

The power of non-violence and the violence of "Homeland Security"

Terry Tempest Williams

30 March 2003

Sent: Sunday, March 30, 2003 1:44 AM
Subject: this will make you cry

This letter was forwarded from the *Minnesota Women's Press*. Williams was writing to people at Dartmouth, where she was recently visiting and speaking.

Dearest Andy:

[first line deleted] as we gather together in these last moments of peace, I can hardly bear to imagine what we are about to unleash. I just wanted to extend to you my love and gratitude.

The shared days at Dartmouth were extraordinary -- and I have to tell you that the students had such an impact on me, so much so, I carried their inspiration with me when I returned home and then back to Washington, D.C., the following week.

I wanted to share these thoughts with you, hoping that you will convey to the students in the Environmental Studies Program, along with the wonderful faculty, that in a very real way, they accompanied me.

The intensity of the capital was palpable -- Sam Hamill asked if I would accompany William Merwin and him to deliver the 13,000 poems against the war to Congress. On March 5, we presented the poems to the Democratic Progressive Caucus. Congresswoman Marcie Kaptur from Ohio was amazing saying "What we need most right now are words." Kucinich (sp.) also from Ohio who as you know is running for president, quoted Aristotle and Plato. He was truly eloquent. And John Conyer moved people to tears when he spoke about the power of poetry to change society. "Words were what moved all of us to the streets to follow Dr. King." William then read his new poem, "Ogres." I had to fight back the tears.

When asked if he thought this would have any affect on President (Resident) Bush, Merwin said, "We are under no illusions. It is our gesture on behalf of democracy. Why would this move an illiterate and illegitimate president?"

It was very, very rich -- allowing me to believe there is still some semblance of democracy in this nation of ours.

On Saturday, there was the "Code Pink" Rally at Martin Luther King Park. [1, 2] I honestly cannot articulate the power of that day -- When Michelle Shocked (a former Mormon) stood up on stage and put on a burqa made from American flags -- and then belted out in the power of her voice, "The Ballad of Penny Evans". People were physically stunned -- the recognition of, the truth of that gesture. Again, the tears.

We walked four miles or so to Lafayette Park directly across from The White House only to find a blockade of police dressed in black, bullet proof vests, rifles, clubs -- standing shoulder to shoulder. We were not allowed to enter the park, this park that is a public park, this park I had just sat in hours before, this park where "Pro-life demonstrators" were standing in with their hideous, brutal pictures. They were standing in front of The White House -- where we could not.

We tried to negotiate with the police. It was clear they could barely uphold the law they were being asked to enforce. We made the decision that 25 of us would test the waters Rachel Bagby, one of the most powerful, beautiful African American women, began singing with the strength of her voice (her voice is legendary). She began singing, "All we are saying is give peace a chance."

She would not stop. We joined her, thousands of women joined in this song. Her eyes locked on the African American policeman blocking her. His eyes met hers and in that moment, you could see the instant recognition that both of them were there because of dissent, the dissent of their mothers and fathers before them. He quietly stepped to the side and created an opening, the opening we walked through.

This is how I remember it.

Once "inside" we walked toward the White House, now prohibited. Slowly, incrementally, we just kept walking backwards, singing, quietly, peacefully. The police said our arrest was imminent. That at 4:05 p.m. they would begin the arrests if we did not leave. 4:05 came, 4:10, 4:20 -- We had managed to simply be there, as people have always been allowed to be there before all this "Homeland Security".

The local captain of the police said he was not going to arrest us. He then asked, Nina Utne in a whisper, if he could have a Code Pink button for his wife.

The atmosphere changed abruptly when the federal police arrived. They arrested Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now*, press -- They took her camera. She was yelling, "You cannot arrest me I am press, I am protected by the First Amendment. I am bearing witness. I am not with these women." It didn't matter. They then went over and arrested a second press person, took her camera. It was only then, I became frightened.

We kept walking until our heels touched the White House fence. We turned and faced The White House our "illegal act."

Two cars arrived and wagons -- the FBI police arrived, set up a tripod with a video camera and filmed us, each one of us -- after they were done -- the arrests began. Can I tell you what that felt like to watch Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, Susan Griffin and the Reverend Patricia Ackerman who had just returned from Iraq handcuffed, photographed like criminals against a white sheet taped to the paddy wagon and taken away? Can I tell you what it felt like to be stripped of all possessions, notebook, pen, handcuffed, photographed, then yanked into the back of a dark vehicle and shoved into a makeshift cell and find yourself sitting next to Amy Goodman who almost died in Timor -- and then hear the door slam shut and locked. I smiled and asked her what breed she was. It felt like being inside a dog pound. In the back

of the vehicle, we listened to these women tell their stories about what was it in their lives that brought them to this place.

None of us had any intention of being arrested.

And then we were taken to Anacostia Corrections Facility, booked, fingerprinted, and locked in a cell. Alice, Maxine, and I were in one cell with a brave student named Holly, 19 years old, and a wonderful housewife from Houston who told us her name was "Mrs. McWhorter."

To witness Alice's deep calm -- and then to hear her speak of meeting Martin Luther King as a young woman in high school. She said, "I now understand that his calm came from being a free man, he was his own sovereign, his obligation was to follow his own conscience."

Four hours later, we were released. As Maxine said, "It was the least we could do."

The police at the Correctional Unit were quite wonderful. Nobody has the will to uphold these newly instated laws and regulations. Our citation is for "Stationary demonstration in front of The White House (restricted)" A direct quote.

When we were released -- we walked out of the fenced compound to the edge of the Anacostia River, a Superfund site, where as Bob Hass put it "the shit of Congress flows" and were met by other women who were there to drive us home.

Two days later, hundreds of young activists, many part of the Sierra Student Coalition, arrived to lobby Congress on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. They were on fire, so idealistic and impassioned for the wild. It made me weep to hear of their hope and strength and resolve. They had organized a rally for the Arctic and Utah Wilderness on the hill, with their own student speakers and all. They had invited a congressman or two. Now, because of General Ashcroft, they have initiated a new rule that after a member of Congress speaks, the gathering must be broken up -- so of course, the kids, not knowing of this new rule by our fascist government, deferred to the Congressman and allowed him to speak first -- Then, the police ordered the rally to be shut down. Can you believe it? The kids did not get to speak, did not get to gather in the name of democracy, did not get to celebrate and defend their arguments as to why the Arctic must be saved. They began to protest, but were quickly silenced. The look on their faces, Andy -- but they did not give up. They witnessed what we are up against.

Even so, good news today -- the Arctic is saved by a vote in the Senate, 52 to 48. It remains wild for now. Ah bless those caribou and their clicking heels across the tundra.

Forgive this long letter, but my heart is full and what can we do but tell our stories and stand on our ground, even as we go to war.

I read the other day in one of the poems sent to Congress that "our personal anarchy is composed of deep pain and intense joys."

Please know how much I loved being with you and the students at Dartmouth. And please thank Ann for sending on the boxes. They arrived with all the beauty of the landscape and

community you represent.

With my love and respect, Terry

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From the Voices of Reason section of the
Code Pink - Women's Pre-emptive Strike For Peace website:

Even in the best of times we need fresh insight and perspective to keep us inspired. Here are voices you won't find in the news, midnight musings, poetry, essays and oped's not yet published.

4th Grade Student: Poets Against The-War reading, New York, February 2003

If you are lucky in this life, a window
will appear on a battlefield between two armies.
When the soldiers look into the window,
they don't see their enemies, they see themselves
as children, and they stop fighting and
go home and go to sleep. When they wake up
the land is well again.

Tom Hayden notes at midnight 3/30/03

When Martin Luther King first opposed the Vietnam War in 1967, more than two years after it was launched, here is what respectable opinion said about him:

FBI: "A traitor to his country and to his race."

Newsweek: "over his head."

Washington Post: "(King has) diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country, and to his people."

New York Times editorial headline: "Dr. King's Error." He "whitewashed Hanoi."

Dr. King was so crushed that "he sat down and cried."

(See Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound*, 1982, pp. 437-438)

After the Fall 1965 anti-Vietnam demonstration organized by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the *New York Times*' James Reston editorialized that the demonstrators were "not promoting peace but postponing it." President Johnson suggested investigations into how "well-meaning demonstrators can become the victims of Communist aggression."

(Sale, *SDS*, 1973, p. 231)

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr: BEYOND VIETNAM

Address delivered to the Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam,
at Riverside Church, 4 April 1967, New York City.

excerpt:

My third reason moves to an even deeper level of awareness, for it grows out of my experience in the ghettos of the North over the last three years, especially the last three summers. As I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men, I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action. But they asked, and rightly so, "What about Vietnam?" They asked if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government. For the sake of those boys, for the sake of this government, for the sake of the hundreds of thousands trembling under our violence, I cannot be silent.