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 underrepresented 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.

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March 19, 2008 marks the fifth anniversary of the Iraq War. The US has reported approximately 4,000 deaths and 30,000 wounded. In Iraq, the staggering loss is estimated to be over 1,000,000 deaths, by direct or indirect consequences of US military occupation. The objective of this war is loosely defined as the restoration of a sovereign state—has clearly been met. This was a nation-state that for almost 30 years functioned in concert with US objectives in the Middle East. But when it squared off, right or wrong, against U.S. interests, the former ally, now “evil” and unworthy of governing itself, had to be invaded and policed, until its return to compliance with US foreign interests.

As a Boricua woman, indigenous to Puerto Rico, who has lived 56 years colonized, it is painful and disturbing, in the wake of such bloodshed, to make sense of this war. State violence and its impact upon my family and my country has been my bedfellow since I was born. The “escape” to the mainland did not leave behind the scars of our impoverishment or the neglected psychic wounds of our oppression. Instead, these were inscribed daily, through the wholesale enactment of class privilege and the brutality of racialized patriarchy. When you grow up “not white,” poor, and female in America, you are forced to constantly live under the shadow of inferiority. This shadow walks with you to school, corrects your pronunciation, berates you for your clothing, molests you in the mirror, reminds you of the doors into which you cannot enter without permission, warns you against the danger lurking behind class crossing, gender crossing, racial crossing, sexual crossing. Borders and fences and walls and glass ceilings are commonplace. The gatekeepers are always waiting. The gatekeepers are always waiting. You have been acclimated to the risk to such public assertion has often been great and its practice difficult. However, it helps us to understand how women and girls have been sparked by the imperative to speak, move, be, and feel, in concert with our own hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits. To believe in mythologies where women gladly or meekly acquiesce to their oppressive male counterparts, without resisting, resisting and reconstructing alternative strategies of survival to equalize power, is simply shortsighted, demeaning, and just plain foolish. That on the surface, oppressed human beings are forced to physically acquiesce or enact submission, fails to recognize that tyranny, no matter how great, remains forever incomplete.

Hence, perhaps the issue is not whether all violence is wrong, but rather under what conditions and toward what ends is violence, and hence war, an acceptable solution? Might there not be political horrors that make war a just alternative? And might there be times when it may be the only solution for our emancipation from oppression? History would prove us wrong to think that there exist no conditions of tyranny far more unjust than waging war. Why did over one million Iraqis die? Why were they swallowed up in the military fervor of “enduring freedom”? What protections did this afford us? This was the killing of human beings that, for all intents and purposes, were as unaware of Al Qaeda’s machinations as most of us. But the difference is that their land is rich with the resources the West has long coveted. Moreover, they are a people deemed backward, extremist and dangerous, just as the island people of my country have been deemed ignorant, violent, and over-sexed. How convenient it has been for the wealthy and powerful to create mythologies of good and evil, of inferiority and supremacy, where the meritorious nature of their goodness is beyond reproach, where the military rape of women in Iraq or the state sterilization of women of color, could be rationalized and justified.

MYTHOLOGIES OF WAR

In the midst of all the fictitious double-speak—just war, “feminist war,” “enduring freedom”—we must challenge mythologies that justify this unjust war. In so doing, the limits of nationalism and patriotic zeal can be exposed, while patriarchal myths of the “brave soldier,” “the good mother,” or “loyal wife” can be shattered, revealing household assumptions that justify poverty, racism, misogyny, and homophobia. Shattering such distortions unveils the fact that, from the beginning of time, women have sought relationships of equality with men. Though the risk to such public assertion has often been great and its practice different across cultures, classes, races, and nations, women like all human beings have been sparked by the imperative to speak, move, be, and feel, in concert with our own hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits. To believe in mythologies where women gladly or meekly acquiesce to their oppressive male counterparts, without resisting, resisting and reconstructing alternative strategies of survival to equalize power, is simply shortsighted, demeaning, and just plain foolish. That on the surface, oppressed human beings are forced to physically acquiesce or enact submission, fails to recognize that tyranny, no matter how great, remains forever incomplete. However, it helps us to understand how women and girls have been sparked by the imperative to speak, move, be, and feel, in concert with our own hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits.

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON VIOLENCE

Yet, for those who have been forced to fight back against physical or psychological assaults that could cost one’s life or sanity, the essential notion that all violence is wrong, seems to ring hollow. Why? Because it has been exactly this capacity to fight back—in ways that pacifists might define as violent—that has allowed us to survive.

Making Sense of the Iraqi War with Boricua Eyes

by Antonia Darder

Antonia Darder is a professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She is longtime Puerto Rican activist-scholar involved in issues related to education, language, immigrant, workers, and women’s rights.
A Toxic Legacy: Douglass Park Residents In Their Own Words

By Douglass Park Residents & C-U Political Action Project

For people living in the Douglass Park neighborhood, the vacant lot at 5th and Hill has a distinctly toxic legacy. People with a connection to the neighborhood have long suspected that the site was a source of problems. As they have come to learn more about the site's history, they have found it difficult to get answers from Ameren, the company responsible for the site. For many residents, the absence of a meaningful community relations program from Ameren or its predecessor Illinois Power is a part of the site's toxic legacy. So are the health concerns, such as several reports of cancer, that have arisen based on the shared experiences among neighbors.

That's why many neighbors have formed a coalition with C-U Citizens for Peace and Justice and Champaign County Health Care Consumers to form the 5th and Hill Neighborhood Rights Campaign. This coalition also involves U of I graduate students who have formed the C-U Political Action Project and conducted a systematic study asking residents a series of questions. These are some of their responses in their own words.

ALVIA DYSON, DOUGLASS PARK

When did you first become aware of the situation with the 5th and Hill Site?

Last year I saw Ameren trucks and stuff digging holes over there, taking dirt out and replacing dirt. That was around 2006. I didn't know what's going on until [CUCPJ and CHCC] started going around letting people know what is going on over there on that site.

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?

Poorly, very poorly. They ain't done nothing and they should have told us something when they started digging over there. They should have let everybody know. I'm sitting on my porch watching them do things over there.

They should have come over while I was sitting there watching them and let me know what's going on and why they were doing whatever they were doing. They should have let everyone know in this neighborhood what's going on over there at that site.

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 is your reaction to that?

You all are outsiders, ... (but the people who own the site don't let us know what's going on ... It's the 'outsiders' that have come out to let us know what is going on. [Contamination from the site] is under my house, and I didn't know it was under my house till you came out and told me. So [the coalition] is excellent, but I'd like to see everybody [in the neighborhood] pull together more to fight this thing and get everything going.

M. D. PELMORE, DOUGLASS PARK

When did you first become aware of the situation with the 5th and Hill Site?

When [CUCPJ and CHCC] mentioned it to us —told us about it, passed out pamphlets, set up a meeting with us [at Douglass Center]... [Ameren] never mentioned anything about that. No letters. No mail. Nothing.

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?

Poor. Not very good at all. They did have a meeting, but that was not very informative to me. They sort of said this... and that... and that... and still not very informative to me. So sort of this is not important or this is not dangerous and all that kind of stuff. Now, you know all this stuff can be dangerous so it wasn't very helpful at all... [Ameren and Illinois Power] could have done things differently. They knew about this stuff when they first pulled out of there a long time ago, and they should have taken care of it then. And they should have either sent everybody letters... then everybody would have been aware of it.

KENYATTA CHAMBERS, DOUGLASS PARK

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?

Well, from what I'm hearing, it could cause cancer and rare diseases in, in people, and I'm one to say that, growing up in this neighborhood, I have been hearing of rare cancers that I had never heard of... my mother being my biggest concern, 'cause I had never heard of multiple myeloma until her case. After her case, I started hearing more about it; people having it. When I found out she had that type of cancer, I researched a little bit, and was like, 'Oh, yeah. That's a rare cancer, but it could become wider spread now. So that tells me right there that there's something going on—even if it's not just that site. We also had a neighbor that was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. My grandfather was diagnosed with leukemia.

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 is your reaction to that?

Well, I'm concerned. I live in the neighborhood and I mean, why would anybody outside the neighborhood be concerned unless they're just trying to inform us? So by informing us of this, it should make all of us concerned. You know, this was something we weren't aware of.

For a full list of questions and answers from residents see ucimc.org. There will be a part two of interviews in the April issue of the Public i.

Unofficial St. Patrick’s Day and Being Irish

Andrew O’Boall

To see those who can put on or take off the clothing of Irishness (who have, perhaps, an Irish grandparent), or those who “become Irish for the day,” generate and reproduce such stereotypes is painful and demeaning. The narrative of the Irish as drunkos and party-animals is derived from an older character stereotype of the Irish as irrational, unable to control their emotions (see also “Fighting Irish”), and ultimately as sub-human. Nineteenth century cartoonists routinely represented the Irish as pigs and apes. While the Irish have in many ways reclaimed this notion of emotionalism and refashioned it to support tourism and cultural exports, there is a bitter-sweetness as the history is meekly linked (until all too recently) with colonization, with mass emigration, and with general poverty. It’s not that I’m opposed to drinking or drunkenness... hell, partying is fun. But the “drink until you’re Irish” concept is simply offensive. If you want to drink, drink. But please don’t imply that drinking a bottle of vodka at 8AM captures the essence of my nation.

This is the country that has more Nobel Laureates for Literature, per head of population, than any other country outside Scandinavia. Our economic growth was, for much of the 1990s, three times that of the rest of Europe. Northern Ireland is in the midst of a complex and important peace process. We have free third level education for all and a musical heritage second to none. And you think you can “drink until you’re Irish?”

There are clear parallels with other forms of cultural appropriation across campus. Indeed, a friend of mine was challenged last year by a ‘Chief’ supporter who asked, “If the ‘Chief’ is culturally insensitive, how come you never find an Irish person who objects to ‘Unofficial’?” In answer, here’s one Irish man who does.

I don’t expect ‘unofficial’ St. Patrick’s Day to go away any time soon—the bars have too much to lose. But perhaps students could just reflect a little. And remember if you really want to be drunk by 9am, you probably don’t need to use your culture as an excuse or theme.
Struggle and Unity in the Politics of Angela Davis

Sasha Mobley

Sasha Mobley is a graduate student in the department of kinesiology and community health at UIUC, doing work on critical sport studies.

In February, the University of Illinois hosted the annual Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference—liberty and Justice for All: Voting for Change. The inspiring “unifying” theme paralleled the goals of the “Take Back the Rights Campaign” (TBTR), the wealthiest political action committee for sexual minority rights, which seeks assimilation into the exclusionary institutions of marriage and the military.

Quickly into the first day, the political tenor of the conference waned as political differences surfaced among participants. Several moments of conflict caused some participants to bristle, including a conversation where Candace Gingrich dismissed the possibility of outing as a political tactic. She claimed, instead, that she could only confirm the queerness of people who she had slept with.

By the time the Q & A session for the opening keynote by gay army veteran Eric Alva—the first casualty of the Iraq war and advocate of “Do Ask, Do Tell”—began, TBTR’s well-oiled, feel-good machine hit a roadblock. When students, challenged the imperialist enterprise of the U.S. military’s mission, they were heckled and shouted down. At various points, any illusion of a “safe and ally-rich” gathering began to collapse. In enters Angela Davis, professor of the History of Consciousness and Feminist Studies at UC Santa Cruz, transforming the conference dynamics from one of fear and loathing to one of unity and inspiration.

Yet, it might seem ironic that Davis became the unifying figure, given her controversial history. In 1968, she joined the Communist Party and, subsequently, endured the McCarthyism of the UCLA regents and then-governor Ronald Reagan, who fired her. In 1970, Davis appeared on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list, when a gun registered in her name was implicated in Jonathon Jackson’s deadly shootout at the Marin County Hall of Justice.

Davis served eighteen months in prison until she was acquitted of charges of conspiracy, kidnapping, and homicide. While the more moderate NAACP and SCLC considered Davis’ Marxist politics taboo, the movement to free Angela Davis garnered support across the political spectrum of Black America. In an editorial written in the Chicago Daily Defender soon after her capture, Louis Martin expressed the solidarity an older generation of civil rights leaders felt with Davis, as well as a collective pride in her academic achievements. Even if they did not share her political theories, they understood her rage and her yearning for justice.

However, despite this support, Davis still contended with accusations by some of not being radical enough, considering her interest and studies of European philosophers a political contradiction. In her 1974 autobiography, Davis also expresses ambivalence about her travels abroad, which coincided with moments of acute crisis in the struggle for civil rights. She was studying abroad when the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was bombed by the KKK, killing four black girls she knew from childhood. As she was embarking for her graduate studies at the Frankfurter Institute in 1965, Watts erupted into flames. Her words speak to the conflicts she experienced between completing her studies and the urgency that she was needed in the civil rights movement. Perhaps, contending consciously and consistently with the dilemmas, conflicts, and contradictions in her life are precisely what have given her the strength to instill a sense of unity in people, even in the midst of great conflict and difference.

Davis’ strength as an organizer rests on the long history of her commitment to abolishing the prison-industrial complex and her ability to bridge the differences among generations and political viewpoints. Her compassion and faith in people temper Davis’ iconic image as a “black militant revolutionary.” Her pedagogy invites us to remember those that have paved the way before, invoking the memory of Bayard Rustin (1912-1987), the openly gay civil rights leader who helped to organize the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Davis’ passion echoes too the post-Reconstruction era anti-knocking advocate Ida B. Wells.

The power of her oratorical style draws from the same well as Martin Luther King. It is perhaps the deep values instilled by this tradition, solidified in the Black experience, which calls forth the responsibility to act now for the sake of future generations. Angela Davis invites us to join together, regardless of our political affiliation, our race, our gender, or our sexuality, and to consider how we will respond to our children in the year 2030, when they ask us, what have we done to shape the world they will inherit?

Consuming Icons: A Report from the Field

by Treva Ellison

Treva Ellison is a community activist and graduate student in the department of geography at UIUC.

“I LOST MY LEG SO THAT YOU COULD HAVE YOUR VOICE!”

Eric Alva, harried at my friend Bess, as he was wrapped on the trauma of his prosthetic leg. Eric Alva, former U.S. Marine and a keynote speaker at the Midwestern Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender Ally College Conference, focused his speech on the need to firmly repudiate the policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” used by the U.S. military to exclude people who identify as LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual or Transgendered). Alva emphasized that our “national security” is compromised at every point when we fail to hire and retain highly skilled people in the military services, simply because they happen to be LGBT. In order to avoid what he perceived as the ridiculousness of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” he remarked that feorns, even feorns, can serve in the military.

What was most disturbing about this spectacle, was the gratuitous support Alva received from the audience. Hearty cheers and standing ovations from the crowd punctuated his speech every time he used a buzzword like “freedom,” or “equality,” or “rights,” or “enemy.” Desperate to bring some sort of counter-narrative to that of gay-nationalism, a group of friends and I stacked ourselves at the microphones during the question and answer session, hoping to problematize the seeming logic that queers should be fighting for their right to play the role of colonizer.

Me first. “Why should I, as a queer woman of color, or any person who has endured abuses by the state, support the project of advocating for the right to take on the role of oppressor, by joining the military and participating in state-sponsored violence?” After a few exchanges between Alva and I, to clarify the question, Alva retreates to quoting Dr. Martin Luther King (insert vigorous audience applause here), and insists that even he knows Iraq is “messed up,” but he didn’t send the troops there. My question, according to Alva, would be better posed to a policy maker class, and gender would undermine the coherence of advocating for “equal” employment in the military. After the dust settled, we were approached by self-proclaimed “lefties,” “socialists,” and “anti-war activists.” They congratulated us for “doing something in there,” or assured us they understood our message, but felt uncomfortable with the fact that you guys attacked a handicapped person.” Since when is a person with a disability not granted the same respect or courtesy of engagement as the rest of the population?

Two days later, Angela Davis, interestingly, delivered a keynote speech in which she problematized the liberal, bourgeois ideals of mainstream LGBT politics, such as gay marriage and military service. She specifically addressed the contradictions inherent in Alva’s discourse. This time—without the sharp stark contrast to their response to questions, which raised similar issues two evenings before—the audience seemed mesmerized, clapping at every opportunity.

Observing all this, I fear that too many of the conference goers were more occupied with consuming Angela Davis, as a celebrity and icon of “good” left politics, than engaging her message. This was not unlike, two nights previously, when the audience was so busy consuming Eric Alva, as an icon of nationalism, that they refused to engage with critiques of the military or the war on terror.

What I witnessed that night was a deep belief in the hegemony of the state and a disavowal of the lived experience of state violence, despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine died in the last decade alone, at the hands of U.S. militarism. It seems folks at the conference still want to eat their freedom fries, only now, with a side of pan-seared radicalism.
A Legacy for the Next Seven Generations
By Charlotte E. Davidson

Charlotte E. Davidson (Dine’, Mandan, Hidatsa, & Arikara) is a graduate of Haskell Indian Nations University, and is currently a Ph.D. student in Educational Policy Studies at UIUC.

Teaching Chicana Power: A Letter to My Daughter
Querida Quetzalli,

Wherever we go, we must find a way to do more than just survive. That’s what Chicana Power is. It’s about our self-determination as mujeres (women), recreating our culture as we fight with integrity against the violence of patriarchal and racialized class relations.

So in the little time I have to mother you, I pray for the strength to teach you to be free. To take yourself seriously and refuse to make yourself small. To know you are connected to all that is alive. To listen to your body and open yourself up to its power. To name the oppression, so as to make it visible and transformable by human action. To master the art of redrawing borders, without losing your center.

And I work to do this by shining along with you, struggling to create the conditions in both our lives that enable us to do so. This means respecting our sovereignty, while teaching you to respect mine. It means letting each other experience the range of our emotions, while letting you witness the intimacy of our relationship and a woman’s power to transmute these into creative acts.

This is especially true of our anger, mija (my daughter). Especially the kind that comes from knowing our fight is centuries old. And so I share with you the stories of our survival as Chicanas, so you can carry them with you, hold them gently, and one day see them from the perspective of your own experience.

Our time has come, Quetzalli. I know it has! For in our struggle toward consciousness, we find fellow Napaneras (women between cultures), recreating themselves and the culture with every conscious act. They are the ones teaching me how to raise you, without losing myself. They are the ones teaching the world that women, no matter their situation, are never just victims.

Thank You for showing me what it is like to live unafraid of our light.

May our generations embody the revolutionary power of a woman’s spirit, so together with our sisters across the globe we can unleash our voices against the mutilation of women in every culture and be beautiful together!

Te Amo,
Mama

Charlotte Project C.E.D.A.R.

My name is Charlotte Davidson. I am born to Waterbust Clan and am born for the Waterbust Clan. My maternal grandfather is the Flint Knife Clan. Flows-Together and I am born for the Waterbust Clan.

My mother, Nora Wilkinson, and my aunt, Myra Tso-Kaye were invited to facilitate the last discussion of this four-part series, Changing Women: Weaving Ways of Being into Scholarship. They both reside on Dine Bííéyah (Nava-Joland) where my mother is a rug weaver, while my aunt is a potter and middle school teacher. They are neither academic professors, nor have they published scholarly pieces, however, they have remained my teachers in “ways of knowing.”

They shared their knowledge about Andáa Náadlééhá (Changing Woman) and how we, as women, embody her in how we live for others selflessly. She informs how we, as women, need to conduct ourselves. When we have insight into our own power, it is recognition of how it is lighten- ing and thunder when we speak. We can make things grow and when we talk, we will things into creation. As human beings, we possess the ability to hurt or heal, humor or humiliate, torture or inspire.

Indigenous scholarship is beyond defending a paper, it is about defending truth and tradition and producing work that doesn’t create suffering. It is our responsibility to ensure that the next seven generations remember and trust their histories, stories, and ceremonies, as we are still arriving. Our stories and knowledge are still arriving. The last session of C.E.D.A.R. was, in fact, not our last session, but became a site of renewal.

In May of 2006, I received a Master’s degree at UIUC. I chose to wear traditional Navajo regalia that included a rug dress that was woven by my maternal grandmother, Sally Yazzie, and a sterling silver concho belt that once belonged to my great, great maternal grandmother. I acknowledged the day as a way to remember those who were here before us, as I listen to the voices of my mother, grandmothers, great grandmothers, and their grandmothers—for we are our mother’s stories.

Hózhó nahásíí bítí In beauty, it is restored.
Hózhó nahásíí bítí In beauty, it is restored.
Hózhó nahásíí bítí In beauty, it is restored.
Hózhó nahásíí bítí In beauty, it is restored.

Charlotte and her son William at graduation

Zapatista Women’s Coops, Fair Trade, and Commercialization: Schools for Chiapas

June 22 until June 28, 2008

The Delegation’s objective is to meet with a variety of Mayan women and men who are producing and distributing artesian, agriculture, and commercial products in the autonomous, indigenous communities of Chiapas, Mexico. Participants will have the option to visit the ancient Mayan city of Palenque. For more information: www.schoolsforchiapas.org/english/store/catalog/trip-72.html

Laura Galicica and Quetzalli Feria-Galicica
In her early twenties, Dorothy Hennessy joined the Franciscan community in Dubuque. For most of her life she was busy teaching in Catholic schools in Iowa. She remembered that in her early years she was a very conservative person. When she was about 55, she became deeply concerned with the world beyond her classroom. She felt called to be in solidarity with people who are suffering.

One thing that occasioned this change was the realization of the injustice of the Vietnam War. The most important influence in her radical change, however, was the letters she received from her brother, Father Ron Hennessey, when he was a missionary in Guatemala. His letters described the massacres and terror brought by the government military forces while he was pastor among the Mayan people. Father Ron’s letter’s changed her life. She became angry and began to speak out and join with others in public protests about U.S. policies that have treated innocent people so brutally.

Starting about 1968, Sister Dorothy began to write letters and attend talks and participate in demonstrations against war and the unfair treatment of others. During the Vietnam War she joined protests at the Rock Island Arsenal. During the early 1980s, she visited Nicaragua with Witness for Peace as part of a human shield that protected northern border villages from CIA-backed Contra attacks. She made three trips to protest at a nuclear test site in Nevada during the 1980s.

In March 1986, at age 73, she set off from Los Angeles on The Great Peace March for Global Nuclear Disarmament with 1,200 other marchers on a 3,500 mile walk to Washington, D.C. In the 1990s she stood with others almost every Wednesday at a Dubuque city park protesting the US military involvement in Central America. In 1992 she participated in a protest action at the SAC airbase in Omaha and ended up with 36 others in police custody.

In 1997, she began to make annual trips to the School of the Americas. Twice Sister Dorothy got arrested for joining with many others to enter into the area close to this infamous school. In 2000, she was arrested for a third time at the gates of the school. This time she and her younger sister who is also a nun, Sister Gwen Hennessey, were sentenced to six months in a federal prison in Pekin, Illinois.

Dorothy was 88 years old at the time of her imprisonment. She and Sister Gwen Hennessey were sentenced to six months in a federal prison in Pekin, Illinois. Dorothy was 88 years old at the time of her imprisonment. Even in her 90s, Sister Dorothy did not consider herself discouraged in her work for peace and justice. Sister Dorothy died January 24, 2008 at age 94. This ex-con deserves to be remembered.

Women and Aging

- Women ages 65 or older make up 58% of the elderly population and 7.3% of the total U.S. population. Over the last forty years, this number is expected to double, while the number of women aged 85 and older is expected to triple.
- Since women tend to have lower income at retirement than men, they are bound to experience higher rates of poverty.
- The image of older women in major newspapers has changed little in the past twenty years. Older women are still underrepresented, and less than 1% of the total space is devoted to any coverage of their views, preferences, or needs.
- George W. Bush abandoned major initiatives aimed at amelioration of women’s poverty, including that of elderly women. The Bush administration not only eliminated the Interagency Council on Women, but also deleted from government websites resources and studies relevant to fighting the feminization of poverty in the U.S.
- A majority of women age 70 and over who still work say they will never retire. These women tend to have a more positive outlook on life than women who do not work.

Dead-ication

To my great, great, grandmother, Vinnie Banks, great-grandmother, Priscilla Sublet, Julia Jones, Carrie May Scott, my grandmothers Millie Jones-Gamble and Fannie Davis, and all those who have returned through my womb.

The circle was drawn six intersecting lines —radius bound— dissected its face twelve houses, ten planets four elements, two nodes three crosses, thirty-six decans three-hundred and sixty degrees

“this is your life”
the aging trumpeter,
my musical mentor said

“you, like most women, have problems with men,”
his wives, moving about the perimeter of our conversation

his trenchant eyes—
framed by the tangle of colors
in a thread worn kufi—
scried my face

“oh,” I said
reading him back

“but you see here? Neptune is elevated in your tenth house”

I fought his willing me to plunge headlong into his particular deep
a Dogon priest on 75th and Cottage Grove

“what?” I asked

“you give birth to ancestors.”

—By Amira Davis

Grandmothers marching against the war

Grandma Hartke, by local artist Sandra Ahten

The poverty rate for Black elderly women was 23%, twice the rate for all elderly.
**The Big Bad Wongsta**

By Cassidy C Browning

Kristina Wong is a Chinese American solo performer, writer, actor, educator, activist, and filmmaker living in Los Angeles. She was an Artist in Residence at UIUC last year. Her work has been described as feminist, activist, hip-hop, and most often, hilarious. Her notoriety began with the creation of the Web site www.chinesemama.com in 2000, the self-proclaimed “#1 mock mail order bride/Asian porn spoof site in the world!”

Wong created the Big Bad Chinese Mama website as a senior project when an undergraduate student at UCLA. She was motivated by the lack of safe spaces for Asian women on the Internet, a desire to increase her computer skills, and a thorough frustration with the inability of her Women’s Studies and Asian American Studies courses to enact the change they championed. While building the site, she copied the metatags from porn sites so searches for porn yielded Big Bad Chinese Mama. She also programmed the site to respond to feminist and Asian and Asian American activist searches. Hence, the guestbook dealt with the lack that frustrated her most about academia—putting the “oppressed” in conversation with the “oppressor.”

Though the site is clearly informed by feminist ideas related to disrupting the male gaze, Wong was hesitant to adopt the label. To her, she was too much of a prankster to fulfill the role of “feminist.” Wong wrote in Catching a Wave, “On one occasion, a student put me on the spot and asked if I thought of myself as a feminist. I explained, I don’t consider myself so much a feminist as I do an artist who believes that there is political power in the personal voice.”

Wong has since reconciled with the term and her concerns about the label. As she defines it in the same anthology, “Third wave feminism is about embracing individual experience and making personal stories political. First and second wave feminisms sought to empower women as a united front. Although they offered a political voice for women as a whole, they didn’t acknowledge the varying agendas and experiences of individual women. Third wave feminism is a response by women of color and others who felt homogenized by a movement defined by the goals of middle-class, white women.”

Her projects include guerrilla theatre characters such as Fannie Wong, Miss Chinatown Second Runner Up and the full-length piece “Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.” Wong crashes Miss Chinatown events dressed as Fannie, complete with a cigar, a bottle of Jack Daniels, an acned-covered face, and horn-rimmed glasses. She approaches individuals there to meet Miss Chinatown and insists on giving autographs and taking pictures with these “fans” before security is called to remove her from the premises. In “Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” Wong explores the alarmingly high rates of depression, mental illness, and suicide in Asian American women.

Wong’s very humorous and interventionist tactics challenge popular conceptions of feminism, activism, and academia. In an interview for Asia Pacific Arts: The Magazine, she stated, “I look at what my work is doing to explore and question words like ‘activist,’ ‘feminist,’ ‘Asian American.’ For me, these are all words that I’m trying to stretch in definition through my work.” Addressing the intersectionality of identity and the specificity of experience are cornerstones of the Third Wave, as is using these themes to critique daily interactions and systems of power.

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**Independent Media Still Remains Unequal**

By Lori Serb

Kristina Wong, shattering representations

For more information about Kristina Wong and her work, visit www.kristinawong.com and request a copy of Cassidy’s thesis, which will be deposited in May.

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Women’s voices are just not heard. If you randomly turn on the radio for an hour during any program (music or public affairs), count how many times you hear a woman’s voice and even more rare, a woman of color speaking. Even programs that pride themselves in being alternative to the mainstream fail to accurately report on the contributions of women locally and around the globe. Women have been present throughout history. We continue to be present—but simply unheard. And, unfortunately, a one-week or one-month commitment to women’s programming in March, though helpful, is hardly enough to transform the inequality.

It is the responsibility of media to document and accurately present information to the masses. But, who makes the decisions of what information and whose contributions are presented to the public? Mainstream media has failed and time and time again has proven this important function within a democratic society: a function that has dramatically eroded in the last 30 years, as the monopoly of mainstream media is held in the hands of a handful of big corporations. However, this requires concrete opportunities for more women and members of underrepresented groups to influence both the governance and programming of a station, rather than remaining stuck in the margins of well-meaning talk.
Women’s Resistance in Manipur
By Shivali Tukdeo

Shivali Tukdeo is an international student from India, completing her doctorate in Educational Policy Studies at UIUC.

Women’s bodies are powerfully coded. As long as they do not disrupt business as usual, they are marveled at, desired, and admired. Otherwise, they are to be repressed, consumed and fenced. Institutions such as marriage, prison and family are enough to show the prowess of the state on women. Through popularized discourses of the single mother-on-welfare or the oppressed third world, the state expresses its desire for supple, malleable women.

In the Northeast of India, state supported violence has been on display for almost fifty years. Preoccupied in its romance with Indian economic growth, the mainstream Indian media has rarely taken note of the region. But it woke to a rather disturbing story in July 2004. Forty women—twelve of them naked—stormed the Army that the state had in its name and shipped off to the state of Manipur, holding signs that read, “Indian Army rape us!” The women aged between 45 and 73 also shouted to the astounded guards, “We are all Manorama’s mothers.”

While it was the abduction, sexual assault, torture, and murder of Thangjam Manorama Devi—a 32-year-old woman—attributed to a member of Manipur’s banned People’s Liberation Army (PLA)—that triggered the protests, the gendered violence at the hands of the Army personnel had been all too common. With their protest, the Manipuri women shamed the Indian army by parading the very female body that brought humiliation and death to their sisters. What’s more, with their raw anger and amazing mobilization, the women refused to be knocked down by the “rape culture” that counts on a dehumanization of women. Human rights violations in Manipur are connected to the special status of this region in the post-independent India that has led to excessive military presence, often at the cost of essential infrastructure. Efforts of political autonomy and determination on the part of the Northeast to carve out a support base for himself. The privilege and power enjoyed by security forces in Manipur has unmistakably turned toward the invasion of women’s bodies. Threats of sexual violence loom large on social spaces. And the long and tiring judicial battles since the 1970s have not delivered justice. The women of Manipur continue to organize under these tumultuous conditions.

Asma Faiz is a national graduate student from Pakistan in the department of Political Science.

Women in Pakistan: A Socio-Political Profile

There are a handful of Pakistani women who attend the University of Illinois. For the most part, the realities of women in Pakistan are seldom discussed or engaged in any substantive manner on the campus. Knowledge of the women in Pakistan is generally limited to perhaps vague references to Benazir Bhutto.

Nevertheless, Pakistani women have persistently worked to improve their social, political and economic standing in Pakistan. Their struggle has been driven in pursuit of four objectives: increasing their literacy levels, gaining representation in the political process, increasing access to employment at different levels, and changing the societal perceptions of the role and status of women in Pakistan. This has been an uphill struggle, in which women have faced numerous obstacles from the state and society.

After the emergence of independent Pakistan, there was hope that the state would take measures to remedy the situation. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, emphasized the need to liberate women out of the four walls of house,” so that they could work alongside their male counterparts in various spheres of life. However, in the subsequent decades the status of women has been intrinsically linked with the discourse on the role of religion.

The 1973 constitution of Pakistan prohibited gender discrimination. This began a period of seemingly rising opportunities for women, as they began to participate in general elections and labor politics. This was concomitant with rising female literacy rates. However, the women’s movement received a setback in the form of an Islamization drive by military dictator Gen. Zia-ul-Haq. His efforts were cynically viewed as an attempt to legitimate his military regime and carve out a support base for himself.

Among the Islamic laws introduced in 1979 by General Zia, women were most adversely affected by the provisions, regarding Islamic hudud punishments for crimes such as adultery, burglary, murder, intoxication, and perjury.
The University of Illinois Experience: From One Muslim Woman

By Amina Sharif Butt

Amina Sharif Butt is a senior in Political Science and Sociology at the University of Illinois. She is also a member of the campus Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Muslim Students Association.

Often, when I am sitting in a classroom, I cannot help but be fully cognizant of the fact that I look different from everyone else. This is a common feeling for any minority, and I, as a headscarf wearing Muslim woman, am not exempt from this. My headscarf, or hijab, is more than just a piece of cloth to me, and ironically, it means more than that to others as well. Although for me it represents modesty, self-respect, and dignity, I’ve come to realize that, to others, it represents oppression, extremism, and religious fanaticism.

That is why, whenever I speak in class, I am well aware that I am probably one of the only headscarf wearing Muslims in the class, (or possibly the only Muslim) that my classmates and professors have ever interacted with. Thus, my every action comes to represent what all Muslims would be like. My headscarf, or hijab, is a symbol of the Muslim experience. It is almost always written by tradition to write an article every semester that attempts to explain the Muslim headscarf. It is almost always written by a white male who is sometimes sympathetic, sometimes frustrated, and always misguided. These men imply that Muslim women are either forced to wear scarves to degrade them, or choose to wear it because they are self-righteous. I did not expect to hear these ideas in an institute of higher learning, (to say the least) but from the comments that followed the articles, I learned that many passionately agree with these false, orientalist views. Freedom of speech has become the freedom to opine on how ‘the other’ is in need of civilization. It is as if one has the right to minimize or own other humans’ experiences and colonize their freedom of expression.

Although there are one billion Muslims in the world, I have learned from my news outlets, my textbooks, and my educators, that the one billion of us are a monolith. We can be painted by one brush stroke. That is perhaps why the university has placed such little emphasis on developing Islamic studies courses and programs of study. For, whatever could American students possibly learn from one-fifth of the world’s population and a culture with a recorded history that dates back to the 6th Century?

The Right Not to Work: Power and Disability

By Sunny Taylor

Disabled people are brought up with the same cultural ideals and ambitions and dreams as their able-bodied counterparts; we too are indoctrinated to fetishize work and romanticize career and to see the performance of wage labor as the ultimate freedom. And yet, for the most part, we are denied access to this fantasy.

If you have a severe disability your likelihood of having a job is 26.1 percent (as compared to a rate of 82.1 percent for working-age non-disabled people). Our largest contribution to the economy is as “beds,” as nursing homes call the aged and disabled who fill their vacancies and bank accounts. Shouldn’t we, of all groups, recognize that it is not work that would liberate us (especially not menial labor made accessible or greeting customers at Wal-Marts across America), but the right to not work?

What I mean by the right not to work is perhaps as much a shift in ideology or consciousness as it is a material shift. It is about our relation not only to labor but the significance of performing that labor, and to the idea that only through the performance of wage labor does the human being actually accrue value themselves. It is about cultivating a skeptical attitude regarding the significance of work, which should not be taken at face value as a sign of equality and enfranchisement.

(Excerpt from article in Monthly Review V.55, N.10 2004)

I Am Not One Of The

I am not one of the physically challenged—
I’m a sock in the eye with gnarled fist
I’m a French kiss with clef tongue
I’m orthopedic shoes sewn on a last of your fears
I am not one of the differently abled—
I’m an epitaph for a million imperfect babies left untreated
I’m an icon carved from bones in a mass grave at Tiergarten, Germany
I’m withered legs hidden with a blanket
I am not one of the able disabled—
I’m a black panther with green eyes and scars like a picket fence
I’m pink lace panties teasing a stub of milk white thigh
I’m the Evil Eye
I’m the first cell divided
I’m mud that talks
I’m Eve I’m Kali
I’m The Mountain That Never Moves
I’ve been forever I’ll be here forever
I’m the Gimp
I’m the Cripple
I’m the Crazy Lady
I’m The Woman With Juice

—Cheryl Marie Wade

Paintings by Riva Lehrer: Circle Story Series

Circle Story #4 (above left)
Riva Lehrer, a Chicago painter for over 20 years, is a woman who has lived with a condition known as spina bifida since birth and has had to endure scores of operations over the years. Her art combines personal and activist themes, unveiling the body as inscription, exposing in others what lies beneath.

Circle Story #2 (above right)
Tekki Lomnicki, performance artist and writer, has done numerous solo and collaborative shows. Her work maps her identity as a Little Person, and her costume-embellished pieces explore, parody and manipulate the ways that small stature is perceived. Her performance, Letting the Dead Rest, was featured at a number of Chicago festivals. Lomnicki is the co-founder and Artistic Director of Tellin’ Tales Theatre, a company dedicated to building community through storytelling in Chicago.

Circle Story #3 (below)
Susan Nussbaum is a playwright, actress, director, and disability rights activist. She has starred in, written and/or directed productions at the Goodman, Victory Gardens, Blue Rider and other major venues. Her play, No One As Nasty is included in the anthology Beyond Victims and Villains: Contemporary Plays by Disabled Playwrights. Nussbaum, who was injured in a car accident twenty years ago, has examined the disability experience with an unparing, critical wit.
From the Inside Out

Tanya DePerio is a licensed social worker and Founder and Executive Director of Women In Progress, Inc. (WIP), a Chicago based non-profit organization that serves women who have been in prison. She was recently a radio guest on ‘Higher Ground’, which airs on WEFT, 90.1 FM.

According to a recent New York Times article, one adult out of 100 is incarcerated. Over 1.5 million adults—largely Black and Latino—have become part of this growing population. Yet, what’s generally left out of the discussion is that women prisoners are one of the fastest growing populations today, increasing over 500% in the last 30 years. Consequently, what led them to incarceration and what they need once released is seldom seriously engaged by society.

Seeking to fill this gap, Women In Progress, provides one-on-one mentoring and services to women who have been incarcerated. The storysearch and the complete disregard for your humanity Crime Against Humanity is a play based on the real life experiences of fourteen Puerto Rican political prisoners who spent more than two decades in prisons for seditious conspiracy—two of whom are still incarcerated. The play brings us into the U.S. prison system in a way no other play has before, focusing on the politically motivated use of isolation, selective punishment, sensory deprivation and disproportionate sentences.

Moreover, the majority of incarcerated women have children, who are often the “other victims” that are left without a voice, when their mothers are sent away. Lack of education and housing, as well as unemployment, are just a few of the formidable struggles they must contend with, once back home. Women who have been incarcerated are re-enter society effectively and become viable members of their communities, they need to find support systems in place that counter the poverty, lack of training, and disillusionments that generally led many of them into crime in the first place. The problem often times is not the ex-offender, but the unchanging and unyielding social attitudes that continue to punish and marginalize formerly incarcerated women for their mistakes, long after they have paid their debt through imprisonment.

As a consequence of this negation and lack of support services, many women of color find themselves back in prison. If recidivism rates are to decline, along with the necessary changes in the lifestyle of ex-offenders, it will require a changing attitude and growing commitment within the larger society: “We,” as a collective, must rise to the challenge of transforming attitudes, grounded in the realities that incarcerated women face, before, during, and after their incarceration. This requires a willingness of communities to advocate and support social and economic endeavors that are required, if the women are ever truly to be free.

We know many of the problems that exist within poor and working class communities of color. What we need are real solutions. Building more prisons is not the answer to reducing crime, nor does it solve our basic needs for survival and self-sufficiency. Instead, we must strategize and mobilize to create conditions for social, educational, and economic empowerment in our communities.

When we have strong and capable women who are able to care, support, and provide for their families, we also have stronger and stable communities. Communities must rise and advocate for women who are or have been incarcerated. They deserve the rights afforded to all human beings. However, as Women In Progress has discovered, to accomplish this effectively requires that we work our way forward, from the inside out. Only through our collective work with incarcerated women can we know them, learn their needs, and address their struggles with dignity and respect.

IMAGINE 27 YEARS OF YOUR LIFE living in a space 6 feet by 9 feet. Imagine being confined in isolation with no human contact. Imagine being shackled, the step search and the complete disregard for your humanity Crime Against Humanity is a play based on the real life experiences of fourteen Puerto Rican political prisoners who spent more than two decades in prisons for seditious conspiracy—two of whom are still incarcerated. The play brings us into the U.S. prison system in a way no other play has before, focusing on the politically motivated use of isolation, selective punishment, sensory deprivation and disproportionate sentences.

Step Two: Educate Ourselves

When we just listen without doing some of our own self-education, we recreate sexist structures of caring/unkaring. We say we would like to help, but we become reliant upon women to handhold us through the process. Pick up a book, attend a workshop, surf the web, talk to friends, but ultimately challenge and educate yourself.

Step Three: Recognize Our Own Privilege

It is easy to get stuck in a “good guy” space: “I don’t tape/abuse/objectify/discriminate against women, so I’m a good guy.” Most of us have committed some level of sexual violence, and all of us have benefited from male privilege in our lives, even if we never sought it out. Recognize and name the ways that you’ve benefited from male privilege and used this power in your life.

Step Four: Responsibility

One common reaction of individuals in positions of privilege is guilt. Guilt is a powerful emotional reaction to the realization how our actions—and the system around us—have hurt people we care about. Guilt is understandable but paralyzing. When we get stuck in guilt, it becomes all about how awful our experience of others’ oppression is. Instead of guilt, let’s think about this in terms of responsibility. What is our responsibility as men for understanding the ways that sexism impacts (and I think harms) us all? Stand up against language that demeans women, subtle attitudes that don’t take women seriously, and gender socialization that keeps us all in rigid boxes. We owe it to women. Frankly, we owe it to ourselves, too.
MARTINA MIRANDA-LUGO WAS BORN in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico and immigrated to the United States 21 years ago. She has lived in Urbana for the last 13 years. In 1995, when Martina arrived with her family to the area, she recalls there were no Mexican markets where she could buy tortillas or other familiar Mexican staples. But today, there is a strong Mexican community in the area, evidenced by the growing number of Mexican restaurants and Spanish-speaking activities.

Despite this reality, when university administrators speak about diversity, they tend to concentrate primarily on White/Black relations, while the Latino immigrant community remains invisible and unacknowledged. Yet, as Martina is quick to acknowledge, there are Mexican immigrants, like her, who have lived for generations in the United States. They come in every skin color. And they identify as Mexican-Americans or Chicanas/os or Latinas/os, but seldom do they call themselves “Hispanics.”

Martina feels a strong connection to this region. It is here that she builds liaisons, works tirelessly, and learns actively from Latino families to better understand the issues they face today in the local community. Over the years, she has worked as a childcare coordinator, Spanish liaison, Spanish teacher, teacher assistant, preschool teacher, recruiter for the Migrant Summer School Program, and as a community volunteer. Currently, Martina teaches Spanish as a second language to K-8th graders, in addition to being the ESL liaison for Unit 4 Early Childhood.

Contrary to demeaning views of Mexican women, Martina has experienced firsthand the power and strength of Mexican mothers in Champaign-Urbana. When their voices have been silenced, the women have joined together to demand that schools provide inclusive spaces for their children. They have strengthened community, to better organize politically. They have demanded bilingual coordinators in the schools and culturally relevant activities such as school plays, anchored in Mexican cultural traditions. Together, the women continue to work to hold educators accountable for the quality of education their children receive. Even more disheartening is the impact of such stereotypes on immigrant children. For this reason, she believes that educators have an important responsibility to include the community in educational decisions that directly impact their children. Those in positions of influence cannot assume to be experts in community matters. They cannot speak for the people, for the people can speak for themselves.

Martina often wonders why the University, situated in the heart of Champaiga-Urbana, does not interact and collaborate more with the local community. Why wait until Latinas/os students are completing high school to include them in outreach efforts? Why not make university resources more accessible throughout their education? Many families must work 2 or 3 jobs to make ends meet. The university could work with Mexican families to advocate for better working conditions, create educational programs, and develop recreational activities that support families about their children.

Martina has no doubt that there are good intentions by university administrators, faculty, and officials from school districts and other related units, but the world is full of good intentions. Instead, Martina advocates tirelessly for educators who are conscientious and actively engaged with families, who truly seek to understand the diversity and complexity of immigrant families. Most importantly, we must all acknowledge the agency and wisdom that Mexicanos/as possess, rather than assuming they cannot think for themselves.
Breaking Tradition with “The Way Things Are”

By Amber Carmer

Healing Works Art Exhibit

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. To promote community awareness of the issue, Healing Works, an event sponsored by RCS, will be a part of the Boneyard Arts Festival for the second year in a row. Healing Works, an exhibit for and by survivors of assault and abuse, includes paintings, poetry, photography, drawing/sketching, collages, sculpture, and other arts. The show will be on display from April 18 to 20. Submissions for the exhibit will be accepted until April 7. For more information about the show or for RCS volunteer opportunities, contact Amber Carmer at carmera@awomenandfund.org. A complete list of events in April can be found at www.odos.uic.edu/women.


Average Little Black Girl

The ones with the straight hair to those with the natural naps

those we see we are to wonder “who do they think they be?” lady, miss black sister who am i to help these average little black girls?
do you want to be my friend? do you want to play dolls? remember when we used to be friends? now we callin’ each other hoes and greeting each other with names like, hey bitch!
average little black girls average little black girls i ask myself is there really such things we have different lives

my life a two toned secret she lives hers with drugs, sex and rape yet we are all looked at exactly the same numbers not unique african sisters i wish i could be an average black girl

—Talisha Kashai, Urbana High School

Tippet Hill

1st place winner of the 2007 Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Award.

We pull out of the filling station and head for the interstate
Aunt Jane looks at me cockeyed
Why do you want to know where Tippet Hill is?

I stammer at the unexpected question
Grandma… she sometimes told about it

I feel strangely defensive
Why am I so interested in my father’s people? Blind fingers like the roots of lilies probing deeper into the generations sifting through the layers of the ages reaching back and back and back

She drives in silence for a while
I am afraid she has forgotten to point it out
Have we passed it yet? I venture
No the word is drawn from the side of her mouth. Then I see we are coming up on a ridge

the highway cuts into it and a house sits near the top

There it is she points

Used to be the highest spot in Central Illinois… maybe in the state. (See those silos there? that’s where the Heath’s settled.)

Some years back they chopped off the top of it for the T.V. tower

They took another chunk when the highway came through.

Used to be three times as high as it is now.

She drives on and our talk turns to the weather and the roadside weeds

A neighbor passes us and waves It is Les Alexander, her brother’s father-in-law

Grandma used to tell how Anna Porter Heath climbed that hill every morning to look Eastward for her David

Waiting for his return

She climbed Tippet Hill for forty years after they brought her the news of his death in Ohio

I am stunned at such faith the forty year faith of long ago lovers my grandmother’s faith in the old story

As we round the bend I catch a last sight of the hill

In the side mirror I try to measure where the top would have been and I am struck with the thought that Aunt Jane was here before the highway before the T.V. tower She must remember Tippet Hill before when it stood like a dinosaur on the outwash plain Maybe she stood at the top once struggling to hold her own against the high prairie winds

She shakes her head and I lean forward to catch her words

Used to be three times as high

And I wonder where I will go to meet my dead

—Mary Lucille Hayes

Our mission at RCS is to deconstruct rape myths and empower sexual assault victims and survivors through our various services. All services at RCS are free and confidential and include: a 24-hour crisis hotline on which anonymity is an option; counseling for survivors and their supportive loved ones; medical advocacy that allows for a victim/volunteer to meet with rape survivors at the hospital to explain their rights with respect to the medical process; legal advocacy by which we can serve as a liaison between the person and other law enforcement agencies; community education; and professional training for service providers on topics like sexual harassment and child abuse indicators. Services are available to men and women, ages 13 and up who are residents of Ford, Champaign, Douglas and Piatt counties.

Because sexual assault is the least reported crime and few victims ever reach out for help, The Rape Crisis Services staff spend a large amount of energy on creating awareness and providing education about violence against women. We ask the community to join us in this commitment, so that together we can work toward ending violence against women!

Amber Carmer is a prevention educator for Rape Crisis Services in Champaign County.

It’s interesting that we, as a society, talk about hate crimes in this country when it comes to race and sexual orientation, but neglect to address the epidemic of hate crimes based on gender alone. Violence against women continues to reach new heights every day (1.3 women over 18 are forcibly raped each minute), yet our communities and even our government treat it as “just the way things are.” As a Prevention Educator for Rape Crisis Services (RCS), I am still barred from many middle and high schools that won’t allow me to come to their schools to speak with youth about harassment, violence and assault. This, despite the fact that 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually assaulted before the age of 18. The government is also complicit in the silence, having cut funding for the Violence Against Women Act and Victims of Crime Act. As a result, our program, like many other social services, is looking at possible staff cuts soon. At RCS, we make a commitment to ending such violence a priority.

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