

NewOptions

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You Don't Have to Be a Baby to Cry

This country is more than ready for a post-liberal, post-socialist, Greenish political party. Nearly everybody now knows (on some level of their being) that we can't go on this way: we can't keep piling up debt, we can't keep destroying the environment, we can't keep ignoring the Third World, we can't keep relying on growth to solve our problems and technology to shape our future.

For the last seven years, this newsletter has paid special attention to the U.S. Green movement (see esp. #8, 40 and 60). I thought that it would be out of this scruffy but idealistic grouping that a powerful new party — counterpart to the successful Green parties of Europe — would come.

I guess you could say my political choices reflected my life choices. When I was growing up lonely and unhappy in a small Minnesota town, I made a sacred commitment to myself. My life would not be about chasing power and privilege (like I imagined my father had done), but would be about discovering life-giving new ways of doing things — on every level.

This month I attended the third national Green Gathering, at a YMCA camp in the Colorado Rockies, and what I saw shook my confidence in the U.S. Greens as a credible, competent vehicle for change. It also made me reassess my life choices. Did I really mean to exchange power for powerlessness, privilege for marginality?

Shall we begin?

When Matthew Gilbert was in seventh grade, he had what may have been the prototypical Green experience, the *Catcher in the Rye* experience. He suddenly realized how different he was from most of his classmates — and it made him very sad.

Now, many years later, he looked out from the podium at nearly 200 Green delegates and felt stretched out, exhausted. As head of the site committee he was the person who'd done

most to pull off the Gathering, and for months he'd been looking forward to making inspiring remarks at the opening session. But now that he was up there, his words betrayed a kind of foreboding: "Try to find the space inside of you that's calm. . . . We may have differences of opinion, but let's remember, we are really all friends here. . . ."

Gilbert was followed to the podium by an intense, wiry redhead from Auburn, Ala., whose bearing contrasted sharply with the laid-back image cultivated by most Green women and nearly all Green men. There is such an avoidance of hierarchy in the Greens, and such an avoidance of information that might suggest a hierarchy, that few of them knew that the speaker, Christa Slaton, was an accomplished political scientist with a book on 21st century democracy, *The Televote Experiments*, about to be published.

What they did know was that Slaton was head of the Greens' platform-writing committee, and that she'd performed heroically in that role for over a year, coordinating input from dozens of chapters nationwide. Since one of the three main tasks of this Green Gathering was to re-write the platform and set up a process for ratifying it, they listened to her intently.

On the surface, it was a rah-rah kind of speech, but many Greens noticed a tone of annoyance, even exasperation, as when she emphasized that facilitating the Greens' platform-writing process was "one of the most difficult things I've done in my life," or when she said the thing that "kept me going" was there were so many "good souls here." More than a few Greens wondered what was going on under Slaton's superenthusiastic exterior.

In fact, she was seething. In her local Green groups she'd noticed that many Greens liked to tear down other people's work, but few liked to actually do the work. Now she felt the pattern was repeating itself on the national level. For months she'd been

barraged by criticisms from people who were barely part of the platform-writing process . . . and now there they were, out in the audience, hoping to subvert the work she'd been devoting herself to so assiduously.

Out in the audience, other people were seething. For months they'd heard Slaton respond to their criticisms by moaning about how overworked and good and giving she was. Now she was doing it again, they felt — at the national Gathering, no less — and they weren't going to stand for it.

The most memorable speaker after Slaton was Danny Moses, an editor at Sierra Club Books whose inspirational speeches and calm, centered presence had helped keep the Greens on track through their previous national Gatherings.

This time his inspirational speech contained a few new twists. He characterized our national leaders as vicious, greedy fools. And he claimed that — because of their spiritual understandings and sense of solidarity — the Greens were among the "Real People" (a concept he borrowed from the Iroquois). Not surprisingly, he received a standing ovation.

I didn't stand. Despite my respect for Moses, I felt the vicious-fools-and-Real-People bit was dangerously arrogant.

I remembered telling myself how Special I was when I worked for various embattled and ineffective organizations. It helped keep me going. But it also helped keep me from being able to reach people.

Because of its rootedness in an Iroquois sensibility, Moses's speech foreshadowed the second great task of the Gathering — figuring out how to relate to Native Americans, African Americans and other "minorities."

"Bureaucrat's heaven"

The third great task was to restructure the organization.

Literally from the day after the Greens were founded in 1984, they had been meeting

to restructure themselves. Several restructurings had already taken place. But by the summer of 1990 everyone wanted to restructure the organization again.

The Interregional Committee (IC), the Greens' vehicle for ongoing national coordination, had become a "bureaucrat's heaven and an activist's nightmare," according to one open letter signed by nine Green activists, "torturous marathons trying to reach consensus on administrative trivia while the issues of the day go unaddressed." In another missive, Charles Betz — co-author of one of the restructuring proposals — observed that "The [last] IC had only 10 voting representatives [present] out of a possible total of 70!"

The Greens didn't build much time for restructuring into their formal agenda. But dozens of Greens who cared deeply about the issue met several times to try to work out their differences. I attended the first of these meetings, a marathon late-night session in the lounge of one of the lodges.

When I walked in, they were debating the wisdom of having the Gathering vote on some restructuring proposals that had already been drawn up.

Dee Berry, former clearinghouse coordinator for the Greens, said she didn't feel that the proposals really came from the grassroots. She wanted a new restructuring committee.

Lauren Sargent, of the Michigan Greens, said we needed a decent structure *now*. "I'd hate for us to initiate another whole process now. Our organization is falling apart!"

Charlie Betz said he wasn't comfortable presenting his restructuring proposal to the delegates because the clearinghouse unaccountably failed to send it to the local chapters in advance of the Gathering.

Berry and Sargent argued over who should be on a new restructuring committee.

Nicholas Dykema, a community organizer from Ohio, said he didn't believe how difficult the Greens were making things. We should simply have the Gathering vote on the restructuring proposals that were before us. "If I described this [process] to any progressive group in the country," he added, "they'd laugh me out of the room."

Karen Tucker, of the Maine Greens, passionately defended the process. Each local group needs to feel that they own the process, she said. And that sense of ownership will make this organization more powerful in the long run. She wanted to send the restructuring proposals back to the locals.

Round and round they went — for hours that night, and the next night, too. On the last day of the Gathering, the plenary elected a new 10-person committee to launch a new restructuring process.

I wish the new process well. But after seven years I cannot take it altogether seriously. The Greens don't even have by-laws yet, or a fund-raising capacity, or an accountable leadership structure. Something more fundamental than process or knowledge must be holding them back.

I suspect it has something to do with many Greens' mistrust of — name one — expertise/hierarchy/efficiency/rules/power/worldly success.

I've been Pure before. It's pretty satisfying. But it's more important to be effective in the world.

Something beautiful?

The Greens began writing their platform in 1985. The effort fizzled, but took off again in earnest two years later, and now, at the Gathering, 23 sections of the platform were to be given their final re-writes before presenting them for ratification to the locals.

The Greens broke up into small groups to consider each of the sections. I spent an enjoyable afternoon drifting in and out of them.

Like most of the groups, "Life Forms and Animal Rights" met in a small log cabin. The 15 delegates began by taking turns identifying their favorite animals, personal heroes, and earliest memories. Then someone suggested they choose a spokesperson by having everyone stand up and put their hands on the shoulders of the person they preferred. Several people objected, and a long discussion about process followed.

The "Social Justice" group took up the issue of decriminalization of drugs. A couple of people spoke up for outright decriminalization. But then Kwazi Nkrumah, a black participant from California, said we needed to "transform our culture" first, and that if we just "took the lid off" things might go from bad to worse.

Nkrumah's forceful speech effectively ended people's willingness to consider decriminalization of all drugs. Nobody spoke up to explain and defend the views of such prominent Greenish advocates of decriminalization as Andrew Weil, Lester Grinspoon and Joseph Galiber (a politician from the Bedford-Stuyvesant ghetto).

Then someone from Santa Cruz said he felt very strongly that marijuana should be legalized. That was batted around for a while ("the public will kill us!" one woman said) and a rather timid version of legalization of marijuana — permitting it to be grown but not sold — was drafted to everyone's satisfaction.

You couldn't fault the Greens for their sincerity, or their willingness to take each other's views into account. But watching their exercise in platform-writing left me feeling both sad and angry.

For 20 years, Greenish scholars and experts have been addressing public policy issues. For the most part, their ideas have been ignored by the mainstream press — and even by the left press. They desperately need a forum, and manifestly deserve one.

The Green platform will fall far short of being that forum. Most of the Greens at the Gathering just didn't have the background to bring the best, freshest Green thinking to the table; truth be told, most of them were better versed in left-wing thought than in Green thought; and of course, Greens would never think of inviting "experts" (even their own experts) to do some of their work for them. That smacks too much of hierarchy and (gasp!) elitism.

There is something beautiful about letting anyone who wants to help write a platform, do so. It is a kind of democracy that even Jefferson never dreamed of. But it is a mistake to confuse that kind of loveliness with crafting a political movement.

A plenary explodes

The day after the small group sessions, all 200 Greens met in plenary session to discuss and vote on the platform.

The plenary got off to a rocky start, so Margo Adair, champion of mediation and meditation who'd been with the Greens through all three Gatherings, led them in a mass meditation: "Note that particular quality inside you where you can be true to yourself, true to your commitment. . . ."

Then each of the 23 platform planks were briefly discussed, and voted up or down (a 25% vote was sufficient to vote a plank down).

The discussions were even more superficial than those in the small groups — the severe time constraints saw to that. On the other hand, the discussions were at least as full of vim and vigor.

For example, during the discussion on the

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Groups

Technology plank someone got up and said, "I'd be *ashamed* of showing this to anybody — it doesn't address dozens of issues we need to address!" Someone else attacked the plank for being "too anthropocentric." Other wild haymakers were thrown. Then someone got up and cried, "We're dissipating the process of our work. All these objections could have been raised *anytime during the last two years!*"

All this enthusiasm was broken when Christa Slaton announced that every plank passed at the Gathering would go back to the locals — and Lauren Sargent rose to object. She wanted the material to go back to each of the individual members of the Greens.

Slaton was at the breaking point. Listen, she said, I've had a lot of experience here. Greens have a lousy track record meeting deadlines, and sending the material to individuals for their input is just absurd!

Every Green who'd felt manipulated or slighted by Slaton was at the edge of their seats. One young Green yelled at her to not "get so violently emotional!" Another Green stood up and rather emotionally told her he felt the group was being talked down to.

Slaton was on the verge of tears. I felt so good until two minutes ago, she said. I feel so wonderful about the overwhelming spirit that's been here. I just wish more of you would appreciate what so many of us have done to this point!

Inside her, things were churning. She'd grown up in small Southern towns. Her father was a truck driver, her mother sometimes worked in factories. She was the only person on either side of her family who'd ever attended college. Everything she'd ever achieved, she felt, was a result of extraordinary persistence and grit.

She was aware of the Greens' pattern of trashing anybody and everybody who tried to take on a leadership role. But she felt that, well, if she really worked extra hard, just like she'd always done, and sent out lots of mailings, and answered every letter and phone call — *then* every Green would feel like they were really a part of the process. And everyone would be content.

Now she felt overwhelmed, undone. Nothing she did was enough! By the time she'd arrived in Colorado she was sleeping four hours a night! Every day at least 10 people would come to her with their "demands" — and each of them swore that their perspective was the overwhelming view of the grassroots! And now they were implying she'd been undemocratic and elitist! It was really more than she could bear.

Inside Lauren Sargent, things were churning too. She couldn't believe Slaton was continuing to take all this so personally!

Sargent had grown up in Grosse Point, Mich., the daughter of a psychiatrist father and psychologist mother, and at night they'd sit around the dinner table and drink coffee and argue. And isn't that how you worked things out in this world? And weren't the Greens a family?

For months she'd been trying to get Slaton to adopt what her local Green group thought of as a more sustainable process — one that would keep Slaton from having to run herself into the ground. She gave her one good argument after another. And now she felt Slaton saw her as an enemy! It saddened her.

The whole scene saddened me, too.

For *seven years* the Greens had been saying they were moving so slow because they — unlike other political groups — were committed to treating their members as Human Beings. They'd introduced dozens of processes, from consensus decision-making to the hokey-pokey, to make good on that commitment.

But sitting there watching Slaton and Sargent and the others, and remembering the vast cast of characters that had passed through the Greens over the years, never to return, I could no longer believe that the Greens had any kind of special handle on sensitivity to others.

On the whole, I thought, they treated each other no better than people did in Common Cause or NARAL or the Democratic party. And sometimes they treated each other much worse.

Starry-eyed

That night was the keynote speech, by Walter Bresette, a Chippewa activist from northern Wisconsin. Most Greens cheered it wildly and found it tremendously inspiring. I found it less than that.

Bresette argued that the Green movement, or something very much like it, is going to happen no matter what the U.S. Greens do. He reminded us that Indians don't consider that they "own" land, they're merely preserving it in trust for their grandchildren. He urged us to rediscover the importance of community, and discover what each of our contributions to it can be.

That was all fine, as far as it went. But how far did it go, really? Is it *true* that anything like a Green movement is happening spontaneously? Is it *relevant* that some Indians don't believe in private property? Is it *meaningful* to speak of "community" without defining it anew for the 21st century?

As Bresette spoke, an American flag hung from the front of the room — except a big picture of an Indian, in a headdress, had been added to it. I felt high when I saw it . . . as high as I felt when we used to paint rainbow

colors on school flags in the 60s. But I also felt another 60s syndrome coming on: the syndrome of starry-eyed whites sitting at the feet of oppressed minorities.

And I had no desire to go through it again.

Poolside

After Bresette's speech I felt kind of blue, the way you do when you know that a chapter in your life is ending, and I wanted to get away for a while. So I walked a friend to the YMCA swimming pool — no Greens there — and watched her swim laps, while children screamed and played all around. Someone had brought a boom-box, and it was playing all these 50s songs, including one of my favorites:

You don't have to be a baby to cry,
All you need is your love to go wrong;
You don't have to be a baby to cry,
Or to lie awake the whole night long.

"Yaah, ya-a-a-ah!"

The next day the Gathering finished discussing the platform, and then two Greens sang a funny song celebrating the Gathering, to the tune of "Sloop John B." Everyone was feeling pretty relaxed and happy. It was the perfect time for John Rensenbrink, the tall, white-haired Bowdoin professor who'd become one of the most powerful and influential members of the Greens, to announce that he was leaving the organization.

"Didn't we do well?" he began, and people cheered (one person shouted: "The quicksand is firmer!"). But our success has come at a cost, he said. Christa is not with us any more.

We tend to like intelligent people with cold hearts, he said, or caring people without intelligence. Well, Christa was a wonderful combination of intelligence and caring. And we drove her out!

Most of us are MIDDLE-CLASS, he said, and we're conditioned to be polite. We can't even recognize we're bullying when we do it!

A lot of behavior that doesn't seem to us MEN like bullying, he said, seems to women like bullying.

He named a number of women whom he felt had been bullied out of the Greens.

Then he announced he was leaving the organization to launch two parallel (not competing!, he stressed) initiatives: a Green Party Organizing Committee and a "national inter-movement and multi-cultural gathering."

I've "enjoyed working with you," he said. And he walked off stage.

Everyone was shocked. Rensenbrink had been with the Greens from the beginning, and had helped guide them nearly all that time. A facilitator told people Rensenbrink had asked them not to clap, but that they

could stand.

People stood silently for several minutes. Some were openly weeping. Others were thinking: There are two sides to the Slaton affair! Since when is criticism "bullying"? Rensenbrink himself is bullying those who disagree with him, but in the indirect, manipulative, dishonest way that is so characteristic of New Age Greens!

Rensenbrink felt at peace with himself. In 1971 there was a crisis in his marriage, and he resolved to get in touch with his responsible, supportive, nurturing side. He took deep pride in being seen as a protective male. Surely now he would be.

The facilitator asked us to bow in appreciation of Rensenbrink. About half of us bowed. The other half gasped, felt too uncomfortable, felt manipulated, looked away. Then a Salish Indian from Montana began beating a hand-held drum and chanting, "Yaah, ya-a-a-ah! Yaah, ya-a-a-ah!" Incredibly loudly. For at least five minutes. Then we went to lunch.

Broken rainbow

That night about 30 Greens, including most of the informal leadership, met to discuss building coalitions with people of color. They called their group the "Rainbow Greens" (after their goal, not their composition — only three or four of them were non-white).

Danny Moses and Roberto Mendoza, a Native American activist, opened the meeting. Then John Rensenbrink said their remarks weren't very "practical." Then there was a kind of uprising — everyone wanted a woman to speak. So they called on Irene Diamond, Jewish intellectual co-editor of an anthology on ecofeminism (NEW OPTIONS #69).

She said that what Moses and Mendoza had said was very important, since it was based on the wisdom of grassroots women, peasant people and indigenous peoples. She added that she thought Rensenbrink's remarks were more mainstream, but that both perspectives were needed.

At that, Kwazi Nkrumah got very upset. He said Diamond had "condensed" everything, and defended Rensenbrink. He screamed, "I am not a peasant people!" And stormed out.

(Terri Williams, a petite Green activist from St. Louis, saw Nkrumah running. Get out of my way, he shouted, I could really hit somebody right now and I don't want to.)

People were hurt and in shock, but their discussion continued — for hours.

Linda Dallas, of the North Carolina Greens (and the only other black in the room), said she was appalled by people's inability to be "real." Why are you making an *agenda* for making contact with people of color? Why don't you all just start *doing* it — first and foremost on an individual level?

A gay Green said he was angry at the group because it didn't see him as someone who was oppressed, too.

"I think we're unbelievably constipated by talk and theory," said Mindy Lorenz, a write-in candidate for Congress in California.

An activist from Detroit said that only women and gay people seemed to be real here.

"People here have been implored to be real," said Moses. "But people are real here in different ways. We need to recognize that."

Moses's comment was one of the few I heard that wasn't riddled with blame, anger, guilt and/or self-flagellation. I figured it was a good note to leave on.

Mau-mauing the rye catchers

The next morning was the last scheduled session. Three new committees were elected with a minimum of havoc, and some people began leaving for the airport. But the Greens weren't done yet.

Christa Slaton's husband was brought on stage to read a letter from his wife. "I regret that my wounds are so deep," she wrote. "We have to change the way we treat each other. . . While I may not see you again. . ."

Margo Adair lamented that Slaton's heart was "too open" for us. Privately, some other Greens muttered their own conclusions.

Then Kwazi Nkrumah was given the microphone. Nearly everyone knew about the Rainbow Greens meeting the night before, and he spent almost 20 minutes lambasting the Greens because of what he felt happened there, and because of many other things.

"I was angry last night because people who know better, still can't get rid of their garbage," he announced. He never did say exactly what that "garbage" was. Perhaps that would have made things too easy on us.

"I don't want to be anybody's token! . . . I don't necessarily want to talk to you just to make you feel good! . . . I'm not afraid of making you know how angry you're making me! . . ."

"We should not let Christa leave this movement! If you let her [leave], don't you dare come to me pretending to be my friend. . ."

After he finished, nobody dared stand up to him — though privately there was some grumbling about "black macho" and "the standard black in white organizations."

Nkrumah had been an activist in the black community since the late 60s, when he was given his name by his high school classmates. It is not difficult to imagine why, in 1990, he'd feel an almost unbearable frustration and rage.

But no serious political organization can afford to recreate the 1960s dynamic of guilty whites and raging blacks. And no organization should want to. The freshest and most challenging black spokespeople today have

put guilting and rage behind them (at least in their public personas). They are speaking of new paths to black self-esteem, new models for black self-help, new approaches to black-white integration.

Among them: Tony Brown (NEW OPTIONS #33), John Childs (#56), Stanley Crouch (#67), Vincent Harding (#67), Julius Lester (#43), William Raspberry (#47), Robert Woodson (#64) and Sylvia Wynter (#68).

The Greens could and *should* have been one of the first political groups to invite these new voices in. The constant presence, instead, of the 60s dynamic was to me a sure sign that the Greens lack the maturity and self-confidence to deal with the race issue.

Restless farewell

I enjoyed myself at the Gathering. I met wonderful people, had great conversations. But after it was over I felt empty inside, for I knew — as certainly as one can know these things — that the U.S. Greens would never affect the political life of our time.

For seven years I'd been trying to convince myself that they might, just might, break out of their ghetto. (I'd been trying to convince you too, dear reader.) But I no longer believed it, even at 2 a.m. with friends.

I knew this, and yet it hurt me deeply to accept it and act on it. For whatever I may think of their internal battles and political prospects, the Greens are My People. Their life choices are my life choices; their failings mirror my own.

When I was a teen-ager and decided not to chase after power and privilege, I followed a route that took me inexorably to the Greens. To accept that the Greens are never going to make it is tantamount to accepting that many of my life choices were not so smart.

I know how to deal with this on a professional level. NEW OPTIONS will not devote long stories to the U.S. Greens again until they begin to affect the American political dialogue. (I'll be rooting for them, but I won't hold my breath.) In the meantime, we'll devote more coverage to Greenish trends in effective real-world organizations like NOW, the Sierra Club and the NAACP.

I am less certain how to deal with this on a personal level. What do you do, exactly, when you realize that many times in your life you've chosen posturing over power, marginality over privilege — all in the name of some abstract political "correctness"?

Do you have to be a baby to cry?

U.S. Greens: P.O. Box 30208, Kansas City MO 64112.

The thoughts and feelings I attribute to people in this article are based on long taped interviews with them.

The Ear . . .

Round one

I have just finished reading your anti-White issue ("Multiculturalism Will Make Us Whole," NEW OPTIONS #68).

I am a White man and I have been discriminated against [for that reason alone]. But my ancestors founded and built America. I am White and I am proud.

As the *NAAWP News* recently said, "No group has more to be rightfully proud of than the White people of the world. . . . Since the dawn of history, we have been a mighty race of builders, explorers, artists, warriors, inventors, philosophers and cultivators."

— Robert L. Jones

*Riverbend Maximum Security Institution
Nashville TN, Cumberland Bioregion*

Great article — we'll use it a lot [in our workshops]. I learned things from it, and will look up some of the other folks. Thanks!

— Joan Lester

*Equity Institute
Amherst MA, Pioneer Valley Bioregion*

While supporting the multicultural approach, I have to admit there's something to be said for the monocultural position.

For example, New Zealand discriminated among the cultures it admitted to its shores. When an American friend of mine accidentally left a camera on the sidewalk over there, he was told, "Don't worry. Just put a notice in the paper." He did so, and the camera was promptly returned.

That says something for the culture of New Zealand.

— Ernest Morgan

Burnsville NC, Appalachia Bioregion

Okay, I'm going to cook ethnic foods for the fundamentalists. But where do we go from there?

— Emily Noble

Indianapolis IN, Heartland Bioregion

Going too far?

I was quite disappointed in the issue on multiculturalism. According to your distinguished commentators, "white culture" — whatever that is — is "empty," "bland," "f—ing insecure," "erotophobic," "immature" and even "un-American." These charges would be greeted by counter-charges of intolerance, racism and homophobia if they had

been directed toward minority groups.

Those who advocate making English the official language are hardly "kooks," as Professor Acuña terms them. The word "nation" refers to a common community, and the principal characteristic of community is communication. Having a common language is essential if America is to avoid the centrifugal forces of race, ethnicity and sexual preference that threaten to bring about the "multicultural bantustans" that Sylvia Wynter is rightly concerned about.

The vision of Mike Myers of "whole areas of cities where English is not heard" would be a nightmare that would preclude any hope of ever achieving a common cultural heritage.

— Mark Smith

Gainesville FL, Peninsula Bioregion

Your analysis of multiculturalism has raised in my mind two questions. Are we shifting from a centralized culture to a cultural mosaic made of separate tiles? And, if so, what is becoming of the trend towards a universal culture that was the dream of many utopians and is the business of transnational corporations?

— Mario Kamenetzky

*The World Bank (retired)
Falls Church VA, Chesapeake Bioregion*

Everyone needs to practice the old Golden Rule and have consideration for all people regardless of their color or ethnic background. However, homosexuality is *not a culture* and pretending it is is not the way for those with deviant sex habits to get accepted. Please delete homosexuality from your definition of Multiculturalism!

— William E. Baer

Anniston AL, Dixie Bioregion

Ruling class plot

Multiculturalism is the last great WASP leadership opportunity in the USA: Jimmy Carter and the Democratic party take note. Multiculturalism may also be the last great leadership opportunity for USA.

— William M. Alexander

*Institute for Food and Development Policy
San Francisco CA, Shasta Bioregion*

Few could argue with the value of multiculturalism, but there are risks involved.

The more we define ourselves (or let ourselves be defined) by our ethnic, racial or sexual identity, the easier it is for the dominant culture/system to divide us, to keep us from uniting around common concerns, and to keep us — as it does now — in competing pressure groups acting out of self- or group interest rather than out of broader communi-

ty, social or ecological interest.

Multiculturalism does enrich us individually. But only shared political and ecological consciousness can help us integrate ourselves holistically and in a socially responsible way.

— Lorna Salzman

Brooklyn Hts NY, Hudson Valley Bior'n

Sins of omission

I'm amazed that in your otherwise excellent piece on "multiculturalism" you almost ignore Asians.

I think it is a grave mistake because the Asian pattern dramatically enlarges what the multicultural process can be. Unlike the other "chords" you highlight, Asians do not (for the most part) feel downtrodden or steamrolled, and here in California often turn over our idea of "minorities."

— Kevin Kelly

*Whole Earth Review
Sausalito CA, Shasta Bioregion*

I was quite taken by the issue on multiculturalism, but — and I always have a but, and it is the same one — it really would be nice if multiculturalism would also be seen in its global context.

I am very much aware that it really is important to understand, interpret, and work with the multicultural processes within "a single society." However, all of this multiculturalism has a global base — hence the *necessity*, not just the desirability, of globalism. The global has arrived.

— Saul Mendlovitz

New York NY, Hudson Valley Bioregion

The author is co-director of the World Order Models Project (#52), which has just won the 1990 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education.

You talked about ethnic cultures, the gay culture, the white non-culture. But what about the *children*? Do you not suppose that children have their own culture?

Children certainly have their own way of thinking, being and relating to the world. Maybe a bit simplistic, a bit experimental, a bit "narrow," some of us might claim. Nevertheless, it is the most innocent, forgiving, and living-in-the-moment culture that we know of.

Maybe a big part of our problems is that we neglect to recognize and respect this important culture.

— Arun Narayan Toké

*Skipping Stones Magazine
Cottage Grove OR, Cascade Bioregion*

There is an important group that didn't get mentioned in your issue — the disabled.

The disabled is a unique cultural grouping. Our social conditioning about disability and illness being simply a personal misfortune is so strong, that many disabled people don't consider themselves part of a "group" at all. Or, if they do, they may only identify with those who share their particular disability.

The disability rights movement has provided the impetus for this sort of thinking to begin to change. And because every ethnic, racial and sexual grouping includes some people who are disabled, the emerging "disability consciousness" and "disability culture" will help provide an answer to the question of who we all are.

— Brian Hartshorn
Hollis NY, Hudson Valley Bioregion

Beyond mere pluralism

I grew up in India, and a real problem there is that the language changes every 100 miles or so. The reason for the existence of all kinds of subdivisions is, precisely, lack of communication due to the language barrier.

Now, as a student at USC, it's been an education watching the interaction (or lack of it) between various ethnic groups. Just like in India, the inability to communicate in English isolates various various ethnic groups from Americans — and from each other.

I don't mean to endorse the English-only groups prevalent in L.A. However, if ethnic groups do not make the effort to learn the dominant language in their area, they are doomed to be cultic. (This argument is equally valid if and when Spanish becomes the majority language here in Southern Cal.)

An alternative to your pluralism and hierarchy scenarios is what I like to call the "wheel scenario."

The wheel symbolizes the fact that different cultures are ascendant at different times. And isn't that what's happening now? Consider white teen-age girls of the 90s learning the latest Janet Jackson dance moves and lapping up Arsenio Hall.

Hopefully each of us can be both at the center and at the periphery of the wheel, continually soaking up the (momentarily) dominant cultures and integrating them with our own.

— Anand Rangarajan
Los Angeles CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion

The self-esteem flap

Thank you for your excellent report on the California Self-Esteem Task Force (NEW OPTIONS #67). It is unfortunate that each of the principals in the argument over the Task Force felt that they must disagree. They all seem so right. . . .

• John Vasconcellos when he says that an

"esteemed" self must be at the core of any truly healthy person;

• David Shannahoff-Khalsa when he says that "the real problem stems from the subconscious";

• William Raspberry when he says that low self-esteem "dare not become an excuse to avoid responsibility";

• Roger Schultz when he says that "the larger issue is that self-esteem problems are rooted in the economy."

The bottom line is this: Until we fully prioritize the healthy raising of children, the building blocks of a new social order will be unavailable. And, until we change the institutional pathology of our culture, prioritizing children will continue to be an option only for the few.

We must start both places, always knowing that the one affects the other.

— Dr. Kent T. Hoffman
Marycliff Institute
Spokane WA, Columbia Bioregion

The turning

A belated many, many thanks for your splendid analysis of the 1980s ("The 1980s Were Better Than We Thought," #64).

What a great, unconventional piece of thinking and synthesis. Your analysis gives hope to all of us.

— Roger M. Craver
Falls Church VA, Chesapeake Bioregion

The author is president of Craver, Mathews, Smith & Co., the most prominent liberal direct-mail firm in the U.S.

I too believe that the 90s have an extraordinary potential to be very different from any previous period. However, the degree of change that will be required is still not understood by our society.

— Robert Theobald
Author, The Rapids of Change (1986)
New Orleans LA, Delta Bioregion

I very much agree with your premise about what the 80s signified, and that things have turned around for the better.

It seems to me that somehow a decision to move in a life-affirming direction was unconsciously reached by our culture in the 80s. I've felt that turnaround in my own reading of popular music as well as in many of the trends you describe.

Because I see the rise in consciousness, it's positively embarrassing to me that so many of my friends in the media are determined to be the last to know about it and tell about it.

— Alan J. Saly
New York NY, Hudson Valley Bioregion

Advisors' corner

Monkeywrenching the bureaucracies

By Dave Foreman

National forest planning has failed — in part because of the Forest Service's failure to properly implement a public involvement process and an environmental impact requirement.

These failures are hardly unique to the Forest Service. Conservationists can point to the failure of many other programs at many other agencies.

In all these agencies, the same thing has happened. Instead of using the environmental impact study as a tool of analysis, it is used to justify a previously made in-house decision. Instead of seeing public involvement as a means to gain outside expertise, it is seen as something to be manipulated.

There are several reasons for this usually conscious perversion of the spirit of the law by bureaucracies.

First, the agencies are run by professionals — "expert" foresters, range managers, etc. They think they know what to do and don't need outside interference.

Second, each agency identifies with its constituency: the Forest Service with the timber industry, the Bureau of Land Management with the grazing and mining industries, etc.

Finally, the agencies are motivated toward those programs that bring them money, status, power and growth.

So what do we do? Forget about reforming the Forest Service and the other agencies. Bureaucracy is bureaucracy. Don't reform. Thwart. Monkeywrench.

Let me offer two real-world examples:

• The Wilderness Act of 1964 was not a reform measure, it was a monkeywrench in the gears of the bureaucracy. The Act basically said that the Forest Service was incapable of protecting wilderness, and that that task would be taken out of its hands. Designation of an area as Wilderness is now a means to thwart standard agency management.

• The National Environmental Policy Act is, in part, a monkeywrench. It offers a handle for legal appeals of and lawsuits against agency decisions. It gives conservationists entry into a branch of government — the courts — that is not part of the bureaucracy and that can overrule agency decisions.

Of course, if all the paper monkeywrenches fail there are more solid kinds to use.

NEW OPTIONS Advisor Dave Foreman is co-founder of Earth First!

Aquarian Conspiracy: best of the 80s?

It can only be described as a surprise: NEW OPTIONS's subscribers have chosen Marilyn Ferguson's *The Aquarian Conspiracy* as the "Best Political Book of the 1980s."

Ferguson's book is not ordinarily thought of as a political book, nor was it taken altogether seriously by many of the pundits whose opinions grace the pages of our newspapers and magazines. But it won our contest decisively, with over 10% more votes than the second place finisher, Worldwatch Institute's *State of the World*.

In third place, but approx. 30% more votes back: Thomas Berry's *Dream of the Earth*.

Thirty books were nominated for the Award — all the books that finished in the top three in Renewal Inc.'s and New Options Inc.'s "Political Book of the Year" contests from 1981-90. Ballots were sent to all 12,000 NEW OPTIONS subscribers.

Why on Earth?

Why did Ferguson beat out such winter-book favorites as *State of the World*, Jonathan Schell's *Fate of the Earth* and Hazel Henderson's *Politics of the Solar Age*? Here's what we found in the margins of some of your ballots:

- From a 68-year-old male engineer in Chevy Chase, Md.: "Gold mine of original thinking, not tied to worn-out left or right premises."
- From a 73-year-old female in Somers, N.Y.: "Provides a wonderful way of looking to the future, with an emphasis on personal transformation as well as on global change."
- From a 63-year-old male college professor in Youngstown, Ohio: "I'm partial to *big* syntheses!"
- From a 44-year-old female administrative consultant in L.A.: "Has had an *incredible* influence worldwide!"

We called Ferguson and asked whether *she* thinks of the book as political. "It's not what you immediately think of as a political book," she replied. "[But] if politics has to do with the distribution and redistribution of power, then I suppose it *is* political — because it was an effort to empower people. . . . I'm interested in the uses of power by individuals for purposes of liberating themselves and for making a creative, just society."

Top ten

So — here are the books that did best in the voting. Scores were obtained by giving five votes to each first-place vote, three to each second-place vote, one to each third-

place vote, then dividing by the number of ballots:

- (1) Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980), 0.80 points;
- (2) Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World* (annual, orig. 1984), 0.71 points;
- (3) Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (1988), 0.54;
- (4) Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987), 0.53;
- (5) Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (1982), 0.46;
- (6) Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (1982), 0.39;
- (7) M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum* (1987), 0.32;
- (8) Willis Harman, *Global Mind Change* (1988), 0.31;
- (9) Marilyn French, *Beyond Power* (1985), 0.30;
- (10) Hazel Henderson, *The Politics of the Solar Age* (1981), 0.29.

Among women only, Riane Eisler's *Chalice and the Blade* finished second, and Marilyn French's *Beyond Power* finished third. Among people 65 and over, Willis Harman's *Global Mind Change* finished second, and Robert Theobald's *Rapids of Change* — 17th overall — finished seventh.

Striking

There are some very striking and — for me — heartening things about our subscribers' Top Ten choices:

- *Variety.* Ferguson and Capra deal with worldviews, Worldwatch and Henderson with the intersection of ecology and economics, Berry and Harman with the intersection of politics and spirit, Eisler and French with feminism, and Schell and Peck with peace-and-community.
- *Sex balance.* Five books are by men, four by women, and one — Worldwatch — has male and female contributors and a female copy editor.
- *Geographic balance.* Five of the authors are Frostbelt, five Sunbelt.
- *Balance between mainstream and alternative publishers.* Five of the books were published or are currently published by alternative publishers (broadly defined).

Among the things that are not so heartening:

- None of the authors is under 48 years old. This suggests to me that many of us have ego problems giving recognition to our peers.
- None of the books deals with the nitty-

gritty side of politics: passing laws, raising money, building organizations. This suggests to me that many of us are temperamentally inclined to be dreamers rather than doers.

Korten: a long way from U.S. AID

David Korten was a well-known maverick when he was at the Ford Foundation and U.S. AID — in fact, he may have been the development bureaucracy's highest-placed advocate of "people-centered" and "grassroots-generated" development strategies. Over the years he wrote many books and articles expressing his views, but most were too technical or narrow in scope to win a broad audience.

Recently he left the bureaucracy to start his own organization, and perhaps because of that life change, his new book, *Getting to the 21st Century* (Kumarian Press, 630 Oakwood Ave., #119, W. Hartford CT 06110, \$19.70 pbk), is the comprehensive and inspiring book that many of us had been hoping he'd write all along. It is the best single account of alternative approaches to global development that we now have.

Transformational approach

There's a devastating critique of traditional development approaches, including the reformist "basic needs" approach. But what makes this book special is its vision of a comprehensive new way of doing things, a vision Korten created not just by thinking deeply about his own work but by synthesizing the work of dozens of innovative global development consultants, some well-known (e.g., Guy Gran, NEW OPTIONS #2, and Doug Helinger, #54), others known just within the international development community.

Korten calls it the "transformational" approach to development, as distinct from the "growth" approach. And unlike many people who use the word transformation, he gets *specific*. The transformational approach to development is said to consist of six stages, as follows: prepare for change (e.g., promote literacy, professionalize the military); reform the rural infrastructure (e.g., redistribute land); diversify agriculture; establish small- and medium-scale rural industries; expand urban industries; promote some exports.

You don't have to be a wizened development expert to see that this sequence basically *reverses* the traditional U.S. AID development model.

Korten has another big fish to fry: He accuses voluntary organizations of being unimaginative and timid in the area of global development. Most of them are still simply pro-

viding relief and welfare, Korten says, though some have begun to encourage Third World community development, Third World policy change, and — even — Third World people's movements. Ultimately Korten would like to see Third World non-governmental organizations play a major role in Third World development, working in tandem with counterparts in the First and Second Worlds.

Korten's last major chapter — a detailed manifesto for change in North *and* South stressing such post-socialist goals as ideological reconciliation, simpler lifestyles, population control, and local economic self-reliance — is a better summing up of global Greenish thinking than the U.S. Greens' platform. He's come a long way from U.S. AID.

Guma: Sanders isn't good enough

If you were going to create somebody to write about Bernard Sanders's four terms as socialist mayor of Burlington, Vt., you might make him a fortysomething Vermont journalist and radical-bookstore-founder and former government worker who almost ran for mayor of Burlington himself before Sanders took the plunge. You'd get just the right mix of empathy and envy, expertise and idealism. That's what you have in Greg Guma, author of *The People's Republic: Vermont and the Sanders Revolution* (New England Press, P.O. Box 575, Shelburne VT 05482, \$15 pbk).

Guma writes well, and he gives you a vivid, complex view of the endless fights over key civic issues like what to do about Burlington's waterfront. But the deeper story-line of this book is Guma's increasing disillusion with Sanders and the socialist politics he represents.

At first Guma was caught up — like everybody else — in the excitement of having a "radical" in city hall. But gradually it dawns on him that Sanders stands for a very dated kind of radicalism — make government more open, make economic growth serve everybody's needs, make the distribution of government largesse a little less unfair.

According to Guma, Sanders liked to identify with "working people," but had less-than-comradely relationships with the women's movement, ecologists, peace activists, and, in general, all those whom he once derided as middle-class dilettantes. He often sided with developers and the pro-growth crowd. He "favored a 'strong mayor' system of government, in which the leader makes decisions on behalf of the people."

It is to Guma's credit that he can be just as hard on Sanders's radical opposition: "The

Greens of Burlington drifted past idealism to purism, leaving reality and sometimes even true democracy behind. . . ."

Guma ends by calling for "another progressive revolution," one that begins to address "thorny questions about growth, the future of an endangered environment, the shift toward a postindustrial society, the rights of women and minorities. . . ." In other words: If you really think Sanders's kind of socialism is the solution to our 21st-century problems, you had better go back to the drawing board.

Tannen: post-feminist manifesto

On one level, Georgetown University linguistics professor Deborah Tannen's new book, *You Just Don't Understand* (Morrow, \$19), is a straightforward study of men's and women's different "conversational styles." On another level, it's the definitive post-feminist book for the 1990s.

Her thesis is that men's and women's conversational styles are so different that conversation between them is like "cross-cultural communication." Little girls grow up trying to achieve closeness with best friends; little boys grow up trying to achieve status in groups. These early patterns inexorably shape our outlooks, wants, needs, hopes, and fears our whole lives long.

Because Tannen argues this thesis in clear, entertaining prose and in fascinating detail, her book has shot to the top of the best-seller lists. But its readers are getting something else in the bargain: a post-feminist philosophy to go with the emerging post-liberal, post-socialist temper of our time.

The feminism of the 70s de-emphasized the differences between men and women; the

feminism of the 80s emphasized the differences and argued that the good society (and/or good men) would have to adopt many allegedly female qualities. Tannen emphasizes the differences, says both men's and women's perspectives are necessary, and urges us to understand, empathize with, and learn from each other.

It's the relentlessly even-handed nature of her interpretations that makes her book post-feminist. Intimacy (a central female goal) is not seen as better than independence (a central male goal); both are seen as admirable but narrow. Men are not seen as more competitive than women; it's just that women compete for different things and by different means (e.g., less directly). It's easy to detect hierarchy among men in conversation — but you can detect hierarchy among women, too, if you know how to look.

What seems odious to traditional feminists often looks different under Tannen's linguistic microscope. Men may criticize other people's ideas harshly and in public — but sometimes it's their way of expressing respect. By the same token, women may use the appearance of community as a way of masking power struggles.

Death of "one right way"

Tannen's solution to our communication problems is not to argue that men should become more like women. It is, rather, to argue that we should all become aware of and flexible in our conversational styles. We should all learn how to interpret each other's messages — and how to better convey our own.

"The biggest mistake," Tannen writes, "is believing there is one right way to listen, to talk, to have a conversation — or a relationship." The death of the "one right way," the death of the politically correct way, marks the birth of post-feminism.

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