

My Forest of Symbols: The Color of...
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In Memory of Sandi

My last undergraduate class in anthropology was the old senior seminar the content of which changed by topic and faculty. In 1971 at Syracuse it was "Symbolic Anthropology." As a student involved all kinds of politics- on and off campus, I did not have time to forage in Victor Turners' forests but I had a final paper to write. My paper looked at the colors of the Black national movement - Black, green and red - former Garvey colors now in the hands of Black power revolutionaries that evoked symbolically historical, political and cultural awareness. These were not the symbolic colors my instructor had intended for me, but I worked those color symbols in my understanding of 1960s-70s Black America expressions embedded in as Victor Turner stated as "a totality gaining significance from the system as a whole."

Colors have always been important signifiers of places, groups and individuals for me, proudly wearing red and blue [my high school colors], orange [Syracuse] the just mentioned black, green and red, salmon pink and apple green [my sorority AKA] Scarlett [Rutgers robe I wear in honor of Vera Green] and White - that in some

cultures is not a color but at Bowdoin College, my first full time job was the school color thanks to an illustrious alumni who went to North Pole. In the early 80s I met Sandi Morgen who at that time was at UMASS Amherst. Our New England proximity made it easy to make a connection. A UMASS colleague, Sylvia Forman introduced us at a some AAA meeting. We found out we had many mutual friends from her UNC days and overlapping interests of politics, institutional building and dismantling old tropes and guises. We spent a lot of time on the phone, talking about kids, spouses, higher education, women's studies, time management and anthropology, not necessarily in that order.

As 2nd generation of Feminist Anthropologists, we were on a mission to include as many women of color into the *Gender and Anthropology* project that Sandi directed and I served on the board. The *Gender and Anthropology* reader changed in small and large ways intro to anthro textbooks, but also recognized that Feminist Anthropologists came in varying colors, races, identities, expertise and experiences. It was sort of an anthropological answer to "all the men are white, but some of us are brave." The cover of the book depicts a range of faces and bodies of women in true cross-cultural style. The color of the title is a shade of green called evergreen. From a western cultural perspective, green

represents growth, harmony, freshness, health, environment and fertility. Not sure if we thought about it, but that color choice was symbol for change for the discipline.

When she moved to Oregon in the early 90s, Sandi remarked that Eugene was the whitest space she ever been – even growing up in Texas. [Almost 20 years later in 2015, there are 472 African American Oregon students but almost 25% of all undergraduates are listed as non-white, the majority of who is Latino.] Going back to the 90s, this new setting gave Sandi great opportunity as the Director of the Center for the Study of Women in Society housed in Sociology. She missed Anthropology and the eclecticism that the discipline afforded in variety of methods and theories. After a stint in Happy Valley, Sandi was able to return to Oregon's anthropology department but found herself in administration. But that is the cost of being brilliant, engaging, creative and energetic.

Sandi Morgen and I literally grew up together as colleagues and friends in our respective areas of expertise, but continuing as institutional builders and dragon slayers. I followed her as president of AFA and then as president of with SANA. Our research interests sort of mirrored each other with Sandi's collaborative work with so many stellar scholars was incredibly rewarding and monumental for

us all. The color of money and power that is so ill distributed was our collective cause – she on the coast of Oregon and me in Jamaica. During this moment of fieldwork on women, work, public assistance, taxes or lack of, I was able to successfully land a weeklong seminar at Bellagio, the Rockefeller Center on Italy's Lake Como on this same topic. I made sure that Sandi was a member of this seminar. On an afternoon break the group took a short boat trip on Lake Como. I forgot sunscreen, but Sandi had a tube ready. It was Factor 75 I think, and when I put it on my arm it turned my appendage purple. Further, this purple dye number whatever was tough to get off of my skin. Victor Turner would have had a field day.

Colors of the level of melanin that the humankind reveals, are just one of the angles of intersectionality as it allows us to see how we are perceived and understand our own positioned in systems of rife with inequities, as well as commonalities and kindred feelings.

How and when we use colors in all of the schemes of our lives evoke all kinds of responses, and not just stop lights, but also white supremacy. Colors identify military strife, such as hanging a yellow ribbon or wearing a gold star indicating the ultimate sacrifice. In the 80s AIDS activists and friends wore red ribbons also in honor of

lost loved ones, but in demand that the society use its powerful resources to find a cure to end the epidemic. Rainbow flags, Lavender graduations, and the ribbons.

There are as many colored ribbons symbolizing the many kinds of cancers that attack our bodies and take away our loved ones. For the past 3 years, bit of my clothing and accessories are in the color of teal. Actually I have been wearing Teal, a color that is a mix of blue and green for years. But now that color has significance to my life. Teal, according to color psychology, is a color that helps us through times of mental or physical stress and aids in decision-making. Actually the color comes from nature. It is the color of the ring around the *Anas crecca* a widespread duck found mostly in Asia and northern Europe. Teal is color combination of blue evoking calm and serene feelings with green symbolizing strength and spirit.

Five years ago, one of the major participants in my 1970s work in Jamaica died of ovarian cancer. We were close. As an unemployed working class woman, she was not told exactly what was making her so ill, but it was just a "womyns problem." Kingston Public Hospital did what they could. Blossom was ritualized with a heartfelt ceremony attended by her neighbors, labor union

comrades, church friends and family. Seven weeks ago, Sandi Morgen ended her battle with the same disease. She had all the miracles of modern and traditional science to help her, but the cancer took another one from us. Today, as most days I wear something Teal, the color symbol of ovarian cancer in memory.