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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Behind the Economic Crisis

Tom Mackaman

For over a decade, the propagandists of capitalism celebrated the triumph of the “American model” of business and financial deregulation, the “end of the business cycle” and even “the End of History.” The economic turmoil of 2008, which threatens a general collapse, has laid these “theories” to rest.

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

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

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

Subprimes allowed families to afford homes that otherwise would have been beyond their reach. This helped inflate a new bubble in the housing market, as prices increased along with credit and home equity lines of credit. The financial industry encouraged borrowing against the value of homes through dubious lending practices such as Adjustable Rate Mortgages (ARMs) and other “subprime” mortgages. Investors are seeking refuge not just in other currencies like the Euro, but in commodities, a process which is ratcheting up the prices for goods and food the world over. The consequences are explosive: Bread riots have occurred in the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Central, South, and Southeast Asia, and there exists the danger for a generalized famine.

The economic crisis of 2008 has starkly demonstrated the reckless and deadly profit drive of the financial elite. It is significant that none of the three remaining candidates for the US presidency contemplate even a diminution of military spending, while their differences over Iraq are largely tactical—how best to secure domination of the ravaged nation and the Middle East/Central Asia as a whole, rather than whether or not to do so. Likewise, the political leadership of both parties—themselves nearly all multi-millionaires and tied by a thousand strings to big business—have made clear that there will be no serious effort to alleviate the suffering of working people.

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

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Wage this Summer
Young People Can Learn a Trade and Earn a
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The Problem with the site at 5th and Hill is clear: we need to get the site cleaned up. Until it is cleaned up, we have to let people know what that site is. We have young kids that live around here, and we have people we care about who live around here. Some of the contaminants at that site can cause cancer, and we don’t want our families to get cancer. That’s the most important thing to me and so the community. That’s why we want to get this stuff cleaned up. That’s why we want people to know about the contamination.

SIGNS OF SOLIDARITY
The people who live around here told the Illinois EPA to put up new signs at the site earlier this year. We wanted signs that would tell people that the site is what it is—contaminated site. And they never did that. They never put up signs that said anything about contamination. So, my idea was this: since they’re taking their time putting up new signs and since they’re not putting up the right signs, let’s put up our own signs to show how we mean business. What did EPA’s refusal to put up better signs mean to us? It meant that we were disregarded—it was very disrespectful. They finally put up some new signs, but these new signs still do not say anything about the contamination and the possible danger over there. We’ve seen kids over there in the past and they needed to know that the site is contaminated. If you look at the fence right now, the proper signs are not up. Right now, they have “no trespassing” signs. I can have a no trespassing sign on my yard, and kids will still come into the yard. A “no trespassing sign” doesn’t really mean anything. It’s not a strong enough message. The signs need to tell people about the contamination.

SIGNS OF ACTION
Why was making these signs so important? It was so important, and it worked out so well, because the community came through to do something we wanted to do. We all pulled together to make these signs and put up these signs. That in itself was important. How do I feel when I see our signs up in the neighborhood? I feel glad because these signs let Ameren and the Illinois EPA know that we mean business. You can’t just talk about it. You got to be about it

Young People Can Learn a Trade and Earn a Wage this Summer
By Belden Fields

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

The focus will be on the development of skills, safety practices, and the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that will be conducive to a successful career in the building trades. These are trades that pay very well. Journeyman, that is to say people who have completed apprenticeships, start at $32.40 per hour for brick masons, $30.61 for carpenters, $36.19 for plumbers and pipelayers, and $33.80 for electricians. Apprentices start with less, ranging from $15.44 to $20.90. But even in those early years, that is still a very good starting wage. The great thing here is that these jobs will always be here. They cannot be exported abroad!

While young people in the summer program learn the kind of skills that apprentices and journeymen receive, but they will be paid $7.50 an hour to learn! They will also get high school elective credit in Residential Carpentry. In addition to a professional vocational education teacher, students will also be paired with a mentor who will be with them through their hands-on job experience.

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

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

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

Like, once we get liberated we’ll deal with this issue. And we fail to see that it is precisely through a logic of sexual violence that colonialism and white supremacy work. If anyone is interested in talking more about this issue, or has personal experiences that you would like to share, contact trevaellison@gmail.com
The Labor of Black Women

IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICA, Black women have labored beneath the surface. In 1774, the first year for which we have national data, 6.5% of the female labor force were Black women. By 1890, the year for which we have the most complete data, 14.6% of the female labor force were Black women. By 2000, 35% of Black women are either full-time working women were paid 59 cents on the dollar. Although the gap between men and women has narrowed over the last 42 years, the wage gap has only narrowed by 20% since 1963, the year of the Equal Pay Act.

Women deserve equal pay
For full-time, year-round workers, women are paid on average 81 cents for every $1 paid to men. When men are paid for women of color, the gap is wider. These wage gaps stubbornly remain despite the passage of the Equal Pay Act more than 40 years ago, and a variety of legislation prohibiting employment discrimination. Women are still not receiving equal pay for equal work. To let alone equal pay for work of equal value. This disparity not only affects women’s spending power, it penalizes their retirement security by creating gaps in social security benefits and pensions.

**Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act Blocked**

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

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

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By Amira Davis

Amira Davis, former director of the AAUP is a mother/post/performance artist and a doctoral student in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois.
Poverty in Champaign County
By Belden Fields

Heartland Alliance, an antipoverty group based in Chicago, has just released its report on poverty in Illinois and in individual counties. The statewide reporting is based upon 2006 data. The picture is not very pretty. Overall, poverty increased in Illinois from 10.7% of the population in 1999 to 12.3% in 2006. Poverty is not random across groups. Extreme poverty is defined as living on an annual income or less that one-half of the federal poverty line, or below $10,000 dollars for a family of four. Nearly half of the people in extreme poverty in this state are either children, seniors, or people with disabilities. The overall picture is:

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

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

### Poverty By Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Population</th>
<th>% Poverty in Population</th>
<th>% Group in Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NonHispanic</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The report does not break down the data by race or gender for Champaign County, but the aggregate data are nonetheless significant. In 2005, there were 29,800 people in this county who were living in poverty. The poverty rate was 17.7%, well above the overall state rate of 12%. The average wage in that county was $45,032. Given the presence of the university and the medical facilities here, this is a surprisingly low average wage. In August 2007, the unemployment rate was 4.9%, slightly below the overall state rate of 5.2%.

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

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

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

Of course, while poverty of both the employed and the unemployed has increased, public policy has seen to it that the rich have become richer and a morally obscene extent. While most of the data in the report are from 2006 or earlier, the situation has become increasingly dire as prices of fuel, food, utilities, and access to medical care and insurance have continued to soar, leaving poor communities in Champaign County more vulnerable than ever.
There were three referendum questions that citizens intended to propose be placed on the November ballot. Despite there being no legal requirement that such proposals be submitted in advance, a meeting packed with Democratic Party stalwarts defeated all three in the name of ‘democracy.’ But it seems that the result was ordained more by Not Originated By Us’ than by any actual flaw in the proposals. All three proposals were something a thoughtful Democratic voter, as well as many independent voters, might support—but none bore the stamp of official Democratic Party prior review and approval. Despite the many complaints from Democratic loyalists that the township meeting was a problematic way to place questions before the voters, all such questions placed on the ballot in the recent past have drawn majority support from Urbana voters. Perhaps it was the case that the township meeting is too democratic, and not enough officially Democratic, that is the problem that the Democratic Party saw with the process.

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

1. Shall Cunningham Township and the City of Urbana post all contracts and itemized expenses on their websites so that taxpay- ers can see how their money is being spent?

2. Shall the voters of Cunningham Township call upon the City of Urbana to place a binding referendum on the April 2009 election ballot asking whether Urbana citi- zens want to change from the current system of plurality voting to Instant Runoff Voting ensuring the winning candidate always receives a majority of the votes cast?

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

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

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

The third proposed referendum has drawn verbal support by Democratic Urbana officials, including the Mayor, although the meetings results calls into question whether this is only nominal sup- port, without any real commitment other than empty pandering to voters angered by rising utility costs and erratic service. The defeat of all three shared two com- mon factors. First, there is the fact that it was the Green Party 2004 candidate for governor, Rich Whitney, who first pointed out their potential. Second, the pro- usable ways for citizens to gain direct access to the political process under state law, leading to the placement of a number of referendums on the ballot in both Champaign and Urbana in recent years. Democrats offered a variety of complicat- ed and tortured explanations to argue against any changes to the agenda, which is how such questions are placed on the bal- lot, and which the agenda purposely didn’t include. Most telling was that a few older citizens were overheard talking among themselves about whether or not any specific proposal was ‘on the agenda before they voted at various points in the meeting. It seems they were brieﬂed to oppose anything proposed from the floor, no matter how good the idea might be or whether or not they disagreed with it.

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

A great deal of effort was expended pre- venting the exercise of democracy as pro- vided for in state law. All of it seemed to be orchestrated by the idea that only propos- als approved by the Democratic city coun- cil majority—who happened to simultane- ously constitute the township board—are acceptable. In Urbana, it seems that unless one has already persuaded this ‘central committee’ of the value of a proposal, it will now be dead on arrival. Sadly, this result will likely undermine the interests of the Democratic majority. It will aid them. Many Democratic Party sup- porters are independent and thoughtful, thus are unlikely to be taken in by the ten- dentious reasons offered by party insiders to prevent adding any referendums to the November ballot.

Essentially, the result clearly signaled that the public will not in the future be allowed to place any referendums on the ballot in both Champaign and Urbana, unless they have been ﬁrst voted a month before by the elected ofﬁcials. No independent citizen in- put from the Cunningham Township ofﬁcials, turned out, with instructions to prevent any additions to the agenda, could just as easily be described as dis- playing naivete, immaturity, and irra- tionalism, that is entirely counterproduct- ive to their stated goals,” as one local Democrat later remarked about the dis- sent crushed at the meeting.

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

By Leon T.
A Women’s Center

Kaytlin Reedy

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

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

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

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

In memory of Cathy Acevedo
1959–2008

A Tribute to Bob Walfedt

Marching so proud throughout his life
Many remember how he stood—
His Life was a lesson he left,
If we live like Bob lived it,
We’ll always be there in Spirit
No child left behind

Bob Walfedt
Marching so proud throughout his life
He stood for what he knew was Right!
Standing besides him on the street,
Be they white, or Asian, or Black
But for the Hungry, and the Poor,
Standing him with banner in hand
We felt we could not know defeat
With Bob there supporting our stand!
He’ll always be there in Spirit
When the time to march comes again!
If we live like Bob lived it,
Then we can do nothing but win!
His life was a lesson he left:
So we would all know how to live.
And when the time to march comes,
We thank Bob for what he had to give!”

—Tom Thomas

Teaching in Rantoul

By Neil Parthun

Neil Parthun is a school teacher in the Rantoul School District.

“They heard that’s a dangerous area.”

The words to Rantoul. That place is so ghetto.

That’s what I hear whenever I tell a parent that I teach in Rantoul, Illinois. These statements are always braced with a “How do you do it?” or “I could never do that.”

A THRIVING PAST

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

Like many other cities, Rantoul has a very rich history. It was once the site of Chanute Air Force Base (AFB). Chanute AFB became the location where the United States Army Air Service Technical Training Command was established in 1914. During World War II, thousands of airmen received technical training through this program. Chanute AFB continued to be a vital part of the local community after World War II. Chanute provided the majority of the jobs in Rantoul. The population also surged due to the AFB. The taxes funding the schools were substantial. The rapid mobility of students to leave or enter the district, which to speak.

A Woment’s Center

Kaytlin Reedy

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

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

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

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

In memory of Cathy Acevedo
1959–2008

A Tribute to Bob Walfedt

Marching so proud throughout his life
Many remember how he stood—
He was a foe of tears and strife.
Standing besides him on the street,
Each of us with banner in hand
He stood for what he knew was Right!
Standing besides him on the street,
We felt we could not know defeat.
With Bob there supporting our stand!
He’ll always be there in Spirit
When the time to march comes again!
If we live like Bob lived it,
Then we can do nothing but win!
His life was a lesson he left:
So we would all know how to live.
And when the time to march comes,
We thank Bob for what he had to give!”

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

In a school auditorium filled with mostly Latino and African American and some white students, parents, and teachers, Andersen elementary school parents asked, “What does phasing out feel like? What research has been done on the effects on children and the community? Eradication?”

The Politics of Eradication

On Feb. 27, the Chicago Board of Education voted to phase out, close, or consolidate 11 schools and turn over 7 others to a non-profit “turn-around specialist.” All, except one, are in working class and low-income African American and Latino communities. This is the latest round of Chicago’s Renaissance 2010 plan to close neighborhood schools and reopen them mostly as privately run charter or selective enrollment schools.

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

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

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

So What Is Going On?

Those fighting Ren2010 say the real agenda is to privatize public education, weaken unions, dismantle local school councils, and genuflect and displace communities of color. A parent put it succinctly: “We’re being pushed out of the city under the guise of school reform.”

A study by UIUC’s Data and Democracy project (www.uic.edu/ceje/ceje/ or www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/) shows closed schools are clustered in areas experiencing high rates of gentrification. In 2006, CPS closed Collins High School and “rebuilt” it under Ren2010. Collins is on beautiful Douglas Park in an African American community which has been disinvested in for decades. Now, $450,000 condos are springing up around the corner. At the time CPS announced plans to close Collins, developers were planning to build 245 homes priced between $250,000 and $600,000 about a mile from Collins.

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

The Struggle Over Schools

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

These decisions are made without regard for the knowledge and wishes of community leaders. Abbott organized a campaign, was able to prevail. Abbott’s African American students have been bused for years to a neighborhood with a history of racist violence. Closing Abbott would undermine a community in an area next to gentrification.

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

Eyes Wide Open

Above: Photos of the Eyes Wide Open: The Human Cost of the Iraq War exhibit on the UIUC Quad, Wednesday April 23.
Dump the Campaign Rebolú!
By Antonia Darder

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

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

Rather than forthrightly demanding that presidential candidates, preparing for their foray into Puerto Rico’s political arena, speak clearly and candidly about future economic policies to dramatically impact Puerto Rico’s poor and working class, they are satisfied mimicking mainland nonsense. Namely, whether it is Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama, who is less stained by shady political or personal acquaintances, current or past. Or, whether Puerto Ricans will determine the outcome of the race, given the newly acquired ‘poll power’—even if they will not have the right to vote in the actual presidential election.

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

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

Today, the Puerto Rican economy is still below that of Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation. More than 45% of Puerto Ricans live below the poverty line. Eighteen percent of Boricua children are on the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs—considered to be one of the best indicators of poverty in a region. The unemployment rate is 12%, with approximately 3% of the population homeless or permanently unemployed. Puerto Rico’s per capital personal income is approximately one-third that of the U.S. Such poverty prevails on the island, despite a recent U.S. Treasury Department report that indicates the return on capital for corporations in Puerto Rico to be five times larger that those on the mainland.

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

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

The Cruel Prospect of Deep Recession
By Mark Weisbrot

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

The answer is very likely no.

As the economy shifts into reverse gear and the Congress and President work out the details of a proposed fiscal stimulus, some are asking whether it will be enough to keep the economy out of a recession. The answer is very likely no. To do that will require a larger stimulus package than the $700 billion Congress has already approved.

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

We also have the first official GDP growth numbers for the last quarter, which show the economy at a near standstill with just 0.6 percent annualized growth. Consumer spending, which accounts for about 70 percent of the economy, has been holding up; but this cannot last as the price of homes that people have been borrowing against continues to fall. The size of the proposed stimulus, which is about $150 billion, is just not large enough to compensate for the kind of spending declines that we can expect. Near the peak of the housing bubble in 2005, homeowners were cashing out about $780 billion in home equity at an annual rate. Although not all of this was used for consumption, a lot of it was, ‘this ATM machine’ has now run out of cash.

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

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

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

Out of the Great Depression came the New Deal, which included Social Security, the legal right to organize unions, unemployment compensation and other reforms that transformed the United States into a more just society while setting the stage for the post-World War II boom. Over the last 30 years, the country has become vastly more unequal and economic performance has also deteriorated with the ascendancy of the Right. We are not facing a depression, but the hard times ahead will highlight the need for structural changes such as universal health care and labor law reform. These and other major reforms—including a bigger and greener fiscal stimulus that would reduce carbon emissions—should be pushed to the top of the political agenda.

Aime Césaire: 1913–2008

Born on June 26, 1913, Aime Césaire was a poet, dramatist, statesman, former deputy for Martinique in the French National Assembly, and mayor of its capital, Fort-de-France. Césaire was one of the earliest advocates of négritude—the awareness of the cultural and historical consequences of being African or of African descent. In his seminal text, Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal (Return to My Native Land), included the following poem.

Aime Césaire died on April 7, 2008, at the age of 94.
“Be Realistic... Demand the Impossible!”

By Altazor and David X.

“It is not that our problems are that big... It’s just that we are looking at them on our knees.” —Grafiti in the Buenos Aires subte, 2003

RISING PERSONAL DEBT AND BANKRUPTCIES, falling wages, housing foreclosures, growing unemployment, increasing service industry ‘underemployment,’ a shrinking middle-class, companies that lose jobs, downsizing, more homelessness, less, rising oil and gas prices, skyrocketing food prices, ever more expensive health care [if you have even got it], the international devaluation of the currency, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, a massive increase in trade deficits, the rich hide their assets safely offshore. $200 billion in corporate bailouts, another $100 billion dollars here and there for the fucking war, nothing for us... and the band plays on... ‘Don’t worry, just have faith,’ we are told, ‘the market will magically correct itself.’ Right? For who? Let’s be honest, the news is bad all around, and the working class is suffering the most. Simply, everyday life is difficult for most of us, and we’re not making it. If a family is barely making it on $40,000 a year—how can those making $20,000 or less have a chance? Families and individuals are living a precarious existence on a razor’s edge. Choices must be made every month between paying the bills, or rent, and buying food. ‘Feed my children first, and then I’ll eat what is left over,’ become the mantra. One illness or job loss, and the whole ship can quickly go under completely. For many of us, this is reality NOW and it is only getting worse, not better.

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

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

Vacant lots were dug up to grow food for the community. Empty buildings were occupied for housing, to hold meetings, and build neighborhood kitchens to feed their children and the hungry. Later some of these squatted buildings also became schools, health clinics, cultural centers, barter markets (truales), and even workplaces. Some built blockades on the roads, piquetes, as a form of protest, or to stop trucks and appropriate basic necessities of life for themselves and their neighbors. Utility companies were occupied or boycotted to force them to turn the electricity, gas, and water back on. When businesses closed, the unemployed returned to the workplace, organized themselves democratically, restarted production of their goods and services under their own control which they then sold directly to former customers. All without their former corporate owners and managers! And, when the police came to evict them from these ‘new spaces’ that they created, they resisted. Of course some confrontations were lost but many were won, mistakes were made but lessons were learned... most importantly, hope survived.

SOCIALITY AND SOLIDARITY... THE 500 POUND GORILLA

True, it would be completely unrealistic to think that such a rebellious situation could erupt overnight here in Champaign-Urbana, or anywhere else in the United States for that matter. We are not yet to the point of desperation that the Argentinian people were in 2001. Nevertheless, things are bad now and getting worse. Our biggest obstacle at this point is alienation. We are so alienated from ourselves, and each other, that the powers that be are able to control us, and this is not accidental. This is how power enforces its will over us. Essentially, the working class is trapped in a vicious circle of fear and abusive relationships with power. It is violence, and coercion. We rarely, if ever, talk to our neighbors and co-workers about what is happening to us. We live in denial and make excuses for what is happening to us—and blame the victim. We keep silent because we feel alone... helpless, hopeless, powerless, and submit to a reality that is fundamentally wrong—that we did not create. As a result, we are more afraid of changing this reality and healing into the unknown, than we are of trying to cope with an intolerable reality that we do know. It’s truly fucked up!

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

The Hard Truth

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

—John Bellamy Foster
Monthly Review, April 2008

DEBT

WE LIVE IN AN ECONOMY that has become deeply dependent on the American consumer for growth. U.S. consumer spending accounts for nearly 70 percent of the US gross domestic product. Consumer credit and mortgage debt is a higher percentage of disposable income now than ever before. The US population is 5.3 trillion dollars. In fact, the credit industry is monopolized by 10 credit companies, who control almost 90 percent of the credit card market, based on credit card receivables outstanding (Source: FDIC).

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

FORECLOSURES

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

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

Champaign County Statistics on Unemployment

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

By Altazor and David X.
Urban Planning’s Dirty Laundry

By Elizabeth Sweet

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

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

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

We want to dispel the myth of the benevolent planner and demystify the results of harmful policy-making. Community decline is a natural process but is the result of often racist and gender blind planning and policy making, such as redlining, restrictive covenants, boarding schools for Native Americans, and anti-immigrant ordinances. Planning has a lot of dirty laundry and it is time we air it out and clean it up!

Highlander Folk School, Education for Social Change

By Jon Hale

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

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

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

Highlander gained notoriety when the staff worked closely with the labor rights movement during the 1930s-1940s. Highlander’s first educational programs focused on training union leaders organized under the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Union leaders travelled to Highlander, learned effective strategies from other union members and returned to their homes to implement and teach others the lessons they learned.

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

Since its role in the Civil Rights Movement, Highlander has renewed its interest in local Appalachian issues such as environmental protection, cleanup projects, land ownership, and labor education. It has also worked on international issues targeting the illiteracy among the poor and unfair immigration practices. The radical Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, worked and taught at Highlander during the 1980s. Perhaps its greatest honor was bestowed in 1982 when Highlander was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. The history of Highlander is also defined by the resistance the school encountered. Highlander is a school for radical progressive education, known to be ahead of its own time. Conservative locals and politicians have historically frowned upon Highlander’s public commitment to racial, political and social equality. One provocative fact of Highlander retreats during the labor and civil rights movement was that the school was racially integrated, where black and white students would live, eat and commune together in a region that was otherwise committed to strict Jim Crow racial segregation.

The school was subject to the harassment of the state government and the violence of the Ku Klux Klan.

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

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

Pedagogy of the Oppressed Revisited

Paulo Freire, the world-renowned Brazilian educator, would have turned 86 years old this May. And although much has transpired since Freire wrote his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, what seems to have remained constant, or decreased, are the structures and historical inequities that breed poverty and human suffering.

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

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

CHALLENGING UNEXAMINED ASSUMPTIONS

By the same token, when efforts are made to honestly challenge unexamined assumptions or practices, those from oppressed communities are accused of being too political, abstract, or ideological, whenever they seek more grounded understanding of lived experience. The truth is, chronic problems in most poor communities have existed for generations. Yet, suddenly when ‘traveler’ agents deem the old problems ‘urgent’, there is a scramble for inordinate repair, even when proposed actions might stillle community participation.

It is not surprising, then, that the politics of expediency often functions as one of the cornerstones of liberal education. This is particularly the case of those pragmatism and expediency are privileged over a historical understanding of complex social phenomena. A phenomenon often aided by the gaze of ‘traveler’ educators, researchers, and organizers who spend a few months in a community and then think they ‘know’ what the community needs, thinks, or who they are. But now, even better than those who have been oppressed and have worked for decades to disrupt these structures of inequality.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

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

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

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

In community work, with an eye toward a liberating intent, many must take into account multiple histories of survival—including those shaped by racism, sexism, class inequalities, homophobia, and patterns of recognizing that all community relations and processes are historical and cultural in nature. Firmly rooted in a complex yet transformative intent, such community efforts address oppression and are grounded upon our personal histories of survival and struggles against oppression.

Above all, we must acknowledge that the work we do within communities, we also do for ourselves. Our work as critical researchers, activists, and organizers must be seen as a two-way street—a partnership that is carried out through communal respect, learning, struggle, and vision.

There is no way that we can be involved in the work to transform social inequalities, without also opening ourselves to critique and a decolonizing process that challenges the negative impact of our own entitlements, enalngements and privileges.

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

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

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