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

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The current crisis in the credit markets and its impacts on the larger economy have got me thinking about whether it is simply greed that ultimately explains current events or whether there is a need for systemic change in the way we order our social, economic and political lives.

There are at least two major ways in which the welfare of society as a whole, that is, the health and wellbeing of all individuals making up society, will improve under capitalism. The first is by having government establish health, labor and environmental standards (among others) which ensure that competition and greed are regulated, that is, prevented from being destructive on grand scales or in ways that avoid certain unacceptable outcomes.

The second is by having government tax the income/wealth of the rich and redistribute it, as needed, to meet the basic economic and welfare needs of those who have not been served as well by the competition. Such redistribution will give the latter access to resources that will improve their ability to compete more effectively themselves in the future—assuming, of course, that they choose to use these resources to compete in economic or other realms as opposed to simply living more enriched leisure lives. Tax revenues would also be used to support project/programs that protect or promote the common good of all members of society (e.g., building roads, bridges, power plans, parks, etc.).

A THIRD WAY

But there is a third way that society as whole could benefit under capitalism, but it would require a significant adjustment in our values that government action alone could not achieve. This would be to redirect the major object of greed from the acquisition of financial/material gain to the enhancement of public welfare itself. What if society shifted its basis for allocating status from achieving personal financial gain (demonstrated primarily through material accumulation and display) to making personal contributions to public welfare (demonstrated through devoting one’s career to public service, paying one’s taxes, making charitable donations, and/or volunteering time and effort to help others or improve the public environment)? One step to encourage such a change in values, of course, would be to implement the tax policies described above. Projects that provide goods or services to the public as a whole (public works) would have the additional benefit of providing employment to workers of widely varying backgrounds and skills.

Could we create a society which returned free markets for their value as highly efficient and effective means for allocating money, labor, and natural resources to produce and distribute goods and services for human use, but insist that their major beneficiaries (financially successful individuals and corporations) be taxed, as needed, to promote the general welfare in the ways described above? In such a society, the highest honor conveyed upon individuals would be for their contributions to the general welfare made through any of the avenues described above, especially through paying high taxes. Individuals and corporations that contribute to the efficient production and use of consumer goods and services in the private economy would still be rewarded with wages, salaries and other benefits commensurate with what the markets will bear, but they would pay, with pride garnering social recognition and esteem, graduated taxes needed to meet public needs and enrich public life. Such a society would of course presuppose that government officials, elected or otherwise, refrain from corrupt/selfish behavior themselves and use the tax revenues collected to effectively/efficiently promote the general welfare. In short, government workers, too, would need to be motivated by public service and public recognition for their contributions to the public good.

Furthermore, to prevent either tax fraud by private individuals and corporations or the misuse of tax money by public employees, highly transparent accounting systems that accurately track the income, assets, and other benefits received by both public and private sector workers/organizations would need to be developed, applied, and continually monitored; the same would apply to the income, assets, and other benefits received by nonprofit and charitable workers and organizations.

Another argument for supporting social and economic changes of the sort just described relates to the environmental need to move away from values and lifestyles that are highly materialistic and that consume or destroy irreplaceable natural resources and ecological cycles that maintain all forms of life. In such an economy, there should be no positive social incentives for successful individuals to be extravagant material consumers. Instead, they should be encouraged to demonstrate lifestyles that are sustainable because of the way they use energy and materials—often minimally! The new aesthetic would be a minimalist aesthetic—or one that achieved aesthetic embellishment through the hand-crafted labor of human beings themselves rather than through the work of complex machine technologies that consume high levels of both energy and materials.

To the extent that a new economy/society recognizes and rewards minimizing the production and use of material goods and services in order to achieve satisfying and meaningful lives (public and private), and yet retains a reliance on free markets and jobs (earned incomes) to distribute these goods and services, there will be a critical need for government to design mechanisms that provide access to income for those who lose their jobs. Why? Because in our current system as demand for material goods and services declines, so will the jobs of those who have produced these goods and services. Without jobs and thus income, these individuals will have no way of purchasing what they need for basic survival, let alone for living satisfying and meaningful lives.

THE THEOBOLD APPROACH

Back in the 1960s, social theorist and planner Robert Theobold suggested mechanisms of the sort that might be needed. He proposed that government use new social security and/or other tax revenues to establish a “guaranteed annual income” (GAI) that would provide basic economic security to all members of society. In addition to a GAI, Theobold suggested that government provide a program called “committed spending” (CS) that would continue (or extend) the income of individuals who lost their jobs, with the amount of this income starting at the average salary/wage level earned over the past three years and declining on a percentage basis over time (for up to four years). CS would thus allow individuals who have lost their jobs to pay most of their major financial obligations (e.g., rent/mortgage, food, health, utility, and transportation expenses) without radically reducing their lifestyles, but only for a limited period of time until they found new jobs or other private sources of income—perhaps after obtaining additional education or training. In the worst case scenario, GAI would be there to provide basic economic security after four years of unemployment.

Under both GAI and CS, recipients of income would be responsible for purchasing their own health care through private insurers in society, including their own insurance programs, thus eliminating the need for expensive in-kind or voucher-oriented welfare programs with their extensive bureaucracies. Benefit levels could be established high enough to allow recipients to manage their own healthcare services or a separate mandatory government (single-payer) health care system could be implemented. If the latter were created, taxes to support it could be paid out of any of a variety of federal taxes: the same social security taxes used to pay for GAI and CS, separate Medicare-type taxes, income taxes, etc. The same applies to retirement incomes/services or pensions. Given the complexity and unreliability of privately arranged IRA investments, I would probably recommend administering retirement incomes/services through social security.

Theobold even suggested that CS in a slightly varied form (let us call it CS-V) be made available to individuals who choose to voluntarily give up their jobs in order to simply relax and refresh, reconsider the direction of their lives/careers, pursue additional education and/or training, try to establish new businesses of their own, or whatever.

Today, I would add that another attractive feature of both CS and CS-V is that, over time, recipients would learn to live their lives with a decreasing dependence on income and material goods and services. They would be given an opportunity to discover that many of the best (most rewarding) experiences of life are “free”—or at least do not cost a whole lot of money! Such discoveries would bode well for their living more ecologically responsible lives. CS-V would also result in limited jobs “turning over” more regularly and thus being more widely shared—a topic that deserves further discussion, but not here.

Let me close by suggesting the possibility of an even more radical reform to discourage successful competitors in the private economy from using their income for the accumulation and display of material wealth with all of the harm this does to the planet. This would be to place caps on the amount of income/profit that could be retained from economic activity. What if we were to tax all income above, say, $250,000 at a 100% tax rate, and determine all of this income into a government fund available to support projects undertaken in the public good? The budget surplus generated from such a policy could be distributed among various levels of government (local, national, state, local), and if governments were sufficiently democratic (another topic deserving future discussion), the decisions about how this money should be spent would be made by citizens collectively. If $250,000/year were judged to be too high or too low, it could be revised through democratic decision-making—but with full recognition of the environmental costs usually associated with high levels of material consumption.
If you close your eyes and picture ‘homeless,’ what would it look like? Do you see a person? What does this person look like? What is this person wearing? Is the person female or male? What is she/he doing?

Some of you may have seen that person who regularly ransacks through the dumpsters at their place of employment or their favorite restaurant. Still others think of the guy or the drunk guy on the bench. Some might even have seen that person who regularly rummages through the dumpsters at their place of employment or their favorite restaurant. Many of the working poor, both housed and unhoused. This is a result of current economic policies, we are seeing a rise in homelessness in the U.S. in a given year. And as a result of this misconception, shelters and transitional living centers assist individuals in molding themselves to fit back into capitalist ideals, so they can “make a living” and “get by,” without ever disrupting the economic system of injustice. But these programs are largely unable to provide individuals with a space to define their own conditions of life. Instead, they operate under sets of rules which are designed to deter behaviors seen as deviant or destructive. The frustration students initially congested on the Illini Union patio. When this began to rain, they moved inside the Union. They demanded to see Chancellor Jack Peltonen and, when the building closed and he had not appeared, they refused to leave the Union. They were ordered to leave, and when they did not the police came in with bat-sized clubs and arrested the students for “mob action.” The male students were taken to the stadium, and then to jail. The female students were loaded into a truck and told that they were going to be transported to their housing. Instead, they were taken directly to jail. On the week-end of November 7th and 8th of this year, there was a 40th anniversary reunion of people who had been recruited in Project 500. One of the events was a press conference, called by local activist Terry Townsend, to demand an apology from the Chicago Tribune for the 1968 series of articles that ran in the paper. The series was titled “The Homelessness Report,” and it covered the story of Project 500, which was a group of students who had come together in 1968 to create a movement to end homelessness in the United States. The series was met with widespread praise, and it helped to bring attention to the issue of homelessness in the country. However, the series also featured a number of inaccuracies and misrepresentations, and the students who had been recruited in Project 500 were not pleased with the way they were portrayed in the series. They decided to demand an apology from the Chicago Tribune for the inaccuracies in the series, and they called on other organizations to do the same. This led to a number of protests and demonstrations, and the students were eventually able to demand an apology from the Chicago Tribune.
The Case of the Gap and the Oak Harbor Strike

By Niloofar Shambayati

In a recent strike, over 600 workers from Oak Harbor Freight Lines (O.H.) have taken the legal and moral principle of corporate social responsibility to a new level. They have taken their case to Oak Harbor’s major clients, demanding that these companies put pressure on O.H. to stop harassing their workers and start negotiating with them in good faith. Several companies, including Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) and Urban Outfitters, have suspended their business with Oak Harbor until a fair contract is signed.

The Gap Inc., which also owns Banana Republic, Pimkie, and Old Navy, however, has refused to place any pressure on the company and continues to transport its merchandise through Oak Harbor. Several organizations, including the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation and Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior, have called on Gap to suspend its relationship with Oak Harbor. But Gap argues that it bears no responsibility in labor-management disputes of its subcontractors and that it has not been in collusion with O.H., despite the fact that the company’s proposed contract included a special “Gap” rule that would deny overtime pay for weekend work on Gap business.

The Teamsters labor contract with O.H. expired on Oct. 31, 2007 and negotiations failed to resolve disagreements over the company’s proposed contract, the most significant part of which is the company’s health insurance plan which, according to the union, would raise many retirees’ premiums between $400 and $700 per month. The strike (the first in the company’s 92 years of operations) started on Sept. 22, 2008. Teamsters and warehouse and office workers have been picketing at the facilities in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, and Nevada. Al Hohn, Teamster vice-president and John Council 28 president, however, insists that the strike has everything to do with unfair, “unlawful” labor negotiations and less to do with the contract itself. “It’s about the owner of the company, its priorities and its date workers. They’re being overly aggressive.” He adds that, “Believe me, this decision to strike wasn’t made lightly.” The union alleges that the company representatives had contacted and intimidated individual workers during the negotiations and has filed charges of unfair-labor practices with the National Labor Relations Board. Company spokesman, Mike Hobby, contends that those charges are unfounded.

Yet the company immediately cut off health care benefits to its unionized workers and its retirees. It hired strike-breaking security started on Sept. 22, 2008. Teamsters and warehouse and office workers have been picketing at the facilities in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, and Nevada. Al Hohn, Teamster vice-president and John Council 28 president, however, insists that the strike has everything to do with unfair, “unlawful” labor negotiations and less to do with the contract itself. “It’s about the owner of the company, its priorities and its date workers. They’re being overly aggressive.” He adds that, “Believe me, this decision to strike wasn’t made lightly.” The union alleges that the company representatives had contacted and intimidated individual workers during the negotiations and has filed charges of unfair-labor practices with the National Labor Relations Board. Company spokesman, Mike Hobby, contends that those charges are unfounded.

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How the Economic Decline Affect Us Locally

By Walter W. McMahon

The Champaign-Urbana economy reflects what is happening nationally. The decline in sales, jobs, and construction, and the rising mortgage foreclosures rates are less severe than surrounding communities such as Decatur and Danville because of the stabilizing influence from the University and from regional health care facilities. But they are substantial. Construction is down and has excess capacity, and the unemployment rate has climbed from 4.5% in April and is near 6%. This is very likely to go higher. The impacts of unemployment are shown by substantial research to include a decrease in happiness. But the decline affects more than 6%, and closer to three times that. The usual rule of thumb is that another 6% have stopped seeking work and dropped out of the labor force and still a third 6% or so feel their jobs are threatened. This 18% gets out to the polls to vote, and they become a determined force in many elections.

The problem is that the economic decline nationally and in Champaign-Urbana reasonably can be expected to continue. There are thus far no national policies that have been put in place capable of turning the real economy around. Monetary policies involving the banks and the financial sector, especially that of setting interest rates by the Federal Reserve and the infusion of government money into banks, are not sufficient under conditions where people are losing their jobs, sales are off, debt is high, excess capacity exists, and the investment outlook is impaired. Fiscal policies are the heavy artillery under this situation.

There are major $700 billion monetary policy steps being taken to stabilize the banks and financial sector, and something like this was necessary to prevent disaster. But President Bush is wrong in contending that we just need to wait for this to work. Businesses with falling sales, excess capacity, and debt twice as high as a percent of GDP as it should be are not likely to borrow to invest in their plant or store, nor should they if they are reasonable. Consumers with new durables, high consumer and mortgage debt, and decimated stock and mutual fund portfolios also will not borrow much more. Monetary policy and the Federal Reserve can lower interest rates further, and although this is accommodating, it is like pushing on a string.

How long will this decline last? In the 1980's 6.3 million jobs were lost from the peak in July 1981 to the trough in November 1982, a decline that lasted 16 months before the turnaround. The current decline can be even worse, given the high debt and slowness in putting in place a well designed fiscal policy. If the decline again should last 16 months that would put the trough in the late Fall of 2009. If there are Federal expenditure cuts as some have advocated, this is an inappropriate stabilization policy that would reduce purchasing power and lower aggregate demand and in the short run make the trough deeper and delay the recovery into 2010 or later.

Based on the experience with past recessions and on a little thought about how the economy works, once a credible fiscal policy involving taxes and government expenditures is enacted, it is likely that the stock market will surge. The stock market depends in large part on expected future earnings. As the unemployment and others receive increases in their disposable incomes due to tax cuts, expenditure increases, or both, they spend it raising sales and reducing excess capacity. This, in turn, stimulates borrowing and investment by businesses with the result that if the effort is sustained the trough of the recession tends to follow in about 6 months.

In Champaign-Urbana, of the economic sectors, employment in manufacturing has fallen by far the fastest, falling by 2000 persons since 2000. Financial services fell very sharply during the 2000 recession, and then leveled off, but will now very likely fall significantly as the 2008-2009 economic decline deepens. The University's budget is likely to see continuing strain as the state's fiscal crisis is made more acute by falling sales tax and income tax revenue. Enrollment is unlikely to be affected since there is a high demand for admissions, which are capped and rationed among the colleges. 2009 graduates will face a weaker job market. But investment in human capital is very long-term, and with 45 or more years for each graduate to be in the labor force the relatively short-term losses in starting salaries and longer job search times will be quickly recouped.

Parkland College is very likely to see increased enrollments. As job markets for high school graduates weaken, their foregone earnings costs of attending college fall, and search times will be quickly recouped. As job markets for high school graduates weaken, their foregone earnings costs of attending college fall, and search times will be quickly recouped.

But the other side of the coin is that with Parkland so heavy dependent on property tax revenues and state support, as house prices level off and fall, mortgage foreclosures rates rise, and housing vacancies are very likely to sharply restrict Parkland's revenues.

Health care delivery system employment is the one bright spot. It is likely to continue its long trend upward as Champaign-Urbana since 1995. Some reforms of the health care delivery system may come early in the new administration, such as coverage of children. But major changes in coverage or in the control of health care costs are a longer term structural reform that is not likely to be the first priority given the national economic crisis and Illinois fiscal crisis.

In the short run the Christmas shopping season in Champaign-Urbana is likely to follow the national pattern. The job losses mentioned above, high consumer credit card debt, and 40% plus stock market losses by many shoppers means that there will be restricted purchasing. Credit availability due to the financial sector bailouts will not increase disposable income. That means that it should be active and lively, but many more early discounts, and not as good as last year.

So, there are good reasons that Ben Bernanke, head of the Federal Reserve, endorsed another round of fiscal stimulus and stressed expenditure increases rather than cuts in the short run. The package needs to be better designed than the last one to put the money in the hands of those who will spend it, thereby getting more bang for the buck. Investment tax credits are excellent for longer run growth, but not as part of a stimulus package because businesses with excess capacity and lagging sales are not generally very interested in investing in new plant and equipment. Inflation is not a real threat, and will return only after full recovery is achieved, and only if at that time the Federal budget is not balanced. Some have estimated that a new stimulus package approaching $450 billion will be needed. The alternative will be a much deeper recession with recovery long delayed.

GEO Rally for Quality Education

By Tarnjeet Kang

On October 29th, the Rally for Quality Education brought together various unions, students, campus workers, and allies. Over 200 people showed up to display their opposition to increasing tuition, wage cuts and limitations on the freedom of speech. Also being questioned was the University's perennial excuse of budget cuts and economic woes to justify making students and workers bear the brunt of balancing the budget. When attendees marched to the Swanlund Administration Building, administrators refused to acknowledge the rally in any way. This lack of action on the part of the administration shows that they do not consider the needs of their students and workers to be a priority. While an e-mail from Chancellor Herman expresses a commitment to maintain access to a quality education and concern for the welfare of the campus community, the actions of the administration contradict this. In the near future we are going to continue to see an increase in ideological, financial, and social changes, both on campus and at the national level. It is imperative that we continue to raise our voices and make our concerns heard, even if the issues at stake...
When Gordon Brown, the current Prime Minister of Great Britain, announced that his government’s response to the financial crisis was to “recapitalize” British banks by buying shares in them, while at the same time extending deposit guarantees, its amounted to a coup d’état, or more precisely, a coup du monde. Britannia literally ruled the world for a moment—at least the world of finance. As soon as Brown announced the plan, other governments in Europe and elsewhere, and most notably here in the US, all having previously announced very different policies, followed suit. They too should create a TARP, or do the same as Brown. The reason they did so is that if they didn’t, customers would take their deposits out of all other banks and put them in Brown’s British banks. That’s economics.

The reason they now all say Brown is a very smart person is they would rather have us believe they were people who choose to save the money instead, that pre- tected our money, our money will earn for you. So you work, borrow, save, work, save, the world, the world for a moment —

The lesson we should draw from this is that we live in one global financial community. There is no protection in boundaries nowadays. Anyone watching the movements on the stock exchanges, these were the same conclu- sions. The indices of exchanges in the US, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Britain, Germany, Russia, Japan, China, Australia and elsewhere move up and down with eerie synchronicity. If they are not in synch, it is probably because they are closed by the authorities.

The lesson is we need to think in terms of world gov- ernments and business leaders coordinate with each other all the time, in and outside the framework of global institu- tions such as the IMF and the United Nations. There are tacit understandings as well as frightened phone calls, and of course there are formal agreements, such as the WTO. Beyond trade promotion, these contribute to the standard- ization of law, accounting and numerous other practices.

Maybe there should be a formally recognized and diferently structured world government; maybe not. That can be debated another time. But beyond debate already now is that we need to think in terms of world government as much as we think in terms of global economy. The reason is that the consequences of policies spread the world over. The current financial crisis is global; and any policies to deal with financial institutions or the recession will have to be global too. Gordon Brown just showed us why. The global problem lurking behind it both the financial crisis and the recession is low wages. Here in the US, wages stagnated during the past thirty years while output and prod- uctivity grew. But the worst is not here; it is overseas in China, India and elsewhere, where output grows faster with productivity grows faster with production techniques rapidly modernizing, but where wages are much lower and are growing only slowly. Modern products efficiently produced using workers making around $1 per hour: that is a recipe for huge business profits. Huge profits cause no trouble when productively invested or plausibly consumed. However, when recipi- ents of profits choose to save the money instead, that pre- sents a challenge to the financial community. Of course the challenge is welcome; that is how the finance industry makes a living; it is a challenge nonetheless.

A central purpose of capitalistic finance is, if you earn your money, your money will earn for you. So you work, borrow, cheat, steal, or inherit: and now the financial community has to take that money and get it to earn returns for you. Think of brokers, bankers, financiers and all the rest as matchmakers, trying to bring together your money and a productive return-yielding project. If they get too much money, they run out of good matches. But they don’t turn away business, saying “sorry!” because that is bad for reputa- tion and earnings. Just like third world matchmakers make any match for a bride that earns the fee, even to pimps on far off lands, these financiers take your money to less reputable ventures. One day it all comes out, that bil- lions or trillions are lost. And instead of too much invest- ment, there is suddenly too little, because everyone is scared, suspecting there is still too much money floating around for it to be safe.

You can complain about the corruption, it doesn’t help. The real problem is not the human character, it is too much money looking for investment opportunities.

Now suppose wages rise all over the world. There would be more demand for products, so more good investment opportunities. At the same time, there would be less profit, so less money looking for investment opportunities. Invest- ment becomes straightforward, so the bloated finance industry shrinks to a proper size. Everything will get better, for quite a while. This would be good global policy. Of course, with well-organized labor all over the world, in China, India, Viet Nam, Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, as well as of course in Europe, Russia, the US and Japan—all enjoying good wages with benefits and a healthy sense of entitlement—you can imagine things eventually going too far: too many investment opportun- ities and no profits left to invest. Stagflation and the bad old 70s return. Time to elect a new Reagan. But—Oh dear!—where is the foreign cheap labor going to come from then?
History Matters, Just Ask Barack

By Aaron Ammons

In 1963 four little girls, Denise McNair (11 years old), Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins, all 14 years old, were preparing for their lessons at the 16th Street Baptist Church when BOOM! A bomb exploded in the church killing all four girls and severely injuring many others. This heinous act prompted many men and women to anger and they set out to kill whoever they thought was guilty of this crime. Two of those angry people were Diane Nash and Reverend James Luther Bevel, strategists and architects of several of the most memorable events of the moment in American history. For the history I am still in amazement of the election results, because America had never elected a person of color to be President of the United States of America.

I am well aware that there is a vast history that created the context for the right to vote campaign, but I was asked to describe November 4, 2008 from my perspective. After a long day of electioneering, my wife Carol and I made our rounds to the Obama Party at the American Legion where 99.9% of the crowd was African American. We were able to comfort the 1% that did not become the President. Based upon the tremendous support Barack received from white America and we were in a room that was 99% white, we thought there would be excitement, especially from the Democrats, but to our surprise, Mt. ‘Big Al’ Kurtz (recently appointed to the County Board in district 7) and his wife Linda, seemed to be the only people in the room who shared our jubilation! We felt like screaming for joy and hugging everyone. We left the event feeling that it best just to leave. Upon leaving we decided to visit with Rev. Bogan and Ruth, who had decided to bring the change in at home. After a short stay and a sharing of thoughts with them, we went home to be with our children. Of course, Jalani (my 13 yr old son) was following the results on TV and we were just in time to see Barack make his acceptance speech at Grant Park. I went to Angy (my 7 yr old son) bedroom and woke him up so he could see the first black President elected in the United States. I warned my two African-American boys to see the results of this victory as a result of sacrifices made by so many others. This heinous act prompted many men and women to anger, frustration and pain. They knew that the negative energy permeating the black community, and the country at that time could be used as a tool for change.

My good friend, Ken Salo, reminds me often that ‘History Matters,’ which is why I used history to transition into my own personal thoughts about ‘Otha-Messiah’ (just kidding) being elected as President of the United States of America.

As an historian of American educational history I am still in amazement of the recent events. November 4, 2008 will go down in history as a milestone moment in American history. For the first time in the history of the nation a person of color, Barack Hussein Obama, was elected President of the United States of America.

The election of Obama was both a moment of pride and amazement to many people I have talked to since the election. I have heard countless people say how proud they are of the election results, because America had finally progressed enough with regard to race relations to elect an African American President. Similarly, I have talked to many people who are still in disbelief that Obama, because of his race, actually won. What strikes me the most in these conversations are the differing messages that shaped the way people thought about race and its role in this presidential election. This is especially true considering Obama did his best to ignore race as a factor.

Most ironic to me in this presidential campaign and election were the conversations I had with people who wondered (even questioned) if Obama could be elected President. Race—for more than merit or qualification—was a foremost consideration in the conversations, and it proved to me that race is still an issue. Regardless of the circumstances, conclusions people draw because of race are without question illogical and illogic does not beget logic.

Take for instance the profiles of the President-elect and the outgoing President. Obama, an always top of his class Columhil and Harvard-educated Senator and first Constitutional Law Professor at the University of Chicago, has been a success throughout his entire adult life. No one should question whether he is qualified to be President. Yet, many in the general electorate and some in the media questioned whether he was qualified, and the conversations I had with friends and colleagues questioned whether the fact that he was a person of color would upend his chances at the presidency.

On the other hand, President George W. Bush proudly self-professed to never being a quality student in college or life before his ascendency to the Presidency, and as President his executive decisiveness without much deliberation has forced this nation into two unnecessary wars, economic recession, intellectual mediocrity, and global disrepute. Despite his inept presidency, and the immense challenges he has left for the new President, Bush holds that as an African American public, I have yet to talk to anyone who has questioned whether Bush was elected because of his race. Still, it was race that played a role in both candidates’ elections. Because of his race, Obama could never be so inept and still be elected (twice), and because of his race, the public never expected or required Bush to be as qualified as Obama to be considered for the highest post in the land.

Nowhere is the election of Obama a sign that both ideology and practice is always evolving, and the election of Obama is living proof that it changes, slowly but surely, even in politics. In the words of President-elect Obama, “If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.”

Obama, to my generation and older, had beaten the odds. He won the presidency despite his race and the role race continues to play in our society. When he spoke those words in Grant Park that election evening, I was watching it with my wife and our three year old son, Langston.

As I glanced down at my son, tears filled my eyes because I knew exactly who he is, the image of an African American President will be normal. He and his peers (regardless of their ethnic or racial background) will come of age assuming that people like Obama are supposed to be president. Langston will be seven years of age when Obama’s first term ends; he would be eleven years old, if Obama is elected to a second term. All he will know in his early childhood is an African American President. So when people say to him, as they did to me as a child, that “if you work hard and do well in school, then one day maybe you can be a President of the United States,” he can think of Barack Obama and his momentous rise in 2008 and say, without the same reservations, “Yes I Can.”

Without Reservations “Yes I Can” by Chris Span

Chris Span is a professor at the University of Illinois in Educational Policy Studies.

As a historian of American educational history I am still in amazement of the recent events. November 4, 2008 will go down in history as a milestone moment in American history. For the first time in the history of the nation a person of color, Barack Hussein Obama, was elected President of the United States of America.

The election of Obama was both a moment of pride and amazement to many people I have talked to since the election. I have heard countless people say how proud they are of the election results, because America had finally progressed enough with regard to race relations to elect an African American President. Similarly, I have talked to many people who are still in disbelief that Obama, because of his race, actually won. What strikes me the most in these conversations are the differing messages that shaped the way people thought about race and its role in this presidential election.
When Obama’s primary campaign seemed to be heading for victory in early March 2008, he came under sharp attack from conservatives in the media and from the Hillary Clinton campaign for his relationship with Rev. Jeremiah Wright, the former pastor of the church Obama attended. Influenced by black liberation theology, Wright’s sermons indicted American racism in ways reminiscent of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. After two weeks of a media-driven scandal, Wright was named Business: Will Not Talking about Race Undermine Racism?

By David Roediger

When Obama’s primary campaign seemed to be heading for victory in early March 2008, he came under sharp attack from conservatives in the media and from the Hillary Clinton campaign for his relationship with Rev. Jeremiah Wright, the former pastor of the church Obama attended. Influenced by black liberation theology, Wright’s sermons indicted American racism in ways reminiscent of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. After two weeks of a media-driven scandal, Wright was named

The Contradictions in Signs of Wonder

By Amira Davis

Like millions of others around the world, I shed tears at the end of my first week of classes. The connections with Illinois (Lincoln and Obama) or that a Black family will be moving into the house built by enslaved men of African descent which, according to Alice Walker, is the family for whom those men had labored.

I find irony in the symbolism of Obama who is as much a testament of personal will and spiritual favoring as the work of a culture industry committed to constructing fantasies. In this instance, Obama has emerged despite the earliest laws of the colonial era being designed to prevent his arrival. The Virginia Statute of 1662 shifted common law practices of children following the status of their father to following that of the mother. This change was intended to make slavery inheritable through the body of Black women so that mulatto children of white men would not be able to inherit the father’s property, including the property of whiteness. Similarly, anti-miscegenation laws were intended to preserve white women’s wombs, also the property of white men, for the transference of white men’s assets. Yet here, the male child of a white woman from Kansas and a Black man from Kenya has been prepped and packaged for consumption as a talisman against despair in a culture of commodity fetishization. It is even more ironic that a man who ostensibly represents the end of the U.S. apartheid in a way that Mandela signaled the beginning of the end of apartheid in South Africa would, in his first few days as president-elect, align himself with forces that would deny the end to the apartheid suffered by Palestinians. This stance produces not only sadness, but visceral fear. I realize critiquing Obama is almost sacrilegious. I called my 82 year old mother—the matriarch, political pundit and fashionista of the family—to find out if she had been able to finally deliver her state—Missouri. I expressed my concern over the Obama brand. She called me a “player hater.” Generally more critical of political performances than I and known to make calls to CSPAN, she chose to critique Michelle’s election night attire. “That dress was ugly.” She said. “Mom,” I said, “these people are a masterful illusionists. I bet you believe reality shows are real. Really real. I talk about policy statements and you’re talking about fashion statements. Sounds like you’re the ‘player hater’ I can’t talk to you right now, but Obama is a victory in the ongoing struggle. For my mother, and so many others, signs of wonder are being searched for in American politics. I pray their faith will be rewarded.
Naomi Klein spoke at the University of Illinois in late October about a liberation movement that began in South America on September 11, 1973. It was a liberation movement for the international corporate sector. The current American economic crisis is a direct result of this liberation movement for the international corporate sector. A shocked former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan testified to a congressional committee that he had mistakenly believed that rational self-interest would preclude the need for more regulation of the financial sector.

Klein gives us reason to hope that there is an emerging alternative that is viable, although an anathema to the functionaries of corporate America, if applied to the economy, offers an alternative that is viable, although an anathema to the functionaries of corporate America. Klein gave us hope for the future. Still, in love with her creations, she warns of our complacency to catastrophic democratic decay. The Great Mother Wails.

The Great Mother Wails

The Earth extends her arms to us; revealing through her nature the changing condition of our existence.

She bends and twists; Deflecting the swords of Our destruction.

Our arrogance, Our glorification, Our deceit.

Unbridled by red alerts or amber warnings, Her ire gives rise to mornoon winds, Jarring us from the stupor of Our academic impunity; Our disjointed conversations, Our empty promises; our black and white dreams.

Filled with unruly discontent, we yearn to dominate her mysteries; reducing her to microscopic dust, we spit upon her sacredness, tempting the fury of her seas.

We spill our unholy wars upon her belly's tender flesh, blazon dislocated corpses, ignite her agony and grief.

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—Antonia Darder (2008)

The Arts and Culture

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Sports, Politics, and Disenfranchised Fans

By Neil Parthun

Since the presence of baseball players like Larry Doby and Jackie Robinson, there is a rich history of social and political activism in athletics. Sport and politics also continue their collision in ways that impact citizens’ lives from increasing costs for fans to stadium funding issues.

Fans spent a record $32.06 billion in 2007 on tickets, parking fees, concessions and on-site merchandise. This amount notes an increase of over 4% since last year. The average ticket prices for the National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB) and National Hockey League (NHL) have risen 5-10% this year. These growing prices and the significant economic downturn have begun to alienate fans from attending games. As Boston Red Sox fan Kent Haines said, “When you combine the cost of the tickets with the effort it takes to get our fannies unreserved parking.” The wealthy donors of private funds have “replaced” fans that used to watch games from those seats. High Memori- al Stadium has access to elevators that carry fans to the upper level stairs while the other half has the foot power ramps. The private funders have plush seats, covered seating, and reserved parking; while the general public has access to smaller steel benches and remotely located unreserved parking. “Richer, corporate fans” have displaced regular fans, locally as well as nationally.

While Memorial Stadium was refurbished with private funds, there has been an epidemic of new stadiums being built with demands that local taxpayers pay the costs. Former part owner of the Texas Rangers baseball franchise, George W. Bush, used eminent domain to take thirteen acres from private homeowners to secure land on which The Ballpark at Arlington was built. Taxpayers largely funded the building of $600+ million stadium for the Washington Nationals. The New York Yankees have spent $1.3 billion new Yankee Stadium that the IRS stated the franchise could no longer demand more money from taxpayers. Also, in a measure that clearly shows the intersections of sports and politics, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson’s son is demanding $85 million in taxpayer funds from the city of Portland, Oregon to build a new sports complex for minor league sports teams that he owns.

Fans are being asked to foot the bill for stadiums to watch their beloved sports, yet many of these same fans have been priced out of using the facilities they are subsidizing. When we are living in a country that is spending billions to bail out greedy Wall Street banking institutions and cutting social program/school funding while millions of people are impoverished and without health care, demanding taxpayers make stadiums a priority for funds is almost criminal.

In order to justify the raiding of the public coffers for private profit, the millionaire/billionaire ownership of sports franchises by stating that these stadiums will provide an economic stimulus to the community. However, there is substantive evidence that stadiums do not have a positive economic impact. Sports economist Dennis Coates (University of Maryland) and Brad R. Humphreys (University of Alberta) researched whether or not the building of new stadiums brought a boost to the local economy. In their study—which spanned nearly thirty years and examined almost forty attempts—they couldn’t find a single example of a sports franchise assisting a local economy.

These issues may primarily be sports related but they are inherently political issues also. Discounting sports as a venue for political issues does a disservice to sports and advocacy for political issues does a disservice to sports and sports fans. The presence of sports teams has intangible positive effects on our communities. But, owners and corporate sponsors should not hold fans hostage or treat us like clueless suckers.

Sports—there’s another crucial example of the indoctrination system, in my view. For one thing because it—yes, I offer people something to pay attention to that’s of no importance. [Sports] keeps them from worrying about things that matter to their lives that they might have some idea of doing something about.

—Noam Chomsky

Analysis about sports like Chomsky’s has gained ground in progressive ideology. However, sports are not activities “of no importance...that keeps [the people] from worrying about things that matter in their lives.” From the presence of baseball players like Larry Doby and Jackie Robinson who began shattering Jim Crow by breaking baseball’s color line to the immortalized black gloved solidarity fists of Olympic track athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos in the 1968 Summer Games to the current activism against war and capital punishment by Washington Wizards player Etan Thomas, there is a rich history of social and political activism in athletics. Sport and politics also continue their collision in ways that impact citizens’ lives from increasing costs for fans to stadium funding issues.

Get Involved with the Public i

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

Sgt. Burge Arrested

The October 2008 edition of the Public i detailed the systematic torture perpetrated by Chicago Police officer Jon Burge and other officers under his command from 1972 to 1993.

On October 21, 2008, Sergeant Burge was arrested at his home in Tampa on two counts of obstruction of justice and one count of perjury. The charges alleged that Burge lied under oath in a November 2003 civil suit that stated Burge and other officers tortured African American suspects.

US Attorney Patrick J. Fitzgerald has said the investigation is continuing and more charges may be filed against Burge and other officers. As Fitzgerald stated at the arrest press conference: “No person is above the law and nobody—even a suspected murderer—is beneath its protection.”

Out of Sequence: Underrepresented Voices in American Comics

Krannert Art Museum and Kinkead Pavilion
October 24, 2008 to January 4, 2009

Curators: John Jennings and Damian Duffy

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I celebrate the holiday of Thanksgiving.

This may surprise those people who wonder what Native Americans think of this official U.S. celebration of the survival of early arrivals in a European invasion that culminated in the deaths of 10 to 30 million native people.

Thanksgiving, to me, has never been about Pilgrims.

When I was six, my mother, a woman of the Dineh nation, which the Board of Trustees retitled, “In 1621 the Pilgrims’ pride” in “America the Beautiful.” Our people, she said, had been here much longer and taken much better care of the land. We were to sing “Land of the Indian’s pride” instead.

I was proud to sing the new lyrics in school, but I sang softly. It was enough for me to know the difference.

Cars and disease hung over the valleys of our people. The English speaking, having traveled to Europe, and took pity on them. Their English crops had failed. The native people led them through the winter and taught them how to grow their food.

These were not merely “friendly Indians.” They had already experienced European slave traders raiding their villages for a hundred years or so, and they were wary—

but it was their way to give freely to those who had nothing. Among many of our peoples, showing that you can give without holding back is the way to earn respect. Among the Dakota, my father’s people, they say, when asked to give, “Are you Dakota and alive?” It was believed that by giving there would be enough for all—

the exact opposite of the system we live in now, which is based on selling, not giving.

Some estimate that diseases accounted for a death toll reaching 90 percent in some Native American communities. By 1626, the Pilgrim leader, a Pilgrim leader, was giving thanks to God for the healthier saugus to make way for ‘a better growth,’ meaning his people.

In stories told by the Dakota people, an evil person always kept secrets from or had power placed over the body. The hero must find that secret place and destroy the heart in order to stop the evil.

I see, in the “First Thanksgiving” story, a hidden Pilgrim heart. The story of that heart is the real tale than needs to be told. What did it hold? Bogie, hatred, greed, self-righteousness? We have seen the evil that it caused in the 350 years since.

Genocide, environmental devastation, poverty, world wars, racism.

Where is the hero who will destroy that evil of heart? I believe it must be each of us. Indeed, when I give thanks this Thursday and cook my native food, I will be thinking of this hidden heart and how my ancestors survived the evil it caused.

Because if we can survive, with our ability to share and to give in turn, then the evil and the good will that met that Thanksgiving day in the land of the Wampanoag will have come full circle.

And the healing can begin.

(From Pacific News Service. Posted January 1, 2000)

New Director of Native American House/American Indian Studies Issues Statement Against the Continued Use of Racist Mascot Imagery at UIUC

By Tom Garza

Students, faculty, and staff associated with Native American House and American Indian Studies at the University of Illinois are dismayed about plans by other members of our campus community to bring back the university’s former mascot imagery.

The planned event represents a step backwards in the process of changing the environment that the NCAA has cited in its sanctions against Illinois and the University of Iowa. The NCAA has ruled the Wampanoag did not have the right to access millions of dollars in federal aid for housing, health care and education.

In 1976, the Mashpee Wampanoag filed a lawsuit to recover land the tribe says was taken from them illegal.

The suit was dismissed in 1978 when a federal judge ruled the Mashpee Wampanoag did not have official tribal status.

With the now newly acquired tribal recognition, the Mashpee Wampanoag’s efforts to recover their ancestral lands has been renewed.

Anti-Chief Protest Express Concerns

By Tom Garza

I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I’m not sure you realize what what you heard is not what I meant.

This quote truly sums up the nature of most public conversations about the chief.

I have been actively involved in fighting the chief against the mascot for several years now, and I’ve been to more rallies, protests, and marches than I can count. So, it was without any particular enthusiasm that I head-

ed over Saturday to yet another protest out-

side of the Assembly Hall, where Students for Chief Illiniwek staged an event titled ‘The Next Dance’. A newly selected ‘chief’ was slated to continue the decades old U of I tradition of playing Indian, albeit this time with a more modern look. The chief had been forced to retire the chief back in 2007.

My friend Allyson and I had decided to document the event. Now, as I sit here now, I realize that we had been doing this sort of thing for years, so you’d think I’d be a bit jaded about the whole process. But I have to say that I don’t remember ever feeling such a thrill run through me as I did when we made came upon the fiesty group of protesters who were stationed near the front doors of the
Cherrie Moraga: Still Loving in the War Years

By Antonio Darder

In November, 52% of California voters passed Proposition 8, which denies same-sex couples the right to marry. The initiative overturned a May ruling by the State Supreme Court that struck down a 2000 ban on same-sex unions. As with other conservative referendums, this action by California voters may serve as a bellwether, with similar actions likely to erupt across the country. In response, a series of nationwide demonstrations against Prop 8 were held to voice their opposition. In concert with the nationwide effort, Champaign-Urbana supporters of same-sex marriage came out to protest the unconstitutionality and unjust nature of the law that prohibits citizens involved in lesbian, gay, or transgender relationships to whomever they choose, irrespective of gender or sexuality.

Anti-Chief Protest

Continued from page 10

Hall. They were organized, energetic, and disciplined, and it seemed to me that the chants never stopped going the entire time we were there. But beyond their enthusiasm, which was instantly infectious, the most exciting part for me personally was the diversity of voices that came out of the crowd. This was an entirely new group of people who clearly intended to stay right where they were, until they'd made a difference. And they did!

United, we were there on that cold Saturday afternoon to fight an ideology and a practice that we believe is wrong. The indefensible nature of the pro-chief position is such that they, instead of seeing the necessity of the event without being forced to reconsider their position on the chief. Despite their entrenched views, they had to think about what we were saying and what they were doing. And if the intensity of their hostility is any indication, our mere presence made them feel very, very uncomfortable. And that, to me, is a big success, and one that I was very proud to be a part of.

Unfinished Business

Continued from page 7

the problem. The subprime catastrophe was poised to serve either as a perfect vehicle to show how issues capable of dragging down much of the whole economy are about both race and class, or as occasion for generalities, pro-mortgage industry policy changes, and wishful thinking. The latter road has been the one taken by Obama and all of his major competitors. To complete the sad picture, in the weeks before the election, right-wing commentators blamed the worsening economic crisis on poor people of color—the horrific Michael Savage imagined that favoritism went mainly to “illegal aliens”—getting loans they “did not deserve.” Race found its way into the discussion purely on terms set by conservatives.

To expect more that is concrete, forthright, and policy-oriented regarding race from Obama in the context of a presidential campaign was fruitless. Elocutiously summing up the ways in which the idea of race has and has not changed, the most important aspect of his campaign has been to show how much and how many people desire peace, and want to find a way to move beyond race. But to make real the latter desire requires going through the question of white supremacy, as South African writers have emphasized, not around it.