

# American Voices

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*An Encyclopedia of  
Contemporary Orators*

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and Richard W. Leeman



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## AUDRE GERALDINE LORDE (1934–1992)

### *Professor of English, Poet, Black Lesbian, and Socialist*

LESTER C. OLSON

Audre Geraldine Lorde was a poet orator whose sensibility as a poet suffused her public speeches throughout her lifetime. She is better known today as a poet of international stature than as a public speaker, essayist, or pamphleteer, even though some of her speeches were brilliant, many have become classics in feminist scholarship, and most are the subject of ongoing controversies. Lorde's oratory focused upon the role of language in communicating social differences in ways that construct relations of power among groups. Her public speeches, the most important of which were collected in *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde* in 1984 and *A Burst of Light* in 1988, have an aphoristic, expansive quality resulting from her extensive use of metaphors, maxims, proverbs, narratives, and stories to affirm her perspective on the relationship among language, self, and society. Her speeches, like her essays and her poems, often examine human differences communicated within a sociopolitical system of power ranging across symbolic oppositions between white and Black, male and female, capitalist and socialist, heterosexual and homosexual, master and slave—oppositions that Lorde criticized as simplistic and as useful to dominant groups for exploiting subordinated communities. Her public speaking is a vital resource for communication scholars engaged in examining the role of language and action in transforming self and society in a diverse culture.

Lorde was born on February 18, 1934, in Harlem in New York City. Her parents, Linda Belmar and Frederic Byron Lorde, were immigrants from Grenada. In interviews, Audre mentioned that she grew up with West Indian parents who spoke patois at home, and whose accent and regard for language were factors in the qualities of her own speaking, such as the deliberate pace, cadence, and accent. Her parents tried to prevent her from learning patois or

speaking with a West Indian accent, because they wished to be private in their conversations and were concerned for the success of their children at a Catholic school run by nuns. Audre remarked in an interview that her parents were "very particular about how we talked, that we learned what was in the King's English."

In interviews, Lorde mentioned that her Catholic upbringing influenced her lifelong interest in rituals, though the substance of her own rituals changed significantly. She distinguished her spiritual life, however, from her Catholic upbringing. By "spirituality," she meant "that very deeply rooted consciousness that we are a part of something that didn't start with us, that came from before [us], and will continue after we have gone, but that our piece in it is essential and important." Regarding ritual, Lorde mentioned her love of incantations, which may be exemplified by her evocative poem "Call," with which she liked to conclude poetry readings. Her use of litany and choral as rhetorical resources also reflects her careful attention to ritual. By the conclusion of her life, she had engaged African cultures' views of spirituality, especially the history of Black goddesses.

As early as 1960, Lorde's poetry was recognized by accomplished writers such as Langston Hughes, a fellow member of the Harlem Writers Guild, who wrote to her about including her poetry in his anthology of "new Negro poets." During 1968, Lorde was a distinguished visiting professor at Atlanta University and, that summer, a poet-in-residence at Tougaloo College in Mississippi. That year she also received a National Endowment for the Arts grant to support her writing of poetry. In 1968, Lorde completed her first poetry collection, a now hard-to-find chapbook titled *The First Cities* that was published by the Poets Press in London and New York. It was followed in 1970 by her second po-

etry collection, titled *Cables to Rage*, published in London by Paul Breman. Ultimately she produced additional collections of poems including *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973), *New York Head Shop and Museum* (1975), *Between Our Selves* (1976), *Coal* (1976), *The Black Unicorn* (1978), *Chosen Poems, Old and New* (1982), *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986), *Undersong* (1992), and *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance* (1993). In 1997, her *Collected Poems* was published by Norton, the most frequent publisher of her collections toward the end of her career. In addition to the poems mentioned elsewhere in this essay, her poetry may be exemplified by "Coal," "Blackstudies," "Afterimages," "Between Ourselves," "Outside," and "Who Said It Was Simple."

The content of Lorde's earliest poetry throughout the 1960s and early 1970s reflected her family life. She married Edwin Ashley Rollins in

York City, especially Manhattan, Staten Island, and Brooklyn, where the extraordinary cultural diversity of people in the cosmopolitan, urban setting was doubtless an influence on her discourse. Lorde earned a B.A. with a double major in English and philosophy at Hunter College in 1959. During the late 1950s, she was an investigator for the Bureau of Child Welfare, and in the early 1960s, a young adult librarian at the Mount Vernon (New York) Public Library. In 1961, she earned a master's degree in library science from Columbia University. Beginning in 1970, initially as a lecturer and subsequently as an assistant professor, Lorde was on the faculty of the English department at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan, where, among students of diverse backgrounds, she trained white police officers and FBI agents. In 1980, she departed for Hunter College, where in 1985 a poetry center was named in her honor and, in 1987, she was

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"I am a poet. When I write prose, I am a poet writing prose. . . . when I say poet, I am speaking of a whole way of looking at life, of moving into it, of using it, of dealing with myself and my experience. I am not speaking of living itself, I am speaking of a use of my living."

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1962, and they had two children, Elizabeth and Jonathan. They separated in 1970 and were formally divorced in 1975. Lorde's early poetry collections and radio broadcasts, such as *The Poet Speaks* on WGBH-FM in Boston (April 1970, December 1971), conveyed no obvious evidence of her lesbianism, which did not surface in her public work until her erotic poem "Meet," which was printed in 1977 in *Sinister Wisdom*. In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), Lorde explored her experiences as a Black lesbian in a book that she called a biomythography, which drew upon her 1953 trip to Mexico. Lorde's partner for almost two decades was Frances Louise Clayton, who helped to raise Lorde's children during most of the 1970s and 1980s and aided Lorde during her diagnosis and early confrontations with cancer.

For most of Lorde's life, she resided in New

named Thomas Hunter Professor. Throughout this period she enjoyed her network of close friendships and professional colleagues engaged in the writing of poetry, history, and lesbian feminism through publication outlets such as the Women of Color/Kitchen Table Press, of which she was a founder, and Out & Out Books.

Lorde was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1978, shortly after her speech "The Uses of the Erotic." She had a mastectomy, a profoundly life-altering experience for her. Envisioning herself not as a victim suffering, but as a warrior battling her condition, she drew upon images of the Amazons of Dahomey, one-breasted women warriors, in her writings. Later she was diagnosed with liver cancer, treatments for which took her in 1984 to Germany, where she gave poetry readings and interviews. While in Berlin, Lorde became deeply involved with Gloria I.

Joseph, a scholar, writer, and social activist who became Lorde's partner and lived with her on St. Croix in the Virgin Islands. Lorde was a founder of Sisterhood in Support of Sisters in South Africa as well as the St. Croix Women's Coalition. While living in the Virgin Islands, she was given the honorific name Gambia Adisa, which means "Warrior: She Who Makes Her Meaning Known." She died there on November 11, 1992.

#### AUDRE LORDE: POET ORATOR FOR REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

Lorde is well known for her contributions to the women's movement during the 1970s and 1980s, especially her courageous struggle with breast cancer as recorded in her *Cancer Journals* (1980). She addressed the topics of age, race, sex, sexual-

part of some group defined as other, deviant, inferior, or just plain wrong." In addition to using her public speeches, essays, and poems to resist externally imposed and reductive definitions of her differences from dominant groups, Lorde explicitly resisted the pressure "to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self"; in her view, "this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live." She affirmed, "My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition."

Lorde's rhetoric demonstrated her complex

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"When I call myself a feminist, I call myself a feminist because I recognize that the root of my vulnerability and my power lies in myself as a woman and because I am primarily focused upon changing the consciousness of myself and other women. That is the first level. I am of course also interested in changing the consciousness of anyone, and that includes men, who can use the work, who can use my energy, who can use what I put out. But my primary focus is my consciousness and the consciousness of women."

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ity, and economic class in a wide range of forums and publication outlets. Themes in her speeches include silence and silencing; the habitual complicity of subordinated peoples with dominant groups; being an outsider as a position of both vulnerability and strength; the erotic as distinct from the pornographic in human relationships as well as commercial products; difference and anger as resources for collaboration and social change rather than divisiveness, capricious bias, and hatred; and survival in a hostile society. Whenever she spoke in public, she explicitly defined her own position as multiply marginal in her relationship to dominant groups. "As a forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an interracial couple," Lorde remarked in 1980, "I usually find myself a

awareness of how privilege and oppression interact in each individual's life situation. Consequently, her rhetoric avoided the simplistic reduction of social tensions to the roles of oppressor and oppressed, noticing as she did so how social, political, economic, educational, and religious factors impinge upon lives in complicated ways that oftentimes have people operating within both roles, even if they are consciously mindful of only one of them. Evoking Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Lorde commented, "The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships." As a consequence, her public speeches are ex-

traordinarily complex, insightful, and instructive in their treatment of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, and the like as they intersect and conflict. Her ideology situated her within a distinctive, though certainly not unique, strand of materialist feminist thought which held that "racism, sexism, and homophobia are inseparable," as she observed in 1979. She held that "there is no hierarchy of oppressions," which became the title of an essay in *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin* (September 1983).

Lorde wrote poetry from her childhood, and her poetry was published for almost two decades before her first recorded public speech. That speech, titled "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," was delivered as part of a panel discussion titled "Lesbians and Literature" at the Modern Language Association meeting in Chicago. It is perhaps her finest speech. Two of her other speeches, however, have been more frequently noted in scholarly literature. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," was delivered initially as part of a panel discussion titled "Power and Oppression" at the Fourth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" was delivered as part of a panel discussion, "The Personal and the Political," at New York University. These three orations are arguably the most important of her public speeches in terms of their technical sophistication in engaging dominant groups.

In Lorde's public address, she drew primarily on her feelings and experiences embodied in her own living as the most dependable resource for her rhetorical invention, because she believed that feeling was more fundamental than understanding for bringing about political change, and because she was deeply skeptical about the value of abstract, disembodied writings, which she designated "theory." Though Lorde was sometimes criticized for reproducing stereotypes of women as intuitive and emotional, she sought to integrate emotion with rational thought rather than artificially separating them. Her views of poetry are concisely summarized in "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," an essay published in *Chrysalis* (1977), for which Lorde served as poetry editor from 1976 until 1979. She described that essay as a transitional moment in her intellectual de-

velopment, which indeed it was, marking her movement into speeches, essays, pamphlets, and public letters, as well as her movement into what she characterized as "linear" modes of expression. Lorde characterized this change in her work as akin to learning a second language. Yet there are interconnections among her poetry, essays, and speeches, all of which were rooted in her life experiences and feelings, because of her practice of connecting the personal and the political, a very common feature of contemporary feminist practice. Consequently, it can be helpful for understanding Lorde's speeches to engage her poetry, as may be exemplified by the relationship between "A Litany for Survival" and "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," or that between "Power" and "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," a difficult but important speech which she delivered to the National Women's Studies Association in June 1981. Ordinarily, her speeches include excerpts of her poetry and, on occasion, a complete poem.

Typically, Lorde's speeches reflected explicitly on language and symbolic practices. Lorde employed language tactically and strategically while being mindful of ideological inheritances of various sorts complicating communication among people of diverse backgrounds and commitments. One example of these qualities is her famous maxim: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." The series of metaphors entailed—tools, dismantle, house—supply her maxim with an expansive and ambiguous quality. To Lorde, "the master's tools" designated techniques of domination through the exercise of political power, moral judgment, and social privilege. The "master" could be understood in relationships of domination over both the "mistress" and the "slave," focusing on sex, race, and the intersection of these embodied in Black women. More important, as a matter of adaptation to the immediate audience of feminists at the Second Sex conference, a white woman could be "mistress" in her relationship to the white "master" while being a "master" over "slaves" of either sex. Lorde's speech explored the ambiguities of the combined roles of white women in U.S. culture by evoking an understanding of their role as "mistress" to examine

their analogous role as "master" across differences in race, class, and sexuality. The expression "the master's tools" underscored the actual tools for production of such material goods as "the master's house," the practices of domination employed by the master over the mistress and the slave, and, specifically in connection with sex differences, the male's sexual anatomy. In this last respect, the master's tool may have been seductive in a layered pun to heterosexual women of any race, age, or class who wanted to reside in the house as an intimate companion.

In general, Lorde was concerned about the seductiveness of power exercised for arbitrary domination over others, even among feminists who deplored its operations under patriarchy. A fundamental reason that using "the master's tools" would be self-defeating was that using those tools reproduced the practices and could transform the users of them into "masters." To Lorde, the practices of arbitrary domination needed to be transformed, not rehearsed. "The master's house" was likewise layered in its multiple meanings. It referred to the site for exercising power, judgment, and privilege as well as the products of these deeds. Unearned entitlement to "the master's house" was salient for Lorde, but "dismantling" the "master's house" referred to repudiating anyone's unearned privilege. In addition, "the master's house" designated the material and/or courtship interests that bound the mistress and/or slave to the master. Finally, "the master's house" implicitly distinguished the reformist approach of the "house" Black from the radical approach of the "field" Black. In this respect, one of "the master's tools" consisted in dividing members of subordinated communities by extending privileges to some through access to the interior of "the master's house" while exploiting most others in the field to support this dwelling. An opposition between "the master's house" and the master's field, though implicit in Lorde's maxim, was vital in challenging reformist feminists to adopt radical feminism. Lorde used an analogy between racism and sexism to shape insights about distinctive reformist and radical political commitments within feminism. As this sustained example may illustrate, Lorde's rhetoric is rich in its layers of meaning and technical sophistication.

Lorde's lively sense of humor and her ability

to move adeptly through her audiences' defense mechanisms—which, she suggested, tended regularly to distort her messages—are perhaps more evident in the audio recordings of her live engagements with audiences at her poetry readings and interviews than in her orations. In a speech in 1980, for instance, Lorde reiterated two extreme distortions around human differences used to exclude work by women of color from the curriculum: "All too often, the excuse given is that the literatures of women of Color can only be taught by Colored women, or that they are too difficult to understand, or that classes cannot 'get into' them because they come out of experiences that are 'too different.'" She then amused her audience by incisively revealing the transparent hypocrisy of such excuses: "I have heard this argument presented by white women of otherwise quite clear intelligence, women who seem to have no trouble at all teaching and reviewing work that comes out of the vastly different experiences of Shakespeare, Molière, Dostoyevsky, and Aristophanes." Her extraordinary skill in leading discussion of sensitive topics is consistently evident in the question-and-answer periods which typically followed her speeches and readings.

Lorde was a perfectionist who extensively revised her ideas even after they had been published, altering them for later collections of poems, speeches, and essays. Because she also preserved numerous typed and handwritten drafts for each speech, essay, or poem, sometimes making the revisions on a copy of an earlier published version, the drafts are an invaluable resource for investigating her rhetorical invention, style, and organization, as well as changes in her sense of audience for the specific forum, genre, or publisher. A wide range of intellectual resources is in evidence in the preliminary drafts for her public address, through the explicit reference to a name or the concepts inaugurated by the person. Her preliminary drafts for speeches and essays often identified people and/or publications whose views or practices she overtly opposed. But these names ordinarily disappeared from the published versions of her remarks, possibly because Lorde was more concerned with the ideas or practices than the specific figure. A partial, but by no

means complete, list of intellectual sources in evidence in her rhetorical invention and style would have to include W.E.B. Du Bois, Paulo Freire, and Adrienne Rich. Lorde spoke approvingly of the Black lesbian playwright Lorraine Hansbury and of Angelina Weld Grimké of the Harlem Renaissance.

To judge from the unpublished materials held at Spelman College, two of the most extensively revised speeches were "Uses of the Erotic" and "Learning from the 60s." For the former speech, there are multiple copies with taped and spliced paper text placed over earlier typed passages, as well as extensive handwritten inserts, not only on the fronts of pages, but sometimes spilling over onto the backs of pages. Lorde delivered the latter speech at Harvard University during Malcolm X Weekend in 1982. Her revisions reflected an endeavor to situate her political activism so that the speech, initially deliberative in its dominant thrust, eventually comported fully with the ceremonial character of the event as she called for future action to honor the famous Black leader's legacy. Yet honoring his legacy proved complex to Lorde. She sought explicitly to recognize and transform its specific shortcomings (in her view), such as the devaluation of women and other ramifications of his specific commitments within Islam in his early speeches. She emphasized how he changed his views with experience, asking that her audiences honor him by doing likewise.

Lorde's speeches in the late 1970s and early 1980s are more accessible to white scholars than her later speeches, because she consciously endeavored to reach them, especially white feminists. During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, Lorde struggled in public forums dominated by white women to engage feminism in order to transform it, despite its reformist politics and its ongoing legacies of racism, classism, and heterosexism. Yet her speeches were rife with evidences of her frustration, anger, and deepening skepticism about the prospects for change within the women's movement. In 1980, she remarked, "There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* which does not in fact exist." Although Lorde expressly continued to welcome critical listening by persons from diverse backgrounds,

her later speeches focused increasingly upon Black women. Three speeches toward the end of her life exemplify this trend: "I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities," delivered in 1985 to the Black Women Rising Together Conference held at Medgar Evers College; "Sisterhood and Survival," a 1985 keynote speech at the conference "Black Women Writers and the Diaspora" held at Michigan State University; and her remarks at the I Am Your Sister Conference: Forging Global Connections Across Difference, held in Boston in October 1990 to honor Lorde for her lifetime achievements. Lorde commented that her speech at Medgar Evers College "came out very, very rapidly" and "just really flowed," requiring only minimal revision in its preparation because, she said, "I felt very strongly about what I was saying"—and presumably because this was the audience whom she knew the best and with whom she felt the most at home, even though, as Lorde often commented, both sexism and heterosexism within Black audiences posed difficulties for her discourse.

Lorde's rhetorical practices reflected her keen awareness of how institutions and organizations enable and disable discourses by women of color and lesbians, as well as often distorting the discourse as a consequence of a tendency to adapt to dominant groups' concerns and beliefs. In 1980, she commented, "I am responsible for educating teachers who dismiss my children's culture in school. Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world." While superficially such educational projects seem to have merit, Lorde disclosed some deficiencies of such projects. "The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions," she remarked, adding that for those who undertake the educating, "There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future." In these respects, a certain meaning of "communication" is "pretense," because what is actually at stake is practicing, rehearsing, and perpetuating the underlying hierarchical dynamic

between oppressor and oppressed, with the latter tending to the former's needs. Subsequently, this awareness was reflected in her publications and participation in organizations, sometimes as a founder.

With few exceptions, mainstream Black audiences have neglected Lorde's work. Yet, Lorde has become an icon of the women's movement. Her pictorial image has become a commodity, marketed on posters, T-shirts, buttons, and the like, symbolizing a strand of feminism committed to fair and equitable relationships across differences in race, sexuality, age, and class, among other social groupings. Her reputation among feminists and women's studies scholars continues to grow. Lesbian, transgender, and queer communities have likewise taken increased interest in Lorde over the years, sometimes coupling her image as a warrior against breast cancer with images of gay men battling the AIDS pandemic, at other times evoking her maxim "Your silence will not protect you" to counter the closeting of same-sexuality. Even so, Lorde's socialism, sex, and race have diminished her appeal to socially and economically conservative gay men and lesbians. Thus, her critical reception was as diverse as the extraordinary range of audiences she addressed, opinions ranging from heartfelt hostility to deep appreciation and gratitude for her work.

There are recurrent difficulties for scholars endeavoring to critically assess Lorde's discourse. She sometimes drew a stark contrast between Euro-American and African cultures in that she viewed Euro-American culture as linear and oriented toward problem-solving, whereas African cultures were holistic in their commitment to feeling through experience and deriving understanding from those feelings. Her commitment to the latter sensibility may explain, in part, why the organization of her speeches is often vexing to discern, since she resisted conventional linear, problem-solving sequences and preferred creative, open-ended, generative suggestions. As a related matter, Lorde's allusions to African goddesses, practices, and intellectual resources are sometimes a source of frustration and bewilderment to audiences. In addition, her speeches, essays, and interviews may be challenging for most readers and listeners because she dealt with sen-

sitive and taboo topics ranging from rape and pornography to harassment, bias crimes, and other forms of abuse and violence. Finally, while concentrating on one aspect of bias as a topic in her speeches, it is easy for readers and listeners to unwittingly reproduce other varieties of bias, despite the best of intentions, simply because these biases continue to be endemic in U.S. culture. Regardless of these and other difficulties, Lorde was a brilliant thinker and speaker whose public address deserves careful study for its ramifications, not only for rhetoric scholars but also for anyone committed to social justice in all its complexity.

## INFORMATION SOURCES

### *Research Collections and Collected Speeches*

Most of Lorde's unpublished papers are held at two locations: the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, New York, and the Spelman College Archives in Atlanta. The Lesbian Herstory Archives is the single best resource for audio recordings of Lorde's speeches. The Spelman College Archives holds the most extensive collection of her papers and effects. In addition to several preliminary drafts for speeches, as well as folders pertaining to the forums for the public address, there is an immense body of unpublished correspondence as well as approximately sixty-three audio recordings, mostly interviews and poetry readings. Currently, Lorde's papers at Spelman are closed to all researchers except the authorized biographer, Alexis De Veaux. Lorde's most important speeches are printed in edited form in *Sister Outsider* and *A Burst of Light*.

Lorde, Audre. *A Burst of Light [BOL]*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1988.

———. *Sister Outsider [SO]*. Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1984.

### *Web Sites*

There are currently no major Web sites appropriate to the study of Audre Lorde.

### *Audiovisual Materials*

Lesbian Herstory Archives [LHA]. Brooklyn, N.Y.

### *Selected Critical Studies*

Olson, Lester C. "Liabilities of Language: Audre Lorde Reclaiming Difference." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84 (1998): 448-70.

———. "On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 49-70.

———. "The Personal, the Political, and Others:

Audre Lorde Denouncing "The Second Sex Conference," followed by an exchange with Jessica Benjamin. *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 33, no. 3 (2000): 259–93.

Upton, Elaine Maria. "Audre Geraldine Lorde (1934–1992)." In *Contemporary Lesbian Writers of the United States: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Sandra Pollack and Denise D. Knight. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1993.

### CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR SPEECHES

See "Research Collections and Collected Speeches" for source codes.

"The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." Chicago, December 28, 1977. Published in *Sinister Wisdom* 6 (1978): 11–15; reprinted with revisions in Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1980), pp. 18–23, and with further revisions, in *SO*, pp. 40–44. Also in *Sinister Wisdom* 43/44 (Summer 1991): 40–45. None of the texts is identical to the audiotape, but the identical versions in *Sinister Wisdom* are the most accurate. Audiotape at *LHA*.

"Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." Mount Holyoke, Mass., August 15, 1978, and San Francisco, November 17, 1978. Reprinted initially as a pamphlet, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Out & Out Books, 1978). An undated typeset version was distributed by the Lesbian Feminist Studies Clearinghouse. Reprinted in *Chrysalis* 9 (Fall 1979): 29–32; *Big Mama Rag* 7, no. 8 (September 1979): 11, 16; *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York: Morrow, 1980), pp. 295–300; *SO*, pp. 53–59; *Whole Earth Review* no. 63 (Summer 1989): 66–69; *Ume Reader* 24 (May/June 1991): 113–14. Broadcast on Pacifica Radio, March 1979. Audiotapes at *LHA* (Mount Holyoke version) as well as the GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, and the Pacifica Radio Archives (San Francisco version). An unauthorized, shortened version, which Lorde once referred to as "a three-paragraph non-sequitur patchwork shred from it," was published by *Ms.* magazine.

"The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." New York City, September 29, 1979. Printed with revisions in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1981; New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), pp. 98–101; *SO*, pp. 110–13. Audiotape at *LHA*.

"When Will the Ignorance End?" (keynote address to

the National Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference). Washington D.C., October 13, 1979. Printed in *Off Our Backs* 9, no. 10 (November 1979): 8, 22; *Gay Insurgent* no. 6 (Summer 1980): 112–14.

"Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" (address to the Copeland Colloquium at Amherst College). Amherst, Mass., April 2, 1980. *SO*, pp. 114–23. An undated typeset version was distributed by the Lesbian Feminist Studies Clearinghouse.

"The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (keynote address at the National Women's Studies Association). Storrs, Conn., June 1, 1981. Printed in *Women's Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 7–10; *SO*, pp. 124–33.

"Learning from the 60s." Cambridge, Mass., February 1982. *SO*, pp. 134–44; *The Rhetoric of Struggle: Public Address by African American Women*, ed. Robbie Jean Walker. New York: Garland, 1992, pp. 125–40.

"Difference and Survival" (address at the Honors Convocation, Hunter College). New York City, May 10, 1982. Printed in *Lesbians Rising: Lesbian Feminist Newspaper* (Hunter College) Spring 1982, pp. 8–9.

"Speech During the 'Litany of Commitment' Before the Civil Rights March/Martin Luther King 1963 Remembrance." Washington D.C., August 27, 1983.

"Sister Outsider" (speech at the University of Oregon). Eugene, Ore., November 12, 1984. Audiotape at Spelman College Archives.

"I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities." Medgar Evers College, Brooklyn, N.Y., March 15–17, 1985. Printed in pamphlet titled *I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities* (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1985); *Practice: The Journal of Politics, Economics, Psychology, Sociology and Culture* 5, no. 1 (September 1987): 83–87; *BOL*, pp. 19–26.

"Sisterhood and Survival." Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich., October 20, 1985. Printed in *The Black Scholar* 17, no. 2 (March/April 1986): 5–7.

"Turning the Beat Round" (address at the Hunter College Lesbian and Gay Community Center's Forum on Lesbian and Gay Parents of Color). New York City, October 1986. Printed in *Black/Out* 1, no. 3/4 (1987): 13–16; *Politics of the Heart: A Lesbian Parenting Anthology*, ed. Sandra Pollack and Jeanne Vaughn. Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1987) *BOL*, pp. 39–48.

"A Question of Survival" (commencement speech at

Oberlin College). Oberlin, Ohio, May 29, 1989. Printed in *Gay Community News* 16, no. 46 (August 13-19, 1989): 5, 12. Videotape at Oberlin College Archives.

"Remarks to the 'I Am Your Sister Conference: Forg-

ing Global Connections Across Differences.'" Boston, October 5-8, 1990.

"Remarks at Albany, New York" (address on the occasion of Lorde's recognition as poet laureate of the State of New York). November 13, 1991.

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## WILMA MANKILLER (1945- )

### *Native American Activist and Former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation*

CHRISTOPHER J. SKILES

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Wilma Mankiller embodies the phrase "identity politics." In public life she vehemently advocates to increase awareness of both Native American and women's rights. For more than thirty years, she has helped initiate change at various levels—from congressional legislation, to community-help projects, to individual consciousness-raising about Native American and women's issues. A self-described Cherokee woman, she speaks regularly about issues from treaty rights to health care, from tribal self-determination to securing access to education for community members of all ages. Confident, purposive, and self-assured when addressing large audiences, congressional committees, or smaller, more intimate gatherings, Mankiller has a well-earned reputation for making members of her audience feel at ease. Her ability to establish rapport with audiences of all types, ranging from hostile and confrontational to genteel and friendly, suggests a mastery of public speaking that few orators achieve. Whether she is drawing on historical events, political theory, personal experience, or the lessons embedded in traditional Cherokee storytelling, Mankiller's oratory demonstrates the power of narrative as a means of persuasion. Indeed, her ability to weave together meaningful elements of narratives with straightforward arguments has helped her achieve an impressive body of political accomplishments.

Wilma Pearl Mankiller was born in the W.W. Hastings Indian Hospital on November 18, 1945, to Clare and Charley Mankiller. The sixth

of eleven children, she joined a Cherokee family long rooted in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. She has a particular fondness for her birthplace (especially her family's tract of land—Mankiller Flats), and after having lived all around the country, has moved back there. To Mankiller, her residence and the land at Mankiller Flats provide an ongoing, living connection not just to her direct past, but to the heritage of her culture and community, to her extended ancestry, and, perhaps most important, to the Earth. Indeed, Mankiller remains closely tied to her own past and that of her ancestors. She often talks about the physical connection she and her family feel to their main source of identity—their land.

It is not that the Mankillers have long owned their land. Although their connection to Mankiller Flats dates back only four generations, Mankiller and her family perceive this land as the palpable source of their spiritual being. The land in Oklahoma became Cherokee land in general, and Mankiller ancestral land in particular, only after the federal government forcefully removed the Cherokee nation from their lands in what is now the state of Georgia. Initiated by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* in 1831 and finalized in 1839, the Trail of Tears (or, translated more directly from the Cherokee language, The Trail Where They Cried) constitutes for the Cherokee a continuing tragic memory. The forced migration of the Cherokee nation, in which