The Public i, a project of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, is an independent, collectively-run, community-oriented publication that provides a forum for topics underreported and voices underrepresented in the dominant media. All contributors to the paper are volunteers. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to submit articles or story ideas to the editorial collective. We prefer, but do not necessarily restrict ourselves to, articles on issues of local impact written by authors with local ties.

The opinions are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the IMC as a whole.

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You don’t need a degree in journalism to be a citizen journalist. We are all experts in something, and we have the ability to share our information and knowledge with others. The Public i is always looking for writers and story ideas. We invite you to submit ideas or proposals during our weekly meetings (Thursdays at 5:30pm at the UCIMC), or to contact one of the editors.

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Get Involved with the Public i
This issue of the Public i is dedicated to Bob J. Wahlfeldt

Paintings by: John Jennings

The Public i, April 2008
V8, #4

Published by the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center

March to Tibet
Kyra Shaughnessy
Page 1

Toxic Legacy, Part 2
CU Political Action Project
Page 2

3 Cops vs. a Community
Brian Dolinar
Page 3

Teaching in Danville’s Prison
Sarah Ross
Page 5
March To Tibet: Tibetans Rise Up after Fifty years of Chinese Occupation

By Kyra Shaughnessy

Kyra Shaughnessy is an international performing artist, writer and recent graduate of the School for Designing a Society. She has a degree in International Development and is currently studying performance and language.

I'm glad to hear about the Dalai Lama talking to the marchers. At the same time it's the only really peaceful thing happening to protest the Chinese occupation. So it's a bit to think about, most of these monks have had brothers and sisters and mothers killed by the Chinese and all they want is to either visit their graves or see if anyone is still alive. So I sympathize with their wanting to go back and I see that the Dalai Lama was right about this not being the right time to protest. The Chinese government has given leave to Han Chinese settlers to kill and rape any Tibetans gathering in a group of more than 2 people. It's a cultural genocide and I'm sure the Chinese will kill all of these monks if they try to cross into China. I can't tell them not to keep on marching just like I can't tell Tibetans who just want to see their families not to try and go home.

—Author's brother, via e-mail from India

On March 10th, hundreds of Tibetan refugees left Dharamsala, India on foot. Demonstrations of solidarity were held in major cities worldwide, including Chicago. This date marked the 49th year since the 1959 Lhasa Uprising, which resulted in the exile of the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, as well as thousands of other Tibetans who fled the oppression of Chinese rule.

The goal of the marchers is to walk across the Himalayas to the Tibetan border where they hope to return to a country and families that they have not been allowed to see in decades. It will take six months to reach their destination. However they have already met with interference from the Indian authorities and it is uncertain whether they will be allowed to continue all the way to the border.

The Indian government fears that support of the march will have a negative impact on economic relations with China. By contrast, the population of India has been extremely supportive of the marchers, likening the non-violent protest to Gandhi's Salt March of 1930. India has been extremely supportive of the Chinese government. Not only are Tibetans granted no right of return to their country (people attempting to return are frequently shot), it is illegal to teach the Tibetan language, fly Tibetan flags, or hold any traditional rituals or celebrations. Simply owning a photo of the Dalai Lama is considered treasonous.

In a recent speech in Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama accused China of "unimaginable and gross violations of human rights." For nearly six decades Tibetans have had to live in a state of constant fear, intimidation and suspicion under Chinese repression [which] continues to increase with monstrous, unimaginable and gross violations of human rights, denial of religious freedom and the politicization of religious issues." Chinese security forces have been reported as routinely raiding Tibetan monasteries, and these raids have increased drastically over the past month.

Many Tibetans feel that extreme action is the only way that change will take place at this point. The Dalai Lama has spent decades trying to sway international bodies such as the United Nations to support the Tibetan cause and stop the ongoing genocide, with little response. Despite this, the majority of protests by Tibetans and their supporters, including the March to Tibet, continue to have non-violent intentions. That these protests frequently result in violence is a consequence of the response of the Chinese Army.

Currently both the British and Chinese Prime Ministers have requested meetings with the Dalai Lama (having refused to meet with him in previous years). The Olympic flame, scheduled to be carried through Tibet, has raised fears among Chinese officials that its reputation will be damaged further, if protests continue during the event. We are on the verge of losing one of the most courageous and peacefully powerful cultures still in existence. The international community has remained silent on this issue for far too long. This is a moment in history with immense transformative potential, should we choose to take it. It is a call to action.

France just announced that it is boycotting the Olympics in China. Opening ceremonies, unless China frees its political prisoners and opens dialogue with the Dalai Lama. So maybe India will ask us to march the whole way now that there is international support... there is talk that we may be deported if we are arrested again... but it is a risk I am willing to take... 

—Email from author's brother

To read regular reports directly from the march and to find ways of showing your support, go to www.tibetanuprising.org.

SNAP

In prison when someone snaps in an extraordinarily shocking manner; the perfect inmate, about to parole out, walks into the shift office, closes the door, tells the warden and entire staff what's wrong with the criminal justice system in general and with each of them in specific and nails it; well, the inmate, he gets banked, that's no surprise shipped immediately to Joliet. Insanely self destructive even according to criminal standards.

Totally unexpected. No warning. All the other inmates amazingly jumpy and paranoid for almost two weeks—mental tipsy toes, no one trusts himself nor anyone else not to screw up. They say, “We got a hawk on a pole.”

—Michael Holloway
A Toxic Legacy: Douglass Park Residents In Their Own Words, Part 2

By Douglass Park Residents & C-U Political Action Project

The Douglass Park neighborhood is home to a toxic legacy. Beneath the vacant lot at 5th and Hill, the soil and groundwater have long been contaminated. Along with an abandoned pump house, this contamination is the last remaining sign that a manufactured gas plant once sat on the property. The Douglass Park neighborhood is also home to a group of residents who are tackling this legacy head-on. Part of that toxic legacy is about information, or rather the lack of it. Most residents say they’ve heard very little over the years from the companies responsible for the site—Ameren and its predecessor company, Illinois Power. They find this to be problematic, given the contaminants in the ground at 5th and Hill, among other cancer-causing agents. Health concerns, of course, are another part of the site’s toxic legacy. Many residents have voiced concerns about illness in their families, and in the families of friends and neighbors. They suspect some of these illnesses may be related to contaminants present at the site.

In recent weeks, many Douglass Park neighbors sat down with the C-U Political Action Project to share their perspectives on the 5th and Hill Site and its toxic legacy.

LILLIAN DRIVER, DOUGLASS PARK RESIDENT
When did you first become aware of the situation with the 5th and Hill site? I became aware of a group of young students [The C-U Political Action Project]. No one from Ameren or the city ever informed any of us. I’ve been here for seven years, one ever informed me. I was concerned, because I would see people taking water samples, and the coalition was the one who confirmed that there was a problem. So I wasn’t wrong in my thinking.

How would you evaluate the efforts of Ameren and its predecessor company, Illinois Power, when it comes to informing the neighborhood? Do you feel the companies have done a good job helping people become informed over the years? Do you think there is anything they could or should have done differently? I would rate them very poorly. They never, they never informed us of anything. I’ve been here for seven years, and I was never informed. Even my neighbors were never informed. They’ve done a horrible job. They should have informed all of the neighbors personally if there was a problem, and that they were trying to take care of it. So let us see and think they’re not doing anything, they’re not concerned, because they never informed any of us.

You’re part of the coalition between people in the Douglass Park Neighborhood, C-U Citizens for Peace and Justice, and Champaign County Health Care Consumers. Some have argued that the coalition is about the concerns of people outside the neighborhood, rather than about the concerns of people in the neighborhood. What’s your reaction to that? That is not true. We are very well concerned. I was so happy to know that when this group of young students came to my home to inform me there was a problem. That confirmed to me, and that here they are taking the initiative to help bring awareness. They made us realize that these young students trying to bring forth a solution for Ameren to help clean up the situation. So this is the only concern we’ve seen. Not Ameren, these young students.

PAULETTE COLEMAN, FORMER DOUGLASS PARK RESIDENT & CCHCC STAFF MEMBER
What concerns do you have about how the site may have affected people over the years? What concerns, if any, do you have about living near the site today? I’m really concerned about the health risks and what the long term health risks are. Because this is a community where people don’t move away. If you get a house over here, it’s probably because you can’t afford to get a house somewhere else. So you probably tend to stay in the house in the area a lot longer.

I’ve only lived here for two and a half years. I’m really interested in what other health effects are, besides those of possible [cancer] cluster and different things like that. I would really like to know the other effects. We’ve been hearing about women with strange bleeding episodes. Women having surgeries on their reproductive organs at young ages. Young boys around here have had problems that might be related to attention and learning disorders.

What successes has the coalition had so far? What still needs to be addressed? I believe that the coalition’s success is that people are now talking about it. People are now asking questions. You know, it went years and years without any questions. People were dying, people were having strange bleeding episodes, and nobody even thought twice about it. Now that questions are being raised [about whether these problems are connected to the site], and that’s the best thing. Word of mouth is the best. The more they talk to each other, the more they can say “oh, my family has similar problems.” You know it’s easier to talk to someone who you think can relate to you.

I think the coalition should definitely try to work with Ameren and all the other people to keep the community notified of the important changes or what the health risks are. Because really—right now—they’re not informed. I think the community should be informed at every step.

RUFUS KERSH, DOUGLASS PARK RESIDENT
What concerns do you have about how the site may have affected people over the years? What concerns, if any, do you have about living near the site today? This could be deadly stuff, you know what I’m saying? I got kids over here so, you know. And this used to be my old stomping grounds so I want to know what’s going on.

You’re part of the coalition between people in the Douglass Park Neighborhood, C-U Citizens for Peace and Justice, and Champaign County Health Care Consumers. Some have argued that the coalition is about the concerns of people outside the neighborhood, rather than about the concerns of people in the neighborhood. What’s your reaction to that? Well, it’s about time somebody started speaking up, because this is some serious stuff. This toxic stuff, people are concerned about this, because people live around here. Kids live around here. You know that’s what I think.

What successes has the coalition had so far? What still needs to be addressed? This coalition has been informing people. That’s what we need to do. It’s the best thing.

Learn about Fifth and Hill WEFT 90.1 FM
Liberacion! Sunday, April 13 at 10:00 am
Prairie Grassroots Hour, April 27 at 10:00 am

¿PROTEJANSE! ICERaids Hit Champaign
The last month has brought a series of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids to immigrant communities across the county. The raids, touted as a criminal fighting activity, have now reached Champaign, with more than a dozen arrests made in the area. Efforts are being made by Latino immigrant rights activists in the area to inform immigrants of their rights.

KNOW YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS!
Location: Shadow Wood Community Center
1600 N. Market St, Champaign
Saturday, April 12 7:00–8:30 pm
The program by Street Law and Latino/α Law Student Association, will cover general law in the topic area. Contact arubin@law.uiuc.edu for more information.

Phaedra C. Pezzullo, is Assistant Professor of Communication and Culture at Indiana University.
What are your thoughts on Fifth and Hill? It’s important to recognize that environmental racism or environmental pollution has been disproportionately placed in communities of color and exists as a national phenomenon. In 2007, there was a landmark study completed, Toxic Wastes and Race at 20, prepared for the United Church of Christ by four top environmental justice sociologists. Their findings confirm, once again, that people of color make up the majority of those who live in host communities, which are less than two miles from a hazardous waste site. Communities of color, too often, are segregated and dumped on in ways that would not be tolerated in white communities. I think it’s encouraging that the Douglass Park community has begun to reach out to so many people outside their neighborhood by inviting them in through toxic tours. This is how we are supposed to act in a democracy.

When companies like Ameren IP and the Illinois EPA say the site poses no immediate threat do you find that misleading? That’s definitely misleading. To say there is no immediate threat would be like saying to someone about their house “Well your house is about to be foreclosed in a month, but don’t worry about it today.” Of course you are going to worry about the future, if it’s your own body, your own health, and your own families’ health. So even if it’s not an ‘immediate threat’ what is the plan? Is the plan to wait until someone dies gets sick, is the plan to wait until someone is harmed? That seems like a poor way to address this issue.

Ameren IP and Public Officials have been quoted as saying that concerned citizens in the neighborhood are outsiders. Is this something you have found to be the case elsewhere? Yes, one of the first facts that institutions make, when they have admitted they polluted the community, is to blame the victim. In a community like Champaign-Urbana where they have admitted to what they have done to this neighborhood, they turn around and try to point the finger at someone else. That’s the best way to address this issue.

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Three Cops Versus an Entire Community
By Brian Dolinar

Three Cops Versus an Entire Community

Probable cause, probable cause
You don't have to break no laws
They say probable cause
—Brandy Nubian, hip hop group

NEARLY A YEAR AGO, on March 30, 2007, a 17-year-old black youth was stopped in Douglass Park, pepper sprayed, and sent to the hospital by Champaign police, it put the issue of police brutality in the spotlight locally. The incident occurred down the street from the home of Gina Jackson, the only African American on City Council, who at the City Council meeting following the incident stated, "racial profiling exists. It always has and it always will."

The trial of Brian Chesley, charged with two misdemeanor counts for resisting and obstructing a peace officer, began on March 25, 2008 and ended four days later with a guilty verdict on both counts. A rotating group of 40-50 community members sat through portions of the trial in support of Chesley. Attorneys Bob Kirchner and Ruth Wyman took the case pro bono. They called 14 witnesses, most of them Chesley. Davis testi

The trial of Brian Chesley, charged with two misdemeanor counts for resisting and obstructing a peace officer, began on March 25, 2008 and ended four days later with a guilty verdict on both counts. A rotating group of 40-50 community members sat through portions of the trial in support of Chesley. Attorneys Bob Kirchner and Ruth Wyman took the case pro bono. They called 14 witnesses, most of them Chesley. Davis tested his story on the stand, but refused to write anything about trespassing in his police report. Davis admitted that he never told Chesley he was trespassing and that he stopped Chesley because, "I wanted to know why he was in the park."

Witnesses would later testify that the gym was open until 11 p.m. and that there were people coming and going from playing basketball. They described approximately 50-60 young people in the gym. It was one of the first warm nights of spring and there were 15-20 kids in the park that night in front of the library, on benches, and on the outdoor basketball court. Kirchner pressed Davis as to why he selectively stopped Chesley. The question went unanswered. How were youth expected to leave the gymnasium if all of the surrounding park area was closed at dusk?

Officers Shannon Bridges and Justus Clinton, both white, followed Davis on the stand. They detailed how they drove up 5th Street in a squad car and turned onto Tremont, where they saw Chesley on the sidewalk, across the street from the park. Bridges got out of the car and asked Chesley to stop. Chesley continued walking. Bridges then grabbed Chesley's right arm and put it behind his back in a move called a "chicken wing." According to her, Chesley "squared up" and took a defensive stance. Speaking in euphemisms, she said that she "secured" Chesley on a fence, but he fought back. By that time, officer Clinton had grabbed his left arm. Next, Bridges described officer Clinton putting Chesley in a "bear hug" and "assisting" him to the ground—the middle of Tremont street approximately 10 feet away. Clinton then pepper-sprayed him once with a second burst of pepper spray.

THE COMMUNITY

The African American youth who were in the park that night gave a different account of what happened. Due to their fear of retaliation from the police, we have chosen not to publish their full names. As attorney Ruth Wyman stated in her opening argument, this trial pitted those who were professional witnesses against ordinary people who were "not polished, because they are not."

Two other youth, ages 8 and 15 at the time, both testified on the stand that they were playing basketball with Chesley at the Douglass Park gymnasium as part of a Mission 180 program that was held every Friday night until 11 p.m. The three of them were leaving the gym to go to the "Arab," a convenience store at 4th and Tremont, and then take the 8-year-old home. They said police stopped Chesley, pushed him into a fence, picked him up, and slammed him face first onto the surrounding street. Chesley was not fighting back. They didn’t know what he was being arrested for.

While officer Bridges described Chesley as being "assisted" to the ground, others who testified said that police: "jumped him," "tackled him down," "piled up on him," "stacked on top of him," "were brutally beating him," "whooping him," and "manhandling him." Once witness said Chesley was sprayed three times with pepper spray. All heard Chesley screaming out repeatedly that he couldn’t breathe, but said police would not get off of him. The 8-year-old said that his friend Brian, "looked dead." Chesley decided to take the stand and testified that he heard Davis instruct him to stop, but told the officer, "I didn’t do nothing wrong." He described getting his hoodie stuck on the fence when he was thrown at him. In reaching to get his hood unstuck, it appears police thought he was fighting back. Chesley described being "lifted up" and slammed to the ground with his chest and face hitting the pavement. He said his arm was pinned underneath him and he couldn’t move it because police had a knee in his back. He said he was never told that he was under arrest or what he was being arrested for.

Throughout the trial, Judge Kennedy overruled many of the defense objections, but the judge’s biases were most apparent in his severe limiting of the instructions given to the jury: Claims of racial profiling, selective enforcement of law, insufficient evidence for a Terry stop, all these were denied. Kirchner claimed he was left with virtually no defense, that he must be able to argue that the stop was made in an unlawful manner.

Barred from considering the basis of the stop, the jury returned after three hours of deliberation with a guilty verdict.

Those who worry about the impending police state in the wake of the Patriot Act and "total information awareness," should be more concerned about its arrival in black neighborhoods. Already given orders to stop, identify, and arrest anyone on the street, police now have a carte blanche to interrogate us all.

Kirchner and Wyman plan to file a motion for a new trial which will be heard on May 7, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. in Courtroom E.
You Can’t Jail the Spirit: US Political Prisoners and POWs

Compiled by the Prison Activist Resource Center. For other Political Prisoner/POW-related resources, go to our political prisoner page. The list is alphabetical. And as of February 2005, there are so many names that we have split off onto separate pages the lists, those who have died in custody and those who have been recently released.

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Delbert Orr Africa #AM-4985
Edward Goodman Africa #AM-4974
Janet Holloway Africa #006308
Janine Phillips Africa #006309
Michael Davis Africa #AM-4973
William Phillips Africa #AM-4984
Imam Jamil Al-Amin #1104651
Tre Arrow CS#05850722
Kalima Aswad #B24120
Zolo Azania #4969
Herman Bell #79C-0262
Greg Boertje-Obed
Nathan Block #1663667
Joseph ”Jo-Jo” Bowen #AM 4272
Veronza Bowers, Jr. #35316-136
Marilyn Buck #00482-285
Fred ”Muhammad” Burton
Ruben Campa (aka Fernando Gonzalez) #58733-004
Byron Shane Chubbuck #07909-051
Jorge Conroy, #93501-011
Marshal Eddie Conway #116469
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Khalifi X. Khalid #587404
Yu Kilunuru #000008-050
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Mohamman Guika Kori, 80-A-0808
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Eric McDavid
Daniel McGowan #36370-053
Masai Mugmuk #58157
Ramiro “Ramsey” R. Muniz #40288-115
Jalil Muntagum (aka Anthony Jalil Bottom) #77A4283
Sevon Odinga #05228-054
Sara Olson #W94197
Leonard Peltier #89637-132
Ana Lucia Gelabert #384484
David Gilbert #83-A-6158
William Gilday #W33537
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John Wade #38548-083
Hermon ”Hooks” Wallace
Mike Walli
Gary Watson #008890
Hugh Williams #AF 2032
Albert Woodfox #72148
Helen Woodress #03231-045
Joyanna Zacher #1662550
DIED IN PRISON
These comrades joined the ancestors while in custody.

William Rodgers, 2006
Richard Williams, 2005
Warren Wells, 2001
Teddy Jah Heath, 2001
Albert Nuh Washington, 2000
Merle Austin Africa, 1998
Kuwait Balagoo, 1986

Puerto Rican Political Prisoners
Left to right: Carlos Alberto Torres, Haydee Beltran Torres, Oscar Lopez Rivera, and Avelino Gonzalez Claudia

Crime Against Humanity

Puerto Rican Political Prisoners

Washington, DC 20004

HUMAN RIGHTS

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Janet Holloway Africa #006308
Janine Phillips Africa #006309
Michael Davis Africa #AM-4973
Willia...
Teaching and Learning Danville’s Prison

By Sarah Ross

There are few quiet places to study. Many students work all day classes are at night, and school is just not cool in men’s prisons. But the students want to learn. They are hungry for information, even while Western art history. Many students are acutely cognizant of their knowledge deficits and are eager to learn everything. Students ask lots of questions, debate each other, and never let me off the hook with a simple answer.

Teaching in prison is simultaneously one of the most depressing and inspiring experiences. Depressing because prisons are always horrible places. Inspiring because it is there, in the most dismal of places in America, that students say education transforms lives. Some students say that their education has “saved” their lives. Others talk about creating new relationships with family on the outside. One student was in friendly competition with his daughter over who could get the higher grade in a college class.

While many of my students on the outside attending state universities and private schools pay handsome sums for their education, they are often expected to get a degree in order to get a job. The end result is concrete. Pursuit of knowledge for the sake of information, exploration, and experimentation seems less of a concern. In prison, however, because of the obvious reason of confinement, perhaps, education is primarily for the pursuit of knowledge. This makes the experience of teaching both challenging and rewarding.

Recently, I visited a maximum-security prison in New York State and spoke briefly with a Deputy of Programs there. He was adamant about the need for programs of all kinds in prisons, saying that many prisoners didn’t have a fighting chance growing up and so the least society could do now is to provide them an education. But many states are in a financial pinch, having to provide for all the people—they’ve incarcerated, of which more than half of the 2.3 million has never committed a violent crime.

Programs of any kind for incarcerated people, let alone higher education, are not popular among taxpayers, though it makes perfect financial sense. One common sentiment from conservatives and liberals alike is: “I can’t afford to send my own kid to college, why should this guy get to go?” The experience of teaching in prison only invigorates my belief that everyone deserves free access to education. Surely then, we could exchange America’s carceral landscapes, in favor of more humane ones.

In contrast, Chancellor Herman of Jewish ancestry, publicly admonished a cartoon portrayed Jewish people negatively. This response to the stereotypical cartoon portrays a difference in the response of the administration toward racism on campus. When minority students attempt to address issues of racism, either by staging peaceful protests or attending town hall meetings, these events are regulated and contained by the administration.

Under such a regime, racism, in the form of hate speech or other sorts of expressions can easily be informed. By allowing them as “intolerance” as free speech, these acts become normalized. Thus, a culture of silence is created in which agents of racism are silent. This silencing behavior may play has to allow racism to carefully analyze their actions. This perpetuates the cycle of power and oppression in different sectors of society. When these acts, ‘in practice, contradict the university’s expressed values or are left unanswered, we are left to question: Education for whom and for what purpose?”

Free Speech For Whom?

By Patty Garcia and Tanjuft Kang

The one-person show, Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop (JHH) by Danny Hoch was presented at spaces across the UIUC campus. Each performance was followed by a discussion with director, Alex Berg-Jacobson, Assistant Director, Keri Carpenter, and actor, Chris Silcox. One night featured members from the local hip-hop community. Each discussion had a specific focus including Hip-Hop’s viability as an art form, social injustice on the campus and the U.S., and social change.

The director’s commitment to social justice is clearly informed by Berg-Jacobson’s note in the program states, “The only things that I was sure of [when proposing the show were] the potential of the medium to change here on campus, and the power of last year’s forum, Racism, Power, and Privilege. Encouraging and facilitating discussions after all performances created the main goals of both the forum and Hip-Hop—open critical engagement.”

This critical engagement is also exercised by the characters in the piece. One character is a high-weighted man wearing a shirt for selling B and O.J. Simpson t-shirts without a merchant’s license. He reflects on the false advertising of the “American Dream,” which is sold with images of young girls running lemonade stands on their lawns—no license required, of course. The prevention of his attempt to claim his piece of the “American Dream,” in combination with his arresting officer’s violent need to determine his racialized identity, inspires a more complex view of the legal system. As he states, “I’m not in prison because I’m a criminal. I’m in prison because I’m poor.” The piece portrays the prison system as something which punishes the disadvantaged and dehumanizes its participants. From the white prison officer’s habitual use of innate of color to plead guilty because of “how the system works,” to the prison guard at a mandated therapy appointment after alteration bearing innate of color to death, clear distinctions between right and wrong are not allowed. When the behaviors created by society are deemed right and then punished, who will defend the wrong/over-tired.
Violence & the LGBT Community

By Claire Vanous

I recently co-facilitated a workshop on sexual and dating violence in the LGBT community at the Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference. The workshop discussed the topic of sexual and dating violence in the LGBT community. The facilitator and I were jolting about whether or not anyone would even show up for the workshop, because we got the popular time slot of 8:30 am on Sunday morning, and it’s just not as attractive as 8:30 on the morning, right? However, we were pleasantly surprised when people started to show up, and eventually the room filled up! We started off the discussion by introducing ourselves, and everyone in the room did so the same way. What happened next made a huge impression on me. One by one, people in the room disclosed that they had been victims of same-sex sexual violence. Of course I knew that same-sex violence happens to people of all races and genders, and a large group is another thing entirely. I felt inspired by the courage of people to disclose. It also made me think again about the lack of LGBT specific resources and the barriers encountered when seeking information or help.

Violence, for anyone can be a difficult topic to discuss, especially if you know a survivor or are one yourself. Sexual and domestic violence does happen within the LGBT community, but often it remains hidden. Unfortunately, there are few statistics that document how often this kind of violence occurs. However, it is thought that domestic violence occurs about as frequently within LGBT relationships, as it does within heterosexual ones. Although violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, there are additional barriers that LGBT people face when discussing sexual and domestic violence. These barriers include stigma about LGBT people and their relationships, homophobia both from others and internally, the smallness of communities, fear of being outed, and a lack of services and resources that address their issues.

As someone who has been involved with violence prevention and awareness, I have found that there are several important things that need to be addressed regarding sexual and domestic violence within the LGBT community. First, there must be a focus and recognition that sexual and domestic violence within the LGBT population does happen, and it needs to be addressed differently than it is in the larger heterosexual community. Although the foundations of the discussion are the same (violence is about power and control, etc.), the context in which it occurs is unique. One cannot simply change a pronoun when discussing sexual and domestic violence within the LGBT population.

Our Voice: Conversations About Violence In LGBT Communities

A Discussion Series for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer People about: Dating/Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault/Abuse, Stalking/Cyberstalking, Hate Violence, and More. FOOD PROVIDED!

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Secondly, there is need to be a space to accomplish this discussion. The space needs to be accessible to LGBT people, meaning that it is safe, accepting, and free of homophobia. Making these spaces and resources available not only allows LGBT survivors to disclose and heal, but also can promote the community to have discussions about how to hold perpetrators accountable and provide them services as well. Through recognition and discussion about LGBT sexual and domestic violence, LGBT communities can help each other to create a space to empower survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and initiate healing and prevention within LGBT communities for all afflicted.

In Memory of a Revolutionary Trade Unionist

Bob Wahlfeldt died on March 26, 2008. He was an important part of an inspiration to much of the local activist community. The following is excerpted from comments about Bob made by Barbara Kessel and Gene Vanderport on October 7, 2007 at the Solidarity Award Banquet.

BK: Solidarity is ‘an injury to one is an injury to all,’ and I think Bob embodied that. He was born into a fairly large family, and he was about 8 years old when the depression hit. His family was already poor, and they got poorer. They took in other families, so there would be 15 or 16 people in their house that his Mom was cooking for. They didn’t have enough money for food for all of those people, but the farmers in the surrounding area would drop off loads of produce and dairy—no name, free donations on a regular basis. That’s how they got through.

Bob joined the union when he worked on the railroad while in high school, the International Association of Machinists. He joined the Navy in World War II and became a rescue swimmer, returning after the war to Danville. His second union was Mining Mill and Smelter Workers, and his third union, and the one he was in for the longest time, was the American Federation of Government Employees. He was a maintenance electrician at the Veteran’s Administration in Danville, which had the AFGE. He discovered a really interesting young social worker there who wasn’t really interested in unions, but Bob convinced her. And I think it worked. His gay name is Gene Vanderport, and he is here today. Gene.

GV: First of all, the road to justice is not a straight road. It’s a spiraling, rising road. I want to invite up two former presidents of the VA local, Charles Quaries, come on up Charles, and Neil Olson. We all came together around one name who will always be on that in Danville, who Bob set up a Commission—s Bob, that is Bob! And all this time, he was just dead serious. They went to Chicago and found this marvellous man named Phil Smith, who agreed to take the job of director, and they got busy. I want to tell you folks from CUPE what they did. This is going to sound a little familiar. They started following the police around, and they discovered that the police did profiling, racial profiling.

They demanded and got a whole bunch of police reports, they put together a report about the reports, and they demanded and got a civilian police review board. These were their glory days. They lasted about 6 months, and then the mayor said, ‘We can’t have any more of this,’ and the Mayor’s lawyers issued an injunction saying that these police reports would have to become closed and that Bob had to turn them over.

Bob went of this. In the middle of the night, he copied them all several times, and left them in the mail boxes of all the people on the commission. The next morning, when he was served the subpoena, he gave the mayor his copies. But the mayor didn’t know they were all over the place. So as punishment, the mayor tried to fire Phil Smith. Well, the commission wouldn’t fire him, so then he dissolved the entire commission. Bob set up a Commission in Exile, and they published a newspaper every month for two years about stories of injustices. The mayor tried to stop them from doing that, but Bob said, ‘We don’t publish it here, we publish it in Chicago, you can’t stop us.’ That was in the late 1970s. Here we are again.

Now I come to my last story. Brian Dolmar and Chris Evans had a lot of interesting information about Sergeant Myers and spics. They wrote a report about this. They wanted it to get to all the people who worked in the courthouse, and they figured they were not in a very good position themselves to pass this leaflet around. So they asked Bob Wahlfeldt, thanking him for Bob, who was a kind old gentleman, so people aren’t going to give him a lot of trouble. I was working in Books to Prisoners, and I was so glad to be indoors, because it was raining sideways. All of a sudden at the door there was this statue coated with rain. It was Bob, and I realized he was smiling. Bob was not only smiling, he was like a Christmas tree—a thousand watts. He was happy, and I said ‘What’s going on,’ and he said ‘I handed out all those leaflets, and people gave me a hard time too!’ That’s Bob, that’s Bob! And all this time, he was just being himself. He tells other people, not just me, ‘Remember to be yourself.’ And I understood, finally, that it means really what it says. It means bring your gifts to the table, whatever they are, and put them out into the community, because he’s for solidarity.

BOB WAHLFELDT DIED ON MARCH 26, 2008. He was an important part of an inspiration to much of the local activist community. The following is excerpted from comments about Bob made by Barbara Kessel and Gene Vanderport on October 7, 2007 at the Solidarity Award Banquet.
A Grassroots School for Social Change

By Rob Scott

Every city/state/society should have at least one educational institution dedicated to the creative construction of new formulations of the social problems and solutions that perpetuate that social system. Only one school is dedicated to such a function and it is located in Urbana, Illinois—the School for Designing a Society.

The school is one student in the Department of Education Policy Studies at the University of Illinois. He has a Masters' degree in Environmental Science.

The school was founded in 1996 by Rob Scott, the current Director. The school has grown from a small group of students and faculty to a large, active community with over 100 members. The school is dedicated to the creative construction of new formulations of the social problems and solutions that perpetuate that social system.

The school believes that education is the key to creating a new society. The school offers courses in sociology, economics, political science, and environmental studies. The school also offers workshops and seminars on a variety of topics, including social justice, environmentalism, and economic development.

The school has a strong commitment to community service. The school has helped to organize many local projects, including a food bank, a homeless shelter, and a community garden. The school also provides training and support for students who want to start their own projects.

The school is located in Urbana, Illinois. The school takes place in a building located at 805 West Pennsylvania Avenue. The school is open to all students and community members.