

The Rouge Forum News

Working Papers, Critical Analysis, and Grassroots News

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Connecting Reason to Power

www.rougeforum.org

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FROM THE EDITOR: M4, a Thousand More

*The only real option open to humanity under these circumstances,
we are convinced,
is to scrap the present failed system and to put a new,
more rational, egalitarian one its place—
one aimed not at the endless pursuit of monetary wealth,
but at the satisfaction of genuine human needs.*

(John Bellamy Foster and Hannah Holleman, *The Monthly Review*,¹ May, 2010)

The Rouge Forum Conference is coming: August 2-5 at George Williams College in Williams Bay, WI. The theme of this year's conference is "Education in the Public Interest." Connecting to Foster and Holleman above, we see the road to a more "rational, egalitarian" system traveling straight through and emanating out from schools.

But, not our current schools, of course. We seek a transformation of status quo schooling. We choose to join those who are already struggling to bring a different form to bear.

Much of Issue 16 of the *Rouge Forum News* takes us back to the basics, again. We think about where the Rouge Forum came from, why it was named as it was, and where we're going from here. This year's conference will focus quite a bit on that road ahead. It's not too late to join us: www.rougeforumconference.org.

August seems a long way off, though. I write on a dreary Saturday morning in May, laptop illuminated by a small desk lamp. Not much light penetrates the front picture window of our 110 year old shotgun house in the Highlands neighborhood of Louisville, KY. The dogs'—Mango and Kingston—snoring interrupts what is otherwise a fairly quiet morning save for a light drizzle saturating the green fullness of our magnolia tree.

It's May 1, May Day, a day to remember workers worldwide—the struggle to uphold the dignity of workers. It's also the first Saturday in May, so it is also the (136th) running of the Kentucky Derby, taking place just a few miles from where I type. One event is a showcase in excess; the other is a reverent remembrance of international solidarity.

The paradox is symbolic of much of what we glean from our world today, teetering on the edge of forever. If we care to notice, the evidence of dehumanization is overwhelming. Let me point to one issue: race, in particular, before ticking off a couple other examples. Then, let's get a sense of the resistance that is building, both here and abroad. The assault on our humanity is reaching a crescendo; perhaps a dissonant resistance is rising to challenge it.

¹ <http://monthlyreview.org/100501foster-holleman.php>.

Like most of you I note the coalescing forces of **the new Jim Crow** (which like the previous form of Jim Crow and slavery before it is a similar sort of economic, intellectual, psychological, and/or physical enslavement: "by what new name shall we call this old institution..."), **tea party activism** (where any sort of rational critique that may be present is overridden by a formidable racist segment), and **the new racist immigration legislation** in Arizona.

The prison industrial complex, ICE raids, the re-segregation of our schools (the return of Apartheid schooling), racist/classist high stakes testing, the Race to the Trough federal sell-out of public education, as well as veiled (and sometimes not-so-veiled) threats to government officials of color are part and parcel of the strategy to promote inequality by keeping us separated, alienated from one another through artificial forms of difference.

This is an old story. Divide and rule.

We see such divide and rule tactics as well regarding (so-called) health care reform and (supposed) Wall Street reform. We bicker about relatively minor details while we are getting creamed by the owners of the means of production. They have convinced us that in some tepidly reformed version, the current systems of sick care and banking can somehow benefit *us*. These are capital's systems; therefore, by their nature, they are not set up to benefit us.

Reform, no; stiff regulation, maybe (but probably not); revolution, yes: something more rational, egalitarian, democratic.

The struggle is, of course, never one-sided. Resistance happens. And, at times, wins, if temporarily. These moments of creation provide us sustenance for the journey, hope for the long haul. They *will* reveal a turning point if our analysis remains sharp.

Resistance is building and spilling out into the streets of the US, Thailand, and Greece. A fight for self-determination and protection of their lands is raging in the countrysides of India and Nepal between the Maoists and their supposed 'democratic' governments.

California and Florida are fighting back. Check out analysis here of the March Forth movement: *The lessons of March 4: A Marxist Analysis*,² *Crisis and Consciousness: Reflections and Lessons from March 4*,³ *A Rouge Forum Broadside: Resistance and Fear*,⁴ and *M4: A Thousand More*.⁵ Oakland teachers went on strike on April 29. And, the

² http://www2.socialistorganizer.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=384&Itemid=1

³ <http://advancethestruggle.wordpress.com/2010/04/12/crisis-and-consciousness-reflections-and-lessons-from-march-4th/>

⁴ <http://rougeforum.org/resistancefear.html>

⁵ <http://rougeforum.org/distilldemocracy.htm>

Capistrano Unified teachers went on strike.⁶ As well, the Fund Education Now network of parents have won, at least temporarily, in their battle against Senate Bill 6 in Florida.⁷

This resistance has been nearly completely non-violent. In southeastern Asia, though, the struggle is decidedly bloody. Fighting what amounts to a resource war, Maoists in India and Nepal have had to choose between death and death. And, it seems they have chosen the more moral death of resistance. While violence is nothing to be celebrated, how shall people respond to structural violence extended through all sorts of ideological apparatuses and to a well-armed state hell bent on land seizures and extracting valuable bauxite from the hills of India?

I would highly encourage our readers to take in Arundhati Roy's latest text, *Fieldnotes on Democracy: Listening to grasshoppers*, as well as her recent expose' of her time in the Maoist camps of India: *Walking with Comrades*.⁸ Regarding Nepal, check out *May First: High Noon in Nepal*⁹ and *Nepal Report: Revolutionary Students Shut Down 8000 Private Schools Indefinitely*.¹⁰

These may be important topics to discuss at the upcoming Rouge Forum conference.

In the meantime, in this issue of the *RF News*, we've captured two excellent creative selections to kick things off. Joe Cronin offers an epic poem, *Gebeorscipes*, and Nancye McCrary talks to us about her recent travels to Istanbul, Turkey. Rich Gibson follows these with further critical examination of the March 4th movement. Jean Gregorek, former Associate Professor of Literature at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, OH, offers an acute analysis of the closing of Antioch College in 2008. I conclude the essays in this 16th issue with the keynote address I gave at Defiance College in Defiance, OH on April 7, 2010: *To distill a different democracy*. Along with concluding announcements about future issues of the *RF News*, an editorial from Mia Sosa-Provencio closes this issue.

In *Calling all Rebels*, Chris Hedges observes,

Those in power have disarmed the liberal class. They do not argue that the current system is just or good, because they cannot, but they have convinced liberals that there is no alternative. But we are not slaves. We have a choice. We can refuse to be either a victim or an executioner. We have the moral capacity to say no, to refuse to cooperate. Any boycott or demonstration, any occupation or sit-in, any strike, any act of obstruction or sabotage, any refusal to pay taxes, any fast, any popular movement and any

⁶ <http://www.oregister.com/news/teachers-244536-school-strike.html>

⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjKFZYIVDGw>

⁸ <http://kasamaproject.org/2010/03/21/walking-with-the-comrades/>

⁹ <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/344.php>

¹⁰ <http://kasamaproject.org/2010/04/25/nepal-report-revolutionary-students-shut-down-8000-private-schools-indefinitely/>

act of civil disobedience ignites the soul of the rebel and exposes the dead hand of authority. . . .The capacity to exercise moral autonomy, the capacity to refuse to cooperate, offers us the only route left to personal freedom and a life with meaning. Rebellion is its own justification.¹¹

In light of this the Rouge Forum continues to deepen its analysis and seeks to hold animated discussions across a broad spectrum in order to decipher what to do next. What shall ignite our soul?

In the 19th century, the central organizing point of society was the farm. In the mid-20th century, the hope of the proletariat rested in the trade unions. Today, as Gibson and the Rouge Forum have suggested, the central organizing point of our de-industrialized, globalized society (and, thus, the centripetal point for spiraling out resistance) is the school.

School workers, students, and parents hold a great deal of power if we focus on schools as our central organizing point. We can (and already are in some sectors--look at California and the March 4 events) build(ing) a multi-racial, multi-class, multi-national coalition of school workers. And, this resistance can work at multiple levels—more reformist agendas of enacting legislation to favor all children, taking charge of curriculum, revamping current teacher education, as well as more revolutionary/rebellious agendas, which include occupations to reclaim our public spaces like schools, building a parallel freedom school structure (akin to 1964 Mississippi), creating our own teacher preparation model, etc.

None of these agendas are unproblematic. Work will jerk forward unevenly. We will begin and need to begin again. We will need to embolden future generations to continue the work, as *we* will likely not summit the mountain. But, at some point, some future generation of rebels will. And, they will because our shoulders were there to hoist them just like we have been hoisted.

The way forward must be premised in community and a commitment to a sort of reconnection that the last 30 years (at least) have militated against. We need reasoned discussions informed by a multiplicity of voices who have a deep understanding of history (or who are at least committed to continually seeking out such a deeper understanding). Disagreement can be a hallmark of this newly distilled democracy, provided our solidaristic passion for a more equitable distribution of resources and condition is foundational. Personally, I could be comforted by an unknown process as long as our directional compass points toward a more material justice for all that lives and breathes.

March 4, a thousand more.

Adam Renner, Louisville, KY

¹¹ http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/calling_all_rebels_20100308/

WHAT IS THE ROUGE FORUM?

The *Rouge Forum* is a group of educators, students, and parents seeking a democratic society. We are concerned about questions like these: How can we teach against racism, national chauvinism and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals and still teach--or learn? Whose interests shall school serve in a society that is ever more unequal? We are both research and action oriented. We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring into practice our present understanding of what that is. We seek to build a caring inclusive community which understands that an injury to one is an injury to all. At the same time, our caring community is going to need to deal decisively with an opposition that is sometimes ruthless.

We hope to demonstrate that the power necessary to win greater democracy will likely rise out of an organization that unites people in new ways—across union boundaries, across community lines, across the fences of race and sex/gender. We believe that good humor and friendships are a vital part of building this kind of organization, as important as theoretical clarity. Friendships allow us to understand that action always reveals errors--the key way we learn. We chose Brer Rabbit as a symbol to underline the good cheer that rightfully guides the struggle for justice. Every part of the world is our briar patch.

We had modest success in defeating the standardized test, the MEAP, in Michigan. We work in faculty organizations and unions to deal with the racism and sexism in academia. We try to press forward questions of class size, curricular freedom, anti-racist pedagogy, real inclusion, and a just tax system. As part of the *Whole Schooling Consortium*, we have sponsored forums in the U.S., uniting hundreds of people for democracy and equality. (Excerpted from the Rouge Forum website: www.rougeforum.org.)

WHY DO YOU CALL IT THE ROUGE FORUM?

The River Rouge runs throughout the Detroit area—where the Rouge Forum was founded in 1998. Once a beautiful river bounteous with fish and plant life, it supported wetlands throughout southeast Michigan. Before industrialization, it was one of three rivers running through what is now the metropolitan area. Today the Rouge meanders through some of the most industrially polluted areas in the United States, past some of the poorest and most segregated areas of North America, only to lead some tributaries to one of the richest cities in the U.S.: Birmingham. The Rouge cares nothing for boundaries. The other two Detroit rivers were paved, early in the life of the city, and now serve as enclosed running sewers. Of the three, the Rouge is the survivor.

The Ford Rouge Plant was built before and during World War I. By 1920, it was the world's largest industrial complex. Everything that went into a Ford car was manufactured at the Rouge. It was one of the world's largest iron foundries and one of the top steel producers. Early on, Henry Ford sought to control every aspect of a worker's life, mind and body, in the plant and out.

Using a goon squad recruited from Michigan prisons led by the infamous Harry Bennett, Ford instituted a code of silence. He systematically divided workers along lines of national origin, sex, race, and language groupings—and set up segregated housing for the workforce. Ford owned Dearborn and its politicians. He designed a sociology department, a group of social workers who demanded entry into workers' homes to discover "appropriate" family relations and to ensure the people ate Ford-approved food, like soybeans, voted right, and went to church. While Ford did introduce the "Five Dollar Day," in fact only a small segment of the employees ever got it, and those who did saw their wages cut quickly when economic downturns, and the depression, eroded Ford profits.

The Rouge is the site that defined "Fordism." Ford ran the line mercilessly. Fordism which centered on conveyor production, single-purpose machines, mass consumption, and mass marketing, seeks to heighten productivity via technique. The processes are designed to strip workers of potentially valuable faculties, like their expertise, to speed production, expand markets, and ultimately to drive down wages. These processes seek to make workers into replaceable machines themselves, but machines also capable of consumption.

Contrary to trendy analysis focused on globalization and the technique of production, Ford was carrying on just-in-time practices at the Rouge in the early 1930's. Ford was and is an international carmaker, in the mid 1970's one of Europe's largest sellers. In 1970, Ford recognized the need to shift to smaller cars, and built them, outside the U.S., importing the parts for assembly—early globalism.

Ford was a fascist. He contributed intellectually and materially to fascism. His anti-Semitic works inspired Hitler. Ford accepted the German equivalent of the Medal of

Honor from Hitler, and his factories continued to operate in Germany, untouched by allied bombs, throughout WWII.

At its height, more than 100,000 workers held jobs at the Rouge. Nineteen trains ran on 85 miles of track, mostly in huge caverns under the plant. It was the nation's largest computer center, the third largest producer of glass. It was also the worst polluter. The Environmental Protection Agency, in 1970, charged the Rouge with nearly 150 violations. Today there are 9,000 workers, most of them working in the now Japanese owned iron foundry. Ford ruthlessly battled worker organizing at the Rouge.

His Dearborn cops and goon squad killed hunger marchers during the depression, leading to massive street demonstrations. In the Battle of Overpass Ford unleashed his armed goons on UAW leaders, a maneuver which led to the battle for collective bargaining at Ford, and was the founding monument to what was once the largest UAW local in the world, Local 600, led by radical organizers for years.

On 1 February 1999, the boilers at the aging Rouge plant blew up, killing six workers. The plant, according to workers, had repeatedly failed safety inspections. UAW local president made a statement saying how sorry he was for the families of the deceased--and for William Clay Ford, "who is having one of the worst days of his life." Papers and the electronic press presented the workers' deaths as a tough day for the young Ford who inherited the presidency of the company after a stint as the top Ford manager in Europe.

The steam went out of Local 600 long ago. The leaders now refer to themselves as "UAW-FORD," proof that they have inherited the fascist views of the company founder.

When environmentalist volunteers tried to clean the rouge in June 1999, they were ordered out of the water. It was too polluted to clean.

So, why the Rouge Forum? The Rouge is both nature and work. The Rouge has never quit; it moves with the resilience of the necessity for labor to rise out of nature itself. The river and the plant followed the path of industrial life throughout the world. The technological advances created at the Rouge, in some ways, led to better lives. In other ways, technology was used to forge the privilege of the few, at the expense of most--and the ecosystems, which brought it to life. The Rouge is a good place to consider a conversation, education, and social action.

That is why.

(Excerpted from the Rouge Forum Conference site: www.rougeforumconference.org.)

Gebeorscipes: A Love Poem

Joe Cronin

As the Democratic National Committee launches a cow from its roof of popular support;
As US Marines patrol the ports of Port Au Prince for the 19th time since 1906;
As the Supreme Court removes the veil of election fraud in a 5-4 vote;
As the bigoted, sexist VOICE OF THE COMMON MAN assures
him that taxes on the rich caused the economic morass;
As Bin Laden bauds; as China sues Google;
As Obama babbles about jobs,
and gets frugal;
We are called to defend Freedom for the LOVE of our country.

Gebeorscipes!

This country now seems like it has hit The Road
shoeless,
rummaging
through fields of discontent.
The Road now seems like the freedom that comes from realizing that cannibalism is
legal,
perhaps needlessly
encouraged and incentivized;
Freedom now seems like the troops we have chosen to deploy to defend regime change;
The troops now seem like exhausted Haitians,
 hovering like bees
 clinging to hot nests
 maneuvering through steel, glass, rubble, and foam;
The deployment now seems like the Wallstreet bailout.
The bailout now seems like a pyramid scheme
 launched by Albanians from a medieval roof supported by straw.
(A necessary consequence of borrow and plunder?)
The Voice of Reason, the Republican National Guard, preemptively fired the first volley:
For the LOVE of your country! For your First and Third Amendment Rights! For your
Right to Own The Road! Invest your freedom in pyramid schemes!
Those men on Wallstreet *deserve* their bonuses. They earned them!
After All: They pay your taxes and defend your country!
Without their taxes we would have no Defense!
Without a Defense there would be no freedom!
Without freedom, there would be no wealth!
Freedom Ain't Free!
SHAME on those of you demanding:
HEALTH CARE!

RENEWABLE ENERGY!
A SAFE, CLEAN ENVIRONMENT!
A FUNCTIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM!
A QUALITY SCHOOL SYSTEM THAT FUNDS HIGHER EDUCATION!
After all...we're not Cuba!

Wee! Wee! Wee! Cried the mousevoiced chorus of the Democratic National Committee.
Wee built the roads upon which corporate trucks ship stuff for free!
Wee built the halls where parties gather... to party, freely!
Wee built the Airport in Bagdad...the Gulag in Cuba...the Port in Haiti...
To free the Unfree!

Gebeorscipes!

Behold how much we have to LOVE. See the mountain of abundance in our midst.
Health Care, which lies buried in the pockets of the beholder.
Security, which lies (concealed) in the guns of the profit.
Education, which lies (openly) in the prophecies of the market.
The market, a sequential series of lies:
The Climate Crisis!
The Energy Crisis!
The Financial Crisis!

Which lie in the eyes of the next Generation.

Behold!

The multi-trillion dollar, triple bottom line of debt, disease, and contradiction has bred:
The death of the sea; barren, overcrowded cities; glacial melting; species extinction;
soil degradation; deforestation; desertification; mudslides;
frankenfood; disease, famine, crime, despair, unemployment, insanity...

Haiti.

Gebeorscipes!

The last President took everyone's money and built a beer hall.

He ordered the people to Consume or die swimming to Cuba

(And to invest the leftovers in pyramid schemes!)

Inside, there were great parties.

Outside, the trash heap grew immense, burgeoning into a giant pile of

Steel, Glass, Rubble, and Foam,

While his son, the monster, looked on

from Horace's promontory

wriggling his fists in disgust.

His father, who disowned him at birth, allowed his son to live alone, misshapen,
mirthless, exiled to his cave by the sea.

Gebeorscipes!

Each night the monster sat on a mountain alone and watched the revelry unfurl.
Each night he persuaded himself to believe he loved his father, his country, for allowing
him to live.

(Wee. Wee. Wee. Even though both had forsaken him!)

Each night he watched the parties grow into cantankerous
Orgies of Bedlam, leaving domelike piles of trash,
Brownfields of sludge, acidic puddles of blood vaporizing into peabrown air -
Which, for eight years, accumulated
into Himalayan ranges of toxic debris -
While smoky orange and black
oil fields burned in the distance -
Without acknowledgement from the Liberal Media.

Each night he saw that the revelers ignored their trash heap, ignoring
meatloaf soil layered in red and brown gravy
blackened rotting pumpkins of earth bulging out of the ground,
needles wrapped in gauze thrown like die in a craps game wrecklessly,
revealing swollen gums pulling out of their teeth
and bloated puss feet sticking from lurching carcasses hucked onto wagons hurriedly.
They were busy doing the work of the State.

Each night he listened as they told stories of how the trash was...

A lie, a sign of hatred of their country, a morality video acted out by Bin Laden and the
ENEMIES OF FREEDOM, a bad Albanian investment scheme to gain pledges of support
to Haiti

sold by the Chinese,
who owned their debts,
to convert everyone to Cuban Socialism!

It enraged his monstrous sensibilities that this last explanation
of accumulated debt, garbage, and listlessness made the most sense to the despicably,
inexcusably insensitive, pathetically uninformed, frighteningly inhumane revelers who
remained unconscious
whenever sense was made of nonsense.

He had heard enough.

As he looked over a winkly sunrise,

A new day was dawning...

Gebeorscipes!

The monster's anger and bewilderment spiraled

As he watched the trash haulers drag out garbage bags full of eggshells, coffee
grounds, and cigar butts crushed into cans, with cakeglobbed druel streaked down
their sides;

As he listened to the revelers explain away their party amid its puffy remains, denying their contribution, even though the heap was visibly growing, to anyone willing to acknowledge its existence (and there were none!);

As he realized that the truth about the trash was easily available to those who denied its spiky self-evidence, attributed it to Cubans, secretly patrolled Haitian ports to conceal it, continued to invest in pyramid schemes to incentivize it, sold contracts to outsource its removal, and ran their business schemes with smoky, sooty oil from Bin Laden's family's fields...

He then remembered the deposed Haitian President, who was helicoptered to the Central African Republic by US Marines;

He reconsidered the legitimacy of the current Haitian President, who resides in a Police barrack under marine protection;

It suddenly dawned on him that Haiti is leaderless because its leader is in exile, Living in a cave by the sea, alone...

Gebeorscipes!

The monster's Anger and Patriotism overcame him.

He took his own freedom into his own hands.

With the fury of a martyr
He attacked the beerhall, and bit
the hand that fed him, forcing
a homemade bomb down the throat of his father,
who had forsaken him.

Biting his father's hand somehow elevated his spirit,
turned his gaze above his own thumb,
and cast his reflections into a thousand plateaus,
as he watched the beerhall disintegrate into a thousand shards.

An internal debate

about the origins of his, and of all,
existence and consciousness, spun in his fibers.

He had exposed the revelers to the drizzled grey flowers
springing from their manure. He had
exposed the filth, decay and corruption
of the State, the economy, and humanity. He then left
the ruins of capitalism without debt, guilt, or shame. He declared his own
bankruptcy, and walked away from the bank
shoeless,
rummaging
through fields of discontent.

Because of his LOVE of his Country!

Because of his LOVE of Freedom!

Because of his LOVE for The Road!

Gebeorscipes!

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On the Train to Istanbul

Nancye McCrary

On the train from Istanbul to Eskisehir I read: “Teachers should protect their position of respect in society in any case (Songun, 2010),” front page news in the *Hurriyet English Daily* (2010). The article was titled: “Lessons in joblessness for 300,000 teachers” and reported a protest in Ankara that *eventually* caught the prime minister’s attention. It seems we are not alone in the United States in our struggle for teachers’ rights. Indeed this article went on to describe the protest led by the *Teachers Who Are Not Appointed* (AYOP): “It’s not bearable anymore,” said Safak Bal, the spokesperson for AYOP. They were calling on “contracted teachers” to participate in a nationwide strike, asking “contracted teachers” not to deliver students’ report cards. These are teachers appointed by the education ministry with more limited rights than “typical public school teachers.” The Education Ministry claims there are 70,000 contracted teachers, while 300,000 “typical public school teachers” are jobless and a severe teacher shortage persists throughout the country. The *Hurriyet* reports: “11 teacher candidates have committed suicide due to the depression caused by unemployment.”

Waving goodbye, she is throwing water after me,
a tradition to bring visitors back soon.

We sign I LOVE YOU.

I-point to ourselves, LOVE-hands over our hearts, YOU-point to each other.

...the eerie sound of the *Call to Prayer* five times a day.
Deep melodic, everywhere.

Protecting Teachers' Positions of Respect in Society

What caught my eye was the notion of teachers *protecting positions of respect*. I have long noticed nearly every place I go, saying I am a *teacher*, seems to elicit a comfortable response. Indeed, that was so in Turkey. Yet, as in countries throughout the world, professors are arrested for questioning governments and ideologies. I visited Anadolu Universitesi in Eskisehir, Turkey, one of the wealthiest public universities in the world. Touring a lab school at Anadolu University, I was told the student-teacher ratio 1:2. It is an incredibly beautiful campus with Japanese Gardens, guest lodges, and well equipped academic facilities.

Celil told stories of the Ottoman Empire, the 99 attributes of Allah, Islamic traditions, and his favorite folk tales on life lessons. Often the tales focused on people who tried to be god-like on the surface, while failing to reach deeper understandings, blinded by their own fervor. We talked of the Taliban and terrorists. Never having met me, he took the sleeping train through the night, arriving at my hotel at 8:00 am. He escorted me by taxi to the ferry between European and Asian Istanbul, and then on the train to Eskisehir. We fed

the seagulls bits of Turkish bagels from the ferry. Although he had been up all night, he was as gracious and kind as if he just woke from a long night's rest.

"Joblessness lesson for many teachers," read the headline in the daily news. *Protecting positions of respect, joblessness lesson*. I puzzled over the meaning of *lesson* in this context. What are *positions of respect* that need *protection*? "In Turkey, 78 percent of schools are suffering from a shortage of qualified staff, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Teaching and Learning International Survey, or TALIS, conducted in 2009. In comparison, this rate is only 13 percent in Poland." There are two categories of non-permanent teachers, (1) contracted and (2) waged. Contracted teachers are appointed to a school by the ministry, have fewer rights than permanent public school teachers, and are prohibited from moving to another school. Waged teachers are assigned to a school but may only earn payment for extra lessons and when a permanent teacher is assigned to that school, waged teachers are fired. Education Minister, Nimet Cubukcu, recently said the ministry will not continue to recruit contracted teachers, not mentioning waged teachers.

It is strange reasoning: 300,000 jobless teachers, 70,000 contracted teachers to fill the gap created by teacher shortages. Such reasoning occurs in the United States as well. We hear of teacher shortages, the number of teachers expected to be laid off, and the increase in emergency certified teachers. It is perplexing to think that shortages result in less than qualified teachers hired while thousands of qualified teachers brace for joblessness. But we enjoy our freedoms in the United States.

The eerie sound of the Call to Prayer...

"Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a speech Tuesday that they are going to appoint 40,000 new teachers this year. Criticizing the teacher candidates' protest, Erdogan said his government has always given the highest quotas for recruiting personnel to the Education Ministry." Education Minister, Nimet Cubukcu spoke at the opening of the conference. She insisted there was a dire need for distance education especially in the western parts of Turkey.

Returning to Istanbul, Dr. Kircaali-Iftar escorted me on the ferry and in the taxi back to my hotel. We talked about the academy in Turkey, international connections, her work, my work, and so on. Then we talked politics. She said she, like so many others throughout the world, was disappointed in President Obama. She asked: "But really, how is it that you elected George Bush TWICE?"

As I left for the train, Celil reminded me their country code is 09 in case I needed to call. Yours is number 01, because, he said, when you create the technology you get first choice. The United States gets to chose almost everything first, where wars will be fought, when they will end, and when we will have our freedoms. The world is accustomed to that but

we have things to teach you as well, the way things repeat themselves, patterns of human behavior over thousands of years, all lessons learned from being a very old country.

You make it, you control it, and you get the best.
That made more sense to Celil than to me.

All things seemed to make sense to Celil, a man of ancient stories, a wise and giving man, a loving man, well read, well traveled, fluent in many languages. I tell his wife how lucky she is, Celil protests, OH NO, I AM THE LUCKY ONE! He believes it.

Re-Turning home, I saw *Americans* first in Paris. I managed to drop all my bags at the airport gate and was scrambling to collect myself. I noticed a group of young men from the U.S. standing next to me. They seemed to look away quickly. I guessed that was so they wouldn't feel obliged to help pick-up my scattered mess. At that moment in Charles De Gaulle Airport, I knew I crossed the divide between the warm community I had visited and a more familiar individualism, between interaction and fending for myself, strangely homesick for the old world I had left. But I enjoy my freedoms.

I remembered again and again, they have a lot to teach us, THEY are us with more history, more stories, and perhaps a deeper wisdom. They are teachers without jobs; they are 5 year old Ipek's throwing water after me for my quick return. They are scholars asking us not once but repeatedly "How is it you elected George W. Bush twice? How is it Obama disappoints most of us who had so hoped for better? NOT ONCE BUT TWICE? HOW? They are us... in an older world, connected to us by our humanity. They say the news media in the U.S. paints an unfortunate picture of their Islamic world. They say listen to the voices of the people, not the media, not our governments, not extremist religious leaders. Listen to us, your neighbors. Feel our humanity.

On my flight from Istanbul, I read *A Sad State Of Freedom* by Turkish poet Nazim Himet (1901-1963). Once a teacher, Himet was arrested in 1938 for inciting the Turkish armed forces to revolt and was sentenced to twenty-eight years in prison on the grounds that military cadets were reading his poems. He was accused of attempting to incite the Turkish navy to rebellion and condemned to the *punishments of hell*. Here is what he said about our great freedom.

[*A Sad State Of Freedom*](#) by Nazim Himet

You waste the attention of your eyes,
the glittering labour of your hands,
and knead the dough enough for dozens of loaves
of which you'll taste not a morsel;
you are free to slave for others--
you are free to make the rich richer.

The moment you're born
they plant around you
mills that grind lies
lies to last you a lifetime.
You keep thinking in your great freedom
a finger on your temple
free to have a free conscience.

Your head bent as if half-cut from the nape,
your arms long, hanging,
you saunter about in your great freedom:
you're free
with the freedom of being unemployed.

You love your country
as the nearest, most precious thing to you.
But one day, for example,
they may endorse it over to America,
and you, too, with your great freedom--
you have the freedom to become an air-base.

You may proclaim that one must live
not as a tool, a number or a link
but as a human being--
then at once they handcuff your wrists.
You are free to be arrested, imprisoned
and even hanged.

There's neither an iron, wooden
nor a tulle curtain
in your life;
there's no need to choose freedom:
you are free.
But this kind of freedom
is a sad affair under the stars.

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A Letter from Rich Gibson

Dear Friends, Colleagues, and Comrades,

I don't want to interrupt the courageous student-led movement that has educated, agitated, organized, occupied, marched, and reflected on action in the last several months. This uprising is inspiring.

The March 4th actions and those that went before gave greater life to the current school workers' strike in Capistrano and the coming strike in Oakland as well.

A "March 4th Conference" held in Los Angeles on April 23 set October 7th as "International Day of Action" and October 16th as Planning Conference at San Francisco State. Over 151 people attended the meeting at the Santee Educational Complex in Los Angeles. Integrated by race and gender, the conference participants clearly backed worker/student unity (educators are workers), internationalism, anti-racism, democracy, and direct action while opposing union sell-outs and bureaucrats.

For the most part, people were extraordinarily patient with honest debates ranging from the ability of the conference to make decisions to the principles participants wished to adopt as guidelines for struggle. Those attending included students from 11 of the 23 California State University schools, 7 of the 11 University of California schools, 11 community colleges, and a handful of k12 educators, professors, and community activists. There is no question the system of capital and its domination of schooling was under assault.

Civil strife on the horizon, well-earned.

The central issue of our time is the rapid rise of color-coded social and economic inequality coupled to the promise of perpetual war, this challenged by the potential of mass, class-conscious, resistance.

If the above paragraph is wrong, completely baseless, then save time, stop reading, as most of what follows flows from it.

What do we want? Well, that may be best left up in the air but perhaps the notion of a caring community where people can determine collectively what equality is, what its connection to democracy may be, where people can live reasonable and free lives because they are not thrown into a war of all on all, as with capitalism, will do.

Such a world is a long way off. How we get to it is set up by the question: Why are things as they are?

I see two slogans in use that seem to me to miss the point: Defend Public Education and Oppose Privatization.

Our core problem is capitalism and its state, the government, now little more than a corporate state where the rich iron out their differences, arm their forces, then allow the rest of us to choose which of them will oppress us more gently.

That means “Public” Education is a myth.

This is capitalist education, segregated mainly by class, then race, home language, to some degree sex/gender. Capitalist not-so-public education is stratified into five or six levels ranging from pre-prison or WalMart schooling (much of Detroit) to pre-clerical worker and soldier training (parts of South-side San Diego), pre-teacher and social worker training (many suburbs), and pre-law and pre-doctor training (rich suburbs like Lajolla, California or Bloomfield Hills, Michigan).

The ruling class sends its children to prestigious private schools, a la the education of George Bush, Mitt Romney, or, today, the demagogue Obama’s children.

These segregated systems teach different “facts,” using different teaching methods. On the whole, most of the system teaches youth that they cannot grasp and change the world. Indeed, schools teach with such incoherence and move with such cruelty, many kids learn not to like to learn. Curiosity, their birthright, is pounded out of them—a terrific success of capitalist education.

Not-so public schools are really missions for capitalism and the vast majority of teachers its missionaries. That is true at every level of schooling. The analogy is nearly perfect.

For the last decade and more, not-so public schooling was propelled by high-stakes standardized tests which employ a bogus form of science that deepens segregation as the test measure little more than class, race, and home language. They’re designed to do that, just as the SAT was first designed.

<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~rgibson/SATFascistOrigins.htm>).

Only a handful of school workers have taken action to resist this systematic child abuse.

That is not surprising. Teachers do not have a proud record of resistance—not anywhere. Some school workers, however, can make a terrific difference. They are seated in the central organizing point of N. American life today (de-industrialization matters) and they work with youth—often the people who create change first.

But to want to “Defend Public Education” is to defend what is, or a myth about what was. And, what *is* has nothing to do with what many of us want to win. Capitalist schools are only that. It’s all that they can be.

In fact, “Defend Public Education,” only demands that we deepen the power of the capitalist state, its schools. The demand tells people the government, the executive committee and the armed weapon of the rich, might be their pal. It won’t. It leads to schemes like CTA’s effort to tax working people to pay for the mis-education of their own children—a ballot measure voted down by a two-thirds majority even though CTA spent nearly \$20 million of dues on it. What CTA managed to do was give more life to the idea that school workers are enemies of other workers.

On both counts, the role of capital, and the role of the state, “Defend Public Education,” doesn’t add up.

Rather, “Transform Education,” or “Rescue Education from the Ruling Classes,” gets to the point.

“Stop Privatization,” doesn’t. Privatization is happening in some areas, but it is not the main thing going on in schools, not by a long shot. Why would elites who also control the tax system want to give up a deal where working people pay to mis-educate their own children? The partial answer is that some wealthy people, Eli Broad or Bill Gates for example, hope to turn a new kind of profit off schools and win social control at the same time—but they are small players in a much bigger game. Old ruling class organizations, the Rockefeller or Ford Foundation, are not hell-bent on privatization.

Like, “Defend Public Education,” the demand to “Stop Privatization,” leads people to the myth about not-so-public education and, again, to empower the capitalist state.

Rather, in schools, as with the current government, we see the merger of corporate and government interests integrated in nearly seamless ways. That is why, for example, Wal-Mart is not privatizing Detroit high schools, but it is taking them over and using them as training centers (even though there is no Wal-Mart in Detroit). Capitalism commonly trumps democracy.

The underlying question is: Why have school?

Let us be clear from the outset: The education agenda is a war agenda. It is a class war agenda and an empire’s war agenda. It is an attack on both life and reason itself.

Capitalist schools are huge markets (49 million kids—about ½ of them draft eligible in the next five years), 5 million unionized teachers and their salaries, architects, booksellers, buses, food courts, etc). The dollar influences every breath of life in school. It is a multi-billion dollar enterprise.

Schools do some skill training (literacy, math—history is mostly abolished) that may or may not be liberating (fascist Germany and Japan were highly literate societies).

Schools do a lot of ideological training—promoting nationalism and racism: the Pledge of Allegiance fetish to the fact that US schools are as segregated as they were in 1954 at the time of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case. Real segregation does not overwhelm a multi-culturalism class—usually a veneer for nationalism anyway.

Schools warehouse kids: babysit. They serve as a massive tax funded service to corporations that don't pay their share. The warehouse factor becomes obvious when you consider the incredible amounts of time wasted in school.

Schools create the next generation of workers, as described above. Since the economic trajectory in the US is, for the vast majority of people, down—schools not only train people for bad jobs (the idea of teaching people to become citizens to participate in a democracy has vanished from school discourse) but they tamp down the expectations of youth so they won't want good jobs—Wal-Mart seems like a good deal. Detroit has four high schools, publicly funded, devoted to Wal-Mart training. No kidding.

Schools fashion Hope: real and false. On one hand it is clear that societies where Hope is foreclosed foster the potential of mass uprisings: France in the summer of 1968 is a good example—uprisings starting in school and quickly involving the working classes nearly overthrew the government. Real hope might be found in showing kids we can comprehend and change the world, collectively, and teaching them how. Ask, “Why are things as they are?” every day. Or, in demonstrating that we are responsible for our own histories, but not our birthrights. False hope might be the typical school hype: Anyone can make it, all you must do is work hard. Nonsense. Inheritance is, more than ever, the key to understanding that.

Capitalist schools are, in the main, aimed at students. That's one of many reasons students need to play key roles in organizing education resistance. Capitalist schooling is not a job bank for school workers.

Capitalist schooling mixes a real elite need for social control with profiteering. In many cases, social control through schooling will trump profits, if only briefly.

What are the key things happening in school today?

The Race to the Top (Ratt) program engendered by the demagogue, Obama, and his education “czar” Arne Duncan is nothing but the Bush, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), thrown into hyper-speed. These are its parts:

*Standardization. The regimentation of the curricula and teaching methods, what people come to know and how they come to know it via, for example, reading or history standards. How these standards came to be is a good question, and the presenter should know the answer. The fact that the RaTT and NCLB are both bi-partisan projects

supported by the majority of Democrats and Republicans who now insist in a national curriculum (unthinkable even ten years ago) demonstrates the nature of class rule through government.

*High Stakes Testing. Always racist, always anti-working class, measuring little but parental income, race, and subservience, behind a mask of science and equality. Those familiar with Marx's Labor Theory of Value will find a useful analogy. A pretense of equality is established. Every child arrives to take the same test and, presumably, if they work hard they will win. But what of the kid arriving hungry, or angry, or abused, in a room with no heat?

*Merit Pay. Rooted in student test scores, this will assault school workers in poorer districts first, only to prove the old adage, "an injury to one only goes before an injury to all." This is like the "fair day's work for a fair days' pay," myth of capitalism which throws the mass of people into ruthless competition for jobs, then never pays the full value of labor—thus the origins of profits. Each fashions an appearance of equality, and an essence of deepening inequality.

*Militarization. Since the September 11 2001, the military invaded schools with a vengeance. Their relentless recruiting is, not surprisingly, running along class lines, enforcing the economic draft, demonstrating that there is an inequitable schools-to-war pipeline. This is true, especially, in militarized California where much of the university systems is devoted to the military, intelligence agencies, etc., but it is true throughout the US.

*Privatization. This is a distant fifth, for reasons described above, but the reality of the privatization of New Orleans, as elites moved fast to wipe out poverty by vanishing the poor, cannot be ignored.

*Obama now promotes "National Service" which appears to be a planned syphon to strain off middle class resistance to the potential of a draft.

*Fear.

*Layoffs, cutbacks in libraries, books, supplies, etc. The working class in the US has been attacked piecemeal, the weakest hit first and hardest but others always to follow. First, the mental institutions were closed, throwing people on the street. Next, the welfare system was attacked. Then came air traffic controllers, industrial workers of all sorts.

Now, teachers are among the last people in the US with collective bargaining contracts, predictable wages, some due process rights, limited on the job freedom, and health benefits. That an injury to one, as with industrial workers, only goes before an injury to all is a lesson educators have taken a long time to learn. Education workers are next.

School workers are likely to fight back, as we see now in Capistrano and Oakland, CA, because they must, to live. At issue is whether educators make sense of why they must fight back, the rule of capital and its relentless wars of all on all, or they take the narrow, unionite, stance and fight only for school workers, at base attacking the rest of the ruling class, as the CTA ballot measure above indicates.

School reform in the absence of radical economic and social reform (which demands a social movement) will not work. It is like washing the air on one side of a screen door as my friend Jean Anyon has demonstrated for a decade. But that is the claim of all education elites who are, on the face of it, either dishonest or stupid.

How can we fight back? I suggest we must connect reason to passion, passion to ethics, ethics to organization, and organization to direct action. For an extension: http://richgibson.com/edagenda_waragenda.html

But, specifically what can we do?

The Capistrano Unified Education Association in California struck for four days, then made concessions. OEA went out April 29. It's is terrific that Capistrano and Oakland took these steps (<http://oaklandea.com/>).

(As an aside, this is not the best time to strike. The districts will not lose money because of these strikes. Best time to strike is during high-stakes exams or at the beginning of the year when all can be fully prepared.

Over time, it is difficult to defend school strikes from scabs (and internal betrayal). In some areas, like Crestwood, Michigan, scabbing and betrayal combined to wipe out an entire teaching force that courageously went on strike, then was told by their union bosses they would "win in court," while at the same time the union hacks told the rank and file that the school grounds were too big to really enforce a picket line (despite the fact that dozens of non-teachers joined the lines and held them fairly strong). The Crestwood teachers let the scabs in, and lost in court. Many of them never taught again.

What can we learn? The courts are not a place where these fights can be settled successfully. Scabbing cannot be tolerated. Union tops cannot be trusted. Direct mass action is key.

One way to stop scabs is to seize buildings. Teachers have keys to the buildings. The buildings are fairly comfortable places. People can bring the school workers food, etc. There are valuable things inside those buildings that bosses don't want destroyed. It's difficult for cops to go in and drag people out of buildings. With cell phones, etc, communication with the outside is easy. Other people can picket outside seized buildings, protecting those inside.

An extension on this tactic is to "reverse strike," that is, to seize the building and invite students inside to conduct real classes, not the daily rubbish that is capitalist schooling, but real education that examines why things are as they are. This is real Freedom Schooling. Why is society offering youth perpetual war and meaningless jobs, or no jobs at all? What can be done about that?

It is even more difficult for cops (one armed wing of the ruling class which never goes and hits superintendents on the head for provoking a school worker strike) to attack educators conducting classes with students.

The unions are unfit to meet the crisis at hand. Even if the unions were led by honest people, and they are not, unionism cannot produce the class-wide solidarity we must initiate on our own. For an extension on US unionism (of which I was a part for a long time): www.richgibson.com/USUnionism.html.

This is a job action primer I wrote some time ago with several other people while working for NEA locals. Since several of us wrote it, it's far more restrained than I am, and it's a bit dated, but it might be helpful for those who are taking up the idea of fighting back in serious way. This little template is no substitute for a concrete grasp of real local, national, and international conditions, nor a substitute for the trusting personal relations that must be developed before and during a job action. Again, this is a fight not a chat. Those who do not want to fight only prepare others for losing. (www.richgibson.com/JOBACTIO.html.)

The core issue of our time is the reality of the promise of endless war coupled to booming color-coded inequality--met by the potential of mass, active, class conscious resistance.

If the happy possibility of a mass resistance is to break out, I hope it combines the true passion of the ethics and call for equality and freedom we outlined with the analytical tools of political economy and the study of things and people as they change: dialectical materialism. People can become whole, joyous, and free within a resistance movement that is making sense of the crux of current conditions and that seeks to change the world.

Everything is at hand for a full rearrangement of the social relations of daily life. Let us get to the real task connecting Reason to Power, to Ethics, to Passion, to Organization and Action.

Good luck to us, every one.



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Another Education is Possible: The Closing of Antioch College and the Story of the Nonstop Liberal Arts Institute

Jean Gregorek

*An endless rain is just beginning.
Into the ark, for where else can you go,
you poems for a single voice,
private exultations,
unnecessary talents,
surplus curiosity,
short-range sorrows and fears,
eagerness to see things from all six sides.*

....

*As far as the eye can see, there's water and hazy horizon.
Into the ark, plans for the distant future,
joy in difference,
admiration for the better man,
choice not narrowed down to one of two,
outworn scruples,
time to think it over,
and the belief that all this
will still come in handy someday.*

--From Wislawa Szymborska, "Into the Ark" translated by Clare Cavanagh

Antioch College was closed by the Board of Trustees of Antioch University on June 30, 2008 after an intensive year-long struggle to save the 155-year-old institution. This was the fourth suspension of operations in the College's history. Opening its doors in 1853, the College was declared bankrupt by 1858—the first of many insolvencies, declarations of financial exigency, payless paydays, and salary cuts. Alongside of this checkered financial history, however, the small liberal arts college carved out a well-deserved reputation at the forefront of both the old and New Left, and as a laboratory for progressive education in the U.S. When this precious legacy was put at risk, the victim of corporatizing trends in higher education, Antiochians united to fight back.

Many of Antioch College's educational experiments, seen as outlandish at the time, have now passed into common practice. From its inception the College employed female faculty and admitted women students to the same curriculum as male students; students of mixed race were accepted in the 1850's and by 1863 the Board of Trustees had decreed that no student could be excluded "on account of color." In the 1920's, influenced in large part by John Dewey's theories of applied learning and education for participatory citizenship, the College pioneered its highly successful "co-operative education" program alternating on-campus semesters of liberal arts courses with semesters of paid work and research. This period also witnessed the deliberate cultivation of town-gown partnerships and enterprises designed to support the local economy while providing experiential opportunities for students. In the following years the College implemented a governance structure that included student representation in decision-making at all levels, including

the hiring and tenuring of faculty, and an honor system for student examinations. Letter grades were abolished in the 1960's in favor of personalized narratives. The outward-looking emphasis of the co-op program was augmented in the 1950's by Antioch Education Abroad, one of the first international study programs in the U.S, and a decade later by the creation of traveling Environmental Field Programs led by recent Antioch graduates.

At the time of its closure in 2008, Antioch College was the flagship campus of Antioch University. The history of what was first described as a 'network,' then a 'federation,' and then Antioch University began from the most idealistic of motives, with a directive from the College Board of Trustees in the mid-sixties to extend its educational opportunities to traditionally underserved populations. This led to the establishing of experimental field programs and mini-campuses all over the country, aimed at communities in Appalachia, Philadelphia, and Washington DC; at Native American reservations, at migrant workers, miners, and prisoners. Still more mini-campuses were engendered through the ambitious initiative known as the University Without Walls, which came about through Antioch's leadership in the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities. Some of these campuses were quite substantial operations; the Antioch School of Law was particularly respected in progressive legal circles. They were also quite successful in terms of reaching large numbers of nontraditional and diverse students. Programs multiplied rapidly, and soon satellites were sending out satellites with a total of somewhere (to this day no one knows exactly) between 35 and 40 mini-Antiochs. The award for the most eccentric campus goes to the Antioch branch in Columbia, Maryland, a one-acre portable college in a giant vinyl bubble (unfortunately, last-minute cost-cutting on the air conditioning meant that the internal temperature became unbearable and all within the bubble ended up poached).¹

The College's noble experiment in taking education to the streets, or in arrogant empire-building, depending on one's perspective, created tremendous confusion in terms of mundane details such as registration, faculty supervision, and tuition payment, and by the time the Board decided to fire the ambitious president who had presided over the chaos, the College finances were in shambles. In the eighties, the College was rescued by another ambitious president who consolidated the most stable of the 'adult' campuses still standing and organized them into a new entity designated Antioch University, made up of the residential liberal arts College plus commuter campuses in Seattle, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Keene, New Hampshire and Antioch McGregor in Yellow Springs. Today these campuses provide a variety of continuing education and graduate programs for adults in such fields as Leadership, Management, Creative Writing, Psychology and Education Certification. However, these institutions evolved without implementing a system of tenure, instead utilizing a small group of core faculty (most have PhD's) to administer programs that rely heavily on adjuncts, practitioners, and short-term contracts with faculty at other institutions. And, with the exception of Antioch McGregor, the staff at the commuter campuses are not represented by a collective bargaining unit. Antioch University therefore came to encompass two very different kinds of educational models—models with incompatible assumptions about governance. While the College's curriculum

1 Scott Sanders, *Antioch: An Episodic History*. Yellow Springs: Antiochiana Publishing, 2004. p. 30-33.

and indeed its very ethos were steeped in ideals of community participation, democratic process, and academic freedom, University campuses prized efficiency and the minimizing of fixed costs. The President of Antioch University McGregor, Barbara Gellman-Danley, touted her reported 2007 staffing of 18 full time faculty members who teach 750 adult learners with the help of 150 adjuncts as “a tight ship,” insisting that her strength as an educational leader was in “running a good business model.”²

Antioch Abandoned

By the late nineties, the stress inherent in the juxtaposition of these two organizational paradigms was manifest and the relationship between the liberal arts College in Yellow Springs and the far-flung satellite campuses becoming increasingly tense. The University leadership sought to use (some would say usurp) the name recognition of the historic College while distancing itself from College traditions of faculty governance, academic freedom protected by tenure, student participation in committees, and political activism. A full account of the gradual disintegration of the College-University relationship and the increasing micromanaging of the College by distant University administrators can be found in the American Association of University Professors Report, “Antioch University and the Closing of Antioch College,” released this past September.

As the AAUP Report observes, “By the beginning of this decade, Antioch College's system of shared governance had become limited to reacting to decisions made at the university level by the board and the chancellor.”³ One indicator of the decline in governance at the once free-standing College is the fact that out of the six College presidents who served between 1996 and 2008, five were selected with virtually no input from the faculty. A series of lay-offs and consolidations in a financial reorganization imposed by the University leadership deprived the College of its own Chief Financial Officer and the College President of a direct relationship with the Board; from 2001 the President reported only to the Chancellor. Investigative journalist Brian Springer explains that the body “responsible and accountable for” the College's administrative leadership became the University Leadership Council (ULC), comprised of the Chancellor, the University Chief Financial Officer, and the presidents of the six campuses, most of whom had no previous experience with liberal arts colleges.⁴ A decade of pleas by successive College presidents for more attention to the needs of the College fell on deaf ears. As one wrote to then-Chancellor Jim Craiglow: “While it seems to me that any University Strategic Planning effort would address...the specific issues of what it will take to sustain such a distinctive residential undergraduate liberal arts program within the framework of a federal University, the financial modeling I've seen thus far has been aimed at standardizing,

2 Lauren Heaton, “The College and the University—Financial Complexities Link Schools.” *The Yellow Springs News*. June 28, 2007. For a breakdown of the faculty/adjunct ratio across the University, see Scott Jascik, “The Adjunctification of Antioch.” *Inside Higher Education*. June 26, 2007.

3 AAUP Report, “Antioch University and the Closing of Antioch College.” *Academe: The Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*. Nov/Dec 2009. p. 49. See also Brian Springer, “Antioch Budgets for Dummies,” and “Antioch Confidential.” Feb 2008. both pieces are archived on the website The Antioch Papers. <http://theantiochpapers.org>.

4 Brian Springer, “Antioch Confidential.” Feb 2008. p. 9. <http://theantiochpapers.org>.

rationalizing, and achieving equity across the campuses, with little regard for the history, circumstance or distinctiveness of the College.”⁵

In 2004 the Board of Trustees and the ULC stepped up micromanagement of the College by mandating a 'renewal plan'—a new interdisciplinary curriculum that abolished departments and proposed to alter the teacher/student ratio from 1:8 or 1:9 to 1:15 (in other words, to reduce the number of faculty positions). Sold to the faculty as a last-ditch effort to put the College on the road to financial stability, the faculty were presented with the task of designing and implementing a logistical nightmare in little over a year. Throughout this period, the faculty struggled mightily to maintain some semblance of a liberal arts curriculum, despite ever decreasing infrastructure and staffing cuts in academic programs, in academic support, and in student services. Neither complacent nor ignorant of the problems of the College, faculty lacked the means through which to make concerns heard. While some faculty left, many stayed, still compelled by the challenges and rewards of teaching a bright, intellectually curious student body. Numerous indicators of academic quality, such as national rankings in the survey of student engagement (NSSE), numbers of students obtaining Fulbrights, rates of acceptance to top graduate programs and of completion of PhD's, remained stellar.

The new curriculum imposed on the College by the Board of Trustees either failed to attract students, or the confusion resulting from the curricular overhaul implemented too quickly made it difficult to explain and to market. Existing students were given incentives to graduate early in order to avoid the delivery of two different curricula at the same time. The unsurprising result was that enrollments dropped significantly. With an incoming class in fall 2005 of only 68 students, the situation turned dire. Although the Board of Trustees had promised to support the College through the inevitable hemorrhages caused by the 'renewal,' this turned out not to be the case. Donations to the College had been falling away. As morale plummeted, a new Director of Communications issued an email bulletin cheerfully named 'The Good News Newsletter.'

The 'cultures' of the College and University continued to diverge and the presidents of the other campuses were encouraged to regard the College as more liability than asset. Gellman-Danley of Antioch McGregor cultivated relations with business leaders in the Dayton area, particularly those with connections to the nearby Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and new funding sources under the Bush Administration's Homeland Security initiatives. In an attempt to literally detach Antioch McGregor from Antioch College, Gellman-Danley ordered the construction of a new \$15 million-dollar facility at the opposite end of the town of Yellow Springs, moving into the 6000-square-foot space in 2007. As the *Yellow Springs News* reported, "Some have wondered how a new building for McGregor was financed while the [college] campus just across the street was crumbling."⁶ The controversy which erupted at McGregor surrounding the building of the new campus and the separation from Antioch College was actively stifled—students' newsletters taken from mailboxes, faculty warned not to speak publicly against the decisions of

⁵ Letter from President Robert Devine to Chancellor James Craiglow, Feb. 22 1999. <http://theantiochpapers.org>

⁶ Lauren Heaton, "The College and the University."

management. This was one of several occasions when the McGregor president made it clear that traditional concepts of academic freedom did not apply under her administration.

In March 2007 the University Chancellor, Tullisse (Toni) Murdock, a former president of the Antioch University unit in Seattle, armed with a consultant's report that characterized the College's tenured faculty and staff union as obstacles to a more flexible, market-oriented institution, informed the Board of Trustees that the College's continued deficits could soon jeopardize the entire University system. The report outlined three options for Board actions. The third option, that of suspending the operations of the College for a minimum of four years in order to "clear out the ghosts" was the course of action explicitly identified as "the one preferred at this time by the university's management team."⁷ That June, without having turned to alumni for help, without having consulted with faculty--as they were contractually obligated to do--without consultation with any of the many stakeholders involved in the fate of this historic institution, the Board of Trustees voted to put the flagship Antioch College to sleep.

The remaining members of the College faculty and staff learned of the decision when they were called to a special meeting, at which then-College President Steven Lawry relayed the news that all College operations would be suspended on June 30 of 2008. Tenure was voided by the declaration of financial exigency--a condition which seemed highly disputable given that other University units claimed to be financially sound. Staff union contracts ensured that many staff received severance pay; faculty were offered a year's contract in lieu of severance. Sympathetic faculty at the McGregor campus were discouraged from talking to the press at the risk of being terminated as well. When President Lawry became too vocal about the glaring structural problems inherent in the College-University relationship, his head was the next to roll.

Pleas of financial exigency also appeared questionable given the salaries and compensation received by University administrators. The year before she presided over the closing of the College, Chancellor Murdock was listed as earning over \$532,491 in total salary and benefits (including deferred compensation of \$264,000). Gellman-Danley received \$399,328, including deferred compensation.⁸

In August of 2007 Murdock unveiled a tentative plan for a 'renewed Antioch College Yellow Springs' to be organized on the same model as the other University campuses, without tenure, and presumably without a staff union. The proposal called for a small core faculty of eight (Antioch College employed 44 full-time faculty that year) to administer a 'high tech' version of a liberal arts education, linked to the other units via the web and assisted by virtual classrooms and a virtual commons.⁹ Later this proposal was quietly dropped.

⁷ Diane Chiddester, "Consultants Advise Antioch Closure." *The Yellow Springs News*. July 5 2007.

⁸ Stephanie Irwin Gottschlich. "Antioch [University] Explains Deferred Payments, Jump in Expenses." *The Dayton Daily News*. July 1 2007.

⁹ Tullisse Murdock, "Chancellor's Address to the Graduates of the Antioch University Ph.D. In Leadership and Change." Antioch University Commencement, August 11 2007.

For an entire year a coalition of outraged College alumni, faculty, staff, students, and citizens of Yellow Springs fought hard to have the decision to suspend operations reversed. This stage of the struggle involved multiple fronts, including a massive alumni fundraising campaign which began with the raising of half a million dollars over one weekend at the June alumni reunion, reaching 18 million in cash and pledges by the time of the October reunion. Other initiatives included a lawsuit filed by the tenured faculty which sought to prevent the closing of the College and the seizing of its assets; the formation of dozens of new alumni chapters; numerous petition and letter writing drives; protests from former trustees; town meetings and rallies in the Village of Yellow Springs; letters of concern from the AAUP; students and alumni haunting meetings of the Board. Efforts to rescue the College soon focused on obtaining a separation from its parent Antioch University, but the Board of Trustees turned down repeated offers by alumni to purchase the College. One group of wealthy alumni and former trustees, the Antioch College Continuation Corporation (ACCC), offered 12.2 million dollars for the College, with 6 million down and the remainder to be paid over the next few years. The ACCC's insistence that they be ensured representation on the Board of Trustees was seen by the University as a 'hostile takeover,' and so the University resisted the deal, insisting that all the money be paid in cash up front. Soon after, the University released a press statement declaring the College 'up for sale' and making it known that they were 'open to negotiations with any potential buyer.'¹⁰ This prompted a mock ad on the local Craigslist: "Antioch College no longer holds any substantial meaning or value to its Board of Trustees, beyond what it can be sold for on the open market. Offers by alumni groups promising to operate the college in a continuous manner, beholden to its traditional values of openness and academic freedom are particularly loathsome. Real Estate developers with proven military-industrial success are preferred."

After June 2008 the beautiful 100-acre campus of Antioch College stood empty, its graceful pre-Civil War brick buildings shuttered, the heating disabled, the campus monitored by security cameras which might or might not have been operational. Despite repeated advance warnings from The Ohio Historical Society and concerned citizens of the Village of Yellow Springs (as well as the University's own consultants), neglect of basic maintenance caused serious damage from burst sprinkler pipes in three buildings over the winter. In spring 2009 the Antioch campus buildings were placed on the Ohio Preservation's list of Ohio's Most Endangered Historic Sites.

The AAUP's investigation into the closing of Antioch College determined that Antioch University had violated numerous AAUP standards and guidelines--most obviously, that faculty governance at the College and faculty control over the College curriculum were repeatedly sidestepped. As the AAUP report states: "There can be little doubt that Antioch College's financial problems were in no small measure a product of managerial decisions made without faculty consultation, including a curricular experiment that was connected to a decline in enrollment and a decision to reduce financial support to the college from the university." The Association further found that academic freedom at the satellite campuses was infringed upon, and that the University's

¹⁰ "Trustees: 'Antioch College Is Up For Sale.'" no author. *Dayton Daily News*. March 30 2008.

declaration of financial exigency in order to terminate employees and eliminate tenured positions remained unsubstantiated. Ultimately the AAUP charged the Board of Trustees and the University administration with what amounts to gross dereliction of duty, noting, "It seems to the investigating committee not at all unreasonable to have expected the trustees to pursue the goal (the operation of Antioch College) for which the enterprise had been established....Unfortunately, the trustees and the administration of Antioch University seem to have lost sight of this purpose."¹¹

In June 2009 College alumni at last succeeded in negotiating a deal with the University to regain the campus and the rights to the name Antioch College. Keys to the campus buildings officially changed hands on September 4. This time, Antioch and its history sell for six million dollars.

Former Antioch student Jeanne Kay characterized Toni Murdock's plan to close Antioch College and open a new unit of the University in its place as the higher education version of the tactic Naomi Klein has named "neoliberal shock therapy."¹² In these cases, drastic actions are taken to displace people, demoralize resistance, erase established traditions, and generally 'clean house' in order for outside interests to rebuild a national or local economy from the top down. In our own small example, a sanitized "Antioch Yellow Springs" was to be superimposed on the former Antioch College; a much reduced clone of the University's tenure-less, administrative-heavy units with little room for dissenting voices was to replace the College and its messy self-governance. Clearly Antioch's plight dramatized these common trends in the corporatization of higher education:

- A consolidation of power in upper levels of administration; the expansion of administrative bureaucracy; a reliance on consultants as opposed to available wisdom and experience; a shift away from faculty and community traditions of governance; the abrogation of faculty control over the curriculum.
- A lack of transparency in governance; a culture of secrecy and closed conversations on the part of Boards of Trustees and administrators; no consultation with other stakeholders in making decisions with far-reaching and damaging impacts.
- The deliberate violation of tenure; increased use of contract, part-time and adjunct labor; increased reliance on distance-learning and low-residency courses; the undermining of tenured faculty through competition with contract faculty and the undermining of contract faculty through competition with adjuncts.
- A succumbing to the 'edifice complex'--prioritizing showpiece buildings and facilities over personnel; the building of ever-larger (and often unnecessary) new buildings rather than the rehabilitation of existing usable spaces.

Claiming the Legacy: Antiochians Fight Back

The decision to dispose of Antioch College was not one that faculty, alumni, staff, and students could accept. While our strategies evolved over time, and different constituencies worked in different arenas, we were united by certain core assumptions. We defined the suspension of the College as a financial and political *choice* made among other available

¹¹ AAUP Report, "Antioch University and the Closing of Antioch College." p. 56, 55.

¹² Jeanne Kay, conversations with the author.

options. This meant countering a number of convenient and widespread narratives--insisting that the College was not merely another regrettable casualty of prevailing economic winds, nor of its own anachronistic refusal to adapt to a changing marketplace. The closure was not a referendum on Antioch's progressive educational mission or curriculum. Nor was the College brought down by a disrespectful, dogmatic, or 'toxic' student body (a view unfortunately given some support by President Lawry).

Our overarching goal was simply to refuse to cede the College to the University. In the winter of 2007-2008, frustrated at the University's intransigence, Antiochians began to contemplate taking Antioch College off campus if the new round of negotiations between the Alumni and the University Board of Trustees did not yield a more positive outcome. An ad hoc group of about thirty faculty, staff, alumni, and students met over a weekend in March 2008 and brainstormed about how to move forward. By the end of that weekend, we had sketched out a plan and a budget for a college in exile that we desperately hoped we would not need, and the Alumni Board had voted to commit its financial resources to the project. A month later we learned that the University Board of Trustees had turned down the ACCC's final offer for the College and were proceeding with the closure. The members of the ACCC disbanded in disgust; planning for what became Nonstop Antioch began in earnest. Faculty and students stopped attending the hollow shell of community governance, the Administrative Council (Adcil), and created our own governing body, named ExCil, or Adcil-in-Exile. In May eighteen Antioch College faculty--most of the tenured faculty at the time--signed up to teach with Antioch in Exile. Faculty then worked without pay from May through August to develop a curriculum, admissions and tuition policies, and a detailed budget. An Executive Collective was voted in, a group of three faculty members who would divide the leadership tasks of the new institution.

As faculty and staff mournfully packed up our offices, we were simultaneously starting to piece together a college from scratch. We scouted around for usable classroom spaces in the Village of Yellow Springs. Churches, coffee shops, arts spaces, and the senior citizens' center opened their doors to us. We found surplus chairs, desks and blackboards at a sale at Wright State University, while computers and even a high-end server were donated. A nearby bookstore agreed to sell textbooks, and the Yellow Springs Library to handle reserve readings, as the University denied Nonstop faculty access to Antioch's (still-open) Olive Kettering Library. After the dramatic rescue of the Antioch Women Center's collection of books from the dumpster where it had been discarded by University staff, we put together our own library-in-exile, which soon added up to approximately 4000 donated and rescued books and materials. Staff and faculty joined Local 768 of the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America, obtaining a healthcare plan through the Steelworkers Health Fund.

Antioch-in-Exile was eventually renamed the Nonstop Liberal Arts Institute in response to a threatened lawsuit from Antioch University prohibiting us from using our own name, logo, or the letter 'A' in any way that could evoke anything Antioch-esque. Taking our name and our vision from one of the slogans of the past year--"Nonstop Antioch"--we saw ourselves as part protest movement, part educational think tank, part holding tank for the progressive traditions and institutional memory of Antioch College. We often described

ourselves as the carriers of Antioch's DNA; we also used the metaphor of Nonstop as a lifeboat or raft, salvaging as many bits of the sunken College as we could.

Our vision was nothing if not ambitious. We intended to keep Antioch's professional educators together and pursuing the meaningful educational work we all feel called to do. We also wanted to apply ourselves more deliberately to the creation of a democratic, intellectually and artistically rich community. Another motivation was the opportunity of experimenting with new educational directions, with the combination of multiple perspectives inherent in the liberal arts joined to hands-on, community-based learning. Equally important was the need to minimize the impact of the loss of jobs and economic activity on the Village of Yellow Springs, as the College had been the town's largest employer. And what better way to show, as former trustee Paula Treichler reasoned, that the College did not, after all, need to be closed- "that there was sufficient money to pay the faculty, that students would find Antioch appealing, that the physical plant need not have been so fraught and immediate an issue?"¹³

Central to our educational philosophy was (and is) the assumption that learning is an inherently social process with an inherently social mission. Here is an excerpt from the first description of the Nonstop Curriculum, written in the summer of 2008:

In response to the tragic and unwarranted closure of the historic Antioch College campus by the Antioch University Board of Trustees, Antioch College faculty, staff, students and alumni are creating The Nonstop Liberal Arts Institute in the Village of Yellow Springs, Ohio. Carrying forward Antioch's long tradition of educational innovation, this enterprise re-imagines education for the 21st century as progressive liberal arts for life. Our goal is a liberal arts education dedicated to the core values of Antioch College and articulated succinctly in its Honor Code as "the search for truth, the development of individual potential, and the pursuit of social justice." The Nonstop Liberal Arts Institute takes these Antiochian ideals into 'exile' with the intent of reinvigorating them in new contexts and environments.

The Institute is based in the Village of Yellow Springs, Ohio, a place with a long legacy of forward thinking, openness to diversity and tolerance. Significant aspects of our educational curriculum are inspired by the interests and needs of the immediate community and its environment. Indeed, the curriculum of the Institute is distinctive in its historically unprecedented level of integration into, and collaboration with, the surrounding community.

Nonstop's nurturing of a relationship with the Yellow Springs community and its careful stewardship of the College in exile were designed to be a marked contrast to the University's indifference toward the historic campus and its environs. We consciously embraced the concept of a turn to the local, asking, "What would it mean to join the insights of 'relocalization' movements to the goals of a liberal arts education? How can we

13 Letter from Paula Treichler, Former Antioch University Trustee to the College Alumni Board. private collection of the author.

build upon existing local specializations and strengths, highlight and preserve local distinctiveness? What partnerships can we develop with local groups and organizations? With whom can we share facilities, spaces, and resources? What contributions can we make to the solving of particular local problems? What contributions can we make to the cultural and intellectual life of the area?" Our curricular directions came from necessity (our small size and shoestring budget) but were also inspired by the challenges facing Yellow Springs—an environmentally-safe power supply, clean water, smart growth without sprawl, affordable housing, the politics of food, the support needed to maintain all kinds of diversity in a small midwestern town.

The Nonstop Institute incorporated the knowledge and skills of talented local experts—particularly in the fields of environmental sustainability and the arts—inviting them to invent workshops, give presentations, and create community art projects. Our faculty, supplemented by Antioch College faculty emeriti, were able to offer a wide range of courses in familiar disciplines and areas (Beginning Chemistry, Research Methods in the Social Sciences, Anthropology of Place, Spanish, Modern Dance, Drawing, Film History, etc) as well as weekend workshops on such varied topics as Personal Finance, The Qur'an, and the History of Jazz. In addition to these, we developed new interdisciplinary courses which we hoped would appeal to Yellow Springers of all ages; these included Community Economics and Environmental Sustainability; Local and Sustainable Agriculture; Queer Theory and Environmental Philosophy. Some courses focused on applied learning aimed at meeting immediate needs—in the Advanced Computer Literacy course, students and faculty worked together to produce the custom-built database that managed Nonstop's registration and evaluation system. Learning took place in countless ways outside the classroom as well, as students worked one-on-one with local artists and filmmakers, and with alumni librarians to catalog the Nonstop collection.

Because classes were generally small (4-10 students) finding classroom spaces proved less of a problem than we had anticipated. Dance classes met in the Presbyterian Church hall, photography classes at the art center, and the cultural history course entitled *Visions of Suburbia* in the living room of a Yellow Springs realtor. Faculty held office hours in coffee shops. Community meetings and weekly potluck lunches took place first in the Yellow Springs town hall and later in the industrial space we renovated to hold our business offices. All of Yellow Springs became the Nonstop Antioch campus, and one could potentially come across a Nonstop class or activity almost anywhere.

Another particularly effective Nonstop initiative was the cultural series we called "Nonstop Presents!" which we deliberately tied to the agendas of the town and to the major themes of the curriculum. Each month we produced a calendar of eclectic events—film screenings, scholarly lectures, artists' talks, performances, panels on political issues. The series showcased the abundant talents of well-known Antioch College alumni from all over the country (most of whom donated their honoraria back to Nonstop), and we again drew upon regional resources—and upon our own students. "Nonstop Presents!" was also designed to enhance certain Nonstop courses and to provide opportunities for students to exhibit and discuss their in-class projects with a wider audience. Our intent was to 'give back' to the Village through the creation of multiple public occasions for the sharing of art,

ideas, and new thinking in community development. All in all “Nonstop Presents!” hosted over 100 events and attracted over 1400 attendees.

Because we had suffered the consequences of being subjected to top-down management, Nonstop was committed to bottom-up governance processes and a 'flat' administrative organization. There was no president, no dean, no faculty rank. Nonstop took the unusual but important step of leveling pay scales so that all were paid roughly the same salary. We reconstituted Antioch's bodies of community government but expanded them as well, regarding them as vital to the cultivation of critical leadership and civic skills. Organized into various committees, students, faculty, and staff regularly sat down together to make decisions about the direction of the project.

Obviously, a self-managed experimental college dedicated to localism and participatory governance required a major reorientation of faculty time commitments and forced us all to expand in new directions. Faculty work could now include such tasks as organizing alumni volunteers; participating in meetings of the Yellow Springs Village Council; negotiating zoning restrictions, building codes and liability insurance; and preparing lunch for sixty people. In retrospect, it's hard to conceive of the faculty at a typical research university refusing to acknowledge their termination and uniting to continue the educational part of their mission outside of the ivory tower. But the high value liberal arts colleges place on collegiality and service had shaped our professional lives and identities. We were also friends and co-conspirators and had already been collaborating on committees organized to fight for the College. While we spanned generations, two-thirds of the faculty and staff who formed the backbone of the Nonstop experiment were female, a fact which may or may not be relevant; for good or for ill women may still be more likely to perform unrecognized forms of work, to relinquish personal ambitions in support of the greater whole.

A heavy contingent of Nonstop faculty came from the arts--partly the result of chance (a high concentration of faculty in the sciences were retirement age and opted to retire), and partly perhaps because arts practitioners are all-too-familiar with short-term projects and irregular incomes. The presence of a number of artists in our midst helps account for our overall willingness to take risks, to live with chronic uncertainty about the immediate future, and to improvise constantly. When the residential space we had rented to house our registrar, student services, and business office proved unworkable, we immediately set about to find another. An Antioch alum who also happened to be an accomplished professional set designer directed the conversion of an old plastics factory into a new energy-efficient space we came to call 'Campus North.' Dozens of us pitched in to spackle walls, paint trim, wash floors and decorate our new home. Everything produced by Nonstop had a vibrant aesthetic quality. Fall semester was launched by a parade with a marching band. Colorful pennants designed by a local artist declared that a Nonstop class or “Nonstop Presents!” event was in session, wherever it happened to be taking place. Projects in dance, photography, graphic design, and installation art expressed our vision of community while the process of art-making, often done collectively, enacted it.

There were far too many dimensions of the Nonstop experiment to do adequate justice to them in this space (for more details, see our very informative multimedia website:

<http://nonstopinstitute.org>). Nonstop's all-open-source Information Technology system, designed and implemented almost entirely by young alumni, is just one facet that deserves its own article. But it is worth noting that the creative use of internet technology was integral to our ability to build and sustain a far-flung community as well as an immediate one. List serves, a sophisticated on-line student newspaper, and the live audio and video streaming of meetings kept interested Antiochians constantly informed and engaged. With regard to teaching and course design, class websites were handy supplements to, but not substitutes for, face-to-face interaction. To explain ourselves to a wider public we deployed multiple modes of outreach across the media spectrum; we sent email petitions, posted video on YouTube and messages on Facebook, appeared on public access TV and local television, produced pamphlets and flyers, invited newspaper reporters to our classes, made presentations at conferences, and networked with academic labor movements across the country.

Rewarding as we found most of our work at Nonstop, the obstacles we faced were often daunting. The timeline of our existence was always unclear, as was our funding. These facts made advance planning and therefore accreditation impossible and severely hampered our efforts to recruit students. As we were not able to become an accredited academic institution, our potential pool of students ended up mostly a mix of former Antioch students, who were of course of traditional college age, and interested villagers, many of whom were senior citizens with the time to take classes. This produced the challenge of integrating very different age groups and degrees of familiarity with higher education within the same classroom; at the same time it created lively opportunities for learning across generational boundaries. The most unfortunate consequence of our unaccredited status turned out to be that traditional-age full-time students were not eligible for federal student loans. Many of the younger students struggled to balance work needed to pay rent alongside their commitment to Nonstop. Tuition, although drastically subsidized (we decided to charge \$100 a credit—or credit equivalent—hour; most classes were 3 'credits') remained difficult to raise for some full time students.

Not surprisingly, the course of community governance 'never did run smooth'—consensus-building meetings often ran overtime, and students did not always feel their contributions were valued by the faculty. The debates that developed around the question of how much tuition Nonstop students should pay, if any, led to intense discussion and eventually considerable acrimony within the community. Everyone agreed that access to knowledge and education should ideally be available to all; opinions differed as to what was practical for Nonstop Antioch to attempt. The tuition debate morphed into a split essentially about the parameters of shared governance, and eventually exposed a deep fissure in the conception of Nonstop on the part of its members: were we, first and foremost, an educational institution, an anti-corporate movement, or an experiment in community-building? Where were the boundaries of this community, and who did it now include? How to weigh the 'shares' in shared governance? Ultimately, although the Executive Collective and the faculty maintained control over the project, some Nonstoppers became disillusioned with what they perceived to be an inadequate vision of community.

Despite unresolved differences in vision, despite the instabilities which plagued the project, Nonstop Antioch's accomplishments in the year of its existence were impressive. We succeeded in keeping College traditions and institutional memory alive and breathing in Yellow Springs until the College campus could be regained. Our vigilance of the College grounds quite literally protected the historic buildings when we discovered and then publicized ongoing water damage due to broken pipes. We saved a large collection of out-of-print books, rare pamphlets, and college records from extinction and catalogued them for easy accessibility. During the dark period following the College's closure, Nonstop preserved twenty-one decent-paying full-time jobs and created a number of part-time jobs in recession-stricken southwest Ohio. Our very public refusal to cede the College's educational legacy inspired alumni and supporters and exerted constant pressure on Antioch University to free the College.

Nonstop enrolled a total of 124 multigenerational students, including a cohort of traditional-aged students. We offered over thirty college-level courses and workshops each semester. Student evaluations of instruction collected the last week of both semesters yielded rave reviews of most of these courses and workshops. These evaluations (admittedly not necessarily indicators of academic and artistic caliber, but certainly useful information) presented glowing pictures of highly-engaged students enthusiastic about the quality of teaching they had received. Unsurprisingly given small class sizes, students described individual attention and ample guidance from faculty. More remarkable were the number of students reporting that they encountered serious, even life-changing, academic and artistic challenges. Almost across the board students commended Nonstop classroom environments for stimulating open discussion and continuous experimentation.

Some measure of our deepening of the partnership of Antioch College and the Village of Yellow Springs can be gauged by the many enthusiastic letters and editorials in the *Yellow Springs News*. Reporter Diane Chiddester described Nonstop as “the little educational engine that could.” In an editorial summarizing our first semester, she wrote:

Nonstop reminded us that the magic of learning has little to do with expensive buildings or high-tech equipment, and everything to do with dedicated teachers and passionate learners, engaged in exploration and critical inquiry....Most of all, Nonstop enriched the village by inspiring us with their example of audacity, perseverance, and the glory of winning a victory for humanity.¹⁴

Nonstop's total expenditures for the year came to 1.4 million dollars; however, this relatively small amount was supplemented by at least half a million worth of in-kind contributions. Supporters from many professions offered us their services—architects, lawyers, writers, photographers, carpenters, restaurateurs and more contributed to the project. Relying on volunteerism and donations (and our own self-exploitation) was obviously a short-term survival strategy on our part. Yet this amazing level of volunteer and discounted labor generated a sense of excitement and solidarity which proved incredibly contagious. According to Olivier De Marcellus, workplace struggles are not

14 Diane Chiddester, “Nonstop Inspiration.” *The Yellow Springs News*. Dec 11 2008.

most fundamentally about defending jobs or wages, vital as these are; rather, they signify the deep need for acknowledgement of the social value of one's work. As such, they are calls for more dignified social relations, for “some minimal common space of liberty or autonomy.” Ours was a campaign to save a threatened educational commons and to preserve it for future generations, but along the way it also became a fight to restore our professional dignity—the dignity of an eminently resourceful faculty and staff who had been discarded. And somewhere along *that* way the struggle forged an unexpected sense of collective possibility in all of us. As De Marcellus frames the question, “isn't that [broad conception of dignity] what people involved in almost every big strike or struggle usually say after winning or losing the specific battle? Isn't that what makes us all continue, generally losing year after year, but always *much* happier doing that than accepting society as it is?”¹⁵

The story of the Nonstop Liberal Arts Institute has not ended with the successful purchase of Antioch College by its alumni. Nonstop is no longer offering classes, but has incorporated as a not-for-profit organization and reconfigured itself as a community arts and performance space providing diverse cultural programming in Yellow Springs. Some of us who created Nonstop have recently been hired by the Board of Trustees Pro Tempore of Antioch College. And, sadly, some have not; at the moment the re-emerging College has made very few hires. While the campus is now secured, many of the faculty and staff that we fought so hard to keep intact have been forced to seek jobs elsewhere. The new Board and the Interim President continue to assert their commitment to tenure, to a unionized staff, and to fair labor practices. As of this writing it is still too early to say how concrete these assurances will turn out to be.

Learning from Disaster

Higher education today is witnessing an exacerbation of the clash between the conception of higher education as a genuine public good, and the conviction (which takes varying forms, from wistful resignation to entrepreneurial zeal) that education must be abandoned to market forces and consumer trends. While its anomalous position under the University's umbrella made our College particularly vulnerable to draconian economic measures, the impact of the corporatization of higher education has been isolating and demoralizing for many of those who work--or once worked--there. Given the current highly visible failures of neoliberalism, we now have an opportunity to interrupt the dominant logic defending the corporate university. Rather than reproducing short term, market-driven discourses, academic workers should be experimenting with a range of collective alternatives and strategies.

In our own example, Nonstop Antioch sought inspiration from the network-organization models pioneered by bioregionalist and 'slow food' movements. Nonstop grounded itself in the existing resources of the Village of Yellow Springs and, at the same time, worked to make connections with other nearby colleges and other similar movements in progressive higher education around the country. These connections, and our constant influx of alumni, kept us from becoming insular and narrow, one of the possible downsides of

¹⁵ Olivier De Marcellus, “Commons, Communities and Movements: Inside, Outside, and Against Capital.” *The Commoner*. No 6. Winter 2003. p. 10.

localism. Yet perhaps the most important lesson of our endeavor turned out to be that surprisingly satisfying educational results can emerge when more attention is paid to the common interests of small colleges and the small towns they frequently inhabit. Underexplored potentialities may well exist for collaborations and the sharing of facilities between small colleges and local civic and environmental organizations, artists' collectives, churches, parks, and community centers. Another lesson is that expensive consultants offering conventional wisdom too-often push to make colleges more generic than distinctive and focused on their own roots in the particularities of place.

The construction of new partnerships will never be sufficient to combat the many serious economic challenges currently facing American liberal arts colleges. Still, there remain many practical as well as environmental reasons for turning to the local. Local economies are threatened by many of the same forces which are undermining small cultural institutions of all kinds: forces which push for continual expansion and needless development; forces which tend towards the imposition of economies of scale and their accompanying homogenization; forces which undermine community self-determination, citizen participation, fair labor practices, and a reasonable quality of life for all. Nonstop's temporary experiment in community-driven education is now over, but we hope that at least some of our creative synthesis of the liberal arts and the local will live on in a newly independent Antioch College.¹⁴

Jean Gregorek is a former Associate Professor at Antioch College.

16 Many thanks to all of the folks who participated in and/or supported the Nonstop Liberal Arts Institute. Special thanks to Brian Springer and Tim Noble for their advice on versions of this essay, and for their dedication to the open flow of information, as demonstrated by their web archive project The Antioch Papers.

To distill a different democracy: Another pedagogy of possibility

Adam Renner

Keynote Lecture presented at Defiance College

McMaster School for Advancing Humanity

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Introduction

I've tentatively entitled this address "To distill a different democracy." I am very much a Freirean when it comes to education, so logically, I am drawn to the issue of reflection and, more precisely praxis—the *twinning* of action and reflection, practice and theory. Any transformational project requires a transformational theory. And, of course, that theory must be premised in critical action. I am especially interested in what a more *protagonist* democratic action entails. So, in a metaphorical turn of praxis, I am interested in distillation, the process of mixing and settling out; mixing, and settling out.

And, I recognize it is going to take several cycles of mixing. We did not arrive here overnight. So this is going to be long term work that we remain committed to and that we turn others on to. This is not a project, a journal article, or a career. It is life.

Through an ongoing and evolutionary process, what I seek to distill is a democracy that is, at once, *empowering*, *distributed*, and *healing*. I want to suggest that we can do this in education—in K-12 education, as well as, teacher education.

Well, actually what I want to suggest, is that we *must* do this if we have any hope of preserving democracy in the future. The stakes, perhaps, could not be higher.

Partisan politics tears a wider hole in the American fabric. (Perhaps, the real partition may exist between the political class and the rest of us.) Manufactured social difference continues to divide us at our ultimate peril. Pick the issue—the achievement gap and return of Apartheid Schooling; the rights of our lesbian sisters and gay brothers to marry; immigration. And, the gap between rich and poor represents a seemingly unbridgeable divide. In a recent *NY Times* article David Leonhardt (March 24, 2010), once again, illustrates the chasm: The incomes of the top 0.01% of workers have increased 400% since 1980 while the median income of all workers went up only 12%. Additionally, the tax rate for the wealthiest Americans decreased at 3x the rate it did for the middle quintile of wage earners.

The disconnect between town and country as one lens on modern injustice

Moreover, related to our purposes here in the McMaster School for Advancing Humanity this week, the disconnect between town and country continues to come into sharper relief.

In 1800 farmers represented nearly 90% of the labor force. In 1900 they comprised approximately 38% of the workforce. In 1950: 12.2%. Today, farmers represent 1-2% of the workforce.

This trend does not bode well.

I first came to understand that more poor people live in rural areas than they do urban areas from Paul Gorski's work on multicultural education.¹² Further research bears this out. According to the Economic Research Service, 26.3% of rural residents live at 1-2x the poverty level whereas 18.2% of urban residents do.¹³ Factor in race and it is even worse. 15% of rural residents of color live *below* the poverty line; 12% of urban residents do.¹⁴ In terms of education attainment rates, the same sort of statistic bears out: 26.6% of urban/metro residents achieve college degrees; 15.5% of rural/non-metro residents do.¹⁵

Globally, the situation is as dire if not more so. NAFTA, other trade agreements, and export-oriented economies driven by the IMF, as well as a drive toward privatization has led to the corporate take-over of public land, as well as massive migration to city slums in order to work in maquiladoras and other sweat shops. As the International Fund for Agricultural Development notes, "Urban and rural poverty are interlinked. Urban work encourages migration from the countryside to the city. Urban-oriented policies alone may fail to reduce urban poverty. It is therefore important to address rural poverty in order to make sustainable progress on urban poverty."¹⁶

Likewise, David Harvey, conjecturing on post-revolutionary society, states that the contradiction of town and country will need to be reconciled: What will be the relationship of nature and technology? What will daily life be like? How will we organize production? What is our food security? Etc.¹⁷

We ignore the demolition of rural country-sides and the impoverishment of our non-metro neighbors at our ultimate peril.

The politics of hope

Despite the gloomy picture painted above and despite the fact that we reside today on the precipice of economic and climatic disaster, I hold out a modicum of hope. Along with being a Freirean I also maintain a Westian philosophy of a blues-inspired hope. Cornel West draws a distinction between optimism and hope. He suggests that the historical record provides us no reason to be optimistic about our future; yet, we can hope since it requires our *participation* in the struggle.¹⁸ It is a get-off-our-knees-to-pray improvisational mode of living akin to an anarchist vision of prefigurative direct action for which to have democracy, we live democratically; to have justice, we live justly; to have beauty, we live in a way that honors such beauty.

Finally, this hope is inspired by complex and complicated freedom fighters such as Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas and Che Guevara, as well as, a more local hero (and less controversial figure, depending on who you talk to, I guess) Staughton Lynd.

¹² <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/>

¹³ <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/rcat/rcat82/rcat82i.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://www.healthreform.gov/reports/hardtimes/>

¹⁵ <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/rdr98/rdr98.htm>

¹⁶ <http://ginsberg.umich.edu/serve/iea/poverty.html>

¹⁷ <http://davidharvey.org/page/2/>

¹⁸ This turn of phrase was offered at the Kentucky Alliance dinner held in Louisville, Kentucky in 2005 to honor the life and work of Anne Braden.

Lynd, in his articulation of Marxian analysis, anarchist vision of post-revolutionary society and liberation theology, suggests that justice is arrived at through a posture of accompaniment.

Accompaniment, he offers, is an ontology for which we seek our ultimate liberation through a tender experience with humanity—of standing with and for others broken by structural violence.¹⁹ Our hope—for democracy, for justice—then resides in our ability to look deep into the face of despair, to analyze the structures of our society (finding the dominant side of its contradictions and maintaining a minority-position perspective), and to act with courage and conviction, subjugating self for the collective, leaving, as Dennis Carlson suggests, “our safe harbors.”²⁰

Schools: Teachers and teaching hope

I believe this can be taught and learned. So, schools, wherever they are, town or country, are pivotal to the project on a different democracy; a democracy that demands our participation.

I agree with Rich Gibson. Schools are a central organizing site of modern industrialized societies, which, as I’m sure we know, are subsumed under a rubric of capitalist ideology aimed at particular modes of production and profitable outcomes for a minority.²¹

A little over a century ago, a central organizing point of our society was the farm. Kevin Baker, in a recent *Harper’s Magazine* article, in fact, elucidates our rich populist history, driven by the agricultural sector.²² Half a century ago, the hope of the proletariat may have been found in our factories and trade unions. Today, the hope of workers everywhere, I think, lies in schools.

Gibson points out that schools are a multi-billion dollar industry; they are a warehousing mechanism for our nation’s children; they provide skill and ideological training; they fashion hope—whether real or false; they produce the next generation of workers (and, cynically, frontline infantry, prison inmates, and the unemployed); and, they are a key extension of capitalist democracy.

To date, when capitalism meets democracy, democracy submits to capital (i.e., free markets, profits, etc.). Think of conflicts over land everywhere, every time: the indigenous of the Americas from north to south, the natural resources of Chile and throughout Latin America, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Maoists in India, and on and on.²³

¹⁹ Lynd, Staughton & Grubacic, Andrej (2007). *Wobblies and Zapatistas*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

²⁰ Carlson, Dennis (2002) *Leaving safe harbors*. NY: Routledge/Falmer.

²¹ Gibson, Rich (2009). Why have school? An Exercise. *The Rouge Forum News* #14: <http://blogs.ubc.ca/ross/files/2009/08/rouge-forum-news-issue-14.pdf>.

²² Baker, Kevin (2010). The Vanishing Liberal. *Harper’s Magazine*, 320 (1919), pp. 29-37.

²³ For further reading, see Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the US*, Eduardo Galeano’s *Open Veins of Latin America*, and *The Monthly Review* at <http://monthlyreview.org>.

But, a capitalist system is shot through with contradictions. And, these are exploitable toward the ends of justice and democracy. Noting the tripping point that workers occupy within such a capitalist system, teachers are positioned at a provocative pivot point in the entire ideology. Serving in contradictory positions of both capitalist and worker, as well as oppressor and oppressed, teachers have a choice (whether conscious of it or not) to help preserve the status quo or to either work within the system to *reform* it or to work outside of the system to *transform* it.

Indeed, teachers occupy a complicated space, what Paul Kivel would call the “buffer zone”—between the ruling elite and the marginalized masses,²⁴ but one that holds a liberating potential; if we do the right mixing.

The necessity of a structural analysis

Toward such a recipe, I offer a particular analytical lens that privileges the structural and the historical and which is intended to expose particular ideologies—to sometimes make the familiar strange, and to help decolonize our minds from imported ideologies—being careful, of course, not to import my own ideology (though, I quite fancy it).

I take this tact because poverty is a structural matter. It is not a personal matter as much as it is bound up in a system that enriches some and impoverishes many. The rich and poor inhabit a dialectical space. Similarly, racism is a systemic matter, not an individually discriminatory one. Likewise sexism/patriarchy is a socio-historically construed construction. And, on and on.

It is necessary to look at injustice, then, at a structural level, since local actions are always informed by ideological apparatuses (master narratives such as race, class, gender or socializing agents like religion, school, and media). Absent this lens, local work becomes uninformed, detached and, potentially, whimsical, denuded of any critical impact. A different democracy, then, begins with a structural analysis.

I want to approach the remainder of this address in 3 interconnected parts:

- (1) What is going on in society?
- (2) What is going on in schools? And,
- (3) From this structural analysis what is to be done?

Going back to the theme of this lecture, “Democracy and Education in the Face of Rural Change,” I use one of my local heroes, Wendell Berry, to help us work through the analytical frames of parts 1 and 2 and to launch us into part 3, Lenin’s famous question he asked a century ago. Some of you may be familiar with Berry’s relatively recent poem, *Questionnaire*.²⁵

²⁴ Kivel, Paul (2000). Social service or social change: Who benefits from your work?

www.paulkivel.com

²⁵ <http://everydayliturgy.com/questionnaire-by-wendell-berry/>

Berry writes:

1. How much poison are you willing to eat for the success of the free market and global trade? Please name your preferred poisons.
2. For the sake of goodness, how much evil are you willing to do? Fill in the following blanks with the names of your favorite evils and acts of hatred.
3. What sacrifices are you prepared to make for culture and civilization? Please list the monuments, shrines, and works of art you would most willingly destroy.
4. In the name of patriotism and the flag, how much of our beloved land are you willing to desecrate? List in the following spaces the mountains, rivers, towns, farms you could most readily do without.
5. State briefly the ideas, ideals, or hopes, the energy sources, the kinds of security, for which you would kill a child. Name, please, the children whom you would be willing to kill.

Imperialism and politics of resources and torture

If we take stanzas 1 and 2 together, we can look at three interrelated issues that inform the first decade of the 21st century: (1) the politics of food, water, and oil; (2) the politics of Guantanamo and torture; and (3) more broadly, the politics of imperialism.

Regarding food, we can look to the work of Michael Pollan and Barbara Kingsolver as directional compasses toward more fulfilling, healthier, and sustainable ways of eating and living. Pollan, for instance, reminds us, “When we eat from the industrial-food system, we are eating oil and spewing greenhouse gases.”²⁶

Kingsolver adds, “US tax payers pay tens of billions of dollars every year to subsidize the production of commodity crops which are mostly corn, wheat, and soybeans. Most of that

²⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/12/magazine/12policy-t.htm? r=1>

production enters our diets without our notice as the ingredients of processed foods like high fructose corn syrup and feed to raise cattle and hogs. And we also, as taxpayers, subsidize the fuel costs of getting these products manufactured and shipped to the market. So it's a funny thing in this country we think of fast food as cheap in spite of all the fossil fuels and processing that were required to make it while we think of simple unprocessed organic produce as sort of elite, an expensive option. It's incredibly ironic that the US government urges us to eat more fruits and vegetables but our agricultural programs offer virtually no assistance to fruit and vegetable growers.”²⁷

Regarding another precious resource, water, as well as corporate geopolitics, we might also consider Bechtel's private ownership of fresh water in the Global South²⁸ or Coca-Cola's diminution of all fresh water sources in some communities of India *in order to produce soda*.²⁹

The first decade of this century finds us enmeshed in two wars under the rubric of a seemingly unwinnable “war on terror” (at least, tangentially, related to oil). We daily battle our consciences regarding the evisceration of habeas corpus and the sanction of torture as a nation. We are caught in a web of contradictions that is captured in a philosophy that *to protect freedom we must eliminate freedom*.

This “war on terror,” of course, can be integrated into a larger calculus of the politics of imperialism, which is played out through a late-capitalistic project of neoliberal globalization. Here we witness the battle for exhaustible fossil fuels, new markets, and exploitable labor.³⁰ As nations of the Global South are consumed by the greed of the Global North as well as their own leaders and militaries (many of whom have been trained in the Global North), we observe a new oppression no less sinister than its previous iterations.

There is a history to this, as we well know. Conquest has been replaced by corporate control. Slavery has been replaced by economic structural adjustment wrought by the World Bank, IMF, and WTO. And, rape of the land for its precious minerals and fuels has been supplanted by privatization and patents.

Our best (though devastating) example, linking all three of these issues, has also unraveled (again) in this first decade: Haiti. Haiti is what happens when food security is eliminated. Think of the history of this great people—the first enslaved Africans to throw off their enslavers, the colonizing French. Coming from a supposed philosophy of Enlightenment, the French would make the freed peoples of Haiti pay restitution to France for, in essence, damages and lost revenue.

Next, it would be America's turn, fearful of a freed nation of Africans so near their borders, to act as the unenlightened ones. We would eventually militarily occupy the island twice

²⁷ Living on earth: <http://www.loe.org/shows/segments.htm?programID=07-P13-00018&segmentID=4>

²⁸ <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/bolivia/links.html>

²⁹ <http://killercoke.org/>; <http://indiaresource.org/news/2010/1009.html>.

³⁰ Cavanagh, John and Jerry Mander (2004). *Alternatives to economic globalization: A better world is possible*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

to protect American business. By way of neoliberal globalization, we would economically coerce the mulatto leaders of the nation (their captains of industry and officeholders) to sell out the grandchildren and great grandchildren of the freedom fighters by usurping their land and creating an urban nightmare of poverty.

What people freely produced, the leaders took away by strokes of pens and backroom deals with the IMF and World Bank. Now, people starve in full view of bags of grain and rice. Individual killing on the streets of Port au Prince pales in comparison to the structural violence wrought by the owners of the means of production and the so-called civilized cultures and enlightened empires.³¹

Racism, culture, and the uncivilized behavior of the colonizer

Moving to stanzas 3 and 4, we can connect to issues of environmental racism, the cheapening of culture, and, overall, the uncivilized behavior of the colonizer.

Again, Berry writes:

What sacrifices are you prepared
to make for culture and civilization?
Please list the monuments, shrines,
and works of art you would
most willingly destroy.

In the name of patriotism and
the flag, how much of our beloved
land are you willing to desecrate?
List in the following spaces
the mountains, rivers, towns, farms
you could most readily do without.

We can see this globally in the dumping of waste in the 3rd world.³² We can see this more locally in Louisville where in “rubber town,” the western portion of our city, which is decidedly Black and poor, filth-emitting industries punctuate the hazy evening horizon. Hurricane Katrina also offers us a transparent example of environmental racism as seen through the lens of Spike Lee’s *When the Levees Broke*.³³

And, who will suffer most from global climate change, but some of the poorest people on earth living in low-lying areas or island nations. Ironically, they produce the least carbon,

³¹ See Steven Stoll’s article in the April 2010 *Harper’s Magazine*, the numerous lesson possibilities in the spring 2010 *Rethinking Schools*, Peter Hallward’s contribution to the January 15, 2010 *The Bullet*, entitled, Our role in Haiti’s plight, and Dan Freeman-Maloy’s contribution to the same magazine on January 17, 2010, entitled, Relief efforts in the shadow of past ‘help’.

³² http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2010/02/22/un_warns_of_threat_from_hi_tech_waste_in_3rd_world/;
<http://mondovista.com/piratesx.html>.

³³ <http://www.teachingthelevees.org/>.

which may be the major contributing factor to an ever-erratic climate and their ultimate demise.

I think also of the evisceration of culture, particularly through commodification. I think about casinos on Indian reservations. I think of Pigeon Forge in Gatlinburg, which caricatures Appalachian culture. I think of the invasion of native lands everywhere—in search of adventure and/or in search of profit.

Consider the corrosive impact on our global commons: seeds crucial to cultures for millennia, patented; subsistence farms that provided local livelihood and survival replaced by corporate farms intended to feed other people thousands of miles away; the minerals stolen from mountainsides throughout the Global South (“Hey, how did our Spanish tin get in those Bolivian mines?!”); and the medicines patented from plants that should not be ours to own or from which to profit.³⁴

And, so Berry helps me think of the colonizer, the true “savage” in the colonizer/colonized dialectic.

Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, brings the colonizer into stark relief. Writing at the time of the conflict in Algeria, he asserts, “The wealth of the imperialist nations is also our wealth. . . .Europe is literally the creation of the 3rd World. The riches choking it are those plundered from the underdeveloped peoples.”

Embracing the perspective of his ‘otherized’ brother, Sartre, in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, speaking to his French brothers and sisters, laments, “You who are so liberal, so humane, who take the love of culture to the point of affectation, you pretend to forget that you have colonies where massacres are committed in your name.”

What affectations might we point to in the present?

And, back to Haiti, and the general issue of neoliberalism, we witness a new breed of colonizer who operates in the shadows of markets, loans, and trade agreements. If the situation becomes dire enough, of course, the bayonets return under the rubric of humanitarian imperialism.

If we really cared about Haiti, would we have countenanced such need to our south with indifference? If we really cared about Haiti, would we have ushered out their leader (a second time) to let it be overrun by vandals? If we really care about Haiti, will we do things differently this time?

I’m not optimistic, but I’m hopeful. Because our more critical appraisal should lead to equally critical action.

³⁴ See Eduardo Galeano’s *Open Veins of Latin America* and John Cavanagh and Jerry Mander’s *Alternatives to Economic Globalization*.

Structural analysis of schooling/education

So far, we've taken a rather hard look at what's happening in society. And, I've certainly taken my shots at a ruling elite that I experience as indifferent to other people's pain. I do so seriously, and not lightly. I do so in a way that also makes me complicit in their calculus. That I eat inexpensively, have a rather extensive wardrobe, and drive without much care of the cost of gasoline makes me a beneficiary of this upside down world order—where a few benefit from the misery of the many.

We might be good people, performing our charity and social service. But, are we operating in a bad *system* for which charity and social service do little to trouble its power?

How have we arrived at such a state? How have we become so well-adjusted to injustice, as Cornel West so provocatively asks?³⁵

In a word: alienation. We have become disconnected from material reality and each other. I will save the dissertation here on alienation and trust my dear listener/reader to consult the historical literature on alienation and encourage you to take a look at Barry Padgett's recent treatise on alienation in contemporary society.³⁶

Put simply, we are alienated to the extent that most of us do not own the means of production—working for someone else's profit; most of us do not control the processes bound up in our labor—doing what others tell us to do; most of us lack the liberty to do exactly what we want—caught in the trappings of a classist/racist/sexist structure, which limits our menu of options.

In these ways we are not free, which is a fundamental premise to being human.

Thus, we are disconnected from our own humanity, as well as the humanity of others. This true human freedom is replaced, instead, by a freedom to consume. Markets mediate our relationships as we compete for perceived scarce resources.

How can good people succumb to such a racket? Socialization.

Calling it a disease, I locate the foundation of injustice as **the unequal distribution of resources**. The manifestation of the disease, then, is **alienation**—the only way we could put up with such injustice (even when it is right in front of our face). The dissemination of said disease happens through our **socialization**. Common ideological apparatuses that contribute to this socialization are corporately-controlled media, religion, families, and, of course, schools.

So, let's take a look at Berry's 5th stanza and use it both to connect to an analysis of schools and education, and also to launch into what is to be done.

³⁵ West, Cornel (2008). *Hope on a Tightrope*. Smiley Books.

³⁶ Padgett, Barry (2007). *Marx and Alienation in Contemporary Society*. NY: Continuum.

Recall that Berry states in his concluding stanza to *Questionnaire*:

State briefly the ideas, ideals, or hopes,
the energy sources, the kinds of security,
for which you would kill a child.
Name, please, the children whom
you would be willing to kill.

While it would be an exercise in extreme fatalism to take up Berry's challenge, literally, let us consider this concept of "killing a child," metaphorically, specifically as it relates to schooling.

Although we could certainly think about the physical death of children—not in the immediate sense of murder—but in the longer term sense of lack of access to good health care or poverty, which have the same end result as murder—let us think about the emotional and intellectual death of children that are endorsed in the hyper-standardized, high-stakes environment to which we subject our kids.

Let us think about the arts as they continue to be excised from our children's educations in favor of four mainstay subjects: science, social studies, math, and reading. In some locations, the focus is just the final two: math and reading.

Let us think about the destabilization of the teaching force and the assault on teachers across the nation—layoffs in California, school closings in Missouri and Rhode Island.³⁷ All coming to a school system near us.

Let us think about teacher education and its puppeteer NCATE. We freely give ourselves over to a monster and squabble over research agendas while Teach for America and district models quietly usurp teacher training for the next generation.

Let us think about the achievement gap—a gap easily predicted by zip codes and skin color.

Let us think about the return to Apartheid education, as race-based student assignment was struck down by, in part, a frivolous lawsuit—at least in the case of the Louisville half of the equation—and a conservative court.

Let us think about the make-up of our school boards and our legislatures and the CEO of our education cabinet. *We do not own the means of this production.*

And, finally, let us think about scripting that is proliferating in our school buildings—alienating the teacher from the human-laden process of his or her work, his or her craft.

³⁷

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/11/us/11kansascity.html?hp>;
<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2010/0225/All-teachers-fired-at-R.I.-school.-Will-that-happen-elsewhere>.

In these ways, I think we are killing our children. We kill them emotionally. And, we kill them intellectually.

We dole out so-called facts that are merely part of a larger story and later extract this information on tests, letting the kids bleed out on bubble sheets. Freire's "banking method" indeed.³⁸

We follow scripts written for ideological purposes (think of the recent textbook debacle in Texas³⁹).

We intuit the future earning power of kids tracked into the lowest levels or warehoused in our nation's poorest schools.

We witness the demolition of hope, replaced by catchy slogans plastered in hallways that kindergartners surely know not to believe. Rhetoric supplants material reality. (Just another blame-the-victim strategy.)

And, we observe these occurrences all the while frightened at the loss of *our* job, which means the loss of our health care (perhaps that has changed), but most certainly means the loss of a lifestyle that is probably just a little more than we can afford, anyway.

But, of course resistance, thankfully, exists. These considerations above are not the story in every classroom, every school building, or every school system. Teachers, students, and parents are fighting back. Teachers, students, and parents are troubling the manufactured reality and are attempting to order off a different menu. Teachers, students, and parents are mixing and settling out, mixing and settling out.

What is to be done?

Let us move, finally, to the more hopeful part of this story. What is to be done?

I'll divide this final part of my talk today into two parts. I want to talk about the work with which I am currently involved and point to the possibilities and problematics of this work. It has been a struggle with some local battles won. Then, I plan to conclude with a more theoretical take on the work ahead, sprinkling in some general pedagogical possibilities and hoping that we might enjoin a lingering conversation toward social change (and hoping to not get too worked up in the process!).

This work is, of course, foundationalized in democratic processes. It begins with analysis and evolves into protagonist action.

³⁸ Freire, Paulo (1970). *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. NY: Continuum.

³⁹ <http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/education/87084042.html>;
<http://curricublog.wordpress.com/2010/03/17/colbert-foner-texas-social-studie/>;
<http://www.ksl.com/?nid=157&sid=9959046>.

A little about my work

I'll talk about my work in three locations: at my university, in Jamaica, and in the Rouge Forum.

At Bellarmine, I am housed in the school of education, a post I have held since 2002. For two years, I inhabited the graduate director's position. I took this learning experience, filled with successes and decidedly more failures, into another aspect of my work at Bellarmine. I now administrate the Interdisciplinary Core in our College of Arts and Sciences.

Interestingly, I took this position on the heels of a SACS visit—a visit that pointed out concerns relative to assessment of our general education program in Arts and Sciences at Bellarmine. Toward that end, we have taken up a patient process of buy in from all constituents who teach in this Core to develop an assessment program. Since every student in the university matriculates through at least one of our classes each year, our assessment data provides a pretty good picture of how students are doing in their liberal arts education.

Of course, the assault is on from the same forces behind the takeover of K-12 education. More and more, universities, having already outsourced food services, bookstores, janitorial services, and faculty, are looking to outsource data collection and evaluation. ETS has already established a battery of assessments for core university subjects. Nothing like a standardized measure weighing in on whether one passes Biology or American History rather than our colleagues.⁴⁰

Analyzing the storm clouds gathering over the rolling Kentucky skyline, our department came together to ensure we would drive assessment and other pedagogical improvements. While we have moved rather swiftly, we have done so, deliberately, and with immense buy-in. I know this because 2 years ago, the program struggled to staff it's nearly 55 classes/semester. Now, we entertain over 80 proposals each semester. The word has gotten out that we value community, co-development, and improvement through empirically-derived data.

As a result of our processes and community of support, they have felt empowered to develop rigorous courses that challenge our students and offer content that is necessary toward the students' moral and ethical development. Course titles include such things as: *The Civil Rights Movement in Literature*, *Moral Choices in War Time*, *History of Sexual Orientation in the US*, *Israeli-Palestinian Impasse*, and *Planning and Community Development*.

In my own teaching of one of these classes, *Liberation Theology*, it has also led to an intriguing final research project for which students were challenged to investigate one of three questions: From where does your breakfast come? From where do your clothes come? Or, what is your carbon footprint?

⁴⁰ See "Empire in the Academy?" in *The Rouge Forum News* #14 for a list of good resources on the corporatization of the university: <http://blogs.ubc.ca/ross/files/2009/08/rouge-forum-news-issue-14.pdf>.

Students have taken the work so seriously that they will be presenting their findings at our university-wide undergraduate research week (the only sociological research in this program of which I am aware). The students divided themselves into 3 groups and took up one of the following projects (1) examining where the athletic department acquires its uniforms; (2) exploring where Sodexo, our outsourced food provider, gets the bulk of their food; and (3) investigating what the carbon footprint of our university is. Of note is the fact that our board of directors attends the presentations at undergraduate research week, so we'll see where that goes.

Perhaps in my most provocative work, connecting with some of the wonderful international work being done here, I have spent the last 12 summers in Jamaica working with schools and children's homes there. My partner and I began this trip in 1998 and we have built a process over the years that continues to arc toward social change and beyond social service.

Paul Kivel talks about this differentiation in terms of helping some people get ahead (social service) vs. helping people get together (social change).

As a sometimes classically defined service trip, we have quite easily engaged in social service—helping out in the schools, bringing supplies to the children's homes, etc. As well, we have worked intimately with a couple of families over the last 12 years. In one case, we helped a young man from Jamaica secure a full scholarship to Bellarmine as well as helped his family immigrate to the US. (By the way, this young man has also received notification, recently, that he has earned a full ride to U of L's medical school).

Additionally, we have poured a lot of resources into the education of one of the teachers with whom we have worked since 1999. As she nears the end of her teacher training, we wonder the kind of impact she might ultimately have in her community as an officially certified teacher. To date, we have helped her get ahead. Our next step is to work in tandem to figure out how we might get folks in her community together.

Our more potentially transformational work has unfolded at a particular school, though. Last year, implementing a Freirean culture circle method we brought the staff of the school together with our team in order to talk about the purposes of education. Out of this discussion emerged an empowered sense from our Jamaican counterparts that we had not witnessed to date. They began to understand that our desire was to be a "partner" in this work, not directors.

With this emergent understanding, they more freely asserted their ideas about the directions they'd like to go and what they would like us to do when we come. It was not only empowering, it was healing.

Although we didn't ameliorate 500 years of oppression with one culture circle, we took a step toward authenticity and, more importantly, toward humanization. More is planned for this summer.

While the social transformation we seek is still distant on the horizon, the path we now traverse travels more directly and deliberately toward that horizon. We know not the outcome, but we trust the process will lead us in a more communal direction, which has the best chance at substantive and sustainable change. Critical analysis led to action which seeks humanization.⁴¹

By way of concluding these comments about my work, I mention my role as community coordinator of the Rouge Forum. The Rouge Forum is an organization of educators, students, and parents seeking a democratic society. We are concerned with questions like: How can we teach against racism, nationalism and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals AND teach? Whose interests do schools serve in a society that is ever more unequal? We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring those into practice.⁴²

We boast of a membership of over 4000 people worldwide, but, like most organizations only a couple hundred are truly active with a few dozen who really provide the backbone to the work of the organization. Based upon yearly conferences which we organize, the infiltration of other conferences, a quarterly newspaper, an international peer-reviewed journal, and animated conversation across all sorts of spaces, the Rouge Forum has centralized our focus on three areas for which we attempt to concentrate our efforts: resistance to standardized tests, the reformulation of teacher education, and the proliferation of freedom schools.

Not exactly a weekend project.

Active in many states across the US, we work with other organizations (like EPATA—Educators and Parents against Testing Abuse), as well as other individual teachers and schools, toward building a critical mass of teachers and parents to undermine high stakes testing. This is a long-term project we see as central to helping the ruling elite take note of our sincerity regarding the recreation of an education that actually serves the best interest of all of our children. We also watch with interest the work of the Fund Education Now network of parents in Florida as they attempt to defeat Senate Bill 6—a bill that is basically a bid to completely take over public education.⁴³

This work is clearly tenuous and filled with pitfalls. So, we patiently take up our work person to person, conference to conference, protest to protest. We await the appropriate turning point to reveal itself.

And, we work on teacher education. Working hard to launching our own teacher education program we continue to survey teachers, students, parents and other activists

⁴¹ See www.bellarmino.edu/service/jamaica and http://www.richgibson.com/rouge_forum/2008/decadework.htm for more information on this service / social change work

⁴² See www.rougeforum.org.

⁴³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjKFZYIVDGw>

who work on the better behalf of humanity to find out the most compelling ingredients of a teacher education program. For instance, a group of us will be working at the United States Social Forum to continue its formation. As well, this topic will consume the bulk of our annual conference this coming August.

How do we create or recreate the education of practicing and future teachers such that they become the organic intellectuals as Antonio Gramsci describes? What experiences are central to making sure that teachers are prepared to meet the needs of all children from any circumstance? How can we connect meeting these needs to systemic change? What do they know about history? About the manufacturing of social difference? Of social difference's connection to injustice? How can we instill a critical democratic spirit in their future pedagogy? A pedagogy that will turn the student from an object shaped by the world to a subject who shapes the world? How can we imbue teachers with the sense of courage that will be necessary to speak truth to power?

While we work within our own teacher education programs to reform them, we also seek this alternative construction such that we can more freely enact the ideals we see as central to teacher preparation. Indeed, we recognize the struggle that awaits us. But, this is where our analysis has led us.

And, finally, recognizing the mis-education that happens to many of our children, we seek the proliferation of freedom schools similar to those Staughton Lynd and others launched in Mississippi in the summer of 1964. This is no longer a southern issue. It is not solely an urban or a rural one. It impacts kids across the country and, frankly, across the world, as we also witness the standardizing efforts in Jamaican schools by their ruling elite. Connecting with models like the San Francisco Freedom School,⁴⁴ we intend to work with various communities where Rouge Forum members are located and connect such alternative schooling possibilities to our teacher education proposition.

A lingering hope remains that we can reform our public schools, that we can wrest control of them from the ruling elite. However, we find it necessary to keep a foot in both worlds, tackling both poles of Rosa Luxemburg's question: "Reform or Revolution?" If we are unable to reform education through the elimination of high stakes testing and/or one-size-fits-all standards, and/or the production of a more insurgent brand of educator prepared to speak truth to power, then we want to have the model of another possibility.

Again, this is not short term work. This work is not without its problematics. Yet, this is what *our* analysis draws us toward. And, we feel confident in a democratically-construed process that includes a multiplicity of voices focused on equitable outcomes.

In fact, the power and possibility of these ideas will only be as rich as the people whose voices will inform the entire process. We fumble toward finding the right side of history.

⁴⁴ http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/ED_SFSS.html

To distill a different democracy

What is to be done? The question plagues us, doesn't it?

So far, I have tried to lay out a structural view of modern society. Using Wendell Berry's poem we transitioned from an analysis of society to an analysis of schools. That the amelioration of the issues raised is tenuous and imperfect, I tried to thrust myself into the center of the mess: showing myself complicit in the system, elucidating a rather utopian vision, but also suggesting, perhaps subliminally so far, that this is process driven work, not product driven.

This work is about relationships. It is about authenticity—teaching who we are and living what we teach. This work is about the bottom-up; it is about the periphery moving toward the center, drawing the circle large enough for all of us. This work is about finding the dominant side of the contradiction, taking a minority-position perspective, and seeing the ways markets mediate our relationships. It is about noticing that democracy too often submits to capitalism.

So, I conclude, our work has to be about emboldening democracy. Toward that end, we must distill a different democracy, one that can confront the prevailing ideology and its apparatuses that seek to contain us, make us less human, and make us believe that our resistance is meaningless. It cannot be a *representative* form. Others cannot do this work for us. Rather, it must be of a more *participatory* form, premised on a pre-figurative process that is lived.

We live it so we can have it.

Our goal in the IDC, for instance, is not an end. It is rather a series of pedagogical moments that tip, hopefully, towards the moral agency of our students.

Our work in Jamaica is not 'finishable'. It is instead always already about one more healing conversation that seeks the resolution to the oppressor/oppressed, server/served dialectic. It is a process of "finishing the unfinished," as Freire might say.

Our work in the Rouge Forum is not about supplanting our idea for someone else's. It is rather a vitalizing process of empowerment for which we come to a more critical understanding of our world, for which we come to better understand our place in it, and for which we come to understand how we might change it. We think that comes from authenticity. We think it comes from a focus on humanization. Freire, from his famous book-length conversation with Myles Horton, observes, "The more people become themselves, the better the democracy."⁴⁵

We seek a process of systemic contamination that will enable the distillation I just described, a constant mixing and settling out, mixing and settling out.

⁴⁵ Freire, Paulo and Horton, Myles. *We make the road by walking*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Begin. Begin again. And, begin from the beginning, once again.

Pedagogically, I have written elsewhere with my friend Milton Brown that this democracy building work is foundationalized in a hopeful curriculum that pivots on three axes of community, consciousness, and courage.⁴⁶

My classes, for example, begin with a focus on *community* – on noticing our interdependence with each other, with others – on reconnecting and suggesting that the promulgation of injustice is enabled by the degree to which we remain disconnected. We think about those things that keep us separate—driven by markets, commodities—and how we are preoccupied by spectacle: reality TV, Play Stations and I-Phones; modern day bread and circus.⁴⁷

And, so we spend our time thinking about alienation—the manifestation of the disease that allows us to become so well-adjusted to injustice.

As educators and students we witness this alienation through:

- (1) The loss of control of our schools (whether through corporate control—textbooks, tests, funding—or school boards or state/federal education departments run by the power elite)—we even see this in universities with the assault on academic freedom and the selling off of the university;
- (2) The loss of control of the curriculum (scripting);
- (3) The fear of the loss of jobs (creating unnecessary competition among workers);
- (4) Merit pay and Race to the Top funds (exacerbating such competition even further);
and
- (5) The increased distance between teacher and student through inauthentic curricula and “banking” approaches to pedagogy.

And, so from there we move to thinking about the concept of occupation. That is, we consider the extent to which we need to re-occupy our lives whether that is through a deepened *consciousness* (replacing the master’s narratives) or reclaiming the space(s) that capitalism has removed from us (as California students, New York students and Republic Windows employees have all shown us, recently). Like the analysis offered earlier in this talk, we seek a structural analysis that overcomes the system’s anesthetizing effect and its encouragement to forget.

Forget, it’s too painful to remember. Forget, the problems are too big. Forget, someone else will do the work. Forget, we have progressed.

⁴⁶ Renner, Adam and Brown, Milton (2006). A hopeful curriculum: Community, praxis, and courage. *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 22(2), pp. 101-122.

⁴⁷ One student remarked to me last year that we’ll never have a revolution as long as we have Bud Light and Monday Night Football.

To retort the system's allure, we seek a minority-position perspective that listens to history's silenced voices. We take a deeper view that crafts new lenses which refract more liberatory possibilities – one that places us in the center of the struggle.

And, this process keeps our focus on liberation. Of liberating ourselves. Of liberating others. Of leaving our safe harbors, leaving the disciplined boundaries—what are, in essence, our prisons, capturing us in the buffer zone between the ruling elite and the oppressed masses.

We seek these ends of liberation through solidarity or what Lynd, again, calls “accompaniment,” that tender experience with humanity.

We can do this by resolving the contradictions in the relationships of teacher/student, oppressor/oppressed, server/served, etc. In dialog and side-by-side work we can build solidarity among colleagues/parents/students. We must take charge of curricula. We must create a compelling public education system premised, primarily, on **equitable conditions** not the meritocratic notion of equality of opportunity.

Education should not be a commodity. Markets should not mediate human relationships.

We can do this by distilling a different democracy, creating processes and experiences that promote dialogue above all else, that hold out hope as possibility (since if the injustice we experience is a given aspect of human nature, then there is no reason to even try), and that prefer a protagonist posturing such that *we* are the democracy.

We are not *represented*. We are representatives as occupiers of our own lives, as both liberator and liberated, at once an individual and part of the greater whole. These processes can be lived in schools. Schools can be resistive sites of massive organization of all peoples interested in social justice. It may be the lone constructive site we have left. We can subversively enact these processes where we have the *courage* to take risks.

Teaching cooperation can be revolutionary. Teaching the silences can break open the possibilities bound up in the deep freeze of standards and curricular banality. Teaching students to take their power can create a new world.

Recently, I was reading Arundhati Roy's latest text, *Fieldnotes on Democracy*. Thinking about how unity and progress have represented doublespeak for bourgeois representation and market reforms, Roy observes the way in which a minority of profiteers (those so effusively admired in Friedman's flat world) destroy the world's largest democracy, India, and degrade its environment. She writes,

What good will forest rights be when there are no more forests? What good will the right to information be if there is no redress for our grievances? What good are rivers without water? What good are plains without

mountains to water and sustain them? It's as though we're hurtling down a cliff in a bus without brakes and fighting over what songs to sing.⁴⁸

What will it take to help *us* see what is happening?

No child left behind? Race to the Top? Free market? Liberal democracy?

What will it take to enable us to not only notice, but to judge in a way that honors humanity toward its fullest potential, especially for the marginalized, disenfranchised, oppressed? Seek the totality.

What will it take to help us enjoin brothers and sisters everywhere in an act of unprecedented solidarity—a solidarity which understands our ultimate liberation is bound up in and wholly dependent upon the liberation of everyone else? Connect our curriculum with the real lives of others.

What might schools offer to such a vision? Certainly not helping them pick out which song is best to sing from a multiple choice list.

What processes must be learned to enact the necessary creative moment? Cooperation, inquiry, critique.

These are the answers and processes I seek with my students and in Jamaica. These are the questions that animate the Rouge Forum toward a more critical analysis of what to do. These are the questions that seem of interest to Defiance College. And, these are the questions that we can answer together.

Indeed, what is to be defied? We must be wary of that which keeps us confused, separated, silenced, and disciplined. We must know what the poisons are. We must understand the devastating outcomes of the free market and global trade for the bulk of humanity.

We need to understand evil, structurally. Undoubtedly, interpersonal conflict, hatred, and violence must be addressed. But, these pale in comparison to the structural violence that obliterates families trapped in the prison-industrial complex, bombed in a so-called war on terror, imprisoned by ghettos, ensnared in sweatshops for the sake of so-called free trade, and betrayed in our long-forgotten country-sides.

We need to understand the harm we do to our environment, the land we desecrate for the profit of the few. We need to understand the long term cost of short sighted policy and the tidy merging of corporations and government. Mixing of that sort has not ended well, historically.

And, we need to reinvigorate our attention on children. Not on test scores, but on live human beings who have ideas, ideals, and hopes.

⁴⁸ Roy, Arundhati (2009). *Field Notes on Democracy*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

This is not done with a clever new strategy in the reading classroom or the latest fad in special education. These may be helpful ingredients, but the task is much more a philosophical and ideological one. We must derive more progressive mental conceptions of the world that understand what kind of alienated society we have created into which we graduate our children.

This new democracy envisioned can best be distilled in the intermingling of K-12 education and teacher formation. As K-12 education becomes more critical, so too do the possibilities of teacher education. As teacher education produces a more insurgent, revolutionary teacher, so K-12 educational outcomes change. And, so the society changes.

Let this iteration of the democracy-building process, the protagonist producing path, involve deeper structural analyses and critical community building projects. Let these seek, then, a leverage point. Positioning our privilege, our immense power, appropriately, we can tip education beyond the milieu of the economic and toward the promise of the aesthetic, existential, and reconstructive. Schools can be massive sites of organization through which we distill a different democracy, one cycle at a time.

Democracy will not be a subject to be studied, but a reality to be lived. It is a process of learning how to occupy our lives. It is coming to understand who we want our work to serve. It is an authentic posture, premised upon teaching who we are and living what we teach. It is a pedagogical moment of creation for which we become midwives to just a little more democracy, just a little more justice, just a little more beauty.

In such a pedagogical process, at one moment, we will eventually give birth to the democracy we seek, to the justice the world needs, to a beauty which we will not be able to name. We must commit to this process. And, we must do it now.

I recognize that in a Freirean move of praxis, these ideas can only be born out in practice. And, then we shape and reshape, mix and settle out.

We can fight back. We must fight back. It sounds like Defiance College wants to make this struggle your struggle.

So, I look forward to our dialog, our distillation, along the way.

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Editorial: Mia Sosa-Provencio

I have had many professors, principals, colleagues and students who have led me down the critical journey that is teaching. I will say, however, that the first time I thought critically about classroom instruction I was 17 years old, and the educational guru that led me to this deeper understanding was another 17 year-old with a flair for slacking off.

Mrs. Parsley, my beloved AP English teacher was going around the room asking questions regarding the poem we were currently reading. She set her sights on Matt, a student who only agreed to take this advanced class under the coercion of his father. Suffice to say that when Ms. Parsley found him sleeping in the back of the room, it was not a complete surprise.

“Matt, wake up. What do you see in the third stanza? What literary device is being used here?” Ms. Parsley asked with more patience than the situation warranted.

“I don’t know, Ms. Parsley,” was his flippant reply.

“Just try, Matt. We went over this yesterday,” she encouraged sweetly.

“I don’t know, Ms. Parsley,” he repeated casually.

“Oh, Matt. It’s a metaphor. The author is comparing the sun to...” The rest of this conversation I cannot fully remember, but Matt’s subsequent remark will forever be burned in my mind.

After receiving the correct answer, Matt replied, “Ms. Parsley, if you already know the answer, then why the h&** are you asking me?” While Matt has since apologized profusely to Ms. Parsley for his outright rude comments and tendency towards afternoon siestas, his point was well taken. His question has since helped to form the critical lens through which I see my own classroom.

While there are many areas of classroom content that truly must be relayed in a question/answer format because of both standardized testing and the need to create a common knowledge base among students, it leaves little room for critical thought. This traditional way of “doing school” does not allow students to go beyond simply answering those questions posed by the teacher. It does not encourage students to formulate and answer critical questions nor reach a destination with no prescribed path.

For as far back as most can remember, teachers were the key to the classroom; we were the voice of expertise in the front of the room. The goal of the classroom has been to make students more like us in both skill and knowledge; however, with all the focus on molding students in this manner, are we as educators truly providing them a deep educational experience? When the goal of the classroom is simply to make our students answer the questions we pose and not to make them competent thinkers, communicators, planners and visionaries, we are not honing the strengths they bring to the classroom.

When educators honor the voice of the generation we have before us, therein lies true transformation of mind. When students are given tools to conceptualize, develop, and carry out projects that they themselves deem as necessary to their community, their school or themselves, they assign themselves more fully to the task and with an enthusiasm that is oftentimes rare in our schools. I have witnessed this firsthand.

Last December, Rio Grande High School English 11 students initiated, planned and carried out what they called *The South Valley Reading Rally* in an attempt to promote and celebrate literacy in their community. After researching the high drop out rates and low literacy scores in Bernalillo County and the South Valley, students began their journey by asking questions such as, “What can we do to affect positive change? Who can we call to action? How can we empower our community?” Students were not only asking the questions and becoming the experts in the classroom, but they were posing critical questions that those who are often deemed “experts” of education have not always had answers to.

In March of this year, the Governor signed into law the Hispanic Education Act, which aims to address the gross achievement gap between Hispanic and Anglo students. It calls teachers to action—it states that our classrooms must reflect the culture of our students in order to fully and effectively serve them. While Hispanics make up the majority in APS, our classrooms still do not “look” like our students in curricular content. When the business of school is resistant to change, we will always get what we have always gotten: a drop-out rate among Latino students that is in the 60% range.

For Latino students with a history of lowered success rates and frustration in the classroom, it is imperative that we, the educators, are not touted as having all the answers. We must foster an educational culture in which the voices of our students drive the curriculum. We must encourage inquiry across the board.

In the words of Kahlil Gibran, “[You] may strive to be like [your children] but seek not to make them like you. For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday”. As long as teachers are the only voice in the room that has validity, students, especially those with a history of educational disenfranchisement, will continue to reject education. We must capitalize on the strengths of this generation and allow them the means to formulate much of their own curriculum through hands-on, inquiry-based learning. We must allow them to ask questions that even we do not have the answers to. For when students are at the center of their own learning as opposed to merely the recipients of age-old, tried and true information, they will voraciously forge paths not yet taken toward their own understanding.

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Announcements:

The **Rouge Forum Conference** is coming: www.rougeforumconference.org. This year's conference will tackle the theme of Education for the Public Interest and will answer such questions as: Transforming the notion of "saving public education" to one of creating education in the public interest, what does teaching and learning for a democratic society look like? How do we learn and teach to get from where we are to where we need to be? How do we stand up for the correctness of our ideas?

This inexpensive four day conference will take place by scenic Geneva Lake. Along with several presentations, panels, and discussions, our two keynote addresses will be provided by: Richard Brosio and Alan Spector.

Call for papers: Issue 17 of the Rouge Forum News: The students speak. The Rouge Forum would like to dedicate Issue 17 to student work: K-12, undergraduate, graduate. If you're a student, consider sending us your work: papers, art, poetry. If you're a K-12 teacher or professor, consider encouraging students who worked on some good papers during the spring semester to submit their work. **Deadline: July 15, 2010.**

Call for papers: Issue 18 of the Rouge Forum News will be dedicated to papers delivered at this year's Rouge Forum conference. **Deadline: September 15, 2010.**

Check out the Rouge Forum on Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rouge_Forum and on [Facebook](#).