

IN THE TIME OF THE RIGHT: REFLECTIONS ON LIBERATION, SECOND EDITION

BY SUZANNE PHARR

A people warned is a people more prepared to defend and protect the freedoms we hold dear.

This book is for students of all ages and all places, large and small, everywhere. It is for all of us who join in the work for social justice every day, especially those working on the ground at the community level. It is for those of us who think we have an imperfect, unfinished democracy that we honor enough to work hard to defend while we are building it. And we ask this question about the threats of growing authoritarianism/fascism: Now that we know, what do we do?

We believe that we will succeed when we collectively create a vision that, in practice, offers a way of life so attractive that people will not be able to resist it.



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**THE 2025 SECOND EDITION OF IN THE TIME OF THE RIGHT
COMES NEARLY 30 YEARS AFTER ITS ORIGINAL 1996
RELEASE.**





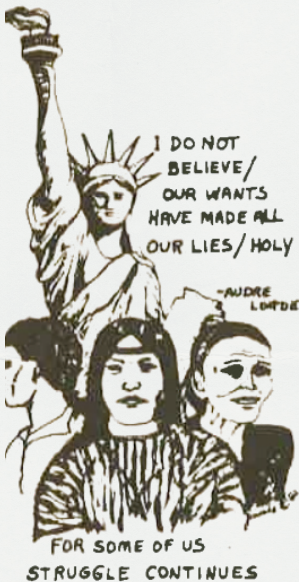
VISION, RISING EXPECTATIONS

It is time for us to move quickly to understand what we are facing and resist it while at the same time building the world of social and economic justice we envision. It is not a time to be afraid; it is the time to act.

BUILDING INTERSECTIONAL MOVEMENTS AROUND MULTI-ISSUE POLITICS

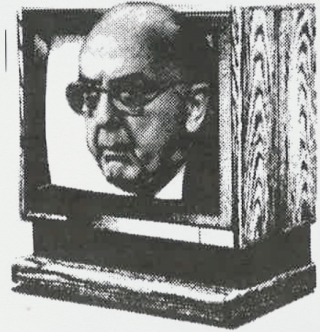


The definition of transformational politics is fairly simple: It is political work that changes the hearts and minds of people; supports personal and group growth in ways that create healthy, whole people, organizations, and communities; and is based on a vision of a society where people – across lines of race, gender, class, and sexuality – are supported by institutions and communities to live their best lives. Among many possibilities, I want to suggest one way to do transformational work: through building community that is based on our moral vision.



HOW DID WE GET HERE? HOW DID RIGHT-WING POPULISM GAIN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL CONTROL OF THE U.S.?

For many, it now seems that the Right suddenly emerged full-blown on the national scene in the 1980s. I invite each reader to reflect and look back on the past few decades or so to events that foreshadowed our current political environment. Each of our own experiences contains political truth. Sometimes we do not comprehend its meaning until there is a critical mass of information and we can recognize the linkages.



Though now entrenched in the political mainstream, the Right has not always been taken seriously. However, over the past several decades, they were developing strategies and building a base. There were many signs of their increasing presence and strength, but many of them were unrecognized or discounted by progressive people.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE RISE AND MERGER OF THE RIGHT, BEGINNING IN 1960...

The analysis in ITOR kicks off in a post- *Brown v. Board* era and the strategies follow from and build upon centuries of communal effort and collective resistance

- **1960:** Barry Goldwater publishes *The Conscience of a Conservative*, William F. Buckley, Jr. forms Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)
- **1961:** Pat Robertson establishes the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN)
- **1962:** On March 7th approximately 18,000 people attend "A Conservative Rally for World Liberation From Communism" in Madison Square Garden, organized by YAF
- **1963:** The John Birch Society opposes the Civil Rights Movement and campaigns against federal enforcement of Civil Rights Laws, advocates "Support Your Local Police"
- **1964:** Republican National Convention focuses on a turn to hard right-wing agenda
- **1965:** Escalation of right-wing efforts to win local elections and take over school boards, rise in Klu Klux Klan (KKK) activity nationwide
- **1968:** election of Richard Nixon to the White House
- **1969:** Debut of *Christian Conservatives* and the *Christian Right* advocating politically for a nostalgic "return" to so-called "Christian Values"
- **1970:** the New Right promotes ideologies of the free market, limited government, and "traditional" values

- **1971:** COINTELPRO exposed; the Powell Memo propagandizes what it refers to as an “Attack on American Free Enterprise System” to mobilize private business leaders and conservative politicians to seek control of political and legal spheres
- **1972:** the GOP enacts “The Southern Strategy” aimed at gaining support from southern white voters by stoking animosity over racial segregation and perpetuating “states’ rights” against Civil Rights.
- **1973:** Heritage Foundation is established; National Right to Life Committee is formed; American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) is founded
- **1974:** Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) is established;
- **1975:** Ronald Reagan’s first campaign for U.S. President; Republicans in Congress unveil their legislative agenda which includes becoming the majority party
- **1976:** Right-wing politicians and evangelical leaders unite to make anti-choice / anti-abortion agenda a focus of the Republican National Convention
- **1977:** James Dobson establishes Focus on the Family, Anita Bryant establishes Save Our Children
- **1978:** Formation of The Aryan Nations; Tax Revolt Movement aims to dismantle public infrastructure and transfer wealth through privatization
- **1979:** Jerry Falwell establishes the Moral Majority; the Conservative Coalition gains influence in Congress; the Cato Institute publishes the first Cato Policy Report calling for privatization of Social Security
- **1980:** Ronald Reagan elected 40th President of the U.S.; The Arkansas Women’s Training Project (AWTP) is founded in Eureka Springs and later becomes The Women’s Project.



WAKE UP CALL!

When I considered the Right, I thought of it as made up of distinct groups. The most dangerous was what seemed to be a corporate Right, which during most of the 1980s I viewed as economic conservatives who were filled with greed but not necessarily turning toward an ideological Right. The far Right was clearly on my radar as primarily an influential, white supremacist defining edge, shaping the parameters of bigotry and violence. As for the theocratic Right, I was one among many who did not take them very seriously, who, in fact, saw them as buffoons on the fringe appealing to those who put emotion before thought and sought simple solutions as salvation in a world of complex problems that were overwhelming them. I was not a researcher, I was a social justice organizer – I saw the Right through a fractured lens as they entered my everyday organizing experience, and I did not see their connected, mutual interests



Why, I asked myself, had I failed to connect the dots between the many signs of the buildup?...Like many other people, I was working on a dozen fronts at once and failing to see the big picture. I was trying to put out brush fires among the trees rather than seeing the whole forest was about to be clear-cut. Also, I was framing the conflict as one between conservatives and liberals, with us progressives trying to define and defend core issues focused on race, class and gender.

A TURNING POINT AND CALL TO ACTION

“If you are trying to transform a brutalized society into one where people can live in dignity and hope, you begin with the empowering of the most powerless. You build from the ground up.”

ADRIENNE RICH



We can no longer afford single-issue politics that look at the small picture and miss the big one. We cannot allow ourselves to be diverted from what is the larger agenda of domination. Our only hope for defending the democracy and freedoms we now possess, and creating the inclusive world we want to live in, is to join together in our efforts. This will require recognizing how oppressions and oppressed people are linked – and then how this linkage necessitates mutual solutions.



BUILDING OUR MOVEMENT

If our organizations are not internally committed to the inclusion and shared power of all those who share our issue, how can we with any integrity demand inclusion and shared power in society at large?



Our Goal

Our goal is social change or, as the poet Adrienne Rich writes, "the transformation of the world." We believe this world can be changed to become a place of peace and justice for all women.

We take risks in our work; we take unpopular stands. We work for all women and against all forms of discrimination and oppression. We believe that we cannot work for all women and against sexism unless we also work against racism, classism, ageism, anti-semitism, heterosexism and homophobia. We see the connection among these oppressions as the context for violence against women in this society.

We are concerned in particular about issues of importance to traditionally underrepresented women: poor women, aged women, women of color, teenage mothers, lesbians, women in prisons, etc. All are women who experience discrimination and violence against their lives.

We are committed to working multi-culturally, multi-racially, and to making our work and cultural events accessible to low income women. We believe that women will not know equality until they know economic justice.

We believe that a few committed women working in coalition and in consensus with other women can make significant change in the quality of life for all women.

To do this work we have to create local organizations that work in combination with national resource centers and are committed to the cause of participatory democracy.



[In 1981] I founded the Women's Project, a nonprofit community organization that uses a multi-issue approach to social change. Focusing on the elimination of racism and sexism, it works primarily in the areas of economics and violence against women and children.

THE RIGHT STRIKES... ONCE LAUGHABLE, NOW THE RIGHT HAS THE WHITE HOUSE

The Right's Goals: An examination of the Right's activities and public statements indicates their goals are to:

- establish more rigid social control through reinforcing traditional hierarchical structures and increasing the police arm of the state;
- redefine and dismantle civil rights;
- promote unequal social and economic opportunity based on individual merit and privilege gained from belonging to the historically dominant class, race, gender, and religion; and
- eliminate barriers to an unregulated free market.



Rightwing/Whitewing

The politics of domination idealizes and promotes the values of being separate, of being elite, of being responsible for and to only a small group of people.

POLITICAL EDUCATION AND A MULTI-ISSUE INTEGRATED ANALYSIS



For change to come about, we must continue to point out contradictions, let conflicts arise, and then organize around them.

It is one thing for us to talk about liberation politics; it is of course another to live them. We lack political integrity when we demand liberation for one cause or one group of people and act out oppression or exploitation toward others. If we do not have an integrated analysis and a commitment to sharing power, it is easy to act out politics that simply reflect a hierarchy of domination.



Political education, linked with action, is imperative. Our work is developing people, not just ideas – people who are strong, knowledgeable, and courageous enough to take on the work for economic and social justice.



For a long while the primary focus of progressive people has been the analysis of and remedies for oppression, and our failure to recognize its connection to economic exploitation has caused difficulty in both our analysis and in our organizing.



The Targets of the Right: In the past few decades, the Right has vigorously opposed teaching evolution, multiculturalism, and sex education; school-based clinics; HIV/AIDS education; gay and lesbian equality; welfare; parental leave; tax increases for public funding of entitlements and social services; environmental protections; reproductive rights; battered women's shelters; the Equal Rights Amendment; the United Nations; the National Endowment for the Arts; the Corporation for Public Broadcasting; the Department of Education; affirmative action; pay equity for women; immigrants; and union organizing.

DEFEND

Defend what we have gained, such as public education and libraries, bodily autonomy, the right to vote, Medicare, the legal freedom to be queer and non-binary, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

RESIST

Resist the violence and harm brought against our people, the damage wrought upon the climate and Earth, and the broad attack against democracy.

BUILD

Build and promote a refreshed International Human Rights definition and commitment that includes the right to food, clothing, shelter, clean air, bodily autonomy, intellectual freedom, the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, the right to vote, and equal treatment before the law.

WHOLENESS & FREEDOM



It may be that our most important political work is figuring out how to make the full human connection; how to engage our hearts as well as our minds; how to heal the injuries we have suffered; how to do organizing that transforms people as well as institutions. With these as goals, we need to rethink our strategies and tactics. We have to think about our vision of change. Are we involved in a struggle for power that requires forces and resources on each side and a confrontational showdown in which only one side wins? If we are in a shoot-out, then the progressive side has already lost, for certainly there are more resources on the Right at this moment.

MOVING PEOPLE TO ACTION

By concentrating on moving people to action, we have often failed to hear the voice of their spirit, their need for connection and wholeness – not for someday after the goal has been gained but in the very process of gaining it.



I am not arguing that we should give up direct action, civil disobedience, issue campaigns, political education, confrontation, membership and voter drives, etc. We need to do these things and much more. I am suggesting that we rethink the meaning of social change and learn how to include the long-term work of transforming people as we work for social justice. We must redefine ‘winning.’



Recognition of the early signs of fascism allows the possibility of offering an alternative vision of how people can act together to seek answers for creating order from economic and social justice, not the injustice of scapegoating and repression.



Those who study fascism agree that it involves a combination of nationalism, militarism, racism, charismatic leadership, populism, and religiosity or sense of heroic destiny, with an emphasis on law and order, discipline, ultra-patriotism, patriarchal families, and hierarchical institutions. It is born out of chaos and disorder, emerging at the point when people are afraid and angry and are seeking survival through the creation of order at any cost. Many of these indicators are now evident in the social and political climate of the United States.



In our community and nation our demand is for equality and justice, for shared power and resources, for opportunity and participation, for individual and group responsibility and freedom. In the search for political integrity, the challenge has been to create an internal philosophy and a structure and practice that reflect the vision of the world we seek for everyone.

NOTES

NOTES

ABOUT SUZANNE PHARR



Suzanne Pharr is a Southern queer feminist and anti-racist organizer. She founded the Women's Project in Arkansas in 1981, was a co-founder of Southerners on New Ground in 1984, and was director of the Highlander Center from 1999 to 2004. Pharr is an organizer and political strategist who has spent her adult life working to build a broad-based, multiracial, multi-issued movement for social and economic justice in the United States. Major themes in her movement work include intersectional issues and strategies, anti-violence, racial and gender equality, cross-generational collaboration, democratic participation, economic justice, and human rights based on equality and justice. Since 1981 and the election of Ronald Reagan, Pharr has observed and documented the development of an authoritarian right-wing agenda aimed at dismantling democracy step-by-step. Based on six decades of work across movements, she now thinks of herself as a political handywoman, working across issues with activists of diverse races, genders, sexual identities, classes, ages, abilities, and cultures to develop strategies for justice and equality.

Pharr is the author of *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (1988), *In the Time of the Right: Reflections on Liberation* (1996, 2025), and *Transformation: Toward a People's Democracy* (2021).

Various video recordings that expand on the different themes in this book can be found at <http://www.suzannepharr.com>.



Download the whole book for free! Additional study guides and resources can be found at collectiveliberation.org/resource-library/

**MANY THANKS TO THE HANDS THAT MADE THIS ZINE POSSIBLE:
SUZANNE PHARR (AUTHOR), CHRISTIAN MATHEIS (EDITOR) &
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