

WALTER L. WILLIAMS' LIFE OF ACTIVISM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Morehouse College and the Gandhi Institute of Reconciliation sponsored a reception on Friday March 24, 2006 at the University of Southern California to mark the end of the exhibition "Gandhi, King, Ikeda: A Legacy of Building Peace." Before a crowd of nearly 150 people, Dr. Lawrence Carter, Dean and Professor of Religion at Morehouse College presented an exceptionally inspiring address on the ideals of peace and human rights in the thought of Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Daisaku Ikeda.

After his speech Professor Carter, on behalf of the Gandhi Institute of Reconciliation, presented the "Gandhi, King, Ikeda Award" to University of Southern California Professor Walter L. Williams. This award was conferred for:

“distinguished commitment and leadership promoting diversity and human rights, especially in pioneering scholarship and for extraordinary efforts to ensure that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, notably on the American college campus, enjoy equality and rights guaranteed to all in our nation. You have wonderfully embodied the noble virtues of the individuals for which this award was named. This award emphasizes the positive difference that one person can make in promoting peace and human rights through non-violent action.”

The following is the full text, from which Walter L. Williams presented a shortened version, of his acceptance speech:

Tonight, I feel deep humility and gratitude to be recognized by this award. In particular, because Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Daisaku Ikeda have each been such

important influences in my life, receiving this award may prompt you to wonder why I, a product of the segregated South, would have gotten involved in the struggles for civil rights and human rights. After all, my ancestors were slaveowners, Confederate soldiers, and prejudiced devotees of the Ku Klux Klan.

Given this background, you might wonder why it hit me so hard when I was growing up in Atlanta, when in 1960 Atlanta's Jewish Temple was bombed. You may wonder why at age fourteen I noisily protested and stormed out of my Sunday School class, never to return, when the Sunday school teacher stated authoritatively that all Jews were going to hell unless they converted to Christianity.

You might wonder why at age seventeen I wrote an editorial in the newspaper of my all-white high school, condemning my classmates who had thrown a barrage of rocks to prevent a black student from registering as he was trying to become the first black person to desegregate my high school. That editorial earned me a disciplinary trip to the principal's office. Though this event happened in 1965, I can still clearly see the angry face of the principal, yelling at me how wrong I was to have written this communist-inspired troublemaking outside agitation editorial.

And in that instant when his reddened face was yelling at me so furiously, telling me that I was a traitor to my race, and that I was going to destroy my chances to become a success in life, something clicked in my brain right there, that stands out as a turning point in my life. Because in that instant I had a recognition that I had never had before. And that was the recognition that just because this principal had a Ph.D., and just because he was in a position of authority, that did not make him right.

Because I knew, in a way that I had absolutely no doubt about, that he was wrong and I

was right. And from that instant, I determined to become active and join the civil rights movement. And that was the beginning of the road that brought me through the many twists and turns of activism that has been a guiding light of my life. And indeed, has brought me to be standing here right now.

Most people know of me as a teacher and a writer. Over the last three decades teaching at five universities, I am proud that I pioneered in teaching courses that focused on the history of race relations, on American Indian history and culture, on overcoming prejudice, on social issues in gender and sexuality, on gay and lesbian studies, and most recently on transgender studies.

I have been privileged to influence the lives of thousands of students, and I am so proud of the accomplishments of so many of them. I am known to many more people from the nine books and over a hundred thirty articles that I have published, and I consider my readers to be just as much my students as anyone who took a class with me. In fact, quite a number have come to the university to work with me because they first read one of my publications.

This teaching and writing is what people know about me. You have been told WHAT I have done. What I would like to do in this time is to focus on WHY I did it. My purpose is not to list a bunch of achievements, but to provide some lessons in how life actually works, what kinds of challenges will arise, and how things get accomplished, so that maybe some young people here will be able to incorporate some of these lessons into your own lives. I would like to see you become a shining example of a fulfilled life. So that one day you can tell me how listening to this little speech helped set you on a road of accomplishment of worthwhile goals, and that you will report to me how you were able to accomplish far more

than I was ever able to do. That would bring me great joy.

What most people do not know is that my motivation to go into academia was my determination to expand human rights. Not the reverse. It has consistently been my human rights activism that laid the basis for the research that I have done, the courses that I have taught, and the subjects that I have chosen to write about.

To the youth of today, this statement that my activism grew out of a recognition that those in authority are not always right may sound mundane, and even non-consequential. Today the statement “Question Authority” is almost a truism. But when I was young, the message that was drummed into us was to obey the law. The message that was drummed into us was not to even question the rightness of the law. And, in the white South, if the law establishes segregation, then that law is of course right and must be obeyed because it IS the law.

The one contrary example that I was exposed to, as a youth, of a different message was Mohandas Gandhi. When I was twelve years old (a crucial point in my life, as I will explain) I happened upon a biography of Gandhi in our school library, and I read with amazement how Gandhi resisted the laws of the British Empire. I had always been taught before that only bad people disobeyed the law. But Gandhi did not break the law because he wanted to do bad. Gandhi resisted the imperial laws because those laws themselves were bad.

Why did the life story of Gandhi so resonate with me? How did I come to not only apply the story of Gandhi to make me question the law of segregation, but to even dare to join in active attempts to overthrow it?

As I look back on my youth, it is clear that I sympathized with the powerless underdog,

and I joined the civil rights movement, for one reason. And that was because I myself felt a deep and profound personal alienation from the established power structure of the society in which I had been raised. And the reason I felt so alienated was because from age 12 I was a criminal. I was not only breaking the law, but I was also engaging in a mortal sin.

What was my crime, what was my sin? It was because I had fallen in love with a person of my same sex. From the first time, when I was 12 years old when I became sexually active with another boy in my neighborhood, I knew what we were doing was against the rules. I knew this forbidden behavior was condemned by my church, and a year later when at age 13 I started a sexual relationship with an adult man, he told me about Georgia's sodomy law, which dictated twenty years imprisonment for what we were doing.

Yet, at the same time that I realized in the eyes of the law I was a criminal, I also felt in my heart of hearts, that the intense emotions and the enjoyment and the absolute joy and fulfillment that I experienced in these loving caring relationships were not evil and were not bad. My adult lover was especially important to my growing sensibility as a human being, and I realize now how much he risked his freedom to be a mentor and a role model for me. Even today that relationship would mark both him and me as criminals. It makes me very sad when I hear ignorant people condemning loving intergenerational relationships and comparing them to rape by making the absurd claim that no one below some arbitrary age of consent has an ability to consent to a willing relationship.

I somehow had the individualistic fortitude to start recognizing these illegal feelings and relationships as a moral good. And I eventually grew to understand that the laws restricting my freedom to express my love for the person of my choice, meant not that I was wrong, but that the law was wrong.

It was this recognition of my criminality in the eyes of the law, that set me to start questioning other social rules and standards. And so, I was fundamentally attracted into sympathizing with the civil rights movement because at that time black people were the only ones I saw who were standing up to unjust laws. Because I was not brave enough to go out by myself and start a movement for my own liberation, I joined in the picket lines and the protests and I sought out those who were standing up for their human rights. I was lucky enough to meet people like Julian Bond and Jesse Jackson, whose words still thrill me. I worked as a volunteer in the first mayoral campaign of Maynard Jackson, just doing simple things like operating a mimeograph machine and bringing food and coffee to those who were doing the really important work. Even though I was sad that Maynard Jackson lost that first campaign, I was so proud when he persevered and in the next election went on to become Atlanta's first black mayor. I will never forget the graciousness of all those black people I interacted with, who treated this young inexperienced white boy with more respect than I deserved.

But there was one person who inspired me above all others, and that person was Martin Luther King. And so, I sought him out, when I was a freshman at Georgia State University. I went to hear him speak at his church that was only a mile from my college. As a sophomore, when I was captain of the Georgia State University debate team, I got the bright idea that we should bring Dr. King to speak on campus. Of course the university administrators were aghast, so I promptly organized a sit-in of their offices. They told me I was establishing a good record with my high grades at the university, but I could destroy my future if I got involved in the civil rights movement. By this time, they were too late. I had heard this all before. So once again, I ran up against those in authority, but I knew from

my by-now confirmed outlaw perspective that I was right and they were wrong.

Eventually, to my surprise, the administration gave in, and I was proud to sit on the front row as Dr. King became the first black person to speak at Georgia State University. I had never heard anyone speak so eloquently.

And a year later he was dead. I stood alone on the sidewalk holding an upside down American flag as his funeral march went right by the building at Georgia State where he spoke. And I will never forget the utter, utter look of sorrow in the face of Coretta Scott King as she passed, walking behind the simple mule-drawn farm wagon that King's casket lay upon.

But Martin Luther King's ideas did not die with him. He convinced me and many others to come out against the war in Vietnam. I started participating in anti-war demonstrations as well as all kinds of civil rights protests. A lot of those demonstrations kind of blur together in my memory, and I wish I had kept a written record of all the things I did. If someone had told me that I should write all that down because some day I would receive an honor for doing that activism, I would have laughed in their face. At that time I was more worried about some official finding out about what I was up to. I remember one time I was carrying a sign as a small group of us marched around the Georgia State Capitol building. I don't even remember exactly what we were protesting. I was excited when I saw some photographers taking our pictures, because I thought it meant my picture would be in the newspaper. But then someone informed me that those photographers were from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and that they were trying to build a file on us as "Un-Georgian."

I was Un-Georgian all right, and to this day if someone says I am a native Georgian, I

correct them and tell them I am a native of Atlanta, which is very different from the rest of Georgia. I cannot remember exactly what date this happened, in 1968, but I remember being so incensed when Georgia Governor Lester Maddox invited segregationist leader Alabama Governor George Wallace to speak on the lawn outside the capitol building. Without even thinking about the danger I was putting myself into, I made a big sign saying “George Wallace is a Nazi,” and mounted it on a stick. I showed up and was immediately surrounded by a crowd of Wallace supporters, spewing venom and spitting on me. The situation got more and more tense, until a Wallace man grabbed my sign and broke the stick over my head. It knocked me backwards and as other protestors nearby saw this, everybody started a free-for-all. Bodies were everywhere, and people all around me were at each others’ throats. But somehow I was standing there in the midst of all this just calmly watching as pandemonium reigned all around me. I thought it was great fun.

Then, as soon as it began, the Georgia State patrol moved in and skillfully separated the protestors from the supporters. A patrolman grabbed me, but he did not hurt me. Their only goal seemed to be to separate those who were fighting. Since I really expected them to take the side of the Wallace people, I was quite impressed with their neutrality and their skill at defusing violence. People settled down, Wallace continued his pathetic speech. I booed him, and his supporters cheered him, but violence was averted.

When I got home and excitedly watched the whole thing on the evening news, my parents were aghast that I had put myself in the line of such danger. They were always supportive of my standing up for civil rights, but they did not want to see their son harmed. My father gave me a stern lecture about the danger of permanent brain damage if some jerk had cracked my skull open. He said I was too smart to expose my brain like that, and said I

would be much more valuable to the civil rights movement if I found other ways to influence people. I knew that he was right, and from that time I decided that furthering my education would be the best way that I could promote social and political change.

Someone who was very important to me was Professor John Hope Franklin. He was a friend of my mentor Professor Bell Wiley, and he came to speak to Wiley's class that I was taking. After his talk I brought a copy of his classic book "From Slavery to Freedom" and asked him to sign it. I told him I wanted to go to graduate school and asked him where I could be most valuable as an activist. He was the one who told me that I could accomplish a lot more for human rights by becoming a prominent academic than anything else. He told me that as a white person I would more likely be believed if I exposed the evils and injustices that had been done in the name of white supremacy. I decided that he was right, and this is the course that I would pursue.

In 1970 I won a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, one of only twelve awarded in the nation, and with that full scholarship I entered graduate school at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. I decided to concentrate my studies on the history of race relations, not only concerning African Americans but also pursuing my longstanding interest in American Indians. I did make a political detour in 1972, when I got involved in George McGovern's anti-war campaign for the presidency. I was chosen to be a McGovern delegate to the North Carolina state Democratic Convention, and I entered a political campaign for the second time.

Then in 1973, while I was doing research while living on the Eastern Cherokee Indian reservation, I got caught up in the American Indian Movement. Later, with my consciousness raised, I did some supportive work for the women's liberation movement.

But mostly, I concentrated on my research and publications.

In 1974 while I was still writing my dissertation, I decided on a lark to apply for a tenure-track assistant professorship at the University of Cincinnati. 353 people, most of whom already had their Ph.D. completed, applied for a job that was advertised for someone to teach the American Civil War. My dissertation was in African American history, and had little to do with the Civil War, so I did not think I stood much chance to even be considered. I was later told that 352 of those applications came in and expressed their interest in a detailed military analysis of one or another campaign of the war. I came with a different approach. I said I wanted to teach the Civil War era as a case study in the history of American race relations. In my mind, the period during and right after the war was THE crucial time when a substantial change might have been able to take place in race relations. Plus, I said I also wanted to develop another course for their department on American Indian History. I was the faculty's choice.

I finished my Ph.D. at age 25, and then spent the next few years publishing books in African American history and American Indian history. I was building a strong reputation as an emerging new scholar in these fields. I thought this would be my career path for the rest of my life. I thought my years of activism were behind me, and my contribution would be as an academic.

And then, life happened while I was busy making plans.

What happened is that the gay liberation movement burst upon the national scene, and I got caught up in it in ways that I never would have predicted. Back in 1969 I had been secretly happy to read newspaper accounts about gays and lesbians rising up to fight against police oppression in the Stonewall Riots in New York City. I remember saying to myself

“right on!” (we used to say things like that in the ‘60s). But I could not bring myself to get involved in protests for gay and lesbian rights.

After all, I had my career to think about. In my second year at the University of Cincinnati I confided in a couple of other professors, and they both told me I was establishing a very good reputation as a teacher and a scholar publishing books in Black Studies and in American Indian Studies, and I could not afford to risk my career by letting people know I was a homosexual. That would discredit my work, and no one would take me seriously if I went public. I took their advice, decided to keep my sexuality quiet, and stayed in the closet.

What changed my life was Anita Bryant. In 1977-78 she led a movement called “Save Our Children,” in which she wanted to save children by leading a campaign to seek out and fire gay and lesbian teachers. This really hit me, in a deeply personal way. I was a gay teacher. Was I going to sit back and do nothing while this bigoted movement gained strength? Was I going to cower in the closet until they came for me? I had to take a hard look in the mirror and ask myself why, if I was willing to put my life on the line for all these other groups, why I was not willing to speak out for equality for my own group.

Once I made the decision that I had no choice but to reactivate my activist life, I joined the Greater Cincinnati Gay Coalition that was just forming, and I founded and became Editor of southern Ohio’s first gay newspaper. Because I was the only person in our coalition who had any experience in activism, before I knew it I was elected to be the chair of this group. In short order I was being interviewed on Cincinnati TV stations as an openly gay teacher, and since no one else in our little group had any writing experience I turned my writing abilities into numerous letters to the editor challenging Cincinnati newspapers’

pervasive homophobia. In what I thought was going to be a break from politics, I organized a swimming party at a public park that I personally paid to rent from the city, but once some prejudiced neighbors realized it was a group of gay men out there in our little speedos a vicious mob gathered and rained a blur of rocks, bottles, and eggs on us. To this day I do not know how we got out of there without someone being seriously injured. We called the police, who arrived and, upon learning it was a gay group, instead of protecting us turned around and drove away, leaving us to the mercy of the mob.

Instead of cowering, we alerted the news media and on the next day a group of us addressed the Cincinnati City Council to demand equal protection by the police. To our chagrin, a group of homophobes also arrived to oppose us. But they were so obnoxious that they actually turned several councilmembers in our favor. The Council acted in our favor and two policemen were fired. That was the spark that ignited gay and lesbian activism in southern Ohio. A swimming party that I had organized primarily because I wanted to look at all those cute bodies in their speedos. Despite the warnings of many that I was putting myself in danger, I kept speaking out for equality for lesbians and gays.

Their warnings were not off the mark. I suffered significantly more violence and threats of violence in Cincinnati than I had ever experienced in the South in the 60s. Someone threw a brick through my car window with “Die Fag!” written on it. On more than one occasion angry homophobes tried to break down my front door while I hid inside. Gunshots pierced the windows of my house. Once when I asked for protection from the police, a policeman lashed out at me with homophobic slurs and threatened to throw me in jail. Once again I had to go to City Council, and got a policeman disciplined.

Cincinnati’s mayor was none other than Jerry Springer, and to his credit he issued that

conservative city's first gay pride proclamation. But after receiving a barrage of criticism, he eventually left the city and moved onto another more noble career.

I started thinking that if Cincinnati was running off Jerry Springer, then maybe I should think about relocation. After one too many death threats, in 1981 I accepted an offer to teach American Indian Studies at UCLA. Though I had been treated very nicely by the University of Cincinnati, under the leadership of its principled President Warren Bennis, I was very happy to get out of homophobic Ohio. When I moved to California, which had repealed its sodomy law in 1976, for the first time in my life I lived in a state where I was not a criminal.

What a relief to be in Los Angeles, which was filled with many gay activists. After all, it was Los Angeles where the gay rights movement had begun in 1950. I loved being able to sit in the back row of a meeting and politely applaud as others led. And so, I decided to shift back to my academic mode.

My best friend Gregory Sprague and I co-founded the Committee on Lesbian and Gay History for the American Historical Association, which we both chaired, and I soon was elected as an officer of the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists for the American Anthropological Association.

But what really changed my life once again is when I took a year's sabbatical in 1982 and 1983 and went out to live on several Indian reservations. After starting on the Omaha reservation, I went from the Pine Ridge Sioux to the Mayas of Yucatan, from the Aleuts of Alaska to the Navajos of Arizona. In all of these and many other Native American cultures I was surprised, even dumbfounded, to learn that Native traditionalists hold a strong respect for people that we would call androgynous homosexuals and transgender people. Such

androgynous persons are seen as having both the spirit of a man and the spirit of a woman combined into one exceptional individual. Several Native languages refer to them as Two-Spirit people. But instead of being looked down upon as abnormal and deviant, these Two-Spirit People are looked upon as exceptional and gifted. Because they are twice as spiritual as the average person, they were traditionally often spiritually powerful religious leaders. Their marriages to persons of the same sex were traditionally accepted and recognized, just the same as a man-woman marriage. Anyone who claims that marriage has always been only between a man and woman is only showing their ignorance of many cultures around the world that have traditionally accepted same-sex marriages.

When I presented a paper on the acceptance of Two-Spirit people in American Indian cultures at the American Society of Ethnohistory, prominent scholars warned me that my previous books on American Indians were establishing me as a recognized scholar in the field, and I was threatening my career if I continued to speak about homosexuality.

And you know what? By this time I was seeing a pattern. I had heard this all before. People most warned me not to do things that, from hindsight I look back on as the most positive and important things I have done in my life. From sitting down in a restaurant with a black person in violation of the segregation laws, to contributing financial support to the militant American Indian Movement activists who were occupying Wounded Knee in violation of the trespass laws, to the intimate joys of lovemaking with my boyfriend in violation of the sodomy laws, in all these cases I look back on these illegal acts as among the most important things I have done in my life.

In the year 1900, after he had languished in prison for two years for violating England's sodomy law, upon his release the famous gay playwright Oscar Wilde was asked if there

were things he had done that he now regretted. He answered that the only things he regretted from the past were things he had NOT done. I feel the same way. I am very glad I made these choices to take action, to break unjust laws, and to speak out. I only regret I did not do more.

In 1983 I was on the program to speak about the history of the suppression of the Native American Two-Spirit people by Christian missionaries working in tandem with the United States government, at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians. This group was meeting in Cincinnati, of all places. True to form for Cincinnati, just before my session began an organizer pulled me aside and told me that an anonymous phone caller had just called and threatened to shoot me if I spoke. The organizer of the conference told me incredulously there had never ever been a death threat at the Organization of American Historians, and he worriedly asked if I would agree to withdraw. I had stayed up all night writing my speech, and I told him I was not going to let such a threat intimidate me. I said I was sure the caller was not a historian, but some local Cincinnati homophobe who somehow recognized my name.

The room where I was scheduled to speak was already packed. It was standing room only, with some of America's most influential historians in attendance. I did not want to lose this opportunity to influence so many. Plus, I was all revved up and ready to go. To protect me the organizers brought in several armed police and stationed them around the room. Knowing what I knew about Cincinnati police, as I got up to speak I could not take my eyes off the policemen, and I wondered if one of them might be the one to pull the trigger. But nothing bad happened, and my speech was a rousing success.

When I wrote a book about this research in 1986, under the title of "*The Spirit and the*

Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture,” it was by far the most controversial thing I have ever written. In fact, a number of faculty lashed out at it, saying that it was not “objective scholarship” and that they did not want the University of Southern California to be known for such sex related research. Since this was my fourth book, no one could claim that it was “publish or perish.” Rather, in my case, it was “publish AND perish.”

I was not at all surprised at the controversy, because I remember so well sitting at my computer and saying to myself, “Should I write this book to get the approval of a tenure committee, or should I write it for the people who most need to read this information?” With tears in my eyes, because I knew I was sealing my fate, I decided to write it for the people who needed to read it: (1) gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, and (2) especially Native American Two-Spirit people.

Then the book was published, and what I can only call a mystic experience ensued.

First, “*The Spirit and the Flesh*” received an award for outstanding scholarship that was presented at the American Anthropological Association. Next it received an award as one of the best books of the year, from the American Library Association. And in short order it received a \$2,000 prize for the best book published on a sexological topic, anywhere in the world, by the World Congress for Sexology. I even got a free trip to Europe to accept the award at the Congress’ convention at Heidelberg University in Germany. I used the money to bring along my mother, since she had always wanted to see Europe. My Mom and I had a blast on the trip.

Since its publication in 1986, *The Spirit and the Flesh* has become more notable than all my other books put together. I was gratified by the positive reviews in academic journals and leading newspapers, but I was absolutely astounded to receive beautiful artwork and

sculptures from artists, poems published dedicated to me, and the Los Angeles Gay Men's Chorus even commissioned an opera based on the book. They asked me to speak at its premier performance, which was held at Bovard Auditorium. Nothing like this had ever happened with any other book I had written. In 1992 *The Spirit and the Flesh* was brought out in a second edition, which is still in print today. It has sold many, many more copies than anything else I have ever published, and I used the money to buy my house which I dearly love. Living well is, indeed, the best revenge.

Another result of this book's success was that in 1987 I won a Fulbright Research Professorship to do research in Indonesia. I spent a year and three months living in Indonesia, and I have to say it was one of the best years of my life. What a karmic reward! It was exactly what the mystic law of the universe ordered up for me, and it could not have been more perfect. As a result of that research, I published two more books on gender and sexuality in Indonesia, and publicized indigenous traditions of acceptance of sexual diversity that are quite similar to the American Indian Two-Spirit.

But destiny held that my role in Indonesia was to be more than just scholarly. Indonesia's pioneering gay activists contacted me and I volunteered to help them. Thus once again I became a human rights activist, this time in an advisory role. Indonesia's first gay magazine was typed on my computer, and I used some of the profits from my book to help finance the growth of gay human rights activism in Indonesia.

After coming back from a wonderful year in Indonesia, I was relaxed and rejuvenated. I felt especially welcomed back by USC's innovative Gender Studies Program. I learned so much from my colleagues, especially Professors Gloria Orenstein and Lois Banner, who were so influential in feminist issues and who had been so supportive of me. In teaching

about the pervasive gender discrimination against women through American history, I found that students would more likely believe these realities if I as a man said them, whereas they would commonly dismiss a female professor's statements as "biased." I thoroughly enjoyed my teaching, and incorporated what I learned in Indonesia into my lectures and into a fifth book that I wrote on gender roles in Indonesia. And a publisher in Indonesia asked me to collaborate with Indonesian scholars on writing a book of biographies of people of Java. That book is written in the Indonesian language.

After publishing these books, I was promoted to full professor. I knew that others had been made full professor after only two or three books, but it was pointless to wallow in resentments. And so I put my energies into pursuing a new goal. I set as my next project the establishment of the world's leading research center to promote scholarship in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender studies. If I had had any idea, any inkling, how complex and nerve-racking this project was going to end up becoming, I would have fled in terror in the opposite direction. My naivete led me to become involved in a project that would end up taking almost a decade of my life.

First I worked to build a strong group of supporters at USC. Earlier I had been faculty advisor for the gay student assembly, and now I became one of the leaders in the USC GLBT employees association. Things were changing at USC, and I was so pleased that it no longer felt like I was the only one doing campus activism. Several people made very important contributions. Provost Lloyd Armstrong appointed me as Chair of the university's Task Force in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies, and things were really clicking along.

Next, I had to convince key administrators at the University of Southern California about

the value of my vision. In this, I was very lucky because USC was fortunate to have a forward-thinking Provost, Dr. Lloyd Armstrong, three very supportive Deans of the USC Libraries, and a President, Dr. Steven Sample, who kept the hounds at bay. I scoured the neighborhood for every property owned by the university, and located a nice building that the administrators agreed to commit for this research center.

Once I had the commitment of a building from USC, then I had to go to two rival collections: ONE Institute, which is the western hemisphere's oldest gay research and educational organization, having been started in Los Angeles in 1952, and the National Gay and Lesbian Archives. Since I had been president of the board of directors of the Archives, and was director of the ONE Institute Center for Advanced Studies, I was the only person who was equally connected to both groups. After overseeing a series of negotiations between these groups, that at times seemed to rival the complexities of a proposal for peace in the Middle East, at last the two main groups agreed to merge. In 1994 they signed an agreement with USC, and ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives was born.

My vision for ONE Archives, as I laid it out in 1994, was that it should be more than just a library. Certainly, having a large library and archives is a necessary base for an outstanding research center. But in addition to that, a research institute should have funded programs to encourage and facilitate researchers to come to the library and make their job as easy as possible. But we had very little money, so instead of money I thought we could offer researchers a free place to live. Having found a USC owned apartment building close to my house that was not occupied, I persuaded the University to turn over this 17-unit apartment complex for researchers who wanted to come to Los Angeles to do research in ONE Archives. USC made a three year commitment of the building, and in 1994 moved

some USC students who were interested in LGBT Studies, into this building. I got the word out, and within a short time scholars arrived from places like Harvard, City University of New York, University of New Mexico, and universities in Brazil, Israel, Australia, Canada, Belgium and other countries.

Desperate for money to fund scholarships, I co-founded the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies with the idea that this organization could raise money to support the visiting scholars. Even though this organization went on to produce ground-breaking research reports of great value, it did not immediately bring in the kind of financial support I hoped for.

I was forced to arm twist friends, and friends of friends, and I gave many tours through the facility to individuals who I hoped would become potential donors. I was not confident of my abilities as a fundraiser, but finally, gay rights pioneer Dr. Hal Call came to the rescue, as I persuaded him to establish the Hal Call Scholarship Fund. This money provided modest living funds for the researchers. With these scholarships, combined with free housing from USC, over the next three years the scholars in residence produced quite a number of books and scholarly articles. Dissertations (at USC and elsewhere) were written, journalistic articles and legal affidavits were researched, and documentary films were made. I am especially proud that I was able to purchase plane tickets and bring over Professor Igor Kon from the Russian Academy of Sciences. This prominent Russian sociologist spent a year doing research at ONE Archives, and he wrote the first book on homosexuality ever to be published in Russia.

After three years USC needed to take back the apartment complex to provide housing for students. I was disappointed, but I could hardly complain, because I realized USC had been

more generous than any other university in its financial support of LGBT Studies.

Nevertheless, my gratitude was mixed with sadness as the last visiting scholars moved out of the complex in 1997. For the next several years I tried to locate funds to purchase another apartment building, but alas without success. What is still needed is major funding to sponsor a new level of such research in the 21st century.

A third area of focus of a research center is to promote publication, and I worked closely with Dorr Legg, the main leader of ONE Institute over the years, and together we wrote a book that summed up his perspective on founding a field of study. The book was titled "*Homophile Studies in Theory and Practice*." The first copies arrived in the mail on Dorr Legg's 89th birthday, and after that he considered his life work to be done. Though he was frail and weak, I could see in his eyes his satisfaction in holding the volume in his hands. I vowed to him that I would dedicate myself to make sure that the educational and research institute he had struggled to build up, and to which he had devoted his entire life, would continue and grow in the future. Two days later he died peacefully, with his devoted longtime companion Johnny Nojima by his side.

At this point I decided that the biggest need in the rapidly expanding field of Gay and Lesbian Studies was to provide reviews of books that were being published in many different disciplines. When I was in Indonesia I saw that books from Europe or the US were prohibitively expensive, so I thought if it were not possible for gay and lesbian people in isolated areas to get books, at least I could make it possible for them to read reviews of those books. In 1996, with the help of two internet specialists at ONE Archives who volunteered to help me, we created the "*International Gay and Lesbian Review*." I am told that this was the world's first academic journal, in any field, to be published entirely online.

While as Editor I aimed for it to be of high academic quality, I also stressed to reviewers about the need to write in clear prose, without jargon, so that the reviews could be read by people around the world. I am proud to say that “International Gay and Lesbian Review” now has over a thousand reviews and abstracts of books in this field.

A fourth purpose of ONE Archives is to provide a forum for publicizing the results of the research to the wider public. Documentary film screenings, public lectures, and symposia are part of this outreach to the public. In addition, with the help of some really dedicated volunteers, and a \$25,000 donation from a friend of mine, I designed and developed a museum on the top floor of the building, with exhibits on the history and creativity of the LGBT community.

Over the last decade I learned that just as the wheels of justice grind slowly, so do the wheels of academic administration and construction projects. I learned more about how the different parts of a university really operate than I ever wanted to know. After many frustrating delays and some petty infighting, but with generous financial contributions by USC and from several individual benefactors and incredibly hard workers, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives opened its newly renovated two-story 14,000 square foot building. It is now the largest collection of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender materials in the world.

It is a beautiful structure, and now that it is in operation and open on a regular basis I am so proud to see so many volunteers involved in ONE Archives, including many of my former students. It is a vibrant living place that is a resource for the whole world. I consider it to be one of the major accomplishments of my life, and I am sure that others who poured their heart and soul into it feel the same way.

Over the past decade researchers have been coming to USC from around the world to do research in this unparalleled archives. The products of this research have not only contributed to the advancement of knowledge, but have helped to advance human rights in both the United States and abroad. To give just one example, Dr. Garay Garabaidy, a Fulbright Scholar from Azerbaijan, came to USC to work with me, and I introduced him to ONE Archives. After spending several months doing research there, this professor went back to his home country and convinced his nation's government to repeal its sodomy law. Azerbaijan is today one of the few Muslim nations with no laws criminalizing homosexuality

Meanwhile, as I was doing this work I wanted to bring the insights I had gained from my civil rights work, my race relations research, my American Indian Movement work, and my gay rights activism together and apply it to my teaching. In response to the 1992 Rodney King uprising in Los Angeles, I was inspired to develop a new course called “Overcoming Prejudice.” Rather than just complain about how bad prejudice is, or trying to prove that it exists, this course proceeds from the assumption that prejudice does exist and that it is a serious problem for society. I encourage students who do not share that assumption to drop the class and to take an introductory race relations course or an introductory gender studies class. The entire focus of this “Overcoming Prejudice” class is to analyze the most effective strategies and techniques for reducing prejudice. This class deals with many kinds of prejudice, including prejudice based on age, race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, immigration status, religion, and on and on.

One of the people coming to do research at ONE Archives was Professor James Sears of Harvard University, and he sat in on this class. As a result, we started a collaboration and

ended up editing a book called “Overcoming Heterosexism and Homophobia: Strategies That Work” published by Columbia University Press. That book was a direct outgrowth of my class at USC.

As my reputation spread, I was drawn into work in areas where I had no idea I would have an impact. Human rights activists in China contacted me and told me about Dr. Wan Yan Hai who is China’s leading gay activist. He was on the verge of being arrested by the Chinese government, and they asked my help in getting him out of the country. I am so proud of USC, because in an instant the USC Center for Feminist Research approved my request for Dr. Wan to come here as a visiting scholar. And I am so proud that the Institute for the Study of Human Resources, on whose board I sit, promptly approved my request for a scholarship that would provide the funds for Dr. Wan to live for the year in the USA.

Armed with a scholarly application from a major research university and a scholarship award, the Chinese immigration department approved his visa without delay. As with any big bureaucracy, sometimes one department does not know what another department is doing. Chinese human rights activists were very nervous that the police could come at any time, so they kept moving him from city to city until word came about the visa approval. With all of us working in his behalf, Dr. Wan got out of China right before the police had a chance to act. I heaved a great sigh of relief when he finally arrived safely in Los Angeles.

Once he came here in 1997, I gave Wan Yan Hai a copy of my new book, “*Overcoming Heterosexism and Homophobia*.” I asked him to think of ways that my theoretical approach to prejudice reduction might be able to help improve human rights in China. Wan worked under my direction for a year, and we came up with a plan. A big problem in China is the fact that the Chinese Psychiatric Association still defined homosexuality as a mental

illness. It was hard to argue for human rights, he said, when they define it as a disease. Several human rights activists were trying to convince the Chinese Psychiatric Association to change their policy, but they were having no success.

As luck would have it, one of the members of the Chinese Psychiatric Association was visiting in Los Angeles. Wan was able to convince him to come to ONE Archives and meet me. This psychiatrist came, and we had a long discussion, with Wan translating. I gave him my whole spiel, a quarter century of research boiled down into less than two hours. He asked really good questions, and Wan felt good about the results.

While Wan was here, he organized the Chinese Society for the Study of Sexual Minorities. I served an advisory role, drawing on the academic organizational work I had done with the Committee on Lesbian and Gay History, and the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists. Together, we planned a conference, and the first academic meeting of the Chinese Society for the Study of Sexual Minorities was held in 1998 at USC. People came from all over the world to attend. History was being made.

As Wan's visa was getting ready to expire, I was very nervous about his return to China. He said not to worry, that the attention span of the police is short, and after the passage of a year they would have forgotten all about him. Besides, he said, he was committed to going back to China to have an impact on his country. I nervously saw him off, not knowing if I would ever see him again.

Upon his return, Wan went straight to work, meeting individually with as many members of the Chinese Psychiatric Association as he could convince to see him. I asked the Institute for the Study of Human Resources to give him another scholarship, so that he would be able to devote full time to this crucial work. Because his own degree is in the

medical field, Dr. Wan Yan Hai got people to listen to him. As a result of his and other human rights activists' hard work, in 2001 the Chinese Psychiatric Association voted to remove homosexuality from its List of Mental Disorders.

This change of policy made headlines in newspapers around the world. Because the Chinese Psychiatric Association is an arm of China's government, their decision meant that the government of China repealed its policy of treating homosexuals as criminals. Their hard work has benefited millions of people, and I was so proud to have a small part in this effort.

As a result of all this, in November 2001 Beijing University invited me to give an address on the history of homosexuality. Beijing University is the leading government university in China, and the next generation of China's leaders largely graduate from this campus. I am told that I was the first foreign scholar to be invited to speak on this subject. When I went there, over two hundred people packed the room. I spoke for an hour and a half, and then the energetic crowd kept me there for another two hours of questions. It was the most invigorating response I think I have ever had.

Right after this, I got another invitation to speak at Shanghai Medical University. In both Shanghai and Beijing, I also spoke to gatherings of those cities' gay activists. Once again, I had to distill years of research into about two hours to give them ideas for how to be effective in reducing prejudice.

Though the battle for the human rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people is hardly won in China, tremendous progress has been made. To give just one indication of the vast change that has occurred in the last few years, today over five hundred Chinese gay and lesbian websites are now flourishing on the internet. Lives have been changed. Lives

have been saved.

A year later this same process occurred in the Republic of Korea, and I was invited to present the inaugural lecture to the Korean Sexual Minority Rights Center. I also gave a speech at Seoul National University, South Korea's leading university.

While all this was going on, I was working on another book with USC Social Work Librarian Yolanda Retter. In 2003 that book, my ninth book, was published by Greenwood Press under the title "*Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States: A Documentary History*." I wanted to publicize the long history of lesbian and gay activists that most people never heard of, especially emphasizing that the movement began here in Los Angeles in 1950, long before the Stonewall uprising in 1969. This book grew out of the lectures that I give on this subject in my USC class "Social Issues in Gender and Sexuality." Once again, I find my teaching and my research and my human rights activism tie together. I consider this academic work to be just as important in advancing human rights for sexual minorities, as any of the explicitly political work that I have done in my life.

Most recently, for several years I have been serving as expert witness for many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender immigrants who have applied for asylum in the United States on the basis of persecution they suffered in their home country. I am proud to say that in every case where I have testified or have written an affidavit, the immigrant has been awarded asylum by various United States Immigration Courts across the nation. For example, just a few weeks ago I was the first of several witnesses to testify for a transgender person from Hong Kong, and right after my testimony the judge cancelled the rest of the trial and ordered the immediate granting of asylum. Each court victory in these cases

provides legal precedent for more victories in the future.

I am very pleased to see this kind of dramatic impact on changing people's lives that is a direct result of my research. But when people tell me today that what I am doing is brave, that my speaking and writing is brave, I just shake my head and say, no, this is not bravery. What I did in Cincinnati years ago, maybe that was a little brave. What I did in the civil rights protests of the 1960s, maybe that was a little brave. But it is important to put into perspective that what I have been through was nothing compared to what Gandhi did in standing up to the British Empire, and later to religious fanaticism. It was nothing compared to what King did in standing up to the segregation system, and later the war machine. And both of them paid for their convictions with their lives.

Daisaku Ikeda is alive, but he also has been the target of assassination attempts. It almost seems that accomplishing great deeds is inevitably accompanied by great criticism and even death threats. I know very little, and care less, about the details of Japanese politics and about the schisms of various religious organizations. Ikeda has been vilified on both of those subjects. But what I do care about is the astounding quality of Daisaku Ikeda's ideas. I first read one of his books exactly twenty years ago, and he has had a profound impact on my life. His commitment to human rights is longstanding, and unwavering. I remember so well how he stressed equality for homosexuals back in the 1970s, before it became popular. He is always quoting the great gay poet Walt Whitman as one of his major influences on his life. Let me give you just a few short quotes, taken from his book "Faith into Action", that may show you why he has been such an inspiration particularly to racial minorities, to sexual minorities, and to women. He stresses equality for everyone. Daisaku Ikeda writes:

“Everyone has a right to flower, to reveal his or her full potential as a human being, to fulfill his or her mission in this world. You have this right, and so does everyone else. To scorn and violate people’s human rights destroys the natural order of things. We must become people who prize human rights and respect others, above all.”

“Buddhism thoroughly protects the sanctity of life and the freedom of the human spirit, and this constitutes our mission.... We must be prepared to protect people whose rights are in danger, or who are threatened by tyranny or oppression.”

“Human rights are fundamental and must take priority over all else; without human rights, neither peace nor human happiness is possible.... Their violation cannot be permitted, whether by states or by any other force.”

“Our schools must teach human rights, our religions must preach human rights, our governments must respect human rights.... Unless we can build a society that regards human beings not as a means to a goal but as THE goal itself, we will remain forever a society of discrimination, unhappiness, and inequality.”

“We must stand up for our beliefs and take action. Human rights will never be won unless we speak out, unless we fight to secure them.... Do not say you will do it ‘someday;’ now is the time. Do not say ‘someone’ will do it; you are the one. Now is the time for youth to take full responsibility and courageously pave the way for the people’s triumph.”

Wow. What a world we could create if every religious leader thought like this. Imagine these words coming from the lips of a Pope, or an Ayatollah, or a fundamentalist preacher on television. Maybe we would indeed be able to create a world in which Jesus of Nazareth said the most important thing is to love one another.

And yet, that is not the world we have. Instead, those who try to do the most to improve

the world get the most opposition. There is an old joke that asks how you recognize a pioneering activist. The answer is to look for the person who has all the knives sticking out of their back. While there is the tendency we all have sometimes to dwell on the hurt and the pain that is sometimes entailed because we felt the need to do something that was out of step with society, on not conforming to prevailing standards, and on marching to a different drummer. Despite this tendency there is the larger need to focus on the reason we felt compelled to do those things that were so out of line with the norm.

People ask me how I deal with the stress of opposition, and yes there have been times when I have been under great stress. How have I gotten through these periods of stress? It is in this regard that the writings of Daisaku Ikeda have been so helpful to me. Daisaku Ikeda is firmly anti-war, and stresses peace. But, for a man of peace, he sure is a model of how to deal with adversity. I've read about how much Gandhi was criticized in his lifetime, and as a teenager I myself heard the awful things that were said about Martin Luther King. But when Ikeda is criticized, he calls it "challenges." That is, not opposition, not a roadblock, but simply a challenge to be overcome. And in the process, this challenge offers us the opportunity to grow from the experience. What a transformative way to look at a negative and to make it into a positive. In Buddhist terms, to change poison into medicine. A few other Ikeda quotes:

"The stronger the opposition from without, the stronger one's determination to summon forth one's inner resources to fight against it—this is the spirit.... to boldly take on great challenges without shunning the subsequent problems and difficulties you will inevitably face."

"Youth must have the spirit to attack injustice, the spirit to refute what is wrong.... [To

be] afraid of ‘making waves,’ are the actions of self-serving youth who are already spiritually old and decrepit.”

“Rather than a life of blank pages, live a life crammed full of memories—of battles well fought and wonderfully diverse experiences. Not to leave behind any history, just to grow old and die, is a sad way to live.”

Dr. Ikeda’s Buddhist philosophy keeps me inspired, not to be a critic, but to do what I can to help make the world a better place. Earlier in my life, I was focused on protesting injustices. Today I am focused on increasing human happiness. Now it is certainly true that major injustices remain unresolved. And happiness is increased in part by working to reduce injustice and inequality. But under Ikeda’s influence my focus now is on the positive. I try to minimize the lower life conditions in my life, like greed, anger and stupidity, and try to maximize the higher life conditions by promoting learning, creativity, and compassion. It is only by this process, Ikeda says, that a person can achieve fulfillment in life.

So, in accepting this award, I want you to know why the Gandhi, King, Ikeda Award is so particularly meaningful to me. While Gandhi was killed a few months before I was born, I consider myself fortunate to have met both King and Ikeda. All three of these thinkers have been so influential to my life. Whatever accomplishments I have been able to make in my life, I don’t want to ever forget that I am standing on the shoulders of giants. Three of these giants are the people for whom this award is named. I hope I can live up to their ideals. --- Walter L. Williams