

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change



2010 Gathering of OLOC: What We Did and Who We Met

By Jennice Thomas, 1940

If you've been wondering where all the Radical Lesbian Feminists of the 70s have gone, they went to the OLOC Gathering in Cleveland this summer where *Sharpening the Radical Edge* was more than a slogan. This was my first but definitely not my last OLOC Gathering. We had five days of adventure. There were over 140 of us from 23 states and Washington, D.C., and from as far away as Australia and Hawaii.

On Wednesday evening we were lavishly welcomed by Cleveland Lesbians. They entertained us with songs and humor in a Cabaret performance emceed by Karen Williams, who helped us laugh at ourselves while we munched on delicacies from a complimentary buffet.

Our keynote speakers highlighted a wide variety of issues: Margaret Cruikshank reminded us that aging is not a disease but ageism can be

deadly. She warned us of the dangers of over-medicating. Marilyn (Jezz) Jesmain told us about the roles of women in Native American tribes. Often female leaders were ignored by European explorers who would speak only to a male. In many tribes, Lesbians and homosexuals were not only accepted but were respected and afforded a high status. Shelia Ortiz-Taylor explained how she uses her fiction as vengeance to expose sexist, ageist, and homophobic attitudes in the legal system, academia, and retirement communities. When our fourth speaker, Vera Martin, could not attend due to complications from knee-replacement surgery, the Three Wizards of OZ (Australians: Suzanne Bellamy, Lavender, and Jean Taylor) stepped up to make us laugh and to make us think as they reminded us of the international scope of our movement. They assured us

continued on next page



Keynote speaker Jezz Jesmain on the left; pictured with SC Member Carole Stoneking



Sandy Tate and Yvonne Johnson building connections, a major strength of OLOC Gatherings.

The Reporter ... A quarterly publication of OLOC

September 2010 VOLUME 20 ISSUE 3

OLOC is a nonprofit 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization.



Cathy Cade cuts a mean rug with Margaret Mann

that the Big Wave of OLOC energy is just getting started.

A panel on Racism and another on Ageism also provided us with multiple perspectives on these areas. Frequently scheduled Speak Outs were a venue for participants to voice opinions about issues and offer resolutions for the OLOC membership to vote on. Also, we could choose 4 from 17 workshops on a wide variety of topics, all of them tempting.

But, even with this wealth of planned activities, space was available for lots of informal conversations at breakfast or in the hospitality lounge where snacks were plentiful and friendships sprouted easily. A high point for me was meeting Sonia Johnson (who ran for president on three alternative party tickets in 1984 and might have been our president instead of Ronald Reagan). While I was buying a denim shirt with the OLOC logo in the Marketplace, I started talking with Sonia. My special interest is feminist utopia, and when I looked into her eyes, I was startled to find not only a kindred spirit but one whose vision was deeper and sharper than

my own. Best of all was her assurance that the change we so fervently seek is imminent. Her new book, *The Sisterwitch Conspiracy*, details the world we hope for.

I haven't even mentioned the talent we discovered when participants at the Gathering entertained us with songs, poetry, and even belly dancing. When an impromptu press conference failed to attract big-media boys, volunteers from the audience challenged the panel to sharpen their responses while providing us with some very funny questions. We also saw two great films: *No Secret Anymore: The Life and Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon* and *Hannah Free*. The dinner and dance on Saturday night featured the presentation of the Del Martin Old Lesbian Pride Award (in absentia) to Carmah Lawler, 1929, and Kathy Glass, 1932; songs and stories by Alix Dobkin; and a delicious meal and music to make you dance. I couldn't have asked for more—except let's do it again in 2012!



Steering Committee members Tita Caldwell and Alix Dobkin multi-tasking: listening, learning and partying.

Margaret Cruikshank's talk "Old Lesbian Pride: Aging on Our Own Terms" offered many insights on what it means for Old Lesbians to age on our own terms. Here are a few quotations from her speech:

Medicalized aging is especially dangerous [for Old Lesbians] ... The most dangerous part of medicalized aging is the invitation to take multiple drugs for years. ... If you are on several, make sure that any experience you label 'aging' is not a result of drug interaction.

Another way to age on our own terms is to think about recovering from the speed and fragmentation that increasingly mark U.S. culture.

We age on our own terms when we are strategic in our expressions of anger. Surely we have much to be angry about... But I hope we will distinguish between anger that is mindful, invigorating, and strategically deployed and anger that is corrosive, that eats us up.

'Comfortably' is an important word here because when we age on our own terms, only we can say if we are aging comfortably. 'Aging gracefully' suggests that someone else is evaluating us. Aging disgracefully sounds like more fun.

Marilyn (Jezz) Jesmain defined "Two-Spirit Women" in Native American culture. Although Native languages had no words for Lesbians, sexuality was a fluid concept and all individuals were respected for who they were. A few quotations from Jezz:

It is said Lozen was very manly in her appearance, and dressed and fought like a man. Instead of her puberty ceremony, which is usually celebrated at a girl's first menstruation, she went alone into the desert on a vision quest. Here her future was revealed to her by her guardian spirits. She was to become a warrior with special powers to predict the whereabouts of her enemy... Although Dahteste had a husband and children, she too was credited as being courageous, daring, and skillful. She could out-ride, out-shoot, out-hunt, out-run, and out-fight her peers, male or female, and she did so with grace....

Lozen was immediately attracted to Dahteste, and they made an unbeatable team. They lived together for several years.

As women matured, they were honored for their wisdom. Elder women, unencumbered by child-bearing, were free to take on the political and economic responsibilities of the tribe.

Although it was an elder woman who headed the family and owned all the household property, she also made the rules that governed the social activities of the entire tribe. Elder women were often in charge of trading expeditions.

Sheila Ortiz-Taylor's speech "No, No, Vengeance Is Mine" entertained us with readings from three of her novels, *Fault Line*, *Outrageous*, and *Assisted Living*, which expose institutionalized sexism and homophobia. She introduced her readings with the following:

I tend naturally toward a kind of peaceable sloth. But three times in my life I have been impelled by rage toward a bitter if oblique skirmish with the patriarchal establishment, followed by the writing of a novel in which my enemies appear in an ungraceful light. Yes, I confess to having a vengeful side.

In the excerpts she read, she addressed her ex-husband's attempt to get custody of her children, a university's homophobia, and a retirement and assisted care facility's discrimination, all situations she had trouble with at various times.

The Three Wizards of Oz (Suzanne Bellamy, Lavender, and Jean Taylor), all long-time Lesbian activists in Australia, filled in for Vera Martin, who could not attend due to complications from knee-replacement surgery. They each spoke briefly of their own organizing stories and advocated for recognition of the international scope of Old Lesbians.

For copies of any of the complete speeches available, contact Susan@oloc.org or phone 888-706-7506.

Fledgling (60.6-year-old) Hits Cleveland for Leadership Training Sessions Prior to OLOC Gathering 2010: Oh My! *By Ellen Gierson, 1950*

Two days of training preceded the National Gathering:

Ageism—The Radical Edge, led by the wonderfully intelligent and generous Alix Dobkin (and yes, she did sign my beloved “Lavender Jane Loves Women” album circa 1975—you gotta come over and check out what she wrote—oh-oh!). This was a good mix of personal experiences regarding ageism and some ideas to help us be strong during this long and sad transitional phase of capitalism. I tried to concentrate on the discussion but I was dazed ‘cause I was sitting next to Alix, OY!

Next up was Organizing and Facilitating a Group led by the very gracious, open, warm, YWCA maven Carole Stoneking, along with the really smart, funny, and brave Margaret Mann. Here I learned that you should BE PREPARED and do everything before the meeting so that the meeting will only last 26 minutes. Also very important is that the leader should really be careful when asking for feedback. You could get killed from the feedback, ‘cause American society values killing the leader. I was very glad to be reminded of this, as you can well imagine! I do not want to be killed just yet as I want to get to know the Effective Meetings facilitator better.

This was followed by a phone conference workshop on Working and Speaking with the Media by Ann Craig (she's from GLAAD). Although I wasn't (glad, that is) ‘cause I couldn't hear what was said all that well, as the phone was little and had lots of static. Ironic, given the topic.

At the Fundraising workshop led by the vivacious Billie Potts, I learned about giving. I was excited to pick up some cool tricks that would help to change small givers into big givers and to learn that giving is relationship-based. Since we Lesbians are always doing relationships, we should, therefore, be able to raise a lot of money! I was very glad to learn this. I will try immediately to get into a relationship in order to give big and will recommend it to others.

I thought that Oakland, CA, was Lesbian land. Forget that! The weekend of July 14–18, in Cleveland, at the biennial, was a spectacular gathering of fabulous, smart, sassy, experienced, and funny women from all over the USA! A few women joined us from Australia, too. This get-together was a huge success!

OLOC Continues Commitment to Challenge Racism and Classism

Twenty-two Lesbians met at the Gathering to talk about how OLOC might better challenge racism and classism within the organization and in the world. Watch future *Reporters* for news about what's next.

Mea Culpa

We apologize for an error that appeared in OLOC's fund-raising letter sent in June. The letter, by Ginny Apuzzo, identified her as “Assistant to the President” in the Carter administration, but it should have said the Clinton administration.

The OLOC Reporter

The OLOC Reporter is published by Old Lesbians Organizing for Change:

- www.oloc.org • E-mail: info@oloc.org
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This Newsletter Brought to You By: Jennice Thomas, 1940, and Susan Wiseheart, 1941, Co-Editors; Malinda McCain, 1940, and Nancy Krody, 1939, Proofreaders and Copy-editors; Mina Meyer, 1940, and Jan Griesinger, 1942, Content Review; Margaret Purcell, 1951, Design/Layout; All of the writers and the mailing crew.

Let your voice be heard.

Deadline for the next issue: October 20, 2010, for a late November 2010 publication date.

Limit submissions to 500 words. Contact us for a style guide. We may edit articles for clarity and length. Send articles to OLOC: info@oloc.org or OLOC, PO Box 5853, Athens, OH 45701.

Contact OLOC at info@oloc.org for our chapter contact list or our research guidelines.
If you prefer print, phone 888-706-7506.

Bay Area OLOC Gathers to Talk about Disability

By Lynn Brown, 1943

Bay Area OLOC held a half-day gathering attended by about 25 Lesbians. The topic was disability. For the check-in, we went oldest to youngest, our usual order. Each of us included our own relationship to disability. What a surprise to discover that all but a few of us feel that we can claim some kind of disability.

Some of the thoughts I heard expressed as Lesbians identified disabilities:

1. Going from obligation to creation (which I think meant to no longer live with anyone's constructs but our own).
2. Finding leisure time to reflect (a plus of disability).
3. Living in community (a community of Lesbians).
4. Having a summer workshop on death and dying.
5. Failing of the body's architecture can open the heart and mind.
6. Listening to doctors' advice because the future is uncertain.
7. Fearing dependence: "I'm not disabled!"
8. Realizing how a partner's disability changes our life.
9. Volunteering (as a person with disability) puts me in touch with other kinds of people.
10. Seeing how people "just get on with it."

The check-in made it easier to begin a deeper conversation, which Simi Litvak introduced with some ideas of her own. Simi's introduction included comments about the "ick factor" in disability. She also talked about how experiences differ for various age groups and about the importance of the Disability Rights Movement. After hearing Simi's ideas, we broke into small groups and focused on what we as individuals had experienced around disability. My group came up with several topics for us to think about: shame from being able and from ableism; the time involved to find support systems, especially for Lesbians; how ageism affects those of us with disability; wanting to ignore our disability; the risk of exposure of our disabilities; and the need for self-advocacy.

Afterwards, we shared the highlights of our small groups with everyone. Incontinence and blaming ourselves for disability were two issues that came up in other groups. We also discovered that there's lots of material for us to continue to work with on this topic.

Ohio Happenings

The Ohio Chapter spoke in April at a meeting of the directors of the Ohio Association of Senior Centers.

OLOC is now an affiliate of Wolfe Video. You can order *Hannah Free* or any other Wolfe Video by using our link and we will receive cash from Wolfe to support our work. www.wolfevideo.com/default.asp?R=1344 will take you to their site. Once there, you can move around, order what you want, and OLOC will receive some money. Wolfe Video is Lesbian-owned-and-operated.



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Please note the early deadline, October 20,
for submissions for the next issue!

Winners of the First Del Martin Old Lesbian Pride Award

Kathy Glass, 79, and Carmah Lawler, 81 (partners for 32 years), received the first ever Del Martin Old Lesbian Pride Award at the 2010 OLOC Gathering in Cleveland on July 17. They were nominated unanimously by the Northern Colorado Chapter of OLOC, of which they have been members since shortly after the Chapter was formed in 1993.

They have been active in the Jefferson County Democrats, the Stonewall Democrats, and the League of Women Voters for many years. Over the years they have raised thousands of dollars to support candidates sympathetic to LGBT issues. Their work on behalf of Jefferson County Democrats was acknowledged when they were selected Democrats of the Year by the GLBT Democratic Caucus and when they received the prestigious Eleanor Roosevelt Award.

Kathy and Carmah frequently testify in state legislative hearings on behalf of bills beneficial to the LGBT community. They often begin their testimony with "This is what an Old Lesbian looks like." Their persistence has resulted in many laws in Colorado protecting LGBT individuals.

When they received word of this latest award from OLOC, Glass said, "We were blown away. It was just such a shock, and we were not aware that our OLOC organization here were the ones who sent in our names and suggested that we receive this....I'm just so humbled to have an award given [in recognition of Del Martin who] has been a heroine of ours for all these years."

Unfortunately, Kathy and Carmah were unable to attend the award ceremony for health reasons, but they were thrilled to receive the award and intend to use the cash prize to support organizations they are connected with.

Resolutions Passed at OLOC Gathering

The Lesbians attending the OLOC Gathering in July passed two resolutions. The first was to oppose Arizona's law (SB 1070), now under legal challenge, requiring anyone in the state to carry documentation proving their immigration status and giving police the right to use race as a determining factor in whether or not to ask for such papers. OLOC stands in solidarity with Latino immigrant communities in Arizona. The second was to memorialize eleven African-American women murdered in Cleveland and to call for efforts to reduce the violence against women and girls worldwide. For the full text of either resolution, contact OLOC (info@oloc.org 888-706-7506) and specify either PDF by e-mail or print by USPS. Also specify English or Spanish for the one about the Arizona law.

Comments about the 2010 Gathering

The conference was absolutely wonderful. The friendliest conference I've ever attended. Many thanks to all the hard-working organizers.

Carol Anne Douglas

We had a wonderful time at the Gathering!

Lynne Cunningham
& Diane Williams

It was a wonderful gathering—thanks to you and the steering committee for the great work you do!

Rita de Quercus

Yes, it was a splendid and inspiring conference and we're still full of the joy of it all.

Jean Taylor

The conference was more than wonderful. I appreciate you all so much.

Sheila Ortiz-Taylor

It was a great gathering.

Lynn Hicks

Thanks for a great conference.

Barbara Besuner
& Barbara Prociak

Another U.S. Social Forum Was Necessary and OLOC Was There!

By Susan Chacin, 1945

I'm still sorting out what the U.S. Social Forum (June 22–27, 2010) meant, but I represented OLOC and I want members to know we were there.

What could a gray-haired dyke do among 18,000 wild organizers? Roam around, asking if folks knew any Old Lesbians. Some were candidates. One woman said she would get to Cleveland "come hell or high water"! Others said they'd pass our info on.

The USSF was held in Detroit to highlight the casino economy's devastation. Only 700,000 people live there, down from 2 million. I had no idea what this would mean to activists from New Orleans. In a "Democracy Now" interview on 6/23, they were shocked to see another city turned into wasteland, prey to developer profiteers. (Go to DemocracyNow.org archives for USSF coverage.)

Veteran organizer Grace Lee Boggs' 95th birthday party was a blast. Reminiscing, she said a Chinese friend of her father said he should expose her to die because she was a girl and cried too much at her 1st birthday. She quotes Hegel, organizes for Black Power, and nurtures gardens and summer youth projects in Detroit. I trolled for Old Lesbians at her event and danced the Electric Slide. What I didn't know was how important her party was for Asian and Pacific Islander youth. Young people I heard on the radio said it was highly significant for them to see an Asian-American WOMAN honored with such fanfare.

Those are two insights I gained after the event. They highlight the difficulty of synthesizing the forum. With over 1,100 workshops, the span of ages, issues, identities, history, dreams, and regions is impossible for any one individual to take in, much less describe.

A few snapshots:

- Urvashi Vaid and Susanne Pharr (an Old Lesbian) working with young LGBTQI groups to set a progressive queer organizing agenda.
- Ai-Jen Poo, organizer of New York domestic workers, who just won the 40-hour work-week, comparing an organizing campaign to an affair. You find time for it no matter what, and fall in love all over again.
- Judy Rebick, a 65 year-old Canadian feminist fresh from the Toronto G-20 demonstrations, describing First Nations leaders taking charge of a march to keep the peace. (Her book, *Transforming Power*, is just out. I recommend it!)

In the Social Forums, which started in 2001, dialog is more important than platforms, and participatory democracy trumps dogma. The motto of the World Social Forum is "Another World Is Possible," to which the USSF adds, "Another U.S. Is Necessary."

I left Detroit with a fistful of contacts and more questions than answers, determined to use them for movement building. I may have recruited a few members for OLOC in the process. Contact me at schacin@pacbell.net.

Mission Statement for OLOC

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change is a national organization for Old Lesbians age 60 and over and will:

- Promote Old Lesbian Pride.
- Educate, support and empower Old Lesbians.
- Challenge ageism in our society and educate the general public about the effects of ageism and oppression.
- Celebrate our strengths, our talents, our experiences, and document our lives.
- Convene National Gatherings of Old Lesbians.
- Encourage, establish, and support local chapters and regional events

Jess McVey, 1918–2010

By Ida Red, 1923

Jess, who liked to be called McVey, is described by her family as a tomboy, daughter, sister, sailor, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, organic gardener, nature lover, librarian, fisher, free thinker, civil rights activist, world traveler, anti-war activist, feminist, hippy, forester, rock hound, lover, Lesbian, unique artist, sculptor, painter, AIDS volunteer, LGBT activist, environmental activist, and friend.

McVey lived for a while on women's land in Oregon and in California. She traveled around the country helping to organize the older women's movement. She was active in gatherings of the Older Women's Network (OWN), which was vital to the creation of OLOC. She was committed to promoting a positive view of aging, activism, and independence for old women and was uncompromising in her dedication to women's liberation. She also felt a powerful identification with Native Americans. One of her favorite activities was a great roaring fire on the beach by the ocean, whether for her raku pottery or for a picnic gathering.

For over ten years McVey participated in an OLOC support circle with eight others in San Francisco, sharing the experiences, feelings, choices, and challenges of living fully until death. In that group she announced that when she was dying, she wanted to have her bed in the middle of a forest and full of Lesbians. Her OLOC Circle didn't quite make that happen, but they were nearby and will always cherish and miss her.

McVey was an activist and a loving supporter to friends and family at all times. With her fierce concern for the earth, she educated everyone around her to be aware and care about ecology and the environment. Her art, which has been widely exhibited and featured in a number of publications, became focused on the current risk and damage to all of nature, especially to fish and humans.

For more of Jess McVey's story, ask to hear her OLOC oral history or see the transcription with pictures at OLOHP Archives, Houston or the GLBT Historical Society Archives, San Francisco.



Heather Hamm, 1940–2009



Heather Hamm, 69, died December 17, 2009, leaving her life partner of 21 years Pat Lamis, her daughter Erin, and her brother Wick. Heather enjoyed and participated fully in OLOC meetings and events when she was well enough and could get a ride.

Born July 6, 1940, in Indiana, the daughter of Victor and Nona Hauprich, Heather studied ballet, played softball, and grew up in diverse metropolitan settings all across the nation. Heather worked as an animator for Hanna-Barbera and other major cartoonists. She supported herself, raised her daughter, and put herself through college.

A lover of the arts, she graduated from California State University Long Beach with a BA in Fine Arts. In 1988 she created and helped develop the still thriving Women of 40-Plus Group at the Long Beach Gay and Lesbian Center.

Memorials

Heather felt that there was a need for a meeting space for Lesbians other than the bars. Older women had no place to get a sense of community. Heather wanted to converse about a multitude of subjects and the bar scene didn't allow that to happen.

Heather had her own business for 20 years, Helio's Heart, for which she designed and made custom artwork, including T-shirts, handbags, pillows, and jewelry. She always attended the local Solstice Fair, and acrylic portraits were her favorite form of art.

During her art career Heather co-founded Women Artist Visibility (WAV) in the early 90s, and in 2003 Heather and Pat started the WBB (Womynz Brunch Bunch), another social event venue with a weekly events and news e-mail newsletter, which has grown to over 5,000 Lesbian memberships.

In 1990, Heather, her daughter Erin, and her partner Pat Lamis opened the first retail condom shop in Long Beach (Condom Wrap). The shop was publicized on the radio, on television, and in major newspapers. Containing a large selection of condoms, the shop also included an education room with many books, pamphlets, and videos showing safer sex.



Ina Mae Murri, 1935–2010 and Stella Lopez-Armijo, 1934–2010

Ina Mae Murri and Stella Lopez-Armijo, partners for 35 years and co-founders of Lavender Seniors of the East Bay in California, died suddenly near Preston, Idaho, on July 17, 2010, in an automobile accident when Ina Mae suffered a massive heart attack. They were visiting in Idaho for a family reunion.

Ina and Stella were pioneers in recognition for Lesbian mothers and were active in Women over 50 and Friends (WOFF). Ina will be remembered for her compassionate commitment to serving her community. She liked to pass out cards that said, "You have been helped by a Lesbian." Stella will be

remembered for her sharp wit and humor. They had an open house for anyone passing through Fremont who needed a meal or a place to spend the night.

Memorial Slide Show

OLOC showed our Lesbian Memorial Slide Show again at the July Gathering. We add photos and names each time. These are sent to us by friends of the Lesbian who has died. We are still missing some information on a few, though, and would love it if you could help us fill in the information or send us a photo. We need: Georgia Middup, photo; Jeanne Adelman, birth year; Ann Ramsey, birth and death years; Marge Green, birth year; Barbara Pyle, photo; Marilyn Murphy, death year; Ethel Hammerquist, death year; Ruth Morales, birth year; Carol Macdonald, photo; Jackie Harmon, photo. If you can provide us with any of this, we would be so grateful.

OLOC is supported in part by grants from the Arcus Foundation, the Carpenter Foundation, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, and Mary's Pence.

Sally Cohn Goes to Hollywood

By Mary Beth Brindley, 1940

Portland Oregon OLOC salutes one of our founding members, Sally Cohn, for her success on the *America's Got Talent* TV program this summer. Sally is a handwhistler.

In the fall of 2009 Sally announced at our OLOC meeting that she had been contacted by *America's Got Talent* and was encouraged to try out at the Portland audition. They had seen her on YouTube.

In March of 2010 she was a call-back, and that program was shown to the American public in June of 2010, at which time the three judges announced that they had picked Sally to go to Las Vegas for more try-outs. Sally announced on that same show that she was a Lesbian and had written a book about her coming out called *A Handwhistler*.

In Las Vegas in July, Sally was again picked by the three judges to go on to Hollywood as one of the 48 remaining contestants. The Hollywood show was the first chance the American people got to vote on the contestants. They chose to send four acts to the semifinals, and all were in their twenties or younger. Ageism again raises its ugly head.

When Sally returned home from Hollywood, she had 3,000 e-mails from Facebook. She has also been on several Portland TV stations talking about her handwhistling.

We look forward to hearing about Sally's journey at our next OLOC meeting. If any of you are interested in buying Sally Cohn's book *A Handwhistler*, you can e-mail her at dunsidhe1@msn.com. The cost is \$12.

For a look at Sally at the Portland tryouts, go to this link: www.nbc.com and put Sally Cohn in the search box.

We love to share news about OLOC women... send it in!

Bev Todd Sings Out!

In June, in Chicago, OLOC member Bev Todd from Boulder, CO, was recognized at the national women's choral festival, *Sister Singers Network*, as being, at age 80, the oldest of the 650 women attending. She sings in *Resonance Women's Chorus*. OLOC members Kathryn Kay from *Windsong* (Cleveland) and Jan Griesinger from *Calliope Feminist Choir* (Athens, OH) also sang at the festival. Griesinger also led a workshop at the event titled "Old Pride: Embracing Our Years over 60."

Sinister Wisdom 80

Willing Up and Keeling Over: A Lesbian Handbook on Death Rights and Rituals

Guest Editors and Contributors: Barbary Clarke, Anah Holland Moore, Claudia Huber, Lorraine le Plastrier, Rosalinda Rayne, Jean Taylor, Ardella Tibby, and Cathy Wheel.

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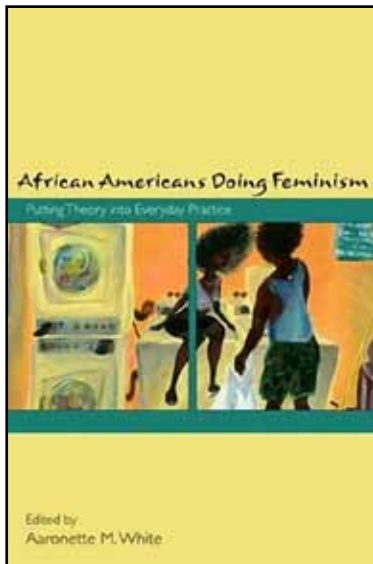
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In describing participants in OLOC's National Gatherings in the book *African Americans Doing Feminism*, Vera Martin says "They leave the conference like they just got a B-12 shot."

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