FROM
THE EDITOR

Becoming a Whole Nation

A year ago, Americans were full of pride at having elected an African American president. For a moment, people across the political spectrum were celebrating the breakthrough.

But any thought that we had vanquished racism was short-lived. Since the inauguration, race has re-emerged as a wedge issue, threatening to stymie a progressive agenda, galvanize the Right, undercut the aspirations of people of color, and divide poor and working class people of all colors.

The history of the United States is littered with examples of race being used to divide natural allies and block progress. Race was used to keep white indentured servants from making common cause with African slaves following the multiracial Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676. In the early 1900s, Hawaiian plantation owners hired replacement workers of one ethnic background to break strikes by workers of a different background. In the 1940s, southern Democrats killed Harry Truman’s health care reform fearing it could lead to integration of the health care system. Racial fears were used to pass draconian sentencing laws that subject thousands of black and brown young adults to long prison terms, enriching the prison-industrial complex while impoverishing communities and schools. Today, coded racial language is used to divert populist anger at Wall Street into spurious attacks on immigrants.

This issue of YES! Magazine asks how we can resist that sort of fear mongering and instead embrace a new American identity that includes all the races and cultures that make up our country.

I started work on this issue excited to imagine a society with less of the fear, hostility, violence, and hopelessness that racism causes. And I wanted to learn how cross-race organizing—like the mobilization that elected Barack Obama—can build the political clout needed to take on our social and political challenges, including the institutions and practices that marginalize people of color.

But as we talked with the contributors and advisors for this issue, it became clear that the potentials of a post-racist society are much greater than we had imagined. The articles in this issue show possibilities for:

• A strengthened sense of community where diversities of all sorts are valued.
• Enhanced self-respect, as many experienced when the Obama campaign called out our potential for greatness.
• Enrichment of music, theater, film, spoken word, and other art forms that draw on the wide range of cultures that now comprise the United States.
• Cities and schools that welcome all people.
• New leadership from people of all races, able to draw on their respective sources of cultural and ancestral wisdom.

There are some extraordinary people working to make a vision of a just, inclusive society a reality. Some of them are featured in this issue (special thanks to our panelists—see page 18—who also advised us on this issue and authored several of the articles).

Of course, we will never achieve a post-racial utopia. We will always be imperfect at understanding people different than ourselves. What we can do, though, is commit ourselves to building a society that is consciously inclusive at every turn. The visionaries and activists of all colors in this issue have given me renewed hope about the path to what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., called the “beloved community.”

Sarah van Gelder
Executive Editor
THE MISSION
OF YES!
is to support you and
other people worldwide in
building a just, sustainable,
and compassionate world.
In each issue we focus on
a different theme through
these lenses ...

NEW VISIONS
Solving today’s big problems will take
more than a quick fix. These authors
offer clarity about the roots of our
problems and visions of a better way.

WORLD & COMMUNITY
New models that foster justice and
real prosperity, and sustain the Earth’s
living systems. How can we bring these
models to life and put them to work?

THE POWER OF ONE
Stories of people who find their courage,
open their hearts, and discover what it
means to be human in today’s world.

BREAKING OPEN
Humor, story-telling, and the arts—
taking you into unexpected spaces
where business-as-usual breaks open
into new possibilities.

THE ISSUE 53 THEME
America: The Remix

18

Our Future as a Multiracial Society
There’s a new American story—one that embraces all the cultures
and peoples of the United States. Six YES! panelists explore what that
means for activism, identity, and our sense of community.
Moderated by Sarah van Gelder

24
Building Beyond Racism
Young activists who powered the Obama
movement bring real change home.
By Rob “Biko” Baker

27
United by Hard Times
A tough economy makes cross-race
organizing more important than
ever. By Carlos Jimenez

31
What Do You Say
to a Screaming Bigot?
How one woman seeks common
ground with radio shock jocks.
Interview with Pramila Jayapal

48
Generation Mixed
My parents’ risky interracial
marriage made me and my politics
possible. By Adrienne Maree Brown

32
My Life in Black
and White
The revolutionary act of telling your
story. By Faith Adiele

44
Songs to End Racism
Pop star Brett Dennen’s music teaches
kids to stand up to intolerance.
By Madeline Ostrander
The City We All Want to Live In
Solutions to climate change start on our streets.
By Carl Anthony

What White People Fear
A white guy confesses his fears and tells why he seeks out settings beyond his comfort zone. By Robert Jensen

Progress Toward a Multiracial Nation
Milestones on the way to an inclusive, just nation.
By Tim Sanders and Kim Eckart

The City We All Want to Live In
Solutions to climate change start on our streets. By Carl Anthony

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
Nobel Winner Talks Common(s) Sense
Orthodox economics teaches that private property works better than the commons. The newest economic Nobel laureate proves otherwise. Fran Korten interviews Elinor Ostrom

Gaviotas: Village of Hope
Two activists discover the secrets of a Colombian community’s success—surprise and imagination. By Seth Biderman and Christian Casillas

For 12,000 Years We’ve Had It Pretty Good
A new book by a leading science writer tells what we need to do to survive climate change. By Sherry Boschert
The Power of Stuff
This morning, I read Annie Leonard’s article in the Winter 2010 issue of YES! I found it at once uplifting and disheartening.

How thrilling to know that many, many other people have expressed support for “The Story of Stuff” and the economic, social, and personal changes it promotes. While not surprising (for it exists within my own family), it is still terribly sad and disturbing to hear about the vicious response from assorted small-thinking individuals. I commend both YES! and Annie for speaking out about this issue; it is as much the right thing to do as it is difficult.

Janel Crooks
via www.yesmagazine.org

Real heroes avoid leather
I am a longtime fan of your magazine and all the wisdom contained on each of its pages. I was excited to see the theme of the latest edition focused on being a “climate hero” but rather disturbed to see Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins on the cover wearing a jacket made either of animal leather or “pleather” (vinyl, which is produced from plastic resin and chlorine), neither of which is sustainable, clean, or free of damage to our fragile ecosystem.

If we are serious about climate change, animal use—for food and leather products—is a topic of personal change that must be addressed rather than ignored, denied, or avoided. A 2006 United Nations report found that the meat industry produces more greenhouse gases than all the SUVs, cars, trucks, planes, and ships in the world combined.

Being a climate hero begins with a deep examination of personal choices, and we must make changes on the most localized level before we can presume to influence others and change the world. If we are still eating meat and cheese and wearing leather products, then we are in denial.

Denise Mannino
Kirkland, WA

Grass-fed vs. grain-fed beef
Just got my latest issue and opened to the poster of “10 Ways to Change Your Life.” How about making the distinction between grain-fed, feedlot beef (and lamb), and grass-fed, natural/organic beef. Nutritionally, we need our meat and meat fats, but we don’t need them grain-fattened.

So instead of “all you have to do is stop eating beef,” how about “demand grass-fed, organic beef or no beef at all?” This way we can stay healthy, give the cows a natural life, and get rid of feedlots, which is where your major pollution and destruction are originating.

Jessie Ayani
Mount Shasta, CA

Turmoil in Honduras
I would like to thank Dr. Stephen Zunes for reporting on an under-reported issue in world politics today. The Honduran crisis is much different than that which its Latin American neighbors have experienced in years past.

As a recently returned Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras, I can both confirm and refute several claims made by Mr. Zunes.

Although I support former President Manuel Zelaya and agree that democracy was not respected, I believe Dr. Zunes has made the same mistake that the majority of the drop-in Western media has made—underreporting the demonstrations in support of a new government. There were as many coup supporters, rich and poor, as Zelaya supporters.

So before we begin claiming this as a victory for democracy and nonviolent resistance, the Western media needs to spend much more time on the ground and not rush to judgment. Hopefully, sometime in the not-too-distant future, we can conclude that what Mr. Zunes has said is indeed right after all.

Jeremy Anhalt
Bellingham, WA

WANT THIS ISSUE?
www.YesMagazine.org/store
or call 800/937-4451
YES! starts the new year
Thank you for the wonderful calendar, which arrived today. It will go on my list of calendars that do not get recycled at the end of the year. This one is a keeper, as are your magazines.

Valerie Cranmer
Lugoff, SC

YES! online or in print? Both!
I might be interested in getting the YES! weekly newsletter updates, but not if they contain material found in the paper version of the magazine. What can you tell me about the information overlap in the weekly updates, the website, and the magazine?

April Pickrel
Ypsilanti, MI

Editor’s note: YES! This Week offers mainly online-only content. We are now posting fresh stories daily on the YES! website; the weekly e-mail will highlight those we think will be of most interest, or you can subscribe to our regular newsletter. Both are free!

A fuller description and archive of our newsletters can be found at www.yesmagazine.org/enews.

Jake Negovan
San Antonio, TX

Moving forward
“12 Innovations From the ’00s That Could Save Us” (www.yesmagazine.org) packaged many of the ideal aspects of my own life and the future I hope to develop in my surrounding world, while purposely avoiding any negativity. The optimism was refreshing and helped remind me there are positive movements that are affecting change.

Brett Dennen: Music to change lives

Millie Humes, Eric Magnuson, Sarah Miller, Gifford Pinchot

WEBSITE:
www.yesmagazine.org

Volunteers
Celia Alario, Katlin Bailey, Sharon Baker, Samantha Buki, Susan Callan, Brenda Clarino, Lisa Down, Preston Enright, Valerie Groszeman, Jenny Heins, Bruce and Nancy Herbert, Mollie Herman, Michael Kearney, Eva Klett, Barbara Kowalski, Jonathan Lawson, Kim MacPherson, Marcia Meyers, Jan Mosher, Ben Packard, Grace Porter, Joanne Reno, Emerson Riehle, Erica Ryberg, Jan Strout, Richard Wilson, Lisa Yarrow

YES! (ISSN 1089-6651) is published quarterly for $24 per year by the Positive Futures Network at 284 Madrona Way NE, Suite 116, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-2870. Periodicals postage paid at Seattle, WA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: send address changes to YES! 284 Madrona Way NE, Suite 116, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-2870. SUBSCRIPTIONS: $24 per year. CALL: 800/937-4457; 206/842-0216 FAX: 206/842-5208 WEBSITE: www.yesmagazine.org E-MAIL: yes@yesmagazine.org

YES! is part of the Creative Commons movement.
We don’t use standard copyright licensing on our work because we want you to pass along our stories of hope and positive change. See our online Reprints Page for easy steps to take when sharing our content: www.yesmagazine.org/reprints
HAITI

“Pro-poor” relief for earthquake-ravaged Haiti

In the aftermath of the Jan. 12 earthquake that is believed to have killed more than 150,000 people, a call is growing for more long-term, sustainable solutions, such as debt relief.

The Caribbean island nation, which suffers from a legacy of political unrest, environmental devastation, and financial ruin, has staggered under the weight of debt since it won independence from France more than 200 years ago.

Today, the poverty-stricken nation of some 9 million people is more than $1 billion in debt, and relief organizations and some government leaders are pushing for solutions that allow Haitians to focus on “recovery, not repayment.”

The World Council of Churches and other groups have pushed for aid to come in the form of grants, not loans, so that Haitians can move forward with rebuilding their country without shouldering ever more debt. Canada’s more than $100 million in assistance, for example, comes from grants; Canada canceled Haiti’s debt last fall. In late January, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez canceled Haiti’s $295 million debt to Petrocaribe, Venezuela’s regional energy distributor.

Humanitarian aid was disorganized and debt relief contentious—and ultimately, limited—after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Nick Dearden, director of the Jubilee Debt Campaign, appealed to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and governments around the world to avoid the “half measures” that followed the tsunami and to pursue debt cancellation.

Robert Glasser, international secretary general of CARE, said help needs to extend beyond the immediate emergency to reconstruction. He urged donors to back not only debt relief but policies and programs that are “pro-poor.” “This is not the first nor will it be the last natural disaster to hit Haiti,” said Glasser. “But it is our chance as a community to relieve the country from a terrible debt burden and help Haitians build a new future on a new foundation of equitable development.”
HUMAN RIGHTS

Protests mount against Israeli blockade of Gaza

In a series of protests across the Arab world, activists have demanded an end to the siege of the Gaza Strip and expressed outrage at the Egyptian government for actions that reflect the political will of Israel and the United States.

The largest of these protests was the Gaza Freedom March, in which 1,362 activists from 43 countries gathered in Egypt to attempt to cross the border into Gaza. The march, which began Dec. 30, occurred one year after an Israeli bombing campaign left approximately 1,400 dead in the Gaza Strip.

The march was meant to raise awareness of Israel and Egypt's blockade of Gaza, which is considered illegal under international human rights and humanitarian law. Despite extensive planning and initial approval from Egyptian authorities, the Freedom March was halted when Egypt restricted the number of entries to just 100 participants and canceled the buses that would take the activists to the Rafah border crossing, citing “security reasons.”

Israel has maintained its blockade since June 2006, preventing desperately needed food and medical supplies from reaching Gaza’s 1.5 million citizens. Exports also have been almost completely restricted, devastating the Gazan economy. The siege could worsen in the coming months as Egypt continues construction of an underground security barrier meant to block the tunnels running between Gaza and Egypt. Israel maintains that the tunnels are used to smuggle munitions into Gaza. The tunnels, however, also have become a main thoroughfare for food and medical supplies not allowed through the sealed borders.

In the weeks following the Gaza Freedom March, crowds gathered in other Arab nations protesting the building of the underground barrier and accusing Egypt of acting as an agent of the Israelis and U.S. governments.

Margit Christenson is a writer based in New York City.

Congress is expected to take up immigration reform this year. Demonstrators in Los Angeles last year release 100 white doves at a rally for immigrant rights.

ECONOMY

Chicago ward tries citizen budgeting

In a city with a history of corruption and lack of transparency, one elected official is restoring meaning to the term “public funds.”

Alderman Joe Moore, of Chicago’s 49th Ward, has launched what is believed to be the United States’ first experiment with “participatory budgeting,” a grassroots process that lets residents allocate municipal funding as they see fit. The

residents of the far north-side ward will oversee the budgeting of this year’s $1 million in infrastructure funds. The city allocates these funds annually to alderpeople to use at their discretion. Moore decided his residents would know what infrastructure improvements were needed better than any government official.

The process started in November 2009 with neighborhood meetings facilitated by ward officials. There, any ward resident could express an opinion about how to spend the money. The process was first used in Brazil in the 1980s and has become popular in Latin America and around the world.

In the 49th Ward, suggestions ranged from more street lighting to installing community gardens. From the neighborhood meetings, residents elected representatives, who then divided into subcommittees to deal with the different project categories, like arts and public safety.

In March, committee representatives will present ward residents with a list of final projects for review. By April, the projects should be underway. If everything goes well, Moore has promised to do this every year and encourage other politicians to follow his lead.

Jeff Raderstrong is a Washington, D.C., writer who blogs at changechanty.blogspot.com.

ALSO...

Oregon voters in January approved two measures that will increase the income tax on wealthy households and on corporations.
The conference will explore the issue of climate debt, the idea that industrialized nations—those most responsible for greenhouse-gas emissions—should give substantial aid to the poorer countries that most often suffer the consequences of climate change. Also on the agenda is the proposal of an international court for environmental crimes, which could try nations for crimes against nature, such as the dumping of toxic waste or the destruction of natural resources.

Bolivia was one of five countries to block a consensus on the Copenhagen Accord that came out of the United Nations climate negotiations in December, the World Conference of the People on Climate Change aims to unite nations that want a stronger agreement. Heads of state from Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba are expected to attend the conference in April in Cochabamba.

The conference will explore the issue of climate debt, the idea that industrialized nations—those most responsible for greenhouse-gas emissions—should give substantial aid to the poorer countries that most often suffer the consequences of climate change. Also on the agenda is the proposal of an international court for environmental crimes, which could try nations for crimes against nature, such as the dumping of toxic waste or the destruction of natural resources.

Bolivia was one of five countries to block a consensus on the Copenhagen Accord, claiming a small group of wealthy nations had drawn it up in secret. Many saw Morales as a roadblock to an agreement. Along with advocating for climate debt, he challenged the conference to hold global temperature increases at 1 degree Celsius (as opposed to the 2-degree limit the conference decided upon). This stricter limit on temperature increase would require a far faster and more costly response from industrialized nations to curb greenhouse-gas emissions.

“Our objective is to save [all of] humanity and not just half of humanity,” Morales said in a speech at Copenhagen. “We are here to save Mother Earth. Our objective is to reduce climate change to under 1 C. [Above this] many islands will disappear, and Africa will suffer a holocaust.”

—Margit Christenson

ALSO...

Scotland’s remote Isle of Eigg has been awarded a share of a 1 million-pound prize from the United Kingdom’s National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. The organization’s Big Green Challenge gave Eigg 300,000 pounds to support the island’s commitment to renewable energy.

Residents purchased the island in 1997 and have since installed solar and hydropower facilities that generate nearly all of Eigg’s electricity needs. According to the Ecologist, Eigg residents will use the prize money for additional energy-efficiency projects.

California has made mandatory its green-building code, “Calgreen.” The nation’s first statewide green-building law requires all new buildings to use recycled materials and reduce water consumption. Critics, including the Natural Resources Defense Council and the U.S. Green Building Council, say the regulations aren’t strict enough and may conflict with stronger municipal green-building codes.

VOTING

Appeals court rules inmates entitled to voting rights

A federal appeals court in January ruled that felons incarcerated in Washington State have been illegally barred from voting. A panel of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals said the state’s prison system is “infected” with racial discrimination and therefore violates voting laws.

The majority ruled that the ban violated the 1965 National Voting Rights Act on grounds of racial discrimination. According to a University of Washington
study, racial and ethnic minorities make up 12 percent of Washington's population, but account for 36 percent of prison inmates. African Americans are nine times more likely to be incarcerated than whites; because of this, 25 percent of black men in Washington are disenfranchised from voting.

A single plaintiff first brought the case to court in 1996; by the time of this ruling, five more had joined. All are members of minority groups claiming political discrimination by the state. Similar cases in other states have gone to trial, but this is the first ruling in favor of inmates. Only Vermont and Maine allow incarcerated felons to vote. Washington State Attorney General Rob McKenna has appealed the Ninth Circuit decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Jeff Raderstrong

FOOD

Sweden labels food with CO2 data

The Swedish government in 2009 announced new food guidelines that recommend eating habits based on greenhouse-gas emissions. Experts say these guidelines, if heeded by consumers, could decrease Sweden's emissions by 20 to 50 percent.

More than 92 percent of Swedes want more information about the “green credentials” of their food, and producers responded to satisfy customers. Some Swedish companies have labeled their products to show how many kilograms of carbon dioxide were released into the atmosphere during production.

One Swedish burger chain, Max Burger, offers beef alternatives and signed on enthusiastically to the new recommendations. It became the first restaurant chain to publish carbon footprints of menu items to encourage people to eat less beef.

Determining food’s carbon footprint is difficult and nuanced. Complex production lines make it difficult to track the carbon footprint of an individual product, and consumer suggestions are not as simple as “eat less meat.” For example, the guidelines discourage Swedes from eating cucumbers and tomatoes because they can only be grown in Sweden in energy-consuming greenhouses.

Low-impact vegetables like carrots are recommended over the less climate-friendly ones.

Jeff Raderstrong

ALSO...

Washington State lawmakers have banned BPA (Bisphenol A) in baby bottles and food containers for children younger than 3.

Washington joins Minnesota and Connecticut in prohibiting some BPA products. The state of Wisconsin is considering a ban.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently reversed a 2008 finding that BPA, the main component of polycarbonate plastic, was safe. The agency said BPA should be studied further for potential health risks to children.

Plastics made with BPA typically have a number 7 on the bottom or the letters “PC” in the recycling triangle.

The legislature will have to hammer out differences in House and Senate versions of the bill, the House version extends the ban to sports bottles. The rule will go into effect in 2011.

The Worldwatch Institute’s State of the World 2010 warns that global consumerism is unsustainable and urges a substantial cultural shift away from buying and toward simplicity.

The economy may propel consumers in that direction. Last fall, a New York Times/CBS News poll found that Americans are spending less money and instead turning to cultural events, hobbies, and family activities. Lower consumer spending is expected during a recession, but the trend toward “doing more,” experts said, is new.

Jeff Raderstrong

President Barack Obama, referring in his State of the Union address to the U.S. Supreme Court decision easing restrictions on campaign spending

Supreme Court Justices John Roberts and Samuel Alito, left, prior to President Obama’s State of the Union address in January.

www.YesMagazine.org/citizens-united

Fran Korten’s 10 ways to fight corporate power

The legislature will have to hammer out differences in House and Senate versions of the bill, the House version extends the ban to sports bottles. The rule will go into effect in 2011.

The Worldwatch Institute’s State of the World 2010 warns that global consumerism is unsustainable and urges a substantial cultural shift away from buying and toward simplicity.

The economy may propel consumers in that direction. Last fall, a New York Times/CBS News poll found that Americans are spending less money and instead turning to cultural events, hobbies, and family activities. Lower consumer spending is expected during a recession, but the trend toward “doing more,” experts said, is new.

Jeff Raderstrong

President Barack Obama, referring in his State of the Union address to the U.S. Supreme Court decision easing restrictions on campaign spending

Supreme Court Justices John Roberts and Samuel Alito, left, prior to President Obama’s State of the Union address in January.

www.YesMagazine.org/citizens-united

Fran Korten’s 10 ways to fight corporate power

The legislature will have to hammer out differences in House and Senate versions of the bill, the House version extends the ban to sports bottles. The rule will go into effect in 2011.

The Worldwatch Institute’s State of the World 2010 warns that global consumerism is unsustainable and urges a substantial cultural shift away from buying and toward simplicity.

The economy may propel consumers in that direction. Last fall, a New York Times/CBS News poll found that Americans are spending less money and instead turning to cultural events, hobbies, and family activities. Lower consumer spending is expected during a recession, but the trend toward “doing more,” experts said, is new.

Jeff Raderstrong
CAROL BECKLEY
Cultivating a Rural Community

Rural Douglas County, Oregon—historically dependent on logging and manufacturing—is home to one of the state’s highest unemployment rates. But in the tiny town of Elkton, a retired teacher has turned her dream into a community hub.

The Elkton Community Education Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to environmental, educational, and social enterprise activities, thrives on the banks of the Umpqua River. Former business teacher Carol Beckley bought the land in 1998, aiming to offer “further education for all ages.”

Today, thanks to fundraising by Beckley and her volunteers, the center includes a 4.5-acre Native Oregon Plant Park, gardens, an amphitheater, a library, and a butterfly pavilion. Students have helped assemble three books on plants, and in recent years, the center has offered a youth employment program.

“Several of our ‘grads’ have earned their way through college using skills they learned at ECEC,” Beckley says.

RICARDO NAVARRO
Choosing a Sustainable Path

Ricardo Navarro used to be a professor of mechanical engineering in his native El Salvador. Then he had an epiphany. Why build new roads and shopping centers, he wondered, when forests and streams are destroyed in the process? Within a few years, he founded El Salvador’s largest environmental NGO: the Salvadoran Center for Appropriate Technology (CESTA).

CESTA’s major project was the “Forest of Reconciliation” on the Guazapa volcano, where 75,000 trees were planted in memory of victims of the Salvadoran Civil War. More recent projects include promoting bicycling and bike maintenance in cities, especially among young people. In rural areas, CESTA has installed dry composting latrines in an effort to stave off disease and groundwater pollution.

Says Navarro: “The struggle we have is basically the struggle to have a better life for everybody—a struggle for survival.”

HAI VO
Revamping the Cafeteria Menu

Hai Vo, 22, is on a mission to educate young people about the value of “real” food: ecologically sound, community-based, and fair to both producers and consumers.

Motivated by his own shift toward a healthy lifestyle—and his subsequent weight loss—Vo in 2007 co-founded the University of California Irvine (UCI) chapter of the Real Food Challenge, a national youth movement to promote a just and sustainable food system. Vo organized a series of dinners, lectures, field trips, and discussions on campus, and spent months examining the origin and production processes of every food item in the UCI dining services.

A winner of a 2009 Brower Youth Award, Vo also worked with the UC Sustainable Food Services Working Group to establish a statewide sustainable food policy, which is committed to serving 20 percent real food throughout the UC system by 2020.

www.YesMagazine.org/hai-vo
Watch Vo’s Brower Award speech

BEVERLY WRIGHT
Cleaning up New Orleans

Hurricane Katrina destroyed Beverly Wright’s home. But she was more concerned with the storm’s long-term impact on the community.

As head of the Dillard University Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ), she partnered with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) to test local soil in the wake of the hurricane. The tests turned up dangerous levels of lead and arsenic.

Wright lobbied the EPA for money to help clean up the contaminated soil, but rather than wait, the DSCEJ, along with the NRDC and the United Steelworkers of America, has built a network of local volunteers to pursue the cleanup.

The work is just the latest effort for Wright, who helped found the DSCEJ in 1992. The center not only mapped toxic emissions in the United States by race and social class; it also has trained disadvantaged young people in hazardous material removal.
COMMENTARY :: Tanya Dawkins

A LITTLE TAX ON THE BIG CASINO

So here we are. It’s as if the whole world is channeling the scene from the movie, Jerry Maguire, when Cuba Gooding Jr. jumps up and down shouting, “Show me the money!” Fund universal health care and climate policy, extend unemployment benefits, and rebuild crumbling infrastructure.

Remember the claims that government is your enemy and that only deregulated business powered by the market’s infallible wisdom can sustain democracy and create growth, jobs, and security? No such talk now as everyone scrambles for a place in the bailout line behind the banks. But there is talk of a way to get the money: a financial transactions tax (FTT).

Currency speculation and financial deregulation topped a recent U.N. Conference on Trade and Development special report as root causes of the recent breakdown of the global economy.

Existing regulations encourage casino-like financial markets. Trillions of dollars in currency trades, for example, do nothing to create real jobs, goods, and services. They only create paper profits from momentary exchange-rate fluctuations.

This lightning-fast, globe-trotting speculation easily eludes regulation and taxation. Yet it can destabilize entire economies and it places more grounded, long-term business and investment at a significant competitive disadvantage.

An FTT could help with both the need to rein in speculation and the need to fund vital projects. The Center for Economic and Policy Research estimates that an FTT of only one-half of one percent would generate at least $60 billion to $100 billion dollars in the United States alone.

This would amount to two pennies for every $4 invested—a pittance for the long-term investor.

But for the speculators, who depend on trillions in quick trades, it would reverse the risk-cost-benefit equation and create an exponentially higher cost. It would give the advantage to long-term, productive investment.

Beyond the revenue potential and discouraging harmful speculation, the tax would have a powerful multiplier effect because it introduces an enforceable mechanism for requiring markets and financial systems to give back to the people, economies, and communities on which they depend. They must contribute their fair share. No more. No less.

The G20 convened in Pittsburgh last September amid rising calls for making an FTT the heart of global economic reform. Former German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrück voiced his support followed by a nod from Chancellor Angela Merkel. U.K. Prime Minister Gordon Brown and French President Nicolas Sarkozy have each supported slightly different versions of the tax.

The G20 missed that opportunity to push this proposal forward, but since the September meeting, they have released general, non-binding language that the financial sector should do more to compensate for its role in the economic crisis. Domestically, the Obama administration has proposed a Bank Responsibility Tax targeted at recouping federal bailout funds. The administration is also expected to propose new limitations on the level of risk that banks in the United States can undertake.

These measures are important, but insufficient to respond to what is called for on both the domestic and international fronts.

The International Labor Organization estimates that the economic crisis will put 51 million people out of work. In the United States, unemployment, hunger, homelessness, and insecurity have reached alarming rates.

There is still time to step up to the need for the kind of ambitious, globally minded, and innovative public policy that an FTT represents. The June G20 meeting in Canada, the U.N. General Assembly, and the debate in Washington, D.C., and capitals around the world are the key venues.

The outcome, of course, depends on whether or not policymakers think they can get away with ignoring such an obvious and strategic opportunity to chart a new path and relieve human suffering. If they hear from their constituents, it won’t be so easy to ignore. If the public keeps the pressure on, it just might happen.

Tanya Dawkins is a member of the YES! Magazine board of directors, and the founder and executive director of the Global-Local Links Project, an initiative working to put people and communities at the center of the global economy. She is an independent analyst, social entrepreneur, writer, and regular commentator on the interconnectedness of global and local issues.
Common(s) Sense Wins One

ELINOR OSTROM WAS AN UNUSUAL CHOICE FOR THE 2009 NOBEL MEMORIAL PRIZE IN ECONOMIC SCIENCES.

For one thing, she is the first woman to receive the prize. Her Ph.D. is in political science, not economics (though she minored in economics, collaborates with many economists, and considers herself a political economist). But what makes this award particularly special is that her work is about cooperation, while standard economics focuses on competition.

Ostrom’s seminal book, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, was published in 1990. But her research on common property goes back to the early 1960s, when she wrote her dissertation on groundwater in California. In 1973 she and her husband,
Fran Korten: When you first learned that you had won the Nobel Prize in Economics, were you surprised?

Elinor Ostrom: Yes. It was quite surprising. I was both happy and relieved.

Fran: Why relieved?

Elinor: Well, relieved in that I was doing a bunch of research through the years that many people thought was very radical and people didn’t like. As a person who does interdisciplinary work, I didn’t fit anywhere. I was relieved that, after all these years of struggle, someone really thought it did add up. That’s very nice.

And it’s very nice for the team that I’ve been a part of here at the Workshop. We have a different style of organizing. It is an interdisciplinary center—we have graduate students, visiting scholars, and faculty working together. I never would have won the Nobel but for being a part of that enterprise.

Fran: It’s interesting that your research is about people learning to cooperate. And your Workshop at the university is also organized on principles of cooperation.

Elinor: I have a new book coming out in May entitled Working Together, written with Amy Poteete and Marco Janssen. It is on collective actions in the commons. What we’re talking about is how people work together. We’ve used an immense array of different methods to look at this question—case studies, including my own dissertation and Amy’s work, modeling, experiments, large-scale statistical work. We show how people use multiple methods to work together.

Fran: Many people associate “the commons” with Garrett Hardin’s famous essay “The Tragedy of the Commons.” He says that if, for example, you have a pasture that everyone in a village has access to, then each person will put as many cows on that land as he can to maximize his own benefit, and pretty soon the pasture will be overgrazed and become worthless. What’s the difference between your perspective and Hardin’s?

Elinor: Well, I don’t see the human as hopeless. There’s a general tendency to presume people just act for short-term profit. But anyone who knows about small town businesses and how people in a community relate to one another realizes that many of those decisions are not just for profit and that humans do try to organize and solve problems.

If you are in a fishery or have a pasture and you know your family’s long-term benefit is that you don’t destroy it, and if you can talk with the other people who use that resource, then you may well figure out rules that fit that local setting and organize to enforce them. But if the community doesn’t have a good way of communicating with each other or the costs of self-organization are too high, then they won’t organize, and there will be failures.

Fran: So, are you saying that Hardin is sometimes right?

Elinor: Yes. People say I disproved him, and I come back and say “No, that’s not right. I’ve not disproved him. I’ve shown that his assertion that common property will always be degraded is wrong.” But he was addressing a problem of considerable significance that we need to take seriously. It’s just that he went too far. He said people could never manage the commons well.

At the Workshop we’ve done experiments where we create an artificial form of common property—such as an imaginary fishery or pasture, and we bring people into a lab and have them make decisions about that property.
When we don’t allow any communication among the players, then they overharvest. But when people can communicate, particularly on a face-to-face basis, and say, “Well, gee, how about if we do this? How about we do that?” Then they can come to an agreement.

Fran: But what about the “free-rider” problem—where some people abide by the rules and some people don’t? Won’t the whole thing fall apart?

Elinor: Well if the people don’t communicate and get some shared norms and rules, that’s right, you’ll have that problem. But if they get together and I unglued me—because I wasn’t expecting it—was the work of Robert Netting, an anthropologist who had been studying the alpine commons for a very long time. He studied Swiss peasants and then studied in Africa too. He was quite disturbed that people were saying that Africans were primitive because they used common property so frequently and they didn’t know about the benefits of private property. The implication was we’ve got to impose private property rules on them. Netting said, “Are the Swiss peasants stupid? They use common property also.”

Let’s think about this a bit. In the valleys, they use private property, there are “spotty” land environments, it really doesn’t make sense to put up fences and have small private plots.

Fran: Lin, if you were to have a sit-down session with someone with a big influence on natural resources policy—say Robert Zoellick, head of the World Bank, or Ken Salazar, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, what would be your advice?

Elinor: No panaceas! We tend to want simple formulas. We have two main prescriptions: privatize the resource or make it state property with uniform rules. But sometimes the people who say, “Hey folks, this is a project that we’re all going to have to contribute to. Now, let’s figure it out,” they can make it work. For example, if it’s a community garden, they might say, “Do we agree every Saturday morning we’re all going to go down to the community garden, and we’re going to take roll and we’re going to put the roll up on a bulletin board?” A lot of communities have figured out subtle ways of making everyone contribute, because if they don’t, those people are noticeable.

Fran: So public shaming and public honoring are one key to managing the commons?

Elinor: Shaming and honoring are very important. We don’t have as much of an understanding of that. There are scholars who understand that, but that’s not been part of our accepted way of thinking about collective action.

Fran: Do you have a favorite example of where people have been able to self-organize to manage property in common?

Elinor: One that I read early on that just while up in the alpine areas, they use common property. So the same people know about private property and common property, but they choose to use common property for the alpine areas. Why? Well, the alpine areas are what Netting calls “spotty.” The rainfall is high in one section one year, and the snow is great, and it’s rich. But the other parts of the area are dry. Now if you put fences up for private property, then Smith’s got great grass one year—he can’t even use it all—and Brown doesn’t have any. So, Netting argued, there are places where it makes sense to have an open pasture rather than a closed one. Then he gives you a very good idea of the wide diversity of the particular rules that people have used for managing that common land.

Fran: Why were Netting’s findings so surprising to you?

Elinor: I had grown up thinking that land was something that would always move to private property. I had done my dissertation on groundwater in California, so I was familiar with the management of water as a commons. But when I read Netting, I realized that when are living on the resource are in the best position to figure out how to manage it as a commons.

Fran: Is there a role for government in those situations?

Elinor: We need institutions that enable people to carry out their management roles. For example, if there’s conflict, you need an open, fair court system at a higher level than the people’s resource management unit. You also need institutions that provide accurate knowledge. The United States Geological Survey is one that I point to repeatedly. They don’t come in and try to make proposals as to what you should do. They just do a really good job of providing accurate scientific knowledge, particularly for groundwater basins such as where I did my Ph.D. research years ago. I’m not against government. I’m just against the idea that it’s got to be some bureaucracy that figures everything out for people.

Fran: How important is it that there is a match between a governing jurisdiction and the area of the resource to be managed?
**Elinor:** To manage common property you need to create boundaries for an area at a size similar to the problem the people are trying to cope with. But it doesn’t need to be a formal jurisdiction. Sometimes public officials don’t even know that the local people have come to some agreements. It may not be in the courts, or even written down. That is why sometimes public authorities wipe out what local people have spent years creating.

**Fran:** You’ve done your research on small- and medium-sized natural resource jurisdictions. How about the global commons? We have the problems of climate change and oceans that are dying. Are there lessons from your work that are relevant to these massive problems we’re now facing?

**Elinor:** I really despair over the oceans. There is a very interesting article in Science on the “roving bandit.” It is so tempting to go along the coast and scoop up all the fish you can and then move on. With very big boats, you can do that. I think we could move towards solving that problem, but right now there are not many instrumentalities for doing that.

Regarding global climate change, I’m more hopeful. There are local public benefits that people can receive at the same time they’re generating benefits for the global environment. Take health and transportation as an example. If more people would walk or bicycle to work and use their car only when they have to go some distance, then their health would be better, the fish in the oceans would be better, and the atmosphere would be better. Of course, if it’s just a few people, it won’t matter, but if more people feel “This is the kind of life I should be living,” that can substantially help the global problem. Similarly, if we invest in re-doing the insulation of a lot of buildings, we can save money as well as help the global environment. Yes, we want some global action but boy, if we just sit around and wait for that? Come on!

**Fran:** Do you have a message for the general public?

**Elinor:** We need to get people away from the notion that you have to have a fancy car and a huge house. Some of the homes that have been built in the last 10 years just appall me. Why do humans need huge homes? I was born poor and I didn’t know you bought clothes at anything but the Goodwill until I went to college. Some of our mentality about what it means to have a good life is, I think, not going to help us in the next 50 years. We have to think through how to choose a meaningful life where we’re helping one another in ways that really help the Earth.

**Fran:** Let’s look ahead 20 years. What would you hope that the world will understand about managing common property systems?

**Elinor:** What we need is a broader sense of what we call “social ecological systems.” We need to look at the biological side and the social side with one framework rather than 30 different languages. That is big, but I now have some of my colleagues very interested. Some of them are young, and what I find encouraging is that with a bunch of us working together, I can see us moving ahead in the next 20 years or so. Twenty years from now, at 96, I probably won’t be as active.

**Fran:** Not as active? I wouldn’t bet on that.

---

**8 Keys to a Successful Commons**

1. Define clear group boundaries.
2. Match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions.
3. Ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.
4. Make sure the rulemaking rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.
5. Develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members’ behavior.
6. Use graduated sanctions for rule violators.
7. Provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.
8. Build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.

Adapted from Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action, edited by Elinor Ostrom, 1990
The average American’s debt on credit cards, auto loans, and other fixed payments in 2008: $16,600  
Amount of gross federal, state, and local debt per capita in the United States for the 2009 Fiscal Year: $51,548.30  
Amount owed by Corey Taylor of Chicago in 2007, when he faked his own death to avoid paying his Verizon phone bill: $175  
Internal temperature, in degrees Celsius, a popcorn kernel must reach before it pops: 180  
Estimated number of reported U.S. home structure fires involving clothes dryers or washing machines in 2006: 17,700  
Amount of direct property damage that ensued from those fires: $194 million  
Percentage of Australian and New Zealand population that air-dries its laundry: 90  
Total minutes spent on Facebook in the U.S. in April 2008: 1.7 billion  
In April 2009: 13.9 billion  
Estimated number of TVs sent to U.S. recyclers following the June 2009 conversion to digital broadcasting: 27,790,564  
Estimated tons of lead from those TVs that will be dumped in developing countries by purported U.S. “recyclers”: 56,000  
Percentage of regional GDP spent on transportation in car-based cities: 12–15  
Percentage of regional GDP spent on transportation in mass transit-based cities: 5–8  
Federal government transportation expenditures on highways in fiscal year 2006: $2.3 billion  
Federal government transportation expenditures on mass transit in fiscal year 2006: $0.1 billion  
As of 2008, number of Emmy Awards won by Sesame Street: 122  
Number of individuals who self-identified as living with a committed same-sex partner in the 2000 U.S. Census: 594,391  
Percentage of same-sex couples between the ages of 22 and 55 raising children in the U.S.: 39  
Number of significant differences identified in peer group relationships, sexual identity, or relationships with fathers or other males in a study comparing the children of lesbian mothers to those of straight mothers: 0  
Percentage of U.S. seniors who take five or more prescription drugs daily: 51  
Percentage of those who do not feel knowledgeable enough about the drugs they’re prescribed or their potential side effects: 34

Complete citations at www.yesmagazine.org/ptc
1. Associated Content, Business and Finance, January 6, 2009  
2. USGovernmentSpending.com, October 2009  
4. NationMaster.com, 2005  
7. Nielsen Online, June 2, 2009  
8. Basel Action Network, June 12, 2009  
11. Sesame Workshop, 2009  
12. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, September 2005  
AMERICA: THE REMIX

Our crises—from the economy to the climate—are too big and too immediate to allow race to continue dividing us. In this issue, we bring you stories of the people and collaborations that are helping our nation finally embrace its identity as a multiracial society.

Who We Are Now. The United States used to be thought of as a predominantly white country. That’s changing.

Signs of a New American Identity. Stories of people, communities, and groups strengthened by diversity.

Building Beyond Racism. The young people energized by the Obama campaign are bringing real change home.

What Do You Say? How one woman finds the courage to take the immigration dialogue to talk radio.

My Life in Black and White. Sharing stories is one way to break through stereotypes and build respect.

100 Years of Progress. Some progress and setbacks on the path toward a multiracial nation.

A City We’d Like to Live In. How to make our cities just, inclusive, and green.

What White People Fear. And how to get over it.

Songs that Fight Racism. What pop star Brett Dennen’s music teaches kids about getting along.
AMERICA: THE REMIX

BARACK OBAMA’S ELECTION DIDN’T LAUNCH A POST-RACIAL ERA.
BUT A RACIALLY JUST, INCLUSIVE, AND EVEN LOVING SOCIETY IS STILL POSSIBLE,
SAYS A YES! MAGAZINE PANEL OF VISIONARIES. Moderated by Sarah van Gelder

Q: IN THE YEAR 2042, people of color will be in the majority in the United States. They already are in many of our cities and farming areas. Yet America still imagines itself—on television, in advertising, and in political rhetoric—as racially white and culturally European. What would it mean to change our self-image and recognize that we’re made up of a mixture of races, nationalities, and cultures?

Carl Anthony: I believe that the biggest change would be the changing of our imagined community. The Eurocentric view of the world rests on a story that goes back probably five centuries. The fact is, everyone has ancestors that go back 200,000 years. The opportunity is to actually develop a shared story that includes everybody and also includes the Earth.

Carlos Jimenez: We’d have an opportunity to break free from chasing a false expectation about who we’re supposed to be. A lot of people go through self-denial in order to conform to the image of white European society. We start
Adrienne Maree Brown: Obama’s election brought a black man into office, but does he bring black culture with him? How do we carry culture forward along with biological race—which is not even a scientific reality? How do we learn the lessons from our history of displacement, slavery, and colonization, and discover each other and all the cultural history that we carry?

With the ecological situation we’re in, it’s ancestral knowledge that we especially need to connect with. Then we can access the secrets for taking care of the planet that we’re on.

Grace Lee Boggs: We need to understand the diversity emerging in this society not only in terms of race. For example, people with physical disabilities are giving us insight into a culture of the heart and of the spirit that can help us evolve.

Carl: I think a pivotal point in our story is the period of European expansion and colonization, which touched every single person on the planet and will be shocked at how swiftly things change in the next century. Nobody thought that the Soviet Union would disappear, but it did.

I think we need a new story and we need it to be an inclusive story that has all of these dimensions in it: race, class, gender, generations, as well as our relationship with the natural world.

Sarah: Do you see signs of this new culture and this new story emerging?

Adrienne: In my work with national organizations like the Ruckus Society, the Allied Media Conference, and now...
the US Social Forum, the number one thing I see is the emergence of wholeness. Folks recognize that health care cannot be separated from the environment or the economy. And direct action strategy can’t stand alone—it has to be part of a holistic strategy that includes negotiation, relationship building, and what happens after there is some success. This wholeness is coming from leaders who are getting more comfortable showing up in their whole identity.

Carlos: I agree about restoring wholeness. At the last World Social Forum, the indigenous Aymara people from the Andes brought the concept of *buen vivir*, which is about living life in harmony and equilibrium among men, women, different communities, and above all between humans and the natural world.

I was blown away. And when I talked with folks from different countries, with different economic, political, and social realities, we discovered that we have a shared agreement of where we want to go. We will take different roads, but ultimately, we have a shared idea about harmony and equality.

Carl: Wholeness also means taking responsibility for directing and leading society. As long as we just protest against somebody else governing, we run up against limitations. In Afghanistan, for example, it’s no longer sufficient to be anti-war.

Sarah: Let’s look at the generational divide. What strengths can each generation contribute to the creation of a new American story?

Biko: If you talk to African American men under the age of 30, I think most young, but I’m worried about dying.

Carl: I have to support what Biko said. As an African American man now turning 70, it has been painful to watch the proliferation of progressive, social movements over the last 30 or 40 years that have forgotten African American men. You see people facing homicide and going to prison. These survival issues have been marginalized in the public conversation about progressive causes.

Grace: In Detroit, we have ex-cons coming back to help who had been part of the crime and crack epidemic. Some are coming back in order to redefine family. They remember Malcolm X, and they realize that carrying on the legacy of Malcolm means transforming themselves and transforming their communities.

That’s the sort of thing that we are doing in Detroit, and that’s the sort of thing that we have to begin spreading so that people see that there’s an alternative to this disgraceful and shameful corporatist government.

I like this discussion, because in the movement we’re very privileged to have intergenerational interaction. I think of my own experience, for example, with young people in their 20s—the Millennial Generation—and with the generation that came out of the ’60s.

The 20th century was a fantastic century. It started with the Russian Revolution and in the middle had the Montgomery bus boycott and then ended with the WTO protests in Seattle. We have such an enormous opportunity to share those experiences and make clear that this is an intergenerational movement.

THE WALLS ARE BREAKING DOWN. WE’RE BEGINNING TO SEE HOW OUR WORK IS INTERRELATED AS OPPOSED TO, “I’M JUST A RACE PERSON,” OR “I’M JUST A THIS PERSON...”
constantly on a plane.
Many national struggles have to be won at a local level first. It’s going to be hard for us to get the kind of health care we want nationally if we don’t have local, intergenerational struggles all over the country.

**Biko:** I think our generation is much more willing to go from opposition to proposition. It’s not taking power, but it’s making power. We have to come up with solutions. We can’t just be angry for the sake of being angry.

**Carlos:** Young people need elders who can help us younger folks slow down and learn from their experiences. Sit down with us and ask some deeper questions that help us grow strong and reaffirm our commitment to social justice work: Why do we fight? What have you learned? What can you teach others now from your experience?

**Sarah:** Many of us witnessed in horror last summer’s media attack on Van Jones, the White House green jobs advisor. When spurious right-wing attacks forced him to resign, many asked what we should have done to support him. Is there something we can learn from this?

**Biko:** I think the attack on Van was a response to an attack on Glenn Beck and FOX News with a strategy that wasn’t based in love. [Editors’ Note: Color of Change convinced some of Beck’s key advertisers to withdraw their support for his show after he accused President Obama of being racist.]

When you push someone into a corner, you’re going to get scratched. As progressives, we need to embrace non-violence because if we’re going to push our vision of the world into society, we can’t be attacking people, even people as problematic as Glenn Beck.

The other thing is Van and people like him are human beings, and they need our love. As a progressive movement, we need to be more honest with each other and stand up for each other. Maybe it’s because I come from

---

**Museum Exhibit Asks, Are We So Different?**

Line up a dozen skin types against your own: Can you tell where black ends and white begins? Not easily, say the creators of the traveling museum exhibit, “Race: Are We So Different?” “Those things that vary among us are not racial; they’re a part of the range of human variation,” says Yolanda Moses, who chairs the exhibit’s advisory board.

Visitors to the exhibit learn just how illusory the concept of race is, as they view montages of faces (like the one above) and use a microscope to compare their skin color to others. In a simulated pharmacy, they can check their blood pressure and read explanations for higher rates of hypertension among African Americans. (Hint: the causes have more to do with inequality than genetics.)

More than 200,000 people toured the exhibit after it opened in St. Paul, Minnesota. It has since traveled to Wichita, Philadelphia, and St. Louis, and will eventually head to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. The online interactive version is at www.understandingrace.org.—Ashlee Green

---

**SIGNS OF A NEW IDENTITY**

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
a street background, but you just can’t let your people be attacked like that without stepping up.

Grace: To look at the question of Van Jones in isolation from the general paralysis in relationship to Obama would be a mistake. We haven’t discovered yet how to struggle seriously with Obama, like, for example, when he failed to stand up to the attacks on Van.

Carl: The people who attacked Van are vicious; they made up arbitrary lies about him. But the fact that they got away with it reveals as much about the weakness in the progressive movement as it does about their viciousness. This was an attack on Obama, and the progressive movement has not built the base to sustain the energy that put Obama in office.

Adrienne: Van was attacked in part for the activist work of his youth. If we have a political culture that’s comfortable with multicultural space, then we’ll be comfortable with all of the politics brought to the table and with the whole story. So someone like Van could say, “That’s who I was when I was younger, and I’m not ashamed of it.” And Obama could say, “I met Fidel, and I’m not ashamed of it.” Because we are in this country that is a democracy, and we’re supposed to have a diversity of political opinions. That’s how we’re going to survive.

Sarah: What is it that we still don’t get about how to work together? Why are wedge issues still able to divide us?

Grace: I think you have to work together on a turf. As long as we’re just talking about different ideologies, we’re going to be hostile to one another or compete with one another. We have to ground ourselves in a place and in a community. Activist work has been successful in Detroit because we have lived and worked here for years.

Robert: It’s not surprising that we have trouble overcoming differences. We live in a society based on hierarchies that are deeply woven into the fabric of our identities. As someone who’s white, male, and belongs to the professional class, I bump into these hierarchies all the time. We are told that they are inevitable and difficult to overcome. But when people commit to common struggles, overcoming them is easier. In the end, our ecological crises will compel us to overcome our differences. It’s possible that the planetary ecosystem
could become unable to sustain human life as we know it, not in some science fiction future but in our lifetime. We are up against something that real, that scary. Recognizing the depth of the ecological crises has not made me despair; it’s helped me commit to the difficult work of crossing boundaries.

Biko: I agree with all of that. The only thing that I would add is that talented organizers can get caught up in the cult of personality. I’ve seen that in my own career as I’ve gone from the grassroots to the national level. There aren’t enough leaders who are challenging their own privilege. It’s something that I’m trying to get better at, and I think it’s something we all need to do.

Carl: Our social movements are all struggling for a moment in the sun and for our viewpoints. We need to understand that we’re all coming out of a common matrix related to that pivotal moment of European expansion.

All the ecological, human rights, and economic issues that we are facing every day came out of a common matrix: that a few pirates and a few so-called kings managed to conquer the whole Earth and turn it to their own private use. Getting the story right is really important, because if I start asking whether black people are more important than indigenous people, or whether the women’s movement is more important than protecting the Earth—those kind of arguments get really dumb.

Adrienne: There are three things that we need to get. First, none of our issues or our identities exist in a vacuum. The moment we struggle against each other is the moment we weaken our movement. Colonization wasn’t color-blind, so the long-term result of that cannot be color-blind or class-blind; race and poverty go hand in hand.

Second, we need to learn to listen to each other’s stories. People are developing new solutions, but we’re not actually listening to each other enough to develop trust in those solutions.

Third, we need to understand that we’re not moving toward some end goal, some win-or-lose point that will make or break our society. This is something I’m learning from Grace. Instead we’re involved in a process, and we need to continue to improve ourselves and evolve.

Book Blended Nation Seeks Out the Blurry Boundaries of Race

After 9/11, photographer Mike Tauber and then-girlfriend Pamela Singh watched with concern as both hate crimes and federal security policies targeted Sikhs. Singh, who is part Indian, convinced Tauber that they could use photography to help Americans grasp the complexities of race.

The couple (who are now married with children) traveled across the country, taking portraits and collecting stories of mixed-race individuals. They used the results of the 2000 Census as their roadmap, visiting states with high mixed-race populations to ensure a variety of subjects. The result, Blended Nation, is a book that chronicles the struggle for identity faced by its subjects, including Janine, Evan and their family of Benicia, California (left); and LaTanya Spann of Los Angeles (right).

“The book is a window into the larger conversation of race in this country,” says Tauber. “The mixed-race experience becomes the avenue to the greater conversation of race.” —Berit Anderson

PHOTOS BY MIKE TAUBER

SIGNS OF A NEW IDENTITY

After 9/11, photographer Mike Tauber and then-girlfriend Pamela Singh watched with concern as both hate crimes and federal security policies targeted Sikhs. Singh, who is part Indian, convinced Tauber that they could use photography to help Americans grasp the complexities of race.

The couple (who are now married with children) traveled across the country, taking portraits and collecting stories of mixed-race individuals. They used the results of the 2000 Census as their roadmap, visiting states with high mixed-race populations to ensure a variety of subjects. The result, Blended Nation, is a book that chronicles the struggle for identity faced by its subjects, including Janine, Evan and their family of Benicia, California (left); and LaTanya Spann of Los Angeles (right).

“The book is a window into the larger conversation of race in this country,” says Tauber. “The mixed-race experience becomes the avenue to the greater conversation of race.” —Berit Anderson

PHOTOS BY MIKE TAUBER
Even with an African American in its top office, our nation still hasn’t figured out how to have a real conversation about race. Most of us would rather dance around this uncomfortable subject than jump into a full-blown discussion of how America continually fails to live up to its principles. Though our Declaration of Independence promises life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the sad reality is that if you are a young person of color, you are more likely to be unemployed, incarcerated, or murdered during your lifetime.

But across the country, a generation of young leaders of color is working at the local level to address the problems of structural racism. Building on the energy generated by Barack Obama’s campaign and election, members of Generation Y—the “Millennial Generation”—are finding ways to address America’s complicated history on their own terms.

Practice Makes Perfect

My generation—kids who grew up in the ’80s and ’90s—became the battleground on which America fought to free itself of its racial contradictions. The civil rights movement knocked open the doors for equality. Our generation is practicing how to make that promise a reality. There is no generation better prepared to take on the challenges of the day. For most of our lives we’ve been having the tough conversations.

Of course, tackling race head-on hasn’t been easy. I still have scars from my experiences of getting called “nigger” on athletic fields and school buses. But like so many from my generation, I gained from those traumatic incidents the tools to express my humanity, even in the face of continued oppression.

Long before Obama entered the national conversation, civic-minded young people were making their presence felt in the halls of power. Some of these folks, like founding member of the National Hip Hop Political Convention and green real-estate developer Baye Adofo-Wilson, have used art and creativity to change desolate communities. As the executive director of Lincoln Park Coast Cultural District, Adofo-Wilson is transforming a low-income neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey, into an arts and cultural district.

Others, like Minneapolis’ Nimco Ahmed, have challenged the status quo by making sure that people from disenfranchised communities are involved in the civic process. A young leader in the local Somali community,
June 12, Loving Day, Celebrates Love that Knows No Racial Bounds

Love was complicated for Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving, an interracial couple living in Virginia in the 1950s. The pair was arrested for eloping, but rather than separate, they fled to Washington, D.C., where interracial marriage was legal. Their case eventually made it to the Supreme Court; the resulting ruling in *Loving v. Virginia* made it illegal for a state to enforce laws banning interracial marriage.

Graphic designer Ken Tanabe created Loving Day (lovingday.org) in 2004, after stumbling across online information about the Loving case. People around the world now celebrate Loving Day on June 12, the anniversary of the 1967 decision. The couple at left is attending the 2009 Loving Day festivities in New York City. —Berit Anderson

Bay Area Groups Broaden Fight for Tenants’ Rights

Low-income tenants in the high-priced San Francisco Bay Area have a tough time. Two organizations working on opposite sides of the Bay Bridge realized that they would be better able to serve these vulnerable communities and ensure their access to affordable housing by working together. St. Peter’s Housing Committee served San Francisco’s predominantly Latino Mission District, while Just Cause Oakland worked in a largely African American community.

They began collaborating by building neighborhood coalitions and lobbying local government to protect rent control and provide due process for youth of color in the judicial system. In January 2010, the two organizations joined forces to become a single group, called Just Cause.

“We saw just so much potential for the two communities to unite and to start to think about the connections between people of color,” said Maria Poblet, lead director of Just Cause. —Berit Anderson
she makes sure her community turns out to vote.

And when people told Pittsburgh’s Chester Thrower he couldn’t get financing for his weatherization company, he didn’t give up. A former cocaine dealer, Thrower was inspired by hearing Van Jones talk about the green economy. He got past numerous obstacles, including lacking the resources to pay for training; has completed several green certification programs; and is currently working with state agencies to secure funding for his business. “When I was in the streets, I never thought I would be working with invitations to a diverse group of elected officials, traditional environmental activists, tradesmen, labor leaders, and local artists to come and discuss Milwaukee’s future. Most of those invited were older than the conveners. Energized by the potential promised by the Obama election, we brought together people who never even thought of working with each other.

At first the attendees were skeptical because they weren’t really sure if these young folks were serious. But after several meetings, naysayers started to become believers. The meetings were the state of Pennsylvania—well, except only as an inmate,” says Thrower, who hopes one day to provide jobs for other young African Americans who have been shut out of the system. “Trust me, change is possible.”

You might not see these stories in the mainstream news, but we are having a transformative impact on our communities. Most importantly, we’re not waiting for anybody to give us permission to lead.

From Opposition to Proposition

Thrower’s case is admittedly unusual. Far too often, youth of color from inner cities aren’t able to overcome the obstacles facing them. But a group of us in Wisconsin hopes to break down the roadblocks preventing people of color from being stakeholders in society. We believe that young people of color have to be involved in all aspects of civic life if society is to become healthier and more productive.

In early 2009, a group of African Americans affiliated with my organization, the League of Young Voters Education Fund, began holding weekly roundtable meetings in Milwaukee with community residents who were interested in greening their neighborhoods. These precocious Millennials sent professional, focused on outcomes, and democratic. The skills learned while organizing young people came in handy with our older constituents.

Many of these discussions focused on the ways that racial discrimination, both individual and institutional, continues to shape Milwaukee’s economic climate. In a city where nearly 50 percent of all African American men are unemployed, these tough conversations uncovered how truly disenfranchised people of color feel. “We spent a lot of time talking about how black tradesmen have been treated unfairly,” says Wesley Carter, who helped organize the meetings. “People are mad, and they don’t feel like anyone is listening to them.”

But rather than dwelling on the historic problems caused by racism, the young facilitators pushed participants to believe that they could collectively come up with solutions for the community’s woes. They asked the group to talk about the ways that traditional, racialized, winner-take-all politics have gotten in the way of moving the city forward. The group realized that continuing on that path would make it impossible to build a green economy that would both save the environment and improve Milwaukee’s unemployment rate.

No longer focused on an opposition agenda, nearly a year after the roundtable discussions started, this collection of community residents has transformed into a diverse alliance called the Making Milwaukee Green Coalition (MMGC). Today the group is tracking stimulus spending, teaching area residents about the green lifestyle, and helping small businesses write green business plans. Most importantly, the MMGC is building bridges into whiter, more affluent parts of the city and state.

Recently, when city officials began discussing privatizing this majority-minority city’s water, leaders of the Milwaukee Green Coalition (MMGC) helped organize a diverse, citywide coalition called Keep Public Our Water (KPOW) to protect the public trust. After weeks of heated debate on talk radio shows and nightly news, city officials agreed that they would not pursue the neoliberal policy.

Jayme Montgomery-Baker, MMGC’s lead facilitator (and my wife), chaired KPOW’s steering committee and facilitated the coalition’s meetings. “If it weren’t for the Making Milwaukee Green [Coalition] I don’t think my community would have been involved in that fight,” says Montgomery-Baker, who recently won an award for her work with KPOW.

MMGC is looking for more ways to involve young African Americans in green careers. This won’t be easy given the historic obstacles facing the segregated city. But the young leaders are looking for bridges over the traditional problems. “The only way Milwaukee can get better is when we all work together,” says Carter. “We don’t know what that looks like yet, but we are going to figure it out.”

Rob “Biko” Baker is executive director of the League of Young Voters Education Fund, a national organization that works to empower non-college youth to become winners and players in the political game.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS GENERATION KNOCKED OPEN THE DOORS FOR EQUALITY. OUR GENERATION IS PRACTICING HOW TO MAKE THAT PROMISE A REALITY.
United by Hard Times
Fight for Workers’ Rights Cuts Across Race Lines

Carlos Jimenez

I’m feeling relieved. For a while it seemed like the historic election of our first African American president would give legitimacy to the idea that we live in a “post-racial” America. The idea that race is no longer a part of people’s daily experience is not merely false. It’s potentially dangerous when a majority of people are struggling to understand what’s happening to them economically. What people are experiencing is exactly what’s supposed to happen to them under capitalism and its current variant, neoliberalism. That economic system is grounded on the idea that society must have winners and losers. It has convinced people that those categories are based on race: that people of color are, in the natural course of things, losers; and that white people, regardless of class, are supposed to win.

When hard times hit, as they have...
recently, people who are losing their grip on their middle-class status—or those who were already poor and are getting poorer—look for someone to blame. They fall back on the official story: White people’s troubles are caused by people of color; the troubles of people of color who were born in this country are caused by immigrants. It’s a divide-and-conquer strategy that keeps people who are natural allies on a class basis from looking at who’s really causing their trouble: the people who run the capitalist system.

This moment presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to get people with shared economic interests working together—to get them past learned racial divides. As long as poor and working-class white people remain convinced that they win by keeping people of color on the margins, all workers will continue to lose economic ground. The opportunity is to use this economic crash as a way to find common ground among those who are the real losers—regardless of race—in the existing system.

**The Current Jobs Reality**

The United States is at the edge of a cliff—economically, financially, and ecologically. For many in this country—especially people of color—there’s never been anything but a cliff. After all, losing homes, not having enough food, and being unable to find work was a reality for millions across the country before the great crash of 2008. That reality has not changed, but many more people are now experiencing it.

Over the last 30 years, the faces of those standing at the edge of the economic cliff have changed. No longer are they just people of color, immigrants, and people without an education. Today, educated and middle-class whites are joining the ranks of those on the brink, and many poorer whites are already off the cliff.

A group of progressive organizations, including my employer, Jobs with Justice, recently released a report entitled *Battered by the Storm: How the Safety Net Is Failing Americans and How to Fix It*, which illustrates that point. It finds that in the current recession, unemployment has risen by 4.5 percent for whites, by 6.9 percent for Latinos, and by 6.8 percent for African Americans. As has always been the case, communities of color are disproportionately affected by job losses, especially since they started with higher levels of unemployment.

In spite of a common interest in challenging a system where the rich get richer and the poor stay poor, people continue to buy into the stories that divide them along racial and identity lines. Working people are all working harder and producing more than ever before, yet most have not seen gains in their wages or benefits.

**Organizing on Common Ground**

Progressives—those who promote social justice, defend self-determination, and share collective responsibility for creating a more just world—cannot miss the opportunity to use this time of economic hardship to break down racial barriers. The economic crisis puts progressives in a position where we can challenge structures, like racism, that cause natural allies to work against one another. Should we choose to sit it out, we will allow reactionary forces to continue to use economic problems to splinter us along race lines. Working-class people, searching for answers to their economic realities, will move to attack what is depicted as the face of the problem.

The union Unite Here has succeeded in bringing workers together in their “Hotel Workers Rising” campaign. Another on the job beyond a greeting and tend to self-divide during breaks. The challenge for the union was building a collective movement that could bring together housekeepers, front-desk workers, and servers to improve wages and working conditions, despite race and language barriers. Unite Here helped workers find common ground on which they could relate. The union identified workers from each department who wanted to improve working conditions and built strong, worker-led committees to be the face of Unite Here. Then they asked the workers to take a variety of actions to help grow the organization and put the power structures in clear view of everyone. Those actions included sitting with new people, reaching out to different departments, participating in meetings between management and workers and their supporters, and stating their pro-union views to their peers. This strategy ensured that workers had a chance to relate to one another and realize their shared interest in winning a union contract.

Similarly, SEIU’s “Stand for Security” national campaign did a phenomenal job moving workers to connect along class lines, particularly in Los Angeles, where
New York restaurant cooperative Colors serves up much more than an eclectic dinner menu of Bento boxes and Argentine-style steaks. The restaurant’s staff-owners, who come from more than a dozen countries, are part of the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC), an organization that fights for fair working conditions for restaurant workers across the country.

Moroccan-born Fekkak Mamdouh (above) helped found ROC after the 9/11 attacks destroyed his former workplace, the World Trade Center’s Windows on the World restaurant, and left more than 300 workers jobless. Windows’ former owners opened a new restaurant in Times Square, but they rehired primarily managers and white employees and rejected applications from Windows’ immigrant workers, including Mamdouh.

It wasn’t the first time Mamdouh witnessed discriminatory or abusive practices in the restaurant industry. He realized that restaurant workers needed more political power.

With support from the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union Local 100, Mamdouh worked with organizer Saru Jayaraman to start ROC and co-lead its first initiatives. ROC staged protests that persuaded Windows’ owners to offer 15 additional positions to former employees. The group also launched campaigns to fight exploitation of restaurant workers—both immigrants and non-immigrants.

Mamdouh founded the worker-owned Colors as a tribute to those who’d lost their lives in the World Trade Center. The project initially met resistance from investors. “They said, ‘You cannot do it,’” Mamdouh says. “‘You’re good at bussing tables and driving taxis, but you cannot run your own business.’”

Today Colors runs a thriving business at night, and by day serves as a training center for restaurant workers. ROC has expanded to eight satellite chapters across the country and is planning to open a second co-op restaurant in Detroit.

it re-engaged the African American community (once a large segment of the city’s labor). SEIU acknowledged rocky experiences in the ‘80s and ‘90s, when the black community was bleeding jobs in the union’s janitorial division. But the campaign guarded against racial divisions by showing that the real culprits behind low wages and benefits were not other ethnic groups, but building owners and property managers. Union organizers—black, Latino, and white—educated and mobilized security officers to join them as they knocked on potential members’ doors. They reminded workers that Fortune 500 companies paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in leasing agreements, yet the security workforce protecting the building did not earn enough to provide for themselves or their families. They asked workers if they found it acceptable that property managers spent more money on the flower arrangements in the lobby than on raises for the security officers. The message became more powerful as workers learned that many of the same security companies, property managers, and building owners that operated a non-union workforce in Los Angeles were also operating union workforces in Chicago, New York, and San Francisco.

In Washington, D.C., a new Jobs with Justice campaign called “Take Back DC” is working to bring together public-sector workers, teachers, and low- to moderate-income residents to take back economic ground they’ve lost in the last decade. These are people who are at times divided by education, class, and race. But they share the burden that privatization places on working-class people. Teachers are dealing with a local administration that invests in charter schools, even as it claims lack of resources and fires public-school teachers. Low-income parents are dealing with the loss of low-cost city day cares, which are being replaced with private ones that are less concerned with the neighborhoods than with making a profit. The day-care workers who once held those publicly funded, union jobs have not been permitted to reapply for their former positions.

Take Back DC is using the same organizing principles that worked for Unite Here and SEIU. Rather than point fingers at one another, members of these disparate groups are seeing the cuts in education and social services, increased privatization, and the attacks on unions as a threat to all of them—the people who make the District work. Their work together is building understanding that issues that traditionally affect working-class communities and communities of color also present a challenge for all of D.C.’s residents.

Take Back DC is educating members about the impacts of privatization on the city, and putting people into action confronting the powerful interests, like developers and unscrupulous politicians, who profit from the privatization agenda. As Take Back DC builds the campaign, there is growing recognition that only by working together can these groups hope to win back valuable public services and jobs that make the city work for everyone.

In all three organizing drives, the key was bridging racial divides by highlighting workers’ class interests. In order to do so, the unions had to directly involve workers and put them into action to build a sense of solidarity that could move them beyond artificial divides.

Moving Forward, Together

Despite the constant use of race as a wedge, and perhaps as a result of it, young people today are turning away from old racial divides and leading the way in creating a multicultural America. Data from a 2003 Gallup Poll showed that 82 percent of white 18- to 25-year-olds disagreed with the idea that they “don’t have much in common with people of other races.”

Spaces like the US Social Forum (USSF) in Detroit serve as opportunities to advance the discussion of building alliances based on class rather than race. The USSF expects more than 25,000 progressive activists and organizers to come together to share their work in areas as diverse as education, stopping the criminalization and incarceration of youth, bringing an end to unjust wars, bargaining collectively for better wages and benefits, attaining reproductive justice, and protecting the environment and Earth’s well-being.

But the overarching theme of the USSF is how we can build a larger movement that addresses not just racism, but the many structures that are impeding people from pursuing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Working people of all races are looking for movements or vehicles through which they can express their self-interest. We cannot allow the right wing and corporate elite to co-opt the anger that is out there, as they have with the “Tea Party” movement and the growing resentment against immigrant workers. Progressives can change the direction of our country for the better by helping working people join together, regardless of race, to be their own champions.

Carlos Jimenez was raised in a working class immigrant family in Los Angeles and currently lives in Washington, D.C. He organizes at Jobs with Justice (jwj.org), is a proud union member, and is working to educate and mobilize young workers to win social and economic justice.
WHAT DO A GLENN BECK FAN and an immigrant rights champion have in common? That's what Pramila Jayapal asks herself when she goes face to face with right-wing talk-show hosts, conservative audiences in small-town Oklahoma, or Republican congressmen in her home state of Washington. Jayapal founded and directs OneAmerica, a national immigration-advocacy group, and she's learned a thing or two about how to find common ground, even with someone who is screaming at you.

Interview by Madeline Ostrander

Madeline Ostrander: Right-wing media often use shock language and sensationalized stories about race to boost ratings. How do you combat that rhetoric?

Pramila Jayapal: Right-wing media are profit-making machines. They are making millions of dollars by exploiting people's fears. Until he was taken off CNN, Lou Dobbs had eight to 10 million viewers every night. But I believe that at least half of those watched purely for entertainment value. If we can be smarter and kinder than voices like Dobbs or O'Reilly, I believe people are moveable. Talk about providing the best for our children, about how America is a fair country and we're all in it together.

Madeline: You've actually appeared on some right-wing talk radio shows. Do you think it's effective to make those appearances?

Pramila: I do, not because I think I'm going to change the host's mind or because he or she is going to give me a fair hearing but because I know a lot of people listen to those shows and are moved by what they hear.

Madeline: It seems that those shows are trying to stoke debate by angering their guests. How do you handle the heat of those conversations?

Pramila: I try not to get rattled or take the abuse. I definitely get angry sometimes, but as I've done these shows more, I feel like I've heard everything that can be said.

I look for something that I can agree with. The host says, "I believe in law and order." I find a way to take that argument and connect it to my values. When I become reasonable, that deflates both my anger and the conversation. The host is not expecting me to agree with anything they say. They're expecting an all-out fight.

I cite statistics. I am the one with the facts. The facts are not to convince anybody but to establish my identity as someone who is calm, uses logic, and isn't just speaking wildly. The host becomes the angry, shouting, loud, mean person.

I focus on values that I believe most people hold deeply. I say, most Americans value respect or hard work, and that's what this debate should be about. The host is not going to say he or she doesn't believe in respect or kindness.

Then when I come home, I need to be around people who can shower me in wonderful, nice things. The hosts' comments are not directed at me personally, but they are personal. A good glass of wine, good friends, good family, good love are important if you are going to be out there on the front lines.

Madeline: Many of us are afraid to talk about racism with our friends and family, let alone with some incendiary radio pundit. How do you confront someone about a racist comment that comes up in ordinary conversation?

Pramila: Those interactions are different from the ones I have on live broadcast. Most people are not trying to stoke the race debate in the same way as someone like Dobbs or Bill O'Reilly. So I try to understand what their history is and ascribe the best possible intentions to them. Sometimes they are unaware. Maybe they grew up in an environment that didn't include people of color.

Then I lay out a logical argument and talk about shared values. You should never expect that somebody will agree with you in the moment. Their ego is usually tied up in their perspective. But I hope that something I've said will affect somebody enough that they'll think about it for another couple of days. The next conversation they have, they might say something different.

I'm not willing to excuse racist statements, ideas, or systems. But we have to talk about those issues without casting blame on each other.

www.YesMagazine.org/talk-racism
Jayapal wins over Republicans and anti-immigrant farmers
When I left my job as director of a multicultural social justice center and became a writer and teacher, I worried I was abandoning my commitment to social justice and turning a strength (my identity) into a liability. As it turns out, I’m still doing the same work.

I teach memoir, the intersection between story and reflection. What I love about memoir is that it democratizes storytelling. Official history is penned by power brokers, but the real stories are lived on the ground by ordinary folks. Memoir is the ultimate multicultural act.

The minute I enter a college classroom, my students make a judgment based on my body. But my true identity isn’t visible until I tell my story—my Nigerian-Nordic immigrant roots or the fact I was raised by a white single mother in small-town Washington, where we were the lone non-Christian Democrats and I the sole black girl.

It’s the first day of class at the University of Pittsburgh, and I explain the big project we’ll be spending weeks on—a personal history timeline I use to demonstrate memoir. “Your presentations will be graded on honesty and risk-taking,” I tell them.

One of my students, a college junior who introduced himself earlier as “white trash,” immediately launches into a story. He recalls a roller skating party where, during the “Sadie Hawkins” girl-ask-boy round, he was picked by the only African American girl. It’s not clear
from his story if there was something “wrong with her,” like a learning disability. A few students start choking, but he plows ahead, telling us how he had to skate with the girl and how the entire student body laughed. By the time he got home, his grandmother had heard the news and teased him, winking, “So, you and the black girl, huh?” He chuckles, either channeling his grandmother or reliving his own embarrassment.

The silence in the room is palpable. The girls in the front row stare saucer-eyed at me, clearly concerned for my feelings. The boys at the back stare open-mouthed at him, clearly concerned for his life. I blink rapidly. This is one of those dreaded moments where the teacher-me requires more than the personal-me thinks she can manage. It doesn’t help that in my town, I was that girl.

Then suddenly I realize what has happened. In this student’s rural Pennsylvania town, where his former classmates spend days working in the factory and nights in the local strip club, he probably never met a black female authority figure. Am I the first? In his surprise and discomfort, he has blurted out his only other experience with female blackness.

“Um, exactly!” I say, fighting the urge to hug him. He has just embodied one of my fundamental goals for
the class—creating an environment where we feel safe taking artistic risks and expressing different, but not necessarily “politically correct,” points of view.

“And if this is any indication of your honesty and risk-taking, it looks like we’re in for quite a ride!” I laugh, shaking my head. The room breathes; shoulders soften.

A few weeks later, the students’ presentations shine. They share their racial struggles, private goals, religious crises, family shame, class insecurities, personal falls from grace. Each week they arrive early. They greet each other joyfully, laughing and arguing until the sound of the bell ushers them out again. The young man from Pennsylvania becomes a favorite, an eccentric honors student whose fanaticism for R&B earns him the nickname “Slow Jamz.”

Four years later, he still sends me more e-mails than any other former student, always witty, updating me on his post-graduation adventures.

**Coming of Age**

I am asked to design a literature course, my first. I model it on an anthology that members of the social justice center gave me when I left: *Coming of Age in America*. I name the class “The Literature of Multicultural Identity.” The students at Framingham State College are primarily working-class, first-generation-college whites who, I’m told, aren’t enthusiastic about multiculturalism.

On the first day we brainstorm questions they have about “the Other.” “Why do all the black kids sit together in the cafeteria?” is a favorite.

“Keep this list,” I advise, “to revisit at the end of the term.”

I create a four-page survey that quizzes them on the accomplishments of some famous queer and non-white Americans. “Don’t feel dumb,” I say once they’ve exhausted their individual and collective knowledge. “There’s a difference between ignorance and intelligence. How do you feel about your ignorance?”

“Angry!” they shout. “High school didn’t teach us anything!”

“Good,” I reply. “Let’s get to work!”

Their first assignment is to work in groups to deconstruct an American cultural myth. My teacher-self thrills, and my personal-self cries as I watch students realize how psychologically violent these myths can be—how shamed they feel for not achieving up-by-their-bootstraps middle-classdom; the perfect nuclear family; thin, white beauty; perpetual happiness through shopping.

When we start reading the literature, I realize my students don’t know the most common racial and cultural stereotypes. Thirty miles outside Boston, and so-called minorities and their histories are invisible. Why does this Chinese writer scoff at laundry? Why does this black author poke fun at switchblades on Friday nights? I find myself in the bizarre position of having to teach stereotypes in order to un-teach stereotypes. The students catalogue the stereotypes they’ve learned from children’s books, television, magazines, games, or online. For Arabs, everyone cites Apu, the Indian owner of the Kwik-E-Mart in *The Simpsons*.

Each class ends with a short imagining on an index card. “I wouldn’t have the strength to endure as a queer woman,” a straight man declares. “If I were a black man,” a white woman writes, “I’d be stronger than I am.“

**WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MEMOIR IS THAT IT DEMOCRATIZES STORYTELLING. OFFICIAL HISTORY IS PENNED BY POWER BROKERS, BUT THE REAL STORIES ARE LIVED ON THE GROUND.**
now, but America would try to crush that out of me.”

As the class progresses, formerly silent students become classroom authorities. A gay student comes out, then starts the first LGBT support group on campus. On Election Day, the class goes to the polls together, many for the first time. The class abandons old cliques, and new configurations of students sit together in the cafeteria.

Had they permanently rewritten their lives? Fourteen years later a student e-mails to say that he uses what he learned “nearly everyday.”

Traveling Shoes

I visit my Anglo-Chicana goddaughters in their small college town. One of them books me a “show and tell” gig in her fifth-grade class. My topic: travel writing.

“I hope you have questions,” I announce as I take a stool at the front of the room. I’m unprepared for what my request unleashes. At every desk, children wave their hands wildly. One boy raises his quivering arm so high it looks like it could pop off.

“Where exactly on the world map have you been?” they want to know. “How many islands have you visited? Have you taken a boat trip? What is your favorite place?”

Many questions are what my father calls “Nigerian style,” merely opportunities for askers to testify about themselves. The fifth-grade version goes like this: “Have you been down the Nile?” Micropause. “I have!”

“Have you been to Michigan?” Arched brow. “I’ve been twice!”

“Tell me about you,” I respond, impressed.

They reveal international lives: “I was born in Mexico City.”

“I speak Farsi.”

“We’re taking a yacht to Brazil, where my dad is from.”

“My uncle adopted two kids from Ethiopia, and I got to see them. They’re really cute!”

“I didn’t know those things about the other kids,” my goddaughter will marvel afterward. “That’s not what we usually tell each other.”

They speak in short-story form, complete with the dramatic hooks and concrete details I beg my college writers to provide. “On November 20 at midnight, my family and I are setting out in a 12-passenger van for Seattle.”

“Every December we get out the box of decorations, and when we take off the lid, it smells like Christmas.”

“My dad visited Java, and they fed him a meal, and he threw up.”

My scheduled 20 minutes stretches to more than an hour. As I gaze out at the sea of hands, I imagine this is what it feels like to be a sports idol or rock star.

“Are you going to write about your visit to this class?” one kid inquires. I laugh, but why not? These kids embody the new multicultural story. My job is to show up and confirm that their narratives are part of the collective memoir we are writing.

As I inch toward the door, they rush toward me with autograph requests. I leave the class with their stories in my head, and they with my name scrawled on their notebooks. One boy asks me to sign his sneaker. Later, I smile as I think about a white kid from Northern California, strutting around with my Nigerian-Nordic-American name on his shoe. 

Faith Lisabet Adiele is currently distinguished visiting writer at Mills College in Oakland, California.
In 2004, international adoptions in U.S. reach peak: Nearly 23,000 children join U.S. families and receive U.S. citizenship. The 2000 Census was the first to distinguish between biological and adopted children; of the families with adopted children, 17 percent have adopted a child of another race.

By the middle of this century, people of color will make up the majority in the United States, a culmination of this country’s long and often-violent struggle with its multiracial identity. But alongside assorted celebrated “firsts,” landmark court cases such as Brown v. Board of Education, and legendary protests such as the March on Washington, are lesser-known political, social, and cultural milestones that have gradually marked the way.

GRAPHICS BY TIM SANDERS AND RESEARCH BY KIM ECKART

71-day standoff at Wounded Knee, S.D., leaves two members of the American Indian Movement dead and elevates Native issues to national stage. (1973)

U.S. Supreme Court strikes down laws prohibiting interracial marriage. (1967)

Civil rights marches from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., eventually lead to passage of National Voting Rights Act. A police assault halts the first march of 600 people; a few weeks later, 25,000 march to the state capitol where Martin Luther King Jr. addresses the crowd. (1965)

First observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a national holiday. (1986)

“The Cosby Show,” a sitcom about an African American family, tops the Nielsen ratings for five consecutive years. (1985-1990)

“Sesame Street,” with its cast of diverse urban characters debuts on public television. (1969)

71-day standoff at Wounded Knee, S.D., leaves two members of the American Indian Movement dead and elevates Native issues to national stage. (1973)

After a more-than-20-year campaign for redress, families of Japanese Americans interned during World War II begin to receive more than $1 billion in reparations. (1990)

First census allowing respondents to check more than one race. (2000)

20 Racial Categories Listed in 2000 U.S. Census


POPULATION: 281.4 million
Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, the first African American player since Major League Baseball banned blacks in the late 1800s. In 2008, players of color made up nearly 40 percent of MLB rosters.

The percentage of people speaking a language other than English rose from 11 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 2000.

The U.S. Census Bureau has begun collecting data for the 2010 Census, offering its most comprehensive questionnaire to date.

Racial Categories Listed in 1920 U.S. Census

- 4 variations of White as well as Negro, Mulatto, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Native, Foreign-born, and “All other”
- POPULATION: 105.7 million

Racial Categories Listed in 1960 U.S. Census

- White, Nonwhite, Negro, Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and “All Other”
- POPULATION: 179.3 million

Racial Categories Listed in 2010 U.S. Census

- 31 variations of race
- POPULATION: 308.7 million

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, an exclusively African American dance troupe, forms. (1958)

Foreign-born workers make up almost 16 percent of the U.S. labor force, the highest proportion since 1920. (2007)

U.S. Senate formally apologizes for its failure to enact an anti-lynching law. Historically, southern senators blocked more than 200 such bills. 3,437 African Americans were lynched from 1880 to 1951. (2005)

Hundreds of thousands boycott work and school to participate in Day Without Immigrants, demonstrating the contributions of immigrants to everyday society. (2006)

Barack Obama, nation’s first African American president, takes office. (2009)

The Harlem Renaissance produces dozens of African American artists, musicians, and writers, including Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, and Zora Neale Hurston. (1920s–1930s)

The 9th Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals declares the segregation of Mexican and Mexican American students unconstitutional in Mendez v. Westminster. (1947)

The California case is considered a precursor to Brown v. Board of Education. (1954)

New Mexico enters the union as the 47th state—and the first bilingual one—protecting Spanish speakers in education and voting. (1912)

10,000 African Americans march in New York, believed to be the first major demonstration against lynching and discrimination. (1917)

10,000 African Americans march in New York, believed to be the first major demonstration against lynching and discrimination. (1917)

Source citations at www.yesmagazine.org/multiracial-nation
Order or download this poster at www.YesMagazine.org/posters
The first American metropolises emerged after World War II, the result of a publicly subsidized mass exodus of white populations that coincided with the migration of blacks from the cotton and sugar fields of the American South to the cities of the North and West. Over the years, segregation in housing and in education increased, and today the nation’s public schools are more segregated than they were decades ago.

Beginning just two years after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision declared segregated schools illegal, the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act, combined with earlier federal housing policies, encouraged the flight of whites from the nation’s cities to the suburbs. These public investments in highway construction, combined with racially restrictive mortgage-lending programs and redlining of black and integrated neighborhoods, created racially exclusive communities. Since then, poverty has increased and become more concentrated in many of the nation’s cities, older suburbs, and rural places.

Now, climate change presents an opportunity to make over our communities in terms of land use, transportation, and racial and social justice. In the 45 years since the publication of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring, the environmental and environmental justice movements have become part of the national consciousness. Concerns such as pollution, destruction of habitat, long commutes, rising energy costs, and global warming stem from the runaway patterns of sprawl and metropolitan development. Beginning in the 1990s, profound inequities emerged between older and newer suburban communities as development of farmland—requiring new infrastructure and shopping facilities—drew populations toward the metropolitan fringe.

A recent Urban Land Institute report points out that the United States has little chance to reduce CO2 production without changes in current development and transportation patterns. By shifting away from suburban sprawl toward more compact, mixed-use development, people...
The City We All Want to Live In

Race, Poverty, and Environment Journal

founded San Francisco’s Urban Habitat Program and the on the environment and community development. He acting director of the Ford Foundation’s worldwide programs

Carl Anthony, founder of Breakthrough Communities, was acting director of the Ford Foundation’s worldwide programs on the environment and community development. He founded San Francisco’s Urban Habitat Program and the Race, Poverty, and Environment Journal.

would drive less, thus cutting down greenhouse-gas emissions. The authors calculate that shifting 60 percent of new growth to compact patterns would save 79 million tons of CO2 annually by 2030.

There is a risk, however, that such policies may resegregate our metropolitan regions in new ways. The high-speed rail and pedestrian communities so attractive to upper-income people may drain transportation resources from lower-income communities and drive up the value of land, making affordable housing hard to find. Land-use changes already underway threaten to transform American metropolitan regions into a pattern typical of developing countries: The rich live in the core cities, while the poor live on the periphery.

It is time to address spatial apartheid in the United States. Society shapes its cities, and our cities in turn shape us. But when it comes to making decisions about the shape of our cities, communities of color historically have not participated in proportion to their numbers. Such decisions are routinely made by society’s most powerful—businesses, upper-income families, and elected officials—who lack the consciousness and incentive to consider the impact of their decisions on vulnerable populations.

But if African Americans and other communities of color participate in the planning process, society could overcome the legacy of racism, and healthy, socially just, multiracial communities could flourish. All residents should have access to good jobs, real transportation choices, safe and stable housing, a good education, a range of parks and natural areas, vibrant public spaces, and healthful, regionally produced foods. The benefits and burdens of growth and change should be equitably shared. All residents and communities should have the opportunity to be involved as full and equal partners in public decision making.

1. DEVELOP A WIDELY SHARED, long-range vision for social justice, and set targets. Advocates for climate-change policies have proposed CO2 reduction targets by 2050. Social-justice advocates should set targets for poverty reduction for the same year.

2. FIND WAYS TO MEET the short-term survival needs of marginalized communities while generating longer-term outcomes that benefit society as a whole. For example, invest in projects that meet the urgent transportation needs of low-income residents while building toward a world-class public transportation system for all.

3. AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO SPRAWL, create public policies to stabilize, reinvest in, and redevelop older inner-ring suburban communities and encourage economic and racial diversity.

4. MANAGE VACANT PROPERTIES consistently with principles of social justice and CO2 reduction. Transit-accessible vacant buildings can be acquired, held, and managed by nonprofit housing groups in ways that pre-empt speculation and promote community stability. Vacant buildings in newer suburbs can be adapted to community uses such as day-care centers, reducing local transportation needs.

5. REPLACE AGING OR UNDERUTILIZED commercial strips with revitalized corridors that link inner cities and older suburbs through public transportation. These sites, with pedestrian-friendly, tree-lined boulevards, are ideal for mixed-income housing, with opportunities for small, locally owned businesses and community organizations.

6. SET ASIDE 20 PERCENT of new residential development for affordable housing and promote transit-oriented development—residential or commercial projects that are high-density, walkable, and close to public transportation. A commitment to affordable housing and community services in these popular developments can dampen the effects of gentrification.

7. BUILD AND STRENGTHEN social-justice institutions committed to regional equity, and link them all in powerful statewide and national networks.

8. REDUCE THE PATTERNS OF CONCENTRATED WEALTH and concentrated poverty in neighborhoods. Create opportunities for affordable housing in privileged and job-rich neighborhoods and, with the help of community-based organizations accountable to residents, develop middle- and upper-income housing in poorer neighborhoods.

9. ADVOCATE METROPOLITAN GROWTH STRATEGIES that systematically reduce health disparities between vulnerable communities and middle- and upper-class society.

10. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES for communities of color and other marginalized populations to participate in new business-improvement districts, regional collaborations, and governance structures promoting sustainable metropolitan development. — Carl Anthony
What White People Fear

Robert Jensen

In the struggle for racial justice, it’s time to pay more attention to the fears of white people. In a white-dominated world, that may seem counterintuitive. In the racial arena, what do we white people have to be afraid of?

There are lots of things to fear in this world, of course; race is not the only aspect of life in which people face injustice and inequality. A majority of people of all colors (including working-class and poor whites) struggles economically in a predatory corporate capitalist system, and all women, regardless of race, cope with gender discrimination and the threat of sexual violence in a male-dominated world.

But what fears could white people have as white people?

Understanding the fears behind the racial politics of both conservative and liberal whites can help guide strategy for changing a society in which wealth and well-being are still tied to race. And make no mistake, there is still a racialized gap between white and non-white America on measures of wealth and well-being—income, home ownership, graduation rates, access to health care, infant mortality, etc. In fact, the gap between white and black America on some of these measures is greater today than in the immediate aftermath of the major legislative achievements of the civil rights movement, and on some measures the rate of improvement is so glacial that it will be decades, if not centuries, before we reach equality. The legislative achievements that ended legal apartheid in America were a great victory, but the economic apartheid that remains is a reminder of our failures.

Put bluntly: The United States abolished a formal apartheid system but remains a white-supremacist society. After more than a decade of writing and speaking about these issues, which has sparked lots of feedback from all political angles, here’s what I have concluded about white folks and our fears.

Aren’t We Special?

For conservative white people, the dominant fear is of someday living without the privilege that comes with whiteness. Polite conservatives defend the primacy of “Western civilization.” More reactionary whites are openly racist about the threat that non-white peoples pose to “our way of life.” Both versions defend the existing distribution of wealth and power, even though many of the working-class and poor whites who endorse such views have access to precious little wealth or power. Race is used by white elites today, just as it was in the nation’s formative years, to drive a wedge between people who would otherwise come together to challenge those elites. Divide-and-conquer strategies, it seems, never go out of style.

Liberals are quick to denounce both the thinly veiled and the openly reactionary conservative racism. But what of the fears of liberals? White liberals might reject the very idea that they are afraid, citing their support for diversity and multiculturalism. But my experience suggests that while white liberals reject assertions of white supremacy, many fear the loss of white centrality. They are willing to renounce the idea that white people are superior, as long as they are allowed to live comfortably in a world where white is the norm.
In short, both the conservative and liberal positions are based on the same underlying assertion: “I’m white, and I’m special.” Conservatives are more likely to say it openly, while liberals tend to offer platitudes about racial justice while avoiding the risks required to make good on anti-racist principles.

What remains obscured is the distinctly uncivilized nature that Europeans and European Americans exhibited during their barbarous conquest of much of the world. The inherently fragile sense of white self-importance that emerges from that history is at the core of white fears—at some level, we all know that the truth of the depravity of white supremacy belies claims of white superiority.

In the institutions that adopt the liberal view, diversity is just fine (as long as whites remain in control) and multiculturalism can flourish (as long as white norms remain dominant). Institutions defined by the values and practices rooted in white Europe can open up to non-white people, as long as we white people remain comfortable. In such a white-defined liberal world, “people of color”—abstracted into a single group, erasing the particularity of people—are welcome, even sought after, to prove that we have transcended white supremacy.

Getting Uncomfortable

This analysis of the dynamics of mixed-race settings is hardly original. Non-white people have long recognized that white liberals are happy to engage with folks who aren’t white as long as their white-centric worldview isn’t threatened, and that white groups are happy to have non-white members as long as the power dynamics don’t change.

I observe all this not from some arrogant high ground, but as someone stuck in the same dynamic, struggling to get out. I know that for all my writing and political work on racial justice, I still feel most comfortable in settings where my understanding of the world defines the interaction, no matter the racial composition of the group. Rather than pretend otherwise, I start

---

**Just the Facts**

Doug Pibel

**RACE-BASED ECONOMICS**

There’s a growing wealth gap.

![Graph showing wealth gap between White and Non-White families](image)

**When hard times hit, they hit people of color harder.**

1. **UNEMPLOYMENT DURING THIS RECESSION**

![Bar chart showing unemployment rates for White, Black, and Latino](image)

2. **EFFECT OF RACE ON HOME LOANS**

A study of 177,000 subprime loans found that, for borrowers with similar qualifications:

**African American** borrowers were **6% to 34%** more likely to get higher-rate loans than white borrowers.

**For Latino** borrowers, the difference was **29% to 142%**

---

with that reality and search for ways to move forward.

A first step for me has been to question the value of the seemingly endless “race dialogues” that are popular in white liberal groups. In the pseudo-therapeutic setting of such dialogues, with more talk about personal healing than about political change, white people are guaranteed that we won’t be forced out of a white-defined world. White-dominated institutions—corporations, nonprofits, universities, government agencies—are happy to sponsor such dialogues, diversity trainings, and multicultural events, precisely because they don’t threaten the fundamental distribution of wealth and power.

I have been involved in many of those events myself, as a facilitator or a participant, and I have learned from them (typically as much from my failures as successes). The most important lesson I take away is that race dialogues are not enough. As long as we stay confined in a safe world that doesn’t challenge power, we guarantee failure—if our goal really is to change the dynamics. For me, that means putting myself in situations where I have to face my fear of being seen—or, more accurately, being seen-as white, or a participant, and I have learned those events myself, as a facilitator.

There’s no easy recipe for this kind of challenge, but we move in the right direction when we seek out places where we don’t feel comfortable, looking for relationships in which we can help change the dynamic. For me, that means putting myself in situations where I have to face my fear of being seen—or, more accurately, being seen-through—by non-white people. What if I step into those uncomfortable spaces and non-white people see the ways in which I hang onto some sense of my own supremacy/centrality? What if they see the ways in which I haven’t shaken off my racist cultural training?

A desire to confront that fear has led me, over the past year, to organizing efforts with the Workers Defense Project. It’s a local group that advocates for workplace justice for immigrant workers, addressing problems such as wage theft within a larger social justice framework.

This project has forced me to cross lines around race and ethnicity, class, language, and age. The members and staff are predominantly Latina/Latino and working class. They speak Spanish and/or English, while I’m monolingual in English, and the leaders of the group include a number of people who are at least two decades younger than me.

The collaboration between WDP and the Third Coast Activist Resource Center (a predominantly white group to which I belong) to buy and renovate a building for a progressive community center has gone forward with explicit conversations about all these differences and how they affect decision-making. The trust necessary to move forward has been built slowly over time, and I’m aware that the WDP staff and members are watching for signs that we are serious about establishing a truly egalitarian relationship.

As tricky as this Latina/Latino-white collaboration can be, we also recognize that a successful community center with progressive politics cannot leave out African Americans, the third largest racial group in Austin. That means not just casting around for some black people to add to the mix, but engaging in serious discussions with people from that part of the community to find out what kinds of collaborations are needed and possible. Austin is a white-dominated city, but that’s no guarantee that black and Latina/Latino groups will automatically come together; such alliances have to be built as carefully as any other. For us white folks in the mix, our contribution is to use the resources we have to aid in that process—not trying to control it, but also not pretending to be detached.

While there is a lot of dialogue necessary in this work, the dialogue is focused on a common goal: to provide office space for organizers, rehearsal space for artists, meeting space for the community, and a place for people to get to know each other. That common goal doesn’t mean we will naturally, or easily, put aside differences, but it means we all have a tangible stake in our collective success.

My interest in this project flows from moral and political principles—a belief in the dignity of all and the struggle to eliminate hierarchy in all forms. But I would be naive or dishonest if I pretended that was my only, or even my most powerful, motive. In the end, I have committed to this project out of selfishness—I would like to claim my full humanity before I check out of this world. To do that, I have to move beyond the framework of conservative versus liberal and adopt a truly radical politics.

I have a choice: I can be white—that is, I can refuse to challenge white supremacy or centrality—or I can be a human being. I can rest comfortably in the privileges that come with being white, or I can struggle to be fully human. But I can’t do both. Though the work is difficult, the choice for those of us who are white should be easy.

Robert Jensen, a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin, is author of The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism and White Privilege and his latest, All My Bones Shake: Seeking a Progressive Path to the Prophetic Voice. He is co-producer of the new documentary Abe Osheroff: One Foot in the Grave, the Other Still Dancing. Contact information and articles at uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen.

Interested? Wealth distribution www.faireconomy.org/issues/racial_wealth_divide WDF www.workersdefense.org Wage theft www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3h1tzGJfow Third Coast Activist Resource Center thirdcoastactivist.org
A little-known album by pop star **Brett Dennen** is still changing lives at The Mosaic Project, teaching kids to stand up to intolerance

**MY MOST IMPORTANT SONGS**
Schools with few resources in poor neighborhoods, and the average white student goes to a school that’s more than 75 percent white, and less than 30 percent low-income.

Even in diverse schools, kids have a tendency to separate into social groups by race and socioeconomic background, a behavior pattern that few schools know how to counteract. Paradoxically, as American society grows more diverse, children have fewer interactions with kids who don’t look like them.

Dennen, who was homeschooled by progressive parents in Oakland, California, may seem an unusual champion for diversity. The shaggy-haired musician, now 30, looks like a high-school kid trying out 1990s grunge.

But in 2000, he met Lara Mendel. The granddaughter of Jewish refugees who fled Nazi Germany, Mendel had spent years working on anti-racism projects for teens. She felt schools were waiting too long to talk to kids about racial, cultural, and gender differences. Research backed her instincts, demonstrating that children can start exhibiting prejudice before they turn 3.

Dennen was in college, a community-studies major planning to work in child education. They got to know each other in a wilderness-safety class and wrote a humorous song together (on backwoods diarrhea) for a class assignment.

Mendel saw an opportunity to use Dennen’s musical talent. She enlisted him to cowrite songs for a curriculum to tackle stereotyping in young children.

She chose the name “Mosaic” as both a metaphor for diversity and an acronym for the values she wanted to teach: mutual respect, openmindedness, self-respect, attitude, individuality, and community.

Now Mendel’s lessons and Dennen’s songs are changing how California teachers and kids approach everything from behavioral problems to bullying.

Crossing the Lines
Nearly 900 kids in total attend the 10 week-long Mosaic Project sessions offered every year. They come from every part of the Bay Area—the West Oakland community that once headquarter the Black Panthers; historic Berkeley farmhouses; the polluted Richmond neighborhoods next to the Chevron oil refinery; and the gentrifying Potrero Hill in San Francisco. The kids are bussed north through wine country to a retreat center outside Napa with a cluster of cabins, a dining hall, a lake, and nature trails that loop through redwoods and madronas.

On the last day of this mid-October Mosaic session, there’s something striking about the kids. At breakfast, instead of clustering into cliques, they’re jaunty, at ease, and so thoroughly racially mixed they look like an ad for UNICEF. You don’t see many hunched shoulders, hands in pockets, or stares directed at the ground.

Lyrics to Dennen’s songs hang on the wall, reminders of what the kids have learned all week. Until 2006, Dennen attended every Mosaic Project session. Now he drops in when his tour schedule permits.

The noise of nearly a hundred high-pitched voices and the clatter of plates settle as Mendel walks to the front of the room. She’s wearing a brimmed cap, from which escape waves of blonde hair, and a purple tank top with the Mosaic logo. At about 5 feet, she’s only a little taller than some of the children.

“Hello, my amazing allies,” she shouts. “Let’s have a moment of silence and appreciation for this beautiful day, our last day. So let’s breathe in deep Mosaic breath number one.” The noise drops to a few murmurs, kids shifting in seats, and shoes scraping across the floor. “And now deep Mosaic breath number two.”

Once the kids have quieted, Mendel rouses them into a cheer. “Drum roll, please,” she says, and the children pound their hands on the tables. She announces an award for the cabin that has done the most to act out the Mosaic lessons. Today every cabin gets the award. The kids whoop, and...
Mendel runs a mini victory lap at the front of the room. Then she cues the staff, who circulate through the room, distributing closing-day surveys.

Maiya Evans, a staff facilitator, pulls aside a brown-skinned little girl with hair in tight braids.

“What did you learn here at Mosaic?” Evans asks.

“We-eeell,” says the girl, swinging her feet, “I learned that if you get into a fight, you shouldn’t yell at each other. You should listen. And you should cool off and take a deep breath.”

She’s describing the first steps of conflict resolution, a skill Mosaic teaches using a song and kid-inspired team activities that involve monsters, cookies, and crossing an imaginary river.

Every session includes fourth- and fifth-grade classes from a balance of affluent, low-income, and racially mixed schools. The staff assigns kids from different schools to each cabin.

On the second evening, a game called “Cross the Line” helps them understand how their differences affect their lives. Mendel recites statements that describe a tough experience a child may face. “Cross the line if you’ve ever been called a mean name or put down just because you’re a girl. Cross the line if you’ve ever been judged or teased because of the color of your skin. Cross the line if you’ve ever been yelled at, slapped, or hit.”

In silence, kids walk over an imaginary line when they hear a statement they identify with.

Ten-year-old Tanaya McCoy, a white, lawyer’s daughter from Berkeley, was stunned to see so many kids walk across the room when Mendel called on those who’ve experienced gunshots close to home. “You learn that not everyone has the same thing. Not everyone gets to go to bed with a full belly of food,” McCoy says. “One of my friends that I met here, I thought it was interesting because she used to actually be homeless.”

“Cross the Line” helps children see that they are not alone—others have been teased, hurt, or felt afraid. It’s a powerful moment.

“It was pretty emotional,” says Erick Linares, an African American boy from Richmond. “But you don’t have to worry about crying at Mosaic. I learned that it’s OK for a dude to cry.”

Such activities create behavioral changes that show up at home and in the classroom.

“Our school is very, very diverse. And you can look at the playground, and it’s amazingly segregated,” says Mary Loeser, a teacher from Cleveland Elementary School in Oakland. “At Mosaic, you see kids interacting with other kids from their class that they have hardly ever spoken to before.”

Teachers consistently report noticing positive behavioral changes in the classroom after their students attend the program. Laurie Grossman, outreach coordinator at Oakland’s Park Day School, says teachers play recordings of Dennen’s songs when class behavior deteriorates. The songs remind students to cool down. Grossman has also seen Mosaic graduates put a stop to instances of name-calling and bullying on the playground.

“One parent said that when she went to pick her child up at the end of the week from Mosaic, she didn’t recognize him walking down the trail.
that we can come to Mosaic to be [youth] leaders when we’re 16,” she says. “And when I go home, I’m going to be whoever I want to be. I don’t have to listen to anybody that tells me what to be.”

Madeline Ostrander is senior editor for YES! Magazine

WWW.YESMAGAZINE.ORG :: YES! SPRING 2010

Artist Explores the “Hapa” Experience

Kip Fulbeck grew up “hapa.” “Hapa,” the Hawaiian word for “half,” is a term often used for mixed-race people, usually part-Asian. As a kid, Fulbeck rarely saw multiracial Asians on TV or in books, and thought he was “the only one.” A few years ago, he created the book he wished he’d had access to then, The Hapa Project, a series of photos and essays documenting the part-Asian experience.

Fulbeck photographed his subjects at their most essential, with little makeup or facial expression. He provided space for each to answer the question, “What are you?” The answers underscore the ambiguity of occupying more than one cultural and racial space. “Some days I’m very Malay,” writes a young woman, “Other days I’m more ‘white,’ American, whatever. But on certain special days, I’m both. Those are the best.”

Fulbeck has since completed a new project, Mixed Kids (mixedkids.com), a book of portraits of multiracial children. —Ashlee Green

www.YesMagazine.org/hapa-project
Kip Fulbeck talks about creating the book he always wanted as a kid
Adrienne Maree Brown

“...I have to be a healer ... my ancestral colonizer’s blood runs through my veins.”

Cara Page

I’ve never been into identity politics. I’ve long felt that people spent too much time analyzing the labels of past generations and too little time feeling part of the mystery and miracle of humanity.

I’m sure this is, in no small part, because I am biracial. My first experiences of race were of people asking me to choose a side, choose a parent. People telling me that in spite of the love, joy, and wholeness of my family, I didn’t fit, or offering me unsolicited judgment about who they thought my parents must be. These people showed no interest in my actual experience.

My parents fell in love in South Carolina in the 1970s, in a way that surprised both of them. Their experiences were poles apart—poverty versus wealth, black versus white, outgoing versus shy. My mother was disowned by her family for some time after she and my father eloped, and they faced deep racism throughout their lives. But they are still in love today—visible, stable, solid, sweet, dedicated love.

I spent most of my childhood in Germany on military bases, as an army brat surrounded by a lot of other racially and culturally mixed kids. By the time I arrived at a Southern middle school, where the kids segregated themselves into white and black, I didn’t feel beholden to any labels.

This isn’t a universal experience for mixed people.

In middle school, high school, and college, I met more and more mixed people who seemed confused, depressed, distraught, or insecure. They felt like constant outsiders or pretended to be solely one race or another. Many were children of divorces or separations caused by cultural differences.

For a while, I thought my experience was a fluke. Then after college I got paid and unpaid work as an organizer, first working with active drug users and communities impacted by HIV/AIDS; then, after that program’s funding got cut, with efforts to engage grassroots community youth in electoral politics. I began to encounter multiracial and multicultural activists who were confident and politicized.

Now I lead the Ruckus Society. We work in places like Oakland, rural New Mexico, and New Orleans, in communities that have been blocked from political power. We train people in those communities to make themselves heard—to stage nonviolent protests and to create their own media.

In these communities, I get to know people who teach me how to tell and

—Berit Anderson

Jen Chau Forms Swirl, Unites Communities

The daughter of a white Jewish mother and a Chinese father, Jen Chau (right) felt like a misfit growing up. So in 2000, Chau started a meet-up group in New York City called Swirl, for multiracial people who wanted to escape isolation and form their own networks. Her first meeting, publicized only by word of mouth, drew 40 people.

The New York membership of Swirl has since grown to 500 people, Chao estimates. Eleven other chapters have opened across the country. The activities of each group depend on its membership, ranging from book clubs and discussion groups to happy hours and film screenings.

In Miami, for example, Jen Steven has built a Swirl community of mixed-race families who meet for play dates. “Traditionally kids have grown up in an environment where they’re pressured to pick one race or the other,” she said. “It was important to me to develop a community where individuals and families of mixed heritage could feel at home.”
share my story.

Now I tell my family story as a love story, my political roots grown deep in the soil of my parents’ audacious, risk-taking, healing love.

People around me, community organizers and young leaders, are starting to speak more openly about their full identities without shame. They aren’t just crossing racial boundaries. They’re working across cultures, abilities, classes, faiths, sexual orientations, and genders. Their leadership is facilitative, healing, listening, solution-oriented, and grounded in love.

“I fell in love with multiracial people, built political relationships with multiracial people, and began to see my identity as something I could choose to define as liberating. It takes a monumental effort to make that choice within a culture that defines ambiguity as loss, where you are neither Chinese nor white. Multiracial existence is a struggle for empowered ambiguity.”

Jenny Lee, Allied Media Conference/Detroit Summer

Is it more comfortable to be multiracial because we have a black president whose candidacy, for better or worse, was more viable because of his white mother? Perhaps. Politics are cyclical. Our sense of morality and humanity is more interesting to me. Is poverty, inequality, or war ever acceptable? I believe injustice happens when you deny your relationship to an “other” who is also suffering.

Whether we want to admit it, more of us are mixed race or cross-cultural than not. When we recognize our multicultural lineage, we become part of a transformation that’s emerging from every corner of society—from philosophy to complex sciences to environmentalism. Post-partisan, post-binary, we are starting to embody our whole selves. We are proof that contradictions can coexist, proliferate, and create rich, new possibilities.

As we tear down the walls of colonization, a previously unimaginable future can become reality.

We must embrace our identities as strengths, see all sides, make moral judgments, and take big leaps in order to heal, especially when our heritage connects us to oppressors, colonizers, or practitioners of white supremacy.

If we repress any part of our histories and legacies, we do not receive the wisdom of how to be in relationship to each other and to the planet, and we contribute to the loss of cultural diversity. Displacement, slavery, rape, colonization, segregation, integration—“that is your indigenous story,” says my friend, Carla Perez, a racial and environmental justice organizer.

Those of us who have a white parent often benefit from the long-lasting effects of white supremacy. And if you grow up around white people, you may acquire a certain privileged know-how for getting ahead in today’s society. We have to acknowledge that privilege, and create a new vision in which survival is about wholeness. We have to work to ensure that we leave no part of identity or community behind.

“Gloria Anzaldua said … as long as we cling to our identity as the colonized, fighting against the colonizer, we… cement that relationship of power/powerlessness … social transformation depend[s] upon everyone seeing the power dynamic of colonizer/colonized playing out within themselves.”

Jenny Lee, Allied Media Project/Detroit Summer

We can only transform and love ourselves if we accept both the honorable and shameful aspects of our history and our humanity. Let’s not water down, whiten, or melt everyone’s identity into a false unity. Let’s use the vision of our cultures collectively to create solutions to the crises we face.

We have to shift the very goals of our generation. We can practice community in ways that are not defined by how well we succeed in white systems, but by how well we honor our lineages and our futures, learning from indigenous leaders to look seven generations into our collective past and future.

Multiracial leaders can be part of a pollination process. They can help all of us learn to collaborate, decentralize, and listen to voices at the margins.

I invite more people to tell their whole stories. I invite us all to step into our roles as healers. Race limits us—it is a concept designed to divide and conquer us. What really matters is expanding the capacity of communities to experience love.

“No one can use the framework of how brown we are to divide us—who we are comes from our heart, not someone else’s definitions.”

Ron Scott, Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality

Adrienne Maree Brown is national coordinator for the US Social Forum (www.ussf2010.org), to be held June 22 to 26, 2010. She also serves on the board of Allied Media, and is director of the Ruckus Society, a network of volunteers who support nonviolent community-based direct action

The “Multiracial America” Resource Guide
The information and links you need to find out more. www.YesMagazine.org/resourceguide53

The “Multiracial America” Discussion Guide
Get a group together and have a conversation. www.YesMagazine.org/discuss53
2009 Founders Circle

Angels ($500,000 +): Ariel Fund • Community Foundation Serving Boulder County Seeds Gift Fund • Ford Foundation • General Atlantic Corporation • David & Fran Korten • New Visions Foundation • One Foundation • Park Foundation • RSF Global Community Fund • RSF Common Future Fund • Deborah Dake • Lydia, Emily & Bob Dalton • Monique Bessette • Chris & Mary Troth • Anonymous (4)

Seed Donors ($500-$999):
- Todd Vogel & Karen Hust • Anonymous (10)

Ott • Linda Sue Park • Portfolio 21 Investments • Alan & Andrea Rabinowitz • Karen & Bill Scarvie • T.M. Scruggs • Cynthia Elizabeth Martin & Ken Fabert • Mel McDonald • Virginia Mudd & Clifford Burke • Nathan Cummings Foundation • Riki Thompson • Robert E. Jones • Barbara T. Lewis • Rebecca Liebman & Charles Stephens • Peter & Melinda Lucas • S. Hagge • Walter Haines & Mary Lou Peck • Bob & Gerri Haynes • Roy A. Hunt Foundation • Stephen Johnson & Marnie Thompson • Robert E. Jones • Barbara T. Lewis • Rebekah Liebman & Charles Stephens • Peter & Melinda Lucas • Elizabeth Martin & Ken Fabert • Mel McDonald • Virginia Mudd & Clifford Burke • Nathan Cummings Foundation • Riki Ott • Linda Sue Park • Portfolio 21 Investments • Alan & Andrea Rabinowitz • Karen & Bill Scarvie • T.M. Scruggs • Cynthia Sears • Ron & Eva-Maria Sher • Marion Sweeney & Kate and Cama Laue • Marsha G. Torkelson • Sarah Ruth van Gelder • Todd Vogel & Karen Hust • Anonymous (10)

Seed Donors ($500-$999):
- Donna & Thomas Ambrogi • Jacob Bommann-Larsen • Susan Boyd • Collins Family Foundation • Tanya Dawkins • Judy Hinkle • Ginny Hornung • Joanna Loehr • Robert J. Schloss & Emily Sack • Suzanne Shafer • William & Holly Stevens • Chris & Mary Troth • Anonymous (4)

2009 Dedicated Friends

(Recurring donations of at least $50/month)

Prosy Abares-Delecruz • Carol Ableman • Jayme & Jiro Adachi • Jennifer Adair • Amber Adams • Gil Wilkins • Virginia Ahrens • Despina Aivaliotis • Vicki Alcose • Rebecca Alder • Georgia Allen • Uta Allers • Pete Amoyoon • Rep. Sherry Appleton • Garret Apuzen-ito • Susan Arnett • Joan Arnold • Elizabeth Arrington • Darci Asche • Stanley E. Aschenbrenner • Marilee Backstrand • Dwayne Bagley • Victor & Carolyn Bain • Laura Banks • David & Diane Banner • Angela Barbati • Jeremy Barnes • Tracy Barnett • Bob Barns • Sonya Barrates • Carol Ann Barrows • Gabriele Bartholomew • Brenda Bass • Judy Beach • Ellen & Larry Beans • Mary & Philip Beard • Becky Beasley • Terre Beasley • Judy Beachon • Judith Beck • Gloria I. Beetle • Vicki Bekkers • Diana Beliard • Martha Bell • Nancy Bellini • Aaron Benner & Kathryn Vroman • Jeff Berend & Jacquie Perry • Bart & Dana Berg • Ted Bernard & Dona Lofgren • David Berrian • Laura Bessette • Monique Bessette • Paul Bethel • Judy Bierman • Robert Bisson • Mary & Keith Blackmore • Anne Blackstone • Jody Blake • Tara Maria A. Blasco • Dagny D Bloland • Daniel Blumenthal • Van Bobbitt & Sharon Wilson • Rev. Tim Boke • Vicki Boldig • Kay Stoner Bolin • Dorothy Bostedt • Ron Bottorf • Julie Boudreau • Julia & John Brabecen • Tom Bradburn • Brian Brandt • Kim Brandt • Kathleen Brennan • Betty Bremennan • Paul Brindle • C. R. Briscoe • Rebecca Brooks • Judith R. Brown • Karen Brown • Robert Brown • Robert M. Brown • Stephen Brown • Preston & Ann Browning • Mary Bullock • Theresa Buratynski • Frieda Burdette • Puanani Burgess • Robert Burke • Betty Burks • Dorothy Burkhardt • Judy Burkhart • David Burnight • Arthur Burns • Ruth Burns • Jeanine Butler • Gerard & Loretta Byrd • Eugene C. Cade • Kim Calhoun • Connie Call • Shirley R. Cameron • Laura Camp • Katherine Campbell • Melissa Capers • Eliza M. Carney • Leonard Carpenter • Jay & Paula Carrigan • Craig Carssalnen • Catherine A. Carter • Peggy Case • Beverly Cashin • Nanka Catuskil • Kristi Ceder • Pat Chamberlin • Sybil Chappellet • Therese Charvet • Nils Chase • Maef & Steve Chase • Rita Chastang • Selah Chideya • Connie Chow • Dorothy Christ • Susan Christensen & Mary Tansill • Mary Christensen • Jean & Don Clark • Sandra Clark • Joan & Chace Clement • Steve Clements • Joyce Clohessy • Deborah Cochran • Cochran-Kitchen Household • Beth Cohen & George Dillmann • Meg Colby • Kathryn C. Cole • Sue Cole • Janice H. Collett • Sally Collier & Bob Caola • Terry Collins • Frances Combs • T. Mark Commons • Roger Cone • Richard Conlin & Sue Allen • Donald C. Conner • Michael Conroy • Panikkos Constanti • Peter Cook • Ed & Gay-Wynn Cooper • Margaret D. Cooper • Lori Houch Con • Ronald Cori • Bev Corwin • Jean M. Coulton • Courtney Courtney • Virginia Cowles • Diana Cristina • Elizabeth

Crites • Becky Croissant • Kathleen Cronin • Andy & Dianne Culver • David M. Cuthbertson • Dean Cycon • Martha Daeblyer • Becky Daggett • Charles Dahlgren • Deborah Dake • Lydia, Emily & Bob Dalton • Janette Daniel-Whitney • Kimberly S. Dark • Kathryn Darland • Robert Darling • Val Davies • James V. Davis • Ralph & Cheryl Davis • Virginia & David Davison • Lynn Decher • Nancy Deren • Mary Dessein • Scott Devonshire • Laili De Silva • Emily G. Diamond • Paul H. Dibos • Leah Dick • Kate Diepenbrock • Steve Dietrich • Rosh Doan • Sandra Dobash • Mannin Dood • Constance Dodge • Peter Donaldson & Cynthia Yost • Monica M. Donley • Vincent Donoghue • Mary Ann Dow • John Draper • Edith & Dale Duttlinger • Jonathan Dykema • Margaret Dyson-Cobb • Donald Easter • Carolyn Eastman • Jen Ebelke • Sunni Eckhardt • Henry Edmonds • Caralee Eicher • Susan Edenschink • Peter Elliston • Jim Embry • Leigh Emerson-Smith • Mary J. Emmett • Rick Englert • Howard Ennes • Preston Enright • Erik Erickson • Wes Ersnesser • Cindy Ettor • Pat Evans • Bill Evans • Margaret Eyheller • Paul Farina • Liza Farmer • Andrea Faste • Laurie Fenstermacher • Georgia Ferderber • Alicia & David Ferguson • Susan Ferrell • Kathryn Fiandt • George Figuereno • Ann Fisher • Chuck Fisher • Jane Fistere • Brendan J. Fitzgerald • Robin Fladebo • Jan L. Flora • Michael Foley • Joriel Foltz & Ben Haley • Louise Fortmann • Emma T. Foss • Dorothy Foster • John Foster • Sam Foshue • Juby Fouts • Susan Franzan • Alan D. Freeman • Janet Freiberg • Jane A. Freitas • Howard & Betsy Friend • Robert Friese • Jen-Beth Fulton • David Funkhouser • Jim Gaither • Nora Gallaher • Katherine Gardiner • Sanjiv & Meena Garg • Ellen Gehring • Ted & Karlene George • Jean Gedt • Carol Giesecke • Vicki Gill Finley • Rhoda Gilman • James Gingery • Kat Gjovik • Barry Godding • James Godshalk • Joy A. Goldenstein • Suzanne Gordon • Sophie Goss • L. Fernand Grauls • Sheryl Greenberg • Taylor Greene • Gay Griffith • Phyllis M. Grimes • Glenn & Dorothy Grimm • Karen Grissom • Virginia Guillo-Ciacio • Carol Gunby • Bruce Haedt • Mike & Cara Hagar • William A. Lochstet • Dorothy Haigh • Christina Haley • David C. Hall • Beth Hanisch • Eileen Hanna • Jenny Hansen • Lloyd Hansen • Polly Hanson • John Harkness • Judith S. Harris • Richard R. Harris • Dorothy Harrison • Francis Harrison • Katharine Harrison • Margaret Sylvia Haun • Nancy Cybilla Hawk • Richard Hayes • Gerald Haynes • Ananda Hazzard • Katherine Hegemann • David M. Heinze

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Thank You YES! Donors. You are wonderful partners on our collective journey of deep social change. Despite the year’s economic difficulties you gave generously—with your financial contributions, gift subscriptions, and enthusiastic words of encouragement. We list the names below to honor your special commitment to the great work of turning the crises of our times into opportunities to create a healthy, joyful world.

Fran Korten, Publisher
YES! Magazine is published by the Positive Futures Network, an independent, nonprofit organization supporting people’s active engagement in creating a just, sustainable, and compassionate world.

The work of the Positive Futures Network is to give visibility and momentum to signs of an emerging society in which life, not money, is what counts; in which everyone matters; and in which vibrant, inclusive communities offer prosperity, security, and meaningful ways of life.
Everyday Conversations to Heal Racism

I AM A SECOND-GENERATION Mexican American leadership coach and elder living in California. I experienced so much prejudice and racism during my young adulthood that for years I avoided even being in the presence of white people. Finally, well into my 30s, I realized that the wounds and pain I carried were robbing me of my full potential. I could do better than be angry at other people; I could work to courageous conversations about race and culture. Here is how to begin.

1. **Initiate the question.** After you develop a connection or mutual comfort you might say, “I’m really trying to understand the experience of different people living in the United States. Can I ask you about your cultural background and what your experience has been like?”

2. **Express your curiosity.** The typical response to the first question is “What do you mean?” or “Why do you want to know?” Give a reply that conveys your authentic commitment. Mine sounds like, “I’m a Mexican-American—which has its ups and downs—and I’m curious to learn about others and how to be more respectful of their realities.”

3. **Listen and show respect.** A meaningful conversation of shared discovery will follow about 90 percent of the time. Remember, your intent is to learn about their experience, so avoid getting into your own cultural story unless asked.

4. **Validate their experience.** Listen and ask questions to validate their experience and encourage their sharing in ways important to them. This can produce miracles as the seed of a thought grows within them: that they, too, can develop a respect for others similar to that demonstrated by your curiosity.

5. **Be ready to share your story.** If time is available, they will likely ask about your experience, so be ready to share your truth to help them more deeply understand your reality, their own dynamics such as institutional racism and privilege, and the changes we must make to advance justice and respect.

Roberto Vargas is a senior trainer with the Rockwood Leadership Institute and author of *Family Activism: Empowering Your Community Beginning with Family & Friends* (Berrett-Koehler, 2008).

transform the ignorance beneath the racial injustice.

During the ensuing years, while I grew to accept the love within me, I also realized the necessity of extending this love to all others. I decided to make my daily conversations opportunities to learn and heal. Racism is extremely complicated, yet understanding and transforming it can begin with the conversations we choose to have.

Over the last dozen years, I’ve initiated hundreds of casual conversations with young and old, queer and straight, and people of all cultural backgrounds, with the intent of increasing respect for our diverse histories and social identities. The result for me has been an increased understanding and sensitivity for others. I have also seen people increase appreciation for themselves and for people different from them, and occasionally make a major new commitment to multicultural respect.

My invitation to you, as a reader who desires to increase fairness and respect among all people, is to be a facilitator of
We first learned about Gaviotas, the legendary sustainable Colombian village, in 2004, while working in our home state, New Mexico. The two of us helped found a group called La Mesita, “the small table,” composed of three educators, a renewable energy scientist, a water-rights attorney, and a community organizer. We decided to start a project that would involve teenagers in organic agriculture and renewable energy in Ribera, a rural village in the north of the state. We believed that reviving northern New Mexico’s
“This is what we’re trying to create,” she said. “This village proves it’s possible.”

All of us took turns tearing through the book, spellbound by the story of a visionary man named Paolo Lugari and the remarkable group of scientists, students, Guahibo Indians, and cowhands who had succeeded in creating a resilient community amid the barren soils, shifting politics, and sporadic violence of Colombia’s eastern savannahs.

The book’s stories of innovation and perseverance inspired us as we moved forward. Our project convened scientists, educators, farmers, builders, and youth for a six-week, hands-on institute, where participants taught permaculture and organic farming, helped build an off-the-grid, energy-efficient house, and handcrafted a working wind turbine. The pilot project ran for two summers, but we were unable to maintain funding, and our colleagues went their separate ways.

It wasn’t until five years later that the authors of this piece had the chance to visit Gaviotas. We had wondered if it held clues that could have moved our New Mexico project forward. Then by coincidence, the two of us ended up in Colombia at the same time.

We contacted New York Times correspondent Simon Romero, a fellow New Mexican who had grown up near the site of the La Mesita summer institutes. Romero had long wanted to report on Gaviotas. With his help, we arranged a one-day tour with Lugari.

Village of Surprises

The night before our visit, we all met up in the busy city of Villavicencio, gateway to the region of savannah known as los llanos. Over steaks and Colombian pilsner, Paolo Lugari captivated us with impassioned conversation that ranged from subjects like the brilliance of Leonardo da Vinci to the failure of Western education.

He was just as energetic the next morning at daybreak in Villavicencio’s tiny airport as he pointed out the black Gaviotas dot on a wall map, and told us to expect the unexpected.

“In Gaviotas,” he said, “one lives in a state of perpetual surprise.”

Ninety minutes later, we began to understand what he meant, as our tiny Cessna airplane descended over Gaviotas. We’d read Weisman’s account of the village’s reforestation projects—Caribbean pines had created shade and soil that nurtured the regrowth of hundreds of species of native flora and fauna. But nothing prepared us for the sight of 20,000 acres of dark green trees bursting impossibly from the acidic savannah soils.

A small group of Gaviotans met us on the airstrip and invited us onto a broken-down minibus, towed by a tractor that ran on biofuel produced in the village. The tractor hauled us into the forest, where the Gaviotans demonstrated how they collect pine resin with little more than an axe and a plastic bag. Between the pines was their new fuel crop, African palms. But the Gaviotas palm plantings looked nothing like the massive, monocropped rows of palms we’d seen outside Villavicencio. Gaviotans mimic nature by keeping the forest diverse, one palm to every 10 pines, interspersed with fruit trees and native plants.

The bus headed past a full-sized dirigible, constructed on-site to monitor forest fires, and into the village. There we watched children pump drinking water from depths of over 100 feet. The award-winning Gaviotan sleeve pump has allowed residents to stop using the contaminated shallow water sources around the village.

We paused at the community kitchen, which produces hundreds of meals a day using an energy-efficient stove that burns wood thinned from the forest. We then followed Lugari into one of the resident’s simple homes, so he could show us the passive cooling system and demonstrate that water from the bathroom faucet was scalding hot, thanks to the rooftop solar water heater the Gaviotans had manufactured themselves.

The longest stop on our tour was
EVERYWHERE WE LOOKED, WE SAW EXAMPLES OF HOW THE GAVIOTANS HAD ENCOUNTERED OBSTACLES ... AND “SURPRISED” THEMSELVES BY DISCOVERING A WAY TO ADAPT.

Founder Paolo Lugari gives a tour of the community’s agricultural fields. Considered a model of sustainable development, Gaviotas grows its own food and runs a successful pine-resin factory in the middle of the harsh Colombian savannahs. www.YesMagazine.org/paolo-lugari An interview with Paolo Lugari

in the economic heart of Gaviotas, its pine-resin processing and packaging factory, which now generates almost 80 percent of the community’s revenue. Here, cartloads of resin are brought from the forest and distilled for use in making varnish, paints, and adhesives. The entire factory runs on renewable energy. Steam used for processing the resin is created in a boiler fueled by sustainably harvested wood, while the generator and tractors operate on African palm oil or recycled vegetable oil from Bogotá mixed with pine turpentine. Many of the residents’ motorcycles run on a gasoline and pine-turpentine mix.

We kept our eyes open for some lesson we could bring back to New Mexico, a secret to Gaviotas’ success. Our first clue came from an offhand comment we overheard in the factory. Lugari asked a foreman how work was proceeding on a project to use byproducts from the resin processing to pave the muddy roads. The foreman gave an inconclusive report.

“Excellent,” said Lugari. “We’ll proceed A.V.V.”

“A.V.V.?” we asked.

“Allí vamos viendo,” he explained. “We’ll see what happens as we go along.”

The response seemed nonchalant, but it represented an approach that has been fundamental to the village’s longevity. Everywhere we looked, we saw examples of how the Gaviotans had encountered obstacles, gone back to the drawing board, and “surprised” themselves by discovering a way to adapt. The very building in which we stood, for example, had been a solar hot-water panel factory before shifting markets and government policy forced Gaviotas to search for a new product. Gaviotans’ efforts to grow their own food had led them through experiments in hydroponics, use of organic fertilizers, and African goat-herding. The beautiful glass and steel building that was once a fully functioning hospital was converted into a research laboratory and then a water-purification and bottling plant.

It became clear to us that most of the successes at Gaviotas were not a result of brilliant planning but of a trial and error process, replete with wrong turns and detours.

Gaviotas showed us that there is not an orchestrated march toward a finished product—there is only the process, the unpredictable evolution of strategies and ideas.
was the double-action water pump, a “from Patagonia to Maine.” There in Gaviotas and adopted in projects of appropriate technologies pioneered “natural diffusion.” He rattled off a list in and out of the community through tions or technology. But ideas flowed formal plan for disseminating solu- ment projects elsewhere in the world. had influenced international develop- gram, and we asked him how Gaviotas United Nations Development Pro- years as a technical evaluator for the technical director of Gaviotas in the 1970s and 1980s.

Zapp said Gaviotas never had a formal plan for disseminating solutions or technology. But ideas flowed in and out of the community through “natural diffusion.” He rattled off a list of appropriate technologies pioneered in Gaviotas and adopted in projects “from Patagonia to Maine.” There was the double-action water pump, a simplified cement and chicken-wire building technique, and pioneering work in low-cost hydroponics. Gaviotan solar water heaters have been installed atop buildings across Colombia. A brick-making press—not invented by Gaviotans but proven viable when they used it to build their factory, hospital, and homes—became a key tool in the reconstruction of cities across Latin America leveled by natural disasters.

But the real lessons of Gaviotas aren’t about technology. “What was spread in large part,” Zapp said, “was that people learned to believe in their own abilities.”

Gaviotas demonstrated to the world how effective it is to involve ordinary people in creating their own technologies and solving their own problems. Case in point: A Peruvian govern- ment official visited Gaviotas in the early 1980s and took note of the village’s nutritional program, which provided a daily glass of fortified milk to each child. The official brought both the idea and Gaviotas’ collaborative approach back to Lima. Instead of creating a top-down government program, he helped mobilize poor mothers to prepare and distribute the milk themselves. The program ultimately empowered thousands of women through the popular movement known as Vaso de Leche. The nutritional practice spread, and with it the Gaviotan emphasis on community participation.

Zapp’s experiences at Gaviotas led to a turning point in his work. He left what he calls the “priesthood of science,” in which experts deliver knowledge to “the masses,” and committed his life to helping people develop their own solutions. In Zapp’s definition, development means renewing one’s faith in the collective intelligence of humans.

Making Space for Creativity

We came away from our visit to Colom- bia with a new understanding of what it looks like to address environmental and social problems in a sustainable, inclusive way.

Lugari made it clear that Gaviotas is not something you can replicate. He’d visited organizations and eco-logically friendly towns around the world. But none combined all the essential ingredients he feels are necessary for sustainability. Security concerns, shifting national politics, and financial constraints have hamstrung efforts to create larger versions of Gaviotas elsewhere in the savannah.

We spoke with Alan Weisman, who confirmed Lugari’s assessment. Weisman has received thousands of inquiries about Gaviotas from professors, energy experts, high schools, international NGOs, and even a dance company in Oregon. “People constantly tell me,” Weisman says, “that the place just gives them hope.” But Weisman knows of no one who has started a Gaviotas replica.

Lugari never intended for Gaviotas to serve as a blueprint for sustainable development, or even a clearinghouse of appropriate technologies. Instead, he wanted to show the world that it was possible to live sustainably by drawing on local resources, or as he describes it, living within the “economy of the near.” And he has done so by staying faithful to two principles: allowing space for adaptation and creativity, and ensuring that everyone, not just “experts,” is involved and empowered.

To realize our New Mexico vision, we’ll need to embrace Lugari’s principles and release our grip on our plans. We are now exploring ways to collaborate with others and expand our summer institute into a year-round “school.” We envision a place where youth work with community members and create their own new strategies and technologies, searching for the imaginative “surprises” that our own little corner of New Mexico so desper-ately needs.

Seth Biderman and Christian Casillas were born and raised in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Biderman is a teacher and writer currently based in Colombia. His work has appeared in New Mexico Magazine, the Santa Fe Reporter, and The New York Times. Casillas is a Ph D candidate at the University of California-Berkeley’s Energy and Resources Group.
It’s time for each of us to have a talk with our inner economist. If humanity is to survive the hardships that lie ahead due to climate change, we’ve got to abandon the now universal, but originally Western, ethos of economic growth. That onward-and-upward, more-is-better paean to the accumulation of individual wealth and to the idea of Earth-as-tool has led us blindly into a very tight spot. If we don’t abandon those notions and change the way our societies operate, we may face utter collapse.

So argues veteran environmental journalist Dianne Dumanoski in The End of the Long Summer: Why We Must Remake Our Civilization to Survive on a Volatile Earth. The book skillfully weaves evidence from climatology, biology, history, anthropology, economics, and other fields to dispel any feel-good misconceptions about global warming, explain its causes, and try to prepare us for what’s ahead.

If you were picturing a gradual climb in Earth’s temperatures potentially making northern areas more hospitable, think again. “Volatile” is the key word here.

Before the last 12,000 years of nearly unprecedented climate stability—the period known as “the long summer” that allowed complex civilizations to develop—chaotic climate swings were the norm. Climate varied more from decade to decade than it has in the past 12,000 years. Picture an ice age developing in the span of a lifetime, or even a decade—this scenario may confront us, depending on how the Earth reacts to our toxic influences.

The Earth’s volatility is a key point, Dumanoski stresses. Science does not (and cannot) predict all, and she says that in the century ahead, we need to prepare for swift, wild surprises. “Nature is not like a mechanical escalator but like a leaping dragon,” she writes. We’ve got to prepare for the worst even as we try to stop our ongoing damage to the Earth.

It’s not an original notion, but only a few have acted on it so far.
example, the San Francisco Chronicle reports that in California, known for its regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, a panel of leaders is forming a “Plan B” to deal with the disruptive effects of climate change. The End of the Long Summer helps readers get the big picture and think globally, but it is less clear on how we should act locally. The idea that we must redirect Western civilization is daunting, so Dumanoski suggests strategies drawn from human history of surviving past climate crises.

She advocates a two-pronged strategy of “survivability” (which she differentiates from individualistic, run-for-the-hills survivalism): Reduce the activities that are “disrupting the Earth’s metabolism,” she says, and improve the resilience of our communities and institutions by changing systems that make us vulnerable to climate change.

Dumanoski urges us to transform our global, must-keep-growing, too-big-to-fail economy and social systems. These systems prioritize the accumulation of financial capital over the generation of social capital. In the future, they will need to be based on trust and cooperation. There may be no one to bail us out if climate change interrupts international trade. We must revise our systems of producing food and “essential” goods to incorporate principles of functional redundancy, diversity, and compartmentalization. In crudely simple terms, we can’t rely on apples from Washington or clothing and steel from China being delivered on demand if climate change rapidly destroys croplands and interrupts transportation. Strong communities will be partially self-sufficient yet rely on multiple sources. They will have allies willing to help, and will warehouse a variety of foods and goods to get through hard times.

Dumanoski offers a number of policy suggestions—her own and others’—toward these ends. We could reinstitute grain stockpiles, which have largely disappeared from countries around the world since the 1990s, due to the policies of the United States, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Governments could mandate that manufacturers use diverse sources of raw materials, components, and services, and require companies to disclose their sources and suppliers, so that investors reward those who spread their risk.

Given the weak agreements that came out of the Copenhagen climate talks, however, it’s hard to imagine world leaders agreeing to change the underpinnings of the world economy. When the economy is mentioned in the same breath as climate change, it’s usually in reference to climate policies potentially hurting “the economy” or kick-starting a “green economy.” Dumanoski suggests that the fundamental ideas that drive economic theory have to change in order to cope with the climate crisis.

What would it look like to have a resilient community that functions in cooperation with the Earth? Could some indigenous societies serve as models? Notably, the idea is not explored in the book. Dumanoski does point to some encouraging trends in the growing activism for organic and locally grown food, the preservation of seed and farmland, crop diversity, and the acknowledgment of Earth as Gaia, a living organism.

The End of the Long Summer gives us another in a string of much-needed wake-up calls. While it may be hard to imagine humanity responding as Dumanoski very convincingly says we should, she emphasizes that we have the capacity to surprise ourselves. “The only certain thing about the coming century is its immense uncertainty,” she writes. It’s time to embrace that uncertainty and start preparing for climate change as best we can.

Sherry Boschert is author of Plug-in Hybrids: The Cars That Will Recharge America (New Society Publishers) and a cofounder of Plug In America.

www.YesMagazine.org/diane-dumanoski
An interview with the author

YES! PICKS ::
Musical inspiration while putting out this issue

Seis Poemas
Central to a revival of Afro-Peruvian music, Susana Baca has been described as bossa nova cut down to its core. Her plaintive voice is most appropriate here—Seis Poemas serves as an elegy to the silenced voices of great poets. Her songs at once celebrate and mourn.

By the People: For the People
Want to recreate Election Night chills? Try this after-the-fact soundtrack inspired by last year’s documentary. Don’t miss Bruce Springsteen’s “This Land is Your Land,” John Mayer and Ben Harper’s “Waiting On the World to Change,” and John Legend’s “Redemption Song.”

Oh! Mighty Engine
Finally, a second solo album from Neil Halstead. His hushed vocals are familiar, and you must—you must—tap your foot. His lyrics tell stories that are personal and imaginative, and they will sweeten your mood.

 mechanically
In many ways, the food movement has spent the last 40 years catching up with Wendell Berry. This most steadfast of advocates for healthy and sustainable food was a lonely voice when he began his defense of traditional farming in the early 1970s. In those days, most thinkers on the subject were still praising corporate farms for increasing production.

A sixth-generation Kentucky farmer, who is also a poet and novelist, Berry was not fooled. The big farms might have solved the problem of production, but at what cost? They had replaced the careful labor of people with “machines, drugs, and chemicals” that damaged the land and put farmers in debt. And when those farmers finally picked up and left, they took with them an irreplaceable knowledge of how they worked on those particular parcels of land and of sustainable practices.

The industry hailed all this as an increase in efficiency, but Berry saw it as a crisis of body and soul. “We have enough farmers to use the land,” he wrote in 1986, “but not enough to use it and protect it at the same time.”

This change had profound consequences for the health of our politics as well as our bodies. “A great danger to democracy now in the United States is the steep decline in the number of people who own farmland,” Berry wrote in 1978. Power cannot truly be shared in a society unable to feed itself.

Pragmatic and passionate insights appear in each of the 24 essays in *Bringing it to the Table*, which manages to convey the essence of 40 years of activism in just a few hundred pages. The organization of the collection is superb. The first section on farming lays out Berry’s principles, which are supported in the second part by profiles of particular farmers. The third section consists mostly of selections from Berry’s novels, which show the preparation and consumption of food in the eminently sociable context where Berry feels it belongs.

For urban readers who may never have enjoyed a meal quite so sumptuous in both cuisine and company as those Berry depicts, there’s a pang of sorrow in reading about ways of life, once common as dirt, that now seem oddly foreign. Yet Berry insists that this healthy and sensible life can be ours again, and this book offers essential advice on how to take it back.

James Trimarco is a YES! contributing editor based in New York City.

---

**Bringing it to the Table**

*Wendell Berry*

*Counterpoint, 2009, 256 pages, $14.95*

reviewed by JAMES TRIMARCO

---

**Getting to the Heart of Interfaith**

*Ted Falcon, Don Mackenzie and Jamal Rahman*


reviewed by The Rev. Wendy L. Bell

They came together after 9/11—a Christian pastor, a Jewish rabbi, and a Muslim sheikh. They believe that in the face of today’s immense global challenges, it is imperative that we work together to solve common problems. “It’s a matter of our survival,” they say, and thus begins the captivating story of their shared journey.

Beginning with the assumption that all major religious traditions are authentic and share important core values, the authors present what they believe are the five stages of genuine engagement with those of other faiths: Move beyond suspicion. Learn more about other traditions. Acknowledge the difficult parts of your own. Confront challenging topics. Share spiritual practices.

Fundamentally, this is a book about relationships. It is also both a call to action and a manual for success. We cannot take an interfaith journey simply by reading a book, not even this one. And we will not solve the big problems of this world alone. Instead, we must take up the mantle of this work in our own communities, never forgetting that “it’s a matter of our survival.”

The Rev. Wendy Bell is a Unitarian Universalist minister in Harvard, Massachusetts.

www.YesMagazine.org/interfaith-amigos

New blog by the three Interfaith Amigos
**FILM ::**

**Crude**  
*Directed by Joe Berlinger, 2009, 105 min.*

**reviewed by Elena Johnson**

As a young manual laborer in the Texaco oil fields near his hometown in the Ecuadorian Amazon, Pablo Fajardo says he witnessed the company spill oil and sludge into nearby streams, rivers, and soil.

Fajardo, 35, is now the lead attorney in a 1993 class-action suit against this same oil company (now part of Chevron Corp.). He represents the 30,000 local people who are suffering the effects of the systematic poisoning of their immediate environment—contaminated water, polluted soil, and ever-increasing rates of cancer, birth defects, and leukemia. Joe Berlinger’s latest film, *Crude*, documents Fajardo’s struggle to hold Chevron accountable for this devastation.

*Crude* is a true documentary—it investigates both sides of the story evenly, revealing surprising complexities. For example, Chevron claims the devastation of the area was caused by Petroecuador, which took over Texaco’s holdings in the country in 1992. And Chevron’s lawyers are quick to point out that Fajardo isn’t working alone—he’s backed legally and financially by a major U.S. law firm. Fajardo won a 2008 Goldman Environmental Prize. One of the Chevron attorneys interviewed in the film was later indicted for fraud.

Filmed in Ecuador and the United States over a three-year period, *Crude* is riveting, insightful, and thoroughly researched. While the case is ongoing and may remain unresolved for another 10 years, a court-appointed, independent investigator in Ecuador has recommended that Chevron pay $27 billion in damages.

*Crude* leaves viewers with a sense of hope: If the current Ecuadorian government stays in power, Fajardo could win.

The film’s account of the financial and legal resources required to challenge a multinational company is sobering, however, as is the question that lingers long after the film ends: Can any amount of money compensate a community for the destruction of its land, its rivers, and its way of life?

*Elena Johnson* is a journalist, poet, and researcher based in Vancouver, B.C.

---

**YES! PICKS ::**

Maddening and motivating independent films

**Pray the Devil Back to Hell**  
*Directed by Gini Reticker, 2008, 72 min.*

Watch this incredible story of the women who united to bring peace to Liberia, and imagine how similar movements might resolve wars the world over. The documentary is a riveting account of the violence-plagued West African nation and the women who survived it to face down dictators and warlords.

**Dirt! The Movie**  
*Common Ground Media, 2009, 86 min.*

This celebratory homage to what’s beneath our feet is both beautiful and educational. Dirt, the speakers and the images in this film make clear, is the foundation of life: In order to sustain that life, we must respect and care for dirt. Sound heavy? Animated dirt clods occasionally bounce into the frame to add a little levity.

---

**YES! PICKS ::**  

**Give YES! a Gift of Stock**

You gain significant tax benefits when you give appreciated stock to the nonprofit Positive Futures Network, publishers of *YES! Magazine*. And you fund the powerful ideas and practical actions for a better world that we highlight every day.

CALL JESSICA AT 206/842-5009 EXT. 213

www.YesMagazine.org/films53  
Watch the trailers
SCRAPS TO SOIL

I don't have much of a yard. Can I still compost?

Composting helps keep food waste out of landfills, reduces your individual carbon footprint, and provides extra nutrients to gardens. And you don't have to live on a vast acreage, or even have a yard at all, to set up your own composting system.

Apartment dwellers can collect table scraps in a small bucket near the sink and empty the bucket into the green yard-waste bins provided by many city recycling programs. If your town’s yard-waste service doesn’t accept food scraps, check around for neighbors or community gardens that would welcome a small weekly addition to their compost piles.

Feeling more ambitious? Construct a small, covered worm bin indoors. Bins can be made from wood or plastic, as long as the materials have never been treated with chemicals and the bin has adequate ventilation. Composting worms can be mail-ordered from gardening catalogues or purchased at a local bait shop (ask for red wigglers). Line your bin with a layer of cool moist bedding, like shredded newspaper, cardboard, or leaves, and bury food scraps throughout the bin.

Worms won’t waste any time digesting your leftovers into nutrient-rich compost—generally a pound of worms can digest about a half-pound of food each day. Nor are they picky eaters—they’ll chow down on eggshells, coffee grounds, and even coffee filters. However, you should NOT feed them meat, animal bones, dairy products, oil and grease, or any kind of fecal matter.

The simplest compost system, if you have a good-sized yard, is a single pile, layered with food and yard waste, to allow for aeration. You can buy a bin or make one yourself. Three feet square is a good starting size. If you’re not worried about neatness, start a heap on the ground—no bin needed.

Green-thumbed composters can also try trench composting. Dig an 8-inch hole or trench, fill with about 4 inches of food scraps, then top with the soil you removed and douse thoroughly with water. It takes about a year for trench compost to break down fully, so it’s a good idea to build your trench next to an existing garden row. This will provide nutrients to neighboring plants while your food scraps are still busy breaking down.

For a list of helpful websites and online resources, visit yesmagazine.org/53yesbuthow.—B.A.

SAFE AND GREEN

Is there such a thing as “green” birth control?

Environmentally friendly contraception is easier than you might think.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, more than 30 percent of U.S. women use birth-control pills, making them the most common method of female contraception today.

Several studies have linked the estrogen that ends up in our sewage systems and bodies of water to sex changes in fish and frogs. One study showed that 80 percent of male smallmouth bass in rivers in Virginia and Maryland were producing eggs.

So the pill is not your greenest option. If you’re set on that method, progestin-only “mini-pills”—slightly less effective than estrogen—are available.

If you have a long-term partner and a knack for recordkeeping, you could try Natural Family Planning (NFP) or “periodic abstinence.” Since both individuals must cooperate, it serves as a great medium for inter-partner communication. NFP is less expensive than standard forms of birth control, works without artificial devices, hormones, or drugs; and has no harmful side effects for the
user. Often, women report feeling more connected to their own bodies, since focusing on cyclical changes is key to this method. Georgetown University’s Institute for Reproductive Health (www.irh.org) offers some great information on the topic.

Condoms are a popular, relatively green option; they account for an incidental amount of U.S. waste.

Polyurethane condoms tend to resist biodegradation, but latex condoms are biodegradable when disposed of properly in a garbage receptacle. If you flush them, they don’t biodegrade. Polysisprene, or natural rubber, condoms are for those with a latex allergy.

Darker hair dyes contain larger quantities of chemicals and may act as more of a health hazard than their lighter counterparts; a 2001 study by the American Cancer Society found an increased risk of bladder cancer in people who used darker dyes monthly over a period of 15 years or more. The European Commission in 2006 banned a list of 22 hair-dye chemicals with potential links to bladder cancer.

Look for eco-friendly salons in your area, or ask your stylist about switching to plant-based coloring products. These dyes use natural ingredients such as henna to color your strands and are available in colors from dark brown to strawberry blonde.

Herbal products will need to be applied more frequently to maintain color, as they don’t use chemicals to strip the shafts of your hair before depositing color. Still, be sure to check the ingredient list before you buy: Some dyes claiming to be natural still use hydrogen peroxide and PPD.

Permanent dyes, however, may be the only effective option if more than half of your hair is grey, or if you want to go lighter. In that case, your best bet is to go for a semi-or demi-permanent dye with lowered levels of peroxide and PPD.—B.A.

user. Often, women report feeling more connected to their own bodies, since focusing on cyclical changes is key to this method. Georgetown University’s Institute for Reproductive Health (www.irh.org) offers some great information on the topic.

Condoms are a popular, relatively green option; they account for an incidental amount of U.S. waste.

Polyurethane condoms tend to resist biodegradation, but latex condoms are biodegradable when disposed of properly in a garbage receptacle. If you flush them, they don’t biodegrade. Polysisprene, or natural rubber, condoms are for those with a latex allergy.

“Natural skin” condoms are not animal-friendly (they’re made from sheep intestines), but they’re your greenest pick. Though as effective as other condoms at pregnancy prevention, they do not protect against sexually transmitted diseases. Casein, a milk derivative, is used to manufacture most condoms.

Though not to be used on a regular basis, the Plan B® One-Step or Next Choice emergency contraceptive pills are available over the counter at most U.S. pharmacies for those at least 17 years old.

Find vegan-friendly condom brands and links to online resources at yesmagazine.org/53yesbuthow.—A.G.
UPDATE

HAS THE PROMISE OF THE STORIES WE’VE PUBLISHED TURNED INTO REALITY?

10 YEARS AGO ...
YES! covered the story of artist Betsy Damon and landscape architect Margie Ruddick’s “Keepers of the Waters” project, the Living Water Garden, part of a citywide revitalization program in Chengdu, China. The garden, built on a fish-shaped 5.9-acre plot of land on the Fu and Nan Rivers in 1998, serves as both an art project and a living water-treatment facility that uses vegetation, settling ponds, and aeration to clean polluted water. It purifies only 250 cubic meters of river water a day—its principal function is education and recreation. Damon was also working on Keepers of the Waters projects in Portland, Oregon, and Duluth, Minnesota.

TODAY ...
In Portland, students, parents, and teachers from the da Vinci Arts Middle School transformed an old tennis court into a water garden that cleans and absorbs all the runoff from the school’s 15,000 square feet of roof and pavement. In addition to reducing the amount of water that drains into the Willamette River, the project demonstrates technology that can manage stormwater even at the individual household level. The Duluth project remains in the planning stages.

Funding difficulties caused by a change in city administration resulted in faulty infrastructure at Chengdu’s Living Water Garden, and Damon left the project unfinished.

In the summer of 2009, however, Damon and her colleagues drew up an alternate blueprint for finishing the park, including transforming a stagnant, mosquito-ridden pool into a dynamic fountain. Construction is underway.

Damon’s latest project is a book and documentary on Tibetan water culture. “Most indigenous cultures knew their water sources and protected them,” Damon says. She is concerned that fresh water supplies in Tibet are imperiled by problems ranging from overuse by corporate bottling plants to the accumulation of plastic prayer offerings at sacred water sites.

Damon started a cleanup crew with a school of Tibetan monks and found the local river strewn with plastic bags, metal paint cans, and other debris. She hopes to hold village meetings and work with one Tibetan monastery at a time to create new educational hubs, spreading clean water knowledge to surrounding areas. “Wherever I go I try to get people to reconnect and make our water systems alive,” she says.

She is also continuing to work in the United States. Damon is now concentrating on the St. Lucie Watershed and the Indian River Lagoon near Stuart, Florida. Plastic trash and other pollutants are causing illness in manatees, dolphins, and even humans. Damon and her team of eight eco-activist artist apprentices are aiming for “plastic-free seas,” urging all businesses selling to boaters to eliminate plastic packaging. —Ashlee Green

www.YesMagazine.org/water-art
Photo essay of the Chengdu project