

lution must be pushed to genius in a way that is understandable to the laity. This genius must first be settled in the process of inner transformation.

The only way to create lasting peaceful outcomes is to pursue such a goal based in the deep and abiding sense of peace that dwells within all of us. This is the only option whose basis, means, and end has the power to relegate the aggressive basis of war into obsolescence.

afterword

howard zinn

IT IS A TRIBUTE to the achievements of the “women’s movement” of the last few decades that, as in the preceding pages, we can have the intensely personal, honest testimonies of men and women about their most secret fears and longings. Reading their stories, one must marvel at the sheer variety of human experience, usually concealed from us as we are taught to see others in the simplistic categories cherished in a myopic culture.

The dominant culture, narrow-minded, suspicious, insists that we answer the questions on all the bureaucratic forms we encounter in the course of living the modern life: Are you male or female? Are you black or white? Are you a citizen or foreign-born? The people in Rebecca Walker’s book defy those questions.

There is something comparable in the history examinations given in schools all over the country: Answer this question, true or false. What is false is the idea that human

behavior can be forced into such narrow channels, compelled to make choices that violate our natures.

Many of the testimonies in this book rebel against society's insistence on a clear-cut distinction between men and women, on preconceived ideas of what is "masculine" and what is "feminine." All of us, the dominant culture declares, must choose one or the other, or rather, have the choice made for us, on the basis of a biological distinction that allows no deviation and remains fixed for the rest of our lives.

Once we have been thus branded and herded into one corral or another, we are expected to behave like everyone else in that corral. And so women are to be compliant, sexually and ideologically, while men are to be strong and dominant, in an artificial division of labor that demeans both sexes.

We are given arbitrary definitions of what is "normal," ironically, in a society that pretends to sanctify individualism while not allowing the individual self-determination. Indeed, a government that claims to care about human rights punishes those who want to be themselves. As one of the writers here points out, the construction of artificial social differences amounts to a violent maintenance of the status quo.

The trick played on men is that while they are supposed to relish their strength, the reality is that they live in a hierarchical world in which only a small number of men have power over the rest: can exploit them economically, can send them off to war. The trick played on women is that their presumed natural delicacy is under constant attack by a world that limits their possibilities for a full life. While pre-

tending to revere them as mothers, this world puts impossible economic pressures on their ability to raise children, and then takes these children, when they are grown, off to die.

Men and women are set against each other as handy in-house enemies while the larger society rules both groups from afar. The challenge then, as Rebecca Walker reminds us, is for men and women to find their purpose in life independent of what the dominant culture has ordained for them. We must not let the rulers of society define us, because if left on our own, we may find that we define ourselves solely by our capacity for love and connectedness, and not by our allegiance to artificial ideals of masculine or feminine.

Perhaps the most pernicious of these artificial definitions is that which says men are naturally violent and women, as bearers of children and supporters of men, will therefore be willing accomplices in this violence.

If this were so, political leaders would not have to work so strenuously to inculcate "patriotism" from the time little children are taught to salute the flag and pledge allegiance and adore military heroes. They would not have to use the most sophisticated propaganda tools to persuade the population that a war is necessary for "freedom" or "democracy" or "national security" or "to end all wars." They would not have to entice young men into military service with promises of economic security, nor have to work hard to convince their mothers and wives and sweethearts that they are doing something noble, "for their country."

I like the story in this book about a father who has to counter the idea in his children that "black manhood" de-

mands physical prowess and military heroism. Years later, his son, the writer of the essay, is told by a spiritualist about Tehuti, a deity who says that we should be neither warriors nor victims. The person to be admired is one who does not fight, but who watches and waits, analyzes and documents. "They are the ones who remain long after the battlefields are paved over with asphalt and strip malls. And then they tell their tale."

The power holders in society will try to divide us by gender or race or religion or national boundaries. But we will continue to resist that, will continue to insist on crossing all those boundaries. We do this because as human beings we have a common interest in peace and love, and we know that it is only the recognition of this common interest that can save us.