

## **Introduction: Just Living**

This is a book about the personal experiences of thirty-five white men who are trying to live a just life, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. To varying degrees, the white men in this book all think of what they do as simply what they must do, as if it is no longer a choice; they are just living their lives. And the task of challenging racism and other forms of oppression is integrated into their day-to-day existence in such a way that their lives are permeated with questions of justice, personally and politically. Challenging racism is, for these men, just living. This book is an attempt to provide some space for the reflections of a group of white men who we believe are living just lives in many different ways.

The narratives include incidents from and comments about complex and rich lives and reflections on antiracist activity. Some of the narratives speak about critical events that led to a life of activism; some of them speak about blind spots when it comes to racism or another form of oppression; some of them speak about offenses in relationships and mistakes in strategy; some of them speak about regrets of actions not taken. And there are expressions of pride in describing accomplishments and victories.

These narratives are like photographs. It is as if each of these white men were momentarily presenting himself to us and you. These narratives are not comprehensive life histories. The white men profiled in this book made decisions about what they wanted to reveal about themselves and what they didn't want to reveal. We encouraged them and sometimes challenged them to reveal more about their most favorite and least favorite sides of themselves.

### *Why Another Book about White Men?*

Given the critical role that people of color have played in the lives of white men who challenge racism and given the fact that it is largely people of color (and to a lesser extent white women) who have given their lives to fight racism, you may wonder why we are writing a book exclusively about white men. In fact, we were occasionally asked, "Why are you focusing on white

men? Aren't people of color the true heroes? Why are you ignoring them? Don't white men already get more attention than they deserve? And what about the work of white women in challenging racism?"

We spent many hours talking about these questions with people of color and other white people. Afiya Madzimoyo, a friend and colleague who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and other women of color consistently told us that there is a desperate need at this point in history for white men to love themselves as white men; Wekesa Madzimoyo, her husband and another friend and colleague, supported us in our learning to love our white male brothers. Afiya and Wekesa emphasized the importance of our being with other white men, praising them for their accomplishments, and challenging them when they didn't "get it."

Wekesa is also emphatic that people of color need to break the centuries-old pattern of taking care of white people; we know from experience that we and other white men have fallen into patterns of looking to people of color—and white women—for encouragement and affirmation as we take on the task of challenging racism. In our worst moments, we have depended on people of color to acknowledge our good efforts, and if they didn't thank us profusely, we decided that they weren't grateful. Or we have avoided contact with other white men, believing that there is little chance of getting support from them. We believe that it is our responsibility as white men to give ourselves the "strokes" we want and need.

We are certainly not the first white people to decide that our work is with other white people. This is what Malcolm X and many other people of color said when asked by white people what their role might be in securing civil rights for African Americans. After reading many of these narratives and giving us feedback, Curdina Hill told us, "White people aren't really doing antiracism work unless they're working with other white people." In a variation on this theme, Winona LaDuke told Rick Whaley, one of the white men interviewed for this book, "You need to know prayers in your own people's language."

We believe that the narratives in this book do what Afiya and Wekesa and other people of color have encouraged us to do. By holding up these white men who challenge racism, we are celebrating their lives. By asking them to be vulnerable about their mistakes and shortcomings and by asking questions that push their understanding of themselves and oppression, we are challenging them. By supporting them and getting support from them, we are encouraging white men to use their white male privilege fully. It does nothing for racial justice if we are meek and shrink into a corner, abandoning

people of color and white women to fight racism on their own. The struggle for racial justice needs all of us in the center of the room.

Just as we hoped our questions were challenging to the men we were interviewing, so we also hope that their answers prove challenging to our readers. In particular, we hope what they say challenges the images that usually arise when people begin to speak of men in connection with the issue of racism. All too often, in our view, introducing the topic “men and racism” into a conversation quickly narrows it down to a discussion solely of the problem of “angry white men.” But there are other men, other white men, other than these “angry white men.” These other white men have anger and many other feelings, as their words show, not toward people of color or women (against whom the anger of the “angry white men” is said to be directed), but against racism and sexism and injustice generally. And they act on those feelings not in hostile acts of rage against other, marginalized people, but in acts of solidarity with those other people and acts of compassionate confrontation toward other white men.

Why, then, yet another book on white men—and this time, irony of ironies, one that even claims to be in opposition to racism and sexism? Because the widely held gendered image of racism—it’s “angry white *men*,” not “angry white *people*”—needs an equally gendered counterimage of antiracism—antiracist white *men*, not antiracist white *people*. Because groups of people, even dominant groups of people, are not monolithic. And it’s important to know this. To really know it, not just in the abstract, but in the concrete details of these people’s lives, as they themselves speak about them. We need to have some personal knowledge of men who have crossed racial lines in pursuit of racial justice, against the dominant stand of their own dominant group. Such knowledge empowers all, whether dominant or subordinate, because it opens the horizon and raises the bar of the possible in pursuit of justice and may even help to empower and inspire others to do likewise.

It is not that we believe that white women don’t have much to teach us. They have taught us much, and we hope to keep learning from them. In fact, our personal experience tells us that there are many more white women than white men who actively challenge racism, and we suspect that there is more contemporary antiracism literature written by white women than by white men. Given that, it seems particularly important to focus on white men, to fill in this gap.

Some of the white men we interviewed also had concerns about being part of this project. A few of them were surprised that we wanted to talk to

them because they didn't think they had done enough. Others were reluctant because they didn't want to seem like heroes or be in the spotlight. For example, John Cole Vodicka is adamant that the real heroes in southwest Georgia, where he works, are the African Americans who are willing to stand up to overtly racist white sheriffs and judges in the face of threats and retaliation. Chip Berlet told us, "When you told me you were doing a book about white men who fight oppression, I thought, 'Oh great, this is gonna be another one of those bang the drum and howl about the burdens of fighting racism and sexism!' I see my personal battles as an inconvenience and nothing compared to the burdens of people who feel the sting of oppression." Even so, some of the white men we talked with admitted that some recognition is important to them and keeps them going.

We have chosen to primarily explore the experiences of white men who challenge racism and not their experiences challenging sexism or other forms of oppression. We don't believe that racism is more important than other oppressions. Indeed, we are committed to the proposition that there is no hierarchy of oppressions and no priority of one liberation struggle over another. But because of where we are in our personal lives and where we believe our nation at this moment stands in its political life, we have chosen in this book to highlight antiracist struggles. It seems to us that many white men have explored and taken seriously the personal and political impacts of sexism, while racism has been treated as if it were only a historical phenomenon or deemed too difficult to change. It seems critical, therefore, to hold up white men who are committed to challenging racism.

We are aware of the problems in using the word "white." Some argue that the very concept of "whiteness" is an oppressive fiction that falsifies a much more complicated social reality. For others, it is an all too real phenomenon but one that must be thoroughly rejected. For others, it is a simple biological fact to be accepted. For us, in the context of this book it is shorthand for people of European descent who have, for the most part, been whitewashed into losing or giving up their identities as European Americans with specific ethnic and national roots. "White" is, for us, primarily a historical and political, rather than biological, concept that has given these people unearned privileges that have had and continue to have tremendous impact on all of our lives. We use it merely to describe, not to endorse, certain identities and institutions, along with their racialized relations of power.

In addition to being asked why we were focusing exclusively on white men, we were also questioned about the fact that we are three white men. "Don't you run the risk of not knowing what you don't know? How can you objectively assess other white men? What is your accountability to people of

color? Isn't this just another example of the use of your own white male privilege to enhance your own status as white men?" When we first contacted Tobin Miller-Shearer to see if he was interested in being interviewed, he asked us about the involvement of people of color in our project. Because we didn't have a formal structure for getting the advice of people of color and because he takes very seriously the creation of structures of accountability to people of color, Tobin was initially hesitant to be interviewed.

We did not create a formal structure of accountability. We did consult regularly with people of color and white women in our lives, and they have given us feedback. For example, Curdina Hill was struck by the ways that some of these white men seemed so wounded from incidents in their childhoods, so she wondered if we had asked them about their personal healing in the interviews. We realized that the question had not occurred to us. We had asked about isolation and the need for support but not the need to heal from past wounds. One of the things that Curdina persistently notices in white men is the residue of old pain and how this negatively impacts white men's relationships with people of color and therefore reduces the effectiveness of their efforts to challenge racism. We assume that there are other things we have "missed"; we assume that we have gotten some things wrong. In a sense, we are trying to do what we have asked the interviewees to do: we're sharing our work with you, knowing that you will see our strengths and shortcomings.

### *Our Approach*

Early in this project, we knew that we didn't want to write a book that critiques the lives of other white men. The three of us have been socialized quite well to study others, find their flaws, point out those flaws in a patronizing way, and proceed to tell them what they need to do differently. We decided instead to let other white men speak for themselves and place ourselves in the role of listeners and learners. The methodology we chose for doing this was to find white men whom others describe, or who describe themselves, as challenging racism; interview them face to face; transcribe and edit parts of the interview so that it read as a first-person narrative, with an occasional question or comment from us; rewrite sections for clarity and arrange the material for dramatic emphasis; and last, review and edit the narrative with the interviewee so that it reflected what he wanted and was willing to say about himself. We were clear that we wanted this to be a collaborative process.

In looking for white men to interview, we wanted a diverse group in

terms of age, place of residence, sexual orientation, class background and current class identity, spiritual tradition and practice, racial and ethnic identities of the people of color with whom they see themselves in alliance, and type of activities they do to challenge racism. We wanted “experts” who know that they are on a journey of learning about themselves and others and the world. We wanted white men who were willing to talk about their accomplishments and failures, who could be both proud and humble. We wanted white men who would be willing to be vulnerable in print. For the most part, we wanted to profile white men who were relatively unknown outside of their geographical communities or field of work. Notable exceptions are Herbert Aptheker, Stetson Kennedy, Si Kahn, and Richard Lapchick, although they are hardly household names.

We formally or informally interviewed about one hundred white men in the process of choosing these thirty-five. We know of or heard about well over one hundred white men challenging racism whom we didn’t interview. Based on the number of white men we identified and the fact that our search was, at times, casual and never exhaustive, we know that there are many more white men in the United States who in some way challenge racism.

The interviews were both structured and spontaneous. We prepared for each interview by having a set of questions we wanted to ask, and the questions we actually asked depended on what happened in the interview. The broad questions we wanted to explore included the following: What do you do to challenge racism? How do you do what you do? Why? How did you come to be committed to doing what you do? What mistakes have you made? What are you proud of? What’s the meaning for you of your various cultural identities? How would you describe your relationships with people of color? With other white people? How do you get support? Where is your community?

When we first started conducting interviews, we prepared a relatively long list of questions based on these themes and then kept those questions in front of us, on paper, as we conducted interviews. (This list is in the appendix.) We eventually realized that it would be a more cooperative strategy to share these questions with the interviewee prior to the interview and did so. At about the same time, we began to trust that we could keep the questions in the back of our minds as we gave the interviewee our full attention. We never asked all of these questions; we tailored our questions to the issues that we felt would be most salient in each interview and then modified them. Sometimes the person we were interviewing took the interview in directions that we hadn’t anticipated; sometimes we took the interview in directions we hadn’t anticipated; most of the time the interview seemed to have a life of its own.

Our decision to create first-person narratives from interviews was inspired by the work of Studs Terkel (*Race*); Bob Blauner (*Black Lives, White Lives*), and Timothy Beneke (*Men on Rape*). We liked the directness and intimacy of this approach. Using first-person narratives to explore complex and multidimensional material also appealed to our desire to use storytelling as a device for learning and teaching.

Creating the narratives from the transcriptions was challenging. When we created the first dozen or so, we didn't have a guide in our hands, nor had we articulated how we might develop the narratives. We were using our intuition and best guesses about how Terkel and others might have followed a similar process. After creating first and second (and third and fourth) drafts of about half of the narratives, we began to articulate what we were doing. At about the same time, Bob Blauner gave us a copy of "Problems of Editing 'First-Person' Sociology" (*Qualitative Sociology*, spring 1987), an article he had written in the process of writing *Black Lives, White Lives*. His essay affirmed what we were learning experientially and encouraged us to continue what we were doing. (Notes on the process of creating a narrative appear in the appendix.)

The final step in writing the narratives is one that we took very seriously. We worked collaboratively with the interviewee to assure that the narrative we had created from his interview was accurate and reflected what he wanted to say. In some cases, this meant hours on the phone, many e-mails, and detailed edits until we got it right. We are proud of our collaborative process and its results. We believe that it makes an additional statement about white men supporting each other in antiracist work. In doing this, we have been true to the spirit of what these white men want to say about themselves.

One aspect of our collaboration with them was to ask them to think carefully about the impact of the publication of their narratives. Some of the interviewees agonized about what to save and what to delete; in the end, a few of them decided to delete particular comments out of concern for their reputations or the potential impact on allies, colleagues, friends, and family. For example, after reading drafts of their narratives that included information about their affiliations with revolutionary groups in the 1960s and 1970s, a few of the white men asked that we remove any references to revolutionary groups out of a legitimate fear that they could be used by conservatives to damage their credibility and hurt the very important work that they were now doing. Clearly, the current political climate in the United States is having a chilling effect on some people's ability to claim a progressive political identity. We are saddened by this reality.

One pitfall in using first-person narratives is the implication that these white men are individual agents. When it comes to social change, we believe that the idea of individual agency is a myth. One of the challenges we face as white men is seeing ourselves as part of a movement, taking leadership from people of color and white women. In general, white men are socialized to see themselves as individuals, and often leaders, rather than as members of communities and followers; indeed, we began this project with that notion. By using the first-person narrative, we have unintentionally reinforced the myth of individual agency. We believe, however, that the content of the narratives challenges this myth: the narratives make visible the ways that these white men have accepted leadership from people of color and white women, are members of communities and organizations challenging racism, and are part of a movement for social change.

Another pitfall in using relatively short first-person narratives is that there is limited information about each person's life. Therefore, if a narrative contains no information about, say, the role of spirituality as an interviewee's inspiration for challenging racism, that does not mean that spirituality has played no role in his life. It simply means that we didn't ask about that and he didn't talk about that; or that we decided to delete that material from the narrative because it was repetitious of what was said in another interview; or that we felt there was other material that was more significant or interesting; or that he is not aware of the role that spirituality plays in his life.

There is no conscious attempt on our part to judge as good or bad what these white men do and think and feel. We have not analyzed them; we have not made distinctions about what are good and bad approaches to challenging racism. We have made no attempt to measure the frequency with which a particular theme is mentioned. We have not commented on how these white men resolve particular dilemmas in their lives. We didn't do any checking on their credentials to see if people of color and other white people thought they were "legitimate" in their attempts to challenge racism.

On the other hand, we did have to make many decisions about whom to interview, how to edit the interviews into narratives, what material we wanted to include in the narratives, and which narratives to include in the book. Our criteria for these decisions included the following questions: Have we included a wide range of white men in terms of who they are, where they live, with whom they work and live, and what they actually do to challenge racism? Is what they have to say compelling and engaging? Have they revealed themselves through the narratives? Do they acknowledge the existence of institutional and cultural racism? Do they account for their white male privilege? Are they aware of other forms of oppression?

Our responses to these questions have been highly subjective. In the end, we don't believe that we have judged these white men according to standards of what is right and wrong; we have judged their comments as being more or less what we found exciting and helpful in our own desire to learn from them and more or less what we believe will be useful and engaging to readers.

*People of Color and White People in the Lives of These White Men*

Almost all of the white men in this book have had and continue to have people of color and white people in their lives as teachers, mentors, partners, and supporters. People of color have been especially important to them. We want to spend some time here detailing the many ways that these white men speak about people of color in their lives, and then how white people play similar roles for them.

Herbert Aptheker, while writing his first book on Nat Turner, was befriended by Carter G. Woodson; while writing *A Documentary History of the Negro People*, he shared an office in New York City with W. E. B. Du Bois. And he considers as pivotal the time he spent as a young man with Dorothy and Louie Burnham, who were gentle and loving teachers. Pat Cusick was profoundly impacted by Mahatma Gandhi's concept of satyagraha (soul force) and a speech by Stokely Carmichael; he was personally encouraged to come out as gay by Bayard Rustin. Richard Lapchick credits Arthur Ashe with helping him see the importance of speaking out about being assaulted for his anti-apartheid activism. Billy Yalowitz recalls feeling lucky that he "grew up in a household where my dad's hero was Paul Robeson. . . . His voice was singing in the house all the time." Matt Reese describes how reading about the Black Panthers, Malcolm X, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired him and helped him understand his role as an activist. Matt also considers Nailah Jumoke to be a mentor; she's the executive director of the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center in Louisville, Kentucky. In the introduction to his narrative, Sean Cahill talks about the importance of his relationship with Urvashi Vaid at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. In the narrative, he mentions his admiration for Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing.

Several of these white men mentioned to us during or after the interviews the importance of reading or hearing the words of bell hooks, Angela Davis, Marion Wright Edelman, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, and James Baldwin. A. T. Miller credits lesbians of color and gay men of color for making connections between oppressions: "Stonewall was all people of color, and some of the earliest out people were the lesbian and bisexual blues women who later became part of the Harlem Renaissance. . . .

Women like Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde taught us all to think more clearly about the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality. They really developed intellectually the concept of multiple simultaneous identity.”

Steve Bailey works with a multiracial staff. He praises the artistic director of Jump-Start, Sterling Houston, for pushing and advising him; one of the members of Jump-Start, S. T. Shimi, for teaching him about her South Asian background; and the director of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, Graciela Sanchez, for educating him about oppression. “My awareness of race issues has been really honed through collaborations with lesbians of color. . . . Graciela Sanchez is both a friend and mentor. Over the years, she has generously given her time and knowledge to help me deal with my place in the world as a white gay man.”

Chris Shuey talks about the impact of his contact with Navajo people, giving him “a different theoretical, conceptual, and philosophical basis for what I do.” For example, as an environmental health specialist, he has learned to incorporate a spiritual dimension in assessments of environmental impact, rather than relying solely on legalistic and scientific approaches. In his personal life, the emphasis in Navajo culture on family has helped him remember the importance of maintaining a connection between his children and his parents. Rick Whaley talks frequently about his mentor and Anishinabe friend Walter Bresette and being inspired by Winona LaDuke.

Nibs Stroupe, the pastor of Oakhurst Presbyterian, a multiracial church in Decatur, Georgia, with an explicit mission to challenge racism, talks about being challenged by a member of his church and a training colleague, Inez Fleming: “I remember a phone call; I don’t remember what the issue was, but she had taken issue with something I’d done. I said, ‘Why are you mad about this?’ And she said, ‘I’m not mad about this. Why do you think I’m mad?’ I said, ‘Well, you sound angry.’ ‘No, I don’t sound angry,’ she said, ‘but if you want me to sound angry, I will. I think the problem is you’re not used to getting this from a Black person.’ . . . She is always pushing me and asking, ‘What are you really thinking? I don’t want this “preacher” stuff.’ ”

Bill Vandenberg, the co-executive director of the Colorado Progressive Coalition (CPC), describes his relationship with his former girlfriend and the other co-executive director, Soyun Park, in this way: “We have a great deal of respect for one another in the work we do. We know what we each do well and where we need a little support. And we give that support to one another.” After going through a painful realization that CPC was dominated by older middle- and upper-class white people, Bill and Soyun and some of their colleagues pushed the organization into becoming more multicultural. By the end of the process, the staff was younger, and seventeen out of twenty

were people of color. Bill says, “My life is enriched more than I can even quantify by working in a multiracial setting.”

White people have also been the conscience, catalyst, and inspiration for these white men. Matt Reese told us about how much he respects and learns from Civil Rights Movement elders like Anne Braden, a longtime social justice activist in the South. David Attyah has such a strong artistic and personal partnership with S. A. Bachman that he prefers to identify their work as *THINK AGAIN* rather than his or her work. Steve Bailey and John Allocca have both used James Loewen’s *Lies My Teacher Told Me* in their work. Herbert Aptheker’s book, *Anti-Racism in U.S. History: The First Two Hundred Years*, includes hundreds of examples of actions by white people that challenged racism; he is currently working on a second volume because he believes that the material is so important. Nibs Stroupe talks about his friendship with David Billings, another white man challenging racism in New Orleans; John Cole Vodicka mentioned to us his respect for Nibs.

Rick Whaley has been deeply inspired by Wendell Berry’s *The Hidden Wound*. For Rick, Berry’s work is essential for exploring the impact of racism on white culture and the land. In 1990, as he was getting ready to join a dangerous witness against racism in northern Wisconsin, Rick told his son, “If anything happens to me, remember two things: take care of our family and read Wendell Berry when you get older.” Interestingly, Rick told us that Berry was very influenced by the essays of James Baldwin.

In a conversation after the interview, Chip Berlet described his supervisor and colleague Jean Hardisty with deep respect, praise, and even joy at being able to work with her. “For me to be invited by her to be an employee to study the right wing is like somebody had just constructed the world’s greatest job. I thought it was fabulous. In terms of the work environment, I’ve never questioned her leadership. I was mesmerized by her presentation the first time I heard her speak, and I’m still mesmerized by her speaking and thinking. She’s quite astonishing.”

In our interview with Art Branscombe, his wife Bea sat nearby, praising Art and sometimes adding details to his comments. At one point I asked Art about his experience accepting leadership from women. Bea responded, “He’s had three daughters, all of whom are feminists.” Art added, “Oh, boy, I’ve been surrounded here! Ye, gods. No way I could have avoided being somewhat of a feminist!”

Herbert Aptheker sings the praises of both his daughter, Bettina, and his wife, Fay. “I’m terrifically proud of Bettina. . . . She’s a conscious antiracist, as well as a feminist. She’s very militant about that, but she’s very militant about the antiracism.” As for Fay, who died in 1999, “I needed her, not only

emotionally and physically, but in my work, where she did a lot of my research. . . . My first book is dedicated to her, and all of my books have something about her. She made it possible for me to produce so much writing. I could never have done it otherwise. It never occurred to me that Fay was anything but at least my equal. . . . She was basic to everything in my life.”

### *Doing Antiracist Work*

It is, after all, antiracist activity that distinguishes these white men from other white men, and the range of activity described in these narratives is impressive: organizing, protesting, engaging in civil disobedience, witnessing, writing, using power and position to raise issues, teaching, infiltrating racist organizations, rescuing people of color from oppressive conditions, getting involved in politics, building coalitions and supporting organizations of color, advocating, taking legal action, boycotting, lobbying, creating and building organizations to challenge racism, researching and spreading information, and making contact with and supporting white men. Here’s a representative sampling from the narratives:

Some of these white men use their professional skills and position to challenge racism. Ken Kimerling is an attorney in New York City who works to protect the rights of Asian immigrants and other people of color. Lee Formwalt, as Executive Director of the Organization of American Historians, led the organization to cancel a six-figure contract to hold its annual meeting at a hotel that had been accused of racial discrimination. Bill Johnston, a former police officer in Boston and head of the Police Department’s Community Disorders Unit, used his power to challenge his fellow officers about the racism, sexism, and homophobia he saw in the department and in the community.

Some of these white men use their art to challenge racism. Si Kahn writes and performs songs about racism and other forms of oppression; his narrative includes the lyrics to “Vann Plantation,” a song about the incarceration of African American men in for-profit prisons. Billy Yalowitz directs community theater projects like *The Black Bottom*, a production based on the story of an African American community that was destroyed by urban renewal, and *Minstrel Shows*, a production about racism, becoming white, and the appropriation of Black culture. David Attyah creates postcards and posters that speak to oppression: “White Men Can’t Count,” a response to white male allegations that Affirmative Action has gone too far, and “Bash Bat,” a response to the fatal beating of a gay man.

Some of these white men spend their days and nights observing racism

and then speaking up. John Cole Vodicka sits in courtrooms and visits prisons in southwest Georgia, documenting racist acts by sheriffs, judges, and prison officials and advocating for justice. Rick Whaley was a coordinator of a multiweek vigil during nighttime attacks on Indian spear fishers in Wisconsin; he describes witnessing as the process of deflecting anger by receiving it. Sean Cahill has gone to Northern Ireland for many years as part of Peace Watch Ireland, a multiracial group of activists who maintain a nonviolent presence during the Protestant marching season and build solidarity between oppressed peoples in Ireland and the United States. Jim Murphy has repeatedly challenged Boston City Council members, Boston Fire Department officials, and his fellow firefighters to deal with the racism, sexism, and homophobia he has witnessed in the department, despite the fact that as the only openly gay man in the department he is at substantial risk for doing so.

Others have also put themselves at great personal risk in the service of challenging racism. Herbert Aptheker traveled to Georgia in the 1930s in a secretive mission to free African Americans from peonage, an economic system in which they were so indebted to white owners that they were essentially imprisoned. Stetson Kennedy infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan in the 1940s and 1950s and distributed the names of Klan members, the minutes of their meetings, and even their secret passwords; had he been caught, he believes he probably would have been tortured and killed. Terry Kupers worked with the Black Panthers at their request in the 1960s, using his training as a doctor to provide emergency medical care, even though there was a chance that he could be caught in shootouts between the police and the Panthers. Richard Lapchick was assaulted while organizing a boycott in the 1970s of the Davis Cup tennis matches and the Los Angeles Olympics because of South African participation. Two masked men broke into his office late one night, severely beat him, and carved the word “nigger” on his stomach.

Finally, there are white men in this book like Jesse Wimberley, who helps working-class white men in North Carolina explore the connections among capitalism, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. He believes that they have been exploited economically, cut off from a sense of community with one another, and therefore are vulnerable to being organized by right-wing groups. Jesse believes that working with these white men is healing for him and for them.

#### *A Final Comment about the Organization of the Narratives*

We decided to arrange the narratives into six sections: “Movement Elders,”

“Grassroots Organizing,” “Art and Politics,” “Challenging the System from Within,” “Challenging the System from the Margins,” and “The Next Generation.” Our decisions about which narratives to place in which sections were somewhat arbitrary; some of the narratives could have been placed in more than one section. For example, Pat Cusick, because of his age and experience in the Civil Rights Movement, rightfully belongs with the elders. But he is very much a grassroots organizer and definitely fights the system from the margins. Although Tim Wise’s narrative could have been placed in “The Next Generation” or either of the “challenging the system” sections, we chose to put him with the artists because he talks about his writing as a creative process.

We like the idea that the book begins with the elders and ends with the next generation. In fact, our final question to Herbert Aptheker, whose narrative appears first in the book, had to do with his advice to younger activists. Matt Reese, whose narrative appears last and who is the youngest of the white men profiled in the book, closes with these comments: “I wouldn’t be where I am without the elders in the Movement. And they wouldn’t have a future without us. Inevitably, everyone’s going to die, and if we’re not there to pick up the pieces, then the Movement is dead.”

We believe that Matt’s words bring the book full circle.