

# PART IX

## Social Change: Revisioning the Future and Making a Difference

*For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*

—AUDRE LORDE

*Abolition is not just about closing the doors to violent institutions, but also about building up and recovering institutions and practices and relationships that nurture wholeness, self-determination, and transformation. . . . Abolition is about breaking down things that oppress and building up things that nourish. Abolition is the practice of transformation in the here and now and the ever after.*

—MORGAN BASSICHIS, ALEXANDER LEE, AND DEAN SPADE

An intersectional understanding of the nature and causes of systems of advantage and oppression based on race, class, and gender is a critical step toward dismantling these systems. How we define a problem affects how we imagine solutions and how we try to implement them. That is why so much of this book is devoted to defining and analyzing the nature of these systems. Only when we appreciate the subtle and complex factors that combine to create a society in which wealth, privilege, and opportunity are unequally apportioned will we be able to formulate viable proposals for bringing about social justice.

What, then, have the selections in this book told us about racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class exploitation? First, the complex ways in which these systems intersect and overlap mean that there is no single cause for any of them. Eliminating these systems of advantage and oppression will involve changes at every level—personal, social, political, and economic. It will require us to think differently about ourselves and others and to see the world

through new lenses. We will have to learn to pay close attention to our own attitudes and behaviors. We will have to reevaluate every institution in society and critically appraise the ways in which each privileges some people and disadvantages others. As we identify the ways in which our society reproduces the forms of inequality and privilege that we have been studying, we will have to act to change them. In short, we must scrutinize every aspect of our personal, economic, political, and social life with a view to asking whose interests are served and whose rights are denied when the world is so organized.

In Selection 1, poet and essayist Audre Lorde asserts that we will need to begin by redefining the meaning of difference. "The old definitions," she states, "have not served us, nor the earth that supports us." Our profit-driven economy, she argues, trains us to respond to differences with "fear and loathing" toward those defined as "other" and toward othered identities within ourselves. Lorde refuses this dynamic: "My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition." Identifying herself as a "Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two," Lorde asserts that real differences among people do exist. She argues, however, that it is *not* these differences that separate us but rather "our refusal to recognize those differences" and the role they play in shaping our relationships and social institutions. Denying or distorting those differences keeps us apart; embracing them "as a springboard for creative change" can provide a new starting point from which to work together to reconstruct our world.

In Selection 2, cultural critic bell hooks joins Audre Lorde in urging us to rethink difference in "a world governed by politics of domination." Both hooks and Lorde are central figures in laying the groundwork for contemporary intersectional feminism, a feminist movement revisioned to acknowledge the ways in which "sexism, racism, and class exploitation constitute interlocking systems of domination." hooks argues, "Feminist struggle to end patriarchal domination should be of primary importance to women and men globally not because it is the foundation of all other oppressive structures but because it is that form of domination we are most likely to encounter in an ongoing way in everyday life," particularly in the sphere of the family. She sees love as a vital mediating element in feminist revolution: "Working together to identify and face our differences—to face the ways we dominate and are dominated—to change our actions, we need a mediating force that can sustain us so that we are not broken in this process, so that we do not despair."

In Selection 3, Amit Taneja's journey to feminist consciousness hinges on his willingness to face the ways in which he is both oppressed and privileged. He traces his movement "from oppressor to activist" through a series of "snapshots"—moments in his life when he came to realize that, even as a "poor, immigrant, big-boned, non-Christian, gay person of color," he still received male privilege and had a duty to challenge patriarchal oppression. Taneja uses this personal transformation as a point of departure to call upon all of us to commit to social justice activism at the structural level, "not just on paper but also in practice."

Confronted by the enormous scale of the work to be done, many of us feel overwhelmed and disheartened. In Selection 4, educator and pastor Andrea Ayvazian suggests that one way to overcome a sense of immobilization and despair is to recognize our multiple social identities and engage in allied behavior. According to Ayvazian, "Allied behavior

is intentional, overt, consistent activity that challenges prevailing patterns of oppression, makes privileges that are so often invisible visible, and facilitates the empowerment of persons targeted by oppression." When they consciously and deliberately work to dismantle forms of oppression from which they benefit, allies can be powerful agents of change.

Whereas Ayvazian's essay focuses on members of the dominant group, in Selection 5, Kristin Anderson and Christina Hsu Accomando expand the focus from allied behavior to coalition work, which involves working collectively for social change across precisely the sorts of differences identified by Lorde. They identify several pitfalls of superficial allied behavior—when "ally" operates merely as an identity, performance, or simplistic binary. In contrast, "coalition work is inherently intersectional," collaborative, and action based. Several of the readings that follow provide concrete examples of contemporary coalition work.

In Selection 6, Black Lives Matter cofounder Alicia Garza describes the genesis of the movement and the intersectional identities at its heart: "Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement." She critiques those who fail to understand the complexity of the movement, who appropriate the movement's work without acknowledging the source, and who "drop 'Black' from the equation of whose lives matter." Garza supports "active solidarities" across differences but cautions against the construction of false unities. She writes: "Progressive movements in the United States have made some unfortunate errors when they push for unity at the expense of really understanding the concrete differences in context, experience, and oppression." Like Lorde and hooks, Garza encourages activists to redefine—but not erase—differences.

Civil rights activist Tarana Burke, in Selection 7, also tells the story of a movement's origin and calls on activists, the media, and the public to honor and build upon the original goals. In 2006, Burke launched Me Too as a grassroots movement to support survivors of sexualized violence, particularly young women of color in underserved communities. A decade later, #MeToo rose to international prominence as women in the Hollywood entertainment industry spoke out against sexual harassment. Burke critiques the mischaracterization of the movement as being focused on "taking down" powerful men. Rather, the focus of the movement she founded has always been on the healing of survivors. She writes: "Everyday people—queer, trans, disabled, men, and women—are living in the aftermath of a trauma that tried, at the very worst, to take away their humanity. This movement at its core is about the restoration of that humanity." While the mainstream media have focused on individual white women's stories (as also pointed out in Selections 11 and 12 in Part IV of this volume), Burke emphasizes the diversity of survivors and the need to address systemic causes: "The work of #MeToo builds on the existing efforts to dismantle systems of oppression that allow sexual violence, patriarchy, racism, and sexism to persist."

In Selection 8, human rights activist Loretta Ross and historian Rickie Solinger describe reproductive justice as a transformative framework and a twenty-first-century movement. They define reproductive justice as a human rights approach that places women of color at the center and fights equally for "(1) the right *not* to have a child; (2) the right to *have* a child; and (3) the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments." Such a

framework necessitates intersectional analysis, coalitions across differences, and creative movement-building. In addition, “Storytelling is a core aspect of reproductive justice practice because attending to someone else’s story invites us to shift the lens—that is, to imagine the life of another person and to reexamine our own realities and reimagine our own possibilities.”

Activist, scholar, and prison abolitionist Angela Davis asks us to radically reimagine our reliance on prisons. In Selection 9, she asks this fundamental question: “If jails and prisons are to be abolished, then what will replace them?” To begin exploring that question, Davis must first challenge our current way of thinking about prisons. The prison industrial complex (also explored in her essay “Masked Racism”—Selection 8 in Part VIII) is more than jails and prisons: “It is a set of symbiotic relationships among correctional communities, transnational corporations, media conglomerates, guards’ unions, and legislative and court agendas.” Thus, imagining alternatives involves a “constellation” of approaches, including “demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free mental and physical care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance.”

The abolitionist authors of Selection 10 also call for transformative strategies that radically reimagine justice, specifically using trans and queer lenses. Dean Spade (a law professor and founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project), legal advocate Alexander Lee, and performer Morgan Bassichis critique not only interlocking systems of domination, but also the ways in which mainstream gay rights movements have reinforced the police state. They identify a range of social problems and juxtapose “official” and transformative solutions. Calling for creative coalitions and “trickle up” change, they highlight diverse examples of visionary activism. The abolitionist trans and queer movement they advocate envisions abolition as not just “closing the doors to violent institutions,” but also building up institutions and practices that “nurture wholeness, self-determination, and transformation.” Ultimately, they argue for “the practice of transformation in the here and now.”

In Selection 11, immigrant rights activist Gaby Pacheco offers advice and strategies from one youth-led movement to another. In 2010, Pacheco led a 1500-mile immigrant rights march from Florida to Washington, D.C. On the eve of the 2018 “March for Our Lives” to end gun violence, led by survivors of a mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, Pacheco shares her experiences as a source of both inspiration and caution. Now in her 30s, she highlights the courage and energy that young people bring to organizing, while also encouraging this new generation of leaders to learn from those who came before. “The young activists of today are more adept with social media than we were,” she points out. “But I would encourage them to get out into the streets to talk to people. Our march took four months, and we spent time in the communities we visited.” She also emphasizes the importance of foregrounding multiple voices, recognizing the complexity of identity, and building coalitions across differences.

In the final selection of Part IX, Chief Arvol Looking Horse, spiritual leader of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nations, articulates both disappointment and hope a year after the closing of the camp at Standing Rock Reservation and the movement forward of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Nevertheless, “Standing Rock has marked the beginning of an international

movement that will continue to work peacefully, purposefully, and tirelessly for the protection of water along all areas of poisonous oil pipelines and across all of Mother Earth.” There are many reasons to work in coalition, and in this case, the stakes are extremely high. Looking Horse writes, “Water is a source of life, not a resource. . . . We must continue to work together for the health and well-being of our water and our Earth.”

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PART IX

1. How do the authors in Part IX use intersectional analysis? Why is it important to look at everything—including strategies for resistance—through an intersectional lens? Which movements discussed in Part IX are reimagined through intersectional lenses?
2. “[T]he master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” writes Audre Lorde. How can we forge new tools to transform our society? What are some examples of new tools in the readings in Part IX?
3. bell hooks argues that “[s]mall groups remain an important place for education for critical consciousness.” What do you think she means by “critical consciousness”? According to hooks, what are some advantages of small-group conversations over classrooms and other more official spaces for education? In the twenty-first century, how might social media play a role in creating small-group conversations?
4. “As we work to be loving, to create a culture that celebrates life, that makes love possible, we move against dehumanization, against domination,” argues bell hooks. How does she imagine love playing a role in feminist politics? How do you think love can counter dehumanization and domination?
5. Amit Taneja writes, “Feminist ideology recognizes the complexities of how oppression affects us and involves a much larger lens than only women’s rights.” How do the readings in Part IX reveal what this larger lens involves?
6. “Many of us are in positions of oppressor and oppressed at the same time,” Taneja points out. “This knowledge must fuel our passion for ending oppression by abdicating and resisting norms that give us privilege over others.” What are some concrete examples of how people can resist their own privileges? Can you identify life-altering moments (Taneja calls them “snapshots”) in your own experience when you resisted privilege, challenged oppression, or bridged differences?
7. What are the pitfalls of ally behavior and identity, according to Anderson and Accomando? How does coalition politics offer an alternative set of practices for working across differences?
8. Alicia Garza describes creating #BlackLivesMatter as a response to the murder of Trayvon Martin; she also states that “Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes.” How does she describe the larger goals of the movement she cofounded?
9. According to Tarana Burke, what were the intended purposes of the Me Too movement? How have the media misrepresented the aims of the movement? How does Burke

counter those misrepresentations? What does she see as the rigorous work that still lies ahead?

10. Why does Angela Davis close her chapter with the story of Amy Biehl? What lessons might we draw from this story that offer hope for “reconciliation and restorative justice” rather than retribution?
11. Morgan Bassichis, Alexander Lee, and Dean Spade identify several “big problems” facing queer and trans people in U.S. society. How do the transformative approaches they discuss differ from the “official” solutions offered by mainstream organizations?
12. How are environmental issues tied to systems of domination? According to Chief Arvol Looking Horse, why is protecting water such an important cause for an international movement? What does he mean when he writes, “Standing Rock is everywhere”? What does he mean when he writes, “we are at the crossroads”?