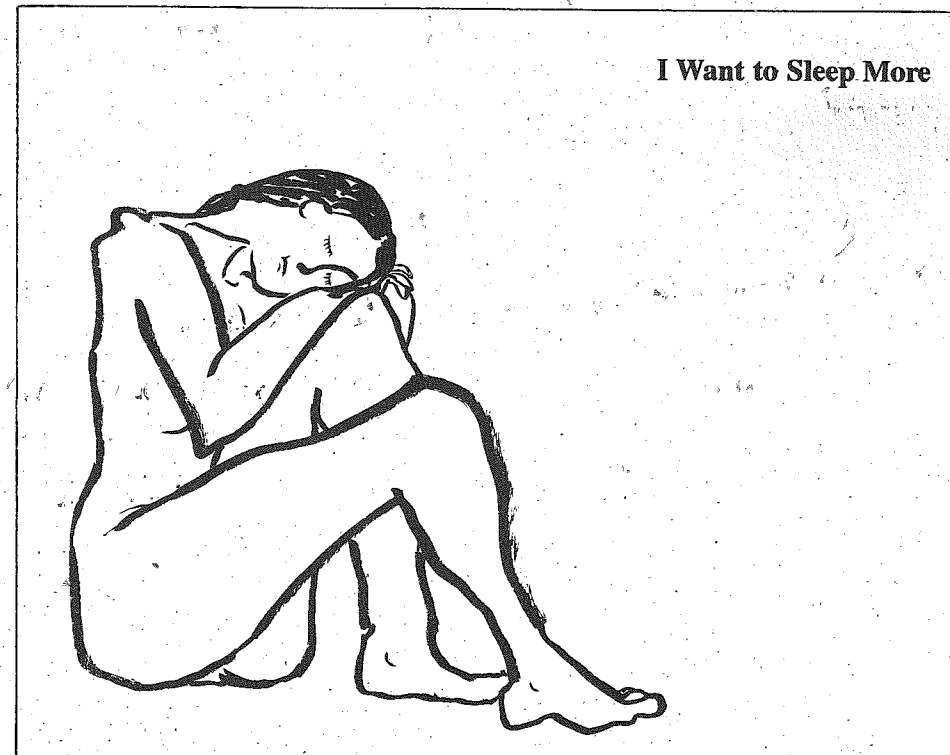
process.

May 13th, 1991. A circle of women sat in the morning sunlight, a warm breeze caressing our skin, as we gave each other our Study/Action certificates. I, a member of this group, felt both sadness and the power to go dancing forth, as we became the newest group of Study/Action alumnae.

Sounds idyllic, eh? Not the word I would use to describe my experience with Study/Action. Turbulent, painful, provocative, fruitful, maybe, but not idyllic.

Idyllic is not a word any of the almost 100 alumnae of the program would use. Most women who enter the program are at a place in their lives where they are asking questions of deep significance. Questions about personal identity, spiritual direction, ethical living, political change. Questions that require a hard and honest look at issues of gender, race, class, and sex. Questions that lead to more and deeper questions.

It is doubtful that any graduate of the Study/Action program would tell you she had an easy year. Given the emphasis on working together as a group and on incorporating experiences of work at field sites that provide services to some of the city's most oppressed and exploited women, the Study/Action program requires a lot from its participants. For some, the most strenuous work is personal --



accepting a new view of one's reality and identity can be intense. For others, the hardest work is in finding common ground in a group that may be diverse in expectation, age, race, class, sexual orientation, nationality, work experience, religious background and belief.

But though the work is often hard, the hours long, and the process sometimes gruelling, Study/Action graduates have wonder-filled stories to tell of personal empowerment and transformation. "What has become clear, totally clear," writes a graduate, "is that I need a new value system. But I also know that trees do not burst into full bloom on the first day of spring. The blossoms come slowly, very slowly, a little at a time."

Another graduate writes: "I have had to look at some harsh realities about the oppression of women, people of color, lesbians and gay men, people who are differently abled. The beauty is that through the process, somehow the 21 or so of us have found a way to create community -- it's not been easy!"

As a graduate of the program myself, I cannot imagine where I would be now if it had not been raining in Toronto one fall day in 1986. I stepped into the This Ain't the Rosedale Library Bookstore to browse until the rain let up. I was looking for

magazines about theatre and found a lonely back issue of *woman of power*. I almost didn't buy it -- I had never paid \$6.00 for a magazine before. But I splurged and eventually read about Study/Action in that issue.

If it hadn't been raining that day, I might have gotten what I needed somewhere else. But I doubt it. Whether you call it providence, fate, serendipity, instinct or luck, something bigger than me gave me the sense to come in out of the rain that day. In using that sense, I got a magazine, a new way of seeing the world, and a community of women with whom I have struggled, laughed, learned, cried and cried, sang, fought, danced. No year of schooling before or since has had such a tremendous impact on how I see the world and myself in the world.

I don't get along equally well with all members of this ever changing community. I don't even like all the people in it. But if Study/Action taught me nothing else, it taught me that if we cannot find creative ways to live and work together across difference and dislike "before the revolution", how ever will the revolution happen?

Happily, that's not the only thing I learned. I also learned that revolutionary change is possible and good. I know. My life is evidence. ♣

Quilt Announcement by Wendy Ritch

Hello Womyn!

This is just a quick update on the quilt, which is being pieced together as I write to you in mid-June. By the time you read this, I hope the quilt will be completed, or close to it. Whether it is finished or not though, the main goal of the project has not nearly been reached. The WTC needs your financial support in the form of purchasing squares of the quilt to help pay for square-feet of our new office space. You may purchase squares for friends, family, partners or yourself at \$50 per square. You may place up to three names on each square and you may pool your resources with others in order to buy squares. For non-profit organizations and womyn-owned businesses, the cost is \$75 and \$100 per square respectively. There's no better deal for a permanent advertisement!

You can buy squares for folks on their birthdays, for the upcoming holidays, or just as a way of showing you care about them and about the WTC. The quilt will decorate a wall of the new space and accompanying it will be a book with a complete photo herstory of the project as well as an exhaustive listing of the patrons and recipients of gift-squares.

So don't delay. Send your contributions today! And I'll let you know in the December newsletter when the Quilt Unveiling will take place. ♣

Memorial/Recognition Fund Contributions to the WTC

from a friend
in memory of
Dolores Harrall, SND;
and from **Kay Evans**
in honor of attorney
Sheila Murphy
of Hanover,
with gratitude
for her
assistance.



Walking Woman

Naming Barriers / Claiming Possibilities

All organizations, institutions and communities struggle with difference, change and transformation. There are many spheres of this struggle: the inclusion of previously excluded people, the uncovering of obscured difference, the conflict around setting priorities when real differences exist, and the strain on our relationships created by our continuing and historical power differences and systemic oppression.

Through Naming Barriers/Claiming Possibilities, the WTC offers workshops for groups and organizations in issues of race and racism. If you would like more information about these workshops for your organization, please fill out and return the form on page 7, or give us a call.

Reflections by Ann Sipko

"The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives." (Audre Lorde, *Sister, Outsider*).

While Lorde is referring to poetry as illumination in the above quote, it is also an appropriate image for the process of scrutiny we undertake when we deal with racism. In its commitment to deal with that particular injustice, the WTC has been offering anti-racism workshops: "Naming Barriers/Claiming Possibilities". These workshops can be arranged with the WTC by groups who have come to a point of wanting a strong "light" in which to scrutinize how racism affects them individually and as a group, and to see how racism affects the possibility of changes they may hope to bring about through their lives.

This past April, Nancy Richardson, Co-director, and Renae Scott, Resource Center Program Associate, travelled to Racine, Wisconsin, to offer a weekend workshop to 65 members of the Racine Dominican community. As a member of that community, and as someone who has participated in the Study/Action program of the WTC, I was in the unique position of seeing parts of two strong communities interact around a common issue.

This particular workshop was part of an ongoing effort within this Dominican community to examine racism within the individuals and within

the community structures, as well as societal structures in which members work. Because workshops can be individually tailored to meet a group's needs, it was possible for me to share



with the two WTC workshop facilitators the work that had already been done within the Racine Dominican community. The workshop itself therefore became another part of an ongoing effort and not an isolated event.

All members of the Dominican community had been encouraged to participate in some anti-racism workshop during the course of the past year. Participants met Friday evening through Sunday morning. In fact, the WTC, in its belief that this work is important and ongoing, expects an organization/group to commit a significant block of time [minimum of 12 hours] to the workshop. Anything less is not enough time to move through a process of naming racism as it is present in particular situations and

claiming possibilities for change. Anti-racism work, at this time in US history, requires a life time commitment. The workshops are for some a beginning, for others another step.

Participants - 65 women - came to this workshop with all of the questions and apprehensions people bring to a workshop on a difficult issue like racism. Because the Racine community, with few exceptions, is a white community, some women came with apprehensions that their guilt would be played on. Some feared that their past efforts might be seen as not good enough. And some came simply with the usual fears of the unknown. All came voluntarily and with a sense that it was important to participate in this type of workshop.

Though members of the community know one another, the opening process of sharing where people work, and the manner in which individuals spoke of that, gave everyone a moment to pause and realize the power a group has in that reality alone. Power is the capacity to act and only when groups can claim their power can they use their capacity to act. This group's simple sharing of who they are began to allow members to tap into that power, into their ability to do this work.

Within the different activities of the workshop there was always a sense that an individual could ask a question or make a comment without fear of being put down in any way. Learning involves being able to put forth our ignorance as well as our insights and

move with one another from those points to places of deeper understanding. It means being able to say, "I don't know," "How could I have been so dumb!" It also means being able to say, "I disagree," and to argue with one another in the struggle to learn another person's reality.

There was time for definition of words we use so often, but for which we don't always have common definitions: *prejudice, bigotry, stereotyping, discrimination, scapegoating*. Participants came to understand that the Civil Rights legislation in this country has to do with working against *discrimination*, not necessarily *racism*. The group looked at the problem of racism in relation to four essential elements that keep it in place. Racism has to do with *power to make and enforce decisions* (who decides), *access to resources* (who has access to what), *standards that are set for appropriate behavior* (assumption that standards of the white community are best), and a *misplacement of the problem itself* (who really is the cause of this problem). The video "Ethnic Notions" aroused a lot of discussion and seemed to be a resource that a number of participants were interested in viewing again in the future.

The workshop moved to the point in which individuals were asked to consider the implications of all of this for the Racine Dominican community. What does this mean for the individual

in her personal and work life? What does this mean for the community as it is a body that relates to employees, to various publics, to individual members, and to a church to which it is structurally tied?

From personal comments and written evaluations, it seems that participants found the workshop challenging, broadening of their understanding of racism and their role in it, while at the same time they realized that they have already done and can continue to do anti-racist work. Levels of awareness were raised, decisions for action were made. Anti-racism work became work that could be done rather than something that raised guilt or seemed so huge that it was impossible to grab.

The "Naming Barriers/Claiming Possibilities" workshops are an important piece of anti-racism work that the WTC does. It is exciting for me to see this work and the impact of the WTC move to the midwest and into the Racine Dominican community. This workshop was a high "quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives". The final words belong again to Audre Lorde. "As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us."

Book Review by Hyo-Jung Kim

Chung Hyun Kyung
Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990

The image of three Korean women dancing and laughing as they celebrate life adorns the cover of *Struggle to be the Sun Again*. This image brought tears to my eyes as I felt the pride of being Korean. Yet at the same time, I felt profound sadness at the loss of my motherland, Korea, which I with my family left 22 years ago. As I savored the cover of the book, I asked myself, "What would it have been like if I had grown up in Korea instead of in the US?" *Struggle to be the Sun Again* gave me an opportunity to hear the words of my Korean and Asian sisters and to listen to their stories of joy and sorrow, and to reconnect with my Korean heritage.

Struggle to be the Sun Again is an engaging discourse about emerging Asian women's liberation theologies. Provocative and challenging, it is a brilliant and wonderfully written introduction to feminist liberation theologies in Asia. Chung writes with a style that counters the traditional white male European style of abstract, cumbersome theologizing. Chung's

Continued, next page



WOMEN'S THEOLOGICAL CENTER

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Check one or more items as appropriate:

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Study/Action 1992-93: general information; detailed information; application form

ChangeWorks

Loves Herself, Regardless

Naming Barriers/Claiming Possibilities

Please add the name(s) below to your mailing list

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My contribution of \$ _____ is enclosed. This represents

a general donation; fee for receiving the newsletter;

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Please do not release my name and address to other groups.

writing is fluid, clear and passionate. Her writing challenges the reader to listen to the stories of Asian women without judgement and assumptions about Asian women.

In her introduction, Chung writes that she "will look at the emerging Asian women's theological voices from the "gender specificity" of their experience in order to pinpoint their distinctive struggle and the search for liberation in their Third World and Asian reality" (p. 9). By doing so, she hopes to empower the liberation process for Asian women. She provides "a new model of survival-liberation-centered syncretism for understanding Asian women's liberation theology" (p. 9). This model, in which "Asian women selectively have chosen life-giving elements of their culture and religions and have woven new patterns of religious meaning" (p. 113) is the embodiment of Asian women's experiences. With this model, Chung provides a challenge to all of us who call ourselves Christians. She challenges us to examine our theologies, asking us what is Christian identity. Professor

Chung asks, "Who owns Christianity?" "What makes Christianity Christian?" Just as she asked herself, "Have you really paid attention to the culture and history of the poor in the development of your theology?", those of us who say that we are committed to the liberation of the oppressed must ask the same question. Whose experiences inform our respective theologies?

Chung unflinchingly places Asian women's experiences at the center of her book. Throughout, she authentically gives voice to Asian women by using extensive primary sources and interviews. Her analysis of class and gender are clear and sharp. She is wholly situated in her specific context. Her language reflects her complete understanding of her people's struggle.

Chung proclaims that Asian women are telling their stories, demanding to be heard. They are struggling to survive under oppressive social structures that are based on racism, sexism, castism, cultural imperialism, and economic exploitation. She writes that "pain and suffering, therefore, are the epistemological starting point for

Asian women in their search for the meaning of full humanity. Asian women's epistemology is an epistemology from the broken body, a broken body longing for healing and wholeness" (p. 39).

Struggle to be the Sun Again is a comprehensive presentation of emerging Asian Feminist liberation theologies. It challenges all of us who ask the question of what it means to be human in the face of oppressive social structures that seek to destroy Asian women spiritually, mentally, and physically. The liberating words of Asian women who defy the social forces that seek their silence are prophetic ones that challenge those who rail or refuse to see Third World Asian women as human beings. In her introduction, Chung writes that she "hopes that my work will provide research that supports Asian women's struggle for self-determination, dignity, and wholeness" (p. 9). Chung has made a fine presentation of Asian women's feminist liberation theologies. She has done so with dignity and wholeness. ♣

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1991 - 92 Schedule of Events and Programs Enclosed!

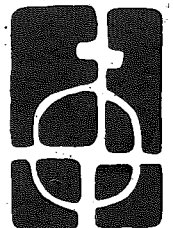
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(Our profound apologies for any oversights. Please let us know if we missed your name.)



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