

South of the Garden

The Newsletter for the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South

Volume 44, Number 2

June 2023

Summer

It's almost summer in North Carolina, which, for some, means trips to the beach or the mountains for warm air and water or the promise of cool mountain breezes. At home in Durham, we can enjoy the Fourth of July Festival for the Eno, and, thereby, help to preserve land along a local river. I love summer, which, in my mind, begins with my birthday in late May along with the opening of swimming pools. I look forward to and rely on the rhythm of the seasons.

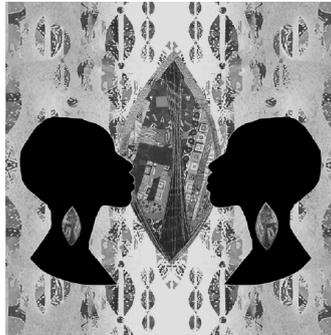
Since moving to North Carolina fifty years ago, I have relied on the rhythms of the political institutions in this state. Though Jesse Helms was our senator when I arrived, the governor and Supreme Court justices were usually reasonable people. Sometimes the legislature was more conservative than I liked, but not as extreme as some further south. But recent gerrymandering and voter suppression have aided the election of more Republicans in our state. They now have a supermajority in the NC House and Senate and can override any veto by our more progressive governor.

Our state Supreme Court is now controlled by startlingly conservative justices. The court recently reheard voting rights cases and reinstated laws that are unfavorable to voters, including requiring voter IDs, and overturned an anti-gerrymandering decision. The legislature, for its part, has introduced and is beginning to pass regressive bills: to ban abortions after twelve weeks and add more barriers to access, to eliminate background checks for gun purchases, to curtail the rights of trans youth, to eliminate tenure contracts for future faculty at state universities. And more.

It's a war on democracy, working people, women, and people of color. The income disparity in this country is a direct descendant of slavery, and the laws of the land favor property rights and rich people over the rights of working people, voters, and democracy itself. If you have not read Nicole Hannah Jones' book *The 1619 Project*, get it. Read the chapters, one at a time, or better yet, get a group of friends to read it with you and talk about it.

It's not random. The people who have taken control in North Carolina (and elsewhere) are serving the interests of the wealthy and disguising their efforts in culture wars to excite their base. Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan didn't really care about abortion one way or the other, but their strategists envisioned a coalition of big business, the Roman Catholic Church, and evangelical Protestants and create a voting block large enough to win elections.

When I begin to slide into despair, I lift my head, look around, and see the amazing groups that are working to shore up democracy. Many of these groups are registering voters and building relations with them. Please learn about and support groups like the Carolina Federation, Democracy NC, Down Home Carolina, Equality NC, and others.



Kindred Spirits

Illustration by Candace Thomas

Quilts

by Kimberley Pierce Cartwright

On June 19, 1865, Union Army General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, and announced that the Civil War had ended and all enslaved people were free, two years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth, also known as Freedom Day or Emancipation Day, commemorates the end of slavery in the United States. This momentous occasion has become a symbol of African American freedom and liberation and is celebrated each year by millions of people across the country.

I chose the Juneteenth weekend to welcome African American quilters to celebrate that freedom and liberation through quilt-work at our Kindred Spirits: A Convergence of African American Quilters, June 15-17. The conference will feature lectures, classes, and a pop-up quilt show "Deconstructing the Mammy Archetype Through African American Art Quiltwork" to visualize our thoughts, help heal our spirits, and promote unity among the participants.

The Mammy Archetype is a stereotypical representation of African American women that was popularized in the media during the 19th and 20th centuries. The Mammy was often portrayed as an overweight, jolly, loyal servant who was dedicated to taking care of the white family she worked for. The mammy image has been deeply ingrained in US culture and used to justify and perpetuate racist beliefs about African American women as submissive and inferior. The mammy stereotype has also been used to justify the enslavement and subjugation of African American women.

Quilting has been an important art form in African American culture throughout slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement and the present. Enslaved women used scraps of cloth to create functional and beautiful quilts. These quilts served to comfort and warm cold bodies. They have also been used as a form of artistic expression and a means of storytelling. African American quilt work today is a tool used to deconstruct and challenge the Mammy Archetype. Quilt artists use the medium to challenge and subvert racist stereotypes.

These quilts often feature images of African American women as strong, independent figures who are not subservient to white people. They may also incorporate symbols of empowerment and resistance, such as the fist as a prominent marque of the Black Power Movement. One example of a quilt that challenges the Mammy Archetype is "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" by Faith Ringgold. The quilt challenges the viewer to confront their own feelings about the Mammy Archetype and the racist beliefs that it perpetuates.

As we celebrate Juneteenth this year, let's remember the legacy of African American quilt-making and the ways that it is used to deconstruct harmful stereotypes. Let's celebrate the richness and diversity of African American culture. Let us also recognize the work that needs to be done to dismantle the systems of oppression that continue to impact the lives of African Americans today.

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. More info: rcwms.org/events.

*June 4, 2023, Sunday, 4:00-5:00 pm EDT
A READING by Laurel Ferejohn (via zoom)
Join Laurel for a reading from her novel *Crossings*, recently long-listed for the Lee Smith Novel Prize from Blair Publisher. In the novel, set on a small island in 1969, a secret friendship offers respite for Tomby, who is a gay Marine, and Valetta, the wary wife of one of Tomby's nemeses in the squadron. With Vietnam looming, the two friends become a safe port for one another as each seeks to survive, define their life, and find belonging.
Laurel is a writer and editor who has published fiction, memoir, essays, and poetry. She occasionally teaches flash writing through RCWMS. She will be introduced by author Abigail DeWitt, who teaches at the Table Rock Writers Workshop.
Free. Registration required: www.rcwms.org/events

*June 15-17, 2023
KINDRED SPIRITS: A Convergence of African American Quilters
The Fruit, 305 S. Dillard St, Durham, NC
Join us for a time of sisterhood, exploration and fun during Juneteenth weekend. Featuring a variety of workshops from some of the top quilting professionals in the country and a pop-up quilt show, this event is an opportunity to explore African American quilting, network and celebrate the legacy of Juneteenth.
Leader: Kimberley Pierce Cartwright is an artist, painter and quilter. She is also the News and Public Affairs Director at NCCU.
Cost: \$125-225.
Register: www.rcwms.org/events

*June 16, 2023, Friday, 6:00-9:00 pm EDT
KINDRED SPIRITS: Quilt Show
The Fruit, 305 S. Dillard St, Durham, NC
Theme: *Deconstructing the Mammy Archetype*
As part of our Kindred Spirits: A Convergence of African American Quilters conference, we will present a quilt show for public viewing during Durham's Third Friday celebration of Juneteenth. All are welcome.
Cost: Free. No registration needed.
More info: www.rcwms.org/events

June 17, 2023, Saturday, 9:00 am-4:00 pm EDT
What It Looks Like to Us and the Words We Use
The Stable in Durham
Poet Ada Limón writes and speaks with a voice that makes you lean closer—to her words, to the world—in full-bodied wonder and, often, laughter. She has written six books of poetry, hosted the poetry podcast *The Slowdown*, become the 24th Poet Laureate of the US—and inspired our latest art & writing retreat. Join us for a day of delight & creativity. Thoughtful writing prompts and unique art projects, evoked by the retreat's title poem will invite us to notice & name what is sacred to us. Through words, landscape, art, we'll tend to our spiritual connection with the natural world, each other, and ourselves.
Cost: \$150
Leaders: Claudia Fulshaw is a graphic designer, artist, long-time wanderer and leader of retreats that combine Art, Spirit, Nature & Rest. Mandy Mizelle is a chaplain, minister, writer, perpetual procrastinator, and imperfection advocate. A lover of words, her favorite sacred texts are the everyday stories of our lives.
Register: www.artwanders.com.

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*June 20, 2023, Tuesday, 10:00-11:30 am EDT
HISTORIC STAGVILLE EMANCIPATION TOUR
Historic Stagville, 5828 Old Oxford Hwy., Durham
As part of Stagville's commemoration of Juneteenth, this guided tour will highlight how enslaved people claimed their freedom at one of North Carolina's largest plantations. Learn how formerly enslaved families celebrated, defended themselves, and organized, while the plantation owners strategized to hold on to their power and wealth. The outdoor walking tour on uneven ground stops at historic buildings. Wear comfortable shoes and bring sunscreen.
Cost: \$10/person. Stagville also welcomes donations.
Register: www.rcwms.org/events

*June 21, 2023, 7:00-8:30 pm EDT (3rd Wednesdays)
THE MINISTRY OF BLACK WOMEN'S SELF-CARE:
A Series with Kim McCrae (via Zoom)
Allowing our bodies, minds, and spirits to break down in the course of doing our work puts ourselves and our work at risk. This series offers practical tools for everyday self-care to Black women-identified people in all forms of ministry, in church and community.
Leader: Kimberly (Gaubault) McCrae
Cost: \$10-\$40
Register: www.rcwms.org/events

August 16-20, 2023
BEING WISELY HUMAN with Therese Fitzgerald
Wellbeing Retreat Center, Tazewell, TN
Join us for a retreat in the idyllic Appalachian Mountains. During our time together we will delve into a state of profound mindfulness. With the support of our fellow practitioners, the nourishing power of solitude and silence, and the opportunity to open ourselves to new insights, this retreat promises to be a transformative journey of self-discovery and renewal.
Leader: Therese Fitzgerald lives on the island of Maui with her husband and works as a hospice chaplain and a Dharma teacher. Originally from North Carolina, she trained at the San Francisco Zen Center, was ordained as a Dharma teacher by Thich Nhat Hanh, and has been teaching for more than 30 years.
Contact: Patty at patty@wellbeingcc.org.
Cost: \$465-\$820, depending on accommodations
www.wellbeingretreatcenter.org/therese-fitzgerald

*September 17-24, 2023
WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING for Women
Trinity Center, Salter Path, NC
Wouldn't you like a whole week of quiet days to think and write? Come spend a week of quiet and writing with a supportive group of women at the beautiful Trinity Center. We observe silence in the daytime so participants can read, write, or rest. In the evenings we gather to reflect on the day and share our work with one another. Everyone gets their own room.
Cost: \$850, includes lodging and meals
Contact: jeanette@rcwms.org

*October 5-6, 2023, Thursday-Friday
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival
Trinity Ave. Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC
Together we will highlight excellent preaching, hone our homiletic skills. There will be workshops, meals, sermons, and worship. In person with masks.
Cost: TBA
Register: www.rcwms.org/events

*RCWMS Weeks of QUIET & WRITING
September 17-24, 2023
January 2-9, May 12-19, 2024
Info: contact Jeanette at info@rcwms.org

(Continued on back.)

Autonomy

by Allison Kirkland

They were telling stories about my body even before they could see it. Stories of caution, of conjecture. "She's not as big as she should be by now," said the doctors. "There's something wrong, but we don't know what it is." So, a cesarian section brought me into the world 6 weeks early. The rest of my body looked like other babies, in miniature, but to everyone's surprise my hands had formed differently. My left arm was fused at the elbow and always sat at a ninety-degree angle. I had one finger on each hand. I weighed only one pound, sixteen ounces.

My mother lay in the cold white hospital room as doctors filtered in with bits of news. "Her chances of survival aren't good," they said, leaving no room for questions. "Her weight is already dropping. She's in intensive care." "Babies born this prematurely usually experience severe brain damage," said another doctor "You should prepare yourself for that outcome."

At twenty-six I scour the available therapists on Psychology Today. I look for a counselor who specializes in relationships and who is located near my office so I can fit it into my lunchbreak. There are only a few who are taking new clients, and I choose the oldest, thinking that she might be wise.

It's summer, and the air is stifling as I walk the few blocks to her office. During our first meeting I tell her that I'm there because I'm ready to start dating for the first time. She seems excited at the thought, and requests that between sessions I think of places to volunteer as a way of meeting new people.

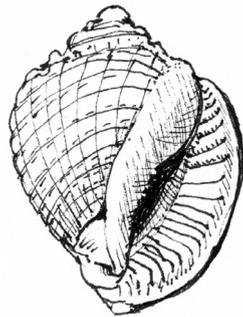
Toward the end of our second session, she looks me up and down, expensive-looking gold earrings jangling loudly in her ears. "I've been thinking about your problem." Problem seems like a surprising word; I wonder what she's referring to. "Men are very superficial. Last session we talked about volunteering as a way to meet single men. Perhaps you could volunteer at a center for the blind. That way you could meet a man who could love you for who you really are."

I stand up and walk out of her office, my body knowing the way before my brain can calculate what I'm doing. I never contact her again, but for years my brain repeats her story because it's a story I've heard from others, too, about what kind of love my body is worthy of receiving. I can only be loved by someone who can't see my body. Maybe she's right.

Later that week I'm waiting for the train at my neighborhood subway stop when a man humbly bows and hands me a few crumpled dollar bills. It's not the first time this has happened, but I'm too tired to refuse it. I take the money and nod my head. "Bless you," he says. I'm thankful for the connection of another person, that I get to witness kindness in a day where maybe others don't, but I wonder what story he's telling himself about my body that makes him choose me for his misdirected generosity.

I'm twenty-eight and getting a master's degree in creative writing. I'm the only visibly disabled member of the class and I'm trying, for the first time, to write about my body. We sit in classrooms high above a

(Continued next column.)



noisy city, sharing a long table, our stories on papers fanned out with red marks and penciled thoughts. I write something funny and grateful, and the class wants to know about my pain. "Are you being funny to cover over the shame?" they ask. They cock their heads almost in unison, asking questions about my stories that I haven't even thought to ask myself yet. I'm not sure. Maybe? But pain and shame are the only stories I've ever heard about what it means to be in a body like mine. I'm trying to show them that there's also something else, a kind of joy.

I don't have the words for it yet, but I'm spending my days in these classrooms trying to excavate my own story from the mountain of other people's narratives that have attached to my body like little remoras. Narratives I didn't even know I was carrying have lodged so deeply that I have a hard time telling which belong to me. It will take a lifetime to untangle them, to wrestle the stories of my body away from people who don't even know what they are taking away.

I'm 31 and on a date with the man who will become my husband. It's the first time I'm picking him up in my car and I don't know what he'll think when he sees that I perch in the driver's seat on a makeshift cushion and that two blocky knobs latch on the steering wheel so I can grip it. The car has been modified just for me. My feet sit on two heavy pedal extenders, the gear shift is latched with a rubber band. My body stiffens as his eyes explore the car. He doesn't say anything. Instead, he smiles as his hands roam across the unfamiliar knobs and buttons. I feel my body relax. I smile.

Eight years later, *Roe v. Wade* is overturned on an unassuming Friday morning. I feel the news in my body first. It's the same feeling I had the morning after the 2016 election of a man who will make some bodies less safe in the world. It's something I've felt before, from a time I can't identify or maybe even know at all: involuntarily stooped over, like I've been punched in the gut, like someone is stepping on me.

I can't stop thinking about what I've recently begun telling my creative writing students. It's not something I heard in my graduate program. I didn't even know if it was real. All I knew is that each time, it held true for me.

Make your writing practice an embodied experience, I tell them. I always stop here to see if they are listening, to see if there are any sparks of recognition. I say it slowly because it's important. When you're writing, or revising, you should learn to listen to your body. In workshop, when you're receiving comments from other writers, listen to your body.

When a piece of writing is finished, I say, you'll feel it in your body. What does finished feel like for you? The first few times I wondered if they'd listen to someone whose body didn't look like any of theirs, or if my words were already drowned out by the stories they were telling themselves about what people in my body could or couldn't do. But I guess maybe that's what teaching is, right? A way to share something you know with others? So I keep saying it.

Listen to your body, I say. This is so important. This is a part of the process. Don't ever stop listening to your body. When another student's feedback rings true, you'll feel it in your body, I say. When you write the truth, you'll feel it in your body.

Allison Kirkland is a writer based in Durham, NC. This essay won second place in the 2022 RCWMS Essay Contest.

Drawing by Sue Sneddon

Calendar...

ONGOING

* 2nd Tuesday each month, 11:30 am–1:30 pm EDT
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women (via Zoom)
Various leaders.
Contact: RCWMS, info@rcwms.org.

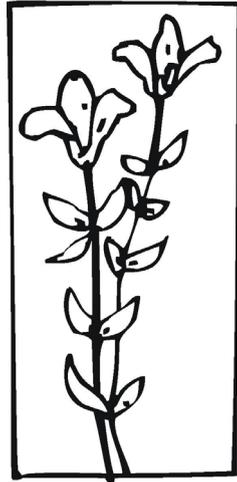
DEMOCRACY OUT LOUD: Weekly Protest Rally (Formerly Tuesdays with Tillis)
Tuesdays, 11:30 am–12:30 pm EDT (via Zoom)
Nonviolent community of resistance began its weekly street protests in January 2017 and continues on Zoom for education, support, and action.
All are welcome.
To register, email name to jmwhee52@gmail.com.

MUSIC: takeOut jazz with mahaloJazz!
Wednesdays, weekly, 5:30–6:30 & 7–8:00 pm EDT
The Eddy, Saxapahaw, NC
Join Alison Weiner for jazz every Wednesday.
Reservations are helpful: The Eddy, 336-535-2010.

June 15, 2023, 7:00 pm EDT
TARA PRACTICE: Practicing the Sadhanas of the 21 Taras with Rachael Wooten (via Zoom)
Monthly on 3rd Thursday
Drawing from her 2020 book, *Tara: The Liberating Power of the Female Buddha*, Wooten will offer teachings about Tara and lead a guided meditation.
Leader: Rachael Wooten, PhD, Jungian analyst, writer, and Tibetan Buddhist dharma teacher.
Cost: Free. More: www.bhumisparsha.org/events/

FINDING FREEDOM: White Women* Taking on Our Own White Supremacy (via Zoom)
Online workshops that aim to deepen our understanding of how we as white women are complicit with white supremacy. *All women, gender-nonconforming, trans, mixed-race and white-passing people of color welcome.
Cost: \$50–300.
Info and dates: www.wearefindingfreedom.org

SOLO WANDERINGS & SOCIAL WANDERINGS!
Creative Retreats (with day and overnight options)
The Stable, a retreat, Durham, NC
Sign up for a self-guided one, or bring a friend or five and enjoy a self-guided group art retreat.
Abundant materials, detailed instructions, beverages and snacks included. Ages 12 and up.
Leader: Claudia Fulshaw, artist & creative retreat leader.
Cost: \$115 solo/\$75 extra person; overnight is extra
Contact: artwanders.com, claudia@artwanders.com



Essay Contest

RCWMS is committed to supporting women as they find their voices and make them heard. In addition to writing classes, workshops, and retreats, we run an annual essay contest. Women and nonbinary people 18 years of age and older may submit previously unpublished nonfiction essays of 1,200 words or less.

THEME: Essays should focus on themes of repair, release, or renewal. Each of us writes amid torn hearts, fractured communities, and broken systems. When do we repair? What do we release? How do we renew? We invite essays that explore, complicate, and/or write against this theme.

DETAILS: Writers may submit up to 2 nonfiction essays, 1,200 words or less. Submit online only: rcwms.submittable.com/submit. Previous first-place winners and current RCWMS Board members not eligible. No sermons, please. Do not put your name on your essay(s). Fill out the online cover letter form with the essay's title, your name, address, phone, and email. Submissions open June 15 and close July 31, 2023.

PRIZES: \$300 for first place, \$200 second, and \$100 third. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, in September or December 2023. Winners will be notified by email.



RCWMS is a forty-five-year-old nonprofit dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. RCWMS sponsors workshops, conferences, and retreats on women, religion, creativity, spirituality, and social justice. The organization mentors and encourages young women, religious leaders, writers, and activists.

RCWMS appreciates contributions of time, energy, money, and stock. To contribute, contact RCWMS or visit www.rcwms.org. We are especially grateful for support from E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Mike McLeod, Emerald Isle Realty, Inavale Foundation, and the Triangle Community Foundation.

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ISSN 0890-7676
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