This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color Study Guide

This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color by Cherríe Moraga

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

"This Bridge Called My Back" is a compilation of poetry and prose writings from feminists from cultures considered in the late-1970s to be Third World. That category included virtually every skin color except white, and dramatically changed the experiences for those American women. Several of them were also identified as lesbians meaning their oppression was two-pronged, frequently coming from inside their culture just as sharply as it came from outside it.

The first section of the book is called "Children Passing in the Streets: The Roots of Our Radicalism" and contains the stories of several writers' experiences as children growing up in America. Their stories are filled with incidents of violent abuse at the hand of the white people around them, and of being disregarded as credible members of school groups, and society at large as a result of simply being differently colored. Some of them talk about "passing" as white and thus striving throughout their childhoods to disguise their accents and behave in every way as much like white girls as they could. Frequently there followed, as the girls grew older and came to understand their parents' experiences and admire their own cultures for what they were, a desire to reclaim what their parents, fearing for their oppression, encouraged them to separate themselves from.

In the second section, entitled "Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh," the women express their feeling of alienation from other women as a deeply painful separation from sisters, and talk about their desire for communion with them. They also describe the impressions of their mothers and the women of their cultures who remain in the oppression of their traditional roles, and seek to understand the roots of their definitions.

Third is "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You: Racism in the Women's Movement" in which the women vent their frustration with the roles they are expected to play by the white women who monopolize the Women's Movement. They are frequently asked to serve as token representatives of Third World women so the white women feel inclusive, but having offered them the chance to speak, they don't seek out knowledge of their lives or priorities on their own.

Next, "Between the Lines: On Culture, Class and Homophobia" examines the ways culture, class and homophobia still manifest in the Women's Movement. The stories the women tell are about their desires to be heard as credible voices and to create a unified movement. They each have had to strive to build understanding among their own people, and to overcome differences among other women to make themselves heard in the Movement.

"Speaking in Tongues: The Third World Woman Writer" addresses the need for the voices of colored women to be heard, and discusses the conception among them that their voices are not worthy, as well as the deep and old pain that is almost inevitably

unearthed when they write about their experiences. The writing in this chapter is some of the most poetic, filled with imagery and passion.

The book concludes with "El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision," a chapter that envisions the world a united feminist movement could create. The authors throughout are women who have been active in the Women's Movement and who are determined as a result to turn the differences among women of Third World races into strengths.

Introduction and Children Passing in the Streets: The Roots of Our Radicalism

Introduction and Children Passing in the Streets: The Roots of Our Radicalism Summary and Analysis

In the book's introduction, editors and compilers Cheri Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua and Toni Cade Bombara, all women's rights activists in 1970s America, each write about the importance of this project in their perceptions of the Women's Movement at the time. Moraga talks about her optimism when she first released the book three years earlier, and how since a unified Women's Movement, one that included and celebrated women of every nationality, still seemed imminent and possible, because such a thing hadn't been attempted. Her conclusion is that, even discouraged, she would press on with the project, because political writers are optimists by nature, sure that they can use words to change the way people understand the world, and so conduct themselves in it. Anzuldua writes in a combination of Spanish and English as she encourages readers that the Movement is coming out of the shadows and breaking with oppressive customs and taboos, and they should continue to work with optimism.

In the Forward, Toni Cade Bombara congratulates those in the Movement who have made such progress toward breaking break bread and chains together. She also warns, however against the danger of sitting back, satisfied with rhetoric at the expense of putting their passion and ideas into action. She encourages readers to use their passion to make revolution irresistible. In a Preface before the first poem included in the book, Cheri Moraga turns to the example of her own story to point out the value of cooperation, since no single person has all the answers, and the struggle will take the support of every kind of woman. She closes by pointing out the pain of separation between women, and how the struggles of women in every culture can unite them.

Donna Kate Rushin is the author of the Bridge Poem that sits between the Preface and the Introduction. She writes about her frustration at being the bridge between people groups who don't understand each other's perspectives, while not completely belonging in any of the groups. She has done the work of understanding the struggles and needs of the people in her world, while they have made no such effort; the poem, therefore, serves to draw the reader's attention to the value of seeking out such understanding, a theme that repeats throughout the book, while also reinforcing the value of being genuinely oneself. Moraga and Anzaldua cooperatively write the Introduction, and use it to define their motivation and process for writing the book. They explain that they want to clarify the reasons as well as the solutions for racial divisions within the Movement, offer introductions to the writers who contributed to the finished product, and encourage readers to put the ideas they present into action.

The first chapter begins with a poem by Nellie Wong called "When I was Growing Up" about her longing to be white and look and speak like the American girls around her,

viewing her own physical appearance as dirty, scorning oriental men, and reflects on the fact with some shame, as if she expects her readers to have some voyeuristic fascination and want more details than she volunteers. Mary Hope Lee contributes a poem called "on not bein" about the childhood experience of being half black and half white, and not fitting in with either group. She talks about the ranking system of beauty and worth according to lightness, and closes with a stanza about marrying a black man who is the first to ask her, and chooses her because black girls aren't intelligent enough, and she's the next best thing to white.

The next poem comes from Cherrie Moraga and is called "For the Color of my Mother." It is a highly symbolic poem that moves through several ages in her own life, and her experiences of being a white girl with a brown mother, and desiring to speak for her as she sees her struggle. Finally, she finds a group of dark women who understand her and her mother's lives. She finally finds peace and refuge in their compassionate and wise listening. Another poem about peace with identity comes from Rosario Morales, called "I Am What I Am," speaking about her experience of being an American from Puerto Rico, as well as a Jew, a New Yorker, a lover of Dickens, and several other things that defy stereotype. She refuses to be categorized or limited by people's ideas or expectations of her, inviting her observers to take her or leave her alone.

Naomi Littlebear adds a particularly painful essay about her experience as a Native American. She was scorned for her identity as a schoolgirl, frequently being beaten for it by the boys she went to school with. Her grandmother would hold her responsible, and so whip her for fighting, until she ran away for blocks, unable to find nurturing anywhere. Reflecting on her childhood as an adult, she talks about the life she and her lover try to create, as both of them carry the scars of painful childhoods, her lover having been the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of her big brother. Even as an adult, she fears groups of boys she encounters in the streets. She says they have no choice but to be survivors.

Closing the first chapter, poet Chrystos presents a story about a child who wasn't allowed knowledge of her heritage in "He Saw." The poem is about a child's observations of a father who changed his identity completely to blend into an American world out of shame for the world he came from. He had been a fisherman, but his mother had died, and his father had gone crazy, so he lived as though they didn't exist, and raised his child the same way, in American schools and neighborhoods. She expresses regret for what has been lost, wishing to understand the child he had been and the world he had come from. Since he wouldn't teach her, she was learning the ancient practice of weaving nets herself.

Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh

Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh Summary and Analysis

A short introduction opens the second chapter, explaining what the editors mean by "Theory in the Flesh." They explain that they intend to address the question of which parts of their mothers that help make them whole, and the parts of them that stifles their knowledge of themselves. The first entry is a poem called "Wonder Woman" by Genny Lim about the divisions between categories of women and her own wondering whether they share fundamental things in common even while they are so different. She wonders why women are born into such very different roles, and what their responsibilities to each other are as women who are, at their essence, all the same.

Next, Cherrie Moraga writes "La Guera" about being a fair-skinned Chicana and her childhood of training to be more white than her mother, and longing for the culture that defined her mother. She identifies lesbianism as a poverty in the same category as brownness or financial poverty, and identifies with her mother in it, and moving through the process of identifying with her lesbianism inspires her to cling more closely to the rest of her identity as a Chicana.

Mitsuye Yamada's "Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman" is an essay about how little understanding she found among white feminists and students of the residual anger among Asians for their times in American concentration camps, and their subsequently being disregarded as quiet, passive people. She expresses a desire for Americans and others to take responsibility for their own actions, their understanding, and their lack of understanding.

Anita Valerio writes next, "It's in My Blood, My Face — My Mother's Voice, The Way I Sweat." It is a free-verse poem about her experiences in sweat lodges and growing up on a Native American reservation. She contemplates the holy standing of a virgin holy woman in her tribe, wondering at the similarity between Catholicism and Native thought, and how relevant it really is. She moves from there through the impressions of her tribe she had through her more modern and educated lens, but comes back by the end of the piece to the deep, visceral connection she has with her tribesmen, weeping over their collective wound in the sweat lodge. That connection contrasts with her separation from them and everyone because of her lesbianism, but she still desires to return to tribal lands for the spiritual healing and deep personal truth she finds there.

Another Native American writer, Barbara Cameron, writes "Gee, You Don't Seem Like An Indian From The Reservation." She writes about the violence her people lived with at the hands of white people, and how many dead bodies became common experiences for her. She only came to recognize the significance of the contrast when she grew up

and left the reservation. She discusses the realities of being a lesbian Native American, and the lack of understanding of both of those things from both white and Native American people alike. She reaches out to both as a teacher, and is disappointed to see her words only selectively heard, still filtered through the preconceptions of her listeners. Like Valerio, she returns to her homeland for the spiritual healing and refuge that keeps her whole.

"...And Even Fidel Can't Change That!" by Aurora Levins Morales is a revealing essay about the sexual culture of Cuba, and the resulting roles and realities of the women there. Girls are taught from early life that men only want one thing, and so to use their sexuality as their power over them. The result is a skewed, aggressive sexuality that doesn't communicate affection or provide a nurturing place for women to retreat to, but she is able to find something more like that in lesbian relationships. She compares the disappearing Cuban culture to the disappearing neighborhoods of her childhood and the resulting homelessness of her mother and her and their Jewish ancestors. She finishes the essay expressing pride in her Spanish and her accent, and wanting to nurture her family out of the disadvantage that has come with their heritage, believing that if she can heal the wound in her mother, live in her education and her heritage, then she can pass on a healthy relationship with both to the generation that follows her.

"I Walk in the History of My People" is a metaphorical poem by Chrystos about the walking wounded that is the tribes of Native Americans, and it concludes this section of the book.

And When you Leave, Take Your Pictures with You: Racism in the Women's Movement

And When you Leave, Take Your Pictures with You: Racism in the Women's Movement Summary and Analysis

In the introduction to this chapter, the fact of the discrimination against women of color that was still escalating within the women's movement sets the tone for what follows. White women at this point were still motivated largely by guilt to include token members of color in their movements, but were making no real effort to educate themselves about them or invite them into leadership, preferring instead to keep their ideas of these women given them by quaint old pictures of their traditional roles. The first piece is the poem by Jo Carrillo from which the chapter takes its name, and she expresses frustration at being limited in her definition to the assumptions white people make about their values and roles based on pictures, thinking they are advocating for this simple group of women who have long since outgrown those definitions. She sounds a similar note in "Beyond the Cliffs of Abiquiu," describing Native Americans living in a bastardized version of their own native lands, which are run and exploited by white people who neither respect nor understand them.

Chrystos offers a free-verse poem next entitled "I Don't Understand Those Who Have Turned Away From Me." She describes the flippancy with which white people talk about the differences between their own health and that of black people they don't think about being poorer and malnourished, and don't even express concern that Native Americans don't even live long enough to experience those difficulties. She expresses frustration at her experience in the Women's Movement with people who make no effort to come learn about her, as hard as she works to understand and come alongside them, and talks about having left the movement completely drained from the lack of love she found there.

Mitsuye Yamada writes the essay called "Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism" about what cliche behavior is expected of Asian American women, and their political activity being completely disregarded by women who simply don't expect it from them, so don't notice when it happens. She points to the experiences of several Third World and Asian women who found the Women's Movement to be largely a middle class white women's movement in which they couldn't find representation or a voice. They are forced instead into ethnic advocacy groups, and feel forced to put off third world feminism until their race can find equality. She writes that there shouldn't have to be a choice between them. Her mother survived just for the sake of her children, and she understands now as an adult what strength that required, deciding now to live in the

freedom, and in search of the freedom, her mother wanted for her. She wants white American women to understand the residual pain in Asian America over their forced encampment, and white America's very limited understanding of the Asian struggle for equality, instead of simply expecting polite appreciation from Asians for being politely treated as America's guests.

"Millicent Fredericks" by Gabrielle Daniels is a prose introduction and a poem about the relationship of mutual respect and affection between a white woman and her black housemaid. She writes about the pain of Millicent's poverty and the seeming hopelessness of her situation, passing the poverty on to her children as if with the very milk from her breasts. The admiration of her mistress, however, gives voice to her pain, and paints a picture of her as a saint, wise and compassionate.

" — But I Know You, American Woman" by Judit Moschkovich is written in response to a letter from a white feminist wanting to learn about Latin culture. Moschkovich writes as a Latina Jewess immigrant annoyed at the request as coming from someone who presumes she will be happy to explain her whole story for the millionth time to someone who has made no effort to understand on her own. The oppressed is being forced to teach the oppressor because the oppressor can't be bothered to reach out in friendship, read the many Latin books, or listen to their music. She resents the expectation that Latins assimilate to American culture and leave behind their own, pointing out that if Americans moved to another country, they would certainly miss their own language, foods, holidays and customs and want to keep some with them. She compares it to women living in the men's world, forced to learn their customs much more than men learn the needs and idiosyncrasies of women.

Doris Davenport writes a particularly candid and visceral critique of the inclusiveness of the Women's Movement of Black women in particular in "The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third World Wimmin." She posits that "the problem is white wimmin" and that it comes from their lack of understanding that they are oppressed by the same misled superiority complex that allows white men to colonize them, as well as every other race of people on earth. She bristles at the fact that white women think black women envy their looks, thinking herself that white women are misshapen and weak, inferior in every way to the physicality of black women. She understands, at the same time, that their racism isn't deliberate, but is a result of years and years of a culture that thinks itself, and so treats itself as if it is entitled. She views white women with contempt as well as pity, focusing her energies on those few white women who are more mentally and spiritually evolved than the majority... that is, those who are un-racist, and willing to view black women as they are in all of their power and potential.

In "We're All in the Same Boat," Rosario Morales calls for unity between races as they strive for sexual equality. She expresses her desire to be unashamed of all the things she is, even as seemingly contradictory as they might be, and to invite all the women around her to be themselves with equal volume and pride. She invites Third World women to accept each other with celebration, so they can build a movement with real staying power. She points out the prejudices that divide races, and calls them weaknesses when these sorrows, accents and distinctions should be the things that

unify them. She asks women to remember the similarity of their abuses in free form poetry, so they can rise from them in unity.

"An Open Letter to Mary Daly" from Audre Lorde addresses the fact of Daly's having asked Lorde to write in endorsement of her book "Gyn/Ecology" while simultaneously and seemingly deliberately leaving out any African influence. Lorde is an African-American woman who had been happy to support the project, but it becomes clear upon release of the book that Daly has selected only white goddesses to serve as inspirations of strength for women world-wide, resting on Lorde's endorsement as enough of a nod to African women. Lorde expresses her disdain both for the omission of the valuable example and inspiration of Afrekete, and for the disregard for the significant message the omission sends to women of color. In "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Lorde lectures on the negligence of being feminist without intimate knowledge of the experience of women of every color and social strata. She calls difference "that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged" and urges women to advocate from and for their own unique perspectives, seeking out and respecting the perspectives of everyone around them until the fear of difference dissolves.

Between the Lines: On Culture, Class and Homophobia

Between the Lines: On Culture, Class and Homophobia Summary and Analysis

The opening poem in this chapter is from Rosario Morales and is called "The Other Heritage." It follows an introduction that talks about the class differences among the already underprivileged Third World cultures in America. The poem deals with the fear she felt walking through the streets of Harlem, and the stench of stalking feet behind her. She carries a similar fear with her into groups of black feminists, wondering whether they will see through to her fear and reject her. She affects white manners, but doesn't fit into white society, so she is left to live with her fear in every circumstance instead of fitting comfortably anywhere.

Hattie Gossett writes the free verse poem "billie lives! billie lives" about the power in Billie Holiday's delivery of "Hungarian Suicide Song" retitled "Gloomy Sunday" to move men so profoundly that they committed suicide after hearing her sing it. Gossett dreams of meeting Billie and asking her how to use her own voice to elicit that kind of passionate reaction to her own words. It is written in rich Ebonic dialect and is filled with wonder and references to juju women and black cultural references.

Sisters Barbara and Beverly Smith give the interview whose transcript becomes "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue." They open with a discussion of the difference between white people who don't know what it is to struggle with money and Third World people whose realities are defined by it. They express frustration with the white option for "downward mobility," not finishing college because they can choose not to and still be granted the privileges that come with their skin. Then, the sexism that white women encounter is a surprise to them instead of sexism that comes with racism that other women have experienced their entire lives. It makes white feminism very different from third world feminism. Still, white women don't understand that the sexism experienced by colored women is extreme and constant instead of occasional. They also point out the assumption among white women that education only results from a middle class background, so they don't expect educated women, whether of color or not, to have struggled with money, much less violence. The result of that distance in experience is that black people behave when they are together in a way that they never behave when they are with white people. They talk about the contrast between the lesbian separatism in colored cultures, when the women share some oppression with the men of their cultures and that in white cultures, in which the women don't have oppression in common with their male counterparts. There are atrocities colored women suffer purely because they are colored, when they aren't even being viewed as women, which is what makes joining a white movement an incomplete union. Black homophobia is the next topic they address, a reality exacerbated by the already present oppression

of a people who fear more reasons for alienation, and so are less willing to accept differences as blatant as homosexuality. They close their interview by reiterating the desire of several Third World women to be respected resources and leaders in the Women's Movement instead of barely acknowledged tokens.

In the essay that follows, Cheryl Clarke describes lesbianism as an act of resistance against the imperialist pattern of white men over women of every color. She describes the resulting culture in black communities, led to believe that black women are more free than black men, because they are free to marry white men. She calls lesbians, then, the only ideological, political and philosophical protesters against heterosexual tyranny. Male domination is perpetuated by the male ability to dominate in the home, and women's only freedom from that system, she posits, is simply not to give them power over them. It is the freedom that can unite black and white women and allow them to care for each other without controlling one another. She closes by calling lesbianism the ultimate in self-love, freeing women from the battle for space at the bottom, joining the final resistance.

"Lowriding Through the Women's Movement" by Barbara Noda describes the group of friends of which Barbara was a part in Watsonville, California that was, for her, the first Third World group of feminist advocates. She reflects fondly on their long talks about their colonizers and what it is to be the colonized. The hostess of those meetings was tragically killed by a car, and so the women are left to advocate in her absence, with the world completely changed.

"Letter to Ma" by Merle Woo is a letter she wrote to her Asian American mother, expressing both her admiration for her and her desire that the two of them might be able to unite under the banner of their heritage and live in mutual pride in the progress they have made. She talks about her mother's journey and struggle, and gives her credit for holding her up and inspiring the strength that has now allowed her to become an advocate for the liberation of all Third World women. She wants her mother to understand her reasons, and not just disregard the struggle as something she'll never understand or be a part of. She describes her struggle to be heard and the ways in which there has been progress, and where there still needs to be more. She describes the ways in which struggling for equality for Asian women will be a boon to Asian men, as well, and allow them all to be proud of who they are instead of trying to be anything else.

Mirtha Quintanales' essay, "I Come with No Illusions" chronicles her feeling of having lost hope of ever finding a Latina woman to spend her life with, and the attendant feeling of having failed to adjust or adapt because that is still what she wants. She confesses, however, that living in intimacy with someone who thinks and sees home life the way she does is a human need everyone shares and something she can't overcome. She marvels both at the wonder of the deep ingraining of culture in us, and at the pain that comes with it. In "I Paid Very Hard For My Immigrant Ignorance," she talks about growing up in Cuba where there were people of several races all living harmoniously together, aware of their differences but not separated by them. She is surprised to observe her lover's inability to understand her Cubanism, even while Quintanales

completely understands her small-town background, as different as it is from her own. She acknowledges that both those who have been victims of, and those who have been complicit in, racism must allow for the healing and correction that will unite disparate groups, or we will always be held down by the weight of history, unable to move forward.

The final essay in the chapter is Naomi Littlebear's "Earth-Lover, Survivor, Musician." It is a letter she wrote to Cherrie in response to her invitation to write for this book, about her exhaustion with the Women's Movement and her preference to be a woman-identified earth-lover and artist. She describes the pain that came with her time in the Movement, bringing her squarely into the mental place of the violence she experienced as a child, and setting her up for more abuse when she still needed to heal from the childhood pain. She asks instead of asking her to be a fellow fighter, if Cherrie would simply be a friend to her, identifying with their shared experiences, celebrating their victories and moving forward in the simple happiness of a life peacefully and creatively lived.

Speaking in Tongues: The Third World Woman Writer

Speaking in Tongues: The Third World Woman Writer Summary and Analysis

Opening the penultimate chapter, Gloria Anzaldua offers "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers" as encouragement to women of color to put their experiences in writing. She talks about the necessity to write in the spaces of life even when women's lives are full and little time is left, and about the vitality of their voices in all their uniqueness. She says that she writes to give the world a handle, and help her make sense of it on her own terms. She also acknowledges that there will be pain in the experience of mining the depths of what one has experienced in order to write, but that that is the vital truth that must be told. She urges women to write out of their own colored, rich, deep and dark truth and to thereby encourage other women to do the same, and live and write as honest observers of real experience.

"who told you anybody wants to hear from you? you ain't nothing but a black woman!" by Hattie Gossett is a free verse poem about her frustration and exhaustion having worked to find writers and publishers for this project. She talks about how black women and the things they have to say come in and out of fashion, and in that season, they were not in. She even points out that no presidential candidate is courting their vote in that election year (1980), and wishes in writing that she could just retreat somewhere to have her nervous breakdown.

Next, Nellie Wong writes "In Search of the Self As Hero: Confetti of Voices on New Year's Night A Letter to Myself" as an examination of why she writes and where she finds the motivation. She writes in distinctively Asian natural imagery, and examines all of the voices in herself as an Asian, a feminist, a poet a wife, longing for expression, as well as the voices speaking as influences to her who also vie for expression. She expresses the temptation to retreat from the overwhelming scale of the task back into her own imagination, but must define her role, since she is a relatively new voice. She could retreat and become a hobo, an alcoholic, and stifle the thoughts in her, but points to the support of her family and friends and the tragedies of several advocates who have come before her as inspiration. She concludes that she has a talent and an inclination to use her voice, and will not succumb to the forces that would silence her, determining to help bring order to a chaotic world.

Norma Alarcon submits "Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-Vision Through Malintzin/ or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object" about a Mexican feminine archetype that finds new relevance as an inspiration for Chicana women seeking equality in America. She describes her victimization as a little girl and the inaction of her family to defend her from it, and how, after growing up and liberating herself from her oppression, she is reunited unexpectedly with her family and meets them with indifference. Her primary

examination is of the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship, in which the mother both leaves the daughter to her enslavement and is enslaved by the same oppression herself. When the daughter is liberated, she becomes a symbol of disobedience to a corrupt system as a virtue and something to be emulated. She shatters the notion that all disobedience is sinful and allows for some civil disobedience to be the most virtuous of acts.

The chapter closes with Chrystos' poem, "Ceremony for Completing a Poetry Reading." She speaks symbolically of gifts from nature and her garden that she has gathered and made, and describes them all as gifts for the reader, and closes by saying that when her hands are empty of their gifts, then her heart will be full.

El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision

El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision Summary and Analysis

The final chapter's introduction talks about femininity in all its forms becoming a strength, if all of its incarnations are used: that every people group would be free because the systems of tyranny would be destroyed by the work a united group of women could do. The work that must be done will be work both of destruction and creation, and the final chapter is meant to define what might be created.

Chrystos' opening poem, "Give Me Back" is another symbolic poem demanding the return of all that has been stolen from her and her people, and closes with her outlining her own shape with knives, carving out her space with battle and, once her space is established, planting her weapons in the ground not to be used again.

"La Prieta" or "The Dark One" by Gloria Anzaldua follows. She tells about her childhood, taught to be ashamed of her darkness by her mother's keeping her out of the sun and her father's buying her Western books that talked about the way the white people regarded brown-skinned people. She got her period very early, and lost her father early, too, so her mother both hid her and depended on her. She leaves her childhood home and its traditional roles to have unsatisfying experiences with male lovers, and come to be known as a snow queen for her frigidity. Her guardedness also defines her as a mountain of strength to friends, and she confesses her fragility to her journal among the urging of friends to be the goddess of destruction. She describes herself as a bridge between cultures and a facilitator, wanting to create instead of destroy. She wants peace toward and among her gay friends, and validation for her feminist friends. She urges feminists to passive resistance of institutions that perpetuate repression, in order that something new can replace them. Closing with a section called El Mundo Zurdo, or The Left-Handed World, she urges people to be spurred to compassion by neediness around them, to span the abysses between people, and to combine their efforts to become a force to create a new world.

"A Black Feminist Statement" is contributed by the Combahee River Collective, and outlines first, the Genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism as the observation that black women have never found representation in the political system and that their liberation will be directly related to the economic well-being of black people as a whole. They outline their belief that they are specifically oppressed and so require specific liberation, not simply adjunct liberation tied to that of black men, defining themselves as feminists, lesbians and socialists. They also draw attention to the fact that, since they are smart, they have as a result been regarded as ugly, and demand a fair hearing as complete human beings, renouncing black men's complicity in their oppression as much as white men's. They point out the difficulty in organizing, because sex has defined power in black culture, and men have reacted very badly to feminine power in the black world. They wish to address the racism in the white feminist movement, and to

denounce and discourage acts of violence or vandalism in the quest for black feminist liberation.

"The Welder" is a poem by Cherrie Moraga about her desire to join different things, but still leave them whole, instead of being an alchemist who would blend them all together until the different elements became indistinguishable. She writes that she understands the power of heat to change the shape of things, encouraging women in her symbolism not to be afraid of the struggle, and closes the poem saying she is taking the power into her own hands.

The transcript from Gloria Anzaldua of "O.K. Momma, Who the Hell Am I?: an Interview with Louisah Teish" is broken into three parts. In the first part, Teish talks about numerology and her early experience in the feminist movement with the rumbling belief in the background of her thoughts that black people had a very particular and unique power to tap. Her revelation came in the form of an encounter with her goddess self who told her to protect women from the things she is most afraid of, so she gave herself to work with women's shelters. In the second part, she says she feels as if something very important is beginning to happen, when Mother Earth is going to tell the men to let go of their machines of destruction and let her clean things up. She talks about feminine spirituality's power to remake the world, and senses that it is moving out of the shadows, taking the power back from the men who have been feeding them piecemeal for so long. She goes on to describe charms she uses for things like wealth and health, and closes the section with her own vision for what the world could be like. Women take back their personal and intellectual power, and everyone has the right to express themselves fully and without shame. The final section talks about the infancy of femininity being its season of oppression, and its adulthood breaking the bonds of the power Europeans only stumbled into by chance. She speaks about women overtaking the "men's room" and shattering the myth of their inherent dominance.

Andrea Canaan's essay, "Brownness" comes next, and in it she examines the history of brown oppression as if it is her own memory, and examines how she has been complicit in her own oppression. She seeks to identify who the real enemy is, examining white women who seduce brown men, brown men who most victimize brown women, white men who set up the whole system of oppression in the first place, but concludes that those would be the easy people to blame, and in so doing, she would be disempowering herself in a different way in each case. She has to acknowledge in the end that the enemy is the human need to categorize and generalize, and that when she allows herself to remain whole, there exists the very real possibility that she will be hated by someone. However, she will remain whole even with that possibility, and defiantly so. She sends out warnings to all her would-be enemies that she is there, whole and unashamed.

Pat Parker's lecture to the BASTA conference in Oakland, California entitled "Revolution: It's Not Neat or Pretty or Quick" serves to call on the same revolutionary spirit and belief in truth and justice that motivated all the revolutions throughout history, reminding women that no single facet of a population can make a revolution, but unity is vital. Closing the chapter, Chystos' free verse poem, "No Rock Scorns Me as Whore"

talks about the necessity of people's regaining acquaintance with the sacred and natural. In the natural world, there is no prejudice or hatred, and nature is therefore the best teacher for humanity.

Characters

Gloria Anzaldua

A Chicano writer and one of the editors of the book, Gloria writes about the value of the Third-World feminine voice and the importance of writing both for the sake of crystallizing one's own perspective on the world, and to motivate and encourage other women in their own journeys. Her voice in the Forward to the Second Edition is a passionate mix of Spanish and English, English always translating lines already written in Spanish, and is used to spur women on in the work of building bridges to the future. She reminds women that the work will be hard, and that work must follow words, and that there are countless images and notions about women and their roles that will take years to reprogram. She is hopeful throughout, however, that hearts are already being changed, and that women have proven their strength throughout history, proving that no one is more worthy of the task. In her essay "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third-World Women Writers" Anzaldua encourages women to use their voices in writing, and to write in the tiny spaces between the demands of daily living if there is no time to sit and write for long stretches, because writing that springs from the realities of living is the vessel of valuable truth, born in the struggle and full of the victory and heartbreak of actual living.

Cherrie Moraga

Cherrie Moraga writes from the perspective of a lesbian living in Boston, and exhausted by the struggle for equality that has defined nearly her entire life. She is one of the driving forces behind the book, and describes her evolution into political life, her search for a publisher and the process of gathering writers for the work, in addition to her own experience as a Third-World feminist in a movement dominated by white women. She talks about being motivated by her love for women, and the pain of being needlessly separated from so many of them, when the cause for which they are all fighting will be e benefit to them all. She quotes her lover as saying that intimacy is "...about who you can sit down to a meal with, who you can cry with, whose face you can touch," and she confesses to her own painful ignorance of the lives and experiences of the black women living around her. In her essay "La Guera" she explains that she is the well-educated daughter of a Latina immigrant who was not well-educated at all, but prioritized the education of her daughter in order that she might "pass" for something other than what she was, other than what her mother was penalized for being. She describes her poverty in terms of her lesbianism and being brown-skinned. She describes the guilt of the oppressor identifying with his victim as just as real as the guilt of the victim fearing she hasn't done enough for those under the same oppression.

Toni Cade Bambara

Toni Cade Bambara is a novelist who writes the Forward to the book, and whose voice largely serves as an admirer and supporter of the writers and activists whose work will comprise the book. She incorporates a number of quotes from the writers included to highlight their hopefulness and the best of their unifying ideas. She stresses the value of working as a unified group of women from every nationality, so their strength becomes collective, and they each value equally the goals of every other group.

Donna Kate Rushkin

Poet whose work entitled "The Bridge Poem" is included in the book's introduction. It serves as an explanation of the bridge between people and groups women often become, having to understand the needs and thoughts of everyone around them in order to communicate between them in compensation for their unwillingness to work to understand each other.

Nellie Wong

Author of the poem entitled "When I was Growing Up" about being Oriental and living in America, longing to be white and shunning her own heritage with the conviction that white was superior. She writes "In Search of the Self as Hero: Confetti of Voices on New Year's Night" as a letter to herself contrasting the things that encourage her with the things that discourage her, and the temptation to retreat into her own imagination from life. She encourages herself by the end that she cares too much to betray those who came before her, or who fight alongside her.

Mary Hope Lee

Poet whose work, "on not bein"' talks about passing as white, and therefore not completely belonging in either the black or the white community, shunned in both schools, and married because her husband considered her the next best thing to white instead of inherently valuable herself.

Rosario Morales

Morales contributes an open-verse poem about being shamelessly made up of contradictions. She is both Puerto Rican and Jewish, and both of those while also being a full-fledged American. She is also a fan of Dickens and the Queen's English, and recognizes how very different that makes her from any of her friends or family. Her next contribution is called "We're all in the Same Boat," and talks about the fact of everyone's sexism and racism, and the need for everyone to overcome imperialism before any other, more internal issues like sexism or racism can be addressed. "The Other

Heritage" is a free verse poem about growing up in Black Harlem and the danger men were to her, the fear of rejection from the women, affecting a crisp white accent to be accepted in white establishments, and longing to be accepted for the mix of nationalities that make her.

Naomi Littlebear

Littlebear is a Native American who writes an essay entitled "Dreams of Violence" about her experiences with violence at the hands of the white boys she went to school with. Her grandmother was so ashamed of her coming home beaten up that she would scold her for fighting. Now, as an adult, she and her lover take refuge in each other as two victims of abuse struggling to live and love coherently and beyond the shadows of their pasts. Later in the book, she contributes "Earth-Lover, Survivor, Musician" about her art and music being her vehicles for protest and expression, and the violence and pain she experienced in the leftist women's movement. What she wants most is friends, not comrades, and to live and enjoy nature.

Chrystos

A Native American writer who contributes several poems and one essay. She writes about the shame her father had for their heritage, not wanting to teach her so she could blend better with white society, and about the abandonment she experienced by people who shunned her for her heritage. She teaches about how to appreciate the wisdom of writers, poets, and those who have lived different lives, and how to give and receive knowledge. Her last piece is about the ways we can learn from the honesty and balance in nature how to accept and celebrate our own differences, and balance our giving and taking.

Genny Lim

Contributes a poem called "Wonder Woman," wondering whether the very different women she observes around her are dreaming and hoping for the same things she is.

Mitsuye Yamada

Yamada contributes the essay, "Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman," in which she reveals the misconceptions she encounters being an Asian feminist. She records the anger of Americans who didn't expect or understand the anger of Asians who hold on to resentment for the years they were held in American concentration camps, or for being generalized about as passive instead of met and understood on their own terms as individuals, and thereby granted the freedom to be who they are. "Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism" talks about Americans' expectations of Asian women and the resulting struggle for them to become teachers of any idea that doesn't conform to that image.

Barbara Cameron

Cameron is a Native American who writes about her experiences watching the violence against her people on the reservation, and coming to understand how significant that was by contrasting it with what she observed in white culture once she left the reservation. Her essay is called "Gee, You Don't Seem Like An Indian From the Reservation" and she goes on to describe how her experience as a gay Native American served to alienate her even from her own people, and her journey towards harmony with her heritage as an adult.

Aurora Levins Morales

Morales writes about Puerto Riacan sexuality, family and New York life and their being significant shapers of her fears and her passions. She talks about the sexual aggressiveness of Puerto Rican men, and so women using their sexuality as a weapon and a kind of power over the men. She discusses her Jewish heritage, and how the theme of homelands being destroyed continues to hold true over her family's childhood homes.

Jo Carrillo

Carrillo contributes the poem, "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You" about the roles to which white feminists wish to reduce Third World women to occupying. She talks about white women wanting to defend Third World women's rights to be what they think they were in their homeland, instead of their rights to be whatever they want to be themselves in the New World. Her next poem strikes a similar chord, in "Beyond the Cliffs of Abiquiu," written in the voice of someone mocking the role a white person wants a Native American to play, while white people ruin and take over Native American lands.

Gabrielle Daniels

"Millicent Fredericks" is an essay and poem dedicated to the relationship between a wealthy white woman and the dedicated black housemaid she came to love and wished to be an advocate for. She discusses the impotence of being a white woman in the era of slavery to do anything about the plight of the black women she watched.

Judit Moschkovich

Moschkovich writes "...But I Know You, American Woman," an essay about how exhausting it is to have to teach American women feigning interest in her culture while they make no effort to learn about it themselves. She is forced to teach the same ideas over and over, and confronted with the reality that if she wants American feminism to

reflect the needs and perspectives of Latin American women, she will have to go on teaching.

Doris Davenport

Davenport writes "The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third World Wimmin," an essay in which she expresses her deep and old frustration with white women who assume they are superior and that black women envy and want to be just like them. She highly values both her heritage and her physiology, and sees white women as having been colonized by the same territory-grabbing men whose inferiority complex inspired them to colonize every other people group on the planet. She says that feminism must either liberate all women of every color, or it is worthless, and defeats its own purposes.

Audre Lorde

Contributes "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," an author who wrote about goddesses' examples of strength for women, but conspicuously leaves out African goddesses. She also writes the essay, "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House" in which she urges women to use their differences as strengths instead of trying to become strong in the ways that men are strong.

Hattie Gossett

Gossett writes a free verse poem in casual Ebonics about the jazz singer Billie Holiday, and her longing to learn how to speak with the power to affect men that she hears in Billie's voice. She also contributes another free-verse poem titled "who told you anybody wants to hear from you? you ain't nothing but a black woman!" This piece expresses frustration that all of her hard work never seems to be enough to affect change, so she just wants to rest for a while and recover from the effort.

Barbara and Beverly Smith

Two sisters in the feminist movement, the Smiths grant an interview whose transcript is used for "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister to Sister Dialogue," and speak to the separations of class and race that still exist in the Women's Movement, the different types of oppressions and the ways to bring all the cultures together without whitewashing them all to look alike. The two also spend a lot of time talking about discrimination against lesbians, and the importance of women inviting Third World women to teach them and affect the movement instead of inviting them in simply as tokens with little affect.

Cheryl Clarke

Clarke contributes "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance," an essay that describes lesbianism as resistance against heterosexual imperialism, and a continuation of the affectionate, loving relationships women have had with each other since time immemorial. She describes the prejudices that exist in different cultures against them, and the reasons lesbianism when lived out loud is such a dangerous thing in the minds of so many.

Barbara Noda

In "Lowriding Through the Women's Movement," Noda reminisces about her group of friends in the early seventies who she imagines was among the very first Third World feminist groups, gathered out of mutual respect and affection, discussing ways to change the world.

Merle Woo

"Letter to Ma" is a letter Woo writes more as a personal expression than as an address to her mother, about her admiration for her mother's strength, and her desire to communicate to her that her strength is what freed Woo to become the advocate of women's rights that she is and her mother so little understands.

Mirtha Quintanales

Quintanales writes in "I Come with no Illusions" about her struggle to find a lover who is like her in her Latina background or to be content alone, seeing her desire for a lover who identifies with her as a personal failure to adjust and adapt. She both celebrates her heritage and finds pain in not being able to bring it into her most intimate relationships. In a letter to Barbara Smith called "I Paid Very Hard for my Immigrant Ignorance," she has finally found some Latina sisters, but talks about the struggles they have to find acceptance with both black and white groups, and being generalized into classes they don't necessarily fit.

Norma Alarcon

Alaron writes an essay entitled "Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-Vision through Malintzin" about the literary archetype of Malintzin who still informs Chicana views of femininity and the way they find their strength and independence.

Andrea Canaan

"Brownness" is an essay about being brown and intellectual at the same time, torn between he understanding of her peoples' oppression and the impulse to stifle her creativity and intellect out of the recognition that liberation was only for a few at a time.

Pat Parker

Parker delivered "Revolution: It's Not Neat or Pretty or Quick" as a speech to the BASTA Conference in Oakland, California in 1980, to inspire the women to revolution in the same vein as the uprises against Nazis, colonial oppression and slavery, describing a corrupt system that must be changed radically and with the cooperation of women of every kind.

Objects/Places

Indian Reservations

Places both of refuge for cultures and retreat from the violence of the white people.

Harlem

A mix of cultures that meant violence as a matter of fact for many who grew up there.

New York

The city serves as another intersection for several cultures, allowing new categories of people to find each other and form new communities away from their homelands.

Boston

A city whose distinct class divisions defined two very disparate worlds for Third World people who were able to afford a private education, but whose race made finding acceptance there harder than getting the education.

the Women's Movement

A largely white middle class movement into which colored women have had a hard time breaking in and finding representation, being used instead as mere token representatives never given a real and consistently representative voice.

Oriental Women

Frustrated by oppression from within the men of their own culture and by the generalizations about themselves they encounter from American women who don't expect anger or frustration from women who are supposed to be mild.

Native American Women

Wounded by the violence of the white world that has so stunted and strangled their culture, and that continues to treat it violently, despite its beauty and ancient wisdom.

Chicana Women

Women from Latin and South American tribal cultures whose sexually aggressive men have shaped the sexuality and culture of the women.

Black Women

Frustrated by the residue of their race's victimization at the hands of white people who are in no way superior, but who give themselves all of the power and privilege.

Lesbians

A group striving to find equality and acceptance whose love for the feminine inspires them to advocate for women's rights, but whose lifestyles frequently alienate them from the struggle.

Combahee River Collective

The group of black feminists who contribute the section of the final chapter called "A Black Feminist Statement" outlining their agenda and vision for a revolutionized culture.

Themes

The Importance of Personal Identity

While the theme of racial identity is an overarching and obvious priority for women of color in the feminist movement, the value of one's own individual identity comes frequently only as a result of that larger, overarching search. When women who identify themselves as lesbians, for example, are rejected in both their own and white American culture, the alienation they feel forces them to find and rest in their own personal strength. They must use that as a source later for the strength to forge new paths in culture. It is also reinforced by the experience of having stifled one's identity in order to more closely resemble white America, when in adulthood, the fatigue of the facade finally drives a woman back to her heritage, and reminds her of its value. Speaking specifically about writers, it is the truth of genuinely felt and expressed personal experience that allows readers to enter in to a writer's experience and understand her struggle. Both Gloria Anzaldu and Nellie Wong spoke to the necessity of speaking from the depth of the most personal and individual experiences in order to most effectively communicate truth. It is a gesture both to the women who have gone before, and to the readers with whom a writer wishes to communicate.

Unity as a Source of Strength

Much of the angst the women felt came from their feeling of isolation resulting from the various forms of prejudice they encountered. The most blatant prejudice came from the white people both in culture at large and in the white Women's Movement, but there was also the prejudice of their own families and countrymen against their lesbianism. By contrast, when they felt they had common causes with either other feminists or with their countrymen, they felt empowered and able to affect whatever changes they sought. Whenever they wrote about a Women's Movement that could really transform culture, it was as a result of a unified group of women, all striving to bring the best of what made them unique, to the cause. Several of the writings address the need to unity, and refer to other revolutions as coming as a result of the unified effort of several groups all striving for the same thing. There is also evidence throughout the book of the encouragement that comes from existing with women whose experiences are like one's own, and the healing that results. Having experienced such healing, and found camaraderie with other women, the participants in the movement would be more whole and inexhaustible in their struggle to transform the culture. Cherrie Moraga's poem, "The Welder" serves as a beautiful analogy for the unity of several people groups bonded together but left in tact, to cooperate for a common cause without sacrificing each of their unique identities.

The Imporance of Self-Education

A source of frustration for the women throughout the book was the unwillingness of white women in the Feminist Movement to educate themselves about the lives and cultures of the Third World women living and advocating right around them. While they themselves knew all about the lives of white women, because the culture they lived in was all about them, they were constantly confronted with the seeming unwillingness of white women to reciprocate and learn about their culture. Instead of buying books or listening to music, befriending women of color or giving them positions of leadership that would allow them to affect the Movement in a way that would serve them, they would invite them as token guests on occasion to panel discussions, and consider that enough. The women of color, on the other hand, lived their whole lives educating themselves even to a point of over-compensation, in order to be able to rise out of the oppression into which they were born. Education has been their most powerful weapon, giving them a voice, and has been the thing white women can take or leave, and still retain the privilege that comes with being white. They are not, however, useful to the culture of women as a whole, encompassing every race, until they have taken the time to educate themselves.

Style

Perspective

The writers whose works are compiled for the book write from the perspective of participants in and observers of the Women's Movement as it existed in the late-1970s in America. They are jaded by the lack of recognition their voices receive in a movement largely dominated by white, middle class women, and so use this medium as a vent for their frustration, and a call for unity among all women of color. The social climate in those years was different from the climate of today, most notably because now there is a black president in America. In those years, women of color felt they had very little or no representation in government, and held out very little hope that they ever would. That is part of what motivated their struggle. They spoke about having been colonized by the white men in the same way whole cultures were colonized, and so spoke from a desire to redefine power and claim what power is uniquely feminine, instead of trying to wield power in a system still designed by and for men. They also speak as individuals who still haven't crossed the lines between the other cultures with which they are categorized, and so recognize that there are other women fighting similar battles, but don't yet know how to bridge the gaps between groups of color.

Tone

There are several tones in which the contributors write, almost as many as there are writers. There are several cases in which the writers begin writing from a place of frustration, and come around to their reasons for hope, or tell their stories of healing. Some of them remain frustrated from the beginning of their pieces to the last, simply recounting their experiences and arriving at the same familiar walls that stop them from getting beyond the point of their frustration. Some speak from sadness for their families and countrymen, longing to regain some lost pride or dignity in their cultural identity. Others dedicate whole pieces to inspiring hope in their fellow advocates, encouraging them to write from the depth of their pain and longing, praising their strength and telling the stories of the strengths that lie in the heart of every woman simply because they are female. Anger at injustice is a recurring tone, and frequently grows out of or diminishes into sadness, as women wonder whether their cultures will ever be the same after the abuses they have suffered and generation after generation has lived under the definition of the oppressed. There is, however, almost universally throughout the book, a tone of pride in femininity as a source of inexhaustible strength, as well as pride in nationality, even in cases when it has in the past seemed like a liability, so that the women in the end embrace their heritages as strengths that can never be taken from them.

Structure

The book is organized topically, with each section naming the category the items therein will address. It opens with several introductions and forwards to unify the themes and prepare the reader for what to expect from the book, and in the beginning of every section, there is another introduction. Those introductions are not attributed to any particular author like the introductory pieces are, and frequently follow a quote from one of the writers. Each section contains a mix of prose, letters, poetry, free verse poetry, transcripts of lectures and interviews. The sections are organized in a sort of chronological fashion, taking the women through the phases of their lives, and following the Movement from its conception in the minds of the writers through to its envisioned execution and resulting new world. Childhood comes first, and serves to introduce the roots of radicalism. The ideas develop through observation of their own cultures, and then to their understanding of the ways their cultures are viewed through the eyes of other cultures, fears and obstacles to unity are addressed next, and the book concludes with encouragement to women to use the power of words to convey their experiences, and to come together in a unified movement.

Quotes

"We have begun to come out of the shadows; we have begun to break with routines and oppressive customs and to discard taboos; we have commenced to carry with pride the task of thawing hearts and changing consciousness. Women, let's not let the danger of the journey and the vastness of the territory scare us — let's look forward and open paths in these woods. Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks." Gloria Anzaldua, Forward to the Second Edition, page v

"I spent a part of my childhood feeling great sadness and helplessness about how it seemed that Indians were open game for the white people to kill, maim, beat up, insult, rape, cheat, or whatever atrocity the white people wanted to play with. There was also a rage and frustration that has not died. When I look back on reservation life it seems that I spent a great deal of time attending the funerals of my relatives or friends of my family.... Death was so common on the reservation that I did not understand the implications of the high death rate until after I moved away and was surprised to learn that I've seen more dead bodies than my friends will probably ever see in their lifetime." Barbara Cameron, "Gee, You Don't Seem Like an Indian From the Reservation", Entering the Lives of Others, page 47

"i wanna go see [Billie Holiday] and ask her if she will teach some of us how to use our voices like she used hers on that old 78 record I am listening to now on this tape so we can learn how to have these moderntime bigtime so & sos jumping outta windows and otherwise offing theyselves in droves so we can raise up offa our knees and move on to a brighter day." Hattie Gossett, "billie lives! billie lives", Between the Lines, page 112

"Being a Yellow Feminist means being a community activist and a humanist. It does not mean 'separatism', either by cutting myself off from non-Asians or men. It does not mean retaining the same power structure and substituting women in positions of control held by men. It does mean fighting the whites and the men who abuse us, straight-jacket us and tape our mouths; it means changing the economic class system and psychological forces (sexism, racism, and homophobia) that really hurt all of us. And I do this, not in isolation, but in community." Merle Woo, "Letter to Ma", Between the Lines, page 142

"I grew up with people of all kinds of skin-color — but we were all Cuban and understood each other, even though we could recognize the most minute 'color differences', even though we could recognize class differences. How was I supposed to know - given the propaganda - that there was no such thing as a 'melting pot'? How was I supposed to know that racism was so widespread and so deeply ingrained in American society? I was shocked in my sophomore year in college when several black women implied that I was a racist when I said I could not figure out what was different about being Black or Yellow, or White, or Red in the United States. I could understand not knowing about a 'culture', but not knowing about a 'race'? Was 'race' per se so important? Was it really liked to a 'culture'?" Mirtha Quitnanales, "I Come with no Illusions", Between the Lines, page 149

"Why am I compelled to write? Because the writing saves me from this complacency I fear. Because I have no choice. Because I must keep the spirit of revolt and myself alive. Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it." Gloria Anzaldua, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers", Speaking in Tongues, page 169

"I think many of us have been fooled by the mass media, bu society's conditioning that our lives must be lived in great explosions, by 'falling in love', by being 'swept off our feet', and by the sorcery of magic genies that will fulfill our every wish, our every childhood longing. Wishes, dreams, and fantasies are important parts of our creative lives. They are the steps a writers integrates into her craft. They are the spectrum of resources to reach the truth, the heart of things, the immediacy and the impact of human impact." Nellie Wong, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers", Speaking in Tongues, page 173

"The vision of radical Third World feminism necessitates our willingness to work with those people who would feel at home in El Mundo Zurdo, the left-handed world: the colored, the queer, the poor, the female, the physically challenged. From our blood and spirit connections with these groups, we women on the bottom throughout the world can form an international feminism. For separatism by by race, nation, or gender will not do the trick of revolution. Autonomy, however, is not separatism." El Mundo Zurdo, page 196

"...If I didn't have the right to fight to create a world that I could live in, if I could not have the right to fight absolutely everybody for the kind of world that I could live in — then I wouldn't live. I wouldn't live in a world where I would have to pretend to be inferior so that some man would look superior. I wouldn't live where somebody got a better break than me only because their skin was lighter." "O.K. Momma, Who the Hell Am I?: an Interview with Luisah Teish, page 222

"In order to leave here prepared to be a strong force in the fight against imperialism we must have a clear understanding of what imperialism is and how it manifests itself in our lives. It is perhaps easier for us to understand the nature of imperialism when we look at how this country deals with other countries. It doesn't take a great amount of political sophistication to see how the interest of oil companies played a role in our relationship with the Shah's Iran. The people of Iran were exploited in order for Americans to drive gas guzzling monsters. And that is perhaps the difficult part of imperialism for us to understand." Pat Parker, "Revolution: It's Not Neat or Pretty or Quick", El Mundo Zurdo, page 238

"I am still in love with the mystery of shadows, wind, bird song The reason that I continue dispite many clumsy mistakes, is love My love for humans, or rather my continuous attempts to love, have been misdirected I am not wise However there is no shame when one is foolish with a tree No bird ever called me crazy No rock scorns me as a whore The earth means exactly what it says The wind is without flattery or lust Greed is balanced by the hunger of all So I embrace anew, as my childhood spirit did,

the whispers of a world without words" Chrystos, "No Rock Scorns Me as a Whore", El Mundo Zurdo, page 244

"I am trying to point out that lesbian-feminism has the potential of reversing and transforming a major component in the system of women's oppression, viz. predatory heterosexuality. If radical lesbian-feminism purports an anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-woman-hating vision of bonding as mutual, reciprocal, as infinitely negotiable, as freedom from antiquated gender prescriptions and proscriptions, then all people struggling to transform the character of relationships in this culture have something to learn from lesbians." Cheryl Clarke, "Lesbianism: an Act of Resistance", Between the Lines, page 134

"Look at yourself, your community, your country, your world and ask yourself, who has the least to lose and the most to gain from economic security, equality, freedom? Who has waited longest, deferred most, worked hardest, lived poorest, nurtured, encouraged, loved more while asking the least in return? Who I ask you? Yes, you are correct. You yourself. Yet who is most oppressed in this land today? No! Don't Put on your visor. It is not the brown man or the third world man. It is the brown woman, the third world woman. Understand, the people who are most oppressed in a society have the most investment in that society's change. It is when that bottom layer becomes a political force for itself that change will occur. Changes will not only occur for that layer but will move outward and upward throughout that society. Remember the civil rights movement?" Andrea Canaan, "Brownness", El Mundo Zurdo, page 237

"Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference; those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black, who are older, know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those other identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths." Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House", And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You, page 99

Topics for Discussion

In what ways do you think the Third World Women's Movement has succeeded in the years since this book's publication? Where do you still see the need for improvement?

Which stories most surprised you as you read about the experiences of different cultures in America? What did you find the most surprising?

Discuss the idea of white men as colonizers of everyone around them. Do you agree or disagree? Defend your answer.

Describe the ways in which lesbianism might change one's perspective on feminism.

Do you particularly identify with any piece in particular? Describe the similarities if your experience to that of the writer.

Is there any particular group you perceive has been left behind in the struggle for equality in America? Explain.

In what ways do you expect race relations could change as a result of America's now having a black president? Do you think those changes will penetrate to feminist rights?