

The Existentialist

Newsletter of the First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta

470 Candler Park Drive, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30307 • Founded in 1976 •

A Philosophically Based Spiritual Community

Dedicated to Human Liberation

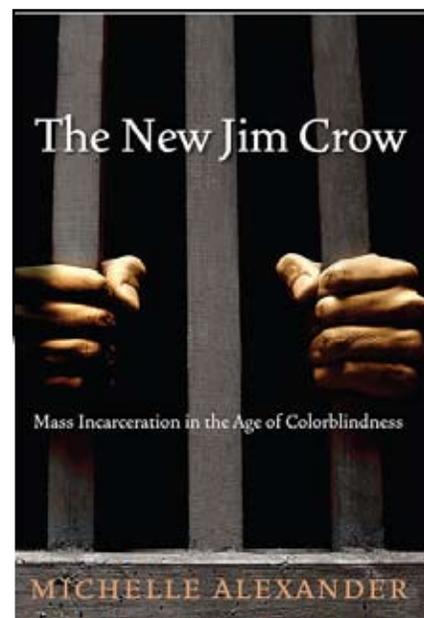
and Founded on Existentialist and Feminist Principles •

The New Jim Crow: Caste in the Age of Color Blindness

"Now and then a book comes along that might ... touch the public and educate social commentators, policymakers, and politicians about a glaring wrong that we have been living with that we ... don't know how to face. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander is such a work...." (*New York Review of Books*, March 2011, quoted on UUA website). Michelle Alexander, civil rights activist and litigator and professor of law at Ohio State University, has written a book that explodes the myth of colorblindness in the United States. Although Jim Crow laws are no longer on the books, although we have a black president, a caste system is still alive and working in this country. Its result: the mass incarceration of young black men in unprecedented numbers. Its mechanism: privatized prisons and the War on Drugs.

Dr. Alexander spoke to over 600 people at the UUA Justice General Assembly in Phoenix, AZ, in July 2012. She outlined her findings about how racial profiling, criminalization, and mass incarceration of African Americans and other people of color have created a new system of institutionalized racism, discrimination, and exclusion, replacing the old Jim Crow system of legalized exclusion. Her book describes and explains how African Americans are kept poor, jobless, and in many states unable to vote as a result of criminalization for often minor drug offenses. Thus a caste system replicating Jim Crow laws now applies to those with prison records, overwhelmingly people of color.

The New Jim Crow has been selected as the UUA "read" for the year. First E members will be reading and meeting to discuss the book in 2013. Our first meeting will take place after the Celebration of Life on March 3. We are ordering books from Charis Books and More at a discount. If you would like to join the discussion group, see Libby or Charlene--or join us on March 3. ~



The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander (The New Press, 2010)

**First Existentialist
Congregation of
Atlanta**

470 Candler Park Drive,
NE
Atlanta, Georgia 30307
404-378-5570
www.firstexistentialist.org

All Are Welcome
Join us in our
Celebrations of Life on
Sundays at 11:00 a.m.
Children's Program
during Sunday services

Fellowship Minister:
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revm@bellsouth.net
Office Administrator:
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human liberation
and founded on existentialist
and feminist principles.*



Notes From the Board

By Libby Ware, Board Chair

The Board met on Monday, January 7, at 7:00 pm.

Ted Pettus presented Randy Pimsler's update on our application status for a Special Use Permit which would permit an after school program to use the downstairs area. Survey on property has been completed, the first step in our application process.

The Board will sponsor a reception after the service on February 24 in recognition of Linda and Tony Scharko and their continuing support of our congregation, including removing a fallen tree at a reduced fee and fixing our fence for free.

A new nominating committee has been formed with Charlene Ball, Ashley Davis and Jon Nye volunteering to serve. This committee's duty is to find candidates for the Board for the coming year. Elections will be held in April.

The Board is developing a Security Plan. Rick will purchase an air horn for the children's educators to use in case of emergency. After the children go downstairs the door to the stairs will be locked and the greeter will hold the key in case families arrive late. Stephanie or Aurelia will hold the other key. We need a script for the police if we need to call in case of an intruder and anyone who is calling 911 should know our address: 470 Candler Park Drive.

Fred Conrad has volunteered to be the garden coordinator. Andy will work on irrigation. There are already 5 rain barrels and one tank. Charlene will contact her handyman about cleaning the gutters.

Ted has been in contact with representatives from the Sweetwater 420 Fest that takes place in April. They have offered a free food booth for our inconvenience. A committee is forming for the food booth. Please contact Ted Pettus if you would like to be on the committee. Andy and Karla will help and Rick has volunteered some of the Lost & Found youth. Ideas include grilled donuts with chocolate sauce and ice cream.

There has been concern about the banner hanging over the front with moisture damage and obscuring the window and word "sanctuary." We decided to move the banner to the ramp railing.

The Board authorized \$150 for paint for Stephanie and Aurelia to paint the downstairs child education area in response to their request.

Karla volunteered to coordinate a facilitator meeting to revisit the Sunday COL. Program Guild has suggested having a talk about our core values each Sunday. Based on comments from the January 6th service, Charlene and Bill Laney will discuss with the Program Guild how to build continuity among Sunday services. (The Program Guild met since this meeting and set a date for a Facilitators' Workshop on April 20 at Linda Bell's.)

Karla donated \$50 gift card toward purchasing books for the Social Justice Guild's UUA read: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*. Thanks, Karla.

Next meeting: February 4 at 7:00. All are welcome. ~

Guild Reports

Membership Guild

by Wilj Sturkey-Mercado

We had a short Membership Guild meeting on Sunday, Jan. 13.

Our next meeting will be on Sunday, Feb. 3 AFTER the Celebration of Life. We decided to meet after the service so we will all be there and it will give us more time to talk about the upcoming round-table discussion that Marsha Mitchiner will facilitate on Feb. 17. At that meeting we hope we will come up with some positive suggestions on how to increase membership at First E, which we will share with the membership at the round-table discussion. We will also host a Kiddush on that date. We will bring cheese and fruit to snack on during the round-table discussion.

In the next few weeks, we will compare lists of First E Members with lists of former members who did not re-pledge, and Marsha M. will contact those who didn't re-pledge.

Our new t-shirts arrived several weeks ago and sold like hotcakes. We only have four more to sell. ~

Program Guild

by Charlene Ball

The Program Guild met on Tuesday, January 22, to plan the COLs for April, May, and June 2013. We have planned to ask some interesting speakers. One exciting piece of news is that Rev. Duncan Teague will be speaking at First E once a month. We're looking forward to hearing Duncan more often, as he was once one of a three-person ministerial team and is a popular guest speaker.

Also, we're asking back some of our favorite ministers and speakers. We'll keep you posted on names and dates as they return our calls.

Another news item: we will hold a Facilitators' Workshop on Saturday, April 20, at the home of Linda Bell. All Program Guild members, all facilitators, and all members and friends who have considered facilitating are invited. It will be an open discussion and sharing of information, tips, and ideas on how to make our COLs more streamlined and give them more continuity from service to service.

The Program Guild consists of Patton White (chair), Charlene Ball, Linda Bell, and Bill Laney. If you have considered facilitating, or if you would like to suggest a speaker or musician, contact us: Patton: patton@beacondance.org; Charlene: mcharleneball@yahoo.com; Linda: lbell@gsu.edu; and Bill: bill3391a@yahoo.com. We welcome your suggestions and input. ~

Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. ~ Margaret Mead

Finance Report: December 2012

General Operating Account Thru Dec. 31

Total Income 64,430

Total Expenses (63,102)

2012 Cash Flow 1,328

Fund Types & Names Account Balances on Dec. 31

< unaudited >

General Operating Account 2,063

Designated Operating Funds 8,532

Gay Dellinger Estate Gift	1,671
Handicap Access Ramp	1,345
Lanier Clance Lighting	1,044
Leadership Development	295
Community Garden	(443)
Building & Grounds	259
Woodland Sanctuary	919
Minister's Discretionary	682
Original 1st E History	68
Labyrinth & Garden	256
Social Justice	914
Attic Insulation Fund	1,250
Music Fund	150
Children's Program	122

Pat Hewatt Revolving Loan Fund 5,063

Special Use Permit Loan Fund (\$4.5K) 3,900

Total First E Funds 19,558

Old Stone Church History Project

Bi-Racial History Account	2,283
Legacy Markers Account	732

Total History Project Funds 3,015

Third Friday Film Series
Standing Army
 Friday, February 15 at 7:30pm
 Sliding Scale Donations Requested \$1-\$10.00
 No one turned away
 Popcorn & Refreshments
 Discussion after the film
 Co-sponsored by Georgia Peace and Justice Coalition

Wednesday Night Suppers
 each Week
 6:30 to 8:00/8:30 pm
 in the Sanctuary
 If you would like to provide a meal
 or bring a covered dish,
 please contact Elaine or Wilj
 of the Membership Guild.

All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence. ~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

If you would like to become a member or friend of First E, please fill out a pledge form located on the sanctuary literature rack or download the form from our website at <http://www.firstexistentialist.org>.

The more sand that has escaped from the hourglass of our life, the clearer we should see through it. ~ Jean-Paul Sartre

Please 'like' us on Facebook!
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/43340332955/>

Community News & Activities

- MEMBERSHIP FOR 2013:** Please remember to send in your pledge form. Copies are in the sanctuary, and you can drop them into the offering. ~
- A book discussion group**, sponsored by the Social Justice Guild, will start on March 3. We will read *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, which is the UUA "read" for the year. If you are interested, contact a member of the Social Justice Guild. We will order books from Charis and meet once a month for 4 to 6 months. ~
- A reception honoring the contributions of Tony and Linda Scharko**, farmers and landscapers, to our Congregation, will be held by the Board following the Celebration of Life on February 24. ~
- The Community Garden** starts in March. If you want to be involved, talk with Fred Conrad. ~
- Wednesday Night Suppers/ Potlucks** start around 6:30 or 7:00. Bring a dish to share and stay for ukuleles and instruction. ~
- Shannon Sanders** and her partner have had a lot of stress lately, with partner's illness and Shannon changing jobs. Shannon has had to resign her First E board position. Please send them both loving & calming thoughts. ~
- Antioch East Elder Mrs. Marian Latimore O'Neal** is at Emory Hospital. As a child she was baptized at the Old Stone Church. Please send her thoughts and prayers. ~
- Congratulations to Mark White and Shelly Ahmann and their family**, which just celebrated its eighth birthday together!! ~
- Andy Weiskopf thanked all the people involved in the recent full workday** preparing for the new lighting in the Sanctuary. ~
- Alan Dynin** has several concerts coming up, one featuring Chopin and one featuring Brubeck, one of which, we hope, will be at First E. ~
- Victoria Trestrail** is concerned that her sister's birthday and recently deceased mother's birthday both fall on January 16, and it will be sad time for her. ~
- Lynn Tippetts** is home resting after being hospitalized with severe respiratory illness. Send her your healing thoughts. ~
- Shelly Ahmann** passed her 10-year professional re-certification. Yay, Shelly!! ~
- The Nominating Committee** is looking for First E members to serve on the Board in 2013. If you are interested, see Charlene Ball, Ashlea Davis, or Jon Nye. ~
- Palestinian nonviolent resistance leader Iyad Burnat** is in the Atlanta area Feb. 1-2. He is the subject of the Oscar-nominated documentary *5 Broken Cameras*. On Saturday, February 2, he will speak at a brunch meeting at 10 a.m. at the Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur. For more information, see <http://www.ifpb.org/education/activities/us/iyadburnat.html> or contact Ilise Cohen at 415-810-1433 or Ilise.cohen@gmail.com.
- One Billion Rising! Join flashmob on Peachtree Street** to oppose violence against women worldwide on February 14. To join, contact Lorraine or go to www.onebillionatlanta.com ; onebillionrising.com for more information. ~
- Rising Up!** Inspired, interactive, and spirited performances with Phyllis Free, Angela Bennett, and others at UUCA, Cliff Valley on February 14, 8-10:00 pm. ~
- Contact Robert Stewart** with your news and activities: rstewart@toyodausa.com . ~

Rev. Duncan Teague Returns to First E on February 3

Duncan Teague is a ministerial candidate with the Unitarian Universalist (UU) Association, where he also serves on the Appointments Committee of the UUA Board. He is a member of the UU Congregation of Atlanta. He has completed his ministerial internship with the Tennessee Valley UU Church of Knoxville, TN. He has been a pulpit guest at many of the Unitarian Universalist congregations, other churches and synagogues. This past year he was the guest alumni preacher of the annual UU student worship service of Cannon Chapel at Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Teague credits his accepting his calling to ministry began when he agreed to be part of the interim ministry team serving the First Existentialist Congregation as a lay minister. He served with Rev. Marsha Mitchiner and Rev. Janna Nelson upon the retirement of Rev. Lanier Clance. His relationship from the early 1990's with the First E-Cong was his formal conversion as a religious liberal.

Teague has more than twenty years of work in HIV/AIDS advocacy, prevention, education and research. He is a recognized leader in the GLBTQ community. He is a featured contributor to *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* by E. Patrick Johnson. As such, he was featured in the reader's theatre production and the full staged adaptations of the book. He was the senior member of the ADODI Muse: A Gay Negro Ensemble. He is happily married to his long-time companion of nineteen years, David Thurman. ~

Craig Washington, Activist and Writer, Speaks on February 24

I was born and lovingly raised by Anna and Leon Washington in Queens, New York. My older cousin Lamont discovered me "reading" a newspaper at the age of three, and I started writing poetry at seven. My parents instilled in my brother Kenny and me a strong sense of self awareness and cultural pride as black boys growing up in the '60s and '70s. During my adolescence, my self-esteem and confidence were eroded by growing anxieties about my homosexuality. I enrolled at Columbia University but left after two semesters. It was not until my friend Sandra assured me there was nothing wrong with me that I began to find the courage within to accept myself. In 1979, she introduced me to her nephew Derek Crawford who would introduce me to New York's gay scene. I thank Sandra, Derek and Karen Taylor for loving me without strings so that I could give myself permission to become myself.

As a young man, I continued writing. With fellow poet Simone Allmond and musician Clara McLaughlin, I formed a poetry ensemble, Us's. Us's used choreopoems and music to stimulate audiences to think and act. In 1985, I developed symptoms of HIV. I began to write about AIDS but refrained from disclosing my status. I attended the Gay Men of African Descent discussions in the Charles Angel Room of the Gay and Lesbian Center and caught the electric performances of Other Countries, the black gay men's writing collective. I started freelance writing for *The City Sun* and published interviews with Cassandra Wilson, Sweet Honey in the Rock, and legendary Other Countries member Donald Woods.

In 1991, I met L. Soon after we started dating, he encouraged me to get tested. The result confirmed what I had already known. We landed in Atlanta on the Fourth of July 1992. At Charis Books, I met Tre Johnson, who introduced me to local black LGBT cultural spaces. I soon began freelance writing for *Southern Voice* and volunteering with AID Atlanta. I later secured the position of African American Outreach Coordinator, delivering prevention and awareness services to black communities.

In 1993, I began attending Second Sunday, a small discussion group for black gay men. During this time, I faced my first AIDS defining illness. Were it not for the care of my former partner L and the support of my closest friends, I would not have made it. In 1996, I was elected co-chair with Ulester Douglas. The following year, I took on a new gay specific position at AID Atlanta, the Deeper Love project, a HIV risk reduction program that featured a workshop series and a monthly forum known as Black Coffee. I consider my work with Second Sunday and the Deeper Love project at AID Atlanta as two of my most meaningful accomplishments.

In 1999, I became Co-Director for Southerners On New Ground (SONG), a regional organization that trained activists to challenge racism, sexism, homophobia, and class oppression. I helped design and present workshops and retreats for orga-

Continued on next page

February 2013 Sunday Celebrations of Life

February 3 ***Running Fast Enough to Get Caught***

Speakers: ***Rev. Duncan Teague***

Facilitator: ***Victoria Trestrail***

Accompanist: ***Alan Dynin***

February 10 ***Why Black History Month is Important For Me***

Speaker: ***Rev. Janna Nelson***

Facilitator: ***Charlene Ball***

Accompanist: ***Richard Rifkin***

February 17 ***E Pluribus Unum***

Speaker: ***Rev. Marsha Mitchiner***

Facilitator: ***Ted Pettus***

Accompanist: ***TBA***

Round Table Discussion after the Service led by Rev. Marsha Mitchiner

February 24 ***TBA***

Speaker: ***Craig Washington***

Facilitator: ***D. Patton White***

Accompanist: ***Charli Vogt***

nizers throughout the Southeast. In 2001, I became director of the Atlanta Gay and Lesbian Center where I helped increase the Center's visibility by engaging people of color and women. In March 2003, I accepted a position with Positive Impact which provides free mental health counseling for people affected by HIV living on limited income. Since 1995, I have served on the Martin Luther King Jr. March planning committee, which has consistently maintained a place at the table for LGBT people, and I am a co-organizer of the annual Bayard Rustin-Lorde Community Breakfast. I also served as a trainer for the National Coalition Builders Institute, which provides workshops and forums to reduce prejudice and foster conflict resolution.

I have published essays, editorials, interviews and reviews in the *Washington Blade*, *Southern Voice*, *Atlanta Voice*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Arise*, *Clique*, *Venus Magazine*, and *The City Sun*. My essay "A Revolutionary Act," a reflection of my walk with HIV, was published in the anthology, *Not In My Family: AIDS in the African American Community* edited by Gil Robertson.

In 2003, with the encouragement of friends like Mary Anne Adams, Maurice Cook, Duncan Teague, and John Peterson, I returned to school to finish my undergraduate degree, spending four years of writing papers in coffeehouses and poring over chapters at breakfast diners. I never knew how much I wanted it until I got it. Weeks after graduation, I started the MSW program at Georgia State University and was awarded a Master of Social Work in 2008.

In August 2008, I returned to AID Atlanta as a prevention programs manager. It felt like coming back to a new home, reuniting with a friend barely recognized because we both had changed so much. My challenge now is re-integrating myself as writer, organizer, amateur R&B music historian, lover of arts, public speaker into one undivided Self. Each day I rise to give, buy, accept what life demands. ~

The Back Page - First E Members and Friends Speak

Peace in the Neighborhood

by Rev. Chris Glaser

Along one of our morning walks, our dog Hobbes and I pass an old house with two-story-high wooden columns. Recent walks have given me an opportunity to really “see” the house, and in a kinder way than I have before.

You see, during President George W. Bush’s wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, the owner of the house nailed a large sign on one of those columns, declaring, “Thanks Pres. Bush & Our Troops for Kicking Ass!” For me, its angry tone disturbed the relative peace of our neighborhood. I’d prefer to see a yellow ribbon or American flag as a sign of solidarity with our troops and our leaders. Instead I felt a little on edge whenever I passed by.

It reminded me of the power of words to be violent, harsh, and violating. The words I most regret are those I’ve spoken or written in careless anger. (I say “careless anger,” because I believe anger can be good if directed, managed, and channeled properly and constructively.) Studies show that even raising your voice can elicit shame in others.

At the polls last November, I endured the toxic sting of just that, a poll manager who yelled at me when all I was doing was looking to see if I was in the right line. I had not spoken, I had not tried to get ahead of anyone, but her blast heard round my neighbors in the social hall of my own church shamed me as if I had. When I returned to my place, two women in line with me who witnessed what transpired said, “We think you need a hug!” And though strangers, each one hugged me. Even the sympathy of other poll workers did not alleviate my desire to vote and get out of there as quickly as possible. And it took me several days to shake the venom the woman had injected.

The incident made me think of those of us who grew up with hateful language directed at us because of who we happened to be, the venom injected into our bodies by words that violated our souls, a toxin many of us carry within us to this day. It is hard not to repay evil for evil, a word for a word. A gay activist friend discovered that when he began writing diatribes against his evangelical world; someone from the King Center for Non-Violent Social Change called this to his attention, and now he is a devotee of non-violence in speech and thought as well as action.

When Barack Obama became president, the sign on the house briefly disappeared, and I wondered if the reason was partisan. But soon it reappeared, amended to read, “Thanks, Pres. Obama & Our Troops for Kicking Ass!” At least the homeowner was bipartisan! But it made me feel no more pleasure walking past it.

Now that U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq is winding down, the sign has recently been removed. The house seems kinder and gentler as we walk past. And the neighborhood feels a little more peaceful. ~

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The First E Newsletter is published monthly. The deadline for submission of material for the March 2013 newsletter is February 10. Send your articles and announcements to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any material submitted.

