

MAY 8 1986

TALK TO CLEVELAND FEMINISTS

APRIL 6, 1983

THAT PLACE ON BELLFLOWER

By Sonia Pressman Fuentes

- HISTORY -

ABOUT 2 OR 3 YEARS AGO, I WAS AT A DINNER PARTY IN WASHINGTON, D. C., SIMILAR TO THIS ONE, WITH MANY OF THE WOMEN, AND ONE OF THE MEN, WHO HAD WORKED FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN WASHINGTON IN THE MID-SIXTIES. I'LL NAME THOSE PRESENT BECAUSE SOME OF YOU MAY KNOW THEM: MARY EASTWOOD, CATHERINE EAST, BUNNY SANDLER, SHEILA TOBIAS, DAISY FIELDS, ALTHEA SIMMONS, TINA HOBSON, AND PHINEAS INDRITZ.

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEAL, MARY EASTWOOD AROSE, JUST AS I HAVE DONE NOW, AND BEGAN TO TALK ABOUT A PIN WHICH BELONGED TO A SUFFRAGIST NAMED BETSY GRAVES REYNEAU. MRS. REYNEAU, WHOSE GRANDFATHER WAS CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE MICHIGAN STATE SUPREME COURT, WAS IN THE FIRST GROUP OF SIX WOMEN ARRESTED ON BASTILLE DAY, JULY 14, 1917, FOR PICKETING THE WHITE HOUSE WITH BANNERS READING, "LIBERTY, EQUALITY, AND FRATERNITY." SIXTEEN WOMEN WERE ARRESTED THAT DAY, BOOKED FOR "UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY," AND SENTENCED TO 60 DAYS IN THE OCCOQUAN WORKHOUSE IN VIRGINIA FOR "OBSTRUCTING TRAFFIC." AS LATER RECORDED BY ONE OF THE WOMEN:

NO WOMAN THERE /AT OCCOQUAN/ WILL EVER FORGET THE SHOCK AND HOT RESENTMENT THAT RUSHED OVER HER WHEN SHE WAS TOLD TO UNDRRESS BEFORE THE ENTIRE COMPANY....WE SILENCED OUR IMPULSE TO RESIST THIS INDIGNITY, WHICH GREW MORE POIGNANT AS EACH WOMAN NAKEDLY WALKED ACROSS THE GREAT VACANT SPACE TO THE DOORLESS SHOWER....

THOSE 16 WOMEN WERE PARDONED BY THE PRESIDENT AFTER 3 DAYS, BUT SUBSEQUENT SUFFRAGIST PICKETS IMPRISONED AT OCCOQUAN SUFFERED ADDITIONAL INDIGNITIES. THE WATER THEY DRANK WAS KEPT IN AN OPEN PAIL. THE SAME PIECE OF SOAP WAS USED FOR EVERY PRISONER, SOME OF WHOM WERE DISEASED. BLANKETS WERE WASHED ONCE A YEAR. THE BEANS, HOMINY, RICE, CORN MEAL, AND CEREAL ALL HAD WORMS IN THEM. SOMETIMES, THE WORMS FLOATED ON TOP OF THE SOUP. THERE WERE OPEN TOILETS, WHICH COULD ONLY BE FLUSHED BY CALLING A GUARD FROM THE OUTSIDE. WOMEN WHO WERE ON A HUNGER STRIKE WERE FORCE FED.

IN DECEMBER 1917, A MASS MEETING WAS HELD TO HONOR 81 SUFFRAGISTS WHO HAD SERVED IN THE DISTRICT JAIL OR THE OCCOQUAN WORKHOUSE. ON THAT OCCASION, SILVER PINS IN THE SHAPE OF A PRISON CELL DOOR WITH A CHAIN ACROSS WERE PRESENTED TO EACH "PRISONER OF FREEDOM." WE ARE AWARE OF THE EXISTENCE OF ONLY THREE OF THESE PINS TODAY. ONE OF THEM IS ON DISPLAY IN THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SECTION OF THE "WE THE PEOPLE" EXHIBIT AT THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION'S MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY, THE SECOND IS PART OF THE RESEARCH COLLECTION OF THAT MUSEUM, AND I AM WEARING THE THIRD TONIGHT.

MRS. REYNEAU, WHO WAS WHITE, WENT ON TO BECOME A DISTINGUISHED PAINTER OF BLACK LEADERS. THOSE SHE PAINTED INCLUDED GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER, THURGOOD MARSHALL, WILLIAM HASTIE, MARY McLEOD BETHUNE, WALTER WHITE, MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., AND JUDGE JANE BOLIN (THE FIRST BLACK WOMAN JUDGE). IN 1947-1948, AN EXHIBITION OF 30 OF HER PORTRAITS WAS SHOWN IN MORE THAN 25 MUSEUMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART. HER COLLECTION OF 37 PORTRAITS WAS SUBSEQUENTLY GIVEN TO THE SMITHSONIAN, AND A NUMBER OF THEM MAY BE SEEN AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT

GALLERY. COINCIDENTALLY, SOME OF HER PORTRAITS WILL BE INCLUDED IN AN EXHIBITION ENTITLED, "PORTRAITS FROM THE HARMON FOUNDATION," OPENING THIS APRIL 17 AT THE ANACOSTIA NEIGHBORHOOD MUSEUM ON MARTIN LUTHER KING AVENUE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

AFTER MRS. REYNEAU'S DEATH, HER DAUGHTER GAVE HER PIN TO BETSY'S FRIEND, PAULI MURRAY, WHO IS A WRITER, POET, LAWYER, EDUCATOR AND THE FIRST BLACK WOMAN EPISCOPAL MINISTER. PAULI BEGAN THE TRADITION OF KEEPING THE PIN FOR A WHILE, AND THEN PASSING IT ON TO ANOTHER FEMINIST.

I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU AN EXPERIENCE I HAD IN RESEARCHING THE HISTORY OF THIS PIN. YESTERDAY, I RECEIVED A NOTE FROM KATHY BRAEMAN, WHO HAS DONE SUCH A TERRIFIC JOB IN ARRANGING THIS DINNER, ENCLOSING A LETTER I HAD GIVEN HER OVER THE WEEKEND. IT WAS A LETTER I HAD WRITTEN TO MARY EASTWOOD 7 YEARS AGO SHARING WITH HER THE DETAILS OF MY VISIT TO ALICE PAUL SHORTLY BEFORE HER DEATH. AS I PUT DOWN KATHY'S NOTE, I RECEIVED A CALL FROM EDITH MAYO, CURATOR OF THE DIVISION OF POLITICAL HISTORY AT THE SMITHSONIAN'S MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY, CONCERNING THE TWO PINS AT THE SMITHSONIAN. WHEN I MENTIONED THAT PAULI MURRAY HAD STARTED A TRADITION OF PASSING ON MRS. REYNEAU'S PIN, EDITH TOLD ME THAT SHE HAD MET PAULI AT AN ERA MARCH IN WASHINGTON, AND LATER HEARD HER PREACH THE EULOGY AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR ALICE PAUL IN 1977. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SMITHSONIAN WERE THE ONLY GROUP ALLOWED INTO THE NATIONAL CATHEDRAL TO PHOTOGRAPH THIS MEMORIAL SERVICE, AND SHE, THEREFORE, HAS PHOTOGRAPHS OF PAULI PREACHING THE EULOGY.

SHE WENT ON TO SAY THAT IN RESEARCHING HER PAPER ON SYMBOLISM IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT, SHE HAD DISCOVERED THAT THE PINS GIVEN TO THE 81 AMERICAN SUFFRAGISTS IN 1917 WERE DESIGNED BY ALICE PAUL AND WERE BASED ON THE "HOLLOWAY BROACH." HOLLOWAY PRISON IN ENGLAND WHERE THE BRITISH SUFFRAGISTS HAD BEEN JAILED HAD A PORTCULLIS AT THE ENTRANCE; THAT'S AN IRON GRATING WHICH IS HUNG OVER A GATEWAY AND LOWERED BETWEEN GROOVES TO PREVENT PASSAGE. SYLVIA PANKHURST HAD DESIGNED A BROACH FOR THE BRITISH SUFFRAGISTS IN THE SHAPE OF THIS PORTCULLIS. AFTER ALICE PAUL WAS JAILED IN ENGLAND, SHE WAS GIVEN A HOLLOWAY BROACH, AND THAT FORMED THE BASIS FOR HER DESIGN OF THE PIN LATER GIVEN TO THE AMERICAN SUFFRAGISTS.

SO THIS PIN I'M WEARING TONIGHT SYMBOLIZES THE LINE OF WOMEN FIGHTING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS FROM THE TIME OF THE BRITISH SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT TO TODAY: FROM SYLVIA PANKHURST TO ALICE PAUL TO PAULI MURRAY AND TO THOSE OTHERS WHO HAVE SINCE WORN THE PIN: AILEEN HERNANDEZ, FIRST WOMAN COMMISSIONER OF THE EEOC; ELIZABETH DUNCAN KOONTZ, FIRST BLACK WOMAN DIRECTOR OF THE FEDERAL WOMEN'S BUREAU; CATHERINE EAST; MARY EASTWOOD; AND I.

ON THAT NIGHT IN WASHINGTON WHEN MARY EASTWOOD TOLD THE STORY OF THIS PIN, I LOOKED AROUND THE TABLE TO SEE WHO WOULD BE RECEIVING IT. YOU CAN IMAGINE MY SURPRISE WHEN MARY HANDED IT TO ME. MY PRINCIPAL EMOTION,

HOWEVER, WAS ONE OF GUILT. I FELT THERE WERE ANY NUMBER OF PEOPLE AT THAT TABLE, AND NOT AT THAT TABLE, MORE WORTHY OF THE HONOR. THE FOLLOWING MORNING I CALLED PAULI, WHO WAS UNABLE TO BE AT THE DINNER, AND DISCUSSED MY FEELINGS WITH HER. SHE TOLD ME TO "ENJOY."

AND THAT'S WHAT I SAY TO JANE PICKER AS I PASS THIS PIN, NOW TURNED INTO A PENDANT, ON TO HER, WITH GREAT PLEASURE AND MUCH AFFECTION.