

# WOMONSCAPE TIMES

~A monthly publication by the Womonscape Center Inc.~



## W O M O N S C A P E C E N T E R

### NO-RULES BOOK GROUP (NRBG)

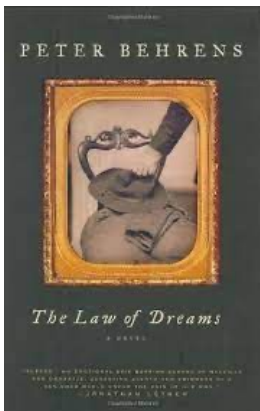
At last! The No Rules Book Group was able to meet again in January, after being sidelined by winter storms in December. Actually, there was another storm that kept some of us away this time as well. Let's hope the February weather is more accommodating....

The next NRBG will meet on Thursday, February 23 at 10:30am in the lower level of the Richland County Courthouse. We'll gather near the elevator and proceed to our meeting room. *NOTE: this is not the usual third Thursday of the month; it is the fourth Thursday!*

Here are the books we shared:

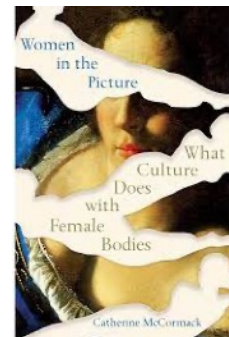
### WOMEN IN THE PICTURE: WHAT CULTURE DOES WITH FEMALE BODIES by Catherine McCormack

#### THE LAW OF DREAMS by Peter Behrens



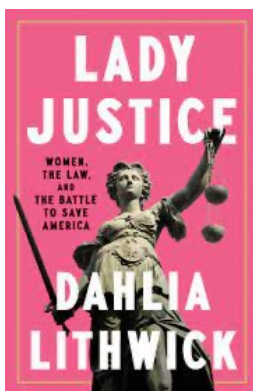
Set in mid-19th century rural Ireland, this novel tells the story of Fergus, age 15, who comes from a poor farm family. When the Great Famine wipes out the rest of his family, Fergus sets out on his own, traveling to cities in England and Ireland, trying to survive and to decide what to do with his life. The story is Dickensian in tone, with rich writing reflective of the era.

Our staff read this book after it was recommended by a *Womonscape Times* reader. Simply put, it should be mandatory reading for all people. In direct, clear prose, art historian Catherine McCormack challenges how art culture teaches us to see women and value their lives and bodies. She analyzes many "masterpieces" to help readers understand the artists who painted them and the audience they were meant to please. The result is eye-opening and includes the origins of many of the most famous paintings on display in museums around the world. Readers unfamiliar with art history may find the book disturbing and infuriating, even as it is fascinating. It would also be a good idea to use reference materials to view the paintings described as you read.



### LADY JUSTICE: WOMEN, THE LAW AND THE BATTLE TO SAVE AMERICA

by Dahlia Lithwick



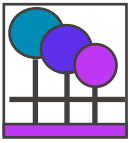
Lawyer and legal reporter Lithwick wrote this collection of essays as a way of showing how women in the U.S. legal profession have worked tirelessly, often behind the scenes, to fight back against political set-backs for the rights of women and other underrepresented populations. The book includes chapters on Sally Yates, Christine Blasey Ford, and Stacey Abrams as well as lesser known legal activists such as Vanita Gupta and Nina Perales. The result is a brilliant, honest, and hopeful testament to the power of women.

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**NO-RULES BOOK GROUP**

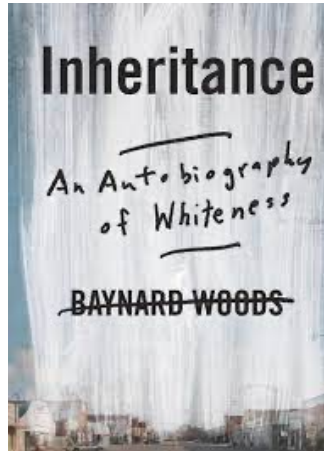
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**INHERITANCE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF WHITENESS**

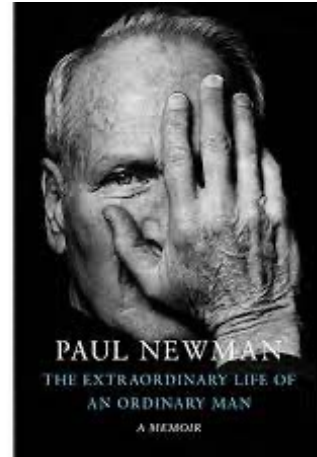
by Baynard Woods

Woods is a straight, white man who grew up in South Carolina. He thought of himself as a rebel, as a good guy, who was helping to expose and reform the South of his youth with his job as a reporter for alternative newspapers. Gradually, however, he came to realize that his sense of rebellion was built on a history of racism that was so ingrained as to be invisible to him and his family. In this book he documents events throughout his life that taught him about what it means to be white and the challenges to recognizing and changing this legacy. Woods chooses to draw a line through his name as a way of distancing himself from the slavers in his ancestry.



**THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF AN ORDINARY MAN: A MEMOIR**

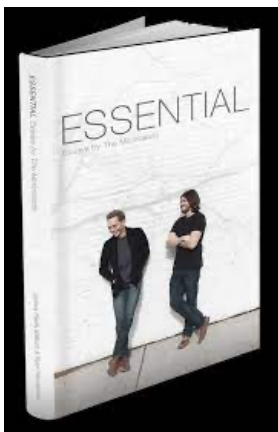
by Paul Newman, with Melissa and Clea Newman



In 1986, several decades before his death, Newman set out to write an oral history of his life, interviewing friends and family members to talk about his life. The only requirement was that they be completely honest. After five years, Newman abandoned the project and burned most of the audio materials. Fortunately, two of his daughters, Melissa and Clea, discovered the typewritten transcripts of the interviews and turned them into this book. The result is a rare and intimate look at a Hollywood legend, the myths and the truths about his very public and very unusual life.

**ESSENTIAL: ESSAYS BY THE MINIMALISTS**

by Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus



Like Marie Condo, Millburn and Nicodemus have dedicated themselves to living with fewer material possessions, in order to reduce clutter and avoid being owned by them. This book is a collection of essays that suggest ways for others to do the same. The goal is not to deprive but to lighten our lives from the weight of consumer items, so there is more time for personal health, growth, and relationships.

**Honorable Mention:**

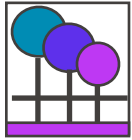
**The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary**

by Simon Winchester

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**DONATIONS WELCOMED**

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## **FILM REVIEWS**

**SHE SAID** (streaming on Peacock) • film directed by Maria Schrader, written by Rebecca Lenkiewicz featuring Carey Mulligan, Zoe Kazan

*She Said* is an important biographical presentation of two *New York Times* reporters, Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, who wrote an investigative report regarding the Harvey Weinstein sexual assault scandal in Hollywood. While the criminal behavior and its cover-up is disturbing, the tenacity of the reporters in not only recording, but in respectfully and honestly presenting this story is inspiring. The film is based on the 2019 book by the same title that was written by Kantor and Twohey. The original *New York Times* story was published on October 5, 2017. After its publication, eighty-two more women came forward with their own allegations against Weinstein, who is currently serving a 23-year sentence for rape and sexual assault in New York, with additional charges pending elsewhere. The article also led to significant workplace and legal reforms and helped launch the #MeToo movement.



**THE WOMAN KING** (streaming on Prime Video)

• film directed by Gina Prince-Blythwood, written by Dana Stevens and Maria Bello, featuring Viola Davis, Thuso Mbedu, Lashana Lynch



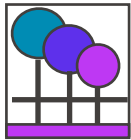
*The Woman King* is a historical epic inspired by the Agojie, the all-female warrior unit from the kingdom of Dahomey in West Africa. Although this group of women existed for two hundred years, from the 17th to the 19th centuries, the film focuses on events related to the 1820s. As an epic, the film is filled with many intense battle scenes, with considerably more violence than its PG-13 rating might imply. However, it is an important, often overlooked part of world and American history, that includes background in the origins and political implications of the transatlantic slave trade, as well as a multi-dimensional look at power, strength, and gender. As a result of the film, the real-life Agojie and other African women warriors and kings were featured in an article in the summer 2022 edition of Ms. Magazine, which is well-worth reading.

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• ***She Said*** was the first movie to ever be shot in the real *New York Times* offices.

• To get in shape for the action sequences in ***The Woman King***, the actors' daily regimen included 90 minutes of weight-lifting, three and a half hours of stunt training, a cardio workout, martial arts practice, sword practice, and spear practice.





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**NO-RULES BOOK GROUP**

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## **FILM REVIEWS**

### **WHITNEY HOUSTON: I WANNA DANCE WITH SOMEBODY** (streaming on Peacock)

- film directed by Kari Lemmons, featuring Naomi Ackie, Tara Tunie, Nafessa Williams

This officially authorized biopic tells the story of the acclaimed singer from her youth as a singer in a church choir until her untimely death in 2012. The film includes many of the breathtakingly wonderful parts of Houston's career and interpersonal relationships as well as some of the destructively sad parts. Her mother, father, producer, friends, and lovers are all included in order to give a multi-dimensional perspective. Naomi Ackie in particular received rave reviews for her performance in this demanding role.



### **EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE** (streaming on Showtime)



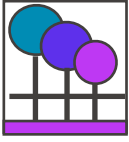
- film written and directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, featuring Michelle Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan, Stephanie Hsu and Jamie Lee Curtis

*Everything Everywhere All At Once* is a phenomenal hit as we go to press. Several of its cast members have already been awarded Golden Globe and Critics Choice Awards, and the film has garnered eleven Oscar nominations. Although it was originally released in March of 2022, the film has returned

to movie theaters for an encore engagement. Described as a quirky and beautiful combination of emotional, brilliant, weird, bizarre, poignant, funny, and wrenching, *Everything Everywhere All At Once* is simply a magnificent film that seems to cater to...everyone, everywhere. It is about family, love, purpose, emptiness, and the ancient but important question, *what is the meaning of life?* Because of its length, and due to its unusual and complex structure, viewers are sure to miss details of the film at first watching. But the time spent is well worth it.

- In *Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance With Somebody*, Whitney Houston's voice is used in 95% of the singing.

- In *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, Michelle Yeoh said that the film was completely out of her comfort zone, "I was suddenly doing comedy, physical comedy, action, horror, every single genre all packed into one, and jumping in and out of it. It was such a gratifying experience. I've waited a long time to receive a script like that. Because, as you get older, the box gets smaller and smaller."



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**HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?**

***JUNE TARPE' MILLS: THE WOMAN BEHIND MISS FURY***



If you take a look at the modern-day Marvel and DC comic film franchises, you might think that including women as comic superheroes really began in earnest with *Wonder Woman*, or with Nakia and Okoye from *The Black Panther*. But back in 1941, six months before the birth of *Wonder Woman*, June Tarpe' Mills published a comic strip featuring the first female action hero actually created by a woman: *Miss Fury*.

*Miss Fury* was the alter ego of socialite Marla Drake. She had no special powers in her ordinary life, but once she put on a special panther skin suit, she gained increased strength and speed so that she was able to fight crime. Since she was a product of the World War II era, some of the recurring villains on her list of criminals-to-fight included a mad scientist named Diane Sarah and Nazi agents

Baroness Erica Von Kampf and General Bruno. The *Miss Fury* comic strip was extremely popular from 1942 to 1949, when it ran in full color on the Sunday Comics pages for 351 consecutive weeks. At its peak, the strip was published in 100 newspapers nationwide, Miss Fury's image was painted on the nose of three American warplanes in Europe and South Pacific, and Perri-Purr, a cat introduced in the strip, became the unofficial mascot of the American troops.

But what about the woman behind the scenes? Who was June Tarpe' Mills, and what prompted her to become a comic strip artist in the first place?

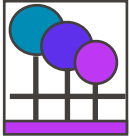
Mills was born on February 25, 1918, in Brooklyn, New York. Her mother was a widow and, in addition to raising June as a single parent, her mother also raised the orphaned children of June's sister. In order to help with family finances, June worked as a model. June's salary also helped pay tuition for her to attend the *Pratt Institute* to study art. Mills began her career as a professional artist by working as a fashion illustrator before she became a comic artist, and this background is definitely reflected in her comic characters. Marla Drake, the socialite who is the non-superhero personality behind Miss Fury, dresses in high fashion, rather than the dowdy clothing typical of earlier women comic characters. Indeed, some of Mills's drawings were considered quite controversial for the era. A strip that featured Marla Drake wearing a bikini, and another which included a female nightclub entertainer in a "questionable" dress, were not allowed to be printed in many newspapers, even though such drawings would be considered tame by today's standards.



With the introduction of *Miss Fury*, Mills had also created a character who was notoriously full of "kinkiness" according to Don Markstein's online encyclopedia of comic and cartoon characters, *Toonopedia*.

Markstein noted that, in spite of the fact that Marla Drake was a reluctant hero, the strip included "whips, spike heels, female-on-female violence and lingerie scenes." Apparently, once she donned the *Miss Fury* costume, there were no limits to the creative use of her powers.

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**HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?**

***JUNE TARPE' MILLS: THE WOMAN BEHIND MISS FURY***

(Continued from page 5)



While she was writing the *Miss Fury* and other comic strips, June dropped her first name, using only Tarpe' Mills or simply Tarpe' as her nom de plume. She explained her decision this way, "It would have been a major let down to kids if they found out that the author of such virile and awesome characters was a gal." But the public gradually learned of her true identity, and she had fans of all genders.

Sadly, Mills's health problems eventually got in the way of the continued success of *Miss Fury*. For awhile Mills attempted to continue the strip with the help of other artists and story-writers, but the quality suffered to the point that *Miss Fury* was officially cancelled in 1951. Although she had Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), and was homebound and oxygen dependent, Mills continued to chain smoke, until her death in 1988. For the last years of her life, Mills worked behind the scenes, in a less demanding role as a commercial artist. Known for her feisty independence and tough, glamorous, yet gender-bending female heroes, June Tarpe' Mills

was posthumously awarded the *Eisner Award* and registered in the *Comics Hall of Fame* in 2019.

***PIRATE WOMEN? REALLY?***

Yes, indeed, throughout history women have held a lot of jobs once only associated with men—doctors, police officers, fire fighters, soldiers—and pirates.

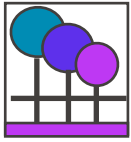
Mary Read was one such woman, and what a life she led! Mary was born in England in 1690, but even before then, her life started out on a bit of an unusual path. Mary's mother was married to a seaman, with whom she had a son. Her husband was lost at sea, and Mary's mother became involved with another man, with whom she was not married, and became pregnant with Mary. In the meantime, her son died of a childhood illness. But Mary's mother was still receiving financial support from her mother-in-law, so she dressed the infant Mary as a boy and tried to pass 'him' off as Mary's deceased older brother, in order to keep receiving some income. The deception worked! As a young girl, Mary continued to dress as a boy to be able to work to support herself and to move around freely in the world. She became a servant for a wealthy family, as well as on a British warship, and a soldier during the Nine Years' War between the British and the French.

During the conflict she fell in love with a fellow soldier, to whom she revealed her true identity as a woman, and the two abandoned military life to get married and run a tavern. Unfortunately, her happiness with her husband was short-lived: he died a few years after they married and she lost the tavern when the war ended and soldiers no longer frequented the establishment.

To support herself, Mary decided to go back to dressing as a man and joined the crew of a ship. All went well until the ship was captured by pirates in 1719. Mary decided to go with the old adage if-you-can't-beat-em-join-em, and became a pirate.

(Continued on back page)





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***HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?***

***PAULI MURRAY: A LIFE OF FIRSTS 1910-1985***

Pauli Murray's name came up in a book written by Dahlia Lithwick (see *Lady Justice* review, on page 1). When we checked out more details of Murray's life, we were so impressed that we thought we'd pass them along.

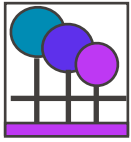
Anna Pauline "Pauli" Murray was truly a one-of-a-kind woman. She was not only a lawyer and activist, she was a priest and an LGBTQ revolutionary, most of the time before any one else had even thought to do such things, let alone done them.



When Murray was a toddler her mother died and her father suffered from mental illness. She was raised by her maternal aunts in North Carolina. While her growing up years were generally pleasant, her father's life continued to deteriorate. Tragically, when Pauli was twelve, her father was committed to a State Hospital for the Insane, where he was killed by a guard. At the age of sixteen, Murray moved to New York City, where she earned a second high school diploma and enrolled at Hunter College. After two years at Hunter, she married William Roy Wynn, in a secret ceremony in 1930. Even though Murray was only 19 years old at the time, she realized that she had no romantic interest in her husband or in any other man. She wondered, "Why is it when men try to make love to me, something in me fights?" As a result, the couple spent only a few months together before splitting up. Eventually, Murray had the marriage annulled.

Murray returned to Hunter College and finished a degree in English in 1933, then continued her education at Jay Lodestone's New Workers School, where she studied Marxist philosophy and economics, and courses with related titles such as Historical Materialism, and Problems of Communist Organization. Like many other people who came of age during the Great Depression, Murray struggled with employment and took a series of jobs, including selling subscriptions with the National Urban League, and working at a She-She-She Conservation Camp (the all-female version of the all-male Civilian Conservation Camps of the era). The camp atmosphere had a positive effect on Murray's physical health, and introduced her to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who had helped establish the camps. It was at the She-She-She camp that Murray also became involved in an important same gender cross-racial relationship with Peg Holmes, another counselor. The camp director disapproved, and the two women left the camp in 1935, traveling the country by walking, hitchhiking, and hopping freight trains.

By 1938, Murray was once again interested in pursuing her formal education. She applied to a PhD program in sociology at the University of North Carolina, but was rejected because of her race. Murray, who was of Black, White, and Native American ancestry, protested the decision. She contacted various school and government officials as well as the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (NAACP) to support her enrollment, but the latter organization refused to represent her because she was considered "not diplomatic." Modern historians have indicated that Murray's open relationships with women and her habit of wearing pants rather than skirts likely added to the NAACP's reluctance. Murray was arrested in New York City some months later and taken to Bellevue Hospital for psychiatric treatment because she was so distraught when one of these romantic relationships ended. Interestingly, Murray left the hospital with Adelene McBean, her roommate and girlfriend, and moved to Virginia in 1940.



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***HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?***

***PAULI MURRAY: A LIFE OF FIRSTS***

(Continued from page 7)

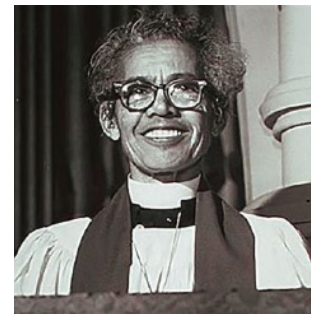


While in Virginia, Murray and McBean, who were both then identified by law as Black, ran into trouble during a bus riding incident. They chose to sit in the White section of the bus rather than sit in the broken seats of the Black section. They had studied Gandhi's philosophy of civil disobedience, so when police were called, they refused to budge and were arrested and jailed. Their case drew the attention of both the NAACP and the *Workers' Defense League* (WDL). When the two women were charged with disorderly conduct, the WDL paid the fine and hired Murray for its administrative committee.

At the WDL, Murray worked on the case of Odell Waller, a Black Virginia sharecropper who had received the death penalty for killing his white landlord in self defense. Murray toured the United States to raise funds for an appeal, and looked to Eleanor Roosevelt and the governor of Virginia for support, but to no avail. Waller was executed in 1942.

There were, however, two positive outcomes from Murray's experiences in Virginia. First, she began a friendship and correspondence with Eleanor Roosevelt that would continue until Ms. Roosevelt's death twenty years later. Second, she was inspired to pursue a career in civil rights law. This led to her 1941 enrollment at Howard University Law School, where she was the only woman and valedictorian of the class, and, in 1943, the first woman to graduate with a law degree. While at Howard, she published an article that challenged segregation in the U.S. military and participated in sit-ins challenging racial discrimination at restaurants in Washington, DC.

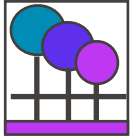
As valedictorian, Murray would ordinarily have been awarded a fellowship to Harvard Law School for graduate work. Harvard Law did not accept women at that time, despite a letter of support from President Roosevelt. So, instead, Murray enrolled at the School of Law at the University of California in Berkeley where she went on to pass the California bar exam and become the state's first black deputy attorney general in January, 1946. She later returned to New York City to work as the first Black woman hired as an associate attorney at the Paul, Weiss law firm from 1956 to 1960. While at Paul, Weiss, Murray met her life partner, office manager Irene "Renee" Barlow. The two were devoted to each other until Barlow's death in 1973. Throughout her life, Murray struggled with her sexual and gender identity, wishing that she could have a monogamous relationship with a woman, in which she took on a traditional male role. Her choice to wear pants, to cut her hair short, and to refer to herself as "Pauli" rather than Anna or Pauline, reflected this perspective. Some scholars argue that in today's world Murray would have identified as transgender.



Despite what must have been a demanding work schedule, Murray continued to write and publish important articles and books on racist and sexist laws, which she referred to as Jim Crow and Jane Crow. Her theories about the inherent inequality implied by the "separate but equal" doctrine of the era were instrumental in Thurgood Marshall's Supreme Court arguments in *Brown v. Board of Education*, when segregated schools were declared unconstitutional.

(Continued on page 9)





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### *HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?*

#### ***PAULI MURRAY: A LIFE OF FIRSTS***

(Continued from page 8)

Murray continued to become recognized for her work for civil rights, particularly women's rights. She was appointed to the Presidential Commission of the Status of Women in 1961, and demanded that "sex" was added as a protected category to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 1966 she cofounded the National Organization for Women (NOW) and worked to ensure that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission included women in its mission. Her work inspired other important women leaders, including Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

Murray also continued to excel in the world of academia. She studied at or served on the faculty of many notable colleges, including Ghana School of Law, Yale Law School, and Brandeis University. At Brandeis she introduced classes on African-American Studies and Women's Studies.

Finally, in the last decades of her life, Murray decided to earn one more academic degree, this one in religion. A lifelong Episcopalian, she attended the General Theological Seminary, where she received a Master of Divinity in 1976. At 66 years old she was ordained in 1977 as an Episcopal priest, the first African-American woman, and one of the first women of any race to earn this honor.

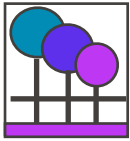
Murray spent the last years of her life as a priest, predominantly in a Washington, DC parish where she focused on ministering to the sick. After her death in 1985, the Episcopal Church sought ways to honor her work and commitment, culminating in a special commemoration on July 1 of 2012 (in 2018 Murray became a permanent part of the Episcopal Calendar of Saints on July 1). Other posthumous honors and memorials followed, including the 2015 designation of her childhood home by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the creation of a residential college in her name by Yale University in 2016, and being chosen as a 2018 honoree by the National Women's History Project.



NOTE: There is a documentary available to watch on Amazon Prime titled, *My Name is Pauli Murray*. See image above. The *Womonscape Times* staff will watch and report on this in another issue! Stay tuned.

#### ***PAULI MURRAY QUOTES***

- One person plus one typewriter constitutes a movement.
- In not a single one of these little campaigns was I victorious. In other words, in each case, I personally failed, but I have lived to see the thesis upon which I was operating vindicated. And what I very often say is that I've lived to see my lost causes found.
  - And while I could not always suppress the violent thoughts that raged inside me, I would nevertheless dedicate my life to seeking alternatives to physical violence, and would wrestle continually with the problem of transforming psychic violence into creative energy.



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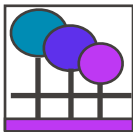
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FEBRUARY 23 — is  
our next scheduled  
*No-Rules Book Group*  
in Richland Center.  
See Page 1 for details.

**Womonscape  
Times**

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**PIRATE WOMEN? REALLY?**

(Continued from page 6)

Here's where the story has yet another twist: it turns out that there was already another female pirate (dressed as a man) living on the pirate ship. What were the odds of *that* happening?) The other pirate's name was Anne Bonny, and the two became good friends, helping their pirate-mates as they plundered merchant ships in and around the Bahamas along shipping routes. The women were known to be as just as ruthless as the men in their ability to swear, steal, and fight. The only person who was apparently aware of the women's true identity was the captain of the ship, who was also Anne's lover.



Artist interpretation of women pirates

Mary's career as a pirate was short-lived. In late 1720 her pirate ship was captured off the western tip of Jamaica. All were taken to Jamaica for trial. The laws at the time demanded that pirates be sentenced to death by hanging, but there was a small loophole for the women: there was another law that forbade the execution of a pregnant woman. So Mary and Anne claimed a pregnancy exemption and simply went to prison. Were they actually pregnant? No one knows for sure, but they did avoid being hanged, unlike their male pirate counterparts.

Sadly, Mary contracted a fever and died in prison in 1721. Anne, on the other hand, was rescued by her father who arranged for her to be deported to her native South Carolina, where she settled down, married a local man, bore eight children, and died a respectable woman at 84. It does make you wonder, though, doesn't it, what stories did she tell her grandchildren?