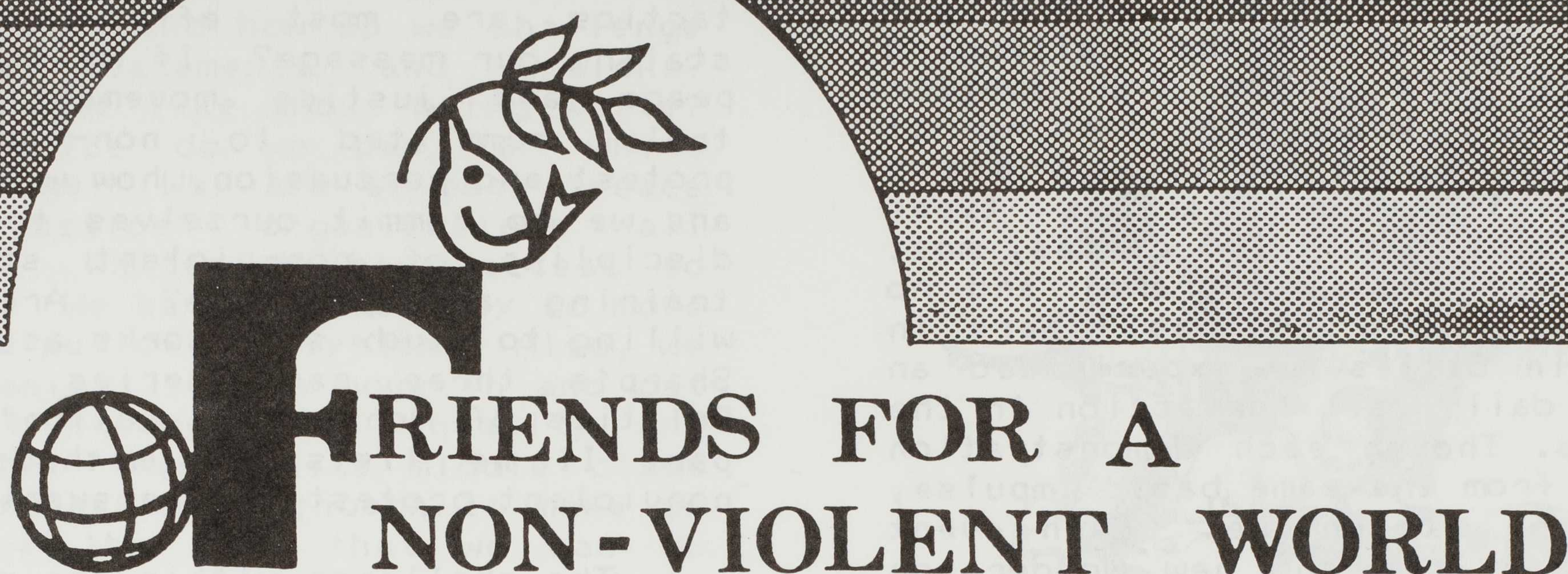




FRIENDS FOR A NON-VIOLENT WORLD

Volume 26

April 1988

UNDOING RACISM

Racism makes smart people dumb.

In February, I attended a workshop on undoing racism sponsored by the Peoples' Institute For Survival and Beyond. The group is based in New Orleans, and has conducted several sessions on race relations in Minnesota. I'd like to share some of the discussions we held.

This system didn't just happen.

The history of racism in North America starts with the idea that Columbus discovered America. There were about 25 million people living in the western hemisphere at the time. You can't "discover" something that's already been found--unless you steal it.

Slavery has been practiced throughout history. The thing that made slavery in this country a "peculiar institution" was the rationale: slavery benefitted slaves by giving them Christianity.

Land, housing and power

A discussion was held regarding the connection between land loss by Indian nations to homelessness, gentrification, and the crisis in public housing.

As cities have "regentrified", increasing rents have pushed poor families out of their neighborhoods. Many find themselves out on the street. Massive cutbacks in public housing monies have meant deteriorating conditions at a time of critical shortage of affordable housing and increasing pressure from downtown development interests. These factors disproportionately affect people of color. The notion that most of the homeless are mentally ill or homeless because they want to be is a big lie: Two thirds of the homeless are women and children under 16.

Racism and the white social change movement

Another discussion focused on the need for white people to work with other whites to understand racism. We seldom have a really clear view of the situation, or where we fit into the system. We need to make it safe for us to confront racism in ourselves and others.

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