

The New York Times

Stepford is Us

By CATHERINE ORENSTEIN

June 9, 2004

Paramount's remake of "The Stepford Wives" is billed as a comedy, but the continuing relevance of this cult classic's dark themes ought to make us all think twice.

The original 1975 film, in which suburban husbands killed and replaced their partners with blonder, bustier robotic look-alikes, dramatized the feminist argument that marriage transformed women into ever-smiling, floor-mopping automatons. In those days, the vast majority of new American houses were built in suburbs, and women — who in midcentury began marrying younger, having children earlier, and doing more hours of housework than in previous decades — were complaining of a malaise brought on by what Betty Friedan had dubbed "the feminine mystique." The remake, in contrast, stars Nicole Kidman as a high-powered TV executive who, previews suggest, is more than a match for her husband — or anyone else's.

While the wives of Stepford have advanced since 1975, along with the rest of us, not everything has panned out the way feminists envisioned. American women today tend to delay marriage; we have careers; we demand that men do their share of the housework; we expect to be equal partners. At the same time, we have internalized a piece of Stepford, becoming, metaphorically speaking, our own Stepford husbands — imposing a conformist definition of beauty and femininity. Girls' and women's magazines incessantly promote perfect thighs, abs and hair, and achieving the perfect look has moved beyond diet and exercise. More and more, we place ourselves willingly under the knife, happily embracing the plastic.

The remake opens at a peak in our Stepfordian obsession with cosmetic surgery. No longer reserved for the rich and the old, reaching for the knife begins these days with the first wrinkle. Along with collagen implants and Botox, summer beauty treatments now include toe-shortening and even pinky-toe removal — the better to fit into pointy shoes.

Television reality shows like "Extreme Makeover" and "The Swan," in which contestants undergo extensive surgery, reinforce our relentless pursuit of physical perfection. On MTV's "I Want a Famous Face," men and women endured radical reconstructions to look like their favorite movie stars. On Fox's series "The Swan," surgically altered women competed against one another for a chance to be part of the beauty pageant in the final episode.

Because they undergo many of the same cosmetic procedures — breast and chin implants, nose and teeth straightening, liposuction and hair lightening — executed by the same surgeons and beauticians, the contestants on these shows ended up looking eerily alike. And, not incidentally, like the two blondes who vied for the Bachelor's hand in marriage, who in turn looked like Britney Spears. All could be knockoffs of the blond Nicole Kidman in the "Stepford" movie posters.

Why do we wish to reinvent ourselves so badly — and so blandly? Our desire taps a powerful myth of self-transformation in which we magically become — and are recognized for — our most ideal selves.

The Cinderella Cycle, as folklorists call that fairy tale and its multitude of global variants, is ubiquitous, appearing in ancient texts (the earliest written version is from ninth century China) as well as in the modern mythic genre of cinema. In movies like "Sabrina," "Pretty Woman," "Moonstruck," "Maid in Manhattan" or "The Princess Diaries," the heroine's transformation from Plain Jane to Queen Bee is represented by a montage in which she shops for clothes and gets her hair and make-up overhauled.

Scholars have debated the meaning of this narrative path, some calling it a seasonal or fertility myth, perhaps derived from ancient ritual. In the eyes of Bruno Bettelheim, the popular Freudian psychologist, the Cinderella tale embodies sibling rivalry and Oedipal conflicts. In its modern incarnations, as in our real-life fixations with rehabbing ourselves through diet, cosmeceuticals and surgery, the fairy tale lends itself to a literal interpretation, as a mere physical makeover. But it also has metaphoric power.

Narratives of physical transformation can be read as symbolic of our desire to be seen, and loved, for who we really are — and to find love, recognition and acceptance that transcends stereotype, class, age, poverty and physical imperfection. The truly climactic moment of Charles Perrault's famous 1697 version of "Cinderella" is not the moment soot stains disappear from the heroine's cheeks; rather, it is the moment when she is recognized, while still in rags, by the prince — thanks to her ability to fit her foot into a tiny slipper (a detail that, incidentally, most likely derives from China, where foot-binding produced a standard of beauty and womanhood).

We could say, then, that the myth of self-transformation is really about recognition of the inner person, perhaps explaining why so many "improved" contestants on "The Swan" and "Extreme Makeover" say they feel for the first time that they look like their true selves.

At what point, though, does a myth about recognition, acceptance and truth become just the opposite — a tale of artifice and disguise?

Myths often contain the seeds of their own inversion, and so it is in this case. In our quest to be Cinderellas, we are risking becoming her impostor stepsisters — eagerly slicing off toe and heel (as they do in the Grimms' version of the fairy tale) to fit into a false shoe.

It is not men (or at least, not men alone) who do this to us. Indeed, Paramount's Web site for "The Stepford Wives" hardly mentions husbands. Instead it addresses the female viewer, showcasing "before" and "after" photos of the character played by Bette Midler much like those belonging to "Swan" contestants, and inviting us to upload our own photos for a personalized "Stepford Makeover."

It's a funny but frightening parody of our aspirations, given the original movie's dark ending. As Sylvia Plath warned us, not long before her suicide in 1963: "The woman is perfected/Her dead/Body wears the smile of accomplishment."

Catherine Orenstein is the author of Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale.

More Clout Needed in Politics

By REBECCA SALDAÑA

August 16, 2016

For women of color Equal Pay Day—the time it takes to catch up with the earnings of male counterparts—has still not arrived yet this year.

While women overall catch up, on average, with male earnings in April, African American women must wait until Aug. 23 of each year, and Latinas wait until Nov. 1, to catch up with the average earnings of a white American male.

What that means: glass ceilings may be shattering for some women, but not nearly fast enough for women of color, overall.

Hillary Clinton’s historic presidential bid notwithstanding, we still need to keep the question of political representation in our headlights and question who is out there watching out for our interests.

Pramila Jayapal, a nationally renowned immigrant rights leader, made history when she clenched the lead in a crowded race for the liberal 7th congressional district of Washington State recently. She is one step closer to becoming the first Indian-American to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.

As a feminist women of color arrested for standing in protest with undocumented workers, Jayapal has a chance to join forces with a powerful but small number of women of color in Congress this November.

Powerful Leadership

At the recent Democratic National Convention, we witnessed the leadership of people of color and black women’s leadership in particular. Consider the powerful speech by Michelle Obama and also by the “Mothers of the Movement,” when Sybrina Fulton, the mother of the late Trayvon Martin, said, “This is not about being politically correct, it is about saving our children.”

Additionally, issues from reproductive justice to economic justice took center stage in the party platform and in the speech of the Democratic presidential nominee. All this contributes to many black women feeling hopeful about the expanding role of women in leadership in this country.

But along with this hopefulness come the setbacks, such as the attack on the Gold Star mother Ghazala Khan by Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump. This prompted a social media movement for and by Muslim women, #CanYouHearUsNow.

Yet and still, with the growing awareness and the mounting milestones achieved, not all women are equal in these United States of America.

“I wrote an op-ed on Pramila [Jayapal] going to Congress and the importance of women’s representation. After I wrote that op-ed, I felt like I needed to answer the question—how can I have the biggest impact?”

In 2017, after publishing this column as an OpEd Project “Public Voices” fellow, Rebecca Saldaña ran for office and was elected to the Washington State Senate. She replaced Jayapal, becoming the only woman of color in the State Senate.

Women of color—Hispanic, African American, Asian American—represent more than 33 percent of the women in this country, according to 2015 U.S. Census Bureau statistics, and about 62 percent of women in this country are white.

U.S. Congress, in general, is a sink hole for female representation, with women making up just 20 percent in either house.

Within those marginal ranks, the overall population statistics roughly hold up. Thirty-three of the 104 women serving in Congress in 2016 are women of color, according to the Center for American Women and Politics. These include 18 African Americans, nine Latinas and six Asian American/Pacific Islanders. There are no Native American women serving in Congress. To date, only 54 women of color have served in Congress.

Meanwhile the most diverse Congress in history isn't actually that diverse; it's still 80 percent white and 80 percent male. Given that, women of color deserve special merit badges for holding their own, proportionately speaking, with white women in the U.S. Congress.

Statewide Offices

In statewide elective executive offices, meanwhile, women of color lag further behind, which means our representation shrinks that much more.

Women, overall, hold only 24 percent of 312 statewide elective executive office. Within that minority, women of color are even harder to find. Of the 76 women serving in statewide elective executive offices, nine, or about 12 percent, are women of color.

In state legislatures women, overall, are 25 percent of the 7,383 seats. And among them women of color are once again in even shorter supply. Of the 1,815 female state legislators serving nationwide 399, or about 22 percent, are women of color. They include 102 state senators and 297 representatives; 366 are Democrats, 30 are Republicans, one is non-partisan, one is Progressive and one is with the Working Families Party. Women of color constitute about 5 percent of the total 7,383 state legislators.

This means moving forward, candidates who are women of color need to win seats, confronting not only patriarchy, but racism. Five-term U.S House Rep. Yvette Clarke reports she still gets asked for an ID when she is in the halls of Congress to serve. As Black Lives Platform so eloquently stated, if we don't seize this moment, breathing will become harder for all of us.

As citizens, we need to champion women of color and queer people of color. We need them to champion progressive platforms that can actually improve the lives of women of color and our communities.

With Women's Equality Day approaching on Aug. 26, there is no better time to assess not only how far some women have come in the fight for fairness; but how far all women need to go.

A Wisconsin poll worker dreads the job

By CARRIE SCHERPELZ

April 17, 2016

I'm a Wisconsin poll worker. I've come to dread my job. After four years of experience at my busy polling place, I was surprised to find myself dreading Wisconsin's primary election. Sadly, running elections has grown more daunting with every new voting law passed by the state Legislature, especially the new photo ID requirement and voter registration rules. The April 5 high-turnout election put even more new guidelines in place — added in the two months since the Feb. 16 election. Not surprisingly, both voters and poll workers are confused. That makes my job much harder and far less rewarding.

I want voters to have confidence in my knowledge of ever more complex procedures. I want to serve them well so they enjoy exercising their right to vote. I don't want them to stand in long lines or feel scrutinized as if they are passing through an airport security checkpoint. Most of all, I hate telling students that their student ID is not an approved voter ID. When I inform students of their options, I apologize and say, 'Please promise me you'll get the proper ID and come back. I want you to be able to vote.'

As a last resort, I can tell those voters they can still 'vote' by casting a provisional ballot and presenting the city clerk with the proper ID within four days. But what good is a vote if it's not counted? Of the 123 provisional ballots cast citywide by voters without ID on April 5, only 41 were counted in the end. Voter impersonation is virtually nonexistent — yet, lacking an approved photo ID, familiar voters listed in our poll book are silenced. How can I possibly feel good about that?

On election day, 24,625 voters registered at the 87 polling places in our city. I appreciate Wisconsin's same-day registration policy, because I love to serve both new voters and regulars who have changed address. I usually spend most of my time assisting long lines at the voter registration table, but I find that task is now more complicated and even troubling.

For instance, I'm very uncomfortable with current requirements for recording a voter's proof of address. Wisconsin banks and businesses: Do you realize that voter registrars must write down the last few digits of people's account numbers when they register them to vote? I find this very intrusive and unnecessary, not to mention a complete waste of time. I know you respect your customers' privacy. I know you would not release information to an official in order to verify a voter's address without a court order.

Do you see why I've come to dread my job? I'd like to anticipate the November presidential election with excitement, but, instead, I'm upset about unnecessary and time-consuming requirements that confuse voters and make them wait longer to cast their vote. To make matters worse, Wisconsin legislators cut early voting hours in half and eliminated early voting on evenings and weekends, creating yet more pressure on election day. Hiring additional poll workers so the April 5 election would run smoothly increased our city clerk's costs, in addition to the challenge of

Carrie Scherpelz, a poll volunteer in Wisconsin, published multiple op-eds on Wisconsin's voter ID laws, including this one in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. As a result, she was asked to be a witness in the case challenging these laws. This case is now going to the Supreme Court. Carrie said, "I'm learning that when my voice is heard loudly and clearly enough, I can go even farther to help make a difference by my actions."

recruiting and training all those new workers. We are doing our best to serve voters. Wisconsin legislators, I have a suggestion: Why not spend a day as a poll worker before you pass more laws that create obstacles to voting?

The New York Times

The

Prosecution Rests, but I Can't

By JOHN THOMPSON

April 9, 2011

I SPENT 18 years in prison for robbery and murder, 14 of them on death row. I've been free since 2003, exonerated after evidence covered up by prosecutors surfaced just weeks before my execution date. Those prosecutors were never punished. Last month, the Supreme Court decided 5-4 to overturn a case I'd won against them and the district attorney who oversaw my case, ruling that they were not liable for the failure to turn over that evidence — which included proof that blood at the robbery scene wasn't mine.

Because of that, prosecutors are free to do the same thing to someone else today.

I was arrested in January 1985 in New Orleans. I remember the police coming to my grandmother's house — we all knew it was the cops because of how hard they banged on the door before kicking it in. My grandmother and my mom were there, along with my little brother and sister, my two sons — John Jr., 4, and Dedric, 6 — my girlfriend and me. The officers had guns drawn and were yelling. I guess they thought they were coming for a murderer. All the children were scared and crying. I was 22.

They took me to the homicide division, and played a cassette tape on which a man I knew named Kevin Freeman accused me of shooting a man. He had also been arrested as a suspect in the murder. A few weeks earlier he had sold me a ring and a gun; it turned out that the ring belonged to the victim and the gun was the murder weapon.

My picture was on the news, and a man called in to report that I looked like someone who had recently tried to rob his children. Suddenly I was accused of that crime, too. I was tried for the robbery first. My lawyers never knew there was blood evidence at the scene, and I was convicted based on the victims' identification.

After that, my lawyers thought it was best if I didn't testify at the murder trial. So I never defended myself, or got to explain that I got the ring and the gun from Kevin Freeman. And now that I officially had a history of violent crime because of the robbery conviction, the prosecutors used it to get the death penalty. I remember the judge telling the courtroom the number of volts of electricity they would put into my body. If the first attempt didn't kill me, he said, they'd put more volts in.

On Sept. 1, 1987, I arrived on death row in the Louisiana State Penitentiary — the infamous Angola prison. I was put in a dead man's cell. His things were still there; he had been executed only a few days before. That past summer they had executed eight men at Angola. I received my first execution date right before I arrived. I would end up knowing 12 men who were executed there.

John Thompson came into The OpEd Project community because we share a seed funder — Echoing Green — which supported J.T. in founding Resurrection After Exoneration, a nonprofit to help exonerated prisoners reintegrate into society. Within days of publication of his op-ed, J.T. was deluged with offers of support and media attention. We ourselves received a thank you note from The New York Times for sending J.T. their way, and his Innocence Project Lawyers wrote us:

"Obviously this has been huge for J.T. As a result, he has already been on CNN, received calls from CNN documentaries, Fox, and 60 minutes and will soon be appearing on The Colbert Report."

Over the years, I was given six execution dates, but all of them were delayed until finally my appeals were exhausted. The seventh — and last — date was set for May 20, 1999. My lawyers had been with me for 11 years by then; they flew in from Philadelphia to give me the news. They didn't want me to hear it from the prison officials. They said it would take a miracle to avoid this execution. I told them it was fine — I was innocent, but it was time to give up.

But then I remembered something about May 20. I had just finished reading a letter from my younger son about how he wanted to go on his senior class trip. I'd been thinking about how I could find a way to pay for it by selling my typewriter and radio. "Oh, no, hold on," I said, "that's the day before John Jr. is graduating from high school." I begged them to get it delayed; I knew it would hurt him.

To make things worse, the next day, when John Jr. was at school, his teacher read the whole class an article from the newspaper about my execution. She didn't know I was John Jr.'s dad; she was just trying to teach them a lesson about making bad choices. So he learned that his father was going to be killed from his teacher, reading the newspaper aloud. I panicked. I needed to talk to him, reassure him.

Amazingly, I got a miracle. The same day that my lawyers visited, an investigator they had hired to look through the evidence one last time found, on some forgotten microfiche, a report sent to the prosecutors on the blood type of the perpetrator of the armed robbery. It didn't match mine; the report, hidden for 15 years, had never been turned over to my lawyers. The investigator later found the names of witnesses and police reports from the murder case that hadn't been turned over either.

As a result, the armed robbery conviction was thrown out in 1999, and I was taken off death row. Then, in 2002, my murder conviction was thrown out. At a retrial the following year, the jury took only 35 minutes to acquit me.

The prosecutors involved in my two cases, from the office of the Orleans Parish district attorney, Harry Connick Sr., helped to cover up 10 separate pieces of evidence. And most of them are still able to practice law today. Why weren't they punished for what they did? When the hidden evidence first surfaced, Mr. Connick announced that his office would hold a grand jury investigation. But once it became clear how many people had been involved, he called it off.

In 2005, I sued the prosecutors and the district attorney's office for what they did to me. The jurors heard testimony from the special prosecutor who had been assigned by Mr. Connick's office to the canceled investigation, who told them, "We should have indicted these guys, but they didn't and it was wrong." The jury awarded me \$14 million in damages — \$1 million for every year on death row — which would have been paid by the district attorney's office. That jury verdict is what the Supreme Court has just overturned.

I don't care about the money. I just want to know why the prosecutors who hid evidence, sent me to prison for something I didn't do and nearly had me killed are not in jail themselves. There were no ethics charges against them, no criminal charges, no one was fired and now, according to the Supreme Court, no one can be sued.

Worst of all, I wasn't the only person they played dirty with. Of the six men one of my prosecutors got sentenced to death, five eventually had their convictions reversed because of prosecutorial misconduct. Because we were sentenced to death, the courts had to appoint us lawyers to fight our appeals. I was lucky, and got lawyers who went to extraordinary lengths. But there are more than 4,000 people serving life without parole in Louisiana, almost none of whom have lawyers after their convictions are final. Someone needs to look at those cases to see how many others might be innocent. If a private investigator hired by a generous law firm hadn't found the blood evidence, I'd be dead today. No doubt about it.

A crime was definitely committed in this case, but not by me.

The New York Times

When War Comes Close to Home

By ZAREENA GREWAL

October 4, 2015

In the dead of night on Sept. 21, an airstrike from the skies above Mosul, Iraq, flattened the homes of my husband's cousins, instantly killing four innocent civilians, and maiming others. The shock wave reverberated throughout our family scattered around the world, even here in quiet Connecticut.

The American-led air campaign did not hit a weapons storage facility belonging to the Islamic State, or ISIS, as one local report claimed. In a secluded part of Mosul that locals call "the Woods," the empty government warehouse, which the Islamic State briefly occupied until January, remains untouched. Instead, the strike hit two homes nearby, killing my husband's cousin, Mohannad Rezzo, a university professor; his 17-year-old son, Najeeb; and their beloved German shepherd, Sinbul.

Mohannad's wife, Sana, survived the explosion, which flung her, burned, from her second-floor bedroom to the driveway below. Mohannad's older brother, Bassim, also narrowly survived, but his wife, Miyada, and their 21-year-old daughter, Tuka, did not. Bassim's pelvis and leg were shattered in the attack and require surgery, but it is his emotional pain that consumes him.

Meanwhile, Bassim's elderly parents have fallen into such a state of shock and grief that they refuse to eat, and we worry for their health. As for the two families' older children, Abdulla, Aya and Yahya, they mourn their parents and siblings from a safe distance, having moved out of Mosul last year. But like us, they are deprived of the solace of attending funerals, and are condemned to sleepless nights trying to make sense of how missiles or bombs could be launched against a defenseless family who did not have so much as a pistol in the home.

A spokeswoman for the United States Air Force Central Command confirmed that it became aware of a "civilian casualty allegation" in Mosul the day after the airstrikes. In an email Friday, the Air Force spokeswoman, Maj. Genieve David, said Centcom was assessing the credibility of the reports, before determining any follow-on action, which might include a "formal investigation."

I desperately want the Islamic State to be defeated, but I wonder if our rage at it has made us blind to anyone we kill along the way, even those whose lives have been terrorized by the group.

Iraqi civilian losses used to be referred to as the inevitable "collateral damage" of war; but from the scant Arabic media coverage and the silence of the Western press, it is painfully clear that the deaths of my loved ones have

Zareena Grewal, one of our OpEd Project "Public Voices" fellows at Yale University (2014), worked with OpEd Project mentor Zeba Khan. The following is a note she shared with us and on Facebook, upon publication of this piece.

"Even though I am a writer, I never believed the pen was mightier than the sword. I spent most of my adult life feeling helpless in the face of endless war. On September 21st, my husband Hamada's family in Mosul was drone-attacked by missiles in the middle of the night and four of them died and others were injured. We've been devastated, but what made it harder was that the U.S. government and U.S. media refused to even acknowledge the attack took place until 5pm Friday when the New York Times editor told the Pentagon they were going to print my article. The threat of this article is what it took for the Pentagon to admit the attack happened, to even consider investigating civilian loss."

not even earned that ghastly euphemism. These civilian victims are simply lumped together with the death toll of Islamic State fighters. Only one Iraqi journalist made reference to “incalculable” civilian losses in this recent wave of Mosul airstrikes.

It will not bring our relatives back, but I want their deaths to be counted and for them to be recognized for who they were: Muslim civilians, not Islamic State militants.

I visited their elegant homes, disastrously mistaken for a weapons depot. My Iraqi relatives’ lives were full of love, laughter, books, delicious smells of food, gleaming marble floors, white curtains floating in the breeze, and children running up and down the stairs. Now relatives send me pictures of unrecognizable rubble.

Last Sunday night, I sat in an airplane seat with my son in my lap, gliding past the largest moon I have ever seen, eclipsed by the slow-moving shadow of the Earth below. Like millions, I was transfixed by this glimpse of proof to the naked eye that the Earth is in motion. Seeing it was also proof that I am here, alive and able to witness such fleeting beauty. What a beautiful, terrible sign: a moon the color of blood.

As a Muslim, I believe that everything in the skies and on Earth is a sign inviting reflection. That does not mean I reject science or reason, only that I believe there is a creative, divine source of the dust that made the moon appear red. And I believe that the source of my life is also the source of my mortality. These beliefs are shared across many religious traditions, yet some insist that there is something warped, even pathological, about how Muslims understand life and death. This sustains the racist lie that for Muslims, life is cheap, that Muslims prefer death to life.

The Muslim prayer for the dead is a simple line from the Quran: “Surely we belong to God, and to God we shall return.” Muslims understand the sustenance of life, and death, as acts of God. Some take issue with Muslims’ view of the all-powerful God who creates and extinguishes life because they presume, wrongly, that this negates free will. They blame Muslims for their “fatalism,” which they argue makes God’s will an alibi for human error and corruption, and encourages Muslims to passively accept their fate and suffering.

Muslims strive for justice in this world, though we believe only divine justice is perfect. We cling to life though we know death is inevitable. The fact that some of my family members survived the airstrike by God’s mercy, and others did not, also by God’s will, does not erase the human culpability and barbarity of war, the human error that caused them to be targeted.

As we flew in that slim aluminum tube with wings, under the eclipsed moon, I felt so grateful for the blessing of the illusion that my safe arrival home was certain, that I would live to see countless full moons.

Zareena Grewal, an associate professor of American studies and religious studies at Yale University, and a Public Voices fellow with The OpEd Project. She is the author of “Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority.”

The Washington Post

Ferguson isn't about black rage against cops. It's white rage against progress.

By CAROL ANDERSON

August 29, 2014

When we look back on what happened in Ferguson, Mo., during the summer of 2014, it will be easy to think of it as yet one more episode of black rage ignited by yet another police killing of an unarmed African American male. But that has it precisely backward. What we've actually seen is the latest outbreak of white rage. Sure, it is cloaked in the niceties of law and order, but it is rage nonetheless.

Protests and looting naturally capture attention. But the real rage smolders in meetings where officials redraw precincts to dilute African American voting strength or seek to slash the government payrolls that have long served as sources of black employment. It goes virtually unnoticed, however, because white rage doesn't have to take to the streets and face rubber bullets to be heard. Instead, white rage carries an aura of respectability and has access to the courts, police, legislatures and governors, who cast its efforts as noble, though they are actually driven by the most ignoble motivations.

White rage recurs in American history. It exploded after the Civil War, erupted again to undermine the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and took on its latest incarnation with Barack Obama's ascent to the White House. For every action of African American advancement, there's a reaction, a backlash.

The North's victory in the Civil War did not bring peace. Instead, emancipation brought white resentment that the good ol' days of black subjugation were over. Legislatures throughout the South scrambled to reinscribe white supremacy and restore the aura of legitimacy that the anti-slavery campaign had tarnished. Lawmakers in several states created the Black Codes, which effectively criminalized blackness, sanctioned forced labor and undermined every tenet of democracy. Even the federal authorities' promise of 40 acres — land seized from traitors who had tried to destroy the United States of America — crumbled like dust.

Influential white legislators such as Rep. Thaddeus Stevens (R-Pa.) and Sen. Charles Sumner (R-Mass.) tried to make this nation live its creed, but they were no match for the swelling resentment that neutralized the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments, and welcomed the Supreme Court's 1876 *United States vs. Cruikshank* decision, which undercut a law aimed at stopping the terror of the Ku Klux Klan.

Nearly 80 years later, *Brown v. Board of Education* seemed like another moment of triumph — with the ruling on the unconstitutionality of separate public schools for black and white students affirming African Americans' rights as citizens. But black children, hungry for quality education, ran headlong into more white rage. Bricks and mobs at school doors were only the most obvious signs. In March 1956, 101 members of Congress issued the

Carol Anderson, one of our Public Voices fellows at Emory University (2014), worked with OpEd Project mentor Chloe Angyal. Her op-ed, "White Rage," was the Washington Post's most emailed op-ed of 2014. It sparked a bidding war among publishers for Anderson's book, White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide, which was published in May 2016. In September 2016, Anderson was named to POLITICO's list of the 50 most influential "thinkers and doers and visionaries changing American politics," alongside Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Lin-Manuel Miranda, and Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Carol was later invited by Harry Reid to speak to the entire Democratic Caucus and her book landed on the New York Times "100 Most Notable Books" list in 2016.

Southern Manifesto, declaring war on the Brown decision. Governors in Virginia, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia and elsewhere then launched “massive resistance.” They created a legal doctrine, interposition, that supposedly nullified any federal law or court decision with which a state disagreed. They passed legislation to withhold public funding from any school that abided by Brown. They shut down public school systems and used tax dollars to ensure that whites could continue their education at racially exclusive private academies. Black children were left to rot with no viable option.

A little more than half a century after Brown, the election of Obama gave hope to the country and the world that a new racial climate had emerged in America, or that it would. But such audacious hopes would be short-lived. A rash of voter-suppression legislation, a series of unfathomable Supreme Court decisions, the rise of stand-your-ground laws and continuing police brutality make clear that Obama’s election and reelection have unleashed yet another wave of fear and anger.

It’s more subtle — less overtly racist — than in 1865 or even 1954. It’s a remake of the Southern Strategy, crafted in the wake of the civil rights movement to exploit white resentment against African Americans, and deployed with precision by Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. As Reagan’s key political strategist, Lee Atwater, explained in a 1981 interview: “You start out in 1954 by saying, ‘N-----, n-----, n-----.’ By 1968 you can’t say ‘n-----’ — that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like ‘forced busing,’ ‘states’ rights’ and all that stuff. You’re getting so abstract now you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things, and a byproduct of them is blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I’m not saying that.” (The interview was originally published anonymously, and only years later did it emerge that Atwater was the subject.)

Now, under the guise of protecting the sanctity of the ballot box, conservatives have devised measures — such as photo ID requirements — to block African Americans’ access to the polls. A joint report by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the NAACP emphasized that the ID requirements would adversely affect more than 6 million African American voters. (Twenty-five percent of black Americans lack a government-issued photo ID, the report noted, compared with only 8 percent of white Americans.) The Supreme Court sanctioned this discrimination in *Shelby County v. Holder*, which gutted the Voting Rights Act and opened the door to 21st-century versions of 19th-century literacy tests and poll taxes.

The economic devastation of the Great Recession also shows African Americans under siege. The foreclosure crisis hit black Americans harder than any other group in the United States. A 2013 report by researchers at Brandeis University calculated that “half the collective wealth of African-American families was stripped away during the Great Recession,” in large part because of the impact on home equity. In the process, the wealth gap between blacks and whites grew: Right before the recession, white Americans had four times more wealth than black Americans, on average; by 2010, the gap had increased to six times. This was a targeted hit. Communities of color were far more likely to have riskier, higher-interest-rate loans than white communities, with good credit scores often making no difference.

Add to this the tea party movement’s assault on so-called Big Government, which despite the sanitized language of fiscal responsibility constitutes an attack on African American jobs. Public-sector employment, where there is less discrimination in hiring and pay, has traditionally been an important venue for creating a black middle class.

So when you think of Ferguson, don’t just think of black resentment at a criminal justice system that allows a white police officer to put six bullets into an unarmed black teen. Consider the economic dislocation of black America. Remember a Florida judge instructing a jury to focus only on the moment when George Zimmerman

and Trayvon Martin interacted, thus transforming a 17-year-old, unarmed kid into a big, scary black guy, while the grown man who stalked him through the neighborhood with a loaded gun becomes a victim. Remember the assault on the Voting Rights Act. Look at *Connick v. Thompson*, a partisan 5-4 Supreme Court decision in 2011 that ruled it was legal for a city prosecutor's staff to hide evidence that exonerated a black man who was rotting on death row for 14 years. And think of a recent study by Stanford University psychology researchers concluding that, when white people were told that black Americans are incarcerated in numbers far beyond their proportion of the population, "they reported being more afraid of crime and more likely to support the kinds of punitive policies that exacerbate the racial disparities," such as three-strikes or stop-and-frisk laws.

Only then does Ferguson make sense. It's about white rage.

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If Men Could Menstruate

By GLORIA STEINEM

October 1978

(Excerpt)

So what would happen if suddenly, magically, men could menstruate and women could not?

Clearly, menstruation would become an enviable, worthy, masculine event:

Men would brag about how long and how much.

Young boys would talk about it as the envied beginning of manhood. Gifts, religious ceremonies, family dinners, and stag parties would mark the day.

To prevent monthly work loss among the powerful, Congress would fund a National Institute of Dysmenorrhea. Doctors would research little about heart attacks, from which men would be hormonally protected, but everything about cramps.

Sanitary supplies would be federally funded and free. Of course, some men would still pay for the prestige of such commercial brands as Paul Newman Tampons, Muhammad Ali's Rope-a-Dope Pads, John Wayne Maxi Pads, and Joe Namath Jock Shields- "For Those Light Bachelor Days."

Statistical surveys would show that men did better in sports and won more Olympic medals during their periods.

Generals, right-wing politicians, and religious fundamentalists would cite menstruation ("*men*-struation") as proof that only men could serve God and country in combat ("You have to give blood to take blood"), occupy high political office ("Can women be properly fierce without a monthly cycle governed by the planet Mars?"), be priests, ministers, God Himself ("He gave this blood for our sins"), or rabbis ("Without a monthly purge of impurities, women are unclean").

Male liberals and radicals, however, would insist that women are equal, just different; and that any woman could join their ranks if only she were willing to recognize the primacy of menstrual rights ("Everything else is a single issue") or self-inflict a major wound every month ("You *must* give blood for the revolution").

Street guys would invent slang ("He's a three-pad man") and "give fives" on the corner with some exchange like, "Man you lookin' *good!*"

"Yeah, man, I'm on the rag!"

TV shows would treat the subject openly. (*Happy Days*: Richie and Potsie try to convince Fonzie that he is still "The Fonz," though he has missed two periods in a row. *Hill Street Blues*: The whole precinct hits the same cycle.) So would newspapers. (*Summer Shark Scare Threatens Menstruating Men. Judge Cites Monthlies In Pardoning Rapist.*) And so would movies. (Newman and Redford in *Blood Brothers!*)

Men would convince women that sex was *more* pleasurable at "that time of the month." Lesbians would be said to fear blood and therefore life itself, though all they needed was a good menstruating man.

Medical schools would limit women's entry ("they might faint at the sight of blood").

Of course, intellectuals would offer the most moral and logical arguments. Without the biological gift for measuring the cycles of the moon and planets, how could a woman master any discipline that demanded a sense of time, space, mathematics-- or the ability to measure anything at all?

Menopause would be celebrated as a positive event, the symbol that men had accumulated enough years of cyclical wisdom to need no more.

Liberal males in every field would try to be kind. The fact that "these people" have no gift for measuring life, the liberals would explain, should be punishment enough.

And how would women be trained to react? One can imagine right-wing women agreeing to all these arguments with a staunch and smiling masochism. ("The ERA would force housewives to wound themselves every month": Phyllis Schlafly)

In short, we would discover, as we should already, that logic is in the eye of the logician. (For instance, here's an idea for theorists and logicians: if women are supposed to be less rational and more emotional at the beginning of our menstrual cycle when the female hormone is at its lowest level, then why isn't it logical to say that, in those few days, women behave the most like the way men behave all month long? I leave further improvisation up to you.)

The truth is that, if men could menstruate, the power justifications would go on and on.

If we let them.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail

(EXCERPT)

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This response to a published statement by eight fellow clergymen from Alabama (Bishop C. C. J. Carpenter, Bishop Joseph A. Durick, Rabbi Hilton L. Grafman, Bishop Paul Hardin, Bishop Holan B. Harmon, the Reverend George M. Murray, the Reverend Edward V. Ramage and the Reverend Earl Stallings) was composed under somewhat constricting circumstance. Begun on the margins of the newspaper in which the statement appeared while I was in jail, the letter was continued on scraps of writing paper supplied by a friendly Negro trusty, and concluded on a pad my attorneys were eventually permitted to leave me. Although the text remains in substance unaltered, I have indulged in the author's prerogative of polishing it for publication.

April 16, 1963

MY DEAR FELLOW CLERGYMEN:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statements in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

* * *

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we stiff creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging dark of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the

uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you no forever fighting a degenerating sense of

"nobodiness" then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

* * *

If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.