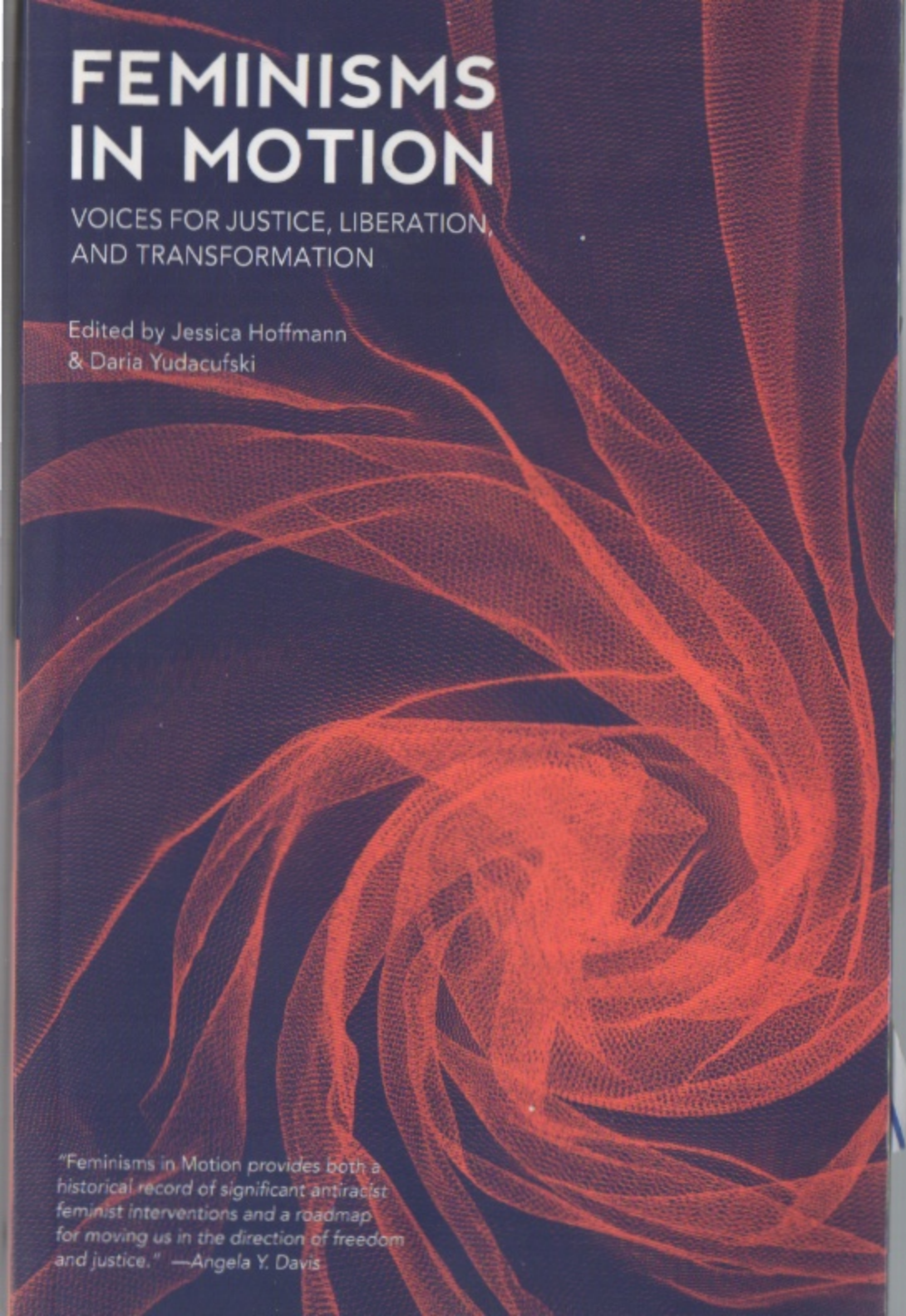
FEMINISMS IN MOTION

VOICES FOR JUSTICE, LIBERATION, AND TRANSFORMATION

Edited by Jessica Hoffmann
& Daria Yudacufski



"Feminisms in Motion provides both a historical record of significant antiracist feminist interventions and a roadmap for moving us in the direction of freedom and justice." —Angela Y. Davis

"Women of color have been at the center and forefront of some of the most urgent political struggles for freedom in the United States. They have pioneered, through practice and theory, models of collective, intersectional feminism that have demanded more radical and more just ways of living, being, and acting. *Feminisms in Motion* is a welcome and urgent anthology that foregrounds the exciting and compelling work of these activists and writers."

—Viet Thanh Nguyen, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Sympathizer*

"In the contemporary political moment, when there is such urgency to act, these writers insist that we consistently critique our analyses and approaches, and remind us how vitally important explicitly intersectional, multi-issue organizing strategies are to the success of our movements. *Feminisms in Motion* provides both a historical record of significant antiracist feminist interventions and a roadmap for moving us in the direction of freedom and justice."

—Angela Y. Davis, Distinguished Professor Emerita, University of California, Santa Cruz

"*Feminisms in Motion* is a testament to the heterogeneity of feminist movements in the 21st century."

—Ange-Marie Hancock Alfaro, author of *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History*

From 2007 to 2017, Jessica Hoffmann and Daria Yudacufski published some of the most inspiring feminist writers in a small, Los Angeles-based magazine called *make/shift*, collecting work that articulated ideas from the grassroots and amplified feminist voices on immigration, state violence, climate change, and other issues. These writings were part of the long and rich traditions of women-of-color-centered feminisms that acknowledge all systems of power as connected and understand that ending one form of violence demands the transformation of society on multiple fronts. *Feminisms in Motion* selects more than forty highlights from the past decade of intersectional feminist thought and action, featuring authors like adrienne maree brown, Grace Lee Boggs, Silvia Federici, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, among many others.

Jessica Hoffmann is a writer, editor, and museum administrator whose writings have appeared in publications like *Bitch*, *ColorLines*, and *SFAQ*.

Daria Yudacufski is the executive director of Visions and Voices: The Arts and Humanities Initiative at the University of Southern California.

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"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle
because we do not live single-issue lives."
—Audre Lorde

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Introduction

By Jessica Hoffmann and Daria Yudacufski

We edited and published *make/shift*, a biannual independent magazine of community-based, intersectional feminist art and action, from 2007 to 2017. We mailed out the twentieth and final issue in the summer of a year that felt like a watershed moment for feminism in the U.S. mainstream. It was a year that started with enormous Women's Marches and closed with a social-media outpouring of truths about sexual violence that knocked powerful abusers from their pedestals one after another. A sliver of a 1968 poem by Muriel Rukeyser was being quoted all over: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life?" Rukeyser asked. She quickly answered, "The world would split open."

In some ways it does feel like the world is splitting open. But it also feels entirely unsurprising. Even if we weren't editors of a feminist magazine who have had the repeated experience of finding that the majority of submissions to each issue were about sexual violence, we are women in this world. We know pervasive sexual violence is the truth because it is and because we do not have the privilege of rationalizing or denying it. (In other words, and of course, #ustoo.)

And: that Rukeyser poem is actually about a different kind of war. It's called "Käthe Kollwitz," and it's about an artist and the world wars she lived through, and economic inequality, and the gendered experience of these, and motherhood, and art, and yes the body (simultaneously individual and social), too.

But what can that mean, "one woman"? We know #metoo, the social-media hashtag that is threading together stories of sexual violence, is true because we are women in this world, but the second we think that, we hear Sojourner Truth asking "Ain't I a woman?" at a women's rights convention in 1851, insisting on the inextricableness of gender and race in her identity—and arguing for the linking of nineteenth-century struggles for women's rights and for the abolition of slavery. We hear the Black feminist group the Combahee River Collective saying, in 1977, "We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives." We hear Kimberlé Crenshaw synthesizing these ideas—ideas born from lives—in the term "intersectionality" in the 1980s. And we hear queer feminism asking what this word "woman" means *while* knowing that if violence against women were taken seriously, at large, addressing it would mitigate other violences (as Courtney Desiree Morris argues in her widely shared 2010 essay originally published in *make/shift*, "Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements"). By now we've all read the stories about how many of the men behind recent mass shootings have a history as domestic abusers. We know violences, and the systems of power they enforce, are connected.

It is true, this idea that if one woman told the truth about her life, the world would split open, *and* it is an idea ripe for questioning, challenging, expanding, refracting. To keep pushing at it: What should we make of a split, or several? Is the world already split open along multiple seams? What do these splits feel like? What do they do? What could they do? What would it take for the world to heal?

The Combahee River Collective, again in their 1977 statement, suggested an answer: "If Black women were free, it would mean that

everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression."

There are multiple feminisms, and we think the most promising of them keep asking questions, keep feeling the truths of interconnectedness, keep pushing to get at the roots, to expand the field of what to care about (everything) and what is possible. In a world structured on hierarchies enforced by violence by way of disconnection, we believe intersectional feminism offers the best views—and examples—of ways of living based on the reality of interdependence, ways that would allow everyone to thrive.

A decade ago, after a few years of working together on a smaller zine called *LOUDmouth*, we and our friend Stephanie Abraham founded *make/shift* magazine to document, critique, and participate in the feminisms of our time, with a specific mission to amplify antiracist, queer, and transnational voices—that is, voices that challenge and create alternatives to systems of oppression in an interconnected, interdisciplinary, multi-issue way. While other feminist media outlets were offering feminist critiques of dominant culture or looking at the effects of current events on women, we wanted to document *feminist* cultures—the actions and ideas that were emerging from lives and communities to uproot violences and transform hierarchies, to create something more like freedom and sustenance for everyone.

With backgrounds as organizers, educators, activists, writers, and independent media makers, we started *make/shift* to cover the movements we were part of, spotlighting community-based art and action, the kind of work that pushes feminisms to grow, usually from the margins. We wanted to publish voices speaking in the tradition of Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Mujeres Creando, and so many other feminists of color who have insisted on complexity, pointed out the connections, and refused to separate the intimate from the public, the cultural from the political, the creative from the critical. That is the tradition we believe is most likely to build a world in which everyone can be whole and free.

Of course, a media outlet that represents these values should be made with a process that reflects these values. That meant, among other things, committing to collaborative editing and to sharing media skills;

publishing a majority of women of color in each issue; paying writers at least *something* for their contributions (even if we never had enough money to pay what they deserved for their work); editing and publishing the magazine in a way that was sustainable for us to do, as volunteers, on top of busy jobs and lives; and valuing critique, accountability, multiplicity, and complexity. Conventional magazine wisdom is that there should be a consistent voice and style from cover to cover; *make/shift* deliberately flouted that, putting different forms, styles, and voices in conversation (the way they actually are).

In 2007, when we had just published our first issue, we tabled for *make/shift* in the lobby of a museum where longtime activist and author Angela Davis was speaking at an exhibition of feminist art from 1965 to 1980. "[I think about] how capitalism constitutes our intimate lives, our dreams . . . forces us to dream as individuals, to dream for ourselves, maybe for our families. Why can't we dream for our communities? Why can't we dream beyond the nation?" she asked.

In some ways, brownfemipower's essay from *make/shift*'s second issue, "Immigration at the Front: Challenging the 'Every Woman' Myth in Online Media," is from a different time. We talked about "the feminist blogosphere" then; it was a burgeoning thing that got big fast and that preceded but could not quite anticipate today's social-media landscape. There was a clear hierarchy of power and popularity in then-emerging online feminist media, and it fell along conventional lines (white women at the front). As brownfemipower's essay shows, it was a time when "intersectionality" was not at all widely embraced by feminist media, and there was a massive disconnect between what prominent white feminists perceived to be feminist issues (things like reproductive rights, body image, violence against women) and issues such as immigration, climate change, prisons, and policing. It is because of women-of-color bloggers like brownfemipower (who took a lot of shit for it) that those issues are weaved through today's feminist media. Likewise, it is because of queer and trans activists that there is an entirely different awareness of gender now across mainstream society than there was when Dean Spade and Sam Feder were talking about trans documentaries in *make/shift* ten years ago.

Yet when feminist discourse hits the mainstream—as in the 2017 and 2018 Women's Marches across the United States, and #metoo—the most visible threads still often center white women voicing a feminism that is binary in its understanding of gender and oblivious to the relationship between violence and power. Again that myth surfaces: the one woman, the "every woman." A poem about two world wars, poverty, motherhood, and several other things is reduced to a one-note quote about sexual violence that fails to recognize all forms of violence and hierarchy as pieces of interlocking systems that are not natural but wholly challengeable, and changeable. Are we watching the world split open right now, or are we watching familiar binaries and reactions as some category called "women" splits open a brief window in which to punish some category called "men," with a backlash looming around the corner?

Once again, intersectional feminism has already opened up this conversation, has not only imagined but begun practicing ways of addressing violence that are not punitive but rather transformative. We offer a peek of this vast conversation in "The Power We Have: Things that Worked in Transformative Justice This Year" by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "'Love' Is on Everyone's Lips: A Roundtable of Women of Color Organizing in Detroit" facilitated by Adela Nieves, "Bring the Troops Home?" by Jessi Lee Jackson, and basically every other piece in this book.

In making *make/shift*, we wanted to share the wisdom of our contemporaries nearby and around the world, from Tiny aka Lisa Gray-Garcia in San Francisco to Trifa Shakely in Sweden to Manshi Asher in India, alongside the wisdom of our elders, including Ida McCray, Emma Torres, Loretta J. Ross, Silvia Federici, and many others. They offer varied answers to the question of what it means to live in this world while bringing forth a different one. For ten years, we published creative and critical writing by people actively engaged in transformative work in their own communities, and we documented and critiqued works published elsewhere in a reviews section edited by author and activist Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore that featured multititle reviews of projects across mediums, mostly from small presses. We have been able to include in this book just a few of the dozens of excellent and unparalleled reviews that Mattilda edited across twenty issues of *make/shift*.

If we start with an oft-quoted line from a poem written by a white woman at the height of another generation's attempts to transform the world, register the truths of that poem, and then push at it and question it, place it in dialogue with a legacy of women-of-color-centered feminism that precedes and exceeds it, those are ways of dreaming together beyond received limits, of expanding the conversation and opening up the set of possibilities for our shared world. We think those are ways of doing feminism and making media rooted in hope and love.

Intersectional feminism didn't appear a few years ago. It has roots that go back forever, and it has been voiced and otherwise nurtured by women of color for generations. It is like a river moving through time, communities, and other contexts, full of differences and always changing. We have always envisioned *make/shift* as dipping into, reflecting on, and contributing to this river, putting into print a few of its moments and voices from a particular time. From 2007 to 2017, we published work by about 350 people who have added to the burbling of that river. It started flowing way before us and will continue long after us, and it is always bigger and more full of possibility than any one of us. It is multifaceted, simultaneous, and constantly shifting, a space where past, present, and future voices and actions flow together, overlap, diverge, and keep moving to make a world where everyone can be free.

A Note from the Editors

The pieces in this book were published in *make/shift* magazine over a ten-year period, from 2007 to 2017. During and since that time, movements for justice and liberation have continued to challenge, expand, and change the language we use to describe our world, our communities, and our lives. For instance, nobody was saying "non-binary" in 2007. The terms "genderqueer," "trans," and "gender-variant" were commonly used at that time to describe genders that exceeded or did not fit within the gender binary. And you'll see that writers in this volume tended to use "Latina/o" or "Latin@" in instances where today they would likely write "Latinx." In these and other cases, we decided to leave the texts as originally written rather than copyediting to reflect the vocabulary of 2018. We have chosen to document rather than erase the evolution of language because it is one of the many ways social movements critically and creatively transform the world.

And we hope it goes without saying, but just in case: because *make/shift*'s vision and politic is deliberately and decidedly heterogeneous, and because feminisms are constantly in motion, the views expressed here are those of their respective authors at the time they wrote them, not necessarily those of the editors, and not even necessarily those of the writers today or tomorrow.

Three Essays on Art, Academia, and Economics

By Jessica Lawless

Just Turn Around Now

When I was a kid I was obsessed with revenge stories. My favorite was *The Girl Most Likely to . . .* , an obscure made-for-TV movie from the 1970s starring Stockard Channing. Channing is the "ugly girl" who gets into a car accident, has plastic surgery, becomes "beautiful," and, one by one, picks off the people who made her life miserable. This gave me hope. As a shy, chubby, not very athletic or popular frizzy-haired girl, revenge meant liberation from my lonely outsider status. I've gotten over the need to avenge my childhood years—for the most part. What I find curious is that I continue to buy into the idea that "success is the best revenge." That there is some fantasy I'm still chasing.

Recently, walking down a corridor of a building on the college campus where I teach, I was reminded of another old fantasy. A decade earlier I had been walking down the corridor of the History of Consciousness department at UC Santa Cruz. I walked by

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Donna Haraway's office and my heart started racing like I was a teenager in love. I walked by Angela Davis's office expecting angels to start singing. My palms were sweating. I expected a security guard to appear and escort me from the building. The irony was that I lived in Seattle, the heyday of the grunge-music scene. I couldn't spit without hitting an actual rock star. But that empty corridor on a secluded college campus in a small hippie town was where *my* rock stars hung out. Behind the one open door was James Clifford, the historian who flipped anthropology on its ass and who I was meeting to learn more about this graduate program. (For those of you keeping track, this was an informational visit; I hadn't even filled out an application yet.) I had a fantasy of hanging out with these folks, reading, talking politics, taking down institutional oppressions. I fantasized about becoming Dr. Lawless, a superhero, the avenging academic, the girl most likely to save the world from intersectional isms.

However, as I was standing there, a different story emerged. The banality of the corridor struck me like a physical blow. Though there were posters on the walls announcing great events, great speakers, great films, great greatness that was happening on the campus, almost every door in the hallway was shut. Through the ones that were open, someone was sitting alone at a computer. Where was the activity, the action, the knowledge being generated? Community, political debate, and artistic collaborations were more evident in the way-too-cool Seattle bars and music scene I was desperately bored with. Too many drunken nights, bad relationships, and painful fights over organizing goals with my sister collective members in the self-defense organization I'd been a part of for the past five years had led to fantasizing about graduate school as my ticket out. So I wasn't willing to see the intense solitude and loneliness permeating the university corridor. At the time I chalked up the discomfort to my usual sense of outsider status. I was looking for the next big thing in my life, and I had decided Dr. Lawless was it.

This fantasy didn't appear out of nowhere. A year earlier I was at the annual conference of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. I was the keynote speaker at the Women of Color Caucus's breakfast. My friend Tracy had invited me to speak about the self-defense program she and I and another friend had created for women in domestic-violence situations. One reason Tracy had asked me was because I had left a violent relationship and ended up in a shelter a few years earlier. That happened the same year my friend Mia was raped and murdered. These were the facts of my life at the time, and it was hard to imagine a time when they wouldn't be. So I was in great awe when Beth Richie gave the opening keynote of the conference and giddily said she is also known as Dr. Richie or Professor Richie, names she never could have imagined being called several years earlier when she was in a violent relationship.[1]

That was truly a revelatory moment. Formerly battered woman does more than survive. As I listened to Beth Richie's talk, the fantasy of Dr. Lawless began. Being a survivor has never been far enough away from being a victim for me. I wanted more. Becoming Professor Lawless would be my best revenge against ex-lovers, ex-friends, family members I wish I could break up with, and the entirety of grades K through 12.

Several years later, when I was living in Pomona, California, and working on my MA in cultural studies, I didn't fully understand the intense loneliness of the academic corridor I had visited at Santa Cruz. I wish I had. Or at least that I had given more consideration to the

1. This isn't true. I apologize, Dr. Richie and *make/shift* readers, for not checking my memory until recently, and for stating that Dr. Richie was in an abusive relationship. In 2017, while editing this story for a longer project on the topic of higher ed becoming a Ponzi scheme in the post-recession economy, I asked a friend to put me in touch with Beth Richie. Dr. Richie graciously let me know that my memory is for shit. She did not tell the story I thought she told; she makes clear in her work that she has never been in a violent relationship with an intimate partner. I'm sorry I put out false information about a person I admire who approaches her own work with clarity and integrity. I'm embarrassed of my buy-in to the American dream despite knowing better. Part of the knowing better was the nagging question in my mind about the fact that Beth Richie has been out and with a female partner for as long as I've known of her work, while the story in my mind involved an abusive cis man. I also couldn't square the date she completed her PhD with the date of the conference I attended. I was so committed to my own myth-making that I ignored the raging red flags. My memory and creativity formed a narrative to serve my unexpected acceptance of the idea that education would ensure an even playing field where I could "pull myself up" into middle-class stability. I'm fascinated with my buy-in to the Horatio Alger bullshit I've been challenging in art, writing, and activism for years. At the same time, this memory being for shit is different from the idea of "false memory," or misremembering traumatic events. I am purposefully using creative license to narrativize my experiences. It makes perfect sense that my origin story about becoming a professor is not true. What I was going for—economic and emotional stability—was never going to be found in academia. The more compelling story is how I moved through that buy-in mind-set to find new concepts of stability and security as an aging, queer, anti-capitalist feminist.

fact that as soon as I finished the GRE I went to a bar. Conclusion: academics make me feel profoundly alone and in need of a drink. Two years of grad school was enough. I would become Dr. Lawless by checking the appropriate box on forms that offered a "title" section. Fuck the PhD.

Timing being everything, I finished my MA in September 2001. My thesis on the renewed interest in anarchism via the anti–corporate globalization movements and the institutional mechanisms of racial profiling did not make me particularly marketable amid the rabid patriotism of the post-9/11 era. After several months of unemployment and then working for the same wage I had earned before I had a master's degree—except for fewer hours and no health care—I revived the fantasy of Dr. Lawless. Like many others do in bad economies, I decided to go back to school.

Except I was rejected by every PhD program I applied to. My best friend cheered me up by pointing out that I had been working against institutions most of my life and shouldn't be surprised if they don't throw open the doors every time I knock. I let go of Dr. Lawless once again, but not Professor Lawless. The following year, I was accepted into an MFA program, which really made more sense, since my cultural studies thesis was a video and not a paper.

Eight years after hearing Beth Richie speak, I had two graduate degrees, $85,000 in student loans, and the honor of being called Professor Lawless at several part-time, adjunct-faculty teaching positions in various Southern California colleges. Academia had become my home. But it was a rental property I couldn't afford. Adjunct professors are contracted semester to semester. We are lucky if this includes an office to meet with students. After subtracting expenditures for preparation, travel, and supplies, our salaries can be as low as ten dollars an hour. There is no health care; these positions almost never become full-time. We are always, always looking for work, trying to secure the next contract while also looking for a tenure-track (permanent) job. At the same time, we must prove our value to our field by exhibiting, publishing, and presenting—all paid for out of our pockets. Classroom teaching is almost an aside, though negative evaluations from students can keep us from being rehired. We are contingent to the universities, not paid enough to

get our student loans out of forbearance, and not given health care. My new home, which had once been a fantasy, turned into a bad dream, reminiscent of when I was homeless a decade earlier. Well, sort of.

I was homeless in Seattle after I left a violent relationship. I qualified for a thirty-day stay in a confidential domestic-violence shelter the night Bryan grabbed the knives from the kitchen drawer, smashed the thirty-inch TV in the street, chased after me in his truck as I left the house on foot, and shot off his gun (the one he had for "the revolution"). After staying in the shelter, I couch surfed until I was able to get back on my feet and off welfare.

Being an adjunct professor is not really like my relationship with Bryan or its aftermath. There are distinct differences between then and now in terms of my socioeconomic status—homeless welfare recipient versus university professor—and my quality of life—I have a loving partner with whom I share a West Hollywood apartment. However, the intense lack of security, self-doubt, isolation, and never knowing what's coming next has painful similarities to being in an abusive relationship.

My first year out of grad school, I had a one-year full-time position with a good salary and benefits. For the couple of years since, I've been doing the equivalent of couch surfing, temporarily setting up shop in other people's classrooms while they're on sabbatical advancing their careers. The nagging question about where I fit in remains. Once it was connected to a peer group; now it is connected to a paycheck. It has always been connected to a fantasy about having something more.

And that's the problem. Having more is a terribly limited goal tangled up in the American dream, a belief that hard work pays off equally and fairly. What happens if you work hard and you don't reach your goal? What happens if you work hard for a home and then lose it? What if that home isn't safe or your basic needs aren't met? What happens if you work hard and all you find is deep loneliness? Success isn't the best revenge if all you're doing is working.

Of course, having more is no longer a reality for most of us. My dream of being a tenured university professor crashed this past winter as the U.S. economy crashed. In response to the thick application packets I sent out, I received letters that read,

Dear Ms. Lawless,

> Unfortunately the [fill in the blank] state budget deficit was greater than anticipated, and the search for the position in [fill in the blank] has been cancelled.

Having my career end before it takes off sucks. Yet, like when Bryan shot off the gun, this is my exit from a situation I am happy to leave. The truth is, I did go from being a homeless woman to being a university professor. Now I am going to go from being a university professor to who knows what. What I do know is that it's going to be so much more than just surviving.

That's How the Light Gets In

In June 2009 I was sitting in my apartment in Los Angeles writing about falling out of a stalled career in academia into the unknown of our crap economy. A year later, writing from my sweet adobe house in Santa Fe, New Mexico, I am very aware that the changes I've made are about much more than geography.

In L.A. the phrase "just turn around now" floated through my head like a command. It's a line from the Gloria Gaynor song (and the gay anthem) "I Will Survive." I've been dancing around survival my whole life. Taking stock of my situation last summer, I was reminded that surviving is not enough. Really embracing life means believing I deserve more than simply surviving (though it is never simple!). Believing is the challenge. It takes a leap of faith—a daunting proposition since I don't subscribe to any organized belief systems. So I learned to just turn around. To look in the cracks and crevices, shifting my viewpoint until the focus is slightly askew. To queer things up, if you will. Or, to quote another anthem, "Anthem" by Leonard Cohen, "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in."

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My last couple of years in L.A. I felt stuck, so beat down that change seemed impossible. I started to believe, like a needle stuck in the groove of a record, that there was something wrong with me, personally. What was actually wrong was that I was thinking of myself as an individual, forgetting that I was connected to various systems with deep systemic problems. The state of California and the state of higher ed in California were bankrupt and corrupt. The shifting grounds were too unstable to find my footing. While there were movements building around this, the lack of stability in my income and the lack of health-care benefits as an adjunct professor meant my involvement in those movements was not sustainable. Movement, for me, meant moving out of the state.

Movement also meant moving out of a state of depression. For several years my partner and I were taking turns being unemployed or underemployed. When we were employed, V was working seven days a week while I put in a second forty hours a week on tenure-track job applications that never panned out. We didn't have material things to lose, but we were hit hard by the crashing economy. Opportunity was shutting down all around us. Merely living hand-to-mouth was becoming a luxury.

The depression began to lift when we stopped correlating employment with success and unemployment with personal failure. By shifting our perspective we realized what we already knew: capitalism is a sick, insidious system that makes it difficult to see one's own complicity with it. For us, movement needed to be about love, not earning more money. We needed to make a move toward happiness rather than career opportunism. We chose northern New Mexico for its absolute and stunning beauty and Santa Fe for its art-centric atmosphere.

Surrounded by beauty and with a renewed relationship to creativity, we found that love easily became a more central location in our lives. We began to see ourselves as family. This is no small feat since we don't believe in marriage as the great equalizer, and we left California while the state was in a tizzy over the passage of Prop 8, the "California Marriage Protection Act," which overturned a previous ruling in favor of same-sex marriage. We were living in West Hollywood, one of the country's gay capitals, where marriage had become the defining factor of family rather than the normalizing, assimilationist force that it is.

Our "community" didn't have room for our queer, gender-nonconforming, anticapitalist relationship. Here, in our new location, we've met a lot of straight couples who have been together for decades without getting married or having kids. Oddly, in this small, relatively rural community, I feel less of an outsider than I did in West Hollywood as a queer woman in my forties who has a genderqueer partner, has never been married, is not planning on getting married, and has happily chosen not to have kids.

Finding our own way to define ourselves as family means we've recognized ways in which we are a conduit between our families of origin. For example, we financially help V's family members, who also live hand-to-mouth, while my father, whose class identity as an immigrant has spanned working class to upper middle class, has helped us out at crucial moments. Besides our other contributions, when we receive money from my dad, we always pass some of it on to V's family. This is a fundamental part of our shared budget.

Being a conduit between our families of origin also means that V, for the first time in his life, has a parental figure who can provide a safety net. I finally have family members who recognize me as a grown person able to take care of myself and others, while my father is still wondering when I am going to "make it" in my career. Through this, V and I now have identities affected by each other's rather than rooted solely in our families of origin. Clearly we retain our individual histories, but together we have a combined class identity different from the ones we grew up in.

Away from the normalizing forces of the mainstream gay community, academia, and the Los Angeles art market, and seeing myself in a new way in relation to family, I've become free from the single-minded focus on career I had after earning my MFA. I expected my graduate degrees would mean entrée into the middle classes, and, when that didn't occur, I felt like I had failed. Now, I find myself wondering why I expected something different from what I have, and why I get stuck thinking I need more.

It's a hard story to change. It's going up against the myth of the American dream, assimilation, and the idea that education guarantees movement. It's going up against the story of my dad's family—a family that was not seen as white when they immigrated (neither here nor in

their country of origin), yet now has the trappings and privileges of whiteness. As a second-generation U.S. citizen, is it my job to continue the myth of that dream, or is it my job to have the strength to change my family story? In my move toward love, I am finding the strength to be a catalyst for changing these family histories.

It is no coincidence that these connections emerged as I made my way through the California higher-ed diaspora. I had moved there to attend graduate school and change my status from "formerly homeless woman due to domestic violence" to "professor." I put a lot of cachet on that, and when it didn't happen, I felt lost. But by changing my story from one of individual failure to one of systemic failure, I am also changing the family stories I was directly and indirectly asked to uphold. I am putting an end to the cover-up.

In some cases the cover-up was quite literal—like the hole my high-school boyfriend put in a wall in my mother's home during a fight in which he broke my arm. My stepdad simply covered the hole with a pretty picture. The perfect metaphor. If everything looks okay, then it must be. That's our unspoken agreement, our covenant of silence. I took our covenant forward for a long time. Now, I am turning back to look through the cracks in that old drywall. Staring me right in the face is my grandmother Ilonka.

I can count on one hand the number of times I met her. I was told she was too difficult to be around. There is a story that she is to blame for her brother's suicide. My dad's childhood memories include his mother, Ilonka, sitting at the kitchen table, sobbing for hours, and that she was in and out of psych wards. He remembers not being able to sleep because his parents were fighting so loudly. He has insomnia to this day.

These stories don't reveal the fact that Ilonka was brought to the United States against her will, by her cousin, my grandfather. He was the one who forged a path for the family to escape anti-Semitism in Hungary, a needed role. But he wanted a Hungarian wife and Hungarian children. My grandmother became the family's sacrificial lamb. She probably sat at the table crying because she was forced to leave her Sephardic, Romani, Hungarian roots to live a life she didn't choose. One of her acts of resistance was to never learn English very well.

Of course, she may have sat at the table crying because so much of the family was killed in the Holocaust/Porrajmos[2] while she and my grandfather were on the fast road to assimilation. Maybe she knew something important was being left behind. Maybe she felt shame for her complicity in wiping out her culture for future generations. As a member of those future generations, this makes more sense to me than blaming her for all of the family's unhappiness. It also makes sense to me, a girl child a generation removed, that my story is not the same as my father's. I didn't pull myself up out of violence into the middle classes never to look back again.

My story is about a family who cut itself off from its own history to escape war, a family whose assimilation into whiteness meant a loss of culture and ethnicity. It's a story of diaspora and forced immigration. One of the most violent acts in this story was cutting me off from my grandmother. The message was, there is something so wrong with a part of who you are that you have to leave it behind. But I see the cracks in the story. I see I'm not the only woman in the family who struggled to live outside the framework of violence. I see it all because I simply turned around.

Educate then Agitate: Adjunct Faculty Are Standing Up and Fighting Back

Snapshot: Broken bones, black eyes, alcohol, heroin, food stamps, general assistance, domestic-violence shelter, homelessness, couch surfing, sexual assault, friends dying from overdoses and illnesses, a friend raped and murdered, a college degree earned and forgotten.

Snapshot: Forty years old and on another side of my own history, two graduate degrees and $90,000 of student debt yet hopeful for something new.

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2. *Porrajmos* is the Romani word for the Holocaust.

Snapshot: Hope fading, a college professor hustling for teaching gigs, editing gay porn, working as a home health-care aide, working in nonprofits, searching and searching for a tenure-track job, an economic collapse, bankruptcy, contracting at nonprofits, searching and searching for any job, unemployment checks in the summers, food stamps, state-funded dental and health care, a move to a less expensive state.

Snapshot: Teaching at a community college and never shutting up about the inequitable system creating the adjunct crisis, being elected to Faculty Senate, asking the new college president (a Latina known for her innovative policies to increase Latin@ student enrollment) what she's going to do to create better working conditions for the three hundred adjunct faculty and getting the response, "It isn't going to be the first thing on the docket, and adjuncts just don't make much money anywhere so I suggest you marry well."

Snapshot: Depression, anxiety, isolation, and an intense sense of failure tinged with embarrassed amusement when telling a friend who routinely exposes the assimilationist scam of "marriage equality" that my immediate response to the college president—"not all of us can legally get married"—was met with a round of applause while I desperately wanted to rescind my statement and break down the clusterfuck of issues at hand.

Snapshot: More regularly writing and publishing my story while participating in adjunct activist e-mail lists and Facebook pages, organizing a simple event for Campus Equity Week, learning from a New Faculty Majority organizer that this small action held great significance for the movement because it put my state on the map, having a colleague tweet a photo of us at our event that went viral and was picked up by *Al Jazeera* for a piece on higher education in the United States, catching my breath in fear for my job while in the same moment realizing that being public is the best job security I could have.

Snapshot: Attending a town-hall meeting on labor and justice, nervously taking the mic at the urging of the friend sitting to my right, after the friend sitting to my left demanded a trans*-inclusive curriculum in public schools, and describing our precarious working conditions at

the community college in front of two of the college's vice presidents, getting loud applause and a card from a labor lawyer in case there are any issues with my bosses as well as an invitation to speak at the next Community Labor Council meeting, realizing that no matter how many committees or task forces are established colleges are not going to change adjunct faculty working conditions—change is going to come from working with the labor movement.

Snapshot: A decade after being hired for my first temporary teaching job and a decade into my post-graduate-degree job search, being hired by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) on the recently launched higher-ed campaign unionizing adjunct faculty, quitting my current teaching job midsemester, moving back to the state I left during the economic collapse, leaving my partner and kitties until they can join me three months later, becoming part of an organizing team that won five union elections in less than a year.

Snapshot: Being in a room filled with six hundred union members from every work sector imaginable and listening to everyone break into loud applause as my friend Jessica Beard, another adjunct professor, walks onto the stage and introduces herself, getting tears in my eyes because I am no longer alone.

I am still trying to understand the whirlwind of changes in my life since I left academia and became a union organizer. I had invested years of intellectual and emotional labor, and my sense of self, in being a professor and looking for a full-time academic job. The intensity and competitiveness of academia messed with my head and confused many of my long-held personal values.

Before I earned my graduate degrees I existed on the margins, living, loving, and organizing, content in my location. Getting my degrees created a bizarre belief in some Horatio Alger bullshit. I got stuck on the singular narrative of "Domestic-violence survivor and former addict becomes professor." Of course, moving through cultural and class statuses by sheer determination and rugged individualism isn't feasible for most people. To get old-school, the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist heterosexist patriarchy is real. It's painfully lonely to believe one is capable of existing outside of this. It's a different pain than the weight of systemic oppression because the trap of individualism prevents people from seeing how to fight what truly needs to be fought.

What broke me out of nearly debilitating depression were several moments when I recognized that I was standing in the center of a growing movement. I was fighting back with my friends and colleagues, all of whom have equally thick stories about the financial, emotional, and physical consequences of no job security, no employer-provided health care, no living wage, no regular channels of participation in campus governance or community, and unfathomable debt.

There are over one million adjunct professors in the United States. That's a lot of people with a brick ceiling blocking their career paths. It's also a lot of people organizing.

Obviously with so many people come differences in goals, tactics, strategies, and values. Most of those in the movement leadership are straight, cisgender, middle-aged white men. Those of us who do not fall into all of those categories are people with cultural capital despite the lack of economic and other privileges. Or we are union staff. At times, what we are doing *feels* radical in its historicity, yet it is ultimately a reform movement. I agree with the current goals—it's the best option we have at this point—but I wonder if a more radical movement is possible. Specifically, I wonder if we can organize from an intersectional feminist framework approaching equity with radical inclusivity. I wonder this especially as the Black Lives Matter movement is beautifully modeling ways to address these very questions.

This is not a random or irrelevant query. Sixty percent of adjunct professors are female.[3] Ten percent of *all* college professors are underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and 73 percent of that 10 percent are contingent faculty. This movement has to address race and gender. I invited Irina Contreras to have a drink one afternoon and chew on this problem together with me. Irina is a friend and co-conspirator of many

3. The research uses the terms "women" and "men." Genderqueer, trans, gender-nonconforming, and non-binary genders are not included. I am using the term "female" with the assumption that within that 60 percent of people marked "woman," there are people who do not identify that way.

years who was finishing up her MFA at California College of the Arts (CCA) in the Bay Area when I was assigned to organize the contingent[4] faculty there. Having been an adjunct before, and very aware that she had been educated mostly by adjunct faculty, Irina has been active in the CCA unionization effort.

Irina noted that the creation of a faceless precarious workforce is not new. Adjunct professors are just the next wave in the rolling tide and, as she pointed out, not the only academic workers caught in the undertow. Janitorial staff, food-service workers, graduate-student teaching assistants, administrative support staff, and undergraduate work-study students are all struggling. Joining forces with these different stakeholders is an obvious way to grow the movement and break down the hierarchical nature of the university. Irina also pointed to the relationship between policing college campuses and gentrification. At CCA this plays out in a fear of houseless Black men who set up encampments near the campus. Administrative policy assumes students and faculty must be protected from this imagined "bogeyman." The school creates a system where Black security guards are hired to keep Black folks off campus. The school-to-prison pipeline and Proposition 209 (a 1996 law that banned affirmative action in hiring and admissions in California's public institutions) ensure a dearth of Black students on campus, so CCA's systemic policing is not suspect to most.

Stephanie Young, a poet and professor at Mills College in Oakland, California, who has been central to creating their union, told me in a conversation we had in her backyard one afternoon that she is not convinced it is possible for the adjunct movement to organize from an intersectional feminist framework. Stephanie did consider one way that intersectionality could be possible: through alliances with students around the issues we share—student debt, questioning the necessity for formal education, housing costs, gentrification, and the racial-justice movements actively using queer feminist organizing.

4. There are a lot of different terms for adjunct faculty. Part of this is institutional bureaucracy, and part of it is movement debates à la 1990s identity politics. I use "adjunct" and "contingent" interchangeably and generally follow each term by "faculty" unless I am making a point of reclaiming the term "adjunct" as a positive location in the university rather than a mark of failure.

Stephanie further explained that if contingent faculty were aligned with students rather than with university administration, this would destabilize the locus of power and allow the movement to make concrete structural changes instead of simply fighting to "get our piece of the pie."[5]

The adjunctification of the university began in the 1970s and 1980s, exactly as women, people of color, and queer and trans* folks entered academia in measurable numbers. Tenure was destroyed because of institutionalized misogyny, racism, cissexism, and homophobia deployed through neoliberal economic policies. Yet we still hold on to the cultural mythology that education is the great equalizer. It's true that students of color earn higher wages with a college degree. On the other hand, Stephanie brought up the troubling idea that many of the women of color she teaches will enter the workforce with such massive debt that they would potentially be in a better position not taking out tens of thousands of dollars of student loans.

A student I've worked closely with over the past year, Lukaza Branfman-Verissimo, recently graduated from CCA. Active in the Students of Color Coalition, Lukaza was part of the union organizing on campus and fearlessly spoke up to the administration in support of her professors. During our communications about the possibility of an intersectional feminist adjunct movement, Lukaza echoed Irina: the history of U.S. labor is largely the history of Black labor. Lukaza highlighted the clear and inherent links between the struggles for racial justice and economic justice during a Black Brunch–style intervention at an event we organized. She wrote:

> On this day in which we consider the power and strength that we gain from coming together to form unions, we also honor those who have come before us. Those union organizers who have fought for workers' rights and died for us to have a living wage, an eight-hour work day, health insurance, social security, family and maternity leave.

5. These ideas are actually from several conversations with Stephanie in real life, on Facebook, and at panel discussions. She and I both think and write about similar concerns in higher ed, and our conversations bleed into each other.

These people stood up to a system that used brutal force to try to stop them from empowering working people. And, as we honor this legacy of organizers in the United States, we also honor those thousands of people of color who continue to be killed at the hands of police in the streets of our country today. Those that hold the power in this country have a vested interest in our not coming together, not drawing the connection between the people's struggles for survival past and present. But we refuse that amnesia. So, we place the memory of all these people side by side. Let their names be called out and heard.

Snapshot: Standing in an art gallery in San Francisco's Mission District, a space that is often predominantly white but is not today because we organized this event with a consciousness about race and gender, surrounded by union members, adjunct faculty, artists, students, low-wage workers fighting for $15 and a union, Black Lives Matter activists, Critical Resistance organizers, Google bus/gentrification resisters, student-debt strikers, labor archivists and historians, a labor choir, legendary Bay Area artists, first-time spoken-word performers, my coworkers, my best friend, my partner, I confidently take the mic to a roomful of applause and say, "Thank you for being here."

Debt

By Javon Johnson

I am a full-time university professor and
my job is exactly as sexy as it sounds.
On most days I read
an ungodly amount. And,
when I am not doing that, I'm teaching
and when I am not doing that
I am either grading,
prepping classes,
in committee meetings,
or doing service work. And,
when I am not doing that
I'm advising and mentoring students,
serving the community in which I live,
conducting my own research, while
managing a full-time performance career,
in other words, I put in work.

I love my job though.
On most days teaching is a lot
like one of those complicated math problems
where if Jonny had 7 candy bars and
a train left Kansas at 3 p.m.
going 90 miles an hour,
how many basketballs

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can he cook on the roof
before the kids start smiling?
It is confusing but
I love how we come together
and almost always figure it out.

I had this one student,
who's as Brown as the border
that crossed her.
Asked me if I think
her white colleagues understand
that her family had been trying
to get her into college for generations?
Wondered if they understood
the weight of that? If they knew
she picked this university
the same way
her grandfather picked fruit:
slow and painful,
but what else was she gonna do?

We spoke about why so many of
her colleagues seemed angrier
with "illegal immigration"
than with illegal banking
practices. Fact:
It would cost this government
63 billion to pay for everyone's tuition
at public colleges and universities,
yet they spend 69 billion
to subsidize the costs,
and another 107 billion on student loans.

When tuition is steadily rising and
the starting salaries
are dropping for recent graduates,
degrees are no different
than your designer bag,

a cheap fashion statement
not even worth the trip to the mall.
No one ever tells you that
you have to drown in debt
in hopes of making it
to the shore; that
the loan system is a lot
like Alcatraz, like Rikers Island,
like getting fucked while
the guards don't even have the decency
to pretend to look the other way.
The difference between prisoners
and student debtors
is that students are taught to think
they are on the outside of the bars.

What kind of world do we live in
where it's okay to bail out banks
who are "too big to fail"
even though they bank on
the failure of students?
What world do we live in
where as a college professor
I too struggle to pay back student loans?
It's like I learned nothing
from Biggie, like I'm getting high
on my own supply.
Like I'm selling crack
to pay down my crack debt.
But I am the American Dream,
all shiny and bright lights. Beautiful,
like pulled-up bootstraps.

Some days I feel like a wolf
in sheep's clothing, like
a shepherd leading his flock to slaughter.
I teach classes on performance, structural

racism and gender inequality in a system
that is more willing to punish students
for plagiarism than for sexual assault.
What are we teaching our students
when we tell them that the thoughts
of dead white men
are far more valuable than their own
living bodies? Students have become nothing
more than Black Friday customers
whose pockets have been picked
clean long before they walked in
the store. The university
does not have time to worry
about whose body gets trampled
in the stampede of it all.

But our Black and Brown bodies being
here is a revolutionary act.
We force them to peel back the curtains
to a well-manicured show;
to deal with the borders,
the rape, the prison system, and
the racism it's all built on.
We watch them squirm
when we open our mouths
because they know we are not satisfied
with just getting into the tower,
we want to claw it down.
And, they should be uncomfortable with that;
it ain't called growing pains for nothing.

So, if Jonny boarded a train
from Kansas with more than
170,000 in debt leaving at 3 p.m.,
how long will it take for us to realize
that cooking basketballs on a roof
makes so much more sense than this?

Dear Nomy

Excerpts from the ongoing advice column by Nomy Lamm

Q: I recently got a job wherein for the first time I have a 401(k) option. I'm torn between putting away a few hundred dollars a month for my retirement (which is decades off) and donating that money to a progressive nonprofit or someplace else where it may be more needed. What do you think?

A: Having money to save or give away is a privilege, and it's always good to think about what effect you want to have on the world. If I had been asked this question five years ago, I would have said that the system won't exist anymore by the time you're of retirement age, that there are a lot of projects that need your money, and that the universe will provide if you live how you want the world to be. Put your money toward building a future that can support you when all this other shit topples.

That was before I had to file five years' worth of taxes all at once. Idealism can lead to harsh awakenings. Who knows if the world will take care of you if you don't plan to take care of yourself? The world-weary thing to do would be to take full advantage and save that shit. You never know what your life will be like in thirty years.