

# FREEDOM ROAD

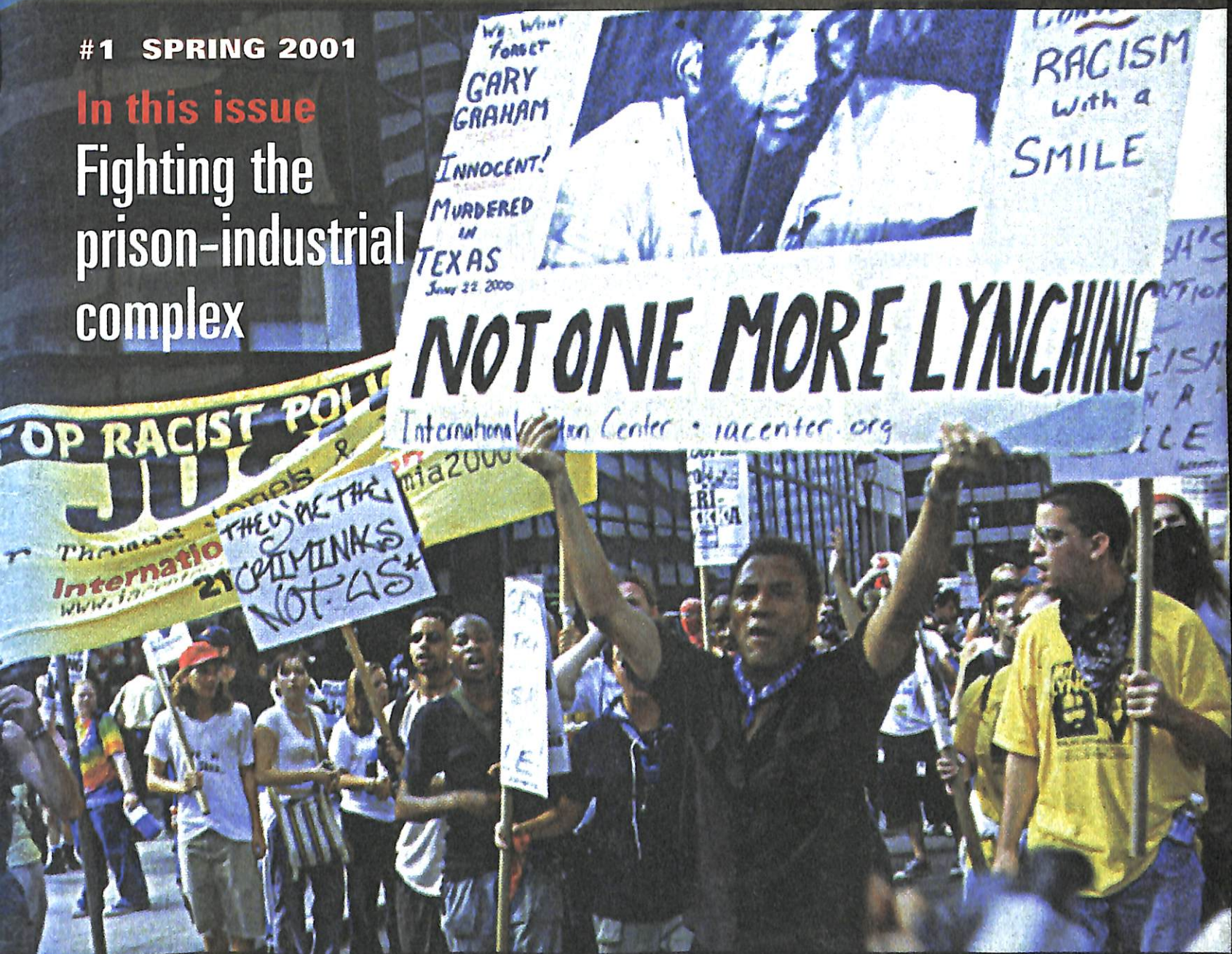
A MAGAZINE OF STRUGGLE, SELF-DETERMINATION AND SOCIALISM



#1 SPRING 2001

In this issue

Fighting the  
prison-industrial  
complex



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- Where next on the road from Seattle
- Black Workers For Justice turns 20
- Linda Evans speaks!
- Chinatown stops Philly stadium cold



# INTRODUCING FREEDOM ROAD!

**T**he Freedom Road Socialist Organization is pleased to present the inaugural issue of our new magazine. We want to spell out here the goals of the publication in order to give you, our readers, a clear understanding of where we're coming from.

## **Building the Mass Struggle**

The main role of *Freedom Road* magazine is to cover people's struggles against oppression and exploitation and for justice and a better life. As much as possible we want to draw out the practical political lessons from the stories we cover, lessons that our readers can, we hope, learn from and apply to other struggles in other places. We believe that only through building the mass movements in a genuine and serious way can we build the level of organization, amongst the working class and all oppressed people, needed to make socialist revolution. Through fighting for actual reforms in real-world struggles, we can create favorable new conditions that will ultimately make such a revolution possible.

## **Promoting the Politics of Self-Determination**

*Freedom Road* also aims to put the politics of anti-racism and self-determination front and center. Any movement that ends up reinforcing white supremacy and white privileges, or any of the other forms of oppression plaguing us, such as male supremacy, heterosexism, or the domination of more privileged strata — within the movement or within society as a whole — is a movement going in the wrong direction. We believe it is the task of conscious revolutionaries to build and lead the movements so that such ills are undermined rather than reinforced.

Taking an active stand against white supremacy and national and racial oppression and supporting the right of oppressed nations to self-determination is especially important given the history of this country. The articles on the

Chinatown struggle, the history of Black Workers For Justice, and Frantz Fanon's legacy particularly reflect this imperative.

## **Aiming for Socialist Revolution**

The magazine also intends to cover questions pertaining more directly to revolution and socialism itself. How do we do this properly as we come out of a period of retreat and enter a period of re-evaluation and regroupment on the Left? In practice we will look at practical work to rebuild a revolutionary movement among the dispossessed as much as we will look directly at theoretical questions around revolution and socialism.

Left Refoundation is the general term we use to describe this on-the-ground work. It involves re-envisioning socialism and rethinking a strategy for bringing it into being, based on common organizing and discussion among anti-capitalist groups and individuals. To do this work successfully we have to combat errors of sectarianism and vanguardism (the belief that one's own group has it all figured out and is the One True Revolutionary Party).

Among other things, we must treat Marxism-Leninism and other revolutionary theory not as a magical formula but as a set of tools for understanding and shaping the world — tools that are limited, incomplete, and not always perfectly matched to the new tasks at hand. These tools always need to be sharpened; sometimes new ones need to be created to meet new tasks, and others need to be set aside.

Rebuilding the Left will take long, patient, principled work. This work is on the agenda in countries around the world as well as the US, and is often more advanced elsewhere. This is reflected in the article on South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign, which shows how people are rising to the new challenges that the struggle presents there. On the domestic level we offer the encouraging example of Activist San Diego, which has put new technology together with old-

fashioned organizing in the service of the movements.

## **This Issue's Focus: The Criminal Injustice System**

Fortunately, we seem to be entering a new period in which all these tasks are becoming easier. The class struggle is heating up. The student movement is lively. Movements which a few years ago were embryonic, such as the new movement against corporate globalization and the movement against the prison-industrial complex, are causing consternation in the ruling class and forcing concessions from them. As a youngish activist, I find it a strange and giddy experience to actually see us hurt the class enemy in real life and not just in the pages of history books or the reminiscences of older comrades.

The rise in recent years of the movement against the prison-industrial complex is particularly inspiring. For many years small numbers of dedicated activists worked to build movements in support of political prisoners; against the death penalty, the soaring rates of incarceration, police brutality, and the "drug war"; and so on. That patient groundwork is beginning to come to fruition.

We are seeing the numbers of folks involved grow and, finally, the beginnings of real impact on the popular consciousness and on the balance of forces between us and the enemy. What were for years largely isolated movements around individual issues and even individual prisoners are now beginning to flow together into a unified movement against an entire system.

One of the most important developments uniting this movement has been Critical Resistance. The founding conference on the West Coast more than two years ago has led to an ongoing network and now an East Coast conference to carry things forward. The history and prospects of this scene are investigated in the piece, "A Wall Is Just a Wall." Other

highlights of the section on the criminal injustice system are articles on the role of grandparents when the parents are put behind bars and the "Education Not Incarceration/Fight the Police State" campaign of the Black Radical Congress.

The Freedom Road Socialist Organization holds that the key link in the continuation of capitalist rule in the U.S. is the white supremacist system of oppression of minority nations and nationalities. In line with this under-

standing, we see the prison-industrial complex as one of the main mechanisms by which white supremacist bourgeois rule is maintained. Thus, any serious revolutionary movement in this country must place heavy emphasis on fighting the criminal injustice system. So it is fitting that we have this struggle as a major focus of the first issue of *Freedom Road*.

As a final note, we hope you enjoy *Freedom Road* magazine and find it useful. If you would like to contact us, please

do so at the address on the table of contents page. For an on-line version of *Freedom Road* and to learn a whole lot more about our organization, visit our slammin' website at <freedomroad.org>.

Peace.

Eric Odell  
Editor

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### EDITOR

Eric Odell

### DESIGN

Doug Wordell

### TRANSLATION

Jullana Barnet

### STAFF

Eric Odell

Doug Wordell

Dennis O'Neill

Juliet Ucelli

### SPECIAL THANKS

Cameron Barron

Scott Braley

Bill Capowski

Ajamu Dillahunt

Michelle Foy

Jon Liss

Mike Melselman

Vicky Manjivar

Rajiv Rawat

Chip Smith

### SUBSCRIPTION INFO

For subscription information or  
to learn more about the  
Freedom Road Socialist  
Organization, visit our web  
site.

### WEBSITE

www.freedomroad.org

### EMAIL

freedomroad@freedomroad.org

### ADDRESS

Freedom Road  
PO Box 1386  
Stuyvesant Station  
New York, NY 10009



# A Wall Is Just A Wall



## Critical Resistance and the Fight Against the Prison-Industrial Complex

BY MICHELLE FOY

*"I have been loved by the lawless.  
Handcuffed by the haters.  
Gagged by the greedy.  
And, if I know anything at all,  
it's that a wall is just a wall  
and nothing more at all.  
It can be broken down."*

— Assata Shakur

In the fall of 1998 an unprecedented gathering of activists, academics, former and current prisoners, labor leaders, religious organizations, feminists, gay, lesbian and transgender activists, youth, families, and policy makers took place at the Critical Resistance conference in Berkeley, California. The conference was a milestone for anti-prison organizers and the movement that they are committed to building. The conference planners, expecting no more than 500 people, were shocked to witness 3500 people come together that weekend. The conference truly provided an important foundation for the growth of the anti-prison movement.

Over the last two decades, we have seen an onslaught of repressive legislation, exponential increases in state and federal funding dedicated to policing, militarization, and criminal injustice, and the disappearing of millions of people, particularly people of color, behind bars, steel doors and razor wire. In response, numerous organizations have arisen to deal with specific aspects of the prison and criminal injustice system. Those organizations have spanned the spectrum from Puerto Rican independence organizations and Black, Asian and Chicano liberation groups to faith-based organi-

zations to liberal and radical white and multiracial groups.

Generally, the harder-left organizations have had a clearer understanding of the role of white supremacy, social control and class domination in the criminal injustice system. Those whose analysis was accompanied by action worked mainly on winning freedom for political prisoners. The more liberal groups have tended to see the issue from a reformist civil liberties perspective, or from the narrow lens of opposition to the death penalty, with less comprehension of the key role of prisons in maintaining the political and economic system. Before Critical Resistance, there had been very little connecting the organizations and their issues, and not much effort devoted to bringing folks from different trends together to develop a thorough analysis and broad strategic approach to the work.

### **The Significance of Critical Resistance**

The 1998 Critical Resistance conference provided these divided and often disparate organizers a means to debate, develop analysis, learn from each others' work, and begin to call for a broad plan to fight the prison-industrial complex. Conference organizers advocated a radical and abolitionist solution to the problems of the criminal injustice system. In other words, rather than focusing solely on methods of reform and means of tweaking the system to be more "humane" for prisoners and their loved ones, they called into question the basis of the system and asked participants to imagine and to work towards fundamentally different alternatives to the

prison-industrial complex.

Organizers examined the racialized nature of criminalization and the class and gender dimensions of incarceration. This was partly due to the emphasis on both academic and activist angles. Organizers consciously involved academics in the conference, connecting them to grassroots work while also encouraging activists to develop a deeper analysis. This model worked so well that other conferences have been organized along similar lines, including "The Color of Violence," a women of color conference in the spring of 2000 that addressed contradictions in the anti-violence and prison movements in the United States.

The conference addressed the situation of women and the prison-industrial complex in every session and workshop, and broke new ground by exploring ways that feminists can fight domestic violence without relying on the police, courts and prisons. It challenged the white-dominated, liberal domestic violence movement to recognize that women of color have always fought domestic and state violence. Activists stressed that the struggle must deal with the class contradictions that exist in professional domestic violence organizations and to commit themselves to fight against white supremacy. Likewise, throughout the weekend, presenters and facilitators questioned the marginalization of women and LGBT folks, a tendency that the anti-prison movement has been criticized for. They also consistently stressed that prisoners, who are viewed simply as criminals by both conservatives and liberals, are human beings who are dealt the worst hand in this society.



Organizers prioritized the involvement of prisoners, who contributed to pre-conference organizing and submitted workshop proposals. Best of all, prisoners participated directly in workshops through dozens of call-ins throughout the conference weekend.

Activists at the conference discussed alliances across borders to oppose the export of U.S. style prisons and incarceration techniques. One of the more egregious exports is the model of Control Unit prisons, including high-tech sensory deprivation and solitary confinement, now used significantly in South Africa and Germany.

### **The Effect of Critical Resistance**

The Critical Resistance conference in the Bay Area was important in terms of countering isolation, building solidarity among already existing organizations and unaffiliated organizers, and laying the groundwork for new organizations. Conference participants and funders discussed strategies to direct resources towards new anti-prison organizations.

Organizers who attended from the East Coast returned home to form new groups and now are convening a Critical Resistance East conference in New York City. Southern organizers have maintained a network and are looking to hold a Southern-Wide Critical Resistance Roundtable in the fall of 2001. Last year, Midwest activists held a "Critical Resistance Solidarity Rally" on the steps of the state capitol in Columbus, Ohio on the anniversary of the conference, drawing 300 demonstrators. Hawaii's "Project Rescue" is now fighting the expansion of prisons on the Big Island and uniting activists across the islands.

Immigrant rights and anti-prison groups in Arizona and California, both in rural and urban Aztlan, are forging a new alliance to fight the federal government's plan to build upwards of 25 new prisons exclusively for immigrants in the Southwest. This groundbreaking alliance is fighting the many faces of domestic militarization by developing a broad-based strategy to stop the construction of new prisons while challenging the crimi-

nalization of immigrants and all people.

Youth participation at the conference was significant, largely as a result of concerted and autonomous youth organizing and outreach prior to the conference, and has led to major subsequent developments. One result of this participation was the formation of The Youth Force, a California-based, multi-racial, youth of color-led coalition, which was in the forefront of the fight against Proposition 21, California's "youth incarceration initiative." These young revolutionary organizers led the call for "schools not jails," a slogan that has been adopted by educators and policy makers (including an unlikely, and opportunistic champion, Colin Powell, who raised the slogan last year in a national speech about the state of education in the United States).

The Critical Resistance organization, which came out of the conference played an important role in mobilizing and educating community-based organizations on the implications of "Prop. 21" – in the Bay Area as well as in the rural communities where the majority of California's prisons are now located. This organization, a unique coalition of both rural and urban anti-prison and environmental justice organizations, is currently taking on the California Department of Corrections in a fight to stop the construction of a 5,000-bed maximum security prison in rural Delano, California. Half of the beds of this prison are projected to house youth convicted under Proposition 21.

### **Critical Resistance – the Movement**

Conferences have historically provided an opportunity for activists to discuss and shape strategies for new movements. However, some Critical Resistance organizers were disappointed that so little thought went into post-conference organization and strategy, which was due partly to the overwhelming logistical demands of such a conference. At the time of the conference, it was unclear to most participants and even some organizers that Critical Resistance was intended to continue on as a national

organization. Due to that lack of clarity and of time at the conference devoted to looking forward, initial attempts at establishing a national campaign and strategy were unfruitful.

Despite those obstacles, Critical Resistance as an organization is now successfully recreating itself and moving beyond a loose network of organizers to a national organization with great potential impact. There are currently plans to develop a truly national structure, one that is made up of folks from all over the country, not just those located in California. Organizers will soon come together to develop a long-term strategic plan for Critical Resistance as an evolving organization. They are evaluating current organizational strategies, such as the work to stop new prison construction in California and other states, cultural work against the Prison Industrial Complex, and linking environmental justice organizing with anti-prison organizing in order to expand on those strategies and develop new ones.

Any grounded summation must conclude that, in its short life span, Critical Resistance has already contributed to a striking shift in the political landscape and has affected people's thinking about prisons and punishment. For example, the first conference played a breakthrough role in popularizing the very term "prison-industrial complex."

Critical Resistance has the potential to provide the leadership necessary for this new movement to advance. With strategy and forethought this emerging movement against the criminal injustice system can break the prison walls down, stop new prison walls from going up and make plans for what we would build in their place.

You can contact CR at: Critical Resistance, 1212 Broadway, Suite 1400, Oakland CA 94612, tel: 510-444-048, fax: 510-444-2177, email: critresist@aol.com, web: criticalresistance.org

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Michelle Foy is a member of Freedom Road Socialist Organization and an organizer with the California Prison Moratorium Project and California Prison Focus.

# OUT & FIGHTING

Freedom Road Interviews Linda Evans



Scott Braley

**O**n January 20, Bill Clinton commuted the sentences of Linda Evans and Susan Rosenberg, anti-imperialist political prisoners incarcerated for nearly 16 years. Linda has hit the ground running. She lives in California and is an activist for the freedom of the remaining political prisoners.

**FR:** What were the specific charges that led to your incarceration?

**LE:** I had five trials altogether. In Louisiana I was convicted of making false statements to purchase otherwise legal weapons. I received a 40-year sentence, reduced on appeal to 30. In New York I received two years for being a felon in possession of a gun and three for harboring a fugitive. In Connecticut all charges were dropped because of FBI misconduct, including the charge of harboring my comrade, Marilyn Buck.

**FR:** As a political prisoner, you and your co-defendants were identified as anti-imperialists. What did that mean to you when you were on trial, and what does it mean to you now?

**LE:** It's important to understand that US imperialism is on a continuum, and that it has now transformed itself into what we call globalization. In the 1960s and '70s Third World peoples identified US imperialism as the primary enemy of national liberation. By joining the struggle against imperialism, North Americans were taking a stand for self-determination for all oppressed people. We in particular supported anti-colonial struggles inside the US by oppressed nations — the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, the Black Liberation Movement and the Chicano/Mexicano

struggle — as well as national liberation struggles in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, particularly in Vietnam. Now many countries have achieved flag independence but not self-determination.

A tool of US imperialism today is the debt and structural adjustment conditions imposed by structures such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund — as well as the threat of trade sanctions and the World Trade Organization. The forms of domination have become more complex because of the centralization of economic and political power in transnational corporations. The role of national governments has changed, although the state still plays the central role in imperialism.

**FR:** You're out. What tasks do you see for radical and revolutionary organizers?

I've been locked up for so long that I wouldn't want to tell people what to do. I have much to learn from those who have been out here working for the last fifteen years.

I do see a few things that are important. White activists must fight white supremacy and racism in all its manifestations, which include everything from the genocidal incarceration of black and brown people, police brutality, the death penalty and other aspects of the prison-industrial complex, to gentrification. Activists must unite grassroots efforts to control resources and against environmental racism and takeover of communities of color by real estate developers. Another aspect of the battle against racism is fighting the growth of the white supremacist movement, racist paramilitary organizations and their public covers such as religious fundamentalists.

Anti-globalization activists need to recognize how structural adjustment manifests itself inside the US, including the growth of the police state as a tool of social control. Domestic structural adjustment, which includes cutbacks in housing, hospitals, education, and welfare, most strongly impact communities of color.

It is important to have an analysis and strategy that brings together fragmented, single-issue work and unites diverse communities in the resistance struggle. Gay men and lesbians, young people, anti-globalization and anti-prison activists and people of color need to be working together to achieve the changes we all need.

**FR:** Why is the movement to free the remaining political prisoners so important?

**LE:** One, support for freedom fighters and those who resist is a way to support militancy, seriousness and dedication in our struggle. To win revolutionary change, risks must be taken. Our willingness to support the political prisoners and POWs actually defines the nature of the movement that we are building.

Second, supporting political prisoners is a human rights struggle. So many comrades have been in for more than two or three decades, and the conditions under which they live are incredibly inhumane. It also unites us with an international movement for the freedom of political prisoners. There are increasing numbers of political prisoners all over the world jailed for resistance to globalization.

Third, we must fight repression and the hegemony of the police state. All prisoners are victims of political circumstances, particularly racism and its intersection with the criminal injustice system. However, political prisoners took affirmative action to confront oppression and win liberation, coming up against extreme state repression. Specific counter-insurgency programs, like COINTELPRO, often framed activists,

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# Raising the Kids of Prisoners If It Weren't for Grandparents...

BY JUDITH RODERICK

**H**ey, Ma, check and see if my gray suit is in the cleaners, I need it... and the gray striped tie. What do ya think... black shirt or white? Hey, Ma, this is real important. I wanna make a good impression.

"My son wasn't dressing for Saturday night out on the town, or a career interview. He was preparing for court," said Celia.

The sentencing of Celia's son, Jerome: "You have been found guilty of armed robbery and are hereby sentenced to a term of at least 15 and not more than 20 years."

*Come on, Ma... You know Tony Jr., he's just like his dad, bad temper. Just tell him to quit it and he'll settle down. Don't forget little Joey has a cold. Come on, Ma, will you take care of the kids for me?*

"My daughter. Well, who knew! I never thought she'd be asking me to do childcare for life. Her life," said Ann.

The sentencing of Ann's daughter, Christine: "You have been found guilty of murder in the first degree and are hereby sentenced to life in prison."

The number of women in prison has increased at a much faster rate than the incarceration of men. African American women now face incarceration at the same rate as white males! Nationally there are 100,000 women in prisons. 80 percent have children. Who cares for these children while their parents are in prison? A few states offer limited pro-

grams that house some short-term offenders and their children if the kids are very young. Other children find themselves in the state children's services system — in Massachusetts the Department of Social Services (DSS). The kids will, most likely, move from foster home to foster home or "age out" at a group home. Those who are lucky are placed with family. Increasingly, it's the grandparents.

DSS has admitted that grandparents who are raising their grandchildren are saving the state millions of dollars. If all these grandparents were to turn their grandchildren over to the state for care, Massachusetts would go broke.

**If all these grandparents who are raising their grandchildren turned them over to the state for care, Massachusetts would go broke.**

## Up-front and Personal

Much has been written about the terrible long-range impact of high incarceration rates on a community. The repercussions for grandparents who take on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren are more up-front and personal. Planning parenthood gives you time to prepare for a child, and even when children aren't planned for, you usually have at least half

a year to get ready. For grandparents the process can occur with the swiftness of a phone call. Imagine waking up in the morning to a call telling you to come pick up not one but two or three grandchildren, and that they will be staying with you indefinitely.

A million thoughts flood your mind. Cancel all your appointments for that day, hell, the whole month. That teen eats so much, do you have enough food? Where will they sleep? Oh my God, how can I care for that hyper four-year-old? What about my trip to Florida next month?

After the first shock, the addition of children changes everything for grand-

parents. Try finding adequate, affordable housing with additional bedroom space for young people. Elder grandparents tend to live on fixed incomes and have to stretch already tight budgets to feed additional mouths. Other grandparents can be as young as 35 years old and are still working. They have to find quality childcare and find it fast. Employers realize that grandparents will now need more time off from the job for childhood ill-

nesses, doctor and school appointments, etc., and they worry about lost production. While some employers value the expertise these workers bring to the job, others feel it may be cost-effective to let the grandparent go.

And grandparents' lifestyles must change almost immediately. They have to consider their physical and mental ability to care for young children, at a time when they are coping with the loss of their child, the parent. The grandchildren also find ways to deal with the immediate loss of their parent and sometimes that means acting-out behavior. It's an extremely traumatic period for all, with little to no help from the system or their communities. Most grandparents — aching back, arthritic knees and all — slowly stand to take on the responsibility.

Support groups are an organized way grandparents raising their grandchildren can help each other. Both Ann and Celia participate in such a group. Ann, from a white middle-class background, has custody of her two grandsons because her daughter, Christine, is serving life at M.C.I. Framingham. Celia, an African American grandmother and also from a middle-class background, has custody of her daughter's two sons, but it's her son, Jerome, who is incarcerated for armed robbery at M.C.I. Bridgewater. Within the grandparent group, where they feel safe and supported, they share their experiences with issues that brought them together: their children's children, the AIDS epidemic, cuts in welfare, substance abuse, mental illness and the incarceration of their sons and daughters.

### **Celia's Story**

Jerome got addicted to crack-cocaine in his mid-20s. Ten years later, still addicted and with several petty arrests on his record, he was identified as the person who held up four convenience stores. He wore a mask, but, as he became more and more successful and more and more high, he forgot to put it on. He used a ruler when he was too high to remember to bring a knife. In the end, old police photos caught up with him.

I asked Celia if she thought her son would have used the knife to hurt someone. "I can't make that call. I'm not sure, how would I know? Under the influence of drugs, it could happen. I never thought I'd say this, but thank God he was caught before anyone was hurt. I believe deep down he wanted to get caught. Why else would you forget to mask your face during a robbery?"

"Jerome was very much aware of the desperate situation he was in and he couldn't find a way out. He wasn't able to get into a long-term drug treatment program that could have helped him. He often mentioned feeling unable to control his drug use and the lengths he knew he might go to to feed his habit. I do a lot of crying over this one because my son wasn't raised in a bad home environment. For him there was no hope of overcoming drug abuse on the outside. Terrible as it is, I think he felt prison was the only answer."

### **Ann's Story**

Ann's daughter, Christine, hooked up in her late teens with a drugs/petty theft/bad checks crowd. She eventually ran off to live with one of the "bad company" guys and for a while seemed to be doing well, but after their second baby the relationship started to collapse. The old crowd reappeared. Christine and her two boys moved around a lot over the next two years, still hanging with the bad crowd. She too was addicted to crack. Whenever she would enter detox or a drug program, Ann would step in, caring for the children, but always as a temporary arrangement.

During a week-long New Year's celebration which involved more getting high than partying, an argument broke out between a female friend and a drug dealer. As the evening wore on, Christine became involved in the argument, a fight broke out, and the drug dealer was stabbed to death. The plan was to dispose of the body in some wooded area, but, as with most plans of this type, someone turned Christine in. It was her friend, the woman first involved in the argument,

who cut a deal for reduced time if she provided evidence to convict Christine. Ann now has custody of the boys.

"January is the bleakest month of the year for me. It's when all this business started. I never went to the trial, I just couldn't. I was having a rough time dealing with my daughter, her crime and her kids who were now my kids. Talking with them about where their mommy was, it was horrible. My poor grandkids are the hardest thing to deal with because it's more physical — they're there staring right back at you. I figured my Christine had made her choices, I had to keep it together for the kids. Now I go through flashes, not hot flashes but flashbacks. On a bad day there are thousands of flashbacks, little reminders of my daughter, what happened; on a good day, I only have two or three flashes."

### **Privilege and Prisons**

As Ann speaks about her experiences, traces of the expectations that come with white privilege surface. Ann is the first one to admit to these expectations: "I didn't expect to be treated like this. All my life I was brought up thinking if you're a good wife, raising your kids right, everything would be fine. But my marriage fell apart, Mr. College Professor running around cheating on me, I started drinking, the kids grew up. This thing with Christine, now my world falls apart, but I've got to hold it together for the kids.

"I never expected the public schools and the Department of Social Services to treat me like this. I always thought they were supposed to be there to help the children, but they're actually only there to break your spirit." A public school principal thought one grandson should be on Ritalin, a behavioral medication. When Ann disagreed, DSS was called in. DSS placed the child in a treatment center, terminated Ann's custodial rights and plans to put the child up for adoption.

"Here I am, a white woman just learning how the system really works. It's like I've been under a pumpkin patch all my life. I used to hear Black people com-



plaining about the court system or schools, and I knew it was because they were Black and the Civil Rights movement hadn't dealt with the good old boys in Boston, but I didn't think it would happen to whites. Boy, was I wrong!" Ann currently lives in subsidized housing in a majority people of color community.

### **Awakening the Community**

Within the African American community in Boston, support for offenders, ex-offenders and their families has been varied, often weak. As in most cities, the

**Obviously, serious education on the real mission of the criminal justice system needs to occur. Those who are touched first-hand by it know the truth and see the link between poor urban public school education, low paying jobs or no jobs, welfare cuts, crime and punishment.**

community has suffered through the ravages of substance abuse and all the violence and crime that accompanies it. Pleas to the police department for help in ridding the community of drugs always fell on deaf ears. That is, until the "inner city revival" struck. Then gentrification became the top priority. For a community under siege by violence, strong law enforcement and a criminal justice system that puts offenders away isn't seen as such a bad thing. It's trying to be safe, to survive. In fact, many, many community folks believe that you must have done something wrong if you're in prison, no one is wrongfully placed there.

Obviously, serious education on the real mission of the criminal justice system needs to occur. Those who are touched first-hand by it know the truth and see the link between poor urban public school education, low paying jobs or no jobs, welfare cuts, crime and punishment.

Our grandparents support group is not specifically for grandparents who have their grandchildren because of a son or daughter's incarceration, but these grandparents have shown an interest in learning about the prison-industrial complex. They want to know what their incarcerated child's rights are, how to support them while they are in prison and what they can do when they get out of prison. An emergency call from a distraught grandmother who fears for her son's life while he is in MCI Shirley made it clear that we on the outside do not

know what to do when harmful situations may threaten our children in prison. With prison guards becoming more and more violent toward prisoners and prisons being more and more closed off from community scrutiny, we need to stand watch over the prison and prison officials.

We encourage grandparents to join the Black Radical Congress—Boston and the District 7 Roundtable Criminal Justice Committee as a grandparent subcommittee or contingent. There are plans for workshops on understanding prisoners' rights and the impact of criminal offenders' record information checks on employment. We will be working on ways to re-start community bus and van transportation service for family prison visits.

The bottom line is we need to be more open about our situation, about what's going on with our incarcerated sons and daughters, our grandchildren and the

prison system. Our whole community is touched by this crisis.

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Judith Roderick was typecast as Mary, Mary Quite Contrary in a school play and remains contrary to this day. Marriage, three children, divorce, welfare, college, dropped out for good-paying factory job, learned about unions, became an organizer. Judith is raising two grandchildren. She is active in the Boston Black Radical Congress, fighting prison injustice and high stakes testing in public schools.

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Continued from page 6

who became political prisoners. Those programs continue to exist today.

FR: What are some particular cases today?

LE: People must support Jamil Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown), who has been set up by the government and is on trial for his life in Atlanta. Sarah Jane Olson is also on trial in Los Angeles. I would also urge people to discover the many political prisoners who have disappeared into the prison-industrial complex, Black Panthers and other freedom fighters. They should become a part of our daily lives and we should be thinking about supporting them in their daily struggle to survive. We should work for the release of political prisoners, and help them live inside-by waging medical campaigns, writing to them, sending books, and developing relationships. We must fight against the isolation, because that is how the state wins.

To work to free political prisoners please contact:

Jericho Amnesty Movement  
[www.thejerichomovement.com](http://www.thejerichomovement.com)

Out of Control: Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners and POWs

[www.prisonactivist.org/oooc](http://www.prisonactivist.org/oooc)

# WE MUST SUCCEED! THE BLACK RADICAL CONGRESS CAMPAIGN

**T**he drama of the November 7th elections further revealed the extent of Black exclusion from US society at the turn of the century. Local officials, poll managers and attendants, police and the Supreme Court all played an active role in stripping Black people of the right to vote. This latest outrage is but part of a broader, on-going attack on the gains of previous progressive, labor and radical movements and an assault on our communities.

The parallels between the end of the 20th Century and the end of the 19th Century are striking. Following the Civil War, Black people led a Reconstruction in which they asserted their rights to full citizenship. White elites responded by reasserting (“redeeming”) white supremacist rule. If the Civil Rights Movement represented a “Second Reconstruction,” then the Reagan-Bush-Clinton years definitely have constituted a “Second Redemption.” The Bush Part II years promise no less. If we assess the 2000 elections against issues of healthcare, stable employment and livable wages, welfare “reform,” education, and the criminal justice system, it is evident that in the post-Civil Rights era Black people are being forced back into the shadows of US political, social and economic life.

## **The Second Redemption: An Erosion of Civil and Social Rights**

In essence, Blacks are struggling, as we have in the past, to maintain and improve basic civil and social rights — the right to health care and shelter, the right to vote, the right to public education, the right to work for decent pay and job security. The privatization of public space, amenities and entitlements is segregating Black people from these rights and quality of life conditions. Predominantly white

communities are privatizing common space by “gating” public roads in an attempt to prevent Black and brown people from entering their cities and neighborhoods. Racial profiling by police and private security is used to target Black mall shoppers, drivers and pedestrians who may venture into public spaces where they are not wanted. In Chicago, Detroit, New York, St. Louis and elsewhere, affordable public housing is being destroyed — disproportionately displacing Black low-income families to make space for businesses and private dwellings for middle-income and upper-income whites.

Black families experience isolation and the loss of civil and social rights in other forms. Fifty percent of Black children in the U.S. live in poverty. Yet, TANF\* policies are removing low-income parents and their children from public assistance — leaving them vulnerable to unemployment and private sector wages insufficient to meet shelter, clothing, food and healthcare needs. The public foster care system too is removing itself from the care of its wards, one-half of whom are Black. Increasingly, private agencies are monitoring these children, and their well-being is subject not only to the profit margins of private enterprise but also corruption.

## **Incarceration**

As more Black people are pushed from welfare rolls and Black people find it increasingly difficult to find living-wage employment, they are disproportionately finding themselves incarcerated in a private, for-profit prison-industrial complex. Corporations contract with local, state, and federal governments to build and operate facilities and to provide food, clothing, and other services to an institu-

tionalized population whose increasing numbers only serve to fuel private profits.

What are the statistics? Approximately 50 percent of prison inmates are Black and almost 1 in 3 Black men aged 20–29 is under some type of correctional control — incarceration, probation, or parole. Moreover, Black men have a 29 percent chance of serving time in prison at some point in their lives. Black women fare little better. They are the fastest growing prison population and over one-half of them are incarcerated for nonviolent offenses.

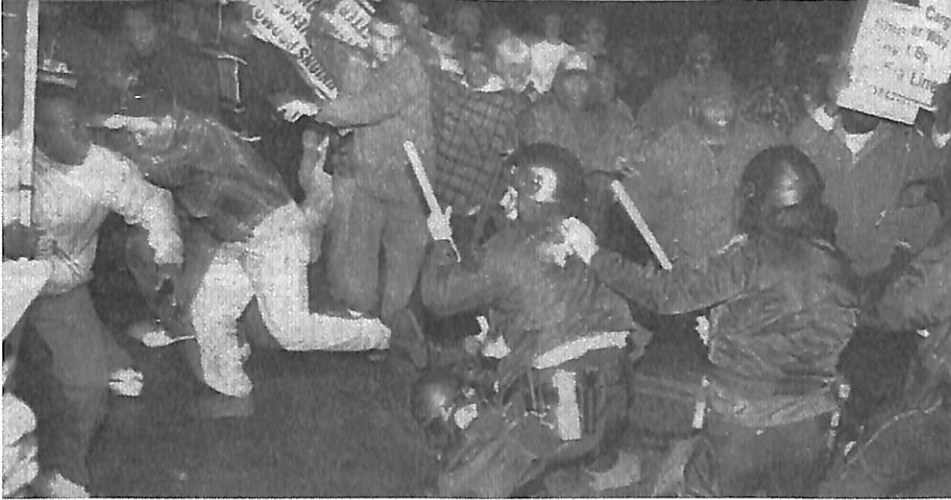
Overall, juvenile offenders are increasingly being treated as adults. Thus, they are subject to harsher punishments. Racial disparities persist here as well. Sixty-seven percent of juvenile defendants prosecuted as adults are Black. And, while Black youth are less likely than their white counterparts to use drugs, 75 percent of juvenile defendants charged with a drug offense in an adult court are Black. Relative to men, incarcerated women and children are more likely to experience violence and sexual abuse behind prison walls.

Once released, many ex-offenders experience further loss of civil rights and isolation — they are often disenfranchised and lose the right to fully participate in the political process. Additionally, they are often unable to gain suitable employment, housing, or higher education.

## **Education**

While more and more tax dollars are spent on the incarceration of Black people, predominantly Black public schools are often unable to meet the academic needs of student bodies. They are disproportionately located in poor and





The Charleston Five face heavy charges after this cop attack on their strike.

low-income communities. They struggle annually to provide up-to-date books, computers and science laboratories. Relative to middle-income white school districts, those of color are more likely to hire low-paid, uncertified teachers for the classroom. They are less able to offer college preparatory courses and other services that would enhance children's access to higher education.

The right to quality public education is further threatened by charter schools and voucher system efforts that will only serve to further strip tax dollars from public schools already in economic dire straits. The majority of children of color will not benefit from either charter or private school voucher systems. Nor will they benefit from continued use of curriculums and teaching methods that do not address their unique experiences.

### **Police State**

The erosion of civil and social rights are reinforced by state repression and police violence in the form of racial profiling, police brutality and murder, and the public assault on workers rights' to maintain and improve job pay, benefits, and security. Likewise, the killing of Amadou Diallo illustrates not only racial profiling but also the lengths the state is willing to go to maintain control over Black people. Further, workers have been struggling against massive layoffs, a decline in real wages, corporate downsizing, and attacks on unions.

### **The Tasks Ahead**

The Black Radical Congress' newly launched national campaign ("Education

Not Incarceration! Fight the Police State!") is well timed and clearly challenges this trend towards privatization, state violence and repression, and the loss of civil and social rights. The campaign has five related Parts. Part I is a petition to make police brutality and misconduct a federal crime. We are aiming to gather 100,000 signatures for this petition. Part II of the campaign involves supporting defense work on behalf of the "Charleston Five," five South Carolina longshore workers facing imprisonment for their role in a planned picket against a union-busting shipping line. The criminal charges they face stem from a police-instigated confrontation with workers.

Part III of the BRC's national campaign centers around a boycott of the multinational Sodexo Marriott Services, a major investor in private, for-profit prisons in the United States. Part IV of the campaign is our opposition to the privatization of public education, in the form of vouchers and similar methods of corporate control. Finally, Part V of this campaign aims to generate attention (and remedies) to the ways in which Black women fall prey to state violence — for instance, the lack of alternative sentencing for women convicted of drug offenses, the anti-family policies of prison facilities, and sexual abuse by guards.

### **A Plan of Action**

Common to all of these components is a recognition that police violence and repression, and mounting incarceration rates, are the linchpin of racial exclusion, gender oppression, and the declining economic conditions of working people.

"The erosion of civil and social rights are reinforced by state repression and police violence in the form of racial profiling, police brutality and murder, and the public assault on workers rights' to maintain and improve job pay, benefits, and security."

Although the various aspects of the campaign fit together, our campaign is potentially unwieldy for a young coalition with limited resources. Though each element of the campaign is equally important we cannot feasibly work on Parts I through V at the same time.

Our Plan of Action then, is to begin with Parts I and II, "The Petition" and the "Charleston Five," both of which emphasize our direct challenge to state repression and the steady erosion of our civil and social rights. One of the indicators of our success will be the extent to which we fortify our existing Local Organizing Committees and build new ones, and cement relationships with other coalitions. We ask other organizations to join us in this struggle. As the landscape grows bleaker, it is at least clear that "Education Not Incarceration! Fight the Police State!" is a campaign we do not have the luxury of forfeiting.

\* Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

### **Contact:**

National Co-Chair, Jennifer Hamer, jenhamer@aol.com  
 National Co-Chair, Bill Fletcher, bfletcher4@compuserve.com  
 National Co-Chair, Manning Marable, mm247@columbia.edu

# New York Stone Cutters Riot against Prison Labor

BY DENNIS O'NEIL

If you ever visit New York University in downtown Manhattan, you'll find a fakey little cobblestone walk right next to the school's information center across from the south side of Washington Square Park. It was built some years back in an effort to give the school a more historic accent and to offset the sterile ghastliness of its architecture. In the midst of that walk is a giant marble plinth that wouldn't have been out of place in Mussolini's Rome. Look to its peak and you'll see a chunk of carved stone from atop the original building that housed NYU.

What the inscription on the plinth doesn't tell you is that this is a monument to prison labor and to workers' struggle. In 1831 a bunch of the ruling elite of the period, headed by Albert Gallatin, a former Secretary of the Treasury who had gone on to become a big banker, laid the plans for a new private university.

Once construction started a couple years later, these men used their connections with Governor William Learned Marcy to cut costs on their new project. They got the State of New York to ship their contractors blocks of stone that had already been "dressed" — prepared for construction — by prisoners at the new state penitentiary, Sing Sing. The prison itself had only opened in 1825, and all the labor to build it was done by prisoners. Once the three original stone cell-blocks were up, the men jailed there were forced to quarry and cut stone for other state projects — and, as NYU shows, for private contractors with connections

as well.

The stone cutters of New York City were already having a hard time in the 1830s. The owners of construction companies had de-skilled a lot of jobs. While a smaller group of highly skilled masons did detail work, stone cutters were "sweated," as the expression went in 1830 — were forced to rough dress the stone for piece rates which kept getting lowered.

The stone cutters formed unions, protested, fought for laws against prison labor being used to drive down wages,

**Perhaps NYU's unions should hold an annual ceremony to place a wreath on that damn monument in memory of the Sing Sing prisoners and the fighting stone cutters who stood up, back in the day.**

and sometimes struck. The dressed stone being shipped down the Hudson to build NYU fueled their anger. In 1834, they erupted in protest. Marching through lower Manhattan in their worn work clothes, carrying not only banners but their hammers and other heavy tools, they dominated the streets. Soon they began looking for the homes of the contractors who were sweating them, and other enemies.

City officials reacted frantically. Feeling that there was no way the police would be able to stop the stone cutters union, they called out the 27th Regiment of the National Guard. Headed by Colonel Stevens, the troops attacked the demonstration and broke it up. Fighting

continued to swirl through the area.

Knowing that the enraged workers planned to attack the construction site at night, city officials would not allow the 27th to return to their nearby armory, but ordered them to set up camp right in Washington Square. Only after three more nights of skirmishing was the situation deemed under control and the Guard pulled out.

The exploitation of prison labor continues to the present day, of course. NYU's new dorm on Third Avenue was built by a non-union contractor using scab labor. The administration spent over half a million dollars in recent years on legal battles to keep their graduate students from forming a union.

Just as NYU hasn't changed its spots much in 170 years, people haven't stopped fighting back. The struggle against the prison-industrial complex,

whose antecedent the stonecutting scheme at Sing-Sing was, is alive and well, as Critical Resistance shows. And last October 31, after a history-making National Labor Relations Board decision gave them the right to unionize, NYU grad students voted in the Graduate Student Organizing Committee, a local of the United Auto Workers!

Perhaps NYU's unions should hold an annual ceremony to place a wreath on that damn monument in memory of the Sing Sing prisoners and the fighting stone cutters who stood up, back in the day.

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Contrary to appearances, Dennis O'Neil is too young to have been in New York City during the stonecutters' riot.



# PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Back to Separate and Unequal?

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BY BOB PETERSON

**N**early 50 years ago, in the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court said that restricting people of color to separate public schools constituted discrimination and racial inequality. Today, after decades of grassroots struggle, advocacy and lawsuits, schools are nominally desegregated but still reflect the discrimination and institutional racism in residency patterns. Recently, the courts have finally begun to recognize that the failure of most state school policies to reduce the funding disparities between richer and poorer districts is an issue of civil rights and racial justice.

On January 10 of this year there was a landmark school ruling in New York . It

A report on school funding in Wisconsin, released only days after the New York ruling, found the same racial disparities. In a report entitled *The Return to Separate and Unequal*, researchers for *Rethinking Schools*, a national news quarterly put out by Milwaukee area teachers, reported that "Race is at the core of education issues in urban areas such as Milwaukee... Half a century after the US Supreme Court outlawed separate and unequal schools based on race, the Milwaukee area has firmly returned to both separate and unequal education."

Key findings of *The Return to Separate and Unequal* include:

- In 1980, when the white and Black populations in MPS were roughly equal, Milwaukee was \$265 above the state average for shared cost (local

The introduction to the report states that the research "lays to rest any question about whether Milwaukee Public Schools 'deserve' significantly more money. The answer is an unequivocal 'yes.' Any other answer legitimizes white privilege and entrenches a system under which MPS and its students of color are denied the funding given to students in predominantly white districts."

The challenge for progressive parents, teachers, students and other activists is to find handles with which to organize around this complex issue. Mass upsurges have developed in various places to fight cutbacks, but state funding systems are so complicated it's hard to sustain organizing around such an amorphous target. Litigation in many states, however, is strengthened by community-based organizing around the issue.

**Mass upsurges have developed in various places to fight cutbacks, but state funding systems are so complicated it's hard to sustain organizing around such an amorphous target. Litigation in many states, however, is strengthened by community-based organizing around the issue.**

declared that the state's school funding system violated federal civil rights laws by causing an adverse and disparate impact on minority students. The New York ruling, resulting from a lawsuit brought by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, was the first time a school funding method had been found illegal not just on state constitutional grounds, but also because the funding policy violated federal civil rights laws. The ruling specifically noted the unequal funding in New York City, where more than 70 percent of the state's students of color live.

property tax and state revenues) per pupil and only \$127 below the suburban average (about 5 percent below the suburbs).

- By 1998, when Milwaukee Public Schools was a majority Black district with about 80 percent students of color, Milwaukee was \$506 below the state average and \$1,254 below the suburban average (nearly 20 percent below the suburbs).

The gap had increased 400 percent since 1980!

For more information on the issue of school funding check out *Funding for Justice: Money, Equity and the Future of Public Education* or the new report *The Return to Separate and Unequal*, both available from *Rethinking Schools* for \$5 each plus shipping and handling. To order call 1-800-669-4192 or visit <[www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org)>.

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Bob Peterson (repmilw@aol.com) is a Milwaukee public school teacher and a founding editor of *Rethinking Schools*.

# 20 Years of BLACK WORKERS FOR JUSTICE

BY SALADIN MUHAMMAD

**T**his year Black Workers For Justice celebrates its twentieth anniversary. For two decades BWFJ has fought dozens of local battles in the South in defense of workers' rights and the Black community. And for two decades, BWFJ has worked to win recognition for the central role of Black workers in the struggle against the oppressive capitalist system we live under.

Black Workers For Justice was born in a struggle at a Kmart store in the city of Rocky Mount, North Carolina in late 1981. Three Black women workers were

organizations and church leaders who, while receptive, were cautious. They asked the workers to give details showing they had obeyed work rules — raising the bar for them to win support. Male chauvinism — constant questioning of the women's own perceptions — was clearly a factor.

The Kmart workers then turned to some Black worker activists who had recently relocated to the area. Together they began to develop a Black working-class perspective and organization. Their approach was that Black women workers must take the initiative, present their own

demands, and call on other community forces to join them in a united struggle. From its inception the new organization faced varying degrees of anti-communist suspicions and red-baiting but was not intimidated.

BWFJ was motivated by a political perspective that sought to build on the local Kmart struggle and spark a movement to organize Black workers — in the US South and nationally — into a conscious

and leading political force. This perspective was influenced by a trend that went back to the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the late 1960s with their

slogan, "Black Workers Take the Lead." This trend had re-emerged in the African liberation support movement of the mid-1970s, which viewed Black workers as a leading force for Black liberation and radical change. It led many Black student activists to go into the factories, post offices and other employment sectors to become part of and reattached to the working class.

Black workers were clearly seen as a key base by the new communist movement that grew out of the "New Left" during the 1970s. Yet some Black liberation organizations which identified themselves as revolutionary nationalist, rather than as part of the New Left or the communist movement, also began to emphasize organizing Black workers at the workplace as a primary base for their political, organizational and ideological development.

## The Main Task for Black Workers

This developing Black workers trend had two main tendencies. One saw the main task of Black workers as challenging, exposing and isolating the Black bourgeoisie for their collaboration with US capitalism and imperialism. This tendency saw the African American liberation movement as an auxiliary to a revolutionary workers movement that would be led exclusively by a multi-racial and multi-national communist party. This meant that the Black working class, as the largest layer by far of the African American oppressed masses, would not have independence from the predominantly white US working class. The effect



Workers at Schlage Lock are among those BWFJ has helped mobilize.

fired for challenging the racial discrimination by the local Kmart management. The fired workers first tried to gain support from established Black civil rights



of this would be to downplay or eliminate the right of African Americans to self-determination.

The formation of BWFJ was influenced by a second tendency. It saw the main task of Black workers as organizing a conscious, radical and independent mass base and leading pole within the African American liberation movement. It also saw the Black workers movement as an organized and active expression of the working-class demands and leadership of the African American liberation movement within the US workers movement, especially the trade union movement — thereby contributing to an anti-racist and anti-imperialist radicalization of the US working class.

BWFJ focused on making Black workplace struggles key issues for the larger African American community in Rocky Mount and as far beyond as possible. Raising shop-floor issues in the church and bringing them to the community organizations and civil rights groups was and is standard practice for BWFJ members.

### **Voting Rights Struggles**

In 1983 three members of BWFJ were part of a lawsuit against the town of Rocky Mount for violating Black voting rights. Our acting as plaintiffs on the lawsuit was key in helping to shape the political identity of BWFJ as an indigenous worker organization in the Black community. This countered the image of labor organizations as outside, impersonal forces — which is how the trade union movement, in particular, often appears to the Black community.

The late Abner W. Berry, a founding member of BWFJ, veteran freedom fighter since the 1920s, and member of the US Communist Party until the 1950s, was one of the main plaintiffs and strategists for BWFJ's participation in the suit. He saw it as an opportunity for BWFJ to offer leadership in a key battle in the African American struggle for self-determination. It would help to highlight the importance of organized Black workers to the broader Rocky Mount and North Carolina Black communities and could

provide some community protection for the workplace organizing of BWFJ. With the trade union movement on the defensive after the Reagan administration's attack on the air traffic controllers union (PATCO) in 1980, the group's leaders felt that BWFJ would become isolated and defeated without the support of the broader Black community.

Key BWFJ organizational components developed out of its participation in various struggles. The *Justice Speaks* newspaper began in 1981 as a regular leaflet during the Kmart struggle, and had, by 1983, become a newsletter connecting the various struggles and BWFJ committees that had developed. The annual Dr. Martin L. King Support for Labor Banquet was initially a fundraiser for buses to the 1983 Dr. King national holiday demonstration held in Washington, DC. Workers and activists from four main workplace and community struggles formed the initial core of the Fruit of Labor, BWFJ's cultural arm and singing group.

### **Relating to the Rainbow**

The 1984 Jesse Jackson presidential campaign with its strong pro-Black political power and pro-labor message, created a political climate that allowed BWFJ to more widely agitate, organize and mobilize Black workers at the workplace and in the communities. While uniting with the main issues and energy of the Jackson campaign, BWFJ decided not to form Rainbow Coalition chapters, fearing that Jackson might subordinate the Rainbow to the Democratic Party. BWFJ related to the Rainbow Coalition forces, forums and program as a united front, maintaining independence to express disagreements where necessary. This independence allowed BWFJ to place emphasis on consolidating and developing key organizational components and political relationships in the course of Jackson's campaign.

In 1985 the first BWFJ Workers School was organized, drawing workplace and community leaders and activists from six North Carolina counties. African



The Fruit of Labor rock the house.

American history, labor history, the role and use of a workers' newspaper, the importance of Black working-class culture, and the need for women's leadership were some of the main topics. Abner Berry and former SNCC leader Don Stone taught at this three-day Workers School.

Following the 1985 Workers School, the various BWFJ embryonic organizational components began to take off. *Justice Speaks* became a monthly newspaper within a year. A Women's Commission and Trade Union Commission were formed. Annual Workers Schools were organized, and regular steering committee meetings were held. This allowed BWFJ to better focus on implementing its program and summing up the work.

### **The Women's Commission**

The formation of the BWFJ Women's Commission in 1987 was an important development, not only for the group but for the general Black workers trend, whose leadership had been largely Black men. Instead of being just an internal commission that mainly reviewed and summed up work, it also became a semi-external, public women's organization, incorporating members beyond BWFJ's own ranks. The Women's Commission led the organizing work at the Rocky Mount Undergarment plant beginning in 1989.

This basic consolidation gave BWFJ confidence to forge links with other Black worker activists and to help form the Black Workers Unity Movement (BWUM) in 1985. BWUM was an agitational, educational and organizing network focused on regrouping and

expanding the Black workers trend and promoting a call for a national congress of Black workers.

BWUM was limited in its geographic locations and in its concentrations in key industries and sectors. However, its impact showed itself at the Labor Notes Conferences beginning in 1986 and around the Labor Party Constitutional Convention in 1996. There, BWUM pushed for the creation of a Black caucus, which led to the inclusion of key planks in the Labor Party Program. This experience exposed BWFJ to the rank-and-file trade union democracy movement and labor left that was made up mainly of whites from areas outside of the South.

Labor Notes Conferences helped BWFJ to make contacts that were vital for launching the Organize the South

shut by management, helped to draw attention to the Organize the South Campaign.

### **Union Organizing and International Ties**

In 1994 BWFJ was key in helping to form the North Carolina Public Service Workers Organization of rank-and-file and labor support activists in public sector workplaces at eleven locations in seven counties. This laid the foundation for the eventual emergence in May 1997 of the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union—United Electrical Workers Local 150 as a statewide local with over 2500 members to date.

In 1997 BWFJ's work to Organize the South expanded internationally through connections with the Transnational

Information Exchange (TIE), an international workers network organized in Europe and some Third World Countries to foster labor solidarity and to empower workers to resist corporations' global production schemes.

BWUM, Labor Notes and TIE forums enabled BWFJ to discuss and understand its work and strategic role within a larger national and international trade union, working-class and pro-socialist context. This influenced major BWFJ decisions around strategic ques-

tions and created organizational pressures to function more as a cadre organization. There was a constant push within the leadership for a disciplined division of labor capable of maintaining and building on these relationships and for focusing sustained attention on these new alignments.

### **New Questions and Tasks**

The membership growth within BWFJ itself has been far smaller than the num-

bers recruited into the workplace committees, unions and community organizations and institutions that have been built by BWFJ. To build a Black working-class presence and leadership in the African American liberation movement and in the broader workers movement, we need a greater consolidation of BWFJ and a larger Black workers movement. Therefore, BWFJ must place a major emphasis on expanding throughout the US South, training a wider layer of politically and ideologically committed cadre members, and working harder to develop a popular mass Black workers movement and culture — in its own right and in the form of BWFJ in particular.

There have been differences within BWFJ around questions of primary organizational focus, racial composition and the political character and aims of the struggles. Some see BWFJ as mainly a statewide organization responding to spontaneous worker and Black community struggles. Others see it as a conscious Black working-class organization with a political program aimed at empowering, radicalizing and mobilizing the working class and African American communities around short- and long-term needs and interests. We have united across these differences around a program that seeks to politicize immediate struggles and transform them into more conscious and wider challenges against the racist and sexist system of corporate rule.

The history of BWFJ has shaped its anti-capitalist vision and program around questions of democracy, social and economic justice, human rights, women's equality and international solidarity as fundamental pillars for a radical social transformation and a new society.

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Saladin Muhammad is National Chairperson of Black Workers For Justice.



Over the years hundreds of activists have attended sessions of BWFJ's Workers Schools.

Campaign and undertaking Midwest and East Coast tours beginning in 1991. Key contacts, including leaders of Labor Notes, attended the 1989 BWFJ Workers School held in Rocky Mount and participated with organizers and workers from various workplace committees in shaping the direction of the Organize the South Campaign. Organizing around the tragic fire at Imperial Foods in Hamlet, North Carolina, which killed 25 workers and injured 56 due to fire exits' being chained

# Bush, Abortion, AIDS and Genocide

BY DENNIS O'NEIL

**G**eorge W. Bush opened his presidency with an act of genocide. This is not overheated radical rhetoric. It is a simple statement of fact.

Bush's first official act in office was to ban all US aid to any family planning group or any agency of a foreign government which so much as mentions abortion in its literature or in its advice to the people it is serving. For the

International Planned Parenthood Foundation, which provides contraception and advice to women and families in 130 countries, this means the loss of 10% of their annual budget, for example.

Bush made his move on the 28th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision in the Supreme Court, which declared that women have a Constitutional right to get an abortion. Clearly his advisors saw it as a symbolic act, red meat thrown to his most reactionary supporters before he has to start cutting deals with the Democrats in Congress.

The symbolism didn't escape the notice of reproductive rights groups and women's organizations, which have correctly treated it as a declaration of war on a woman's right to choose and begun to mobilize.

## **Beyond the Symbol, the Substance Is Death**

But Bush's move did not take place in the media vacuum of soundbites and spin. It will have profound and deadly effects in the real world.

The ban cuts off the flow of money to some of the very groups and governmental agencies on the front lines in the global battle against the AIDS epidemic. These groups fund the men and women who distribute condoms and provide safe sex information in vast urban slums and desperately poor remote villages. These groups run the poorly equipped clinics offering the only hope to millions of people with AIDS.

As a result of Bush's ban, millions of people in Africa and around the world will miss the chance to learn and to protect themselves. Many of them will become infected with HIV. They will contract AIDS. In time, they will die.

In the real world there is a global AIDS crisis so immense it is hard for regular people to wrap our brains around it. The epicenter of the catastrophe is Africa, where HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, has infected over 30 million people. The consequences for Africa in decades to come will be horrific — tens of millions dead, tens of millions of orphans, economic crisis and shrinking as working age adults die, the weakening of government and social institutions.

## **Call It Genocide**

The countries and peoples of Africa have spent the last five hundred years struggling for survival. The continent has survived the African Holocaust (also known as the Atlantic slave trade), colonial conquest and pillage by European powers, the long bloody struggle for national liberation, and the chains of

**These corporate giants are more than willing to watch millions around the world die and to let an entire continent be thrown back in time, if that's what it takes to keep their profits high.**

neo-colonialism — survived and pushed forward.

Now, as much of the world enters the 21st century, the devastating AIDS epidemic threatens to throw Africa back decades. And what has been the response of the ruling class and government of the United States?

Call it genocide. It's not a conspiracy. But to protect their profits, their precious "intellectual property rights," the big pharmaceutical companies like



# New AIDS Group Shakes Up South Africa

GlaxoSmithKline and Pfizer have gone to the mattresses. They are fighting tooth and nail against any proposal to let Third World countries produce and distribute the drugs which have saved the lives of so many people with AIDS in the US and Europe in the last decade. These corporate giants are more than willing to watch millions around the world die and to let an entire continent be thrown back in time, if that's what it takes to keep their profits high.

Call it genocide. There's no master plan. But the everyday operation of racism in the ruling circles of this country has let ten years pass while policy makers ignored a crisis they knew full well was mushrooming. For them, Africa is barely on the radar, Black lives have no importance, and they have had to pay no price for their inaction.

Call it genocide. No government official will advocate it publicly. But the Bush administration followed up his attack on the international family planning forces by announcing that his administration would not have a White House AIDS office. Next, just a week later, they announced they would "review" a Presidential regulation finally promulgated by Clinton after seven and a half years in office, permitting African states to import less expensive versions of US-patented AIDS medications.

Call it genocide. It may sound harsh or awkward. But 50 years from now, humanity will look back with anger and shame and disbelief at today's polite excuses: "We have an obligation to our stockholders." "It doesn't really affect me directly." "We don't have enough information."

Call it genocide. And let's figure out how to organize a mass movement against it.

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Dennis O'Neil is active in the rank and file group Morgan for Mumia, an officer of his APWU local, and a member of the National Executive Committee of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

BY JOHN RILEY

**O**n January 13 one of the more unusual smuggling operations in the history of Africa went into action again. Morne Visser, an AIDS activist, flew into Cape Town International Airport from Thailand. His luggage contained thousands of doses of generic fluconazole, a lifesaving drug which combats cryptococcal meningitis, a deadly and usually fatal infection of the brain, as well as thrush and other opportunistic infections that can disable and kill people with AIDS.

Among the operation's unique features was the press release issued the day before, announcing his plans and his scheduled arrival time. He further demanded that the government facilitate getting the drug through customs. Supporters gathered at the airport to make sure it happened. South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) had struck again!

Technically, such importation is legal. Under heavy pressure from Pfizer, the pharmaceutical giant which has a legal monopoly on fluconazole in most of the world, and from the US government, however, the South African health ministry distributes only Pfizer's version, at a cost of \$4 a pill. (Private physicians there charge \$7.) The Thai generics cost 28 cents each. Showdowns at the airport bring in needed medicine, to be sure, but they also turn up the heat on the government to defy the drug companies and the US and bring in generic versions of all needed AIDS medications.

Like ACT UP in the early days of the AIDS epidemic in this country, the TAC is waging an all-out battle for survival. They face a government which has played down the gravity of the crisis and whose president, Thabo Mbeki, has promoted discredited views about the non-existence

of the HIV virus, making it harder to convince people to seek or demand treatment.

And the TAC is working under even more difficult basic conditions than ACT UP ever had to. Consider three statistics:

- Over 100,000 South Africans now die of AIDS every year, a number that is growing at a rate which threatens to lower the average life expectancy there to 36 years by the year 2010!
- The cost of the multi-drug, anti-retroviral "cocktails," which let many people with AIDS in the US function normally despite the disease, runs at least \$9,000 a year at drug company prices.
- The average wage in South Africa is under \$50 a week.

The TAC started just a little over two years ago. Since then they have had a major impact on the battle against AIDS in South Africa. In addition to the Christopher Moraka Defiance Campaign, the official name of the importation effort, the threat of a TAC lawsuit has forced the government to inaugurate a program to cut mother-to-child-transmission of the disease. And TAC members are willing to take to the streets in protest as well.

I met TAC folks last year, during the 13th International AIDS Conference, held in Durban, South Africa. It was an exciting week, full of gains for the AIDS movement globally. ACT UP Paris convened a meeting of generic drug manufacturers and ministers from Third World countries to facilitate networking and the trade in affordable medication. Activists did zaps in which they took over and occupied the booths of Bristol Meyer Squib and Abbott Laboratories for several hours, using them to distribute literature that exposed the criminal greed of the

**The members of the Treatment Action Campaign show that people with AIDS in less developed countries aren't simply victims, heart-rending pictures in photo spreads or TV specials, unfortunates to be pitied.**

drug companies. The drug companies were falling over themselves trying to cover their asses with announcements of petty but well-publicized concessions.

The high point, though, was the demonstration TAC organized — over 5,000 people marched from the center of Durban to the opening of the conference. Several people said they hadn't seen that many people from the old anti-apartheid movement at a demonstration in a decade. Fighters from the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and other forces marched together protesting gov-

ernment inaction as well as the profiteering of the drug companies and their enforcers in the governments of the US and Europe. Winnie Mandela gave a powerful and thoughtful speech, in which she laid out a detailed and radical program for the crisis, exactly the kind of program AIDS activists demand that the government adopt.

For those of us in ACT UP and other organizations fighting the scourge of AIDS, the brothers and sisters of the TAC are more than a inspiration, more than valued comrades in our struggle. Their work, and the work of activists in other developing countries like Thailand, has

changed the face of the global struggle.

The members of the Treatment Action Campaign show that people with AIDS in less developed countries aren't simply victims, heart-rending pictures in photo spreads or TV specials, unfortunates to be pitied. Their brave deeds declare that the tens of millions in Africa and globally who are suffering needlessly because of greed and disinterest in the world's metropolis are stepping forward as a force to be reckoned with. They have put the ones who have caused that suffering and profited from it on notice: the world will hold you accountable.

The Treatment Action Campaign's website is <[www.tac.org.za](http://www.tac.org.za)>.

John Riley is a long-time member of ACT UP/New York, whose most recent arrest put him in jail in DC with 154 other anti-IMF/World Bank protesters for six days of jail solidarity last April.



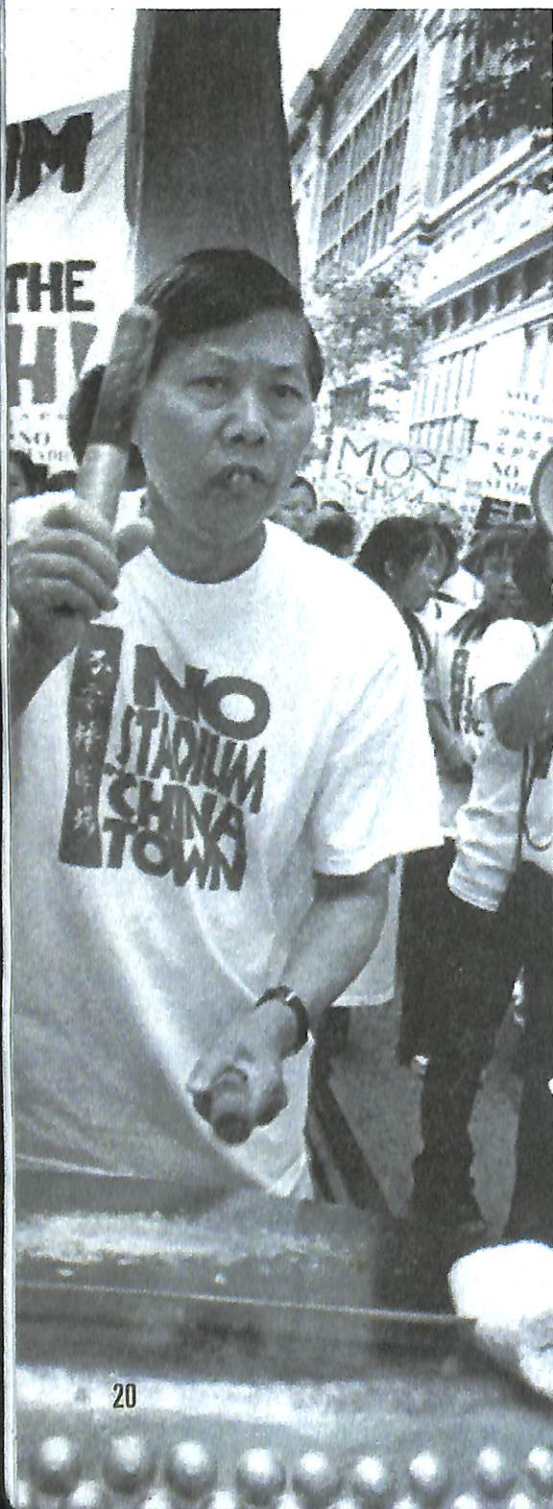


不要  
棒球場  
華極  
埠救

Chinatown is ours  
and we say:  
**NO  
STADIUM**

不要  
棒球場  
**NO  
STADIUM  
CHINA  
TOWN**

# PHILLY CHINATOWN BEATS BACK A STADIUM



Rodney Atienza

BY ELLEN SOMEKAWA AND DEBBIE WEI

In the spring of 2000, a shock hit residents of Philadelphia's Chinatown. Out of the blue, the City pegged our neighborhood as their intended site for a new baseball stadium. In response, the Chinatown community came together to fight the project like we haven't seen since the mid-'70s. Youth and elders, conservatives and progressives, immigrant and U.S.-born organized and fought using tactics ranging all the way up to a Chinatown-wide general strike. Our group, Asian Americans United, joined this broad array of forces in the struggle.

Half a year later, the city gave in and announced that the whole stadium mess would instead go up in south Philly near the site of the existing stadium. Our neighborhood united in complete opposition to the stadium. We stopped their stadium, but there's still more to win. Here's part of the story.

## **Chinatown: Neighborhood or Construction Site?**

Philadelphia Chinatown is on the north end of Philadelphia's downtown (known as Center City). Over decades the city has time and again used the neighborhood as convenient territory to raid for development projects intended to help Center City big business interests and bring in tourists. In the '70s they saddled us with the Vine Street Expressway which displaced hundreds of residents and cut the neighborhood in half. In the '80s they gave us the Gallery shopping mall and a commuter tunnel to bring suburban

shoppers in to the Gallery. In the '90s they built the Convention Center on the western end of Chinatown. They tried to put up a federal prison next door to Chinatown's Catholic church and school but backed down in the face of community opposition.

At the same time that hundreds of millions of public dollars were being spent for urban removal projects which ate away at the geographic integrity of Chinatown, little to no public money entered the community to ensure that its residents received the most basic services which help anchor a neighborhood. Today, Philadelphia's Chinatown has no public school, recreation center, library, health care center, or park.

When they sprang the stadium plans on us, it was the last straw. Residents saw the neighborhood being chopped up into pieces by these projects and realized that they had to break this pattern or soon there would only be an illusion of a Chinatown left. The stadium project threatened Chinatown's very existence.

The first anyone heard of the plans was a news report in April that Chinatown was on a short list of three possible sites. Mayor John Street quickly organized public hearings and paraded a series of "experts" from Center City business, tourism and real estate interests to talk about how trashing our neighborhood would really help us by attracting tourist dollars and helping local business. Like all that followed, the hearings were conducted in English without interpreters.

It took just three weeks for the other potential sites to drop away. Mayor Street





Tze Ming Chau

**A Billion \$  
for Stadiums  
While Our  
Schools  
Close Down?  
Explain that  
to voters  
back in the  
District!  
No Stadium  
in Chinatown!**

**SAVE  
CHINA  
TOWN  
NO STADIUM**

announced that Chinatown was the one and only site under consideration. This decision reflected the City administration's tourism-based vision for the city. The place we live in was being packaged as a destination. The Chinatown site fit into this development strategy, whereas other sites did not.

### **The Question of Language**

Contrary to the image that Chinatown is a quaint collection of restaurants there for the consumption of tourists and diners, Chinatown is a neighborhood of families, working people, small businesses, and institutions. Philadelphia's Chinatown is over 130 years old and home to 4000 residents, a majority of whom are non-English-speaking immigrants.

Through the entire seven months of this struggle, the mayor and the city administration did not communicate even once to the Chinatown community in Chinese. Not a single letter or public notice, not a translator at a meeting, or invitation to a hearing was given in Chinese. At the City Council hearing on siting the stadium in Chinatown, the City Council President cut off the brief Chinese testimony of the president of the Chinese Benevolent Association, a widely

community meeting in Chinatown to discuss the project and its impact — in sharp contrast to the two other neighborhoods that were considered as possible stadium sites where community meetings were held in school auditoriums.

Struggles over language equality also played out in our organizing within Chinatown. Some of the American-born Chinese, college educated, and fluent English speakers regarded it as their proper role to speak for the immigrant, non-English speaking community residents. Rather than making information accessible to Chinese speakers or consulting with community elders and the broad public in Chinese, they attempted to substitute their own voice, vision and strategy.

In the past, community elders had allowed this pattern to go on. But this time around, they insisted on participating. In the process they brought some of the most creative tactics to the struggle, tactics which came out of their gut sense of justice and their innate knowledge of how to mobilize their community.

### **Taking to the Streets**

The first public display of opposition to the stadium was a march in May of over 1000 people through Chinatown and

mission to leave school early. High school youth organized a youth speak-out of over 300 youth and then joined the march. The Chinatown churches and the kung fu academy played an active role in mobilizing.

The march was spirited with hot sun, drums, and banners. With donations collected from Chinatown businesses, all the marchers were given T-shirts to show our message and unity in a graphic way. At the cue of drummers and cymbal players from the kung fu academy positioned on



Tze Ming Chau

This main banner was key in keeping unity at the June 8 rally.

four street corners in Chinatown, businesses throughout Chinatown went on strike in the afternoon, shutting their doors for two hours in opposition to the stadium. At one point, folks just took the street and sat down, blocking rush hour traffic for 15 minutes.

We packed City Council hearings that were held at the beginning of the summer. Chinatown restaurants gave out over 200 meals to the participants of one hearing. We used humor, showing up to every session of City Council with huge signs saying things like, "You'll never find parking. You'll never find parking. You'll drive in circles forever." Even City Council members were turning their

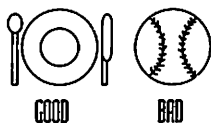
**Fighting for the rights of immigrants and non-English speakers to speak on their own behalf could not be separated out from the struggle against the stadium.**

acknowledged community leader in Chinatown. Such blatant disrespect enraged the crowd of Chinatown community members. The City held no open

onto City Hall. In June, a second demonstration brought over 1800 people to City Hall. Children from the public school serving Chinatown got their parents' per-

**City Council  
should  
represent  
the Voters,  
NOT  
Political Pals &  
Campaign  
Contributors.  
Vote NO  
on the  
Chinatown  
Stadium  
Boondoggle**

**DEAR PHILLIES:  
COME BY FOR DINNER-  
BUT DON'T STAY.**



**YOU'LL NEVER  
FIND PARKING  
YOU'LL NEVER  
FIND PARKING  
YOU'LL DRIVE  
IN CIRCLES  
FOREVER**

heads away and sniggering. At one hearing the President of the CBA turned in over 10,000 petition signatures.

As the struggle dragged out, Mayor Street kept setting one deadline after another for finishing different stages of the process. And one after another, the deadlines kept passing without substantial progress toward his goal. In the summer things slowed down and the City Council went into recess.

During this time another major issue was developing in the city: all the public employees' labor contracts were up for

### **What Just Happened?**

In the community you have to pay attention to the sometimes subtle cultural cues that the American-born often overlook. Some folks decided to launch a lawsuit. But they failed to ask the elders what they thought; they merely announced it. The elders nodded in response, and these forces subsequently claimed they had the support of the elders. But to the elders, nodding merely signified receipt of the information, not support. Many of us had to learn to relate to the elders in a culturally competent way, giving appro-

threatened their neighborhoods. Efforts were made to make alliances with other communities of color.

But key to the struggle were the forces who paid close attention to dynamics within the community. Efforts had to be made to insure that political divisions such as pro-China versus pro-Taiwan orientation didn't get in the way of the struggle. For example, for the June 8th march the brilliant tactical decision was made to only have one main banner with a general anti-stadium slogan leading the march rather than individual organiza-

**In strong, sustainable communities, we all know we are responsible for each other. In order for our cities to survive, we have to ensure that our children are raised to place more value on social ties than on material wealth — on the development of our neighborhoods, and not on profits for a few.**

renewal — teachers, sanitation workers, white-collar workers, firefighters, cops. At the same time they were pushing a \$1.3 billion stadium plan, the city was trying to negotiate these contracts. The unions were quick to point out that the city was willing to spend all this money on a stadium but didn't want to give decent contracts to its workers.

November 30, the date by which the mayor had promised the team he would work things out, was fast approaching. With all this tension building, suddenly it all went poof. On December 3, with ten minutes' notice, we rushed to City Hall to hear Mayor Street announce that he had changed his mind and was pursuing a different site, the South Philadelphia location where the existing stadium complex is located.

priate respect while at the same time engaging in honest dialogue and debate over the difficult strategic and tactical questions that confronted us.

Local business networks and organizations did a lot of on-the-ground organizing work amongst the Chinatown businesses, collecting donations door to door, getting shops to put up signs and petitions against the stadium, distributing news updates in Chinese, and organizing the June 8 business shutdown. Other organizing efforts went into a legal strategy — filing a freedom of information suit challenging the City's refusal to release information to the public about the details of its plans or its studies justifying the proposed Chinatown site. Alliances were built with other, predominantly white, Center City neighborhood groups who felt that the stadium also

tional banners. This was to prevent any clashes between pro-China and pro-Taiwan groups vying for the lead position in the march and resulting loss of face for the groups that lost out.

The traditionally conservative Chinatown family and business associations also proved to be much more open to building alliances with other progressive forces in the city. They came out for Unity Day at the Republican Convention in August, whereas some of the liberal forces argued against getting involved in these events "with all these anarchists running around." The CBA brought twelve cases of water to give to the Kensington Welfare Rights Union for their march for economic human rights because they knew that KWRU had turned out for anti-stadium actions. They drove around for two hours trying



**HISTORY  
OF STRUGGLE  
FUTURE  
WORTH  
FIGHTING FOR  
SAVE  
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NO STADIUM**

**Chinatown  
is  
Troubletown  
You're asking for it.  
NO  
STADIUM**

**SAVE  
CHINATOWN  
NO  
STADIUM**

to get the water through police barricades and finally gave up. The CBA's analysis, much more than that of some of the liberal organizations, focused on the question: Who are our allies and how do we show them support?

In this struggle new alliances were formed. Some of these relationships posed big questions. For those of us working among women and men who sweated in the restaurants and garment shops, what did it mean to be working with the businessmen? We had to think through our relationship to the masses of working Chinatown residents as we worked alongside of its business owners.

One thing became clear: if language issues and immigrant status meant that Chinatown business owners couldn't be heard, what hope was there for immigrant, working-class people? Our assessment was that the business owners were part of the united front in this struggle. Their self-interest lies in the defense of their community; they had more freedom to organize around this issue than their own workers, and they did so passionately. Fighting for the rights of immigrants and non-English speakers to speak on their own behalf could not be separated out from the struggle against the stadium.

It's clear that relationships shift and transform and can even turn into their opposite. Twenty-five years ago the CBA embodied the older, conservative power structure. Chinatown development types were a progressive force in the community, and it was radicalized second-generation youth who were down with the struggle. As many of those young people have been through college and become business people, some of their allegiances have shifted. In this struggle, things had developed to the point where the relationship between

these forces had become reversed. If we had come in with an analysis stuck in the past, we might have missed all this.

Coming out of this battle, the youth especially learned a great deal. After Mayor Street announced his retreat from pushing for the Chinatown site, youth organizers responded that it's more than just about preserving Chinatown, it's about how we use our money, where the City's priorities are. They continued to organize, turning out over 40 young people to testify at subsequent City Council meetings to oppose public funding for a South Philadelphia stadium site. The media, ignorant as usual, never made the connection that these were the same young people that they covered during the Chinatown struggle.

One final lesson we learned from this struggle is that the fight for the local — the fight to keep global capitalism from erasing our sense of place, our sense of community — is the crux of much of our struggle into the next decade. How are we to sustain and rebuild local community? How do we recover a sense of collective responsibility to each other in a local place and build relationships of trust and integrity?

As African American activist James Boggs said nearly fifteen years ago in reflecting on the city of Detroit, "We have to stop seeing the city as just a place to which you come to get a job or to make a living, and start seeing it as the place where the humanity of people is enriched because they have the opportunity to live with people of many different ethnic and social backgrounds." The foundations of our city are the people living in the communities. In strong, sustainable communities, we all know we are responsible for each other. In order for our cities to survive, we have to ensure that our children are raised to place more value on

social ties than on material wealth — on the development of our neighborhoods, and not on profits for a few.

There is nothing sacred about developing industries based on tourists and commuters who have no commitment to our city, our neighborhoods, and our children. Such development renders our neighborhoods invisible. In the fantasy development vision for this city's downtown core, residential neighborhoods are imagined only as chic quaint areas inhabited by yuppies. In this fantasy Philadelphia, there are no children, no elderly, no working-class people. It is no wonder that in the year 2001 Chinatown is the last intact community of color in the downtown core.

In this struggle, it is not enough for us to simply raise consciousness within our community nor to build alliances merely to fight for the removal of a stadium plan. The struggle must be carried deeper and farther to the heart of our vision for Chinatown as a community. We must work to engage all sectors of the community — youth as well as elderly, English speaking and Chinese speaking, and workers and even business owners — in the protracted struggle to build community in the face of the dehumanization we confront each day. That is a struggle we must carry on for the long haul.

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Ellen Somekawa is a community activist in Philadelphia. She has been involved with Asian Americans United for the past twelve years.

As a child growing up on the fringes of urban Philadelphia, Debbie Wei remembers heading to Chinatown every weekend to buy the food staples which nourished the spirits and bodies of her immigrant parents and three siblings. Now her own children find the same sustenance in the same place, and her hope remains for the community to carry on maintaining hearts and souls for generations to come.



# LOCAL CYBER-ACTIVISM IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

## Lessons and Perspectives for Organizers

BY MARTIN EDER

**S**ince the California "electricity crisis" hit, the Coalition for Affordable Public Power has been spearheading the fightback in San Diego. This alliance of environmentalists, consumer advocates and community organizers came together to organize press conferences and call demonstrations that expose corporate capitalism and promote clean, sustainable, publicly-owned alternatives.

The CAPP was in large part born through the efforts of Activist San Diego, an ambitious experiment in cyber-activism, combined with other, more traditional forms of organizing. ASD seeks to unite the left-progressive community and build broad links across the political landscape. In under two years, it has become a major source for communication and mobilization in the San Diego border region.

Though still in its infancy, Activist San Diego sends email bulletins to over a thousand activist subscribers once or twice a week and can instantly alert several hundred community leaders about critical actions. Our website has logged over 25,000 visits. During the last year we've helped spread the word about hundreds of events, speakers, cultural gatherings, campaigns and emergency mobilizations — to people who would have had no other way of finding out about them. In January, our People's Inaugural Ball, the ASD answer to George W. Bush, drew over 300 people and captured lots of local TV and press attention.

Activist San Diego is a united-front effort of the left-progressive community. Its aim is to strengthen local activism, the culture of resistance and political organizing. Often initiatives like this have been political ploys by one left group to

serve its own aims. In this case, a conscious effort has been made to invite several organizations and political trends to participate, with the idea that left regroupment in the US can happen only in the course of shared practice. The leadership is overwhelmingly from the left, but decidedly multi-tendency. ASD has attracted socialists and nationalists, anarchists and liberals. Most participants don't hold membership in any self-defined left organization.

### **Meeting the Need for an Activist Center**

ASD first arose during planning for emergency response mobilizations to the 1998 bombing of Iraq. Area activists set up a local web page, updated daily, to let each other know where and when to gather, once the bombing began.

This helped overcome the frustration of progressives feeling politically isolated and ineffective. San Diego, like many other cities, has lacked a bricks and mortar organizing center. A multiracial group of activists met for almost a year talking about creating a permanent institution to foster coordination and empowerment. We looked at many of the wonderful websites that serve national causes, national campaigns and national networking. But ASD may be at the forefront of creating a local model of cyber-activism as part of a comprehensive strategy to invigorate grassroots action and networking.

Our website ([www.ActivistSanDiego.org](http://www.ActivistSanDiego.org)) creates unique opportunities. For example we've had young people moving to the area, contact us before they even arrived in town. "I was dreading coming to school in San Diego..." wrote one young woman, "then I discovered ASD!"

### **Cyber-Activism as an Organizer's Tool**

The beauty of the web is that you can transfer massive amounts of vital information to huge numbers of people at virtually no cost. Synchronous conversations (like chat rooms) and asynchronous ones (like email lists) can keep everyone in a group informed and involved. Yet we must remember that these are just the newest tools of our trade -- not the panacea to replace grassroots organizing. Technology is not inherently progressive. It is more likely to be used to indoctrinate, monopolize and maintain the existing capitalist power structure than change it. It is important to remind ourselves of this to temper understandable enthusiasm for cyber-activism and its potential.

A left-progressive movement must ultimately be vibrant at the local level where individuals and groups can organize face-to-face and join in collective action. The Activist San Diego website was built to serve a comprehensive set of local functions:

- A centralized activist calendar drawing from peace, student, GLBT, communities of color and environmental calendars. While ASD administers it, anyone can post onto the calendar.
- Web pages for action alerts, events, general info and volunteers.
- An easy and automated "build-your-own-page" feature to post alerts, events, announcements, etc.
- An activist directory listing organizations, contact info, purpose, etc. (very much a work in progress).
- Listings of resources for activists and links to national and international groups and causes.

Activist websites need continual and effective outreach to develop a sizable audience. We learned two primary lessons here. First, cyber-activists must regularly contact their base to give them reason to visit the site. Our method is to send out an information-rich ASD e-newsletter every week like clockwork. Rather than filling up subscribers' email boxes with multiple postings, we send a single list of events and campaigns, with very short descriptions and links to deeper information.

Second, we have relearned the age-old lessons of grassroots organizing — nothing substitutes for personal contact and follow-up. Having created Activist San Diego as a cyberspace community center, we recently set up an office in the World Beat Center, a Black-led cultural institution. Most of us in the social justice movement are really hungry for a genuinely supportive community. Organizers and members need to meet,

**Activist San Diego may be at the forefront of creating a local model of cyber-activism as part of a comprehensive strategy to invigorate grassroots action and networking.**

strategize, share and socialize together. ASD holds a potluck dinner on the second Monday of every month, which currently draws about twenty people.

Even for mobilizing, we have found that combining email with flyers, phone calls and face-to-face organizing on priority campaigns produces the best results. Web announcements alone would never have turned out the couple hundred people who came to the ASD Action Camp to train for participation in the D2K demonstration in Los Angeles. More striking evidence comes from fundraising. Maybe one contact in a hundred will respond to an email plea for monetary support; one in three will help us when asked by phone.

**The Downsides of  
Cyber-Activism: The Digital Divide**

The primary challenge to cyber-activists is what's known as the digital divide. Poor people, who are disproportionately people of color, have less technology at their disposal. The problem of the color line has always been the most important roadblock to building a powerful revolutionary movement in the US. Cyber-activists have to be conscious of this.

Activist San Diego has had to challenge our own technical elitism. Our e-newsletters used to be really fancy — nice fonts, colored text, graphically appealing. People with higher-end computers loved it. But we dumped all that for a plain-text format, in keeping with our mission of empowering the disenfranchised — immigrants, working class folks, communities of color, people with disabilities, poor youth and the elderly. These people, if they have anything, have the oldest

computers, the slowest Internet connections, the least access to emerging technologies.

Activist San Diego's next task is to seek activist members from diverse communities and to build connections to those sectors. We are also seeking funding to equip and train grassroots organizations and individuals. We believe that concentrating our efforts among youth will help bridge the divide. It will be computer-savvy youth, alongside community organizers, who will bring these tools into new constituencies.

One of our most serious challenges is to become multilingual. On the Internet, maybe "no one can tell that you're a dog" (as the famous cartoon says), but they sure can tell that you're not writing in

Spanish. ASD needs to be more accessible and connected to the struggles of Chicano/as and Latino/as and to Mexicano/as on both sides of the border. As a beginning, we have placed a heavy emphasis on publicizing and building events in communities of color, like a recent cross-border conference on globalization.

**The Future Is Here**

The potential of the Internet as an organizing tool is unbelievable. ASD has tested the waters of streaming video and Internet radio. Within this decade we could potentially deliver specially created news programs to activists. Solidarity activists could have live video meetings with groups anywhere in the world. But for every democratic potential there will be the stronger pull toward monopolization of the technology by government or corporations. Our ultimate power still lies in collective action and organization. New technologies will always be tools, nothing more.

Part of the vision of Activist San Diego is to create a collaborative software package with others, software that would allow activists in any city to set up a site and not have to worry about many aspects of the technology. It would take a huge chunk of change, but it is possible. We dream of [ActivistBatonRouge.org](http://ActivistBatonRouge.org), [ActivistAlbuquerque.org](http://ActivistAlbuquerque.org) and [Activist-YourHomeTown.org](http://Activist-YourHomeTown.org).

Sometimes we hit technological problems, and they can eat up an enormous amount of time we'd prefer to spend organizing. Faced with frustrating problems, we remind ourselves of the difference ASD has already made in the San Diego area and of the enormous potential for growth. In the not-too-distant future, we think we could wind up communicating regularly with some 10,000 progressives. Technology alone can't do it, but we are going to need technology to make it happen.

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Martin Eder is a founder of Activist San Diego. He is an educator, former union organizer and member of Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

# Hasta La Victoria!



## Organizing Cucumber Workers in North Carolina

JACK HOLTZMAN

It's okay to eat grapes again, but think twice the next time you want pickles on your double cheeseburger. There's a national boycott on against Mount Olive Pickles. In May 1997, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), a farmworker union affiliated with the AFL-CIO, began an organizing campaign among the 5,000 workers in North Carolina who pick the cucumbers which are processed into pickles by the company.

Faced with the continued refusal by Mount Olive to negotiate a labor agreement to obtain better wages and conditions in the labor camps, FLOC decided in March 1999 to call for a national boycott in order to force Mount Olive to negotiate a union contract with

their brands) The company pumped out 80 million jars of pickles last year. Still, it may be hard to find them in places like Massachusetts or California.

Here in North Carolina, Mount Olive Pickles are everywhere. You think, "We might as well try to boycott barbecue." Yet the boycott has picked up steam around the country, and even in Mount Olive's own back yard. More than 200 union locals, churches and community groups have endorsed the boycott since it was announced by FLOC, including locals from the UFCW, Teamsters, and Steelworkers; the North Carolina and Ohio AFL-CIO; the United Church of Christ; the N.C. Council of Churches; the Catholic Diocese of Raleigh and eastern North Carolina; and the Labor Party. In an early boycott victory, all 19 Kroger

are horrific. Farmworkers picking cucumbers to be supplied to Mount Olive earn about \$1.80 per 100 pounds of pickles harvested. Do the math: that's \$36 for bending over long enough to pick a ton of pickles. Workers say the most anyone has ever earned is \$56 in a ten-hour day.

These pay rates help explain the dramatic change in the face of farm labor in North Carolina over the past ten years, from mostly African American to 90% Latino, many undocumented. The others are Mexicans brought here legally under the federal H-2A "guest worker" program.

This pittance looks good only by comparison with the situation back home, where, many say, "No hay trabajo." Even if field work can be found in Mexico, it

**The workers have good reason to organize. Their living and working conditions are horrific.**

**Farmworkers picking cucumbers to be supplied to Mount Olive earn about \$1.80 per 100 pounds of pickles harvested. Do the math: that's \$36 for bending over long enough to pick a ton of pickles.**

**Workers say the most anyone has ever earned is \$56 in a ten-hour day.**

its cucumber pickers.

Mount Olive is the second largest pickle producer in the United States, and the South is its home turf. Mount Olive Pickles are sold in thirty states. (It also produces pickles for the Food Lion and Harris-Teeter supermarket chains, under

Supermarket stores in Northwest Ohio have agreed to not sell Mount Olive Pickles.

### The Deck Is Stacked

The workers have good reason to organize. Their living and working conditions

pays \$6 a day.

The Mount Olive drive faces three obstacles: the immigration status of the workers, the law, and Mount Olive's subcontracting practices.

Well over 100,000 migrant workers arrive in North Carolina each year to pick



## **What You Can Do To Support The Boycott**

- Don't buy Mount Olive Pickles
- Get your union or community group to pass a resolution of support and send it to: FLOC, 503 Solomon St., Faison, NC 28341.
- Write a letter to Mount Olive Pickle company telling them you support the boycott: Mount Olive Pickle Co., PO Box 609, Mt. Olive, NC 28365.

### **To contact Farm Labor Organizing Committee:**

email: [info@floc.com](mailto:info@floc.com)  
web: [www.floc.com](http://www.floc.com)

tobacco, apples, sweet potatoes, cucumbers and other crops on 22,000 farms throughout the state. Those who are undocumented have traveled thousands of miles to earn enough to feed their families back in Mexico or Central America.

Many of the 5,000 pickers who harvest cucumbers only come to North Carolina temporarily, during the harvest season from April through November, and then return home. Many are fearful of losing their jobs if they speak out or do anything to challenge the appalling conditions that exist in North Carolina's farm labor camps.

The law is no help. North Carolina officials brag of being a "right to work" state with one of the lowest rates of unionization in the country. Under federal law, it is not illegal to fire farmworkers engaged in union activity. As agricultural workers, the cucumber pickers are not covered under the federal laws offering some protection of the right to organize against long hours, short pay, unsafe pesticides, little drinking water or other workplace conditions in the North Carolina fields. And that's for US citizens.

Like undocumented workers, "legal" farm laborers in the H-2A program face the real prospect of retaliation and deportation if they join FLOC's union drive or are seen as sympathetic to the union. If H-2A workers try to unionize, their employer can cancel their work contract, placing them "out of status" and subject to deportation. In 1997 a report by the U.S. General Accounting Office noted that "H-2A workers are unlikely to complain about worker pro-

tection violations, fearing they will lose their jobs or will not be hired in the future."

As if this weren't bad enough, Mount Olive has erected another barrier to unionizing, one that will be familiar to anybody who has been active in the anti-sweatshop movement in recent years. They claim that the workers' beef is with

### **The only real hope for better conditions is a union victory.**

the farmers who grow the pickles and the company has nothing to do with wages and working conditions in the fields. FLOC, the company argues, should be trying to negotiate a separate contract with each of the fifty growers who own the cucumber fields that supply Mount Olive's processing plants.

In actuality, Mount Olive is the growers' biggest buyer of cucumbers, has almost total control over the growing process, and can dictate its requirements to the growers. This gives it final say over what happens in the cucumber fields.

### **FLOC's Organizing Strategy**

FLOC has not backed down. Organizers have been working in the fields, labor camps and communities, collecting signatures on union cards. As of January, over 3000 workers had authorized the union to represent them.

The farmworkers have had help from community-based organizations like the Latino Workers Association and churches. Black Workers For Justice and locals of other unions have also given support, especially the NC Public Service Workers Union, UE 150. They have a common bond with the farmworkers: state law denies public workers the right to collective bargaining. These working relationships have laid the basis for the formation of the African American/Latino Workers Alliance.

The heart of FLOC's strategy will also be familiar to sweatshop activists. The union is targeting the Mount Olive Pickle Company as the main beneficiary of the low wages and terrible working conditions, even more than the individual growers. If Mount Olive can be forced to negotiate about a union contract with FLOC, then it will in turn be able to bring the individual growers along in the process.

FLOC pioneered this strategy in Ohio in the 1980s. A powerful consumer boycott of Campbell Soup won a multi-party labor contract in 1986 covering tomato and cucumber pickers on scores of farms. It is this model that the union is demanding Mt. Olive accept.

The only real hope for better conditions is a union victory. Ramiro Sarabia, leader of FLOC's organizing drive in North Carolina states, "Everyone takes advantage of a migrant worker. The wages are low. Some are even paid less than minimum wage. And everywhere you look you see bad conditions. A union is the only way we're going to improve conditions. FLOC is going to be here a long time, maybe forever."

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Jack Holtzman lives in North Carolina and has supported the Mt. Olive Pickle Boycott since its inception.



# Aaron McGruder

## The Most Dangerous Man Alive?

BY SCOTT M.X. TURNER

**W**ho is this Mr. McGruder, and what makes him so formidable?

Aaron McGruder's weapons of choice are a pen, scathing wit, and the belief that words, images and a daily platform in the nation's newspapers are a lethal combination for effective social and political change.

**The man's a comic-strip assassin.**

Aaron McGruder draws *The Boondocks*, a strip syndicated by Universal Press Syndicate in hundreds of newspapers across the U.S. of A.

This ain't no ordinary comic strip. Imagine... a daily broadside against racism, consumerism, capitalism, yard-work and crap Star Wars sequels.

*The Boondocks* is revolutionary. And reader, I don't use that word lightly. With cool plotlines, skilled artwork, cutting humor and brutally honest and progressive politics, *The Boondocks* has returned Black Power to the daily newspapers for the first time since the heyday of the Panthers.

**Before we go any further, here's the cast of characters:**

- Huey: the older of two African-

American kid brothers sent away from Chicago's South Side to live with Grandpa in suburban Woodcrest. Huey's reading list is more *Autobiography of Malcolm X* than *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, and his belief in a socialist revolution keeps him fired-up in the stultification of the 'burbs;

- Riley: the younger brother, whose hip-hop is gangsta to Huey's Public Enemy, whose crass materialism frustrates Huey's socialism, and whose scheming to ride the worst elements of the American Dream flies in the face of Huey's attempts to topple it;
- Grandpa: the content-in-the-'burbs elder Huey and Riley live with, a man comfortable in his element and now upset by the explosive, at-loggerheads worldviews of his two new charges;
- Caesar, another recent arrival in the 'burbs—from Bed-Stuy, Do-Or-Die, no less!;
- Tom and Sarah DuBois, the next-door neighbors. He's a buppie, she's a white activist who for 15 years has worked at the NAACP. Currently Tom's in the marital doghouse for condescendingly

criticizing Sarah for her support of Ralph Nader;

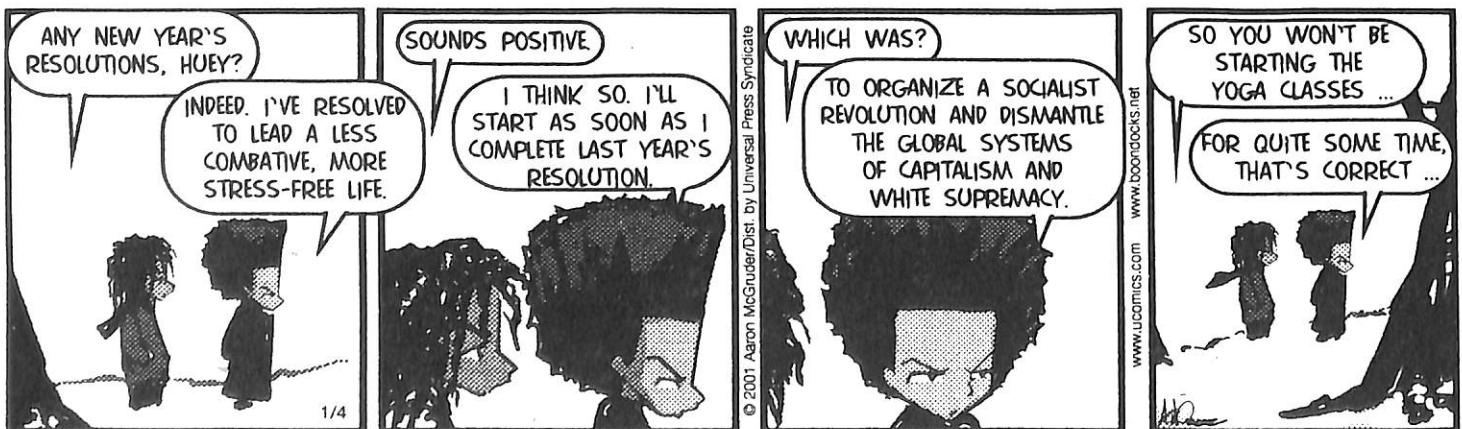
- An assortment of school teachers ill-prepared to deal with students of color; white and impressionable school-mates; sci-fi obsessed slackers; and a tap-dancin', chitlin'-chewin', Amos'n'Andy-grinnin' Jar Jar Binks.

McGruder, 25, uses Japanese anime to illustrate *The Boondocks*. The crisp, intense images make every block a frameable piece of art, especially the Sunday strips. McGruder's art stands alone on the comics page... at least the comics pages in the U.S.

McGruder knows he's on the cutting edge, a member of the community of cultural activists who use their platform to speak out. In his first book, *Because I Know You Don't Read The Newspaper*, he gives shout-outs to recent comic artists whose well-drawn strips have been run through with blunt politics, including Garry Trudeau (*Doonesbury*) and Berke Breathed (*Bloom County*). Namecalls of cultural activists pop up regularly in the strip.

It's working. *Boondocks* supporters are adrenalized and its enemies are pissed. Check out [www.boondocks.net](http://www.boondocks.net) where angry letters to McGruder are posted regularly.

McGruder makes clear that the African-American struggle has a long way to go, and urges readers to know the past. References to his—and Huey's—heroes abound. Malcolm X, W.E.B. DuBois, Bob Marley, et al. Huey's the strip's voice of conscience, so when he declares for a





# Children of Jerusalem

*F* *C*  
 Did you see them pray-ing Watch the Ar-my march-ing  
*G* *F* *C*  
 in As they clubbed old wo-men Did you see the gen-eral  
*G* *F* *C* *G*  
 grin Watch the stones fly And the sni-pers tak-ing aim  
*F* *C* *G*  
 On Sha-til-la's birth-day It's a cal-cu-la-ted game And they're  
*F* *G* *C*  
 gun-nig down the child-ren of Je-ru-sa-lem

Did you hear the screaming  
 See the horror on his face  
 As he hid for cover  
 In a tiny, unprotected space  
 Did you hear his father pleading  
 "There is a child here"  
 Trying to protect his son  
 Who yelled in terror and in fear  
 That they're gunning down the children of Jerusalem

Did you feel the wind blow  
 From the helicopter blades  
 Did you smell the tear gas  
 See the demolition raids  
 Did you see the rockets  
 And the dum-dum bullets fly  
 Did you feel the horror  
 To watch one more child die  
 As they're gunning down the children of Jerusalem

Did you see the roadblocks  
 Letting nobody go past  
 Watch the blood flow  
 As time is running fast  
 See someone's brother  
 Taking his last breath  
 So close to the hospital  
 But closer still to death  
 And they're gunning down the children of Jerusalem

— David Rovics

David Rovics is a folk singer from the Boston area. See [www.davidrovics.com](http://www.davidrovics.com)

socialist revolution, it's *The Boondocks'* declaration as well.

Truth isn't true unless it's comprehensive. Hence, many of McGruder's biggest targets are in the African-American community—BET and its CEO, Robert Johnson; Puffy Combs; Ward Connerly; gun-infatuated, sexist gangsta rappers; buppies; over-serious Kwanzaa practitioners.

Regarding "Black issues," McGruder doesn't believe in "keeping it in the family." His attacks on BET's decidedly non-conscious programming and willingness to pander to sexism and has led to a back and forth featuring Johnson's defensive and clumsy posturing withering under McGruder's deft satire.

White people in the U.S. have traditionally been comfortable with African-American infighting, and have embraced those figures willing to go public with the dirty laundry, figures like Lionel Hampton, Roy Innis, Stanley Crouch and Clarence Thomas.

But McGruder's nobody's Doubting Clarence Thomas. Just the opposite. McGruder's attacks don't serve the establishment's degradation of Black people but rather bolster the African-American community's struggle against racism, capitalism and tyranny.

Sounds heavy. It is. But McGruder's revolution is filled with laughs, underlying camaraderie and few sacred cows. He and Huey know that sacred cows just slow a movement down.

Laughing at the enemy means nothing if we can't laugh at ourselves. Some of us used to have the confidence to skewer our most sacred cow, revolution — Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, the Fugs, to name a few. But those moments are past glories. Even corporate entities like Budweiser can poke fun at both themselves and white culture in its "whassup!" commercials. Pathetic... Budweiser has more self-confidence than we do.

Until we learn to get over ourselves, we're in for a hard, hard time.

Lesson learned?

Scott M.X. Turner plays guitar for the Irish/punk/reggae band The Devil's Advocates and has just finished a book about sports obsession, youth, and the Vietnam War era.



# THE ROAD FROM SEATTLE



A union president talks with anti-globalization activists about alliance-building.

BY JEFF CROSBY

I want to talk a little bit about our movement, where it's been, and, most important, where it's going.

When members of my local union and central labor council returned from the demonstrations in Seattle in November of 1999 we got an incredible welcome — “like conquering heroes,” one member put it.

We never forget that we never would have been recognized, never have received the attention that we did, if not for the courage of the young people and their direct action in blockading the WTO meetings. During all the debate about tactics and the hand-wringing about turning people off, we never forgot that. (I wrote about this in a piece called “The Kids Are Alright,” which got wide circulation on the net.)

Fast forward from the unity on the streets of Seattle to Boston, in October of 2000, and you find a different movement. We find a movement split over Nader vs. Gore for president, a movement that split earlier in the year over the campaign against Permanent Normalized Trade Relations with China, a movement split over the demonstrations at the Democratic Party national convention in August.

There was even a physical confrontation between supporters of Gore and of Nader at the Presidential debate. For a brief moment the powers that be and the media could hold out hope for a replay of the battles between union workers and students during the movement against the Vietnam War 30 years ago.

There is no need for discouragement in the face of this. In fact, the movement against corporate globalization is a united front — an alliance of different social movements from different social classes and with different political interests and strengths and weaknesses. There will be many differences and even conflicts along the way.

Gore stood for the corporate agenda on globalization, for continued armed intervention in Colombia, etc. But in this past election, the AFL-CIO did in fact go all out for Gore, despite the obvious fact that Nader had a much better program for labor. We contacted 93% of our members (13 million people), made 8 million personal phone calls, distributed 755 different kinds of leaflets, and on and on. After all this, 32% of union members did not vote for Gore. They voted, in fact, for George Bush! White men in the unions only voted for Gore by a 9% margin — women by 41%, union gun owners by only 8%.

How did this happen?

## Labor: Not Like Other “Movements”

Let's look at the labor movement for a minute. In many ways its not a “movement” like other movements represented in this room, a movement around the environment or genetically engineered food.

First of all, a union typically consists of everyone in a given workplace, or everyone in a given trade. In my plant, for example, if you are hired by General Electric, you start paying union dues the day you get your first paycheck, whoever you are. So I have in my local union Republicans,

Democrats, Greens, feminists, misogynists, supporters of Lyndon LaRouche, socialists, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews, agnostics, atheists, fundamentalists, criminals, lay preachers and Sunday School teachers, every kind of saint and sinner under the sun. Each of them gets a vote on the policy of the union, each of them gets a vote on whether, for example, I remain president.

People don't come to the union because of their political views. They may not even come to the union by their own choice, or even know what the union is all about at first.

Think about how it might change the political nature of your organization if everyone who attended your school or lived in your community was automatically a voting member of your group. It will give you some appreciation of the problems of maintaining an alliance between trade unions and highly political groups with very specific progressive goals and agendas.

Second, the labor movement is really a combination of at least three sectors. Only one, the manufacturing sector, is primarily moved by issues related to trade.

But take a union electrician or construction worker supporting Gore at the Boston debate. He may not have known or cared much about NAFTA. Trade agreements don't directly affect his job. He was more likely to be motivated by a desire to defend the prevailing wage laws. These laws protect union jobs and wage levels by requiring that all businesses which have government contracts pay union-scale wages. And the Democrats



do pretty well defending the prevailing wage. It's fair to say that Democrats like Ted Kennedy who defend the prevailing wage year after year in the Senate are putting food on the table of these union workers and their families.

A young woman I saw on TV that night complained that she was unable to "educate" a carpenter at that demonstration. No doubt there was some educating to be done for the union members there — and some for the other folks as well.

If you are a public sector worker employed by some level of government, you are most likely to be motivated by the threat of "privatization" turning your jobs over to a private company at lower wages in order to "be competitive." And very few public sector workers understand yet that "privatization" is a piece of the neo-liberal economic model that is applied by the same financial institutions to the medical system in El Salvador and a city hospital in Boston and the water supply in Bolivia.

So given the nature of the labor movement, the relationship between it and other sections of the anti-globalization movement is going to be problematic and will have its ups and downs. In the labor movement we deal with the American people in all their glory — their courage, their stoicism, their hard-work ethic, and all their contradictory views as well. For that reason alone, it's the greatest place to spend your life and organizing sweat that I can imagine.

So let me pose a key question.

Can this movement reach out strategically to other sectors of the American people and still maintain the inspirational, militant role that it played in Seattle?

Yes we can, if we properly understand our target and the face of the neo-liberal capitalist system today. It has its domestic face as well as its international face — and both demand our attention, our organizing sweat, and our hatred.

### "Globalization" at Home

In the run-up to the demonstrations at the Republican Convention in Philadelphia last year, important efforts

were made to reach out to people of color. Part of the effort was made around exposure of the "prison-industrial complex," the fact that our system of criminal justice is deeply racist. We are talking about deep institutional racism that punishes the user of crack cocaine with penalties 7 to 10 times more severe than those for the user of powder cocaine (mostly by suburban white people). We are talking about a death penalty which is many times more likely to kill a black defendant than a white defendant for the same crime.

If you are a wealthy white man from a ruling-class family, you can get caught driving under the influence and get a slap on the wrist. You can play cute with your probable use of cocaine and get elected

holding people in slavery. The real value of the minimum wage is lower than it has been since the 1970s. In town after town there are efforts to pass living wage laws, to raise the wages paid by government bodies or those who do business with the government to at least the poverty level, \$7.50 or even \$10.50 an hour.

It is inevitable that the depression of wages in the Third World will depress wages at home. The economists have been talking about a labor shortage for almost a decade, but real hourly wages have only started to creep up in the United States in the last couple of years and are still only at the level they were at 20 years ago. The mobility of capital and the capitalists' ability to exploit the



IUE Local 201 workers aboard anti-GE float, amidst young marchers at the November 1999 anti-WTO demonstration in Seattle.

President! An African-American with a comparable drug charge may well do time and emerge unable to even vote — the fate of one out of three African-American males in Florida.

Corporate globalization depends upon discrimination and dehumanization of people of color. It always has.

Recently, sweatshops in New York City have made the news. Los Angeles plant owners have even been busted for

cheapest labor in any corner of the world is the key reason for this, and more and more US workers understand it.

Corporate globalization depends on driving down wages at home as well as abroad. It always has and always will.

Millions of immigrants, fleeing oppression or exploitation in their homelands, continue to come to the US and are changing the face of the working class. These workers, many of them from





BGAN supports Local 201 during contract talks with GE.

Central and South America, tend to be more pro-union than their native counterparts. They are changing the voting patterns throughout the country, especially in places like California and Florida. This is true not only in the Southwest and Northeast, but in states like North Carolina, whose work force has one of the highest immigration rates in the country. We see it also in places like Iowa, where Latino workers do the meatpacking jobs that were done 15 years ago by higher-paid white workers when the unions were stronger in that industry.

### **Solidarity with Immigrant Workers**

In Boston, there are a dozen immigrant organizations fighting for English as a Second Language programs, for the right to organize unions, for job training, for amnesty for undocumented workers. They would welcome efforts by the anti-corporate globalization movement to reach out to them.

Think about what kind of system we live under. A capitalist like Ametek Aerospace can move jobs from a plant represented by my local in Wilmington, Massachusetts to Reynosa, Mexico, where people are paid \$4 a day to do what we do for \$18 an hour. The managers of that Ametek plant in Reynosa live in gated neighborhoods in McCallen, Texas. They drive across the fortified border every day through neighborhoods called "colonias," where people live in shacks with no clean running water, exposed to chemicals dumped in their towns by the multinational corporations.

That's what they call free trade.

But if one of those Mexican workers tries to cross back from that Ametek plant and find work in the United States

for \$6.50 an hour instead of \$4 a day, she will be hunted down like a dog. She may even become one of those 2000 people who have died crossing the US-Mexico border over the last 3-4 years alone.

That's also what they call free trade.

Corporate globalization has always depended on moving hundreds of thousands of workers across borders for its own needs. It always has and always will.

Now I am not arguing for a domestic focus in place of the international focus. The international focus of the global justice movement is one of its strengths. And the exposure of the lack of democracy in the secret trade deals made by corporate lawyers behind the backs even of the world governments is at the heart of much of the global justice movement in the US. But we need to deepen the ties to the domestic movements, to make alliances and understand our own country better.

I can tell you that members of my local union have not forgotten the support of the Boston Global Action Network during our contract negotiations last year — puppets and all! Kids wearing our union T-shirts along with their Mohawks and nose-rings stood shoulder-to-shoulder with 50-year-old shop stewards carrying standard-issue Local 201 beer bellies, and the world was a slightly different place when we were done. We did better for our members and for our retirees in those negotiations than in previous years.

### **On to Quebec**

In April of this year we have the opportunity to reach out and strengthen the alliance of diverse sectors of the global justice movement. Leaders of 34 countries — the entire Western Hemisphere excluding Cuba, and including our own George Bush — will meet to continue negotiations to form a "Free Trade Area of the Americas," or FTAA. With the experience of NAFTA behind us — loss of good jobs in the US and Canada, lower wages and environmental disaster in Mexico — we don't need a lot of explanation about why a hemisphere-wide NAFTA would be harmful to citizens of

all of those countries. And a fight against "Super-NAFTA" will be easier for the various elements of the movement to work together on than anything since Seattle.

The global justice movement is gearing up. Several dozen union locals and central labor councils have initiated a Northeast Committee for Global Justice in the New England states to join in protests both in Quebec and in a dozen New England towns. We are also reaching out to community groups around Lynn, Massachusetts, where I work. And we are working with the People's Summit in Quebec and Jobs with Justice and the Global Action Network in Boston to deliver a week of educational activities and protests in the wake of the Quebec demonstrations.

The AFL-CIO will be endorsing the demonstrations. In a national action on May Day in Boston, the AFL-CIO will be kicking off its own Campaign for Global Justice and tying it to the demand for justice for immigrant workers in the US.

The mobilization against the FTAA is an opportunity to bring the global justice movement together again, and to build the alliance between its sectors both broader and deeper. To do this we need to be bold and organize militant and even controversial actions. Yet at the same time we need to have a long-term perspective and faith in ordinary people who may not see things our way right now. At its best, the movement for global justice combines both of these strengths. And in doing this it can maintain its militant character and reach out to the majority of the people.

See you in Quebec.

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Jeff Crosby is the president of Local 201 of the International Union of Electrical Workers-Communications Workers of America, and of the North Shore Labor Council in Lynn, Massachusetts. This article is based on talks he gave to the New England Global Action Network and the Northeast Action Conference.



# Frantz Fanon

## And Revolutionary Anti-colonial Psychology

BY JULIET UCELLI

**A**t a time when even Marxist analyses of imperialism were marred by Eurocentric thinking and economism, Frantz Fanon — Black psychiatrist and revolutionary fighter — opened people’s eyes to the psycho-cultural aspects of colonialism and of the struggle against it.

Like Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon was born in 1925 and died before his 40th birthday. Fanon’s birthplace was Martinique, a Caribbean island which held high status in the French colonial hierarchy. Coming from a middle-class family, Fanon initially conceived of himself as French, like many intellectuals from the colonies. At 18, Fanon left home to volunteer for the Free French Army, which fought to liberate France from Nazi occupation during World War II.

Fanon stayed in France after the war to study medicine and psychiatry on scholarship. There, confronting a white majority and vicious, overt racism for the first time, he found he needed to go beyond the Freudian theory taught in medical school. To understand his personal situation and inform his psychiatric practice, he studied the analysis of group dehumanization presented by the French left-wing philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in his book *Anti-Semite and Jew*, along with Aimé Césaire’s anti-colonialist theories, among others.

### **Black Skin, White Masks**

Fanon began to see that in even speaking French, the colonizer’s language, he was internalizing the colonizer’s values which

equate Blackness with evil. In such a situation, he said, the Black man wants to see himself as white and therefore becomes alienated from himself. (I use the term “man” deliberately, since Fanon actually had some very narrow and sexist ideas about colonized women, portraying them one-sidedly as collaborators with colonialism.) At a time when psychology often blamed the status of nations and people of color on “infantile” and “underdeveloped” personalities, it was radical to turn the tables and say that it

mostly Algerian independence fighters (suffering from what we would now call Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) — and their French torturers! As France dug in its heels and the French white left caved in to national chauvinism (with some notable exceptions like Sartre, who got daily death threats), Fanon saw that no peaceful solution was possible. (Fanon’s fascinating personal/political transformation is documented in *Toward the African Revolution*.) He resigned his job and worked with the Algerian indepen-

**At a time when psychology often blamed the status of nations and people of color on ‘infantile’ and ‘underdeveloped’ personalities, it was radical to turn the tables and say that it was a white racist, imperialist culture which was damaging to the psychological health of Black individuals.**

was a white racist, imperialist culture which was damaging to the psychological health of Black individuals. These insights were published in *Black Skin, White Masks* in 1952 when Fanon was 27 years old.

In 1952, Fanon took a position as head of psychiatry at a hospital in Algeria where the armed struggle for independence from French rule was breaking out. There, he desegregated the wards, and treated the victims of torture who were

dence movement (mostly underground) until his death of leukemia at the age of 36 in 1961.

### **The Wretched of the Earth**

Fanon’s experiences in Algeria are reflected in his pathbreaking masterpiece, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Though its title is taken from the second line of “The Internationale,” the anthem of the Communist movement, (“Arise, ye wretched of the earth!”), it was an anti-



dote to the dryness of much Marxist analysis of the period. When I was coming up in the anti-Vietnam War movement of the early '70s, it was one book that everybody said you had to read. From this complex, passionate and sometimes all-over-the place book, probably the most influential and still relevant concepts are "internalized oppression," (though I didn't catch Fanon actually using those words) and "collective autodestruction." In his words:

"While the settler or the policeman has the right the livelong day to strike the native, to insult him and to make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native; for the last resort of the native is to defend his personality vis-à-vis his brother... Thus collective autodestruction in a very concrete form is one of the ways in which the native's muscular tension is set free. All these patterns of conduct are those of the death reflex when faced with danger, a suicidal behavior which proves to the settler (whose existence and domination is by them all the more justified) that these men are not reasonable human beings." (p. 54)

As a public school social worker, I spend a lot of time preventing verbal conflicts from turning into fights, processing with young people after fights, and listening to young people de-compress and vent by recounting to me the fights they had on the weekend. In discussions with progressive colleagues, we've been struck by the relevance of Fanon's ideas to the students' situation. Lately I've begun to ask, when I think my rapport with the student is deep enough, "Why are you so ready to fight with your Black brother (or sister)? Is it that you don't know how to challenge the white power structure that's holding both of you down, so you take it out on each other? And that deep down you really believe the shit that white racists say about you? You believe that your lives aren't worth anything?" Sometimes it breaks the self-justification cycle ("I wasn't trying to fight but she kept giving me that evil look so I hadda do somethin'.") and gets them to actually question their own behavior. The

**Though many of his hopes for the African revolutions are still to be realized, Fanon contributed concepts which challenged reactionary ideology in the fields of psychiatry, social psychology and social work, and which paved the way for scholars like Edward Said and the best of the post-colonial theorists. These concepts are indispensable for anyone who is doing progressive organizing or healing work within an oppressed community.**

concept of collective autodestruction can help us understand and combat a range of practices within an oppressed community that are destructive to the community as a whole as well as the individual self, such as drug use and drug dealing and fighting.

### **Reclaiming History and Culture**

*Wretched of the Earth* is full of insights on diverse topics including the impact of Western entertainment commodities on the youth of underdeveloped countries, the tensions between the urban middle classes and the peasantry, and, if you can stomach it, the experience of torture and what it does to the torturer and the tortured, from Fanon's clinical notes. Listen to Fanon on the importance of challenging Eurocentric distortions of history to the morale and self-respect of people of color. Though couched in academic, psychological terms, it's very similar to what Malcolm X was saying at the same time about how white supremacy had stolen the history of Black people in the US:

"The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native.

Perhaps we have not sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. (p. 210)"

Though many of his hopes for the African revolutions are still to be realized, Fanon contributed concepts which challenged reactionary ideology in the fields of psychiatry, social psychology and social work, and which paved the way for scholars like Edward Said and the best of the post-colonial theorists. These concepts are indispensable for anyone who is doing progressive organizing or healing work within an oppressed community.

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Juliet Ucelli is a public education activist and a member of the National Executive Committee of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

\* Thanks to Suzanne Ross for pointing out the usefulness of the concept of collective autodestruction for people working in the public schools.



# FREEDOM ROAD

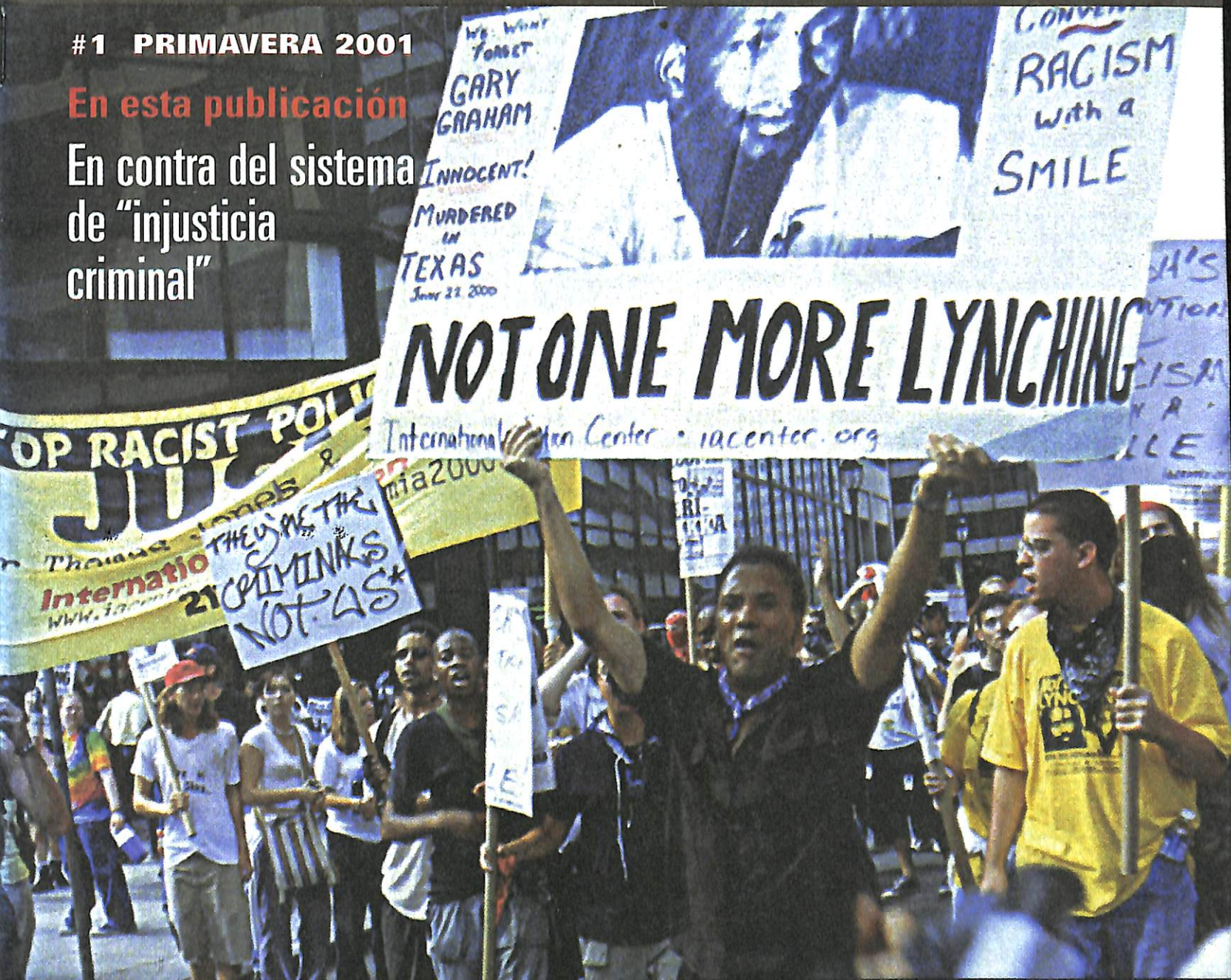
UNA REVISTA DE LUCHA, AUTODETERMINACIÓN Y SOCIALISMO



#1 PRIMAVERA 2001

En esta publicación

En contra del sistema  
de "injusticia  
criminal"



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\$1

- ¡HASTA LA VICTORIA!  
Sindicato de  
Trabajadores del Pepino  
en Carolina del Norte

- FRANZ FANÓN  
Y la Psicología  
a Revolucionaria  
Anti-colonial



# Organizando en Contra del Sistema de "Injusticia Criminal"

Entre las señales alentadoras del renacer de la resistencia en los años recientes, el ascenso del movimiento en contra del complejo penal-industrial es particularmente inspirador. Durante muchos años, un reducido número de activistas dedicados ha trabajado para desarrollar las luchas de apoyo a presos políticos y para combatir la pena de muerte, el crecimiento desmedido del encarcelamiento, la "guerra contra las drogas," y la brutalidad de las fuerzas policíacas, entre otras luchas. Este trabajo de base ahora comienza a dar frutos.

Vemos que están participando en este movimiento un número cada vez mayor de personas y que por fin empieza a haber un impacto real sobre la conciencia popular y el equilibrio de fuerzas entre nosotros y el enemigo. Los distintos movimientos están ahora en contacto más cercano y están más unidos, bajo la bandera de la oposición al "complejo penal-industrial."

## **Resistencia Crítica**

Un factor clave ha sido la conferencia Resistencia Crítica. Esta conferencia fundadora, que tuvo lugar en otoño del 1998, juntó a 3,500 personas en una reunión sin precedentes, de activistas, académicos, ex-presos y presos actuales, dirigentes sindicales, organizaciones religiosas, feministas, activistas gays, lesbianas, bisexuales y transgéneros, juventud, familias y funcionarios públicos.

Antes de la conferencia Resistencia Crítica, había muy pocas conexiones entre los distintos hilos del movimiento y los problemas que abordaban y no había suficiente esfuerzo dedicado a juntar a la gente de las diferentes tendencias para desarrollar un análisis completo y un enfoque amplio y estratégico para este trabajo.

La conferencia de Resistencia Crítica proporcionó a estos organizadores un medio para debatir, forjar análisis, compartir conocimientos sobre su trabajo y

empezar a llamar a un amplio plan de lucha. Los organizadores de la conferencia proponían una solución radical: abolir el actual sistema de "injusticia criminal." En otras palabras, en lugar de enfocarse únicamente en los métodos para reformar el sistema para hacerlo más "humano" para los presos y sus seres queridos, ellos ponían en duda la misma base del sistema. Les pidieron a los asistentes imaginar y trabajar hacia alternativas al complejo penal-industrial que fueran radicalmente nuevas.

La conferencia inicial llevó al establecimiento de una red de activistas, la cual hasta ahora ha trabajado con mayor efectividad en la Costa Occidental del país. A través de la misma se ha dado trabajo en común en torno a varios temas, en particular la Proposición 21, la iniciativa de California respecto al encarcelamiento de jóvenes. En general, el trabajo de organización bajo la rúbrica de Resistencia Crítica empezó en forma limitada, pero ahora parece que está echando raíces. Y ahora se va a celebrar la conferencia de Resistencia Crítica de la Costa Oriental en marzo de este año en Nueva York, para llevar las cosas hacia adelante.

La Organización Socialista Camino de la Libertad (Freedom Road Socialist Organization-FRSO) mantiene que la clave para la continuación del dominio capitalista en los EEUU es el sistema de supremacía blanca de opresión a las naciones y nacionalidades minoritarias. Acorde con esta convicción, vemos al complejo penal-industrial como uno de los mecanismos principales de mantener el régimen burgués de supremacía blanca. Así, cualquier movimiento revolucionario serio en este país debe insistir mucho en la lucha contra el sistema de injusticia criminal.

## **Presentamos a Freedom Road (Camino de la Libertad)**

Como éste es el número inaugural de Freedom Road, nuestra revista nueva, la Organización Socialista Camino de la

Libertad hará aquí una relación de algunas de nuestras metas, para darles a Uds., nuestros lectores, una idea clara de nuestro punto de partida.

**Desarrollar la Lucha de Masas.** El papel principal de esta revista es cubrir las luchas de la gente contra la opresión y la explotación, y para la justicia y una vida mejor. Hasta donde sea posible, queremos sacar lecciones políticas prácticas que nuestros lectores puedan aprender y aplicar a otras luchas en otros sitios.

**Promover la Política de la Auto-determinación.** Asimismo, Freedom Road se propone dar el lugar central a la política de lucha contra el racismo y a la auto-determinación de los pueblos oprimidos. Creemos que es una tarea de revolucionarios conscientes construir y dirigir las luchas populares de modo que éstas debiliten en lugar de reforzar los males como la supremacía blanca y los privilegios de los blancos, la supremacía masculina, el heterosexismo, y el dominio de las clases más privilegiadas.

**Apuntando hacia la Revolución Socialista.** Además, la revista cubrirá temas relacionados más directamente con la revolución y el socialismo mismos. La Refundación de la Izquierda es el término general que utilizamos para describir el trabajo concreto de re-imaginar el socialismo y re-pensar una estrategia para darle vida, basada en la organización y la discusión entre grupos e individuos anti-capitalistas.

Esperamos que disfruten de la revista Freedom Road, y que la encuentren útil. Estamos muy necesitados de voluntarios entre nuestros lectores bilingües que puedan escribir y traducir para nosotros. Pueden ponerse en contacto con nosotros por correo electrónico al <freedomroad@freedomroad.org>.

Paz,

Eric Odell y Michelle Foy

• Traducción por Juliana Barnett.



# ¡Hasta La Victoria!

## Campaña de Sindicalización de Trabajadores del Pepino en Carolina del Norte



POR JACK HOLTZMAN

Ahora ya se pueden comer uvas, pero piénsalo dos veces antes de pedir pepinos para tu hamburguesa doble con queso, pues hay un boicot a nivel nacional de la compañía Mount Olive Pickles. En mayo del 1997, el Comité Organizador de los Trabajadores del Campo (Farm Labor Organizing Committee-FLOC), un sindicato campesino afiliado con la AFL-CIO, inició una campaña de sindicalización entre los 5,000 trabajadores de Carolina del Norte quienes cosechan los pepinos que son procesados en escabeche o salmuera por esta compañía.

Como la Mount Olive se negó repetidas veces a negociar un acuerdo laboral para instituir mejores sueldos y condiciones de vida en los campamentos donde viven los trabajadores, en marzo del 1999 el FLOC decidió llamar a un boicot nacional para obligar a la Mount Olive a negociar un contrato sindical con sus trabajadores del pepino.

La Mount Olive, radicada en el sur de los Estados Unidos, es la segunda productora de pepinos en escabeche del país. Se vende su producto en treinta estados. (También produce pepinos para las cadenas de supermercado Food Lion y Harris-Teeter, bajo las etiquetas de éstas.). Aunque se ven rara vez en lugares como Massachusetts o California, la compañía produjo 80 millones de frascos de pepinos el año pasado, y aquí en Carolina del Norte los pepinos Mount Olive se hallan en todas partes. Uno podría pensar que sería igual de fácil tratar de boicotear la barbacoa. No

obstante, el boicot ha ganado impulso a través del país, incluso en el mismo patio trasero de la compañía. Más de 200 sindicatos locales, iglesias, y grupos comunitarios han respaldado el boicot desde que el FLOC lo anunció, incluyendo a locales de la UFCW, Teamsters y Steelworkers; la AFL-CIO de Carolina del Norte y de Ohio; la United Church of Christ; el Consejo de Iglesias de Carolina del Norte; la Diócesis Católica de Raleigh y de la región oriental de Carolina del Norte; así como el Partido Laboral. En una victoria temprana para el boicot, las 19 sucursales de Supermercados Kroger, que se ubican en la parte noroeste de Ohio, han aceptado no vender los pepinos Mount Olive.

### Explotación en Grande

Los trabajadores tienen buenos motivos para organizarse. Sus condiciones de vida y de trabajo son horribles. Los trabajadores que cosechan los pepinos para Mount Olive ganan aproximadamente \$1.80 por cada 100 libras de pepinos cosechados. Haz el cálculo: son \$36 por estar agachado durante todo el tiempo requerido para recolectar una tonelada de pepinos. Los trabajadores dicen que lo máximo que se llegan a ganar son \$56 en una jornada de 10 horas.

Estos pésimos niveles de pago explican en gran parte el por qué se ha cambiado tan dramáticamente la composición étnica de la fuerza laboral en el campo de Carolina del Norte en los últimos diez años. Antes, los trabajadores eran mayoritariamente Afro Americanos; ahora el 90% son Latinos, muchos de los cuales

indocumentados. El restante son mexicanos traídos en forma legal bajo el programa federal H-2A de "trabajadores huéspedes."

El sueldo miserable que ganan aquí se ve atractivo únicamente a comparación de la situación en sus lugares de origen, en donde muchos aseguran que "No hay trabajo." Aún cuando se logra encontrar trabajo en los campos de México, el salario es de solo \$6.00 al día.

La campaña para sindicalizar a la Mount Olive se enfrenta a tres obstáculos: el estado migratorio de los trabajadores, la ley, y la práctica de la Mount Olive de subcontratar la producción.

Más de 100.000 trabajadores migratorios llegan a Carolina del Norte cada año para cosechar tabaco, manzanas, camotes, pepinos y otros cultivos, labrando en 22,000 granjas a través de todo el estado. Los que carecen de documentos han viajado miles de millas para ganar lo suficiente como para alimentar a sus familias en México o Centroamérica.

Muchos de los 5,000 trabajadores del pepino vienen a Carolina del Norte en forma temporal, durante la época de la cosecha que dura de abril a noviembre, para después volver a sus lugares de origen. Muchos tienen miedo de perder su empleo si manifiestan sus descontento o si hacen cualquier cosa para protestar las condiciones espantosas que existen en los campamentos donde se hacían los trabajadores del campo en Carolina del Norte.

La ley no les ayuda. Los funcionarios de este estado se jactan de ser una entidad

## **Lo que tú puedes hacer para participar en el Boicot:**

- No comprar pepinos de la marca Mount Olive
- Convencer a tu sindicato o grupo comunitario a adoptar una resolución de apoyo y mandar la misma al: FLOC, 503 Solomon St., Faison, NC 28341
- Escribir una carta a la Mount Olive Pickle Company, informándoles que estás apoyando al boicot. Su dirección es: Mount Olive Pickle Co., PO Box 609, Mt. Olive, NC 28365.

### **Para comunicarse con el FLOC—Comité Organizador de los Trabajadores del Campo:**

correo electrónico: [info@floc.com](mailto:info@floc.com)  
red mundial:

que practica el “derecho al trabajo,” donde el porcentaje de la fuerza laboral organizada en sindicatos es de los más bajos de todo el país. Bajo la ley federal, no es ilegal despedir a trabajadores del campo que participen en actividad sindical. Aunque sean ciudadanos norteamericanos, por ser trabajadores agrícolas los que trabajan en la pizca del pepino no están amparados por las leyes federales que ofrecen cierta protección al derecho a organizarse en contra de las jornadas excesivas, sueldos bajos, plaguicidas tóxicas, falta de agua potable, u otras condiciones de trabajo que prevalecen en los campos de Carolina del Norte.

Al igual que los trabajadores indocumentados, los que están aquí en forma ‘legal’ bajo el programa H-2A se enfrentan al peligro de retribución o deportación si se unen a la campaña sindicalista del FLOC, o si se les percibe como simpatizantes de la misma. Si los trabajadores H-2A intentan organizarse, su patrón puede cancelar su contrato de trabajo, colocándolos en una situación irregular que los puede llevar a la deportación. En 1997, un informe de la Oficina General de Contabilidad de los EEUU notó que “los trabajadores H-2A raras veces se quejan de violaciones a sus garantías como trabajadores, porque temen perder su empleo o que no se les vaya a contratar en el futuro.”

Si esto fuera poco, la Mount Olive ha erigido otra barrera a la sindicalización, una que le será familiar a cualquiera que haya participado en el movimiento en contra de la sobre-explotación en las fábricas o talleres (sweatshops) en años recientes. La compañía asevera que la queja de los trabajadores debe ir contra los granjeros que siembran los pepinos, y que la compañía no tiene nada que ver con los sueldos o condiciones laborales en los campos. El FLOC, arguye la compañía, debería de negociar contratos por separado con cada uno de los cincuenta dueños de las fincas que abastecen de pepinos a las plantas procesadoras de la Mount Olive.

En realidad, la Mount Olive compra la mayor parte de los pepinos, tiene un con-

trol casi completo del proceso de cultivo, y puede dictar sus requerimientos a los dueños de las granjas. Ello le da la última palabra sobre lo que pasa en los campos del pepino.

### **La Estrategia Organizativa del FLOC**

El FLOC no se ha echado para atrás. Los organizadores han estado trabajando en los campos, en los campamentos donde habitan los trabajadores, y en las comunidades, recolectando firmas en las tarjetas de apoyo al sindicato. Para enero de este año, más de 3,000 trabajadores habían autorizado al sindicato para representarlos.

Los trabajadores agrícolas han recibido asistencia de organizaciones basadas en la comunidad, como las iglesias y la Asociación de Trabajadores Latinos. Los Trabajadores Negros por la Justicia (Black Workers For Justice—BWFJ) y los locales de otros sindicatos, también los han apoyado, sobretodo el Sindicato de los Trabajadores del Servicio Público de Carolina del Norte (NC Public Service Workers Union), Sindicato de Electricistas (United Electricians—UE) 150. Estos tienen un punto en común con los trabajadores agrícolas: la ley del estado niega a los empleados públicos el derecho a la negociación colectiva. Estas relaciones de trabajo han sido la base de la formación de la Alianza de Trabajadores Afro Americanos y Latinos.

La estrategia del FLOC es otro punto en común con la lucha contra las condiciones inhumanas en las fábricas. El sindicato subraya que aun más que los cultivadores individuales, es la Mount Olive la que se beneficia de los sueldos bajos y las condiciones infames de trabajo. Si se le puede obligar a la Mount Olive a negociar un contrato con el FLOC, la compañía a su vez presionará a los cultivadores.

El FLOC lanzó esta estrategia en los años 80 en Ohio. Un amplio boicot de consumidores a la Campbell Soup resultó en un contrato laboral en 1986, suscrito por múltiples productores, el cual cubrió a los trabajadores de veintenas de granjas del tomate y el pepino. Es este el modelo de acuerdo que está exigiendo el sindicato sea aceptado por la Mount Olive.

La única esperanza verdadera de mejorar las condiciones es una victoria sindical. Ramiro Sarabia, dirigente de la campaña organizativa del FLOC en Carolina del Norte, declara, “Todo el mundo se aprovecha del trabajador migratorio. Los sueldos son bajos, a veces incluso menos que el sueldo mínimo. Dondequiera que uno mira, ve malas condiciones. Un sindicato es la única manera en que vamos a mejorar las condiciones. El FLOC va a estar aquí durante mucho tiempo, quizás para siempre.”

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Jack Holtzman vive en Carolina del Norte y ha apoyado al boicot de la Mount Olive desde su inicio.

• Traducción por Juliana Barnet.



# Franz Fanón

## Y la Psicología Revolucionaria Anti-colonial

POR JULIET UCELLI

**E**n una época en donde incluso los análisis marxistas del imperialismo tenían una actitud eurocentrista y economicista, Frantz Fanón, siquiatra negro y luchador revolucionario, abrió los ojos de la gente ante los aspectos sico-culturales del colonialismo y de la lucha contra el mismo.

Como Malcolm X, Frantz Fanón nació en 1925 y murió antes de cumplir los 40 años. Era originario de Martinique, una isla del Caribe que gozaba de rango elevado en la jerarquía colonial francesa. De una familia de clase media, Fanón inicialmente se consideró francés, al igual que muchos intelectuales de las colonias. A los 18 años, Fanón se fue de su casa para inscribirse como voluntario en el Ejército de Liberación Francés, el cual peleó para liberar a Francia de la ocupación Nazi durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Fanón permaneció en Francia después de la guerra, becado para estudiar medicina y siquiatria. Ahí, al verse por primera vez frente a una mayoría blanca y al racismo abierto y maligno, Fanón encontró que sería necesario irse más allá de la teoría freudiana que enseñaban en la escuela de medicina. Para comprender su situación personal e informar su práctica de la siquiatria, estudió el análisis de la deshumanización de grupos presentado por el filósofo francés de izquierda, Jean-Paul Sartre, en su libro *Anti-Semita y Judío*, junto con la teoría anti-colonialista de Aime Cesaire, entre otros.

### Piel Negra. Máscaras Blancas

Fanón empezó a ver que con el simple hecho de hablar el francés, idioma del colonizador, él estaba internalizando los valores de éste, los cuales asociaban la Negritud con el mal. En tal situación, decía, el hombre negro quiere verse como blanco y por ello se enajena de sí mismo. (Utilizo el término “hombre” a propósito, ya que Fanón en realidad tenía unas ideas muy intolerantes y sexistas acerca de las mujeres colonizadas, pintándolas en forma unilateral, como colaboradores con el colonialismo.) En un momento en que la sicología solía echarle la culpa de la situación de las naciones y pueblos de color a sus personalidades “infantiles” y “subdesarrolladas,” era radical voltear el análisis y decir que era la cultura blanca racista e imperialista la que privaba a los individuos negros de la posibilidad de una buena salud psicológica. Publicó estas ideas en el libro *Piel Negra, Máscaras Blancas*, a la edad de 27 años.

En 1952, Fanón tomó un puesto como jefe de siquiatria en un hospital en Argelia, en donde estaba brotando la lucha armada por independizarse del dominio francés. Ahí, Fanón acabó con la práctica de separar a blancos y negros en distintos pabellones del hospital, y atendió a los víctimas de la tortura, quienes en su mayoría eran luchadores por la independencia de Argelia (sufriendo de lo que ahora llamaríamos el Síndrome del Estrés Post-Traumático) — ¡al lado de sus torturadores franceses! Mientras Francia se empecinaba en su postura colonialista y la izquierda francesa cedía el paso ante el chovinismo

nacional (con algunas excepciones notables como Sartre, quien recibía amenazas de muerte a diario), Fanón vio que no había posibilidad de una solución pacífica. (La fascinante transformación personal y política de Fanón se documenta en *Hacia la Revolución Africana*.) Renunció a su empleo y trabajó (más que nada en forma clandestina) con el movimiento de independencia de Argelia hasta su muerte por leucemia a la edad de 36 años, en 1961.

### Los Oprimidos de la Tierra

Las experiencias de Fanón en Argelia son reflejadas en su obra maestra innovadora, *Los Oprimidos de la Tierra*. Aunque el título fue tomado de la segunda línea del Internacional, himno del movimiento comunista — ¡Arriba, los oprimidos de la tierra! — su estilo se contrasta con lo árido de gran parte de los análisis marxistas de aquel periodo. Cuando estuve en el movimiento contra la guerra en Vietnam, a principio de los años 70, era un libro que todo el mundo decía que había que leer. De este libro complejo, apasionado y a veces desperdigado, probablemente los conceptos más útiles, y relevantes hasta el día de hoy, son la “opresión internalizada,” (aunque no vi que Fanón usara esas palabras textuales) y la “autodestrucción colectiva.” En sus palabras:

Mientras el colono o el policía tienen derecho, a cualquier hora del día, a golpear al nativo, insultarlo y hacerlo arrastrarse ante ellos, Ud. verá al nativo sacar su puñal en respuesta a la más ligera mirada hostil o agresiva que le dirija otro nativo; pues el último recurso del nativo es defender su personalidad frente a su hermano. Así, la



autodestrucción colectiva en una forma muy concreta es uno de los medios por los cuales se libera la tensión muscular del nativo. Todos estos patrones de conducta son una reacción reflexiva de muerte ante el peligro, un comportamiento suicida que demuestra al colono (cuya existencia y dominio se justifican aún más a raíz de los mismos) que estos hombres no son seres humanos razonables. (p. 54)

Como trabajadora social en una escuela pública, yo dedico mucho tiempo a prevenir que los conflictos verbales se conviertan en peleas, discutir la situación con los jóvenes después de una pelea, y escuchar a los jóvenes mientras se explayan y se desahogan conmigo al contarme acerca de sus peleas del fin de semana. En discusiones con colegas progresistas, hemos notado la relevancia de las ideas de Fanón con respecto a la situación de los estudiantes. Ultimamente, les he empezado a preguntar, suponiendo que tengo una relación de suficiente confianza con el estudiante, “¿Por qué estás tan dispuesto (o dispuesta) a pelearte con tu hermano o hermana negro/a? ¿Podría ser porque no sabes cómo desafiar la estructura de poder racista que tiene a ambos sujetos, haciendo que se desquiten uno con otro? ¿Y que realmente creas en la mierda que dicen los racistas blancos acerca de Uds., que sus vidas no valen nada?” A veces esto rompe el ciclo de la auto-justificación — “Yo no quería pelearme, pero él me seguía mirando feo, así que tuve que hacer algo” — y los lleva a analizar su propio comportamiento. El concepto de la autodestrucción colectiva puede ayudarnos a comprender y combatir una variedad de prácticas dentro de una comunidad oprimida que son destructoras para la comunidad en su totalidad, al igual que para el individuo, tales como uso de drogas, venta de drogas, y peleas.

*Los Oprimidos de la Tierra* ilumina temas diversos, incluyendo el impacto de los productos de diversión occidentales sobre la juventud de los países subdesarrollados, las tensiones entre las clases medias urbanas y el campesinado, y, si puedes aguantarlo, la experiencia de la tortura y como afecta al torturador y al

**El concepto de la autodestrucción colectiva puede ayudarnos a comprender y combatir una variedad de prácticas dentro de una comunidad oprimida que son destructoras para la comunidad en su totalidad, al igual que para el individuo, tales como uso de drogas, venta de drogas, y peleas.**

torturado, de las notas clínicas de Fanón. En la siguiente cita, Fanón insiste en la importancia para la moral y dignidad de la gente de color de confrontar las distorsiones eurocentristas a la historia. Aunque se expresa en términos académicos y psicológicos, es muy semejante a lo que decía Malcolm X en la misma época, de como la supremacía blanca le había robado su historia al pueblo negro en los EEUU:

La identificación con una cultura nacional en el pasado no sólo rehabilita a esa nación y sirve como justificación para aspirar a una cultura nacional del futuro. En la esfera del equilibrio psico-afectivo, ha provocado un cambio importante en el nativo. Tal vez no hayamos insistido lo suficiente en que el colonialismo no se contenta únicamente con imponer su dominio sobre el presente y el futuro de un país subyugado. El colonialismo no se satisface meramente con apretar a un pueblo en sus garras y vaciar el cerebro del nativo de toda forma y contenido. Siguiendo una especie de lógica perversa, dirige su atención al pasado del pueblo oprimido y lo distorsiona, deforma y destruye. (p.210)

Aunque muchas de sus esperanzas para las revoluciones africanas aún quedan por realizarse, Fanón contribuyó conceptos que desafiaron la ideología reaccionaria en los campos de la siquia-

tría, la sicología social, y el trabajo social, los cuales allanaron el camino para los intelectuales como Edward Said y lo mejor de los teóricos post-coloniales, y que son indispensables para cualquiera que participe en el trabajo progresista de organización o atención a la salud en el seno de una comunidad oprimida.

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Juliet Ucelli es una activista en la educación pública y miembro del Comité Ejecutivo Nacional de la Organización Socialista Camino a la Libertad (Freedom Road Socialist Organization).

\* Gracias a Suzanne Ross por señalar la utilidad del concepto de la autodestrucción colectiva para quienes trabajan en las escuelas públicas.

• Traducción por Juliana Barnett.