about this booklet

This edition of Reflections marks twenty years since we began this project—the first edition was called “Building a nonviolent community: an exploration.” It grew from an intentional exploration of nonviolent community embarked upon by members of the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance. We printed 18 copies. It has since expanded, by word of mouth, to include 300 members of our peace community. Some readings in this edition first appeared in the inaugural issue in January 2001 or in the first year.

Our intention is to use the booklet to build spiritual community. Those who are using the book are asked to participate by contributing readings to it.

The common thread in these reflections is the struggle of human beings to improve the world. In OREPA, our struggle to end bomb production is part of that struggle. In these reflections, we join ourselves with the larger community that works to heal the world.

From the outset, the reflection booklet has been provided free of charge. If you are able to make a donation to cover the cost of your booklet, it would be greatly appreciated. A gift of $20 would cover the cost of paper, printing and mailing for one year. If you are unable to make a donation, no worries. Please continue to accept the reflection booklet and use it.

Each Thursday, in addition to the reflection, you will find the name of a person who is using this booklet like you are. This is an opportunity to think a little about that person and all those who work for peace on her/his day.

contributions, suggestions, requests can be sent to OREPA, P O Box 5743, Oak Ridge, TN 37831 or by e-mail to orep@earthlink.net

sources

Readings contributed by Stephen Wing and extracted from: *We Were Eight Years in Power*, by Ta-Nehisi Coates; *Welcome to the Wisdom of the World*, by Joan Chittister; *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*, edited by Roxane Gay; *Such Color*, by Tracy K. Smith; and *On Violence and On Violence Against Women*, by Jacqueline Jones.
There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist fighting for peace by nonviolent methods most easily succumbs—activism and overwork. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. More than that, it is cooperation in violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his or her work, because it kills the root and inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

~ Thomas Merton
Thursday, December 2
Karen Charbonnet

1942: FIRST SUSTAINED ATOMIC CHAIN REACTION, CHICAGO
1980: THREE MARYKNOLL NUNS AND ONE LAY WORKER MURDERED IN EL SALVADOR

My ancestors, the great mass of them, had not lived in times of hope. Most of them were not the Harriet Tubmans or Martin Luther Kings, living on the precipice of monumental change, but were strugglers wending their way through the murky before, after, and in-between. They did not alter history. They were Celia, enslaved, hanged in 1855 for murdering her master, but who for a brief moment, stick in hand, lifeless body beneath her, knew freedom, for she had stopped this master from “forcing her.” They were Margaret Garner, who would slaughter her own child before submitting her to the slow slaughter of bondage, who with her last breath said to her husband, “never marry again in slavery.” They were Ida B. Wells, who defied the great wave of lynching even when the men whom it victimized would not, even as the country turned away from her. All of these heroes had failed to cajole and coerce the masters of America. Their ambition of a better world had been frustrated. This was the story of my ancestors, the story I expected for myself. These were not stories of hope, but were they without import? If Celia, Margaret and Ida had failed to help the country at large locate its morality, they had succeeded in living by their own. And that was all they could control. Within the small and narrow frame of their own lives, all they had was their own conscience, their own story. The lessons they passed down were not about an abstract hope, an unknowable dream. They were about the power and necessity of immediate defiance. That is where I joined them.

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates
Friday, December 3

The evil that is in the world almost always stems from ignorance...the most helpless vice being ignorance which believes it knows everything and therefore grants itself the right to kill.

~ Albert Camus

Saturday, December 4

1969 : CHICAGO POLICE MURDER BLACK PANTHERS FRED HAMPTON AND MARK CLARKE

The question is not “Will what we are doing succeed?” The question is “Are we doing everything we can, and will we do it as long as it takes?”

~ Joan Chittister

Sunday, December 5

My anger has meant pain to me, but it has also meant survival, and before I give it up, I’m going to be sure there is something at least as powerful to take its place.

~ Audre Lorde

Monday, December 6

1865 : THIRTEENTH AMENDMENT TO US CONSTITUTION ENDS SLAVERY

The masters could lie to themselves, lie to the world, but they would never force me to lie to myself. I would never forget that they were liars, that they justified rape, child slavery, and lynching by telling themselves and us and the world there was something benighted in us, some flaw in our genes...

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates

Tuesday, December 7

Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.

~ Pope John Paul II

Wednesday, December 8

ENLIGHTENMENT OF BUDDHA CELEBRATED
1886 : DIEGO RIVERA BORN

One Buddha is not enough. We need many Buddhas.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh
It is not the anger of Black women which is dripping down over this globe like a diseased liquid. It is not my anger that launches rockets, spends over sixty thousand dollars a second on missiles and other agents of war and death, slaughters children in cities, stockpiles nerve gas and chemical bombs, sodomizes our daughters and our earth. It is not the anger of Black women which corrodes into blind, dehumanizing power, bent upon the annihilation of us all unless we meet it with what we have, our power to examine and to redefine the terms on which we will live and work; our power to envision and to reconstruct, anger by painful anger, stone upon heavy stone, a future of pollinating difference and the earth to support our choices. We welcome all women who can meet us, face to face, beyond objectification and beyond guilt.

~ Audre Lorde
If one thing has become clear over the past decade, it is that the most prevalent, insidious forms of violence are those that cannot be seen.

~ Jacqueline Rose

Power resides in the willingness to stand alone until the whole world is forced, just by reason of our unremitting, implacable committed presence, to recognize that there is more to the present question than the answer we have been given.

~ Joan Chittister

The strength of women lies in recognizing differences between us as creative. The anger of women can transform difference through insight into power.

~ Audre Lorde

White supremacy is a crime and a lie, but it’s also a machine that generates meaning. This existential gift, as much as anything, is the source of its enormous, centuries-spanning power.

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates

None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.

~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Many of us have been running all of our lives. Practice stopping.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh
They rise from the dawn and dress.

They raise the bundles to their heads
And their shadows broaden—
Dark ghosts grounded to nothing.

They grin and grip their skirts.

They finger the gold and purple beads
Circling their necks, lift them
Absently to their teeth. They speak

A lanuage of kicked stones.

And it’s not the future their eyes see,
But history. It stretches
Like a dry road uphill before them.

They climb it.

~ Tracy Smith
Friday, December 17

It is difficult to free fools from the chains they revere.

~ Voltaire

Saturday, December 18

1946: STEVEN BIKO BORN

If the question is, What does it mean to make a difference? the answer may simply be that I must not allow failure to become more important to me than witness.

~ Joan Chittister

Sunday, December 19

If we accept our powerlessness, any anger can defeat us.

~ Audre Lorde

Monday, December 20

1989: US INVADES PANAMA

From America’s very founding, the pursuit of the right to labor, and the right to live free of whipping and of the sale of one’s children, were forbidden for blacks.

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates

Tuesday, December 21

Anger makes you smaller, while forgiveness forces you to grow beyond what you were.

~ Cherie Carter-Scott

Wednesday, December 22

1993: WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN PARLIAMENT VOTES SELF OUT OF EXISTENCE
1998: US OKAYS PRODUCTION OF BOMB TRITIUM IN WATTS BAR REACTOR

The situation the Earth is in today has been created by unmindful production and unmindful consumption. We consume to forget our worries and our anxieties. Tranquilizing ourselves with over-consumption is not the way.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh
A group of identical looking white men in dark suits are photographed as their president signs an executive order banning US state funding to groups anywhere in the world offering abortion or abortion counseling. This “Global Gag Rule” in January 2017 effectively inaugurated the Trump presidency. The ruling means an increase in deaths by illegal abortion for thousands of women throughout the developing world. Its effects are as cruel as they are precise. At a talk in London in June 2019, Kate Gilmore, the UN deputy commissioner for human rights, described US policy on abortion as a form of extremist hate that amounts to the torture of women. “This is gender-based violence against women, no question.”

Judging from that original photo—iconic of twenty-first century manhood in power—the White House officials might have been watching the president sign anything. They looked as bland as they were ruthless, mildly complacent. No shadow crossed their brow, no steely glint in the eye or pursing of the lips to suggest their actions were fueled by hatred. Doubtless they believe their motives are pure, that they are saving the lives of the unborn.

These men are killers. But their murderousness is invisible—to the world and to themselves. Not even in their wildest dreams, I would imagine, does it cross their minds that their decisions might be fuelled by the desire to inflict pain. With hands lightly clasped or hanging loose by their sides, what they convey is vacuous ease. It is my central premise that violence in our time thrives on a form of mental blindness. Like a hothouse plant, it flourishes under the heady steam of its own unstoppable conviction.

~ Jacqueline Rose
Friday, December 24

To be the last person on earth opposed to the dropping of a nuclear bomb on innocent people is to preserve more of what it means to be human than can possibly be preserved by using the bomb.

~ Joan Chittister

Saturday, December 25

BIRTH OF JESUS OF NAZARETH CELEBRATED
1875: JESSIE WALLACE HUGHAN, WAR RESISTERS’ LEAGUE FOUNDER, BORN

Don Juan Chavarría: Not until that moment was there peace on earth—when the child was born. And that’s probably why there was joy in heaven. That’s what the angels are singing, it seems to me.

Edgard: The glory of God can’t exist in heaven until there is peace among people, which means justice, brotherhood, equality. Peace is all this. The rich often believe they give glory to God, but they don’t give peace and justice, and so they don’t give glory to God because the two things go together.

~ The Gospel in Solentiname

Sunday, December 26

My response to racism is anger. That anger has eaten clefts into my living only when it remained unspoken, useless to anyone. When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are “creating a mood of hopelessness,” “preventing white women from getting past guilt,” or “standing in the way of trusting communication and action.” But what you hear in my voice is fury, not suffering. Anger, not moral authority. There is a difference.

~ Audre Lorde

Monday, December 27

1960: FRANCE DETONATES THIRD ATOMIC BOMB IN SAHARA DESERT

H. R. Haldeman said that President Nixon believed that when it came to welfare, “the whole problem really was blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while appearing not to.” he wrote in his diary.

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates
Tuesday, December 28

Citizens should develop a generous and loyal devotion to their country, but without any narrowing of mind. In other words, they must always look simultaneously to the welfare of the whole human family, which is tied together by manifold bonds linking races, peoples, and nations.

~ Second Vatican Council, 1965

Wednesday, December 29

It’s very important that we re-learn the art of resting and relaxing. Not only does it help prevent the onset of many illnesses that develop through chronic tension and worrying; it allows us to clear our minds, focus, and find creative solutions to problems.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

Rachel Stewart, junior at the University of Tennessee, addressed the Board of Trustees at their annual meeting in October, calling on the Board to abandon its bid to be part of the team managing the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.
Who decides what is called out as violence? Who determines what forms of violence we are allowed, and permit ourselves, to see? Not naming violence—its often undercover path of destruction, its random disposal of the bodies it needs and does not need—is one of the ways that capitalism has always preserved and perpetuated itself. In one of her sharpest insights and most trenchant ripostes, social revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg cautioned against the charge that the 1905 Russian Revolution had spilt blood by pointing out that the level of suffering was nothing compared with the indiscriminate, mostly unremarked, cutting down of lives by the brute machinery of capital which had flourished up until then. “Abroad, the picture created of the Russian Revolution is that of an enormous blood-bath, with all the unspeakable suffering of the people without a single ray of light,” she said at a rally in Mannheim in 1906. “The suffering during the revolution is a mere nothing compared to what the Russian people had to put up with before the revolution under so-called quiet conditions.” She then listed hunger, scurvy, and the thousands of workers killed in factories without attracting the attention of the statisticians. “Quiet conditions” is key—she is referring to the skill with which capital cloaks its crimes.

~ Jacqueline Rose
Friday, December 31
1915 : FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION FOUNDED

Let us take the risk of peace upon our lives, and not impose the risks of war upon the world.

~ Quaker proverb

Saturday, January 1
1863 : ABRAHAM LINCOLN SIGNS EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

It is only using what we have in order to do what must be done whether we succeed or not that counts. It is putting our own backs into the effort that makes the moral stretch from here to there to anywhere possible.

~ Joan Chittister

Sunday, January 2

Alice of Soweto, cursing the mission songs: “We have our own political songs now for the young people to sing—no more damn forgiveness!”

~ Audre Lorde

Monday, January 3
1993 : STRATEGIC ARMS REDUCTION TREATY 2 SIGNED

For most of our history, our political system was premised on two conflicting facts—one, an oft-stated love of democracy; the other, an undemocratic white supremacy inscribed at every level of government.

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates

Tuesday, January 4

To hope is to risk frustration. So make up your mind to risk frustration.

~ Thomas Merton

Wednesday, January 5

People sacrifice the present for the future. But life is available only in the present. That is why we should walk in such a way that every step can bring us to the here and the now.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh
Thursday, January 6
Coleman Smith

1878: Carl Sandburg born
1885: A J Muste born

Florence, Ala, December 7, 1866

Dear sir

I take the pleasure of writing you
A few lines hoping that I will not offend you
by doing so

I was raised in your state
and was sold from there when I was 31 years old
left wife one child, mother, brothers, and sisters
My wife died about 12 years ago and ten years
ago I made money and went back and bought my old mother and she lives with me

Seven years ago I married again and commenced
to by myself and wife for two thousand dollars and
last Christmas I made the last payment and I have
made some little money this year and I wish
to get my kinde all with me and I will take it
as a greate favor if you will help me to get them

~ Tracy Smith
Friday, January 7
1891 : ZORA NEALE HURSTON BORN

Gods always behave like the people who make them.
   ~ Zora Neale Hurston

Saturday, January 8

Oh, we give ourselves so many reasons to excuse ourselves from the excitement of being alive. We’re too slow, too weak, too unprepared, not fully equipped, don’t have the power…And so we do nothing.
   ~ Joan Chittister

Sunday, January 9

Anger expressed and translated into action is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification through which we identify who are our allies with whom we have differences, and who are our genuine enemies.
   ~ Audre Lorde

Monday, January 10

Racism is not merely a simplistic hatred. It is, more often, broad sympathy toward some and broader skepticism toward others. Black America lives ever under that skeptical eye.
   ~ Ta-Nehisi Coates

Tuesday, January 11
1912 : TEXTILE WORKERS IN LAWRENCE, MA LAUNCH BREAD AND ROSES STRIKE
1952 : FIRST BRITISH PROTEST AGAINST NUCLEAR WEAPONS

It helps to remember that billions of years ago the Earth was just so much interstellar dust. And look what it’s come to. Our efforts, too, will be fruitful if we persevere.
   ~ Denise Laffan

Wednesday, January 12

You carry Mother Earth within you. She is not outside of you. Mother Earth is not just your environment. In that insight of inter-being, it is possible to have real communication with the Earth, which is the highest form of prayer.
   ~ Thich Nhat Hanh
All of bell hooks’ teachers at Booker T. Washington Elementary had been black women who, although they never stated it in such terms, were fired up by a “revolutionary pedagogy of resistance.” For these women, rousing their students was to transgress a racial heritage that did everything it could to suppress black thought and desire. All this changed with racial integration. Black children bussed to white schools quickly discovered that their passionate enthusiasm in the classroom was seen as a threat to white privilege. They were cut down to size. This—hooks is citing Buddhist Pema Chodron—could, I think, fairly be called a manifesto:

“My models were those who stepped outside of the conventional mind and who could actually stop my mind and completely open it up and free it, even for a moment, from a conventional, habitual way of looking at things. If you are really preparing for groundlessness, preparing for the reality of human existence, you are living on the razor’s edge, and you must become used to the fact that things shift and change. Things are not certain and they do not last and you do not know what is going to happen. My teachers have always pushed my over a cliff.”

~ Jacqueline Rose
Friday, January 14
1918 : EMMA GOLDSBORN SENTENCED TO TWO YEARS IN PRISON FOR OBSTRUCTING DRAFT

There are plenty of people who pray for peace. If praying were enough, it would have come to be.

~ Jewel Kilcher

Saturday, January 15
1929 : MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BORN

I am no doctrinaire pacifist... But I am convinced that the church cannot remain silent while mankind (sic) faces the threat of being plunged into the abyss of nuclear annihilation. If the church is true to its mission, it must call for an end to the arms race.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sunday, January 16
1991 : GEORGE H W BUSH BEGINS FIRST GULF WAR

Life confronts us always with our weakest selves. It is those parts we must come to understand, to own, to embrace.

~ Joan Chittister

Monday, January 17
1961 : DWIGHT EISENHOWER’S FAREWELL ADDRESS WARNS AGAINST MILITARISM

It was fear that gave the symbols Donald Trump deployed—the symbols of racism—enough potency to make him president, and thus put him in a position to injure the world.

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates

Tuesday, January 18
2005 : 500,000 MARCH IN WASHINGTON DC AGAINST IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN WARS

Women today are still being called upon to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is a primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns.

~ Audre Lorde

Wednesday, January 19

Freedom is not given to us by anyone; we have to cultivate it ourselves. It is a daily practice. No one can prevent you from being aware of each step you take or each breath in and breath out.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh
Thursday, January 20
Stephen Nesvacik

Standing here on the curb outside the submarine base with my stack of leaflets and my sign, I feel like a hitchhiker again, calm and relaxed, posing like a model in an ad for casual friendliness and peaceable intent, swiveling at the hip as the wheels roll by to keep my sign straight toward the passing possibility of a glance—"The choice today is between nonviolence and nonexistence!" —MLK, abridged—aiming my gaze like a peace-seeking missile at the spot behind each tinted windshield where I calculate the driver’s eyes watch the red light and wait for the green, smiling just enough to imply I’m having more fun out here than you are in there, absolutely no place I’d rather be!—not even especially impatient for someone to roll down the glass barrier that divides us to accept a leaflet and trade pleasantries, How’re you doing, all right, have a great day now—never once letting on how deep and forceful the blast of joy that erupts from inside each time it happen, Eureka, hallelujah, praise the Lord, I got a ride!

~ Stephen Wing
Friday, January 21
1977: JIMMY CARTER GRANTS AMNESTY TO VIETNAM DRAFT RESISTERS/EVADERS
2017: MORE THAN 1,000,000 MARCH IN US TO DEMAND PROTECTION OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS.

If the question is What is wrong with me? Why can’t I change? the answer may be that I have to decide to begin.

~ Joan Chittister

Saturday, January 22
1973: VIETNAM PEACE AGREEMENT SIGNED
2021: TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS ENTERS INTO FORCE

Each state party undertakes never under any circumstances to:
Develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

~ Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, Article I

Sunday, January 23

Possibility is neither forever nor instant. It is not easy to sustain belief in its efficacy.

~ Audre Lorde

Monday, January 24

I know now that hunger for some other time when things were so simple is a retreat from the knotty present into myth. And what ultimately awaits those who retreat into fairy tales is tragedy.

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates

Tuesday, January 25
1851: SOJOURNER TRUTH ADDRESSES BLACK WOMEN’S RIGHTS CONVENTION, AKRON, OH
1914: GANDHI CAMPAIGN FOR INDIAN NATIONALS’ RIGHTS IN SOUTH AFRICA SUCCEEDS

The Shambhala warrior trains in the use of two weapons: insight and compassion.

~ Choegyal Rinpoche

Wednesday, January 26

When you love someone, the best thing you can offer is your presence. How can you love if you are not there?

~ Thich Nhat Hanh
Feminists have always had to confront the violence they expose, and—in exposing—provoke, but in the case of the transsexual person, there seems to be an even shorter fuse between the progressive movement and the virulent, crushing payback. It is a myth, albeit one of liberalism’s most potent, that knowing—finding oneself face-to-face with something or someone outside one’s usual frame of reference—is the first step on the path to understanding. What distinguishes the transexual woman or man, writes psychoanalyst Patricia Gherovici, is “that the almost infinite distance between one face and the other will be crossed by a single person” (a space of acknowledged difference and otherness which is normally sacrosanct however close two people may get). Perhaps this is the real scandal. Not crossing the line of gender—although that is scandal enough—but blurring psychic and physical boundaries, placing in intimate proximity parts of the mind and different forms of human embodiment, which non-trans people have the luxury of believing they can safely keep asunder.

~ Jacqueline Rose
Friday, January 28

If you go to one demonstration and then go home, that’s something, but the people in power can live with that. What they can’t live with is sustained pressure that keeps building, organizations that keep doing things, people that keep learning lessons from the last time and doing it better the next time.

~ Noam Chomsky

Saturday, January 29

1996 : FRANCE HALTS NUCLEAR TESTING

We need to give our own gift of self so that we ourselves do not become the shrine of the very small god at which we adore.

~ Joan Chittister

Sunday, January 30

1948 : GANDHI ASSASSINATED

The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free.

~ Audre Lorde

Monday, January 31

1797 : FRANZ SCHUBERT BORN
1915 : THOMAS MERTON BORN
1919 : JACKIE ROBINSON BORN

A huge mountain shadowed Aspen and a ski lift stretched up to the peak. Kenyatta insisted we take it. I am afraid of heights, but a mix of machismo and curiosity pushed me forth. I remember the sloping ground rising and falling beneath us, the swaying in the high wind, the town falling away, the fear tightening in my arms, legs, throat, and then at the top, the clouds hanging over mountain ridges still, in June, speckled with white. I did not love it, but I loved it. The fear I felt then was not just the anguish in my gut, but the price of seeing the world anew.

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates
It’s not a tower, but that’s not a bad guess. Oliver and Sawada shonin are busy erecting concrete forms for the central pillar that will support the dome of the peace pagoda under construction in Cosby, TN, while Mori, in the foreground, contemplates his next move with a long length of rebar.

In the aftermath of the Transform Now Plowshares action, Knoxville was fortunate to get to know the principals of that action, Megan Rice, Michael Walli, and Greg Boertje-Obed as they prepared for hearings and their trial. In the process, they made numerous presentations in the community. Top: being interviewed by CNN at the Riverside Catholic Worker house, home base while they were in Knoxville. Middle: Megan speaks at the Unitarian church in Knoxville. Bottom: leaving the federal courthouse on a break.
The Transform Now Plowshares action reverberated through the community, across the country, and around the globe. Above, Megan holds the microphone for Greg at Church of the Savior. Left, talking to media outside the federal courthouse in downtown Knoxville.

Above: Michael, Megan, Ellen Barfield, Erik Johnson, and Bill Quigley in a pre-trial legal strategy session at the Riverside Catholic Worker in Knoxville. Right: Jack Cohen-Joppa, in town for the Festival of Hope and trial, shared his TNP pie with Greg, Michael and Megan.