

The PUBLIC

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THE PUBLIC I

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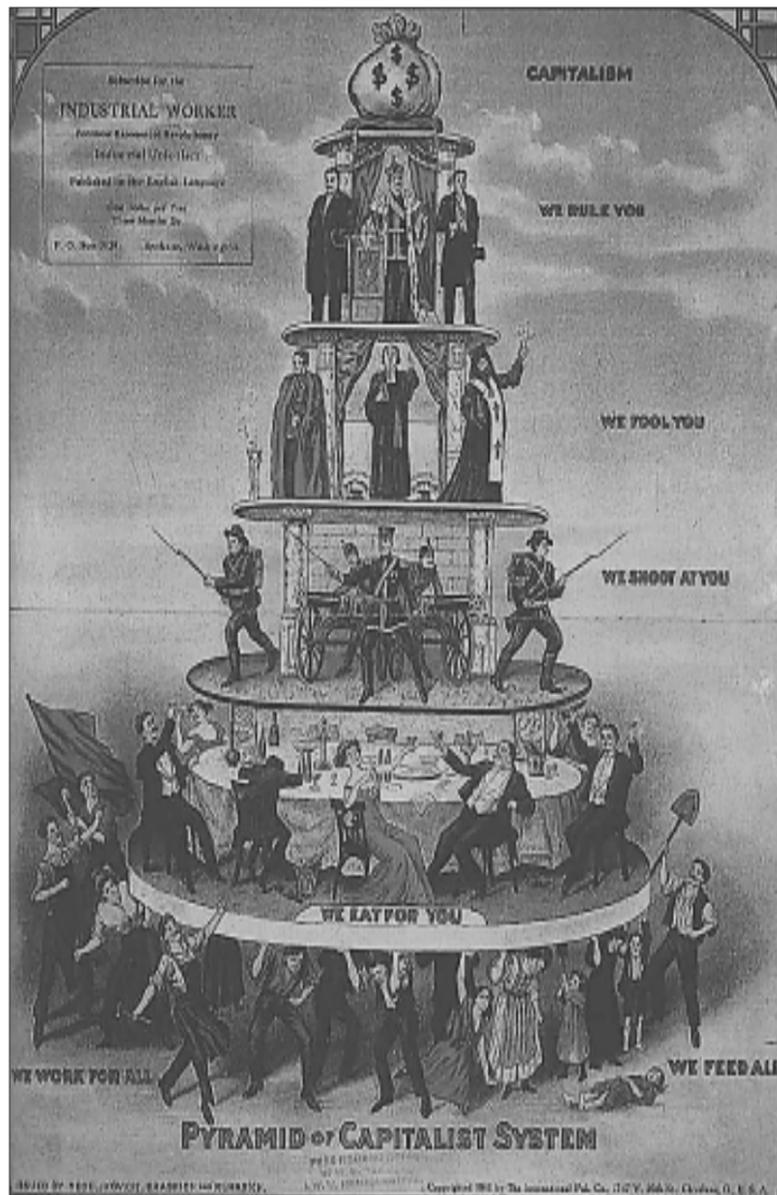


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A Paper of the People
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Behind the Economic Crisis
Tom Mackaman
Page 1



Signs of the Times in Douglass Park
Alvia Dyson
Page 2



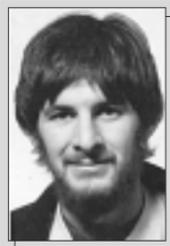
The Labor of Black Women
Amira Davis
Page 3



Teaching in Rantoul
Neil Parthun
Page 6

Behind the Economic Crisis

Tom Mackaman



Tom Mackaman is a UIUC graduate student in History whose interests include labor, immigration, and political economy. He is a member of the Socialist Equality Party, and the International Students for Social Equality, and is an occasional contributor to the World Socialist Web Site (wsws.org). He welcomes comments at tmackaman@yahoo.com.

FOR OVER A DECADE, THE PROPAGANDISTS of capitalism celebrated the triumph of the “American model” of business and financial deregulation, the “end of the business cycle” and even “the End of History.” The economic turmoil of 2008, which threatens a general collapse, has laid these ‘theories’ to rest.

For working people various aspects of the turndown threaten ruin. In effect, through inflation—especially rising fuel and food costs—the economy is delivering a big pay cut to those who work for wages and salaries. At the same time, wages have shown no sign of keeping up, unemployment is mounting, and credit is drying up. Food stamp use is at a record high, and charities and food banks are stretched thin.

The current troubles come after three decades of stagnating wages, during which the maintenance of working families has depended on what economist Robert Reich has called “coping mechanisms.” One such mechanism has been working more hours at more jobs, buttressed by the mass movement of wives and mothers into the labor force. A second has been borrowing through the use of credit cards and home equity lines of credit.

The financial industry encouraged borrowing against the value of homes through dubious lending practices such as Adjustable Rate Mortgages (ARMs) and other ‘sub-prime’ mortgages with enticing low-interest credit. The Fed under Alan Greenspan cultivated this cheap credit environment in order to soften the blow of the bursting Dot-Com bubble of the 1990s.

Subprimes allowed families to afford homes that otherwise would have been beyond their reach. This helped inflate a new bubble in the housing market, as prices increasingly showed little relationship to consumers’ ability to pay. Meanwhile, creditors ‘risk-managed’ housing debt through murky techniques of bundling, selling, and repackaging debt. Speculators reaped windfall profits in the process.

Finally in 2008, this system ran head-on into limits imposed by material conditions. Growing numbers of underpaid workers could no longer afford their mortgages, resulting in higher numbers of delinquencies and foreclosures, which then threw into doubt the paper value of

bundled debt devices carried by scores of investment houses and banks. The resulting crisis was not just one of ‘liquidity,’ but of solvency, a full scale crisis of confidence in the financial system arising from the impoverishment of the US working and middle classes. You can’t squeeze blood out of a turnip, as the old saying goes.

On an even more basic level, the financial meltdown is the latest chapter in the long-term decline of US capitalism. The crisis in the subprime mortgage sector has set fire to the larger economy, only under conditions in which a lot of explosive tinder was lying about. Bundled debt based on subprime mortgages was but one example of a general feature of an economy based increasingly on the smoke and mirrors of financial speculation. As Marx long ago noted, periods of rampant financial swindling both arise from, and attempt to gloss over, the more fundamental putrefaction of the real economy. ‘Creative’ financing—aka “cooking the books”—has been one of the methods through which capitalists have attempted to resuscitate the rate of profit in times when the extraction of surplus value from workers in the labor process itself has run into a wall.

The overall decline of US capitalism registers most clearly in another feature of the current crisis, the decline of the dollar. For years, government and business have been financed by an extraordinary inflow of investment and loans from the rest of the world. But foreign creditors are starting to think twice, as the US itself looks more and more like a ‘bad credit risk,’ and are diversifying into non-US and non-dollar denominated assets. The dollar’s status as de facto international reserve currency—which has allowed the US to incur deficits that would be considered unsustainable in other countries—is being eroded.

Investors are seeking refuge not just in other currencies like the Euro, but in commodities, a process which is ratcheting up prices for goods and food the world over. The consequences are explosive. Bread riots have occurred in the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and in Central, South, and Southeast Asia, and there exists the danger for a generalized famine.

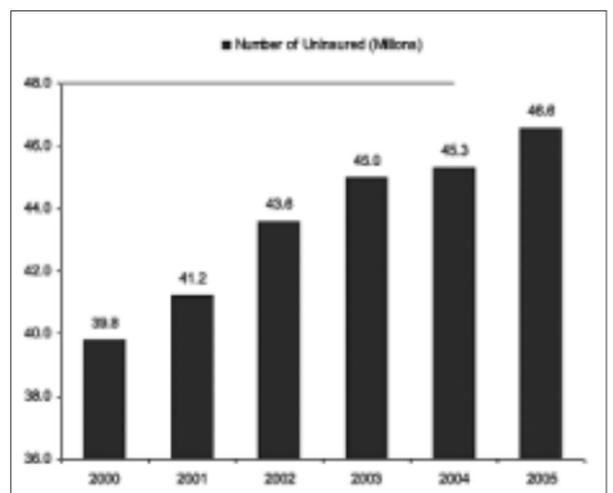
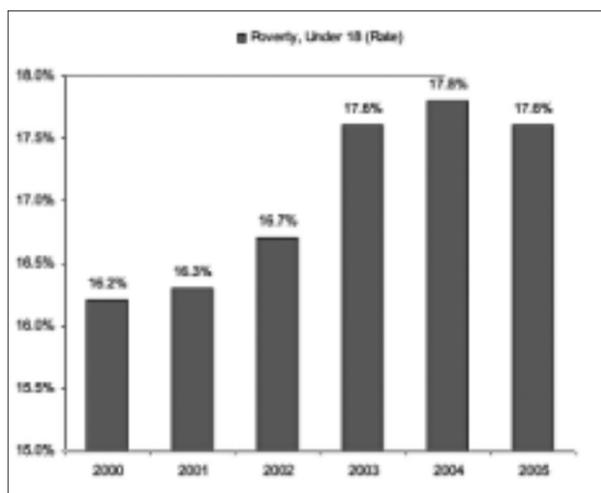
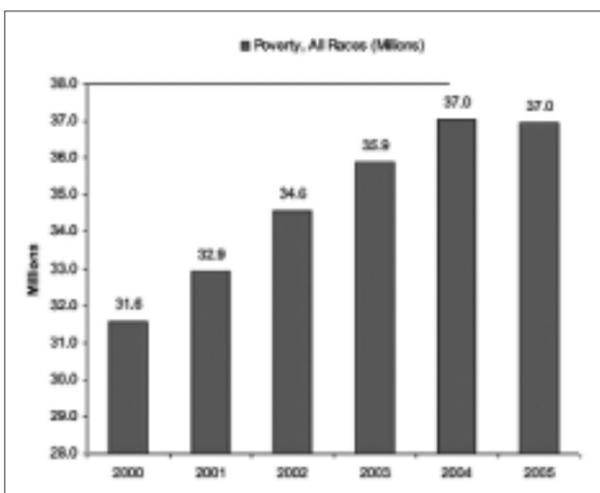
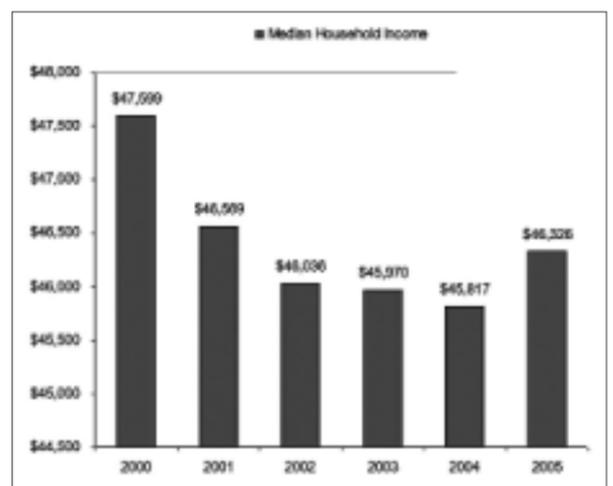
The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and enormous military spending more generally, have played an important role in forming and exacerbating the current crisis. Washington’s attempt to seize Iraqi oil reserves—the world’s second largest—and to control access to Central Asian gas, and thereby to put a stranglehold on the world’s most precious commodities and key strategic regions, has resulted in a debacle of epic proportions. The failure to achieve stability in either country, in spite of unfathomable bloodshed and spending has sent oil prices skyrocketing. Meanwhile the enormous costs of war and militarism have contributed to inflation and the further gutting of US infrastructure.



A soup line during the Great Depression

It is significant that none of the three remaining candidates for the US presidency contemplate even a diminution of military spending, while their differences over Iraq are largely tactical—how best to secure domination of the ravaged nation and the Middle East/Central Asia as a whole, rather than whether or not to do so. Likewise, the political leadership of both parties—themselves nearly all multi-millionaires and tied by a thousand strings to big business—have made clear that there will be no serious effort to alleviate the suffering of working people.

The economic crisis of 2008 has starkly demonstrated the predatory and anarchic essence of the profit system. The crisis urgently poses the need for socialism—workers’ democratic control and the rational organization of the economy in order to meet the world’s needs, rather than the reckless and deadly profit drive of the financial elite.





Signs of the Times: A Message from Douglass Park Resident to a Toxic Neighbor

By Alvia Dyson



Alvia Dyson is a member of the 5th and Hill Neighborhood Rights Campaign.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE SITE at 5th and Hill is clear: we need to get the site cleaned up. Until it is cleaned up, we have to let people know what that site is. We have young kids that live around here, and we have people we care about who live around here. Some of the contaminants at that site can cause cancer, and we don't want our families to get cancer. That's the most important thing to me and to the community. That's why we want to get this stuff cleaned up. That's why we want people to know about the contamination.

SIGNS OF SOLIDARITY

The people who live around here told the Illinois EPA to put up new signs at the site earlier this year. We wanted signs that would tell people that the site is what it is—a contaminated site. And they never did that. They never put up signs that said anything about contamination. So, my idea was this: since they're taking their time putting up new signs and since they're not putting up the right signs, let's put up our own signs to show them we mean business.

What did EPA's refusal to put up better signs mean to us? It meant that



Alvia in front of her house with a sign

we were disrespected—it was very disrespectful. They did finally put up some new signs, but these new signs still do not say anything about the contamination and the possible danger over there. We've seen kids over there in the past and they need to know that the site is contaminated. If you look at the fence right now, the proper signs are not up. Right now, they have "no trespassing" signs. I can have a no trespassing sign on my yard, and kids will still come into the yard. A "no trespassing sign" doesn't really mean anything. It's not a strong enough message. The signs need to tell people about the contamination.

That is why we came together to show our awareness and concern about the contamination at that site, and the concerns we have about people's health in our neighborhood. That is why we made our own signs.

SIGNS OF ACTION

Why was making these signs so important? It was so important, and it worked out so well, because the community came through to do something we wanted to do. We all pulled together to make these signs and put up these signs. That in itself was important. How do I feel when I see our signs up in the neighborhood? I feel glad because these signs let Ameren and the Illinois EPA know that we mean business.

You can't just talk about it. You got to be about it

Police Officers in Unit Four Schools

Treva Ellison

Treva Ellison is an activist and a graduate student in the Ph.D. program of the Department of Geography at the UIUC.

On April 18 2006, in response to what school officials called an increase in the severity of physical confrontations between students, the Champaign City Council passed a resolution to approve an intergovernmental agreement with Unit 4 School District that would put police officers in Unit 4 schools.

The total operating cost for the city, over a three-year period, to employ five officers to serve as "law enforcement officers, law related counselors, and law related educational instructors" is over one million dollars. This cost is to be paid by the City of Champaign and \$643,586 dollars to be paid by Unit 4 schools. Meanwhile, there are students in Unit 4 schools who cannot take home textbooks to do their homework, because schools claim they cannot afford to buy extra books.

This 'intergovernmental resolution,' was called into question by a number of people

who were concerned that questionable practices of racial profiling by Champaign police (especially in the North End) would replicate themselves within Unit 4 schools.

For those of us who have regular conversations with youth inside Unit 4 schools, it is no secret that the police officers in the schools target black students for punishment. Since the Security Resource Officer (SRO) program was instituted, there has been very little public response from the Champaign City Council, Unit 4 schools, and the Champaign Police Department, in addressing the concerns raised at the April 18, 2006 Champaign City Council meeting on racial profiling.

I was recently returned my *Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)* request about the School Resource Officer Program and the numbers provided by the Champaign Police Department only reaffirm the stories that we are hearing about how the classroom has become a carceral space for Black students.

In the 2006–2007 school year, police officers documented 683 incidents of contact with students. Of these 683 cases, 559 of

them, or 87.6% percent, were involving black students and 249 of those cases, or 39% of those cases involved black female students.

Young Black women are disproportionately having contact with school police officers for vague disciplinary infractions such as 'Defiance and Disorderly Conduct,' and 'Bullying,' that seem deeply rooted in stereotypes of Black women.

Hence, young Black women are described in terms (loud, sassy, etc...) that make them violators of 'proper gender behavior' and, thus, in need of management and/or policing. I bring up black female students, because black females have sort of become secondary to discussions about the prison industrial complex and the classroom to prison pipeline. To quote Andrea Smith, "There's a tendency in our decolonization movements, our racial justice struggles to see gendered justice as kind of an add on.



Protest at the Champaign County Court

Like, once we get liberated we'll deal with this issue. And we fail to see that it is precisely through a logic of sexual violence that colonialism and white supremacy work."

If anyone is interested in talking more about this issue, or has personal experiences that you would like to share, contact trevaellison@gmail.com

The War on Workers

On *Liberacion!* WEFT 90.1 FM, Sunday, May 12 at 10:00 am

Young People Can Learn a Trade and Earn a Wage this Summer

By Belden Fields

This summer, from July 14 to August 8, there will be a construction-training program giving priority to minority and female youth. This is part of a larger attempt to attract more youth to the building trades unions and job sites. The summer program is meant only to be the start to a program that will continue through the school year. Students will participate in specialized hands-on training, classroom instruction, and tours at various sites.

The focus will be on the development of skills, safety practices, and the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that will be conducive to a successful career in the building trades. These are trades that pay very well. Journeymen, that is to say people

who have completed apprenticeships, start at \$32.40 per hour for brick masons, \$30.61 for carpenters, \$36.19 for plumbers and pipefitters, and \$33.80 for electricians. Apprentices start with less, ranging from \$15.44 to \$20.90. But even in those early years, that is still a very good starting wage. The great thing here is that these jobs will always be here. They cannot be exported abroad!

While young people in the summer program will not get the kind of wages that apprentices and journeymen receive, but they will be paid \$7.50 an hour to learn! They will also get high school elective credit in Residential Carpentry. In addition to a professional vocational education

teacher, students will also be paired with a mentor who will be with them through actual hands-on job experience.

Again, this is a program that gives priority to minority youth and girls. Requirements to enter the program include:

- The person must be a high school junior or senior enrolled in a Champaign, Rantoul, or Urbana high school.
- The student must be at least 16 years old at the beginning of the program. That is the legal age at which people can work with power tools.
- The student must have a good school attendance record.

- The student must have no major school discipline action on record.
- The student must fill in an application and complete an interview.

Applications for this program are available at the high school guidance offices in Champaign, Urbana, or Rantoul, or they can be obtained by sending a request to lmcdonald@efe.k12.il.us If you are an interested and eligible young person looking for a positive summer experience in which you can earn money and prepare for a well-paid career, or if you know someone who is, act quickly to secure a position in this exciting new learning and earning experience.



The Labor of Black Women

By Amira Davis



Amira Davis, former director of the AACAP, is a mother/poet/percussionist and a doctoral student in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois.

IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICA, Black women have labored harder within its borders than any other group. Black women have constituted the most disposal segment of the American labor force, working in the least desirable, least paid positions. Not only did they work along side men in fields, Black women labored in kitchens, cleaned houses and washed clothes while the planter class leisured. As cotton became king, Black women's bodies were industrialized. Through her womb came workers and her breasts fed future masters, while her own children went lacking.

Hence, even mothering, a devalued status in the U.S., has been a contested space between white and Black women. White mothers birthed citizens for the Republic. Black women were breeders of its laborers and as Jim Crow and sharecropping systems collapsed, they were breeders of surplus labor. While Black women have fought for control of their reproductive labor, particularly their children, white women have rallied for freedom from the "carceral" constraints of mothering. Further, Black women have had to struggle to balance mother work, kin work and spiritual work with efforts to attain living wages.

To date, Black women remain among the lowest paid workers in the U.S. Yet, Black women's labor history includes union activities, although their efforts to

unionize domestic and laundry work were unsuccessful based on contracts that were individually and orally constructed. The 1881 Washerwoman's strike in Atlanta was one example of Black women seeking to leverage their power for better wages. It was through unions and the agitation of groups like the NAACP that economic gains were realized. It was through the efforts of Charles Hamilton Houston that Black teachers were able to be paid equal to white teachers. Still, they were excluded from social security coverage, the protection of wage and hour laws and worker's compensation.

Today the failure of schools reflects the failure of the economy to support the demand for living wage employment by all adults. Schools educate youth to compete effectively in the global market. The disappearance of work has a symbiotic relationship with education in urban communities. No longer able to work the land, domestic and service work still avails itself to some unskilled Black women as hotel/motel housekeepers and as nursing assistants in senior citizens homes, albeit with increasing competition from immigrant women.

There has been a direct relationship to Black women's labor and war. The Civil War allowed them to enter the free labor market where they were, conceptually, able to negotiate for wages. During the First and Second World Wars, Black women were able to gain temporary access to better, higher paying jobs. However, when Rosie the Riveter returned to the domesticated space of her husband's home, Black women were once again forced to find creative means to provide for their families.

Today, the military is an anxious employer, soliciting Black women right out

of high school with promises of education that will prepare them for employment in the 21st century. Not only is the military-industrial-complex a willing employer but, its twin, the prison-industrial-complex is making use of Black women's unfree labor in a range of vocations, including telemarketing, travel agents and on furniture assembly lines.

Workplace cultures also impinge on the opportunities of Black women, as employers enforce an assimilated racial and gender identity in the job selection process. For example, employers seeking correct 'fit' often find only certain 'normative' characteristics attractive, while they negatively sanctioning what they deem as 'inappropriate' behavior—behaviors that may actually reflect cultural differences. Hence, the desired 'fit' is actually one that approximates white norms or what whites are willing to tolerate with respect to a Black identity, making Black assimilation a highly valued commodity for white employers. Moreover, Black women, who are too Black—consciously, phenotypically, or culturally—are less likely to find employment.

Today, Black women comprise six percent of the total U.S. population. Yet, according to the U.S. Department of Labor 2000, 35% of Black women are either unemployed or not in active in the labor force. Only 25% of Black women work 35 or more hours a week, while the rest work less than full time or not at all. The median income for full-time Black women workers is \$25,589 compared to white women who earn \$27,878 and only 32% of Black women 14–54 years of age live at or above the poverty line.

Locally, the University of Illinois is the largest local employer and the best hope for Black workers to elevate their families

out of poverty, through benefits that include a living wage, health and life insurance and tuition reimbursement for employees and their children. Unfortunately, it is difficult to gain and retain employment at the University at nearly every level. As of fall 2005, only 3% of faculty were Black, while Black academic professionals comprised only 5% of all Academic Professional posts. In support staff positions, of 140 workers classified as Administrative/Management, 64% were female and only 10% were Black. In the Professional category, out of 525 workers 68% were women and 10% are Black. In clerical/secretary positions, 92% are female with 10% Black; of the 654 technical/paraprofessionals, 12% are Black and 57% women. In the skilled crafts, there are a total of 567 employees, with 7.5% Black and 5.6% women. And of 1,349 service/maintenance employees, there are 18% Black and 41% women. These numbers have remained fairly consistent over the last 22 years.

Black women have labored to build this country, literally from the bottom up yet their productive and reproductive labor—from the fields to the ivory tower—has been consumed and devalued in ways that detract from their rights of personhood. Despite their decreasing value in the neoliberal, global economy, Black women are very much valued for the labor they perform for their families and communities as mothers, lovers, sisters, daughters, aunts, kin and friends. We must dare to envision a world without racism and patriarchy, where Black women will be allowed the rights, freedoms and protections of citizenship—where their dignity and worth can unfold for the benefit of all.

Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act Blocked

ON CAPITOL HILL, Senate Republicans have blocked a bill that would have overturned a Supreme Court ruling limiting pay discrimination lawsuits. The Senate fell four votes short of considering the *Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act*, named for a female employee of the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company who was paid 40 percent less than her male colleagues doing the same job. Ledbetter lost her suit against Goodyear after the court ruled she did not file a complaint in time. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has promised to bring this Act up for a vote again within the next year. All our voices, coming together, can help get those extra 3 votes needed to turn the tide.

The *Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act* (H.R. 2831) is considered an important legislative "fix" to a May 2007 U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*) The court decision severely limited the ability of victims of pay discrimination to sue and recover damages under *Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Without this "fix," the impact of the Court's decision will likely be widespread, affecting pay discrimination cases under Title VII involving women and racial and ethnic minorities, as well as cases under the *Age Discrimination in Employment Act* and under the *Americans with Disabilities Act*.

WOMEN DESERVE EQUAL PAY

For full-time, year-round workers, women are paid on average only about 77% of what men are paid; for women of color, the gap is even wider. These wage gaps stubbornly remain despite the passage of the Equal Pay Act more than 40 years ago, and a variety of legislation prohibiting employment discrimination. Women are still not receiving equal pay for equal work, let alone

equal pay for work of equal value. This disparity not only affects women's spending power, it penalizes their retirement security by creating gaps in social security benefits and pensions.



Oh, so that explains the difference in our salaries!

Facts about Pay Equity

- In 2005, women's median annual earnings were \$.77 for every \$1.00 earned by men. For women of color, the gap is worse—only \$.71 for African American women and \$.58 for Latinas.
- The pay gap between full-time male and female managers widened between 1995 and 2000.
- If women received the same wages as men who work, then women's annual income would rise by \$4,000; poverty rates would be cut in half; working families would gain \$200 billion in annual income.
- Pay equity in female-dominated jobs would increase wages for women by approximately 18%.
- 55% of all women work in female-dominated jobs, whereas only 8.5% of all men work in these occupations. Yet, the men working in female-dominated jobs still receive about 20% more than the women.
- Women are paid less in every occupational classification, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics.
- In 1963, the year of the *Equal Pay Act's* passage, full-time working women were paid 59 cents on average to the dollar received by men. During the last 42 years, the wage gap has only narrowed by less than half of a penny per year.

Source: www.now.org/issues/economic/factsheet.html



Poverty in Champaign County

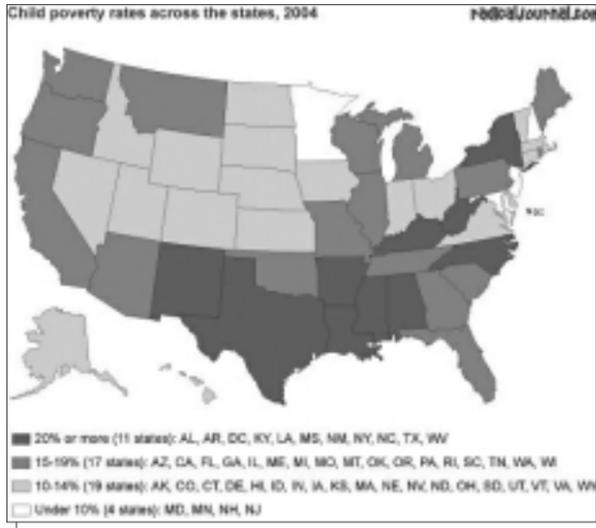
By Belden Fields

HEARTLAND ALLIANCE, AN ANTIPOVERTY GROUP based in Chicago, has just released its report on poverty in Illinois and in individual counties. The statewide reporting is based upon 2006 data. The picture is not very pretty. Overall, poverty increased in Illinois from 10.7% of the population in 1999 to 12.3% in 2006.

Poverty is not random across groups. Extreme poverty is defined as living on an annual income or less that one-half of the federal poverty line, or below \$10,000 dollars for a family of four. Nearly half of the people in extreme poverty in this state are either children, seniors, or people with disabilities. The overall picture is:

- 680,000, or 5.8% of our population lives in extreme poverty.
- 853,063, or 6.8%, live between 50% and 100% of the poverty line

Another 2,004,651, are classified as being “at risk” of falling into poverty. These are people who live between 100% and 150% of the poverty level (988,100, or 7.9% of the population), and those who live between 150% and 200% of the poverty line (1,016,551 or 8.1% of the population). These two latter categories combine made up 16% of the state’s population. In addition, the data reveals a severe racial and gender disparity in poverty in our state.



age wage of \$45,032. Given the presence of the university and the medical facilities here, this is a surprisingly low average wage. In August 2007, the unemployment rate was 4.9%, slightly below the overall state rate of 5.2%.

Current (2008) data on rental housing show that the estimated mean hourly wage of a renter in this county is \$9.01, which is below the poverty line (\$9.60) for a family of four. However, the wage needed to rent a two-bedroom apartment is \$12.73. A person working just at the Illinois minimum wage would have to work 68 hours a week at the state’s minimum wage to be able to afford such an apartment in the area.

What the data reveal is that poverty is a serious problem in both the state and the county; that such poverty is unevenly distributed across lines of race, gender, age, and ability/disability; and that poverty has become increasingly serious in the first 8 years of the Twenty-First Century. Economic policies at the national level have “trickled down” to the states and local communities causing greater and greater poverty.

These policies have destroyed the last vestiges of a safety net and cut back on positive initiatives in health and education that both help people climb out of poverty and offer care to those so vulnerable that they cannot do so. The recent cut in Medicaid, which is so threatening to our county nursing home, is just one example of the mean-spirited public policies that have been imposed on this country, this state, and this county since 2000.

Of course, while poverty of both the employed and the unemployed has increased, public policy has seen to it that the rich have become richer to a morally obscene extent. While most of the data in the report are from 2006 or earlier, the situation has become increasingly dire as prices of food, fuel, utilities, and access to medical care and insurance have continued to soar, leaving poor communities in Champaign County more vulnerable than ever.

Family Budgets

From the Economic Policy Institute

The federal poverty line has traditionally been used to measure whether families have incomes high enough to enable them to meet basic needs. Yet most researchers now agree that a “poverty line” income is not sufficient to support most working families. “Basic family budgets,” individualized for communities nationwide and for type of family (e.g., one parent/one child, two parents/two children) offer a realistic measure of the income required to have a safe and decent though basic standard of living.

Family Budget Calculator lets you determine the income needed for particular types of families to make ends meet. Because costs of goods and services vary across the U.S., the calculator customizes the budgets for every U.S. community—over 400 in all. Simply select from one of six family types, pick a state, and then select a community to see how much that family is likely to need for housing, food, child care, etc. The calculator also shows the percent and number of families in that state living below the family budget level.

It is important to note that a basic family budget is indeed “basic.” It comprises only the amounts a family needs to spend to feed, shelter, and clothe itself, get to work and school, and subsist in 21st century America. Hence, it includes no savings, no restaurant meals, no funds for emergencies—not even renters’ insurance to protect against fire, flood or theft.

*Note: These family budgets are for the year 2004.

ILLINOIS TOTALS

Percentage of all people in state living below family budget line 22%. Number of all people in state living below family budget line 488,000

BASIC BUDGETS FOR CHAMPAIGN-URBANA

1 parent/1 child

Monthly housing	\$611
Monthly food	\$265
Monthly child care	\$472
Monthly transportation	\$275
Monthly health care	\$245
Monthly other necessities	\$237
Monthly taxes	\$167
Monthly total	\$2,272
Annual total income	\$27,264

1 parent/2 children

Monthly housing	\$611
Monthly food	\$405
Monthly child care-9	\$763
Monthly transportation	\$275
Monthly health care	\$285
Monthly other necessities	\$274
Monthly taxes	\$103
Monthly total	\$2,716
Annual total income	\$32,592

2 parents/1 child

Monthly housing	\$611
Monthly food	\$448
Monthly child care	\$472
Monthly transportation	\$375
Monthly health care	\$313
Monthly other necessities	\$286
Monthly taxes	\$247
Monthly total	\$2,752
Annual total income	\$33,024

2 parents/2 children

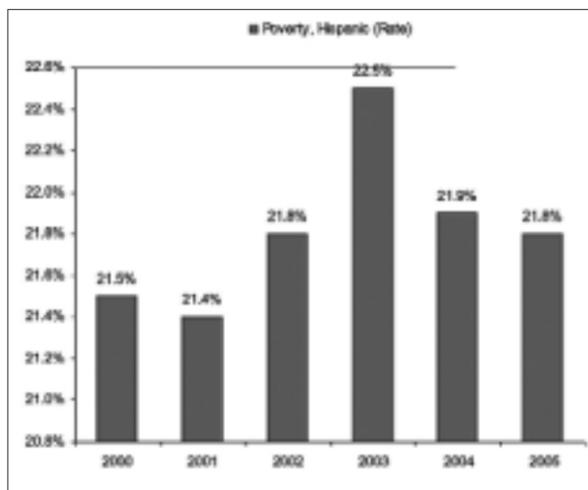
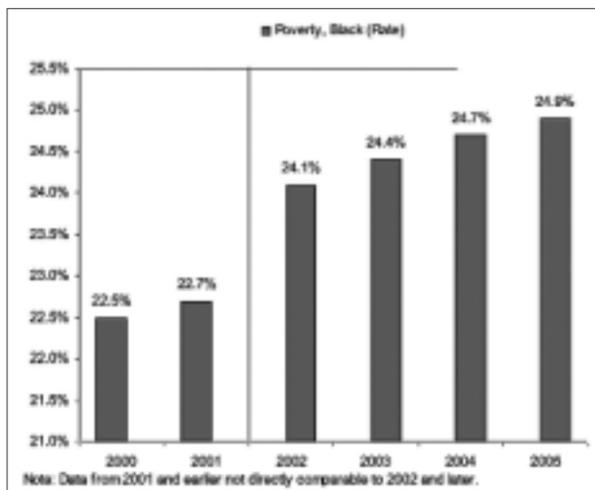
Monthly housing	\$611
Monthly food	\$587
Monthly child care	\$763
Monthly transportation	\$375
Monthly health care	\$350
Monthly other necessities	\$323
Monthly taxes	\$178
Monthly total	\$3,187
Annual total income	\$38,244

You can find out what the monthly basic budget for your household should be by visiting: http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/datazone_fambud_budget

	% Population	% Poverty Population	% Group in Poverty
White/NonHispanic	65.2	41.0	7.7
Hispanic	14.8	21.3	17.6
Black	14.6	33.1	28.0
Asian	4.2	3.1	8.9

	Women	Men
White/NonHispanic	8.7	6.5
Hispanic	18.7	11.2
Black	26.6	19.6
Asian	8.5	9.2

The report does not break down the data by race or gender for Champaign County, but the aggregate data are nonetheless significant. In 2005, there were 29,800 people in this county were living in poverty. The poverty rate was 17.7%, well above the overall state rate of 12%. The monthly earnings in the county for new hires had fallen 4.6% between 2004 and 2005. In 2006, the average wage per job was \$33,051, compared with the overall state aver-



Of the 100 largest economies of the world, 51 percent are transnational corporations.

See: *The Story of Stuff* <<http://www.storyofstuff.com>>



'democracy': Not the Democrats—RIP in Urbana

By Leon T.

Leon T., a community journalist, reporting from the Cunningham Township 2008 Yearly Meeting.

There were three referendum questions that citizens intended to propose be placed on the November ballot. Despite there being no legal requirement that such proposals be submitted in advance, a meeting packed with Democratic Party stalwarts defeated all three in the name of 'democracy.' But it seems that the result was ordained more by 'Not Originated By Us' than by any actual flaw in the proposals. All three proposals were something a thoughtful Democratic voter, as well as many independent voters, might support—but none bore the stamp of official Democratic Party prior review and approval.

Despite the many complaints from Democratic loyalists that the township meeting was a problematic way to place questions before the voters, all such questions placed on the ballot in the recent past have drawn majority support from Urbana voters. Perhaps it was the case that the township meeting is too democratic, and not enough officially Democratic, that is the problem that the Democratic Party saw with the process.

Here are what citizens proposed to be placed on this November's ballot, in order. The first two were actually proposed from the floor and defeated, while the third never made it that far:

1. "Shall Cunningham Township and the City of Urbana post all contracts and itemized expenses on their websites so that taxpayers can see how their money is being spent?"
2. "Shall the voters of Cunningham Township call upon the City of

Urbana to place a binding referendum on the April 2009 election ballot asking whether Urbana citizens want to change from the current system of plurality voting to Instant Runoff Voting ensuring the winning candidate always receives a majority of the votes cast?"

3. "The City of Urbana will commit to a study of the feasibility of the municipal ownership of the city water company."

The first was reportedly proposed by local Libertarians and seems like good governmental practice. Denying voters the chance to vote on this question will inflame conservative sentiment in Urbana, as well as foster support for the Green Party, which makes a point of supporting governmental transparency.

The second proposal was a voting method supported by many in Urbana, although it has also been supported by both peace and Green Party activists. Ironically, such a proposal could lead to solidification of a progressive political agenda in Urbana. However, a progressive agenda without control by the Democratic majority seems to be a threat to the interests of Democratic Party loyalists.

The third proposed referendum has drawn verbal support by Democratic Urbana officials, including the Mayor, although the meeting's results calls into question whether this is only nominal support, without any real commitment other than empty pandering to voters angered by rising utility costs and erratic service.

The defeat of all three shared two common factors. First, there is the fact that it was the Green Party 2004 candidate for governor, Rich Whitney, who first pointed out that annual township meetings are viable ways for citizens to gain direct

access to the political process under state law, leading to the placement of a number of referendums on the ballot in both Champaign and Urbana in recent years.

Democrats offered a variety of convoluted and tortured explanations to argue against any changes to the agenda, which is how such questions are placed on the ballot for citizens to decide and which the agenda purposely didn't include. Most telling was that a few older citizens were overheard talking among themselves about whether or not any specific proposal was 'on the agenda' before they voted at various points in the meeting. It seems they were briefed to oppose anything proposed from the floor, no matter how good the idea might be or whether or not they disagreed with it.

One African-American citizen expressed the notion that the very idea that citizens could organize to place referendums on the ballot was a nefarious process directed at depriving them of their hard-fought right of access to voting. Unfortunately, the false pretenses that seem to have been deployed to persuade people to come to the meeting—just this once—may indicate less of a commitment to the black community by the Democratic Party than seemed to motivate many citizens doing its bidding that night.

A great deal of effort was expended preventing the exercise of democracy as provided for in state law. All of it seemed to be orchestrated by the idea that only proposals approved by the Democratic city council majority—who happened to simultaneously constitute the township board—are acceptable. In Urbana, it seems that unless one has already persuaded this 'central committee' of the value of a proposal, it will now be dead on arrival. Sadly, this result will likely undermine the interests of the Democratic majority more than it will aid it. Many Democratic Party sup-

porters are independent and thoughtful, thus are unlikely to be taken in by the tententious reasons offered by party insiders to prevent adding any referendums to the November ballot.

Essentially, the result clearly signaled that the public will not in the future be allowed to place any referendums on the ballot via this legal method at the yearly township meeting, unless they have been first vetted a month before by the elected officials. No independent citizen input allowed. Period.

So who exactly is preventing the people from 'speak[ing] for themselves' as many claimed to be the case in their argument in favor of defeating the motions? Unless you still believe in the tooth fairy, it wasn't those who wanted the voters to have the final say on these issues.

What's so amazing is that it was the FEAR that questions put on the ballot would enjoy wide support and result in wins for all three questions that seemed to motivate the Democrats' ire. If proposals from the floor of the meeting were really so unrepresentative of the way that voters in Urbana think, then all that needed be done was let them be voted on in November and watch them get defeated.

Thus the folks that the Democratic officials turned out, with instructions to prevent any additions to the agenda, could just as easily be described as displaying "naivete, immaturity, and irrationalism, that is entirely counterproductive to their stated goals," as one local Democrat later remarked about the dissent crushed at the meeting.

Needless to say, the final judge of what should be an acceptable resolution should be the voters. The result that night was exactly the opposite. The voters will NOT be consulted on these issues.

Crisis at the Champaign County Nursing Home

By Joe Futrelle

Joe Futrelle is a co-founder of the School for Designing a Society. Joe is the Green Party candidate for Champaign County Board in district 8.

THE CHAMPAIGN COUNTY NURSING HOME needs ten more nurses. According to nursing home administrator Andrew Buffenbarger, that's what it would take to meet the home's need for 30 nurses without resorting to high-priced, high-turnover contract nurses. Along with a recent cut in state Medicaid funding, the home's reliance on contract nursing to fill the staffing gap is the major factor contributing to the home's persistent operating deficit of about \$1 million.

The deficit, down from \$2 million after the County Board hired an independent consulting company to find ways to improve the home's finances, has become a major crisis for the board, which is struggling to find cuts to avoid having to dip into county coffers. The county's finance committee has given the nursing home about a month and a half before the home will need to absorb a cut of about \$500,000 of its \$15 million budget. According to Buffenbarger, that means not being able to pay the home's bills. The immediate healthcare needs of the 60% of residents who depend on Medicaid now hinges on who blinks first—the nursing home administration, or the board.

Why is the nursing home having such a hard time finding and retaining full-time nurses? In part because, like most other healthcare providers, it's facing a national nursing shortage. According to the Department of Health and Human Services surveys, increased demand, an aging population, and crowded nursing schools are contributing to a growing number of unfilled nursing positions throughout the U.S., as well as an escalating wage war between healthcare providers competing for nurses. It's a wage war that public facilities can't win. With lower wages than comparable private facilities, the home has to attract and retain nurses with a different incentive: an intangible combination of benefits, good working conditions, and morale that board members like Jenny Putman refer to as "TLC."

But as the nursing shortage worsens, full-time nurses are facing deteriorating working conditions as they shoulder higher workloads alongside employees who have been hired to fulfill some of the roles that would otherwise fall to nurses. A 2002 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that 75% of working nurses felt the nursing shortage was increasing stress and leading to attrition.

This same finding was echoed at the County Board's April 15th study session by AFSCME Local 31 representa-

tives, who reported that full-time nurses at the Champaign County Nursing home are having to divide time between nursing and helping contract nurses learn about the home's policies and residents. Union representatives also reported that morale was low and attrition was high because many nurses were unhappy with their supervisors. But with no formal exit interview process to shed light on why nurses are leaving, and informal talks between workers and the board largely stalled, time is running out to find out what changes need to be made, much less make them.

In fact, the ticking clock has trumped most other concerns for the board, and at the recent study session the board came up with dozens of short-term measures, most of which were aimed at reducing operating costs or raising revenue in the very short term. From raising rates on single-occupancy rooms to renting out unused space, no single measure appears capable of bridging the \$1 million shortfall. Given time and public support, filling the gap in the home's full-time nursing staff could go a long way towards putting its finances on a sustainable course. But with just a few weeks remaining before the cut, the public and the board are going to have to either make a major, renewed commitment to the nursing home or face the prospect of the elderly poor and ill going without necessary care.



Teaching in Rantoul

By Neil Parthun



Neil Parthun is a schoolteacher in the Rantoul School District.

"I've heard that's a dangerous area."

"Have fun in Rantucky. That place is so ghetto."

THAT'S WHAT I HEAR whenever I tell a person that I teach in Rantoul, Illinois. These statements are almost always braced with a "How do you do it?" or "I could never do that."

A THRIVING PAST

In decades past, there were very different perceptions about Rantoul. Rantoul was seen as a town with dedicated and successful people. Within the last fifteen years, the perceptions of Rantoul radically changed. Beliefs about the community transformed Rantoul from a successful town to one that has had to deal with the destructive impact of poverty on a daily basis. Rantoul's economic woes are a microcosm of what is happening to families who live in impoverished working class communities throughout the U.S.

Like many other cities, Rantoul has a very rich history. It was once the site of Chanute Air Force Base (AFB). Chanute AFB became the location where the United States Army Air Service Technical Training Command was established in 1941. During World War II, thousands of airmen received technical training through this program. Chanute AFB continued to be a vital part of the local community after World War II. Chanute provided the majority of the jobs in Rantoul. The population also surged due to the base. The taxes funding the schools were substantial. There was a strong home life for the students with involved parents. Rantoul was an example of a positive community. Then, certain events occurred and peoples' perceptions changed.

Chanute Air Force Base was officially closed in 1993. The aftermath devastated Rantoul. Thousands of jobs with living wages disappeared with no replacement. The school system not only lost a major source of tax income, but they also lost one half of the entire student population. Ninety teachers lost their jobs during the school district's reduction in force.

At the school where I teach, J. W. Eater, 70.5% of students are now eligible to receive free or reduced price

lunch and labeled 'economically disadvantaged'. At J. W. Eater, approximately one out of every four students will transfer to another school district or be a new student. It is these students who daily face the issues of poverty.

CURRENT DIFFICULTIES

A major problem facing Rantoul is something over which the students have no control, the circumstances and educational background of their parents. After the base closure, Rantoul's job market became minimum-wage, low-skill service-sector jobs. Some parents came to Rantoul due to the availability of such jobs, since they did not have the skills or educational background to be employed in a professional job. These parents likely did not receive the educational training necessary for professional jobs because of the socioeconomic struggles of their parents and so on back into the past.

These generational issues of impoverishment put students at a disadvantage. I have encountered parents that lack the knowledge to help their child with homework. I have students regularly ask me for school supplies, because they are unable to purchase them. Many parents have rightfully put survival as the priority. It is disingenuous, callous and morally wrong to hear politicians and pundits demanding that these students 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps' when many of the children, through no fault of their own, have no proverbial boots of which to speak.

The mobility rate for my junior high students clearly shows the trend that parents move to where jobs are. With the rapid mobility of students to leave or enter the district, teachers face major problems. There is little continuity in what and how something has been taught. The children are not able to develop rapport with other students and their teachers, nor are they able to get in the habits of what is expected of them. Yet, teachers are being held accountable in standardized testing for all of these factors over which they have no control.

All the students at J. W. Eater are expected to take the Illinois State Achievement Test. The scores from these tests are then used to determine if the school has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP/meeting or exceeding standards'), according to *No Child Left Behind*. The federal government divides the scores into different subgroups—by race, special education, and economic disadvantage. A percentage benchmark of "meeting or exceeding standards" is developed by the state. If any one subgroup fails

to meet/exceed the percentage, the entire school fails to meet AYP. My school has failed to meet AYP due to the special education subgroup.

While having standards and holding schools accountable is an excellent idea in theory, *No Child Left Behind* standards and expectations fail to recognize the realities in many classrooms. Special education students have documented evidence showing that they have cognitive, developmental or emotional disabilities that make them unable to meet the same academic expectations as their age appropriate peers. However, these students are expected to meet or exceed the same testing standards as their non-disabled peers. These students have significant difficulties meeting or exceeding the standards. These difficulties are compounded by the economic problems that they face at home.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Yet, hope is not lost for towns like Rantoul. Hope can be found in J. W. Eater being recognized by the government for significant gains in learning achievement. These achievements are a testament to the work ethic and dedication of the families who work and live in Rantoul. The teachers at Eater provide developmental learning skills for these students—from math formulas to positive conflict resolution skills. It takes a lot of patience, but it is worth every moment.

By no means are the solutions to the issues in Rantoul going to be found overnight. But when people talk about Rantoul, they should focus on the tireless efforts of the community members who work hard to provide for their families. They should focus on the children who work hard at school. They should focus on the Rantoul citizens who positively contribute to their community. They should focus on how the families at J. W. Eater came together to donate more than 4,000 pounds of food to the Rantoul Community Service Center. Despite all of their challenges, these families support teachers and do what they can to ensure success.

As I tell my classes, people will rise to the expectations you have. When people only report negative stories or prejudicial stereotypes about Rantoul, it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. When we believe that people can achieve anything to which they focus their efforts, the positive results begin. Rantoul deserves our support and belief in the community's abilities. For those who ask me "How can you do it?" I usually respond with "How could I not?"

A Women's Center

Kaytlin Reedy

Kaytlin Reedy is a graduate student in Psychology/Sociology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the UIUC.

AS ONE OF THE ORGANIZERS for the campaign to get a Women's Center on the UIUC campus, I've had a unique opportunity to see the lives that such a center can touch. I've also had an opportunity to visit Women's Centers at other colleges and see the impact they make on campus life. Perhaps one of the most important reasons for a Women's Center is the many opportunities it provides women from different classes, races, sexualities and abilities. The Center would also serve as an open venue for women scholars, writers, artists, and musicians who to come speak to our campus community. It can be a place where classrooms and meetings can be held safely, a place to centralize the many resources we have on campus, and a place to learn about the variety of struggles and obstacles that all women face.

This isn't to say that the already existing services aren't amazing. They are. But they just aren't adequately sized for a campus of our magnitude. Perhaps a campus of 4,000 could operate efficiently with a two-office, Women and Gender Studies Program. A campus of 40,000, however, needs much more. At the current staffing ration, we have 1 staff member per 8,000 students—and that doesn't even take into account the needs of women faculty and staff who could benefit from such a Center on our campus.

The fact that UIUC doesn't have a Women's Center speaks volumes about the institution's attitude towards women. The university is willing to invest 80 million dollars on renovations of Assembly Hall, while, in the same breath, telling students that there is no money for funding a Women's Center. As a consequence, the Allies For A Women's Center have come together to work for change. We hope that now and in the future our voices will be heard.

In Memory of Cathy Acevedo 1959–2008



Associate Dean of Students Cathy Acevedo died on April 7, leaving students, faculty, and her administrative colleagues thunderstruck. Passionate and committed to equity, Cathy left a legacy of programs that transformed for the better the nature of the student experience on the UIUC campus.

A Tribute to Bob Walfedt

Marching so proud throughout his life
Many remember how he stood—
He was a foe of tears and strife.
Always standing for what was good!

He stood up tall, he stood up proud,
Marching with me Brothers along—
He knew the Truth, and spoke it loud,
As we all sang our Union song!

For most of the last century,
He stood for what he knew was Right!
He stood against War's treachery,
But he was not afraid to fight!

The kind of war that Bob stood for
Was never that crime in Iraq,
But for the Hungry, and the Poor,
Be they white, or Asian, or Black...

Standing besides him on the street,
Each of us with banner in hand
We felt we could not know defeat
With Bob there supporting our stand!

He'll always be there in Spirit
When the time to march comes again!
If we live like Bob lived it,
Then we can do nothing but win!

His Life was a lesson he left,
So we would all know how to live.
And though our hearts are now bereft,
We thank Bob for what he had to give!

—Tom Thomas



The Closing of Chicago Public Schools

By Pauline Lipman

Pauline Lipman is a community activist and professor of Education Policy Studies at UIC. She is active in Teachers for Social Justice in Chicago and the struggle against Renaissance 2010.

IN A SCHOOL AUDITORIUM FILLED with mostly Latino and African American and some white students, parents, and teachers, Andersen elementary school parents asked, "What does phasing out feel like? What research has been done on the effects on children and the community? Eradication?"

THE POLITICS OF ERADICATION

On Feb. 27, the Chicago Board of Education voted to phase out, close, or consolidate 10 schools and turn over 7 others to a non-profit "turn-around specialist." All, except one, are in working class and low-income African American and Latino communities. This is the latest round of Chicago's *Renaissance 2010* plan to close neighborhood schools and reopen them mostly as privately run charter or selective enrollment schools.

Since 2004, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has closed 56 schools. *Ren2010* schools are not required to have elected Local School Councils and charter schools are non-union. As in past years, the Board ignored the pleas, protests, demonstrations, and data of students, community members, teachers, unions, and school reform organizations fighting for their schools and the resources and support they need to improve them.

The Board's rationale is the schools are plagued by persistent 'failure.' But school staff and parents point to CPS's legacy of

failure to provide necessary resources and support, and failure to build on the strengths of schools in African American and Latino communities. This year the rationale was under-enrollment. An example is Andersen with a capacity of 1200 students which CPS said was 47% utilized. But teachers and parents who knew how space was actually used knew differently.

CPS didn't account for Andersen's extensive special education program, which required very small classes. Another case was Abbott elementary school which CPS claimed was under-utilized, but this didn't include a charter school and preschool in the building. In fact the building was fully utilized. On the other hand, 24 of CPS's 108 Autonomous Management Performance Schools (AMPs), considered some of the 'best' schools, are underenrolled—some significantly more than schools that were closed. Yet, no AMPs schools were closed.

SO WHAT IS GOING ON?

Those fighting *Ren2010* say the real agenda is to privatize public education, weaken unions, eliminate local school councils, and gentrify and displace communities of color. A parent put it succinctly: "We're being pushed out of the city under the guise of school reform."

A study by UIC's Data and Democracy project (www.uic.edu/educ/ceje/ or www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/) shows closed schools are clustered in areas experiencing high rates of gentrification. In 2006, CPS closed Collins High School and "rebirthed" it under *Ren2010*. Collins is on beautiful Douglas Park in an African American community which has been disinvest-

ed in for decades. Now, \$450,000 condos are springing up around the corner. At the time CPS announced plans to close Collins, developers were planning to build 245 homes priced between \$250,000 and \$600,000 about a mile from Collins.

Andersen, which is 73% Latino, 18% African American, and 94% low-income, is located in a prime gentrified neighborhood with an active real estate market in \$1 million-plus homes. The board voted to phase out Andersen and replace it with a clone of LaSalle Language Academy, a highly prized selective magnet school. Andersen students, many of whom speak Spanish as a first language and have been reassigned to other schools, would have to join the citywide competition for admission to a school that emphasizes world languages.

THE STRUGGLE OVER SCHOOLS

Schools are crucial community institutions. Closing them destabilizes a community, encouraging families to move. Abbott is the only school that serves Wentworth Gardens a public housing community where residents fought for the right to return after it is renovated. Abbott's African-American students were to be bused nearly two miles to a neighborhood with a history of racist violence. Closing Abbott would undermine a community in an area next to gentrification.

These decisions are made without regard for the knowledge and wishes of communities. Plans to close schools were announced a month before the Board's vote. Most public hearings were held downtown at Board headquarters, away from the community. People had two minutes to testify and could

not ask school officials questions, organize the order of their presentations, or use power point. Anderson organized five bus loads of children, parents, and teachers to testify for over three hours unanimously in favor of keeping their school which had won awards for achievement. CPS voted to close it anyway. Only Abbott, who also had a well-organized campaign, was able to prevail.

This is way more than a school plan. *Ren2010* was proposed by the Commercial



Protest of school closures

Club of Chicago—the most powerful corporate, financial, and political elites in the city, which set up a public-private partnership, Renaissance School Fund, to oversee it. *Ren2010* is linked to the agenda of Mayor Daley and the Commercial Club to make Chicago a first-tier global city in which financial and corporate interests, real estate development, and high paid knowledge workers are primary, labor rights and the voices of people of color are squashed and working class people of color are policed and displaced to the margins of the city. The struggle over schools is fundamentally about the right to live in the city.

May Day—Made in America

In October 1884, a convention held by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (FOTLU) of the United States and Canada unanimously set May 1, 1886, as the date by which the eight-hour work day would become standard. When May 1, 1886 approached, American labor unions prepared for a general strike in support of the eight-hour day.

On Saturday, May 1, rallies were held throughout the United States. There were an estimated 10,000 demonstrators in New York and 11,000 in Detroit. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin some 10,000 workers turned out. The movement's center was in Chicago, where an estimated 40,000 workers went on strike. Albert Parsons was an anarchist and founder of the International Working People's Association (IWPA). Parsons, with his wife Lucy and their children, led a march of 80,000 people down Michigan Avenue. Another 10,000 men employed in the lumberyards held a separate march in Chicago. Estimates of the total number of striking American workers range from 300,000 to half a million.

On May 3, striking workers in Chicago met near the McCormick Harvesting Machine Co. plant. A fight broke out when replacement workers attempted to cross the picket lines. Chicago police intervened and attacked the strikers, killing four and wounding several others, sparking outrage in the city's working community.

Local anarchists quickly printed and distributed fliers calling for a rally the following day at Haymarket Square, which at the time was a bustling commercial center near the corner of Randolph Street and Des

Plaines Street in what was later called Chicago's West Loop. These fliers alleged police had murdered the strikers on behalf of business interests and urged workers to seek justice. One surviving flyer printed in both German and English contains the words "Workingmen Arm Yourselves and Appear in Full Force."

Today, May 1st, is known as May Day or International Worker's Day. The day is an official government holiday in most countries around the world, with mass demonstrations, rallies and marches held to express labor solidarity and celebrate worker's rights. Here in the U.S., May Day is not a government-sanctioned holiday, even though its commemoration began in this country.



Eyes Wide Open



Above: Photos of the *Eyes Wide Open: The Human Cost of the Iraq War* exhibit on the UIUC Quad, Wednesday April 23.



Dump the Campaign *Rebolu!*

By Antonia Darder

AMID ALL THE *REBOLU* (as we often say in Puerto Rico) about the upcoming democratic primary on the island, the issue of poverty seems eclipsed. In the flurry of exchanges by those who often begin by stating their cultural credentials, newspapers and blogs perpetuate sound bites that sing to the interests of Democrat elites and their supporters, on both sides of the Obama and Clinton camps. In the midst of this cacophony, few express any real concerns for Puerto Rico's increasing economic woes.

It is disheartening that even many who reside in Puerto Rico echo the shallow refrains and fling the stale accusations of political party machines who convince voters that winning the election is far more important than addressing real issues. Instead of utilizing this significant moment in Puerto Rican history to openly challenge persistent federal economic policies that have intensified poverty, many insert their voices into the mainstream political debate to express a celebratory gushing of Puerto Rican cultural pride, seemingly oblivious to the historical impact of colonial conquest.

Rather than forthrightly demanding that presidential candidates, preparing for their foray into Puerto Rico's political arena, speak clearly and candidly about future economic policies to dramatically impact Puerto Rico's poor and working class, they are satisfied mimicking mainland nonsense. Namely, whether it is Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama, who is less stained by shady political or personal acquaintances, current or past. Or, whether Puerto Ricans will determine the outcome of the race, given the newly acquired 'poll power'—even if

they will not have the right to vote in the actual presidential election.

It seems we all need a reality check. Puerto Rico, colonized for over 500 years under the guise of extinguished indigenous claims to sovereignty, has been in the hands of the United States since 1898, when it was surrendered as war booty, after Spain's loss to the U.S. Actually, what remains veiled in U.S. historical accounts is that for Caribbeans, the Spanish American War, as it is known, was actually the struggle for the independence of Cuba and Puerto Rico from Spanish colonial rule. At the end of war, however, the U.S. gave Cuba its freedom, reneging on its promise of independence to the people of Puerto Rico.

Hence, the U.S. initiated its 110 years of environmental degeneration of the island's natural resources, control of the political economic domain, and wholesale disrespect for the self-determination of *Boricua* citizens. Since inception, U.S. relations with Puerto Rico have been founded on a politics of deceit, dispossession, and outright usury of colonial subjects as fodder for foreign wars, labor exploitation for economic profit, experimentation with population control programs, and as a strategic site of military operations, including the testing of radioactive weapons on Vieques.

Today, the Puerto Rican economy is still below that of Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation. More than 45% of Puerto Ricans live below the poverty line. Eight-seven percent of *Boricua* children are on the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs—considered to be one of

the best indicators of poverty in a region. The unemployment rate is 12%, with approximately 3% of the population homeless or permanently unemployed. Puerto Rico's per capital personal income is approximately one-third that of the U.S. Such poverty prevails on the island, despite a recent U.S. Treasury Department report that indicates the return on capital for corporations in Puerto Rico to be five times larger than those on the mainland.

Meanwhile, necessary debates related to economic disparities and the island's growing economic woes are overshadowed by popular mythical rhetoric of presidential candidate virtues. In the process, a new realm of exploitation seems to have emerged—the seduction of the Puerto Rican vote. Thus, the past disregard of *Boricua* voters is now replaced by a frenzy of solicitation, since neither Hillary Clinton nor Barack Obama has managed to secure the 2025 delegates required to seize the Democratic race. Such a lead would have automatically prized Puerto Rico's delegates to the first place candidate. You might say that Puerto Rico continues to live out its function as booty, but this time in electoral wars.

Hence, all the *rebolu*. Puerto Rico's 63 delegates are now an enviable prize to be grasped for their temporary use by the neoliberal elite, the same power elite who in a recent federal legislative poll expressed absolutely no interest, whatsoever, in welfare reform for the island. These are the same neoliberal guardians—whether female or Black—of a political economy that has perpetuated the impoverishment and environmental demise of not only the people of Puerto Rico, but the vast majority of the world's population.

The Cruel Prospect of Deep Recession

By Mark Weisbrot

Mark Weisbrot co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, in Washington, D.C. He is co-author, with Dean Baker, of *Social Security: The Phony Crisis*. He is also president of *Just Foreign Policy*.

AS THE ECONOMY SHIFTS INTO REVERSE gear and the Congress and President work out the details of a proposed fiscal stimulus, some are asking whether it will be enough to keep the economy out of a recession. The answer is very likely no.

The timing, length, and depth of a recession depend on many variables and is therefore difficult to predict. But there are certain things that we already know. First, we are witnessing the bursting of an unprecedented bubble in house prices. Nationally, a loss of wealth of about \$8 trillion would be necessary just to bring these prices back to their normal long-term trend. Even conservative estimates of the effect of such a drop imply a decline in consumer spending of \$400 billion, or about 3 percent of GDP. Some economists think it would be much more than that, because of the expansion in recent years of consumers borrowing against the (previously rising) values of their homes.

We also have the first official GDP growth numbers for the last quarter, which show the economy at a near standstill with just 0.6 percent annualized growth. Consumer spending, which accounts for about 70 percent of the economy, has been holding up; but this cannot last as the price of homes that people have been borrowing against continues to fall.

The size of the proposed stimulus, which is about \$150 billion, is just not large enough to compensate for the kind of spending declines that we can expect. Near the peak of the housing bubble in 2005, homeowners were cashing out about \$780 billion in home equity at an annual rate. Although not all of this was used for consumption, a lot of it was; this 'ATM machine' has now run out of cash.

It is worth looking at the total fiscal stimulus provided by the federal government, when the last huge asset bubble—in the stock market—burst. The federal budget went from a surplus of 2.4 percent of GDP in 2000, to a deficit of 3.5 percent of GDP in 2003. This is about 6 times the size of the proposed stimulus package, although the federal government will automatically provide at least some more stimulus than the current package, as tax rev-

enues fall and some social spending rises.

Based on the experience of the last three recessions, the Center for Economic and Policy Research has estimated that the next recession could increase unemployment by 3.2 to 5.8 million people, and poverty by 4.7 to 10.4 million, with at least 4.2 million also losing health insurance. The range depends on whether it is a mild-to-moderate recession like the last two (2001 and 1990–91) or more severe as in 1980–82.

Given the magnitude of the risks and economic pain that our economy is facing, it is imperative to demand measures that will soften the blow—especially for the most vulnerable, including the elderly, unemployed, and poor. The package that passes Congress, despite some positive additions by the Senate, will be especially inadequate in this regard.

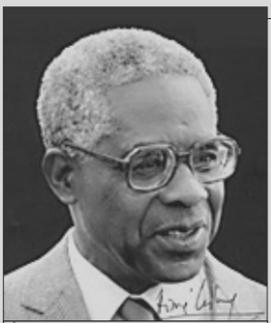
Out of the Great Depression came the New Deal, which included Social Security, the legal right to organize unions, unemployment compensation and other reforms that trans-



formed the United States into a more just society while setting the stage for the post-World War II boom. Over the last 30 years, the country has become vastly more unequal and economic performance has also deteriorated with the ascendancy of the Right.

We are not facing a depression, but the hard times ahead will highlight the need for structural changes such as universal health care and labor law reform. These and other major reforms—including a bigger and 'green' fiscal stimulus that would reduce carbon emissions—should be pushed to the top of the political agenda.

Aime Césaire: 1913–2008



Aime Césaire

Born on June 26, 1913, Aimé Césaire was a poet, dramatist, statesman, former deputy for Martinique in the French National Assembly, and mayor of its capital, Fort-de-France.

Césaire was one of the earliest advocates of *négritude*—the awareness of the cultural and historical consequences of being African or of African descent. In his seminal text, *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* (Return to My Native Land), included the following poem.

Césaire died on April 17, 2008, at the age of 94.

*my negritude is not a stone
nor a deafness flung against the clamor of the day
my negritude is not a white speck of dead water
on the dead eye of the earth
my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral
it plunges into the red flesh of the soil
it plunges into the blaxing flesh of the sky
my negritude riddles with holes
the dense affliction of its worthy patience.*



"Be Realistic... Demand the Impossible!"

By Altazor and David X.

"It is not that our problems are that big... It's just that we are looking at them on our knees."

—Grafitti in the Buenos Aires subte, 2003

RISING PERSONAL DEBT AND BANKRUPTCIES, falling wages, housing foreclosures, growing unemployment, increasing service industry 'underemployment,' a shrinking middle-class, overall full-time job losses, downsizing, more homeless, rising oil and gas prices, skyrocketing food prices, ever more expensive health care [if you have even got it], the international devaluation of the currency, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, a massive international debt, the rich hide their assets safely offshore, \$200 billion in corporate bailouts, another \$100 billion dollars here and there for the fucking war, nothing for us... and the band plays on... "Don't worry, just have faith," we are told, "the market will *magically* correct itself." Right? For who?

Let's be honest, the news is bad all around, and the working class is suffering the most. Simply, everyday life is difficult for most of us, and we're *not* making it. If a family is barely making it on \$40,000 a year—how can those making \$20,000 or less have a chance? Families and individuals are living a precarious existence on a razor's edge. Choices must be made every month between paying the bills, or rent, and buying food. "Feed my children first, and then I'll eat what is left over," becomes the mantra. One illness or job loss, and the whole ship can quickly go under completely. For many of us, this is reality NOW and it is only getting worse, not better.

AUTONOMÍA 2001—EDUCATION, DEMOCRACY, SELF-MANAGEMENT, AUTONOMY

A very similar situation existed in Argentina prior to their economic crash of December 2001 when the bottom finally fell out, and the populace had no choice but to get "off their knees." Neighbors met in parks and street corners to talk about what was happening to them, and the conditions they had to endure. Many found for the first time that they were not alone, and for many, it was the first time they ever met and really got to know each other. Relationships and friendships were built. They formed their own democratic neighborhood organizations, called MTDs, to discuss their problems and find their own solutions. It was a simple fact, since the government and private enterprise would not, or could not, meet their everyday needs, then they had to make their own decisions and do it themselves. There was no other choice, and they took action.

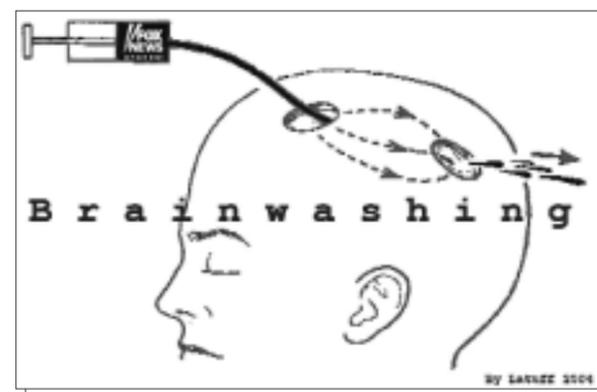
Vacant lots were dug up to grow food for the community. Empty buildings were occupied for housing, to hold meetings, and build neighborhood kitchens to feed their children and the hungry. Later some of these squatted buildings also became schools, health clinics, cultural centers, barter markets (*truques*), and even workplaces. Some built blockades on the roads, *piquetes*, as a form of protest, or to stop trucks and appropriate basic necessities of life for

themselves and their neighbors. Utility companies were occupied or boycotted to force them to turn the electricity, gas, and water back on. When businesses closed, the unemployed returned to the workplace, organized themselves democratically, restarted production of their goods and services under their *own* control which they then sold directly to former customers. All without their former corporate owners and managers! And, when the police came to evict them from these 'new spaces' that they created, they resisted. Of course some confrontations were lost but many were won, mistakes were made but lessons were learned... most importantly, hope survived.

'SOCIALITY' AND SOLIDARITY... THE 500 POUND GORILLA

True, it would be completely unrealistic to think that such a rebellious situation could erupt overnight here in Champaign-Urbana, or anywhere else in the United States for that matter. We are not yet to the point of desperation that the Argentinian people were in 2001. Nevertheless, things are bad *now* and getting worse. Our biggest obstacle at this point is alienation. We are so alienated from ourselves, and each other, that the powers that be are able to control us, and this is no accident. This is how *power* enforces its will over us. Essentially, the working class is trapped in a very dysfunctional and abusive relationship with *power*. It is violence, and coercion. We rarely, if ever, talk to our neighbors and co-workers about what is happening to us. We live in denial and make excuses for what is happening to us—and 'blame the victim.' We keep silent because we feel alone... helpless, hopeless, powerless, and submit to a reality that is fundamentally wrong—that we did not create. As a result, we are more afraid of changing this reality and heading into the unknown, than we are of trying to cope with an intolerable reality that we do know. It's truly fucked up!

Like the Argentinians, and others throughout the world, we *can* find creative solutions to our problems. They are not that big, and we are not that powerless—but we can't do it alone. But, before we can do that, we need to talk about them without shame, and face what is happening to us. We need to see our *everyday life* clearly, without the distortions of the marketplace, the media, and those in power. In short, we need to 'break the spell' that we are under, so that we can see that we are not alone after all. That we have many common experiences that we share with our friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and co-workers—even strangers. We can get to know each other again, face to face, and build new relationships based on love, trust, and mutual support. Then we can begin to organize ourselves, build community, discuss solutions to our problems, and make decisions together. That is what solidarity is. We can build hope. Like the Argentinians we need to 'get off our knees,' stand up for ourselves, and say—"¡Ya Basta!"—"Enough!" Until then, we are powerless and helpless only because we believe it to be so.



The Hard Truth

The hard truth of the matter is that the regime of monopoly-finance capital is designed to benefit a tiny group of oligopolists who dominate both production and finance. A relatively small number of individuals and corporations control huge pools of capital and find no other way to continue to make money on the required scale than through a heavy reliance on finance and speculation. This is a deep-seated contradiction intrinsic to the development of capitalism itself. If the goal is to advance the needs of humanity as a whole, the world will sooner or later have to embrace an alternative system. There is no other way.

—John Bellamy Foster

Monthly Review, April 2008

DEBT

WE LIVE IN AN ECONOMY that has become deeply dependent on the American consumer for growth. U.S. consumer spending accounts for nearly 70 percent of the US gross domestic product. Consumer credit and mortgage debt is a higher percentage of disposable income now than ever been before. The US population is \$5.3 trillion in debt. In

fact, the credit industry is monopolized by 10 credit companies, who control almost 90 percent of the credit card market, based on credit card receivables outstanding (Source: FDIC).

- About 43% of American families spend more than they earn each year.
- Average households carry some \$8,000 in credit card debt.
- Personal bankruptcies have doubled in the past decade.

FORECLOSURES

Up to 4 percent of America's mortgaged homeowners might lose their homes to foreclosure in coming months, as those homeowners find themselves trapped by heavy debt and the housing slump. That's four times worse than the historical average of 1 in 100 mortgaged homeowners who fail to keep up payments. The national foreclosure rate has climbed 27% from a year ago with an estimated \$110 billion worth of homes expected to go into foreclosure.

National foreclosures are expected to hit 1.2 million to 1.3 million by the end of the year. \$1 trillion in mortgage debt will come due next year as the rates on millions of adjustable loans reset, sending individual monthly mortgage payments hundreds of dollars higher. In one case, a family started with a "teaser rate," paying just \$1,700 a month. They thought it was fixed, but it wasn't. With rising interest rates and deferred interest, the monthly payment has now ballooned to \$3,700 a month. They can't afford to pay it and, worse, they will probably lose their home and all they have invested. Unfortunately, this family is not alone.

Champaign County Statistics on Unemployment

Statistics provided by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission show an overall 13.8 percent unemployment rate for African-Americans as compared with 3.7 percent for whites.



Urban Planning's Dirty Laundry

By Elizabeth Sweet

Elizabeth L. Sweet is an assistant professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the UIUC.

THE UIUC CHAPTER OF THE PLANNERS NETWORK organized a clothesline event in Temple Buell Hall on Thursday April 24th. The goal was to create a display of the good, the bad and the ugly done by planners and policy-makers to affect people's lives and communities through history. Planning happens at many levels; participants sought to bring to the fore the inequality that is wide spread in planning practice. We hung laundry with phrases and descriptions of planning and policy decisions, programs, and projects from the past and present for all to see.

Students and faculty from the Department of Urban and Regional Planning participated in the event. The clotheslines were displayed in the atrium of the building for two hours, and participants had the opportunity to write and display their thoughts on T-shirts, pants and other clothes. Examples of the phrases used were "Sundown towns," "Using parks to promote racist drug-enforcement policy," "Bad planning affects good people," "Urban renewal," "Red lining," among others.

We want to dispel the myth of the benevolent planner and demystify the results of harmful policy-making. Community decline is not a natural process but is the result of often racist and gender blind planning and policy making, such as redlining, restrictive covenants, boarding schools for Native Americans, and anti-immigrant ordinances. Planning has a lot of dirty laundry and it is time we air it out and clean it up!

The Planners Network, an international association of professionals, activists, academics, and students involved in physical, social, economic, and environmental planning in urban and rural areas, promotes fundamental change in our political and economic systems. We hope this will be one of many events to follow. Anyone can join our listserve and participate in activities. If you have ideas for events you can make suggestion through the list or during meetings, which are organized via the list.

For more information see: www.urban.uiuc.edu/student_orgs/PNC/ or contact sortize@uiuc.edu or rserpa2@uiuc.edu

Photos from the clothesline event at Temple Buell Hall



Highlander Folk School, Education for Social Change

By Jon Hale



Jon Hale is a PhD student in Educational Policy Studies at UIUC. His research focuses on the social history of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools and the civil rights/freedom struggle movement.

IN THE MIDST OF CALLS FOR SOCIAL REFORM, interested educators and volunteers should take note of the quiet history of education for social change in the United States. The Highlander Research and Education Center, originally known as the Highlander Folk School, was started in Monteagle, Tennessee in 1932 by Myles Horton and Don West. Highlander is an adult education school located in the mountains of eastern Tennessee. The school institutes programs and classes that focus on democratic social change.

Since its founding, the Highlander staff has focused on enacting social change by working with social activists, meeting the needs of the poor and oppressed, and aligning itself with social movements with the same goals. Myles Horton would become synonymous with Highlander after Don West left in 1933 to pursue a different political agenda. Horton said that education was always political, people had their own solutions to their own problems, and it would just take the right conditions, discussion and respect to arrive at the solutions. Since 1932, Highlander has been such a place for thousands of social activists to gather.

Highlander gained notoriety when the staff worked closely with the labor rights movement during the 1930s-1940s. Highlander's first educational programs focused on training union

leaders organized under the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Union leaders travelled to Highlander, learned effective strategies from other union members and returned to their homes to implement and teach others the lessons they learned.

During the mid-1950s, the Highlander staff began to turn its attention toward issues of race. It started a network of schools known as the Citizenship Schools that created educational programs among southern blacks about the strategies needed to bypass laws which prevented them from voting. Within ten years, Martin Luther King, Jr. had taken over the schools and over 50,000 African Americans had registered to vote. In 1955 Rosa Parks had attended classes at Highlander just weeks before she defiantly refused to give up her seat, which instigated the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Various civil rights organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee had used Highlander as a safe place to discuss their experiences, develop new strategies and teach others interested in participating in the Civil Rights Movement.

Since its role in the Civil Rights Movement, Highlander has renewed its interest in local Appalachian issues such as environmental protection, cleanup projects, land ownership, and labor education. It has also worked on international issues targeting the illiteracy among the poor and unfair immigration practices. The radical Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, worked and taught at Highlander during the 1980s. Perhaps its greatest honor was bestowed in 1982 when Highlander was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. The history of Highlander is also defined by the resistance the school encour-

tered. Highlander is a school for radical progressive education, known to be ahead of its own time. Conservative locals and politicians have historically frowned upon Highlander's public commitment to racial, political and social equality. One provocative fact of Highlander retreats during the labor and civil rights movement was that the school was racially integrated, where black and white students would live, eat and commune together in a region that was otherwise committed to strict Jim Crow racial segregation. The school was subject to the harassment of the state government and the violence of the Ku Klux Klan.

In the McCarthy era, Highlander was branded as a "Communist Training School." The Internal Revenue Service revoked its educational tax exempt status in 1957. The Tennessee legislature confiscated Highlander property in 1962 and auctioned off its property. The school buildings at Highlander were mysteriously burned thereafter. As Myles Horton was quick to note, however, Highlander was first and foremost an idea. Highlander relocated to Knoxville until 1971 when it moved to its current location in New Market, Tennessee. Highlander has proven to be resilient in the face of such resistance.

Highlander continues its historical mission of studying, revising and teaching solutions to endemic social, political and economic issues. It currently practices methods of participatory action research, where local activists come to Highlander for resources and guidance in identifying, researching and solving the problems directly facing their communities. The school currently holds its own workshops and offer many resources that focus on civil and human rights, humane immigration policy, criminal justice reform, economic justice and workers' rights, international peace and solidarity, environmental justice, youth leadership, and racial, gender and sexual discrimination. In keeping with its original educational method of meeting the needs and interests of the students, educators and activists interested and concerned with social change can use Highlander's buildings and land, which are located in the peaceful mountains of eastern Tennessee. For more information, visit: <http://www.highlandercenter.org>.



Rosa Parks at the Highlander School



Pedagogy of the Oppressed Revisited

By Antonia Darder



Antonia Darder is a professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She is longtime Puerto Rican activist-scholar involved in issues related to education, language, immigrant, workers, and women's rights.

PAULO FREIRE, THE WORLD-RENOWNED Brazilian educator, would have turned 86 years old this May. And although much has transpired since Freire wrote his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, what seems to have remained constant, or deepened, are the structures and politics of inequality that breed poverty and human suffering.

Impoverished communities today face the dreadful consequences of an intensifying economic malaise. Former opportunities for work and earning a decent livelihood have disappeared, as communities struggle to maintain their dignity in the face of monetary collapse. Many oppressed communities have also been forced to contend with the debilitating impact of being turned into quasi-laboratories for the benefit of university educators, researchers and organizers. And, though some of their efforts may have been positive, more times than not, the gains are short lived, as 'traveller' educators, researchers, and organizers complete their projects and move on to slay new dragons.

In Freire's work, he constantly sought to ask, as should we, how can those who enter oppressed communities labor in ways that respect the wisdom, cultures, and histories of the oppressed. This is particularly important, given a mainstream culture of 'expert' intervention with its emphasis on quick-fix solutions. Too often such efforts, inadvertently, splinter and uproot community self-determination (albeit unintentionally), as community members become objects of study to be used for purposes beyond their own interests.

CHALLENGING UNEXAMINED ASSUMPTIONS

By the same token, when efforts are made to honestly challenge unexamined assumptions or practices, those from oppressed communities are accused of being too political, abstract, or ideological, whenever they seek more grounded dialogue. Again Freire is useful here, for he reminds us the importance of resisting discourses of fatalism and the conditioned responses of urgency, in the name of expediency. The truth is, chronic problems in most poor communities have existed for generations. Yet, suddenly when 'traveller' agents deem the old problems 'urgent,' there is a scramble for immediate repair, even when proposed actions might stifle community participation.

It is not surprising, then, that the politics of expediency often functions as one of the cornerstones of liberal approaches to problematic community intervention. Rather than to seek organic opportunities for voice, participation, and social action among community members themselves, a premature leap, for example, into a well-defined 'Rights' campaign can lead to premature solutions.

What must not be ignored here is that solutions anchored in 'Rights' are often much more compelling to white educators, researchers or organizers, since it allows them to feel secure, competent, and comfortable leading. This, despite their lack of lived knowledge about the manner in which generations of racism and poverty can disable community empowerment, through conflict, dependency, and despair.

In many ways, Freire's work strongly spoke to the need for a decolonizing approach to community education,

research and organizing. He signaled the need for a critical approach to community development, one that instills a sense of intimacy and openness about grappling with class, cultural, gendered and racialized differences, within the context of any community project for change.

This calls for a community politics that begins from the lived experiences of community members, with faith in their capacities to contend with their own issues in creative and vital ways. Hence, 'traveller' educators, researchers, and organizers must work with community residents from inception, so that when university agents leave, the community is left stronger for the relationship, rather than more weakened, used, and maligned.

Central to Paulo Freire's work is an expectation that our engagement with community members will be anchored in honesty, faith, and love—which develops over time. Through forging such relationships, we are able to participate together in naming the history of formal and informal power relationships that not only reproduce inequalities, foster manipulation, and inscribe dependency, but also the many solutions anchored within the reality of each community. This is to say that a recipe approach to education, research, or community organizing—whether legal, scientific, or political in nature—functions against critical community empowerment.

In contrast, community work, with an eye toward a liberating intent, must take into account multiple histories of survival—including those shaped by racism, sexism, class inequalities, homophobia, disablism—recognizing that all community relations and processes are historical and cultural in nature. Firmly rooted in a complex yet transformative intent, such community efforts against oppression acknowledge both the power of indigenous identities and the power of collective existence.

This is particularly the case where pragmatism and expediency are privileged over a historical understanding of complex social phenomena. A phenomenon often aided by the gaze of 'traveller' educators, researchers, and organizers who spend a few months in a community and then think they 'know' what the community needs, thinks, or who they are. But now, even better than those who have been oppressed and have worked for decades to disrupt these structures of inequality.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

In an effort to disrupt commonsense meanings, Freire spoke to the need for a more transformative approach to our work, one which acknowledges both the power of subordinated identities and the power of collective action. Inherent to this decolonizing perspective are important questions for reflection that we must hold as central in our efforts.

Who produces, analysis, and makes conclusions about the multiple and often divergent narratives or political needs of the community? Whose interests does the timetables and research agendas of political interventions serve?

Who consumes the program or research and toward what ends? What leadership and organizational structures, as well as communication styles, are being utilized to create a more solid grassroots political mobilization? What privileges and economic interests enable the production and consumption of education and research? How can these function in the interests of the residents' long-term, as well as short-term, needs?

Questions like these are key to the manner in which education, research and organizing are conducted, the analysis of research is developed, and the products of edu-

cation, research and political organizing are utilized. Moreover, there must be a manner in which to not marginalize these questions as 'abstract' in favor of 'practical' questions, by those more aligned with mainstream notions of community organizing.

CULTIVATING POLITICAL GRACE

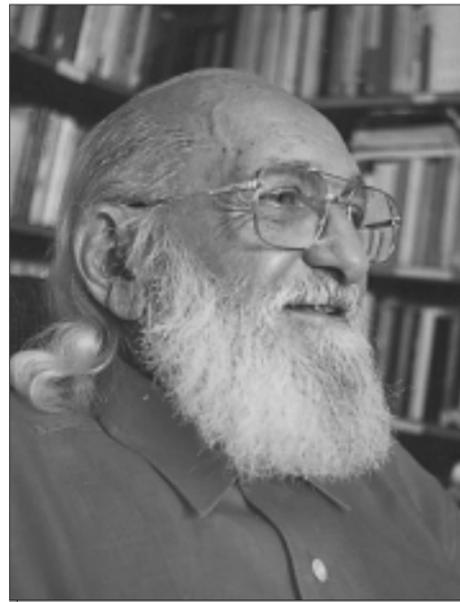
At this point in our long history of battling racism and economic injustice, there must be a way that we can sit together with open hearts and minds, in order to grapple with a more complex understanding of what it is that we each bring to the table. This begins with recognition that we carry different knowledge and perspective, grounded upon our personal histories of survival and struggles against oppression.

Above all, we must acknowledge that the work we do within communities, we also do for ourselves. Our work as critical researchers, activists, and organizers must be seen as a two-way street—a partnership that is carried out through mutual respect, learning, struggle, and vision. Hence, there is no way that we can be involved in the work to transform social inequalities, without also opening ourselves to critique and a decolonizing process that challenged the negative impact of our own entitlements, entanglements and privileges.

As Paulo Freire often reminded us, the struggle for empowerment must be both pedagogical and political. It requires a solidarity that is founded upon shared power, where differences and disagreements are not demonized or falsely contained, but rather welcomed as the fuel for creatively learning about our place in the world.

Such political grace, requires that we recognize that, no matter from where we enter the room, our labor as educators, researchers, and organizers must ultimately also be about 'saving our own lives.' For Freire, this meant a grace born from teaching and learning together, in ways that affirm our humanity, while yet, steadfastly, challenging the social and material conditions of alienation, greed, and dispossession.

There is no question that this requires enormous patience, fortitude and wherewithal. However, it is also an approach that, in the long run, may leave communities more armed to contend with on-going and future issues and concerns of oppression—long after 'traveling' university educators, researchers, and placeless political organizers are long gone.



Paulo Freire

Activist to Be Tried Again May 12

URBANA—The criminal case against activist Patrick Thompson, the founder of VEYA, is scheduled for a third jury trial, Monday, May 12 in Courtroom A at 1:30 p.m. Thompson remains accused of home invasion and criminal sexual abuse since the creation of VEYA's controversial video documentary that exposed police behaving aggressively in the north district. Less than a day after police seized the video from Urbana Public Television station, Thompson was arrested despite the police conducting no investigation into the allegations. The he said/she said case ended in a mistrial when Thompson represented himself in 2005. A jury in the second trial found Thompson guilty, but the verdict was overturned when Judge Harry Clem found defense attorney Harvey Welch ineffective and the heresy evidence presented at the second trial prejudicial.

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