

Religion and Politics 2004: Women's Votes, Women's Voices

National Press Club, September 13, 2004

Biographical Sketches of Panelists

Dr. Laila Al-Marayati

Dr. Laila Al-Marayati is the spokesperson and past president of the Muslim Women's League (MWL), a Los Angeles based organization dedicated to disseminating accurate information about Islam and women and to strengthening the role of Muslim women in society. Dr. Al-Marayati has written articles and participated in numerous conferences addressing issues of concern to Muslim women; topics include basic women's rights in Islam, reproductive health and sexuality, stereotyping, violence against women and so on. In addition, Dr. Al-Marayati spearheaded the MWL's efforts on behalf of rape survivors from the war in Bosnia in 1993 and she was a member of the official US Delegation to the UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

Dr. Al-Marayati has also participated in numerous activities related to international religious freedom. She served as a Presidential appointee to the Commission on International Religious Freedom from 1999 to May 2001. Prior to that, she was a member of the State Department Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. She has testified before Congress and as part of the US delegation to the OSCE Human Dimensions meeting in Poland regarding religious intolerance against Muslims in Europe.

As an American of Palestinian descent, Dr. Al-Marayati frequently speaks about the rights of Palestinians. She is a member of the Board of Directors of KinderUSA, a newly formed charity whose primary focus at this time is on addressing the health and educational needs of Palestinian children living in the West Bank and Gaza.

Dr. Al-Marayati is a Board-certified obstetrician-gynecologist in private practice in Southern California. She is married to Salam Al-Marayati and is the mother of three children, Malek, Zayd and Jinan.

Ms. Kim Bobo

Kim Bobo is the founder and executive director of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, the leading national organization that mobilizes religious support for low-wage workers and rebuilds partnerships with the labor movement. Since its founding in 1996, the organization has built a network of sixty religion-labor groups around the country, originated the "Labor in the Pulpits" program in which a hundred cities participate, started the Seminary Summer program -- a joint program with the AFL-CIO placing seminary and rabbinical students with unions for summer internships, and created dozens of congregational resources on economic justice.

Prior to the National Interfaith Committee, Ms. Bobo was a trainer for the Midwest Academy, and Director of Organizing for Bread for the World. She is co-author of *Organizing for Social Change*, the best selling organizing manual in the country.

Ms. Bobo is the Choir Director at Good News Community Church, a multi-cultural congregation, and active on her church's soup kitchen committee. Ms. Bobo and her husband Stephen Coats have twin sons Eric and Benjamin.

Ms. Veronica E. De La Garza

Veronica is the Executive Director of Youth Vote Coalition, the largest non-partisan coalition ever created to encourage civic participation among our nation's young adults. Veronica also serves as vice-chair for the Center for Environmental Citizens' (CEC) Board of Directors as well as on the advisory boards of Mobilizing America's Youth, New Voters Project and Citizens' Debate Commission.

Veronica has over 10 years of knowledge, skills and hands on experience in the political, government and nonprofit sector. Veronica has worked on national, state and local political and youth campaigns. Through her work in the youth and voting community, she has trained over 1000 young people and through her work with the Youth Vote Coalition has helped mobilize millions of young people towards civic and political participation.

Veronica has appeared on or in CNN en Español, ESPN's *Cold Pizza*, National Public Radio, *USA Today*, *Associated Press*, Fox News, MSNBC, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Glamour*, *Campaigns and Elections*, and several dozen local newspapers across the country. Veronica had the honor of being featured on HBO's "Iron Jawed Angels" introduction with Senator Clinton and Senator Dole and appeared on WB 50s "I Vote" program. Veronica has also had the honor to train and share her experience at national conferences including the National Association of Secretaries of States' summer meeting, National Council of La Raza (NCLR) national conferences, Choice USA's trainings, Harvard University's Colorlines Conference and the William J. Clinton Presidential Foundation's Youth Forum.

Veronica received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from The University of Texas-Pan American and a Nonprofit Management Certification from Georgetown University.

Veronica is Mexican-American and a native of Chicago. By working in collaboration she looks forward to increasing the Youth Vote turnout to 20 million in 2004!

Ms. Maia Duerr

Maia Duerr is the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's executive director. Most recently, she was the Research Director of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, based in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she led a study on the use of meditation and other contemplative practices in the workplace. She is the author of "The Contemplative Organization," published in the February 2004 issue of the *Journal of Organizational*

Change Management. Maia received a Master's degree in cultural anthropology from the California Institute of Integral Studies in 1996, and considers qualitative research another form of dharma practice. She has also worked as a mental health professional and was active in advocating for the rights of people with psychiatric disabilities.

A Buddhist practitioner since 1993, Maia received lay ordination from Roshi Joan Halifax into both the Order of Interbeing and the Zen Peacemaker Order. She is currently a student in the Soto Zen lineage of Suzuki Roshi, and has lived and practiced at the San Francisco Zen Center. She has also been involved with Thich Nhat Hanh's Community of Mindful Living and served as the managing editor of *The Mindfulness Bell* from 1996-1997.

Maia has been part of the BPF community since 1999, first as the associate editor of *Turning Wheel* and then as a board member. She is committed to exploring the intersection of social change and dharma practice, and engaged in her first civil disobedience during a March 2003 action at the Westover Air Base in Chicopee, Massachusetts, at the start of the Iraq war.

Dr. Diana L. Eck

Diana L. Eck is Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University and Director of the Pluralism Project. As a scholar of the religious traditions of India, she has published *Banaras, City of Light* and *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. Her book *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* is about interreligious dialogue and Christian faith in a world of many faiths. Her latest book, *A New Religious America*, was published by HarperSF in June 2001. With the Pluralism Project, she has turned her attention to the United States and produced the CD-ROM, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, for which she received a National Humanities Medal in 1998 from President Clinton. She is a member of the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, the Committee on the Study of Religion, and the Divinity School Faculty. She and her partner, Dorothy Austin, are Masters of Lowell House, one of Harvard's twelve residential houses for undergraduates.

Ms. Sarah Eltantawi

Sarah Eltantawi is a consultant to American organizations dedicated to promoting harmony among diverse communities and a sound and productive foreign policy toward the Muslim world. Some of her current consulting projects are with the Asma Society, a group dedicated to building bridges between the American Muslim community and other Americans based in New York City, and Bridges T.V., a new American Muslim Entertainment Channel. She is also a founding member of the Progressive Muslim Union of North America (PMU-NA), a new Progressive Muslim organization due to launch in November of this year. From 2001-2004, Ms. Eltantawi served as Communications Director for the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) in Washington D.C. Ms. Eltantawi is a frequent media commentator on American Muslim affairs and Middle East policy, making hundreds of television and radio appearances on national media outlets.

Ms. Eltantawi has also written for publications such as *The New York Times Upfront* on counterterrorism issues. She is also contributing to an anthology on the lives of Muslim women to be published by Harper's San Francisco next year, and frequently writes on social and political issues. Ms. Eltantawi served as the Secretary for the National Coalition to Protect Political Freedom in Washington D.C. from 2002-2003. In 2004, she was invited by the Brookings Institute and the state of Qatar to participate in a world U.S.-Islamic dialogue. Also in 2004, she briefed Democratic National Convention delegates on outreach to the American Muslim community. Ms. Eltantawi has a Bachelor's degree in Rhetoric and English from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Master's degree in Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University. She lives in New York City.

Rabbi Marla Feldman

Rabbi Marla J. Feldman is the Director of the Commission on Social Action, which is a joint commission of the Union for Reform Judaism and the CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis). The Commission on Social Action reviews the public policy agenda of the Reform Movement, which is then implemented by the Religious Action Center in Washington, D.C.

Feldman is both a Reform Rabbi and a lawyer. She received her J.D. *cum laude*, from the University of Florida in 1993 and is a member of the Florida Bar. Rabbi Feldman was ordained at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in New York in 1985 and received her Master of Hebrew Literature degree from HUC-JIR in 1983. She was a Jewish Studies major at the University of Pennsylvania where she received her B.A., *cum laude*, in 1979.

Prior to joining the staff of the UAHC, Rabbi Feldman served as Assistant Director of the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit, Executive Director of the Michigan Board of Rabbis and Director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Delaware. She taught as adjunct faculty at the University of Detroit, Mercy and Widener University College of Law. Prior to obtaining her law degree, Rabbi Feldman served congregations in Sarasota and Orlando, Florida.

Rabbi Feldman has served on numerous boards of Jewish and interfaith organizations, as well as state and local boards of the ACLU. She helped create the Michigan Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, the Detroit Jewish Coalition for Literacy, the Attorney's Council of Hadassah of Greater Detroit, the Delaware Coalition for Bosnia and the Hope and Help Center of Central Florida (the largest AIDS service organization in the area).

Rabbi Feldman is the author of the action manual *From Tzedek to Tzedakah: Social and Economic Issues of Concern for Women and Children* (National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, New York, N.Y. 1985). Her article "The Jewish Seat on the Supreme Court" won an award and was published in *The Record*, the magazine of the Jewish Historical

Society of Greater Washington (1992). Other articles have appeared in Jewish publications throughout the country.

In her spare time, Rabbi Feldman writes modern midrash, which have been published in the *Journal of Reform Judaism* and in several collections.

Rev. Brenda Girton-Mitchell

Reverend Brenda Girton-Mitchell is a native of the state of Indiana. She is inspired in her ministry by a very supportive spouse, Mr. James A. Mitchell and resides in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Reverend Girton-Mitchell received a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from Ball State University and a Master's degree from Indiana/Purdue University in Indianapolis. She graduated with honors from Chicago Kent College of Law. Ms. Girton-Mitchell has been admitted to the Bar in the State of Illinois, the District of Columbia and to the United States Supreme Court. She received her Master of Divinity degree from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.

Rev. Girton-Mitchell was licensed to preach in 1998. She was ordained at Metropolitan Baptist church in Washington, DC in 2004 and now serves as Minister for Christian Discipleship, a member of the Metropolitan Community Development Corporation, and the Millennium Building Committee.

Reverend Girton-Mitchell is a life member of the National Council of Negro Women, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Washington Urban League. She also holds membership in the National Bar Association, Washington Bar Association, Women's Bar Association, and is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. She serves as chaplain for the National Bar Association and is on the Board of Wesley Theological Seminary.

Rev. Girton-Mitchell has received numerous awards including the National Bar Association Presidential Award, the Charlotte Ray Award, and she is the recipient of the Sagamore of the Wabash Award, the highest award given to any civilian by the State of Indiana.

Ms. Gagandeep Kaur

Gagandeep Kaur is a Financial Advisor at Prudential Financial, San Diego. She develops and manages financial plans for individuals, small businesses, large corporations and non-profit organizations. She is also actively involved in community affairs and is the Chairperson of The Sikh MediaWatch and Resource Task Force (SMART), the oldest national Sikh civil rights organizations. She is also the Vice President of The San Diego APIA Alliance, a coalition of San Diego APIA organizations.

In her spare time, Gagandeep likes to write and has had several essays published, one of which is in the anthology *Breaking the Silence: Domestic Violence in the South Asian-American Community*, June 2001. The anthology is a compilation of the voices of community activists, scholars, artists, and survivors of the South Asian American community. She has also been privileged to have been invited to speak at several conferences both locally, nationally, and internationally such as the Columbia University's 1998 South Asian Community Conference on Domestic Violence and Singapore Management University's conference on the Sikh Diaspora, Singapore, December 2000.

Ms. Sammie Moshenberg

Sammie Moshenberg is the Director of Washington Operations of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). As head of the organization's Washington office, Ms. Moshenberg is the staff director for all of NCJW's advocacy efforts nationwide including its State Public Affairs network, a team of volunteer advocates representing the organization in more than 30 states.

Ms. Moshenberg has been active in national coalitions on issues of concern to NCJW including: civil rights, reproductive rights, child care, and First Amendment issues. She is a member of the Advisory Board of the Women's Information Network of Washington, DC, and co-chairs the New Faces, New Voices program of the National Council of Women's Organizations. On behalf of NCJW, Ms. Moshenberg served as the first co-chair of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights' Women's Caucus. In addition, she chaired the "First Tuesday Group" which consists of the Washington representatives of major American Jewish organizations for 1986-87 and 1993-94. She has spoken on public policy and legislative issues to a variety of groups throughout the country, including synagogues, universities, Jewish communal organizations, youth groups, and advocacy groups in the general community.

NCJW presented its Hannah G. Solomon Award to Ms. Moshenberg on February 24, 1998. In 1997, Ms. Moshenberg was honored with the YWCA of the National Capital Area's Racial Justice Award, and in 2000, the Ruth Osborn Award from the Women's Studies Program at George Washington University. In 2003, she spent a year in South Africa where she worked with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) on HIV/AIDS issues. In 1995, she spent six months in South Africa where she did advocacy training and served as an aide to a Member of Parliament, working on legislation and the new South African constitution.

Ms. Moshenberg began working for NCJW in 1981. Prior to coming to NCJW's Washington office in 1983, she was Communications Coordinator in the organization's New York headquarters. A former magazine editor and public school teacher, Sammie Moshenberg has a Master's degree from Loyola College in Baltimore and a B.A. from Shimer College in Illinois. Ms. Moshenberg is an active volunteer in her home community of Alexandria, Virginia.

Dr. Vasudha Narayanan

Dr. Vasudha Narayanan is a Professor of Religion at the University of Florida and a past President of the American Academy of Religion (2001-2002). She was educated at the Universities of Madras and Bombay in India, and at Harvard University. Her fields of interest are the Sri Vaishnava tradition; Hindu traditions in India, Cambodia, America; Hinduism and the environment; and gender issues.

She is the author and editor of six books and over ninety articles, chapters, and encyclopedia entries. Her research has been supported by grants and fellowships from several organizations including the American Council of Learned Societies (2004-2005); National Endowment for the Humanities (1987, 1989-90, and 1998-99), the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation (1991-92), the Smithsonian, the American Institute for Indian Studies, and the Social Science Research Council. She was the president of the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies from 1996-1998. She is currently working on Hindu temples and Vaishnava traditions in Cambodia.

Her publications include: *Hinduism* (2004); *The Vernacular Veda: Revelation, Recitation, and Ritual* (1994); *The Way and the Goal: Expressions of Devotion in the Early Srivaisnava Tradition* (1987); (with John Carman) *The Tamil Veda: Pillan's Interpretation of the Tiruvaymoli* (1989); "The Hindu Tradition" in *World Religions: Eastern Traditions*, ed. by Willard Oxtoby (1996; rev. 2001); "Brimming with Bhakti, Embodiments of Sakti: Deities, Devotees, Performers, Reformers and other Women of Power in the Hindu tradition" in *Feminism in World Religions*, ed. by Katherine Young (1998), 25-77; "Water, Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu Traditions." *Daedalus*, 130/4 (Fall 2001); "Casting Light on the Sounds of the Tamil Veda: Tirukkoneri Dasyai's 'Garland of Words.'" *Jewels of Authority: Women and Text in the Hindu Tradition*, edited Laurie L. Patton, (2002); "Gurus and Goddesses, Deities and Devotees" in *The Graceful Guru: Hindu Female Gurus in India and the United States*, edited by Karen Pechilis (2004).

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton, CSJ

Catherine Pinkerton CSJ is a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph of Cleveland. For the past twenty years, she has been a lobbyist on Capitol Hill for NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby.

Founded by women religious in 1971, NETWORK focuses on legislation which affects those who are economically impoverished both domestically and globally. Therefore, NETWORK has a broad economic justice agenda which it analyzes out of the lens of Catholic social teaching.

Catherine has lobbied Congress on international and domestic issues -- the federal budget, health care, women's employment issues, welfare reform and most recently the unfolding phenomenon of globalization. Her workshops explore economic globalization

-- the international financial institutions -- trade, investment, debt, etc., as well as the theological trends which affect economic globalization.

She has worked extensively with faith-based groups, currently serving as co-chair of the Churches' Center on Theology and Public Policy in Washington. Catherine has served in a variety of leadership roles, among them as President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious of the United States. Defining authentic politics as "a ministry of justice," her frequent presentations and workshops stress the relationship between one's faith and one's political involvement.

Ms. Nancy E. Tate

Nancy E. Tate is the Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of the United States and the League of Women Voters Education Fund. The League is the nation's premier nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and works to increase understanding of major public policy issues through education and advocacy. Ms. Tate joined the League staff in October 2000.

From 1994 until accepting the top staff position at the League, Ms. Tate was the Chief Operating Officer of the National Academy of Public Administration. The Academy is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization chartered by Congress to examine the emerging issues of governance and to improve the effectiveness of government at all levels.

Previously, Ms. Tate held a senior position in a management-consulting firm, where she managed a large multi-year contract focusing on the design and roll-out of a state-of-the-art computer system for all military hospitals. Before joining the private sector, Ms. Tate had a distinguished career in the federal government in the Department of Energy (where she specialized in energy conservation), the Department of Education, and the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Ms. Tate has a B.A. in political science from Stanford University and a Master's degree in public administration from George Washington University. She is active in numerous professional and civic organizations.

Ms. Karen Vagley

Ms. Vagley, a lawyer, is the Director of the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Acting Director for the Department of Advocacy of the ELCA.

Karen spent twenty-five years as a senior legislative counsel to three committees (Appropriations, Education and Labor, and Budget) of the United States House of Representatives where she served both Republican and Democratic members. She specialized in health and employee benefits, immigration, civil rights, and

Medicare/Medicaid issues. She also worked in the private sector as a consultant on legislative, business and organizational strategy, communications planning and technology.

Karen did her undergraduate work at Michigan State University, graduate work at Georgetown University and John Hopkins University, and received a law degree from the Georgetown University Law Center.

A life-long Lutheran, Karen was baptized in the Swedish Lutheran Church in Reed City, Michigan, and currently attends Emmanuel Lutheran in Vienna, Virginia. She has taught Sunday school for over twenty years and has served as Church trustee, member of Council and Lay Minister of Education. She currently sits on the Public Policy Committee of Lutheran Services in America and on the Commission on Justice and Advocacy of the National Council of Churches. She is married and has two adult daughters.

Dr. Linda Williams

Linda Faye Williams, Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland, College Park, is a leading analyst of public policy and electoral politics. Formerly Director of the Institute for Policy Research and Education at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Williams was principal investigator for a number of basic and applied research projects related to African Americans, the legislative process, and public policy. At the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, where she was Associate Director of Research, Williams conducted a number of surveys in conjunction with the Gallup Organization and Princeton Survey Research Associates on black/white public opinion toward candidates, parties, issues, and values. In 2000, she was one of three pollsters for the Women's Voices Project sponsored by the Center for Policy Alternatives and Lifetime Television. She also has conducted surveys of black elected officials and of minority staffs of offices of the House of Representatives and the Senate and conducted focus groups for a number of projects related to women's economic issues. She has been a member of the advisory board of a number of important surveys of minority public opinion including the National Latino Political Survey.

Williams has served as a consultant on election issues and interpreting election results to a variety of women's groups including the Institute for Women's Policy Research, the National Women's Political Caucus, the National Black Women's Political Congress, and the Coalition of 100 Black Women. She has also worked as a lobbyist for the NAACP and as a researcher for the Chicago Urban League, the National Black Leadership Roundtable, and the Washington Post. Williams is co-editor of *The Long Struggle for Black Political Empowerment* and the author of academic and popular articles on urban, black, and gender politics as well as in several public policy areas (especially urban policy, health care, welfare reform, and globalization). Her most recent book, *The Constraint of Race*, published by Penn State University Press in July 2003, won three prominent national book awards.

A native of Texas, Williams earned her Bachelor's degree at Rice University and her Master's and doctoral degrees at the University of Chicago. Prior to coming to the University of Maryland, Williams taught at a number of universities including Cornell, Howard, and Brandeis. She served as a research fellow of the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center for the Study of the Press, Politics and Public Policy of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University from Fall 1989 through Summer 1991. Her primary teaching areas are: American politics, public policy, and civil society. Currently, she is a Principal of the Democracy Collaborative, an international consortium committed to strengthening the understanding and practice of democracy worldwide.

Williams has been interviewed by all of the major networks' evening news programs, CNN, C-SPAN, *MacNeil-Lehrer*, *Nightline*, *The Today Show*, the three major news weeklies, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and many other prominent news media. Williams is a member of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists and the American Political Science Association and has served on the Executive Councils of both organizations. She has also been a member of the editorial boards of the *National Journal of Political Science*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, and *Urban Affairs Quarterly*.