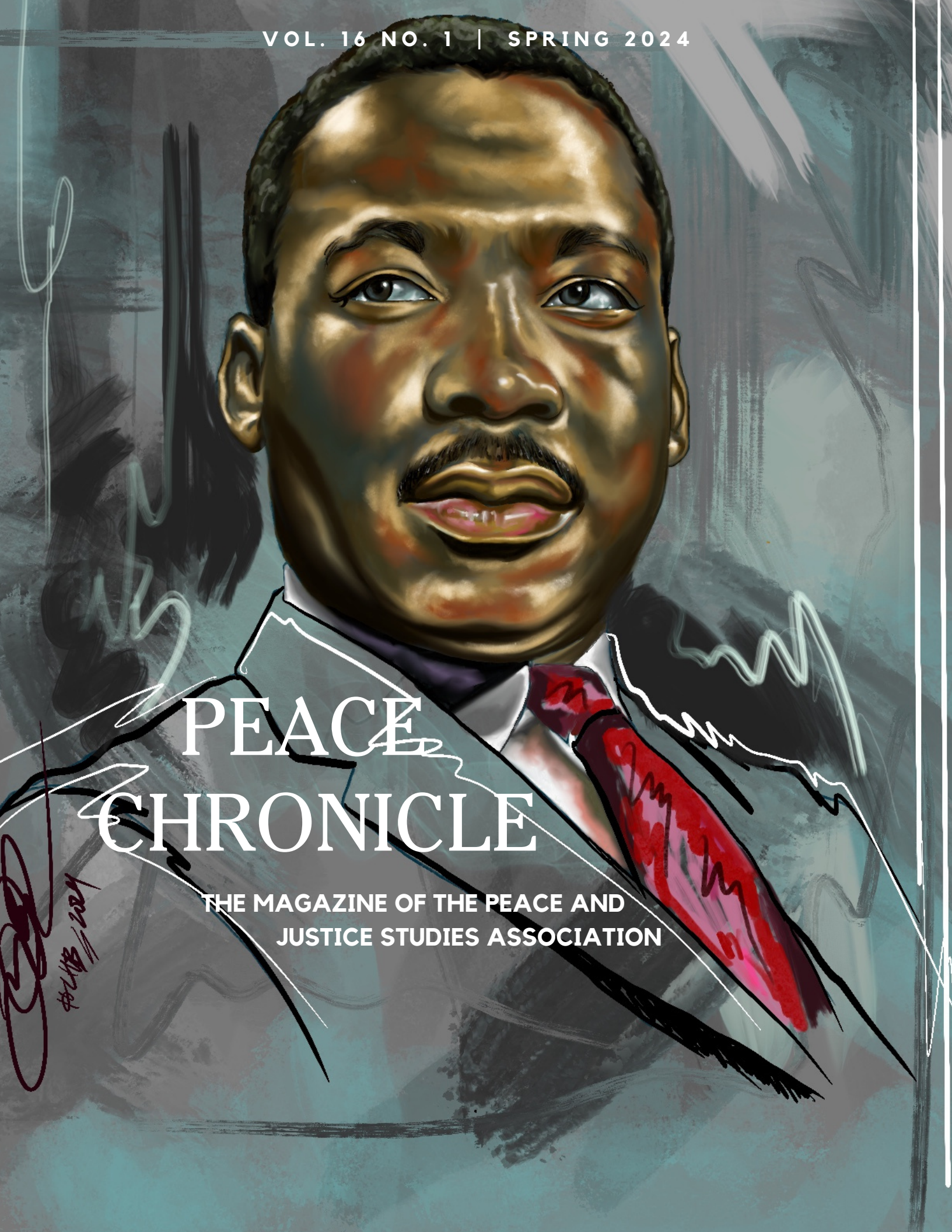


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PEACE CHRONICLE

The Magazine of the Peace and Justice Studies Association

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A NOTE ON THE COVER ART

TYSHAUN TYSON

I usually work with acrylic paints and sometimes dabble into other mediums. When creating this I used digital media. I always find my most unique and creative moments during this time of the year. It's something about the celebration of my African Heritage that excites me and sparks my curiosity in ways I can't predict. I went into this piece unsure of the desired outcome, but seemed to naturally arrive at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as my subject. Dr King is the ultimate example of peace so it seemed natural to go this route. I am very happy with how it turned out and honored to have it represented with your project.

PROMOTING BELIEF AND ACTION THROUGH CRITICAL THINKING: EMBRACING THE TEACHER AS ACTIVIST

DAVE REILLY

Serving as the guest editor for this Activism edition of Peace Chronicle is an honor, a distinct pleasure, and a catharsis. Although I have been teaching for a quarter century, my role and my self-assessment of my responsibility as an educator have evolved. Preparing this issue has provided the opportunity to reflect on those who have served as mentors and inspirations in my evolution – Betty Reardon, David Gilbert, Jalil Muntaqim, Stephen Gordon, Leslie Pickering – and to celebrate the community of activism that I am fortunate to be a part of in Western New York.

The articles included within represent a variety of perspectives, topical areas, and efforts that have shaped our community and our collective identity. Niagara University, located less than five miles from the majestic Niagara Falls, will host the 2024 Peace and

Justice Studies Association annual conference, and the collection of articles in this issue will hopefully serve as an introduction to our region and many of the people who serve critical roles in promoting justice and peace within Western New York.

At the conference you will meet many of the authors and have the opportunity to learn more about their experiences, their advocacy, their research, and their work. I am certain that you will find their stories compelling and inspirational; as they have motivated and taught me how to be an activist and to embrace my responsibility as an educator and advocate.

It is only recently that I identify as an activist. In the past I resisted advocacy as a necessary part of teaching, and of my responsibility as an educator.

In my teaching over a quarter century I started with a concentration in International Relations and political science, and have moved over time toward social movements and peace and justice studies with classes that include topics such as Organizing and Advocating for Justice. For me the common theme in my teaching is not the content or the subject matter, but rather the emphasis on developing critical thinking skills and encouraging students to become increasingly discerning in their consumption of information. I want and expect students to be disciplined in their thinking, to learn how to actively and skillfully conceptualize, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information that is gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, and communication.

This in turn should serve as a guide to belief and action – two distinct and important aspects of learning that we tend to treat very differently in higher education. Belief and action.

In my career I have given primacy in my teaching to belief at the expense of action. I have encouraged students to learn to think, but have only recently begun to encourage students to learn to act. And yet I recognize now that both are essential aspects of critical thinking. Critical thinking is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter: clarity, accuracy, precision,

consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.

But to understand good reasons, fairness, and how to draw sound conclusions also presupposes a responsibility to act. If we understand that the development of the intellect is for the purpose of guiding behavior, then teachers also have an obligation to cultivate that behavior in constructive and positive ways that reinforce our intellectual values and transform them into action for the common good – to take on and embrace responsibility and obligation.

However, as academics and scholars we are trained to be impartial and objective, to subordinate our feelings and emotions in favor of statistics and data. And it is impressed upon us and reinforced that experience and living and sensing are to be repressed and replaced with Western-focused disciplined and unbiased scientifically designed inquiry. To engage and to participate and to advocate is to introduce bias and to taint pure science with opinion.

Within the world of pure scholarship we are trained to observe from an ivory tower and to remove ourselves from the findings and their consequences. It does not matter what we know to be true – a good scholar does not think that way; we must be able to prove and document and explain in order for knowledge to have value. And if we insert

ourselves into the experience, we cannot be impartial and we cannot have confidence in our analyses.

So we build a wall between our lives as academics and the real world. We convince ourselves that there is an importance to our work that exceeds our role as individuals, that is more important than our personal beliefs. We claim that it is not our job to advocate but rather to provide good information and let others decide how to act upon it. This is what we are trained to do, and what is rewarded within the academy in the form of funding and grants, promotion and tenure, and publication of our ideas.

And we pass this impartiality down through our teaching to our students. We encourage them to look at the world through unbiased and non-judgmental eyes. We tell them that the university and the college are spaces where knowledge is shared and disseminated, but not necessarily where that knowledge is acted upon. Action is for the real world and the university is altogether separate from that world – a place where we can refine our knowledge and skills without consequence.

If I have learned anything during twenty-five years of teaching, I have learned that no teaching is or ever can be impartial. It must be, and always is, situated in a cultural context, an historical flow, an economic

condition. Teaching must be toward something; it must take a stand; it is either for or against.

When we choose topics to discuss in class, when we agree to a curriculum, when we present theories and hypotheses, we are making choices of what to share with students. Their understanding of the world, their perspective on critical debates, their knowledge of the key facts, will be determined in part by what we as teachers choose to put in front of them and the way that we approach that information and discussion. In other words, we are providing our support for or recommendation of a particular way of thinking, of the data students should consider, and the framing of that information. We are advocating.

If we choose to include information on Columbus' discovery of America in our classes we are advocating to students that this information is worthy of their consideration. If we introduce that there are skeptics of human-induced climate change and that this skepticism is valid as one of many reasonable conclusions to draw from scientific knowledge that exists, we allow students to build their beliefs around this. If we accept in our teaching, either actively or passively, that nature exists to serve humans, we reinforce those ideas in the minds of our students. If our teaching includes the underlying assumption that rights are bestowed only

upon humans and not upon other-than-human modes of being, we miss the opportunity to think critically about how our beliefs guide our behavior. And in turn we advocate for what exists, not for what is possible.

I have, more recently, made a commitment in my teaching to embrace advocacy, and to unabashedly and wholeheartedly attempt to teach for justice.

What does this mean?

- Engaging students in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity, obstacles to their freedom, obstacles to their responsibility and obligations to all beings, obstacles to their ability to advocate for others, and then to drive against those obstacles
- The fundamental message of teaching for justice is: You can change the world.

What I try to be for is an awareness, a consciousness, an ability to critically analyze that makes injustice unendurable. What I am against is exploitation and domination, in all forms.

So, embedded in teaching for justice is advocacy. It is the intersection of belief and action that comprises critical thinking.

College campuses are expected to be safe spaces for imagining how to transform society, and at the same time a sanctuary

from the worst of society. Often, administrators and faculty aspire to make college campuses a place in which profound social cleavages -- racial, partisan, economic -- exist only as abstract issues that we can have a "common good conversation" about, rather than as real conflicts that can and should be confronted.

If we are creating safe spaces, it should be for the exploration of ideas and tactics to advance justice. It is more important that we create a space on our campuses where students can experiment and learn to stop exploitation and domination in the world than that we create equal space for ideas that objectify, marginalize, disparage, and repress the least advantaged within our society. Students need to be able to learn through trial and error how to respond to oppression-- and what better place than a college campus? We need to prioritize justice over the "right" of oppressive ideas and structures to persist.

As Thomas Berry observes, "Of the institutions that should be guiding us into a viable future, the university has a special place because it teaches all those professions that control the human endeavor. In recent centuries the universities have supported an exploitation of the Earth by their teaching... Our educational institutions need to see their purpose not as training personnel for exploiting the Earth but as guiding students toward an intimate

relationship with the Earth. For it is the planet itself that brings us into being, sustains us in life, and delights us with its wonders. In this context we might consider the intellectual, political, and economic orientations that will enable us to fulfill the historical assignment before us – to establish a more viable way into the future” (The Great Work, 1999, x).

If the academy, the college, the university, is to be transformed, it cannot lose the commitment to critical thinking. This has always been and should always remain at the core. But what must be transformed is what critical thinking means. It cannot be limited to belief, but must guide action.

If there is to be a revolution in our social values – one that recognizes the intrinsic value of all other-than-human modes of people and that is explicit in human responsibility to protect all people – it must begin through education. We must change our beliefs by integrating the knowledge that is apparent all around us and then using this knowledge to guide our action.

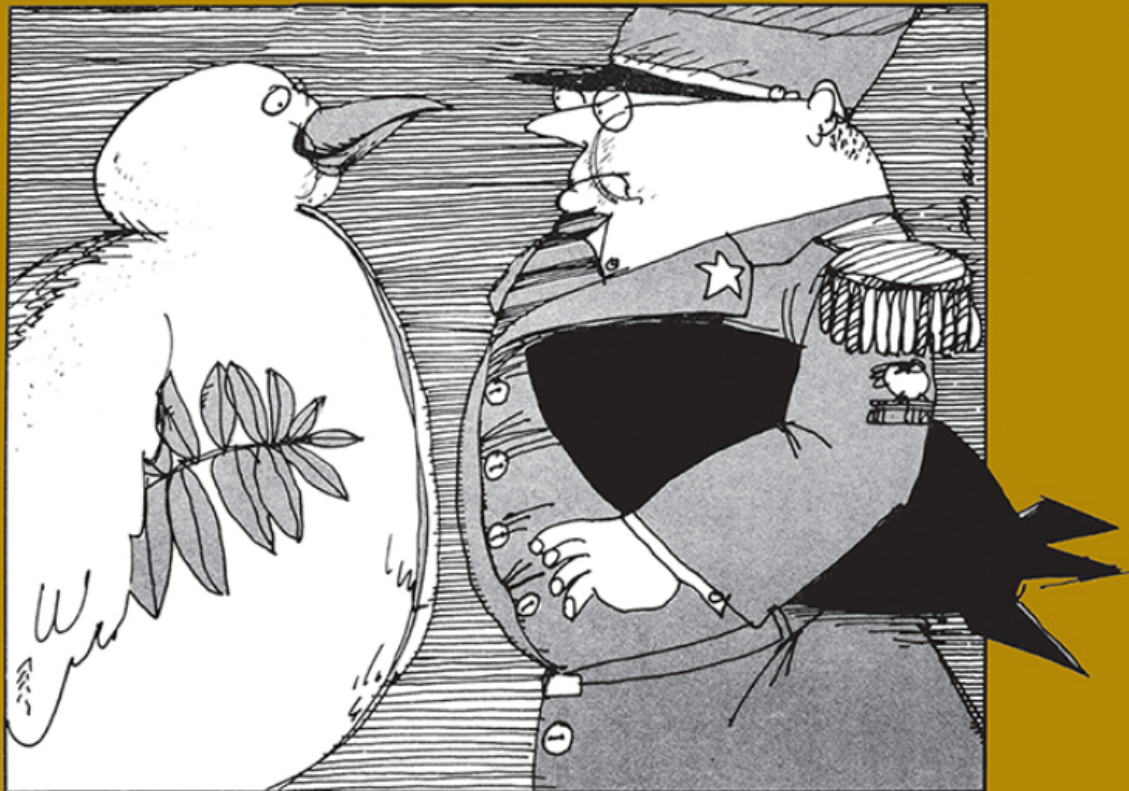
Recognizing the failures of our education systems of the past involves committing to advocacy in our teaching that is based on critical thinking. We must decolonize education and learn from Indigenous populations the world over who understand and appreciate what Thomas Berry calls “the spontaneities found in every form of

existence in the natural world, spontaneities that we associate with the wild – that which is uncontrolled by human dominance. We misconceive our role if we consider that our historical mission is to ‘civilize’ or to ‘domesticate’ the planet, as though wildness is something destructive rather than the ultimate creative modality of any form of earthly being. We are not here to control. We are here to become integral with the larger Earth community.” (48)

So let’s learn to change our values and to embrace revolutionary beliefs. And let’s learn to act.



War Resisters League
100 YEARS OF RESISTANCE
to
WAR AND THE
CAUSES OF WAR



Activists calling for a ceasefire in Israel/Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen, and other current wars are part of a long legacy of nonviolent resistance to war. War Resisters League: 100 Years of Resistance to War and the Causes of War recently published by the War Resisters League documents 100 years of such activism in the United States. This full-color, 84-page, 7" x 9" book is a history of the War Resisters League, the oldest secular pacifist organization in the United States. It reproduces WRL's 100th Anniversary Traveling Exhibit, including 186 images, a timeline of key demonstrations and other events, WRL programs, notable individuals, and publications throughout WRL's history. Relying on dozens of primary sources, the exhibit and book was researched, written, and edited by Ruth Benn and Ed Hedemann; designed by Rick Bickhart.

This wide-ranging book invites reflection on where we have been and offers inspiration to continue the ongoing struggle for peace and justice. Designed to appeal to a broad audience, this book captures the dynamism and creativity of generations of activists resisting war. It provides historical context and inspiration for current activists who can see the evolution of tactics and the impact of nonviolent resistance in many settings.

The book is an engaging text for courses on the history of nonviolent resistance and the interconnection between militarism and

social justice. It highlights remarkable activists – pacifist, socialist, religious, atheist, suffragist, anarchist, feminist – who shaped WRL and the antiwar movement. Photos and captions illustrate an evolving variety of nonviolent tactics used to resist war, including civil disobedience, war tax resistance, individual resistance, creative small actions, coalitions, mass demonstrations, and street flyers, posters, and magazines with contributions by well-known artists and writers. Along with focusing on war resistance from World War I to the present, the book includes civil rights issues from prison desegregation to gay power to Black Lives Matter, the connection between international militarism and violence at home, draft and tax resistance, and feminist peace encampments.

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CITY OF REDLINED NEIGHBORS: REDLINING IN PAST AND PRESENT BUFFALO

JAMES COUGHLIN

“Segregated housing became in Buffalo alone a big boon to some citizens indeed” remarked high schooler Samuel Boykin in 1960, about residential segregation’s predatory economic impact in Buffalo, New York’s “East Side.” “A typical case history was a family living in a converted wood shed, forced to move from their former residence, a man, his wife and daughter – rent? \$120.00 a month; an upstairs flat, three-bedroom apartment, four adults and 14 year old girl – rent? \$100.00 a month, no central heating, rent paid in cash, no receipt.”(1) Buffalo’s residential segregation was proliferated and entrenched through a combination of segregationist, exclusionary federal and local government redlining and public housing policies, white homeowners’ racialized conception of property values and wealth, coinciding with private real estate speculation and blockbusting. Buffalo’s burgeoning Black community, intentionally segregated to redlined neighborhoods amid

a regional housing shortage, were discriminatorily excluded from government insured loans towards newer housing and financing to refurbish existing dwellings. Redlining abetted deteriorating and overcrowded housing conditions in Buffalo’s Ellicott and Masten Districts, segregated public housing, and deleterious urban renewal policies such as the Ellicott Urban Renewal Plan.(2) Only three percent of Buffalo’s population, by 1940, most Black Buffalonians lived in the integrated Ellicott alongside Italian and Jewish Buffalonians. Although in overcrowded, utility deprived, poor-quality housing, Black Buffalonians attests Henry Louis Taylor Jr. “were not separated from white workers, and there was no demand to exclude them from the neighborhood.”(3)

Buffalo’s professionalizing real estate industry Buffalo Real Estate Board (BREB) through founder Fenton M. Parke instrumentally

facilitated Black Buffalonians' segregation, promoting that integrated neighborhood depreciated property values.(4) Associated with the National Association of Real Estate Brokers, BREB's influence and ideals reveals how realtors, developers, and suburbanizing residents conceived of and responded to perceived racialized neighborhood decline.(5) Enacted in 1925, Article 34 of NAREB's ethics code prohibited realtors from "introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood," giving tremendous "discretionary powers" to realtors to measure property values with neighborhood homogeneity.(6)

Realtors also influenced the Federal Housing Authority's (FHA) adoption of Home Owners' Loan Corporation redlining maps. Green and blue shaded neighbors receiving "A" or "B" grades, had minimal perceived lending risk for FHA backed, low interest amortized loans. Yellow or red shaded neighborhoods receiving "C" or "D" grades, were deemed declining, slum neighborhoods, risky for investment. Redlining maps reflected the "neighborhood composition rule," asserting "federal housing projects should reflect the previous racial composition of their neighborhoods."(7) Sections 284(2) and 284(3) of the 1936 FHA underwriting manual further reinforced neighborhood racial preference,

insisting upon "prohibition of the occupancy of properties except by the race for which they are intended and appropriate provisions for enforcement."(8)

Redlining maps were "prophecies," notes Gene Slater, determining where federal investment was "the primary source of capital for home mortgages" and "which neighborhoods would physically deteriorate."(9) Real estate boards and financial professionals throughout New York created redlining maps. Rochester, New York's map "was drawn up in consultation with the president of the local real estate board and five of the city's leading banking and insurance executives."(10) Fenton Parke and BREB members produced Buffalo's HOLC redlining map grades, excluding Black Buffalonians from newer housing opportunities and FHA backed loans, under the guise of protecting property-values. For realtors, "racial exclusion was essential" because it "protected white neighborhoods from depreciation by other races," and therefore the wealth of white families through homeownership.

Segregated public housing relegated Black Buffalonians to the Ellicott District's Willert Park, completed by the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA) in June 1938.(11) A May 1941 federal proposal to construct 200 public housing for Black Buffalonians in North Buffalo, Cheektowaga, South Buffalo, or

Lovejoy faced staunch white backlash. Senator James M. Mead stated Black public housing “would depreciate property values of Cheektowaga.”(12) South Buffalo’s Holy Family Church Reverend John J. Nash declared “the right to protect our homes is as sacred as the right to defend our lives.”(13) Buffalo’s government negotiated Willert Park’s extension in March 1942, as Buffalo Urban League Executive Secretary William L. Evans wrote “persistently refused to alter or compromise its position of complete segregation of Negroes in all housing managed by it.”(14)

effectively all-white, Green Acres community. (17) Blockbusters throughout Buffalo’s Masten District employed racialized property-value assumptions, selling one home to a Black household in an all-white block, subsequently panicking white neighbors into selling their homes. Homes then were sold or rented at an exorbitant and predatory rate to Black Buffalonians, excluded from other housing opportunities.(18) Perceptions of Black criminality and increased crime reinforced white Buffalonians’ justifications for suburbanizing, while East Side Neighborhoods became boons for realtors.(19)

Realtors’ collective commitment to segregation is shown through simultaneous white flight and Black migration and into Buffalo’s Ellicott and Masten Districts. Subsidized homeownership opportunities facilitated white suburbanization, alongside zoning, restrictive covenants, and appraisals conducted through BREB members, reinforced racially homogenous, exclusionary neighborhoods, and appreciating property values.(15) Restrictions in the Town of Tonawanda’s Green Acres limited the construction to single family homes, allowed homeowners “to prosecute any proceedings at law and in equity” and to “recover damages” against violating neighbors, enforceable for twenty-five years.(16) Legally, protecting homes and property-values became a joint responsibility for the

The Ellicott Urban renewal plan, approved in December 1957 to address overcrowded, deteriorating housing, entrenched Buffalo’s segregation. A survey of 1,750, of 2,219 dislocated households noted “fifteen realtors working with BREB operating in the Ellicott and Masten areas” had “handled the bulk of the new home purchases.”(20) Eighty percent of displaced households were Black-led, seventy percent moving into seven adjacent East Side census tracts, while sixty-five percent of white-led households relocated elsewhere.(21) Political Scientist Neil Kraus claims “specifically 86 percent of all the Black residents displaced were moved to either elsewhere in the Ellicott District or to the Masten District.”(22) A Criterion editorial asserted urban renewal will shift Black Buffalonians “from the status of property

owners to tenants and setting them back, so others can make a gain at their expense.”(23)

Redlining’s detrimental and exclusionary consequences remain prevalent, causing myriad health, environmental, housing, and economic disparities throughout Buffalo’s East Side. With 85% of Black Buffalonians living on the East Side, “over 55% of East Side residents pay 30% or more of their income on housing, and 36% spend more than 50%” amid an estimated 7,000 vacant lots and substandard housing.(24) In Buffalo, a “56% difference between the household income of Blacks and Whites and a 55% difference in poverty rates” with median Black household income at \$28,320.(25) Throughout Erie County, 33% of Black households own their home compared to 73% of white households, impacted by continued redlining.(26) A 2015 settlement between New York State and Evans Bank sought to “resolve charges that it engaged in redlining” by “denying access to mortgages to those communities based on the race of their population.”(27) Furthermore, a New York State mortgage lending study between 2016 and 2019 found “loans made to minorities in the Buffalo Metropolitan Statistical Area comprise only 9.74% of the total loans made.”(28)

Food apartheid continues impacting Buffalo’s East Side, exemplified by the Jefferson Avenue Tops’ temporary closure following the May 14th, 2022 white

supremacist shooting that claimed ten Black lives. Health problems due to “housing, intermittent maintenance, and willful neglect of homes by unaccountable landlords” exacerbate lead poisoning, respiratory illness, mold exposure. With 64.1% of Buffalo’s homes built before 1940, inadequate dwelling weatherization came into focus following the catastrophic December 23, 2022 blizzard.(29) Unaddressed lead paint and managing sewage system has caused elevated blood lead levels for Buffalo’s children to be three to eight times as much as Flint, Michigan.(30)

Contemporary Buffalo sustains a robust activist community working towards repairing segregation’s injustices. Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) works to fight housing discrimination through “education, advocacy, and enforcement of fair housing laws” and “ensure all people an equal opportunity to live in housing and communities of their choice.”(31) Black Love Resists in the Rust, a Black-led grassroots abolitionist group seeks to “repair the harm done” by government and corporations to Black communities and develop alternatives to “policing,” the “Buffalo Police Department,” and “all carceral systems.”(32) Open Buffalo is another Black-led group based on Jefferson Avenue, working to ensure “all communities in Western New York to thrive free from discrimination and poverty” through empowering a democratic, grassroots approach “by training individuals in how to

identify problems and create solutions in public policy and public systems.”(33) A synthesis of housing and environmental justice is championed by People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH). PUSH seeks to “to mobilize residents to create strong neighborhoods with quality, affordable housing; to expand local hiring opportunities; and to advance racial, economic, and environmental justice” with an emphasis on reclaiming abandoned homes for low-income Buffalonians.(34) The East Side Parkways Coalition recently emerged, “concerned that the proposed New York State Department of Transportation” Kensington Expressway tunnel inadequately meets “the community’s needs and desires for a healthy environment.”(35)

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TESTIMONY OF A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

AM I AN ACTIVIST?

TISH O'DELL

I recently helped to organize a Truth and Reckoning event for Nature and the Great Lakes. We invited people to give testimony from lived experience and knowledge about various topics related to our current culture and how each impacts the Great Lakes and Nature as a whole. We heard from a Catholic nun, a college professor, a medical doctor, a journalist, an environmental lawyer, a former EPA contractor as well as many others including Indigenous people, college students, and community members too. It was an impactful day, listening to their truths, hearing about their part in the system and culture that we have all been born into, and ultimately how to reckon with those truths.

That day wasn't about blame, but about taking responsibility. If we continue to blame others, then we find ourselves always trying to educate and plead with others to make change for us. But what if we started with

recognizing the change closer than that? Those who spoke provided amazing testimony filled with heartfelt honesty including internal struggles on reconciling how the dominant system forces us to choose between things like having a job and feeding our families at the expense of harming nature.

I've found myself being inspired to deal with a variety of truths since then. So that's why I'm taking the opportunity now to provide written testimony of my truth and reckoning as a "community activist".

Am I an "activist"?

If anyone would have asked me this question a year ago, I would have quickly replied "yes". Ask me today and I might say no. We live in a time where there is more chaos and less order than when I was a younger woman or at least that is how it seems looking back and through the lens of my personal reality.

Maybe reading this, some of my words will resonate with you, maybe they won't. And that's ok. That is one of many recent lessons I have learned.

The label "activist" is applied broadly to many people and organizations in conversations, in the news and on social media. So I decided to start with the dictionary definition to see how our culture actually defines an activist.

According to Britannica Dictionary:

: a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) to help make changes in politics or society.

According to Merriam-Webster:

: one who advocates or practices activism : a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue

And according to Cambridge Dictionary:

: a person who believes strongly in political or social change and takes part in activities such as public protests to try to make this happen

There is a pattern here which doesn't align with my lived experience and my truth as an activist for community rights and rights of nature. Part of my truth is that for much of my life, I did believe that marching in protests

was activism. It is what we are taught, it is what we see on TV, in print and at the movies. This is how our culture portrays activism. So when it comes to the needed systemic change, where has protesting collectively brought us?

My Truth

Thirteen years ago urban drilling for oil/gas came to my community and many others around Ohio. So I did what many have done and went to protest marches and even spoke at some of them. I was an "anti-fracking activist". But what I soon discovered was that no matter how many protest marches I attended, it wasn't stopping the advance of fracking in my community.

Along my journey to try and stop fracking, I encountered CELDF (Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund) and saw "activism" through a new lens. Instead of protesting what is, what if the people got together and wrote a law for what should be, which for my community was about stopping the drilling and recognizing rights for nature not to be harmed by the destructive process of fracking? With CELDF's guidance we did just that.

This form of activism seemed much more empowering to me. The people practicing direct democracy where they lived. Of course, the drilling corporations didn't think this was an acceptable form of activism and so they

filed a lawsuit against the community and our new law. The courts, unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, agreed with the drillers. But, despite what appeared to be defeats, these were actually victories in peeling back the inner workings of a faulty system. What if we could get more and more communities to engage in this form of activism instead of shaming, blaming and pleading through protests?

I spent the next decade assisting other communities to practice this form of activism. As more communities attempted to empower themselves, to practice democracy, to create the communities they envisioned, the system of government and the courts began to squash the people's efforts one by one.

Then the pandemic hit and things changed dramatically with "activism". Protests in the streets came to a stand still as people were told to stay home and lock down. For "activists" it became a time of endless Zoom meetings and webinars. The pandemic, however you may have related to it, altered and changed our culture and how we each relate to the world around us.

Synchronistically, part of my reflections over this time period, working with my friends at CELDF were also focused on how to change culture. How do people's mindsets shift about relationships, language, governmental

structures and institutions, etc.? Do laws change culture or does culture change the laws?

So much of my so-labeled "activism" was centered around educating community members about how the system functioned so they could then draft their own laws and either pass those with direct initiatives on the ballot or try to convince elected officials to pass these laws for them. This form of activism was still centered on a belief that if the people simply followed the "rules" of the system, they could achieve the results they wanted—stopping harms and creating healthier communities.

But that isn't how it played out. Coming back to my community's story, where the court eventually overturned the law passed by the people, I realized that the problem with making effective change landed back in the laps of my neighbors and me. Even though we now understood about the dangers of fracking, had done the hard work to pass a law, and then experienced the court overturning that law...many weren't willing to do anything more to confront the clear dangers. From what I can tell, they simply accepted that this is how the system works. It was a "you can't fight city hall" reality.

This has happened in many communities since then. So of course my question is, why? What will it take for people to not just read

articles, write letters, sign a petition, go to a march, trust in the system, etc. All the things that “activists” are known to do. What is needed, for a very long time now, is a mass cultural shift in thinking. This means shifting focus from the few that hold positions of authority in our community to focusing on the many who live there as having authority.

My Reckoning

I can't help but wonder, reflecting on my past work as an “activist”, if I haven't been leading people right down a “cattle chute” of sorts. I had learned through my own experience in my community that at the end of the system's options, democracy by the people was just talk...an illusion that our culture paints for us and yet can be stripped away at any corporation and judge's whim. That when the powerful have the ability to create a system that benefits and protects the powerful's authority, you can't really make it work for the people or nature - no matter how strong your belief is or how active you think you are. By assisting communities to draft laws and tell them to work within the existing system to get them passed, was I just helping the system by giving it more credibility and leading more people into it and believing that this is where the authority lies?

How do I, as a community activist, help to shift our cultural mindset that the residents within a community, including the trees and

the animals and the rivers, not only have to be part of the community decision making process, but also have the authority to be decision makers. Protests automatically divide the community. You are either with the protesters or against them. But, in reality being part of a community is about bringing people together around shared values and having dialog with other community members.

Again, back to my community. Some people supported fracking because they were benefitting with royalty checks. Others weren't. But what we all shared in common was that no one wanted the air to be polluted or the water poisoned or to have an explosion next to the school because like it or not, we all shared this physical place together.

Maybe instead of being so quick to label our neighbors, what if we could sit down with a few of them and try to get to know them better and see if we can find common ground together and build from there.

Right Relationship

Part I of the event I helped organize in October, will continue with Part II next April 2024. With truths told, others to come, and all of us being witness to those truths and reckoning with them, the objective for coming together in the spring is to explore and discover how we get in “Right

Relationship” with Nature and the Great Lakes.

To be honest, I don't know what will come out of the April gathering. But, what I do know is that we have to all start from a place of truth and sometimes grapple with hard questions that come out of those truths and be open to hearing other people's perspectives and knowledge too. Perhaps we'll find some shared values that will begin conversations about changes that have to happen in our culture and our form of governance and decision making in order to truly protect nature and the Great Lakes.

Maybe a new definition of what an activist is will emerge as well....I know it already has for me.



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THE WAR WILL END

MAHTAB MITRA

The war will end
And the leaders will warm together
And there remains that old mother who is
looking forward to her martyred child
And that young woman who is waiting for
her lover
And the children who are waiting for their
hero father
I don't know who sold the homeland
But I saw who
He/She paid the price.
"Mahmood Darwish"

Life is not same for all of us; some people live what they consider a normal life—born and raised in peace, they plan and strive to achieve their goals. But others are defined and driven by outside forces, which determine their direction. For me, a citizen of Afghanistan, almost everything in my life has been directed by outside forces, not by me. As a child of a war-torn country, whose family, friends, acquaintances and everybody in her society for three generations have been victims of war, it is not surprising that I choose to be an activist and call for peace. Wouldn't you? It is the least I can do to help make the world a more beautiful place to live.

I believe that war is a voluntary and stupid choice by political forces for their own profit and power. If we try, we can always find solutions with fewer casualties to solve genuine problems. War always and inevitably results from a failure of human intelligence and imagination, and it inflicts dire and incalculable long-term harm that lasts for generations. Do warmongers really think that war will solve the apparent problems? Recently, this word "war" has been so hateful to me that I can't even be proud, as an Afghan citizen, of winning an unequal war. We call the Afghan-Soviet War an unequal war because Afghanistan was a poor country, while the Soviet Union was a superpower. However, this superpower couldn't win the war after invading my country in 1979. That devastating war is the main cause of my social activism for peace; it made me realize how stupid and evil the decision to invade another country and fight with each other is.

Perhaps if you hear my story of how war shaped my family's lives for three generations, you, too, will understand the importance of peace and social activism. My words may seem exaggerated, but although I was born

seven years after the end of the Afghan-Soviet war, I declare that I was and am a victim of that war. Although we can find casualty statistics, what I am talking about goes beyond these numbers. The cost of war must be understood not only in terms of deaths, but in terms of children orphaned, women widowed, refugees forced to flee their countries against their will, mentally and physically ill and elderly people and their families, and others subjected to the painful conditions caused by war -- all are "victims of war."

Unfortunately, those of us who are victims of war too often allow our governments and politicians to use us as fuel for their power struggles and as a means to maintain, consolidate, or increase their power. This happened to us Afghans, and we are still suffering from the devastating impacts of the Afghan-Soviet war that ended over thirty years ago. I doubt the stench left over from that war will be cleaned up or erased anytime soon. My bitter personal experience of the effects of the lack of peace led me to understand how important peace is and how urgent it is to call the world toward it.

The Afghan-Soviet war started in 1979. My mother was five that year, and the war made her an immigrant, when she and her family fled the war to Iran, and a half-orphan at seven. My grandmother was widowed by the war at 30, and she had to raise her eight

children, the eldest of whom was nine years old, alone. My mother's father had belonged to a rich family, and they owned hundreds of kilometers of land in our province in Afghanistan. But my mother and her siblings were orphans and weren't able to travel from Iran to Afghanistan or to sell their land. Thus, despite owning property, they grew up in poverty as a direct result of war. When I say poverty, I mean that they did not have enough food to eat. I mean that they had no clothing, so they had to reuse other people's used clothes. My aunt says that most of their classmates in Iran used to ridicule them for their old clothes. All these experiences, which represented the impact of war on human lives, made me more determined to keep the ideal of peace in my mind and heart and to struggle to achieve it.

My grandfather stayed in Afghanistan and fought against the Soviets, but he sent his family to Iran because it wasn't safe for them to stay. I've heard from my mother that the Soviet were inspecting the houses of Mujahidin and arresting any man from their families. They killed one of my grandfather's nephews after arresting him, just as they killed my grandfather in battle. Widowed by the war at a young age, my grandmother never re-married, but the difficult life conditions after the martyrdom of her husband, and the poverty imposed by war and immigration forced her to make painful choices to survive.

And so, she married my mother -- at the age of 13 -- to her cousin, my 25-year-old father. As I heard from my elders, my grandmother never asked my mother about this marriage. Instead, one day, when my mother talked and laughed with her cousins and my grandmother noticed it, she told her not to laugh aloud, because she was married now. To understand this, we need to understand long-standing customs and traditions of the Afghan people. The groom's family chooses the girl they think is suitable for their child and goes to the girl's parents to propose. If the girl's parents like the groom and his family, they say yes and give a handkerchief, thread, and needle, to the family, as a promise of their daughter's marriage to the boy. But if the groom or the groom's family are not liked by the girl's family, they receive a rejection.

While some families ask the opinion of the bride and groom about this marriage, others decide for their children. My mother was one of those who was not informed. And so, one day, when she was happy with the presence of her aunt and her aunt's daughters in their house and was laughing with them, her mother told her not to laugh loudly because laughing loudly is not appropriate for a married woman. Without telling my mother, my grandmother had promised her marriage to my father and his family.

In later years, when we asked my grandmother why she hadn't asked her own daughter's opinion, she said, "I knew she would not be satisfied with this marriage, and I, in desperate need of help, could not find any other way." My grandmother still suffers from the wrong decision she made thirty years ago and expresses her shame and regret to us. So, to me, this is another cost of war: my grandmother did this to her daughter because she wasn't able to support her children and believed that her son-in-law would help her. Perhaps because of this involuntary marriage at age 13, my mother encouraged and supported the education of me and my sisters, and before that she fostered the education of her siblings, who had been deprived of education due to the family's poverty and refugee status. Due, in fact, to war. Knowing the story of my grandmother and my mother, I feel a huge responsibility toward all the women whose lives have been reduced to only "breathing" as a result of the lack of peace.

My father, who was born in 1963, was also a victim of war. He was 16 when the Soviets invaded our country. At a young age, he witnessed the tragic martyrdom of his three uncles, as well as other close relatives, a cousin, a brother, and dozens of his peers. My father would sometimes talk to us about his many bitter memories of the war. While he was no more than a teenager, he was forced - many times -- to collect the pieces of the

corpses of his comrades from the ground, while all the internal parts of their bodies were visible and scattered. As he spoke of these memories, I could see and feel the change on his face. How sad he looked when he talked about the pains and hardships of the war, and how proud he looked when he talked about the bravery of the great men who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of the country.

As a result of war, trauma, and injuries, my father suffered for much of his life from anger, depression, and PTSD, and he eventually became addicted to drugs. These further consequences of war caused my mother, my sisters, and me to suffer for our lifetimes. And so, this Soviet-Afghan war made our family refugees and immigrants, deprived us of the blessing of literacy and education, inflicted trauma, mental illness, and addiction, and made us and many Afghans helpless and hopeless. Thus, I believe that the first spark for me to call for peace happened years before I was born, in the miseries that war brought upon my parents' lives. Hatred of war created a love for peace in me. My nature has been mixed with pacifism; and thus, I have been a social activist for peace.

So many costs of war, visible to me every day, bring me to think more and more about the urgent need for peace. In Afghanistan, we lost many great men in the Soviet invasion, and the generation that survived the war

were often orphans left with a bag full of regrets and daily repetition of "I wish it wasn't like this..." and "I wish it was like this..." While we believe we know what war does to soldiers and families and economies, we too often forget the invisible costs of war: it can also deprive us of exactly the strong and courageous people who might have helped build a peaceful society. I understand, looking back now, that we suffered both the deaths of those leaders who might have rebuilt the country, and the loss of those who fled the country, and the contributions they all might have made.

Even measurable war casualties are always far greater than the statistics show. I have seen so many children, mothers, siblings, and fathers of martyrs that I doubt the credibility of the published statistics on the number of people killed in this war. My grandfather, his two brothers, and many of his friends and comrades were victims of the Soviet-Afghan war, as well as my grandfather and grandmother and mother and father and my aunts and uncles. Their generations are still burning in the same fire that originated from the war. We lost hundreds and thousands of great people in the war. Our homes became "fatherless" and our country "leaderless," lacking leaders who are charismatic and wise, not any selfish people who are thirsty for power.

In short, my life and the lives of my family have taught me that war has never had a good and sweet outcome and never will. War has always been painful, destructive, and terrifying for all sides. Russia's war in Afghanistan was not only devastating for us, but also caused the death and injury of thousands of Russian soldiers, the suffering of hundreds and thousands of Russian families, and the destruction of millions of dollars of the nation's resources. But still, unfortunately, throughout history, human beings have repeatedly caught themselves and their fellow humans in this fire of wars.

As a victim of the Afghan-Soviet war, I deeply understand that the effects of war cannot be summed up in the published statistics of war casualties. Is war the solution to the conflicts or the creator of more conflicts? It reminds me of a famous quote often attributed to Albert Einstein: "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe." I think only a fool can sacrifice tens, hundreds, and thousands of other people in this short human life because of his/her greed and selfishness.

I ask the peace-loving people of the world not to be silent, but to work for the end of all current and future wars. Our silence in the face of this horror causes us to burn endlessly in the fire of war. Let's join hands and rid our minds and hearts – and those of our children -- of the dirty culture of war and killing. Let's

welcome into our countries the refugees of these wars, understanding that eventually, the fire which burns you today will engulf me tomorrow. Let's spend the same energy, time, and money that we sacrifice in wars for power, on safety and prosperity of ourselves and our world. Let's build schools and hospitals, and spend money finding solutions to climate change or eliminating poverty. Let's each of us, wherever we are, try to make the world a more beautiful place for humanity.

My war now is the war of the pen; I fight with my pen for cosmopolitanism. I request to all the peace-loving people of the world that each one of them, with their actions, words, or even with a text like me, try to realize this indisputable human right, which is to live in peace.

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YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

OLIVIA SHELDON AND JESSICA BISBEE

Olivia Sheldon:

On July 11, my friends and I piled in the car to take a trip to Woodlawn Beach just twenty minutes away in Blasdell, New York. Walking through the sand to find a spot for the day felt normal, setting up our blanket and snacks. "Let's go down to the water, it's hot", says my friend. Walking down the water, my friend notices something floating. "It's a big fish!" I say, "Wait, it's a catfish. Wait - it's a dead cat fish". The dead fish, floating along the shore, was not the only one. Soon after taking pictures, the group and I noticed the multitude of fish carcasses and skeletons around our feet and in the back of the photos. We then noticed the kids. The kids swimming with their siblings and cousins and friends. The kids getting so close to the bloated and big fish, avoiding animal-control trying to remove the deceased. The saddest part was not the kids dodging the carcass, but the return to normal conversation and beach games that happened. The picture taking and pointing fingers faded and pressed play on their speakers and into the cooler for another drink - while the kids

played among dead sea life, and whatever bacteria was killing it.

Henry David Thoreau, an author, poet, and philosopher wrote "In wildness is the preservation of the world". In attributing nature and the state of the environment to an equivalent state of humanity, Thoreau's complicated words become fairly simple - the protection of our planet and its abundant resources will be what saves us a human race. With that, the question that lies is -what are we to do about the fish at Woodlawn? Is this even an issue for those around us? For those making laws and policies? The ultimate question reveals itself as what are we going to do about it?

The Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature defines the rights of nature as "the recognition that our ecosystems - including trees, oceans, animals, mountains - have rights just as human beings have rights". Under the rights of nature, it is acknowledged that these ecosystems and all of nature have the right to exist, persist, and maintain their

cycles. This may seem simple in theory - that living ecosystems and organisms should be given and protected, but if it were - would there be an influx of dead organisms at our feet? The topic of climate change has been refused since its origin, arguments posing themselves as 'too complicated' because the science behind climate change and the data used to prove that global warming is happening may often seem too complex. The argument of denying climate change is easier to understand than the complicated scientific theories behind the destruction of the planet. Some may argue that since we have lizards, birds, or beautiful gardens in our backyards that climate change is not visibly occurring to the naked eye. So is it really a problem?

These arguments may seem sound, but there is truth underneath lies and commercial greenwashing that our generation has noticed. In 2015, Greta Thunberg took the world by storm and started speaking out against climate change from a young person's perspective to world leaders. In speaking to the Members of Parliament at the Houses of Parliament in April 2019, Greta reveals "around the year 2030, 10 years 252 days and 10 hours away from now we will be in a position where we set off an irreversible chain reaction beyond human control, that will most likely lead to the end of our civilization as we know it". That timeline to 2030 is now dangerously short - from today,

October 16th 2023, it is 6 years, 2 months, and 15 days away. I share that fear. My peers share that fear. The noticeable difference in September's and Octobers in my home of Western New York over the years of my youth contribute to that fear. The Septembers and Octobers when I used to wear sweatpants under my school uniform shivering at the bus stop to Fall Semester classes being moved locations because it's too hot to sit in a room without air conditioning. The endangered and extinction notices of animals I grew up with or the red fox that now is forced to find his habitat in the school parking lot across my home because their home is being stripped from them. I fear that my kids will grow up in a world without elephants, tigers, penguins, or diverse sea life. I'm not alone in that fear.

Fellow Niagara University students were asked about their feelings on climate change and our current state of the planet, there were varied responses. These responses are represented on the scale below. The first end of the scale exhibits plausible deniability.

"Our climate is fine. Won't matter until my kids' kids."

The next, or middle area of the scale shows the concern with the changing climate, but with a tone of optimism:

"The climate is always varying. That being said, there are actions that do need to be taken to mitigate the impact of humans on our environment. I think climate change

will slightly affect us in our lifetime but not to the point where our generation will be greatly impacted.”

However, the end of the scale represents the fear that Greta speaks to. The recognition of the destruction of our planet, which is why I’m here talking to you today.

“I think the state of our climate now is in disrepair. For this reason, my future as I grow older will look very different from my parents and my grandparents, and will affect my decision on whether or not to have children.”

This end of the scale is where Jessica and I along with my peers who were with me at Woodlawn Beach stand, it is mainly where our generation lives.

These different perspectives on this scale represent the utter truth and confusion that our generation has about the future. The uncertainty that my children will be able to swim in the lakes and oceans. We are living in this confusion and exhaustion, with virtually no way out. The weary predictions that one day soon our water will not be drinkable without harsh filtration are becoming true. The already visual effects of deforestation and corporation infiltration into habitats of species in our backyards happens daily. The effects of climate change and the lack of rights for our ecosystems and its resources such as our drinking water have dire

consequences that are not coming in the future. Rather, they are here, in our lakes, gardens, backyards, schools, and oceans.

Jessica Bisbee:

Pennsylvania is a pretty landlocked state for the most part, but I am fortunate enough to live a short drive away from Lake Erie. My friends and I frequently drive to Presque Isle State Park to enjoy the beach, just like everyone else. But more often than not, there are always headlines on the local news warning people about the state park, saying that certain “parts of the beach are closed due to harmful bacteria in the water,” “do not bring your dogs to Presque Isle State Park because there is bacteria in the water that is extremely harmful to pets,” “people have contracted a flesh eating bacteria after spending the day in the water at Presque Isle State Park.” My friends and other people I know contracted flesh eating bacteria and had other mysterious rashes after spending time in the water, yet the news always says “certain parts of the beach” but is it not all the same beach? Does swimming at the opposite end of the same beach where people contracted flesh eating bacteria really protect me from getting the same bacteria? In previous summers, my friends and I would go to Presque Isle every other week. This summer, we only went once and we did not go into the water because the anxiety of getting some sort of ailment from going in the water is so high.

As time goes on, people are becoming more aware of harmful bacteria in Lake Erie and it is becoming more and more difficult for people to ignore. In December of 2019, the Erie Coke Corporation plant - which "made coke by heating coal in batteries of ovens to burn off impurities and create a fuel source that is used in a variety of industries, including steel mills" - was permanently shut down after discovering that the plant had violated the Clean Air Act for at least four years. The plant was located to the east of Presque Isle State Park. The reports showed that the coke plant had dumped their waste into a bluff that goes directly into Lake Erie. This reckless action that went on for at least four years introduced carcinogens and other toxins into the water. The Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Environmental Protection cleaned up 180 acres of Lake Erie and it cost over seven million dollars to clean it up. But water travels. This was an issue that harmed more than the 180 acres of water that the EPA and DEP cleaned up. Think of all the boats that traveled through that water over four years, the people and pets who swam and ingested that water for four years, the wildlife who lived in that water. If the Erie Coke plant could get away with contaminating the lake for four years, think of all of the other corporations that do the same. And who knows how long these corporations get away with it, because I feel pretty comfortable betting that the Erie Coke plant harmed Lake

Erie for more than four years. Lake Erie does not just affect Pennsylvania and New York. It also affects Ohio, Michigan, and Ontario, Canada. Lake Erie may not be the biggest body of water, but millions of people and wildlife depend on it everyday for survival.

While living in Erie, Pennsylvania, I think about Lake Erie all of the time and all of the carcinogens and dead catfish that are in the water. I think about how all of these different invasive species are infesting the lake and killing off the indigenous species. I think about how I am already anxious about swimming in Lake Erie myself and I think about all of the children who swim in the water, who live in an ignorant state of bliss because they do not know what is really in the water. While the EPA did shut down the Erie Coke plant, I also frequently think about how deeply ingrained corporations are in our politics and how easily corporations can manipulate and sway government officials to benefit them. If corporations can continue to have this much power over our government and if some government officials continue to allow it or not to care about it, who do we have to trust to protect us? It feels as if we cannot trust that our government will set regulations to keep our water clean and protect our environment. It feels as if the government and corporations care more about how much money is in their pockets than protecting their own children. Everyday that passes, we get closer to making climate

change irreversible and who knows what will happen to the world once we get past that threshold. As a young person, it feels like it is up to my generation to fight for the environment because it is the rest of our lives that are at stake. And your generations have failed mine. My generation has to do more because yours did less. We have to grow up with different worries than you all grew up with because our futures are uncertain. You all got to grow up and live the lives you wanted, but people my age have to seriously consider if the place we want to live in will be highly affected by climate change, if we want to bring children into a dying planet because the cost of living is steadily increasing yet the quality of life on the planet is decreasing. My outlook on the future is bleak. But people in Erie, Pennsylvania, Tonawanda, New York, Love Canal, and Toledo, Ohio were able to hold dirty corporations accountable through collective action, and that is the hope that I hold onto.

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International Institute on Peace Education 2024: Nepal

The 2024 International Institute on Peace Education will take place in Nepal from July 21-28, 2024. The Institute is being organized by the IIPE Secretariat in partnership with a network of former IIPE participants in Nepal and various local NGOs, including ASER Nepal (Annual Status of Education Report) and Galli Galli.

IIPE 2024: Nepal will convene educators from around the globe for a week-long, residential, learning community experience in peace education. A rich exchange of peacebuilding research, academic theory, best practices, and actions will be shared by participants from around the world through IIPE's evolving dialogical, cooperative, and

intersubjective modes of reflective inquiry and experiential learning.

Learn more and apply today: www.i-i-p-e.org

Overarching Theme: The Pedagogy and Peace Politics of Change: Navigating the Tensions Between Tradition and Modernity

Nepal today epitomizes a crossroads of transitions and an exchange of knowledge and culture as it did on the ancient Silk Road, a pathway of trade between East and West. IIPE 2024 aims to be a crossroads of *peacelearning* for peace educator-activists and scholars where Nepalese participants will exchange perspectives with global participants on shared, diverse challenges and problems. IIPE Nepal invites questions

that open new perspectives on global and local issues. All participants will offer their experience to the learning community that will build shared understandings towards adapting for the survival and well-being of peoples and Earth in this time of crises. IIPE in Nepal offers a unique opportunity for incorporating ancient wisdom with present knowledge for peaceful futures: how can these ways of knowing be brought together to better educate and learn for peace?

Nepal: Themes & Issues

In the context of Nepal, we'll explore political, economic, and ecological challenges that also exist globally. Nepal is diverse in landscape, languages, geographies, and ethnicities; strivings here offer a microcosm that mirrors global contexts. Nepal, a federated constitutional democracy since 2015, faces pressures of militarism, autocracy, displaced peoples, human rights violations, competition for resources, culture including gender, as well as pressures of global great power dynamics that exist in all present-day democracies. These challenges, like those in the global peace community, raise questions of how to navigate the tensions between ancient cultures and spiritual traditions and the present economic and political pressures of the modern globalized world. (See the country profile for Nepal on "Mapping Peace Education" for additional context and an introduction to historical and present peace education efforts in the country.)

Global Commonalities

At IIPE 2024: Nepal, we will delve into the diverse perspectives of Nepalese and global participants on threats and challenges such as the climate catastrophes that are transforming our geographical landscapes as well as the pressures due to political shifts in great powers that transform the contexts of our realities. These shifts seem to render ordinary citizens helpless. Yet, educating for peace aims to empower citizens to open their minds to the potential of cross-contextual thinking together to generate collective understandings and creative alternative paths for actions.

Invitation to Apply

*The *application* deadline for IIPE 2024 is March 15.

The IIPE invites formal and non-formal educators, students, practitioners, academics, researchers and activists from the fields of peacebuilding, human rights education, international/intercultural/global/global citizenship education, education for sustainable development, anti-racist education, decolonizing education, conflict transformation, community development, the arts, health and faith-based professions, and others with interest in peace education— with all levels of experience - to apply to join the weeklong co-learning community.

The IIPE only accommodates 60 participants. While we would like to accept everyone who

applies, the number of applicants usually exceeds the places at each IIPE.

All potential participants must complete an online application to be considered. Acceptance for participation in the IIPE is based upon the applicant's potential contribution to the goal of developing and strengthening peace education in their local context as well as the host region, and toward developing a more global perspective on peace education among all participants. Additional acceptance criteria will be made available on our application page.

When applying, potential participants are requested to propose plenary or workshop topics related to the frameworks presented above.

Learn more and apply today: www.i-i-p-e.org

“FREEDOM, AIN’T FREE”

SALADIN ALLAH

One of my favorite quotes is from my colleague Jasiah who often remarks, “There is not just one form of resistance, there are many forms of resistance.” In the times of slavery, resistance came in the form of breaking tools, faking like one was injured or sick, destroying crops, poisoning enslavers, rebellions, insurrections, escaping along an underground railroad, etc. Resistance also came in the form of socioeconomic empowerment.

In the mid-1850s, shortly after the passage of The Fugitive Slave Act, a new hotel opened its doors to the public here in the city of Niagara Falls. Its name was the Free Soil Hotel, named after the Free Soil Party; a national political party that opposed the expansion of slavery into the western territories of the United States. Its owner was James Paterson; a formerly enslaved freedom seeker turned entrepreneur who previously worked as a charismatic porter at the world-renowned Cataract House Hotel. He saved up tips for fifteen years before purchasing the Falls Street property and converting it into a hotel. In our local history census records Paterson is listed as owning

an estate valued at \$8,000 in the 1860s. That would be equivalent to over \$270,000 in that time period. Paterson was not an anomaly. His colleague, Lewis L.F. Hamilton, whom he worked alongside at the Cataract House, opened several businesses. One of those businesses was an employment agency right across the street from Cataract House. Hamilton would put ads in our local newspaper for “Hamilton’s General Agency and Intelligence Office” and is listed in the 1870s census record as owning an estate equivalent to well over \$100,000 at that time. You also have John Hunter, a former barber at the International Hotel who was listed in the same 1870s census as a servant working at the Spencer House Hotel who owned an estate valued at over \$125,000. By 1900, Charlotte Washington Dett who was an activist, suffragist, and mother of the famous pianist R. Nathaniel Dett, owned and operated a seventeen-room boardinghouse in walking distance from the Cataract House. Dett’s successful enterprise entertained guests like Madame C. J. Walker, the first woman to be a self-made millionaire, Mary McLeod Bethune, President of Bethune-Cookman College and future cabinet

member in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, Robert Moton, the president of Tuskegee Institute, and Dr. William Pickens, Field Secretary for the N.A.A.C.P. None of these Niagarians were anomalies, nor were they rugged individualists amassing wealth to flaunt in the face of our people. They were community builders who represented a consistent theme of self-determined Black folks living in proximity to, and politically under, white -often violently racist- communities. Demographically, Paterson, Hamilton, Hunter, and Dett were part of a small Black community that was 3.5% of Niagara Falls' total population between the 1850s and 1900s. Based upon the sheer size, the historic "Black Wallstreet" Greenwood District in Tulsa Oklahoma, had dozens of Lewis L.F. Hamiltons. The Hayti District in Durham North Carolina, known as "the Black Capitol of the South", had many James Patersons and John Hunters. Jackson Ward, dubbed "the Harlem of the South", also had a self-sufficient economy and a monumental figure like Niagara Falls' Charlotte Washington Dett; her name was Maggie L. Walker, founder of the first Black and woman-owned bank in this country. So, it stands to reason that with a growing Black population similar to what we have seen across the South, we could have seen even greater economic success right here in Niagara Falls.

Oftentimes when we speak about anti-slavery and the black liberation movement, we fail to discuss their socioeconomic backdrop. Most Black folks can tell you a story about a great-grandparent, a great-aunt, a cousin, or other kinfolk who were formally enslaved, and uneducated, yet came to own acres of land and successfully raise a dozen children with no government assistance. What happened? Another story not far behind it is how those family members were either tricked and/or terrorized to give up that land by white supremacists, who like today, masquerade as Patriotic Americans. I grew up hearing numerous stories about how Black family members were denied employment, restricted from living in certain neighborhoods, denied loans, resources, and public services, and forbidden to attend institutions, enter businesses, or socialize with white people. All because local, regional, state, and federal laws declared us as Black and by proxy, systematically inferior to white folks. To young people today, I am sure this sounds unbelievable. It probably sounds just as unbelievable when I tell them how radio stations refused to play rap music when I was a child and it was often called "jungle music."

These are just some of the transgenerational traumatic odds that Black people overcame, and still strive to overcome, to simply survive and maintain some semblance of sanity in an insane society. A society of American Dementia that denies that its sadistic history

even existed. What we are taught regarding this history, both explicitly and implicitly, is that poverty, health disparities, crime statistics, and lack of education in Black communities are solely because of Black people. Not because in America's 247 years, this country legally denied Black people were human, the right of citizenship, and restricted our ability to socioeconomically participate in this society for 188 of those years or 76% of the time that America has existed. It seems like whenever something is wrong with a Black person, psychology is used to pathologize us, but whenever something is right, we are assessed through a sociological lens. All of this is enough to drive a person crazy! Then imagine going to a culturally incompetent therapist who classifies our inability, over-ability, or outright unwillingness to articulate this racist experience as paranoid schizophrenia or any number of Drapetomania-like mental disorders. And to think, there are people born with the "privilege" of not even having to think about any of this. And now that they are thinking about it because they read this, they still have the privilege to not address it. See how that works? No pun intended.

My heroes and sheroes are not the Black Capitalist celebrities whom the mainstream media would like us to praise for their material gains. I acknowledge, yet rarely celebrate Black firsts. You know, like the first Black MLB player, the first Black Grammy

Award Winner, the first Black Congressman, etc. For many of us, they are just traumatic reminders that they were the first Black people who were not killed [yet] after crossing the alligator-infested mote around America called the color line. I find inspiration in everyday Black folks, doing extraordinary things to quietly build and sustain our communities while finding joy in what it means to be Black and human. From the times of slavery, through generational movements of Black liberation, their acts all distilled in the form of socioeconomic resistance. From the seamstresses and tailors along the underground railroad and the candy lady who sold penny candy out of her home, to the Greenbook Bed & Breakfasts before Airbnb and the green thumb neighbors who created a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) before that was an idea. From the storefront church that served meals for the sick and shut-in, to the barber and hairdresser serving clients in their basements. From the volunteer sports coaches and Big Momma babysitting everyone's child on the block, to the teachers who tutored at their homes, and the children who shoveled our elder's walkways.

Historically, one of the most liberating acts one could perform in the interest of Black liberation is where you put a dollar, consistently. When it comes to white allies, this is also what makes the most cents [sense]. Why? Because freedom, ain't free.



CLEAN AIR COALITION

BRIDGE RAUCH

If I could give young activists one piece of advice, it would be to become involved in movements, not just protests.

While politics and activism has always been a feature in my life due in large part to my mom's progressiveness, I think the first firm memory I have of activism was the mainstream news coverage of the Battle of Seattle in 1999 - images of black bloc anarchists smashing Starbucks windows, with only passing references to the devastating decisions made by the World Trade Organization that brought the 40,000 activists to Seattle to protest, or to the years of movement work that led up to the uprising.

I remember voicing my support for the uprising to family members, and being told that the activists were undermining their message by destroying property. Being only 13, I remember being unable to offer a defense to the activists - but I also recall not being convinced, and became very interested in general in progressive activism and advocacy movements. Within a few years, I would find myself staging a one-

person demonstration against our school district's racist mascot, joining tens of thousands of others in NYC to protest our government's push for an invasion of Iraq, and starting a school anti-hate club.

Unfortunately, none of these efforts immediately had an impact - the club disbanded, I graduated high school with the mascot emblazoned on decor, and our nation's violent militarism utterly devastated the Iraqi people in the subsequent war and occupation. I recall how disheartening these early efforts were, and how demobilizing that helplessness and hopelessness was - what was the point of standing in those cold protests, walking for miles, if it didn't stop our nation from committing such a heinous, indefensible and unjust crime as invading another nation?

With hindsight 20 years later... it is still disheartening and horrifying. However, a lesson I have since learned is that protests alone will never stop our opposition in their pursuit of fascism, authoritarianism, and extractive capitalism, just as hateful protests I

like Charlottesville will never stop us from fighting for justice.

Activism is about so much more than flashy public demonstrations with leaders (sometimes self-appointed) shouting into bullhorns. International uprisings do not spring suddenly from the ether, but from years of quiet work to raise awareness of issues, from failed efforts at reform, and from societal cultural and political shifts that can take generations to reach. The passage of a change in the law may seem sudden, but in almost every instance, it's been workshopped and rewritten dozens of times over years. Activism is almost never West Wing Aaron Sorkin-style speeches in response to an injustice changing everyone's minds, or other cinematic movement moments. It's usually hard, long days spent building movements and developing strategies to address not only the immediate crisis but the underlying injustices that systemically lead to the problem.

This realization led me to my current role as an organizer for the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York. Clean Air started around 2005 when residents in the Town of Tonawanda and surrounding areas just to the north of the City of Buffalo began talking with each other about public health concerns, and organized to identify the industrial sources of their health conditions. This work

was in part inspired by similar grassroots organizing efforts in Niagara Falls a generation earlier in the Love Canal neighborhood, and that work in turn was built from prior decades of environmental justice movements.

Clean Air's philosophy is simple - to win environmental justice and public health campaigns, we must build power by developing grassroots leaders who organize their communities to run those campaigns. A campaign is never about one singular charismatic leader - it's about neighbors finding the leadership skills they each bring and utilizing those skills to work collectively towards a common goal.

Our campaigns start with residents who come to us with an issue they have already begun organizing about - sometimes all residents need is some direction about who to lodge a complaint with, or some strategy tips. For longer campaigns, we work with residents to identify strategy, missing skill sets, and to connect them with needed resources. Our longer campaigns have been re-invented several times over, with residents and organizers who have come and gone and shifts in the goals and outcomes sought - there may never be a big flashy "win" that closes our work out, as we're striving for a progressive vision that is always on the horizon.

We live in an honestly bleak moment of time - I don't believe there has ever been a period in my life where the possibility of outright civil war seemed so close. Climate change ravages communities, and a mix of authoritarian fascists and white supremacists are violently fighting to roll back political and social reforms that we've won not just over the past few years, but over the past several decades.

But I am inspired by the memory of those who have come before me in this work, by those whose company I share, and by the visions of younger generations of the future yet to come - even moreso, I feel driven by a sense of responsibility to those younger generations. We must maintain hope even in the face of the worst adversity, because if we do not, then we are writing off all their dreams and aspirations.

As we look ahead to the rough period we will likely be embroiled in, I am also reminded of all the progress we have made to date, and I feel confident that the backlash we see today are the dying throes of an unjust system - in the words of Ursula K. Le Guin, "We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words."

So, yes, sometimes activism can be an inspiring Sorkin-style speech before thousands at a demonstration that can shift things - but, even moreso, it's conversations we have with our neighbors and the strangers on the bus. It's developing friendships, trust, and learning to recognize each other's strengths over long lengths of time. It's joining groups that work on the issues that concern you, and pitching in on the long grinding work.

Sometimes, revolution doesn't look like smashing a Starbucks window, but instead like a spreadsheet of contacts to reach out to.

(PS! If you want to support or learn more about our work at Clean Air, please visit cacwny.org)

THE THIN BLUE (AND BLACK) LINE: ON THE PERMEABILITY OF ANTIFASCIST-POLICE INTELLIGENCE EFFORTS

MICHAEL LOADENTHAL

I. As Oscar Wilde wrote in 1891 in *The Decay of Lying*, “life imitates art,” and while I do not often consider the painstaking construction of a journal article “art,” the adage still holds some relevant truth. Recently, while putting the finishing touches on “We Protect Us: Cyber Persistent Digital Antifascism and Dual Use Knowledge,” published as part of a Special Issue of the top-ranked terrorism studies journal, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, I reconsidered how my own scholarship had recently become unintentionally reflective of my own lived reality.

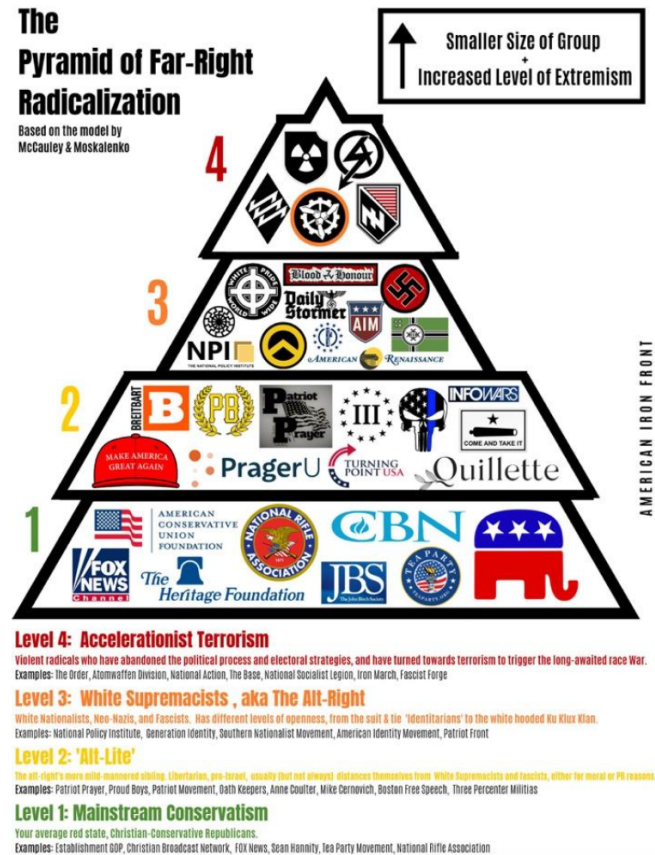
For me, Wilde’s pithy observation rang recurrent in my ears as I sat at my desk, pinned between two monitors—on the left, the copy edits for [this journal article](#), and on my right, an ever-growing list of articles denouncing me as the result of false

reporting by North America’s favorite center-right news network. While the right’s articles’ accusations spanned the gamut—ranging from ‘Michael the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) stooge was weaponized by the Biden administration to attack conservative, Christian America’ to ‘Michael the militant antifa extremist taught children how to doxx’—the sentiment was overwhelmingly and undeniably threatening. The original Fox article spawned several dozen derivatives, each one a bit farther from the truth—reminiscent of the children’s game telephone, where a message is relayed person-to-person until it is unrecognizable to its creator. From there it made its way to cable news, a certain Senator’s podcast, and into my DMs, email, voicemail inbox....

The genesis for this confluence of events—writing and reality colliding—is worth a quick recap.

II. In May 2023, a conservative 'media watchdog group' known for climate change denialism and misrepresenting the January 6th attack on the US Capitol as "99%...peaceful", published a report, rife with mischaracterizations, half-truths, and dubious framing. The authoring organization was described by the Columbia Journalism Review as "just one part of a wider movement by the far right," and has reportedly "posted white nationalist screeds", including promoting an article claiming Black people "are a threat to all who cross their paths."

The report they authored stated that through its "new Freedom of Information Act investigations," the investigators discovered that a DHS grant was being used to "target the entire spectrum of the political right and Christians...as part of a coordinated effort to make America into a one-party system." The Executive Summary states that the "Biden administration is weaponizing a government-funded anti-terrorism grant program in an effort to destroy conservatives, Christians and the Republican Party." A central piece of 'evidence' in this expose was a diagram I had used several years prior during a talk I delivered, on request, for the University of Dayton's Human Rights Center. I had been asked to speak about "my community's" (i.e., anti-fascists') strategic response to white nationalism.



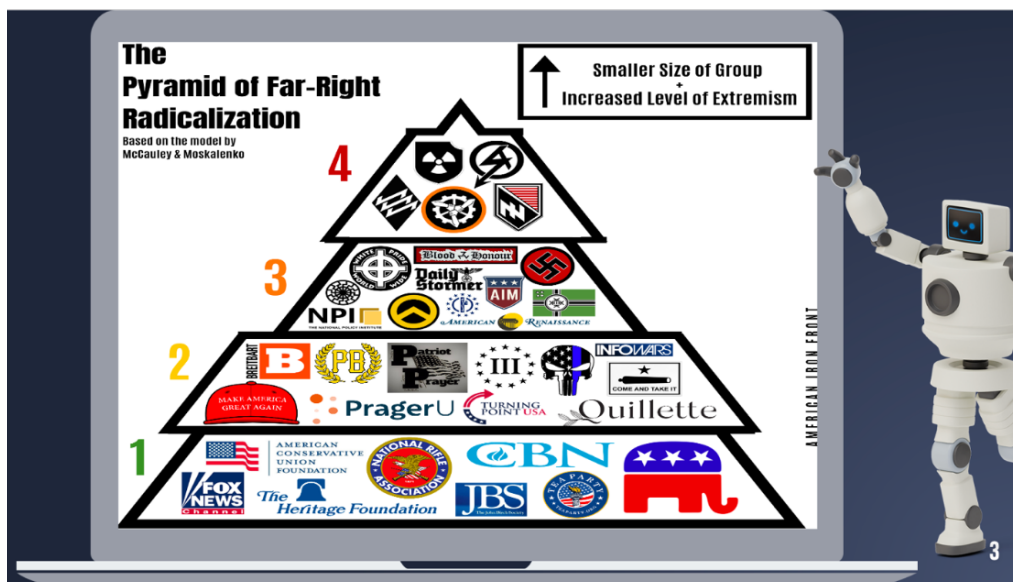
Source: American Iron Front Twitter account (posted 16 August 2019)

Although the slide in question had two separate, plainly visible attributions—one for the creator of the image and one for the academics who penned the theory of radicalization undergirding it—the image was misconstrued as my creation. The chart (shown above) was mischaracterized, as a chart used by DHS and its grantee in a training program [which] equates mainstream groups and militant neo-Nazis."

When examining this claim, it is simply false. The chart was not "used by DHS" nor am I, the person displaying it within the context of a lecture, a "DHS...grantee." Further, the session

was an academic exchange for professional practitioners, not a “training program” for students, and finally, in no way does the tiered image “equate” groups. In fact, even a superficial interrogation of the chart demonstrates just the opposite. The chart communicates that “mainstream conservatives” and (what the chart terms) “accelerationist terrorism” are not the same but rather non-deterministic phases in “far-right radicalization.” The groups at the top—Atomwaffen Division, National Action, the Base, the National Socialist Legion, and the Iron March network—are fed by the groups below, but quite obviously the chart is not meant to imply that everyone who forms the base of mainstream conservatism progresses to terrorism. That would be a silly claim, unsupported by fact, and indefensible in an academic setting.

Any sober, honest evaluation of the image makes this clear. This is precisely why the image is structured as a triangle—as one moves up the shape, fewer individuals are involved. In other words, only a portion of individuals move from tier 1 to tier 2. An even smaller selection moves from tier 2 to tier 3, and so on. If this image was meant to communicate that the mainstream conservatives of tier 1 are the same as tiers 2, 3, or 4 as my detractors claimed, the images would be structured as a square, not a triangle. The decreasing size of the levels is meant to be self-explanatory. It should be noted, lest I be accused of deception, that when I displayed the image, I cropped the colorful text below the chart to make a square image and to fit within the slide deck’s modernist robotics theme (see below), but I explained the tiered system, even voicing my disagreement with elements of the taxonomy.



Source: “Digital Communities of the Modern Far Right: from eco-attack to the embrace of accelerationist collapse,” Michael Loadenthal (delivered 3 December 2021)

While this intentional misunderstanding of the diagram is frustrating, it is compounded by a series of other misrepresentations throughout the short-lived virality of the story: the men sitting next to me are DHS agents, my current affiliation is as an abortion provider, I am lavishly supported by DHS, I am training students to break the law...all said in plain language and all demonstrably false.

The men sitting next to me were professors, an uncontestable fact as the entirety of their remarks proceeded my own in the same video. While I did work as an abortion provider for nearly a decade, that was more than 15 years ago. The event was not in any way funded by DHS, nor did the DHS have any input into my remarks. The event was not a professor instructing students, but rather a practitioner sharing strategies for community-level defense to a room of other practitioners.

III. Returning to where we began, what is the relevance to life imitating art? My central unresolved question recurrent throughout the article is: *What is the relationship between US intelligence/police and anti-carceral antifascists seeking to undermine far-right digital networks?* I argue that since law enforcement routinely scavenges antifascist intelligence products for its own ends (e.g., investigation, prosecution), antifascists cannot continue proceeding with the false notion that they are operating

outside, and apart from the State. If you need convincing, go no further:

- [BREAKING: Antifa Used as Source in Coeur d'Alene Police FOIA Documents after 'Pride in the Park' Arrest of 31 Members of 'Patriot Front' in North Idaho](#) (Idaho Tribune)
- [2 Capitol riot suspects were arrested from online sleuths' info, documents show](#) (National Public Radio)
- [Jan 6 series: How OSINT powered the largest criminal investigation in US history](#) (Institute for Strategic Dialogue)

In my research, I found scores of similar articles, including four from explicitly far-right (e.g., [The American Futurist](#), [National Justice Party](#)) and slightly-less-right (e.g., [Front Page Magazine](#)) outlets. With odd uniformity, nearly all of the articles reached varied versions of the same conclusion, namely that police, prosecutors, and intelligence officials were combing through activists' efforts for their own ends.

This argument was not one forged from an armchair but from my own work as an antifascist investigator outside of law enforcement. I have become increasingly uncomfortable with the frequency in which I see my own work appear in evidentiary records and the commonality of requests for information sent from federal intelligence officials. Even though intelligence-police

official and antifascists may find themselves on the same side of the us v. far-right seesaw, no one seems comfortable with the current ambiguity.

I wrote the article to try and make sense of this increasingly entangled assemblage. I wrote to try and identify the location of the red line demarking a weaponized civilian engaged in crowd-sourced policing. I wrote to explore what this unintentionally-shared moment means for those engaged in this work. I wrote to try and make sense, and in the process of doing so, discovered even more nuance and complexity than I had originally predicted. This process was made more difficult by my own predicament—being accused of acting as a State agent when in fact I was not. This conflation of roles spoke precisely to the tension I had identified; the poorly-delineated siloing of the State and non-State.

As I investigated this issue, I found more and more evidence to support my conclusion. In the post-peer-review revision stage, months after the article has been written, I came upon a large cache of leaked far-right communications, and within that trove, found additional confirmation of this discourse playing out in the encrypted chats which form the communication bodies of the modern far-right. I saw agitprop stickers supporting my thesis, and a host of anonymous individuals and organizations

parroting the claim on Telegram, Tam Tam, Gab, and elsewhere. Then, more than a month later, while I was completing the final pre-publication copy edits, the crosshairs encircled me, and for a short while, I became the focus. Not only did this public harassment drive home the words of Mr. Wilde, they demonstrated in no uncertain terms, that whether the product of confusion or intentionally-mischaracterized defamation, for mainstream conservatives as well as the rightists who sent violent, antisemitic, homophobic, and (oddly enough) transphobic threats to me in response, for a seemingly growing community, there is little to no difference between antifascist activists and State intelligence agencies, despite neither community sharing much in the way of affinities.

When I began writing this article in August of 2021, I had assumed that engaging US cyber defensive measures with antifascist deplatforming politics would arouse controversy, but after I saw the parallels, I could not unsee them. In seeking to make sense of all this, I am reminded of the words of Kurt Vonnegut, who in *Mother Night*, warned that given time, “we are what we pretend to be.” While I certainly do not think that antifascist researchers are pretending to be cops, I wonder—Does this symbiosis we find ourselves immersed within amount to an unwitting civilian security force; an unintentional, unacknowledged, unpaid

internship functioning as hobbyist intelligence agents?

When writing [the article unpinning this essay](#), I had assumed scorn would come my way, but expected it from my own community of antifascists whom I've organized and sacrificed with for more than two decades. I had thought that I would be accused of some manner of proto-State conspiracy for problematizing the separation between police and activists. I did not consider that those roles would be conflated by my opponents, and that I would become the target of harassment and threats because of an ill-conceived, intentionally-deceptive blending. I felt prepared to deal with my detractors, but had not properly anticipated who they would be.

Maybe I am just yearning for a simpler time—a time before the civilianization of deplatforming and before the January 6th riot ushered in a new era of crowd-sourced policing. Maybe I am simply seeking to return to a time of more stark contrast, or as my favorite Canadian antifascists [once sung](#): “I’d rather know my enemies and let you know the same—whose windows to smash and whose tires to slash, and where to point the f**ing blame.”

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TEACHING LOVE CANAL'S ENDURING LESSONS

LUELLE N. KENNY AND KEVIN A. HINKLEY

Love Canal began as a utopian dream. William T. Love arrived in Western New York with a plan to create a Model City “free from defiling vapors” (quoted in Jenks 2011, p. 44). According to Love’s plan for Model City, propelled by “the late wonderful advance in electricity and by the aid of our limitless water power, we can heat and light our city by electricity and operate our factories by water power, in an atmosphere of ideal purity” (quoted in Jenks 2011, p. 44). Love planned to dig a canal, five miles long, connecting the Upper and Lower Niagara River and bypassing the “legendary cataract” at Niagara Falls (Jenks 2011, p. 44). Love’s canal would feed an artificial waterfall carved into the Niagara Gorge, generating “immense quantities” of hydroelectric energy, powering the “industrial ‘megalopolis’ to the north called Model City, which Love convinced the New York State Legislature to charter as his own personal company town” (Jenks 2011, p. 44). “No skill, art or effort will be spared to make it the most beautiful city in the world,” Love proclaimed, “a monument to the progressive

spirit of the age—to the genius, goodness and greatness of the American people” (quoted in Jenks 2011, p. 44).

The company Love founded to bring his vision into reality, the Niagara Power and Development Corporation, began to dig the five-mile canal Love had envisioned, starting from the Upper Niagara River and moving north (Jenks 2011, p. 44). When the national economy fell into a depression in the late 1890s, Love’s venture collapsed (Jenks 2011, p. 44), and Love fled town ahead of his creditors (O’Brien 2022, pp. 29-30). Left behind was a partially dug canal 3,000 feet long, 60 to 80 feet wide, and 8 to 16 feet deep (United States v. Hooker Chemicals & Plastics Corp.).

The abandoned canal “was embedded in an area of orchards and farms, watered by [streams] and creeks stemming from the Niagara, in the pastoral village of LaSalle, to the east of the city of Niagara Falls” (Levine 1982, p. 9). Love’s canal filled with water, and for decades afterward residents “swam and fished in the canal during the summer and

skated on it in winter” (Jenks 2011, p. 44). In May 1927 the city of Niagara Falls annexed the village of LaSalle (Levine 1982, p. 10).

In the intervening years the burgeoning chemical industry had come to Niagara Falls, attracted by “cheap” and “abundant” electrical power (Levine 1982, p. 9). In 1905, Elon Huntington Hooker, an engineer from Rochester, founded the Hooker Electrochemical Company, which began operations in Niagara Falls, manufacturing chlorine and sodium hydroxide, also known as caustic soda or lye (Levine 1982, p. 9). Hooker Electrochemical Company was just one of the major chemical companies that built plants in Niagara Falls and the surrounding area: others included Carborundum, DuPont, Olin-Mathieson, and Union Carbide (Levine 1982, p. 10).

In 1942, Hooker began dumping chemical wastes into Love’s abandoned canal, a practice that it would continue for the next decade (Levine 1982, p. 10). “Hooker company officials considered the old canal an excellent dump site; it was large, lined with walls of thick, impermeable clay, and located in a thinly populated area where zoning regulations did not prevent waste disposal” (Levine 1982, p. 10). Between 1942 and 1952, Hooker dumped more than 21,000 tons—42 million pounds—of chemical wastes in the canal (Levine 1982, p. 10).

More than 200 distinct chemical compounds have been detected at Love Canal (Jenks 2011, p. 47). The toxic stew includes chemicals that are lethal in the event of acute exposure and highly carcinogenic even in minute concentrations. And these deadly chemicals are present in enormous quantities, including 13 million pounds of lindane, 4 million pounds of chlorobenzenes, and 400,000 pounds of dioxin (Jenks 2011, p. 47). Additionally, “[t]he U.S. Army contracted with numerous metallurgical companies in the area to produce chemical weapons and weapons-grade uranium for the Manhattan Project”—and hazardous wastes from production of these weapons, including radioactive materials, wound up in Love Canal (Jenks 2011, p. 47).

In 1953, with Love Canal nearly full, Hooker covered it with topsoil or clay and sold it to the Niagara Falls School Board as part of a 16-acre parcel for the token price of one dollar (Jenks 2011, p. 48; Levine 1982, p. 11). “Hooker’s lawyers inserted a clause in the deed that exempted the company from [liability for] any health damage resulting from use of the land and it warned the school district that the soil should not be disturbed,” although the reasons for this warning were left vague (Jenks 2011, pp. 48-49). “Seemingly oblivious to these warnings, the school district built a new school directly on top of the canal” (Jenks 2011, p. 49). The school district “then sold unused land to real-estate developers, who in

turn sold tracts for new housing” (Jenks 2011, p. 49). “As the years went by after the school was built, modest two- and three-bedroom homes went up, with backyards bordering the lands extending from both sides of the canal” (Levine 1982, p. 13).

Meanwhile, Hooker prospered, growing from \$19 million in sales in 1945 to \$75 million in 1955, and then to \$1.7 billion in 1978, employing 18,000 people worldwide, with its corporate headquarters and largest of 60 manufacturing plants in Niagara Falls (Levine 1982, p. 9). Hooker was later acquired by Occidental Petroleum Corporation (often referred to by its stock symbol, “Oxy”), the multinational, vertically integrated oil and petrochemical company, which today has a market capitalization of \$53 billion.

While legal, political, economic, and social forces combined to set the stage for disaster, geological, hydrological, and meteorological forces—environmental realities—ultimately brought the buried wastes to the surface. Residents of Love Canal discovered to their horror that they were living on top of a chemical waste dump, and the chemicals were leaching into their homes and yards and the fields surrounding the neighborhood school (O’Brien 2022). Thus Love’s canal became Love Canal—“the American dream turned into a suburban nightmare” (Jenks 2011, p. 45).

“The Love Canal story,” as Lois Gibbs wrote, “is about a thousand families who lived near the site of an abandoned toxic chemical waste dump” (Gibbs 2011, p. 19). But it is more than that. Love Canal is a story of technological hubris, environmental contamination, and the “perils of progress” (Jenks 2011). Love Canal is a story of how utopian dreams can descend into dystopian nightmares (Jenks 2011).

Love Canal led to the enactment of CERCLA, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, better known as the “Superfund” law (Lazarus 2006, p. 108). And Love Canal would become the nation’s first Superfund site. So the story of Love Canal is a key chapter in the making of modern environmental law.

For those who lived it, Love Canal is also the story “of how we, ordinary citizens of the United States, can take control of our lives by insisting that we be heard” (Gibbs 2011, p. 19). Love Canal thus marks a turning point in the environmental movement in the United States and around the world.

The Love Canal story, we contend, remains relevant—indeed, essential—for understanding environmental issues, environmental law and policy, and environmental activism today. As educators, we have endeavored to teach the lessons of Love Canal. And our teaching has gone beyond the classroom, as we have taken students to Love Canal to walk the

abandoned streets, to see the so-called containment zone, and to hear Luella's story (Hinkley 2023, p. 48). We share part of Luella's story here, as an example of environmental activism through teaching.

Luella's Story

My world and the direction of my life changed dramatically in 1978. Up to that time, I felt that I had achieved my life's dream. I had a college degree, which I thought was an accomplishment for a woman in the 1950s. My family, career, and singing in a chorale were the center of my life.

The nightmare began in June 1978 when my seven-year-old son, Jon Allen, was diagnosed with minimal lesion nephrosis, an immune-response disease. The summer of 1978 went by with my son in the hospital and doctors' appointments when he was not in the hospital. I was told that Jon would outgrow the disease. He died on October 4, 1978.

Without warning I became a grieving mother trying to protect my family from the chemicals that were taking over my backyard, where my children played. My house was in Love Canal, the neighborhood in Niagara Falls where—unbeknownst to the residents—more than 21,000 tons of chemicals had been buried. The chemicals began to migrate through the residential neighborhood, seeping into our homes and

causing illnesses, miscarriages, birth defects, and deaths. Suddenly I was an environmental activist, along with many of my neighbors.

For the next two years our lives were consumed with the campaign to convince the government to evacuate us. A group of ordinary citizens fought and succeeded in persuading the government to purchase these houses and we were evacuated. Our grassroots campaign inspired people around the world to demand environmental action. Forty-five years later I am still an environmental activist, and I continue to try to help other grassroots groups that are facing the same problems.

The morning of my son's funeral a front-page story in the *Buffalo Courier-Express* reported that the New York State Department of Health was going to investigate Jon's death because it was unusual for a seven-year-old to die from his illness. My husband and I were scientists, and we decided to research Jon's illness so that we would be knowledgeable to discuss the state's findings. Much to our dismay we found several articles in medical journals describing exposure to chemicals as a cause of minimal lesion nephrosis. After months of waiting to hear from the Department of Health I approached Dr. David Axelrod, New York State Health Commissioner, at a public meeting and asked him about the status of the investigation. He informed me that the department had

thoroughly investigated Jon's death and that I should contact his office so we could meet.

I finally met with Dr. Axelrod in June 1979. On the day of the meeting, he walked into the office and told me, "you have to stop flagellating yourself and go on with your life." He went on to say that the children of Love Canal did not have kidney disease, but instead ruptured their kidneys while playing football.

In preparation for my meeting with Health Commissioner Axelrod I read my son's autopsy report, a deeply painful experience for any mother, and learned that he had no thymus gland. Dr. Axelrod told me, "you don't need a thymus gland." I responded that the thymus gland was in fact needed for a seven year old to develop a healthy immune response. Clearly, Jon Allen, who was the only one of my children born at Love Canal, had no immune response. The Health Commissioner's cavalier attitude, together with the mountain of lies we were fed by officials at all levels of government, was what made me an environmental activist. The powers that be, who were supposed to be responsible for protecting the people of New York, simply did not care about helping the residents of Love Canal live in a safe environment.

Countless times state officials told me to move back into my house because it was safe. At the same time my husband's cardiologist warned that we should not be in that house because my husband's heart condition was deteriorating due to chemical exposure. For over a year and a half we were vagabonds, living at times in a hotel, or with my mother-in-law, or in military housing at the Niagara Falls Air Force Base. My house was burglarized six times. Thieves even took our regulation pool table; I still don't know how they got it out the door. At this point the only thing I valued was my family.

We were a group of mothers trying to protect our families. We were derided as "hysterical housewives." But we would shrug off the insults and endure any hardship in this fight for our lives. Along the way we were offered what I called "lollypops" intended to make us act like good little children and be quiet—or better yet, go away. I have always considered the so-called investigation into Jon's death one of those lollypops. We had one goal in mind and that was evacuation, and we would not settle for less.

Unexpectedly, I found myself swarmed by media and constantly being asked to tell my story in interviews. I was even the subject of a PBS documentary. I never knew when I would be home; frequently, I would get a phone call and I was off to Atlanta, New York City, or wherever else I was needed. The

whole world was interested: I gave interviews to Swedish and Japanese reporters and even spoke to the BBC. I received a letter from a friend in Japan saying he saw my name in the newspaper in Japanese characters.

In 1980 I was invited by the Interfaith Council on Corporate Responsibility to be one of the speakers for the corporate-responsibility resolution that was on the ballot at Occidental Petroleum's annual shareholders' meeting in Beverly Hills, California. Armand Hammer, Occidental's legendary CEO, controlled the meeting as he controlled everything and everybody. We sat for what seemed like hours watching home movies of Hammer greeting heads of state. Hammer always arranged for the shareholders' meeting to be held on his birthday, so that at the appointed time a squadron of little old ladies could run up to the dais, cake in hand, to wish him a happy birthday. He had very little time for the resolutions and simply brushed speakers off. The first speaker was able to read one paragraph before getting cut off. I went up next and was able to read my whole five-minute speech. Hammer then told me to "go back to Buffalo," not even realizing that Love Canal is in Niagara Falls, a thirty-minute drive from Buffalo. Hammer said that President Carter had just declared a federal emergency and Occidental "was not responsible" for what happened. Later, Occidental was found legally responsible in the many lawsuits that were filed, including

an action by the U.S. government to recover cleanup costs.

Following our prepared speeches, we scrambled for microphones. Another speaker tried to warn shareholders that Love Canal was only the tip of the iceberg, and that Occidental had other toxic waste sites in and around Niagara Falls. He was physically dragged out of the meeting hall. I was in the rear of the room, and Hammer didn't recognize me at first, but as soon as I said a few words he yelled, "you are determined for publicity." Before he cut off my microphone, I was able to shout back, "I am determined that no other child will die because of corporate irresponsibility." Hammer then said, "you're lucky you're not a man or I would have you thrown out too." I said, "go ahead and do it, I'm not going to stop speaking as I'm dragged out." I've never stopped speaking about Love Canal and the dangers of corporate irresponsibility.

The EPA hostage-taking (1), President Carter's emergency declaration, and the Occidental shareholders' meeting were all happening at the same time. Reporters from national and international news organizations descended on Niagara Falls. And the next day my family was scheduled to go to New York City for the Polish Singers' Convention. My husband and I sang in choral groups for many years, and I maintain that singing was the best therapy for stress and an indispensable source of

comfort during this chaotic time. As we checked into the hotel I found that there were many notes from media waiting for me, requesting interviews. While my family was watching the show at Radio City Music Hall, I was giving an interview on the phone in the lobby. While people were dancing at the Convention's ball, I was back in the hotel room doing another interview.

Our goal to be evacuated from Love Canal was finally achieved in early 1981. But I had adopted the mantra that I was determined that no other child would die because of corporate irresponsibility. This is my mission in life, and it has sustained me for the last forty-five years as I continue to speak out about the dangers of exposure to toxic chemicals and to give tours of Love Canal. I have talked to students from elementary school to college and graduate school, and to church groups, environmental groups, and book clubs. Speaking to students is especially important to me. They are our future, and they need to know that exposure to chemicals will destroy future generations. Children in Flint, Michigan, and across the United States suffer from lifelong intellectual disabilities because of lead in their drinking water. Untold numbers of children are born with severe birth defects because they were exposed to chemicals in utero. The U.S. Supreme Court either doesn't understand these tragic realities or doesn't care as it renders decisions preventing the EPA from

regulating clean air and water. So much for respect for life.

In addition to teaching and mentoring students, I have visited grassroots groups across the country to help them navigate the bureaucracy, and I have marched with them in protest. I have served on two environmental boards, written innumerable letters, served on a mock court, and given numerous interviews to all forms of media. I have kept fighting.

Love Canal is still there—the 21,000 tons of chemicals are still there—surrounded by a chain-link fence with a sign indicating only that it is “private property.” The Love Canal Superfund site is covered by a clay cap and is monitored by a subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum: the proverbial fox guarding the henhouse. There are no signs or warnings referencing Love Canal—the world's most notorious toxic waste dump. The surrounding neighborhood has been renamed “Black Creek Village” and a playground has been erected just yards from the fence surrounding the Superfund site. Unknowingly or unbelievably, mothers bring their children to play on the playground in the shadow of Love Canal. While leading tours I've seen pregnant women and young children at the playground, and I shudder knowing that pregnant women (and fetuses) and young children are the most vulnerable to chemical exposure.

In the 1990s one section of the area formerly known as Love Canal was declared habitable, and many homes were resold. The remaining section was declared uninhabitable. And while a handful of holdouts chose to stay in the uninhabitable zone, their homes were never to be resold. Recently, however, several of these homes have been resold without disclosing that they are in Love Canal (McKinley 2023). History repeats itself and the fight goes on.

Several years ago, I was on a panel for an EPA conference. During a preparatory session I was told by the EPA representative on the panel that I was discussing history and there was no time for history. I replied, that attitude is the reason we keep making the same mistakes. I still have hope, and I see the pendulum swinging in the right direction.

My advice to the next generation of activists is just this: never give up and continue to fight. It's not easy, but it is so rewarding. I can't bring Jon back and the ache in my heart is always present, but I can save other children from the same fate.

Notes:

1. After the release of an EPA study showing high rates of chromosomal damage among residents of Love Canal, members of the Love Canal Homeowners Association took drastic action, holding two EPA officials as "hostages" for several hours.

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“STRENGTH COMES FROM THE PEOPLE:” SUSTAINING ACTIVISM AND THE ARTS IN YOGYAKARTA, INDONESIA

SHELLY CLAY-ROBISON

“Come hang out with us and you will see how we deal with all this anger and violence,” laughed an Indonesian artist engaged in environmental and human rights activism, when I asked him how he copes with the frustrations and hardships that can come with activism. The goal of this essay is to highlight the ways in which some socially-engaged Indonesian artists and activists care for themselves and their communities so that they have the physical, emotional, and mental energy to engage with social movements for the long haul. While this work focuses specifically on Indonesia, another hope for this piece is to spark ideas and discussions for activists and socially-engaged artists around the world and to ask readers: How might you incorporate your cultural traditions into your own activism?

The Context in Indonesia

In the mid-1960s, Indonesia experienced a mass atrocity event that is unofficially referred to as the 1965 Mass Killings. An estimated 250,000-1 million people associated with communism, women’s rights organizations, ethnic Chinese, leftist artists, authors, playwrights, and activists were imprisoned and tortured without trial and many were killed by the Indonesian army and civilian death squads. In the three decades that followed, the Orde Baru (New Order regime) led by President Suharto, was authoritarian in nature and gave voice to the political and economic elite while working to hush dissenting thought, resistance, and activism. Yet during this oppressive regime, and beyond, artists and activists developed ways to continue their work supporting progressive social movements.

My ethnographic work with artist and activist communities in Indonesia began in 2018 in the “arts capital,” Yogyakarta, locally referred to as Jogja. Initially, I worked with artists and community members who focused on the 1965 survivor movement. Even decades later, this community, along with their family members, still experience the stigma and threats that come from their political status. Activists and artists work with this community to uplift and help remember their stories, to support them financially and socially, and to prevent future violence through education. Because 1965 set the stage for three decades of authoritarian rule where the government prescribed a patriarchal and conservative way of living, I also seek out the activist and artistic work in the feminist and women’s rights movements and the environmental movement.

In this context, socially-engaged artists are exposed to stories about the trauma of torture, imprisonment, and death from the 1965 mass killings. They are also operating in a context that prioritizes economic development and corporate interests over human rights, and corruption. They conduct arts-based workshops in communities experiencing illness from environmental pollution. They engage with issues of gender inequity in the home and in society and gender-based violence. Sometimes they are the ones who are threatened with censorship or even direct violence for engaging with

these themes and issues. In spite of this, many socially-engaged artists I worked with are also deeply empathetic and feel the pain experienced by the individuals and communities they work with. It is no wonder that I heard expressions of cynicism, exhaustion, and frustration with the movements and causes themselves, the socio-political climate, but also with fellow activists and socially-engaged artists. How then, are they continuing their work in such a context?

Beyond Concepts of Burnout and Resilience

Discussions around burnout and how to be resilient during difficult times are commonplace in many fields from corporate to activism to education. Burnout is considered a state of physical and emotional exhaustion that can leave a person or team feeling negative and incapable of moving forward with their work. Often, the answer presented to this is building resilience or adopting behaviors that promote physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual positive health. There is important work addressing exposure to trauma, burnout, and mental health in human rights advocacy. There is also recognition that the human rights advocacy space in general is in need of mental health systems, supportive communities of practice, and funding for these activities. In the references section,

there are several articles and books that readers may find useful.

It is also important to look to local communities and investigate how they are already doing this kind of restorative work through cultural traditions. Many of the artists and activists in Jogja have worked in social movements for decades and I wondered how they maintain their energy and dedication to issues that can feel insurmountable and in contexts that can be frightening and exhausting.

Engaging with the Pain of Socio-Political Issues

Not all artists engaging with social issues see themselves as activists. In fact, some of them are adamant in telling me they are not activists. They express that the goal of their work is not to specifically influence political or social change. But their work has the potential to influence worldviews and encourage audiences to question previously held ideas about political positions, gender, and social inequity nonetheless, and so in this way, it may encourage social change.

The artist Entang Wiharso interacts with the socio-political conditions in Indonesia and while his work is not activist in nature, he does investigate humanity's ability to perceive multi-layered social conflicts. His paintings and sculptures are vivid, large, and complex. Over espresso one afternoon, he

described to me how people like his mother, who come from small or rural communities in Indonesia, where there is little access to art like his, may have trouble interpreting complex works like his. Late one evening, Entang's mother visited him in his studio. He often works late into the night, and she came up quietly behind him and asked, "Aren't you tired?" She was not asking about physical exhaustion and the late hour, she wanted to know if he was tired and sad from the subject matter and the issues he deals with in his work. Why would he choose to make the work he does when he could choose something less painful?

Entang likens his work to that of a religious person whose purpose is to talk about social issues. This is why he wanted to become an artist, he felt an obligation to his community. Instead of making him tired, it makes him happy because that is how he engages with difficult and complex social issues. But Entang's mother was always concerned for her son and she worried about his exposure to and engagement with difficult socio-political issues. She was perhaps worried about her son's mental health. And rightly so, constantly thinking about, worrying about, considering, and investigating issues like poverty, violence, discrimination, and inequality can take a toll on a person. This is something audiences around the world might ask of Entang and those like him as well. Why are you engaged with politics and

social issues all the time? Don't you want to be happy? Many activists and socially-engaged artists in Jogja do not see their work in terms of this happy-not happy binary, however. They see injustice in the world and they must engage with it through art and activism in order to process through the anger, frustration, or sadness.

Committing to the Movement by Committing to Yourself

Syafiatudina, who goes by Dina, is a member of the research-action collective KUNCI. She is a writer, curator, and organizer who has worked as an activist in a variety of social movements. At the beginning of the Covid pandemic, she dedicated most of her time to organizing an emergency action network that supported communities experiencing food and resource insecurity. In situations like this, when she realizes that she is dedicating an abundance of time to one of her three professional identities, she knows she needs to pull back and give time and energy to the others so that she does not lose herself. And if she loses herself, it is harder to continue activist work. Dina explained further,

"I've worked in social movements for a long time and sometimes I just get so tired and I get angry. I get angry at rich people. I get angry at the government and sometimes I'm like, 'Should I give up? How do I do this? How do I keep going?' But I never stop. Although, some people might say, 'Dina isn't very active anymore' or 'We haven't seen her in a

meeting for a while.' But actually, it was because I took time to be involved in different spaces. I know my limitations. But I think strength also comes from the people that I meet and are connecting with in the community. The stories that they tell me, the stories that we exchange are important. The most sustained political space that I'm involved in is the social movement contexts where I can be open and vulnerable, but also where I can have the community to hold me accountable for our shared values. Sometimes it's not a big space, it's 3 or 4 people. It keeps me going."

Dina finds ways to honor the multiple aspects of her life and treats herself humanely so that she can continue working for justice in her community.

Connecting With Each Other's Humanity

In a rural village in Sukoharjo, about 40 miles east of Yogyakarta, residents experience a variety of illnesses due to a rayon factory that pollutes their air and waterways. In July 2023, I was invited to join an environmental and solidarity festival there. I joined a group of artists and activists who work with this community to educate the public, to engage in protest and resistance against corporate power, to strengthen community bonds through live music, to share food and communal artmaking, and to socialize. I was told that I was the first foreigner to visit this village and I was nervous about the implications that my presence could cause. When I arrived, the sun was blazingly hot, I

was exhausted from traveling, and I knew my white skin color drew attention to myself and away from the festival. My Indonesian friends apologized for all the selfies people wanted to take with me, but after community members became somewhat used to my presence, the women there pulled me over to their spot on a mat under a large tent. We shared snacks and tea and they each took turns sitting next to me, holding my hand, and asking me questions about my family while I asked about theirs as well. One woman in particular sat with me and maternally patted my back, while she told me about her life and the experiences of her village. "Please don't forget me when you leave. Please remember me. Remember us." I was overcome with emotion and promised that I would not forget her or the stories she told me while we held hands.

I had not expected to connect with someone in such a way. It was a common, every day interaction, but it was also a deep connection for people who live worlds apart. Artist Fitri DK, who works tirelessly with communities like this around Indonesia, confirmed the power of these kinds of connections in activist work. Sometimes it's the children she is able to connect with first, their curiosity and openness create opportunities for play and interaction. They giggle as they help her create a woodblock printed t-shirt or paint a wayang kardus (cardboard puppet) to be used later in a protest or demonstration. The

children run home then to tell their mothers and fathers and eventually the adults slowly begin to engage. She has moments where community members experiencing social, environmental, or direct violence build trust, rapport, and connection with her. She told me that these moments recharge her batteries and help her stay committed to this work. It is not that the work is no longer hard or exhausting, but the sharing of experiences, of emotions, and deep connection between humans, no matter how fleeting, can be sustaining and can be drawn on in moments of despair or frustration. It is necessary then, in order to have these experiences, to be with a community. To stay, to listen, to engage, and to weather discomfort.

***Nongkrong*: Hanging Out With Purpose to Build Trust**

Indonesian culture often makes it easy to stay and engage through the concept of *nongkrong*. Artists Rangga Purbaya and Sirin Farid Stevy created "Faith in Speculations," a mapping project that documents the oral histories of 1965 survivors. These stories run counter to the government's official narrative and seek to resist political and social oppression experienced by survivors. I asked Rangga how he and Farid find people to contribute stories and he proudly and joyfully replied,

“By *nongkrong*, of course! In Indonesia we have this activity, *nongkrong*, it's like hanging out with people for no reason, just hanging out for no purpose. You just be together and talk about life, jobs, and you're just doing nothing. This is how we get trust with each other.” They go into neighboring cities or communities and stop in a small food stall on the street and then start talking with people. Sometimes to the owner or just people lingering after a snack. They will sit and make small talk for a while and then they start testing the waters about 1965. Many times, people have stories to share. “

Humor and having fun together are often elements in *nongkrong*. While these elements may seem commonplace, unimportant, or just people hanging out, they are quietly significant to the health and longevity of a movement. Participants actively build trust and connection with each other but also with the communities they work with as well. This is not to say that *nongkrong* as a concept is utopian in practice. Several female activists and arts-workers questioned who *nongkrong* was for in some spaces. Women do not always feel safe and sometimes experience harassment or sexual assault in some gatherings. Other times, they feel ignored or pushed to the periphery. In movements that tout equality and upholding human rights, it is especially important to consider group power dynamics and practicing these very values. Importantly, some women create their own spaces and opportunities for *nongkrong*

where they work to stop the replication of oppression and violence.

Sumsuman: Celebrating Collective Activism

During Summer 2023, I was invited to *nongkrong* with the artist collective, Taring Padi. It was a chance for the collective's members to get together and socialize and to include members who live abroad but who come back to visit Jogja during the summer months. To an outside observer, the event looks like a typical social gathering with family-style Javanese food and tea to drink. We sat on the floor and shared plates of home cooked food, while children filtered in and out, people laughed and chatted with each other, and quiet sounds from the forest filtered in. I sat next to my friend and artist Fitri DK and commented to her that it was nice to see the collective's members gathered together for *nongkrong*. She agreed that *nongkrong* is part of it, but clarified that the purpose of this gathering is also styled after the Javanese concept of *sumsuman* which is like an after party or a gathering of specific inner circle members after an event. This custom originated as a tradition after wedding ceremonies and celebrations to recognize the end of the work or event planning done by the neighborhood team of people who helped with the wedding. Traditionally, there is a special dessert porridge dish served called *bubur sumsum*, which is where the concept gets its name.

But in this case, Taring Padi used the concept of *sumsuman* to bring the artists and activists together to celebrate the activism projects they had been working on all year around the world. This very purposeful event was about tending to relationships and keeping the social ecosystem healthy and strong. We rejoiced in each other's company, but through this cultural event, we were also reminded that we belong to something beyond ourselves: to a collective, to a movement, to a cause, to each other. This reconnection and bond strengthening coupled with family, friends, food, and fun, helps to keep activists committed to each other and to a movement while refueling them through difficult times. In Indonesia, being an activist is not just an individual identity but also a collective one. It makes sense then that part of that identity includes collective restoration.

Conclusion

I am incredibly lucky that conducting fieldwork in Indonesia also provides the opportunity for building friendships, which is my own source of restoration. One such friendship is with Vivi, director of Jakarta Feminist. Her dedication to the global and local feminist movements is inspiring, but it is not without hardship. She is regularly harassed and faces verbal violence both online and in person, so I asked her how she copes with it. "Dogs and cats are mental health helpers! But at the beginning when I

did this activism, I thought I had to be 'on' all the time. But then, I read bell hooks and Audre Lorde and they say that rest and self-care is resistance. So, I release my stress by cooking because there is pounding of the meat or stabbing a vegetable! And I pretend I'm pounding the patriarchy!" Humor is certainly a means of restoration, but Vivi was tending to the physical body is as well. Readers may be interested in the book *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* and its accompanying podcast *Feminist Survival Project*, by Drs. Emily and Amelia Nagoski, which are referenced below.

The socially engaged artists and activists I worked with in Jogja strive to commit to more than just social justice. They make an intentional commitment to themselves as individuals, to each other and the groups they work with, and to building community in an intentional way through their cultural traditions and celebrations.

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LOVE CANAL

EMMA COOK

Love Canal. Sounds like a wonderful place. I mean, love is in the name so it must be nice, right? Wrong. Search Love Canal in your local search engine and you'll be met with headlines that read 'tragedy', 'environmental disaster', 'public health time bomb', etc. You won't be met with a canal like that of the Erie Canal. In fact, it was a scene of one of the worst environmental tragedies to ever occur in the United States. Now, if you were to visit the site of the Love Canal today, you'd think I was making up a story. You'd see nothing but stretches of grass fields surrounded by lines of wiry looking fencing. It's a sight I personally have especially easy access to. For all my twenty years on this Earth, I've maintained residence only about a half of a mile from the notorious Love Canal. I've ridden my bike, walked with my mom, taken my dog for walks etc. past it. For most of my life I wouldn't give it a second look; I was completely unaware of the tragedy that took place there. Once I learned about it at school and from my mom, it induced some fear. A younger me was asking my mother, "Am I going to get cancer, Mom?" and "I'm still going to be able to have kids, right, Mom?". Despite the Love Canal not being an active

issue, it raises alarms that a young child would even have to concern themselves with. I should've been worried about my homework or what videogames I was going to play, but instead I was worried about infertility and an illness. The citizens of Niagara Falls who resided around the time of the disaster shouldn't have had to worry either.

The origins of the disaster started with William Love, who the canal was named after, proposed to build a canal in the late 1800s that would provide cheap hydroelectric power. The project was ultimately left incomplete due to issues with currents. Between 1942 and 1953, Hooker Electrochemical Company saw an opportunity to dispose of their waste. They dumped over twenty thousand tons of hazardous chemicals at the incomplete Love Canal. These chemicals were Dioxin, benzene, chloroform, and other PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). Those chemicals would seep into the soil and groundwater which would be the spark starting a much larger fire down the road. After the dump site was covered, Hooker sold

the land to the Niagara Falls Board of Education for a deal of a whopping one dollar and a clause that released them from being liable for any issues that should occur in the future. The Board of Education made the deal with intentions of building a school on the property.

Yep. You heard right. A school. A place of education for children. Right directly on top of a hazardous chemical dump site. It's hard to decide which is worse: Hooker not caring what happens in regards to the site because it wouldn't be their legal responsibility any longer or the Board of Education knowing full and well they were buying a plot of land used for waste disposal and still planning to build a school on it. After the completion of the 99th street school, another school was built on 93rd street along with a number of homes in the surrounding area of the site. The homeowners who bought these homes were completely oblivious of what was underneath the site. The parents that sent their children to these schools unaware their children would be frolicking the halls built on chemicals. All was seemingly well until the 1960s and 1970s when citizens started to complain about putrid odors and strange substances coming to the surface in their yards, playgrounds, and basements. The health effects ranged from increased reports of stillbirths and miscarriages, birth defects, liver dysfunctions, epilepsy and more. The complaints were adding up so the EPA and

NYSDEC investigated and soon after President Carter put out an emergency declaration. Immediate cleanup was employed and almost a thousand families were evacuated and relocated in a certain radius to Love Canal.

The most vital player to this story was a Niagara Falls citizen, Lois Gibbs. Gibbs wasn't anyone of notable position or status; she was merely a concerned citizen and mother of a sickly child. She went straight to the school board with recommendations from physicians that her child transfer schools. The school board was in fear that if they were to allow her child to transfer then other parents would follow suit so they denied the transfer. Lois was outraged by this response from the board and in turn gathered with other parents to discover their children were experiencing health issues as well. It expanded into a discovery of a community wide problem. Lois headed a movement of parents in the Love Canal Parents movement and other Niagara falls residents in the Love Canal Homeowners Association to demand action. A ten foot wall was built around the site and the government bought a couple hundred homes to attempt to ease the situation. The lack of substantial action angered the citizens due to no one really knowing the extent of the effects of the chemicals, still residents left living near the site, children and people were sick and dying. When the EPA had significant findings of

chromosomal damage and links to cancer, Gibbs took matters into her own hands. She held two EPA agents hostage in her home for approximately six hours. Her demands were that the government relocate the hundreds of families that lived in close proximity to the Love Canal. Within two days, the government agreed and relocated the families. Lois and the Love Canal Homeowners Association eventually obliged President Carter to declare a second emergency declaration to relocate the remaining families. Gibbs and the other residents struggled for three long years to demand rightful action to extreme wrongdoing. Without the determination and relentless activism of Gibbs and others, the Love Canal disaster would have continued to wreak havoc on the health of the Niagara Falls community surrounding the site.

This disaster left an impacting legacy but also leaves a lesson and harsh reality. This level of environmental disaster could happen at any time and any location in the world again. As a person in the younger generation, I can say honestly that I am scared shitless. The government's disregard of the citizens' health and outrage for action back in the 60s was a foreshadowing of how they are today. There is no regard for human life in the environmental issues we experience. We, as a human population, are dealing with an overwhelming amount of environmental issues already with climate change and the irreversible damage of that as my classmates

talked about earlier today. Scientists worried there would be another Love Canal, but what they fail to realize, we are Love Canal. The governments have already failed us. Rising temperatures, unwavering carbon emissions, deforestation, toxic air and too many more to count. We are living in not just the greatest environmental tragedy in the U.S, but the greatest environmental tragedy to ever see this planet. My generation now must fight to hold the government accountable and we don't have three years to struggle over local issues anymore. But, I and I believe millions of other young persons like myself, want to take a page out of Lois Gibbs book. I may not necessarily want to hold government agents hostage like she so boldly did, but I'm ready to take it straight to our governments at every level.

GROWING POLITICAL ACTIVISM: ONE JOURNEY

VICTORIA ROSS

Let's define activism as being a change agent. Being a change agent came naturally to me, mostly because my older sister was a paraplegic. Doing things for her and acting on her behalf, with a deep awareness of the inequity so present in our lives and our world, made me more of a "do-er". Our younger brother and sister's coming along made me even more of a helper, key for supporting our mother. Being a generally high-energy person added to that drive to make things better for people.

Our father was a German Jew, a Holocaust survivor who was run out of Munich, Germany in 1933 as a 15-year-old. A rebel, he'd: beaten up a Hitler Youth leader; refused to Heil-Hitler when receiving a prize at his school's Sports Day; pointedly held up a Zionist newspaper in the front seat of a bus; whistled a different tune, digging his hands into his pockets while his class sang a Nazi anthem and some on each side repeatedly pulled his hands out. He became a kibbutznik in then-Palestine and eventually

joined the British Army to fight the Nazis. Justice and integrity was paramount to him.

Our mother was a peacemaker. She applied for early admission to Swarthmore College, the Quaker school, knowing in adolescence where she wanted to go. She would go to any lengths to get people to end a conflict and make peace with each other.

My political awakening occurred gradually. I understood there was a big world out there from an early age, due to our dad's being "a foreigner" and a frequent world traveler. War, injustice, racism, and the international arena loomed large in my mind, as did compassion and the need to help each other.

That compassion which inspires political activism drove my work in every arena (in turn nurses' aid, paralegal, banking, and social work/mobile therapy) even though I was not yet politically active; while I was increasingly alarmed by national politics. My older sister became active in disability and access issues.

And from 1989, my younger sister was a political activist, intent on justice. However, I was afraid if I let more of the political issues in into my brain, that I would never have any peace from worrying about it. Turned out, happily, I was right.

My entry into real political activism came during the first 9/11 anniversary, with the U.S. immersed in a drumbeat to war on Iraq. This was obvious manipulation, with the media featuring propaganda and the government warped by ulterior motives. I was in a performance art piece in Scranton in which I played a Woman In Black (WIB). This is when I first heard of the group, started by Israeli and Palestinian women who banded together to stand on street corners in silent vigil with signs about stopping the violence. They didn't want to lose any more family, friends, community members. (We have a chapter of WIB in Buffalo, meeting every Saturday Noon-1pm at Bidwell & Elmwood. Sign are on hand and all are welcome!)

I was eager to do what I could to stop the misguided, disingenuous march to war. I could see that George Bush and the neo-cons were angling for more money for Halliburton and other war profiteers. It was also a means for giving the executive branch the increased power and popularity attainable by a "War President," allowing suppression of our civil liberties on a new scale (all as specified in "the Project for a New

American Century"). It angered me so much that I almost signed up to be a "human shield." However, as I explored it, I wondered whether we might be "human magnets"; George Bush et al might have found it highly convenient if peace activists could be quickly disposed of, while in a war zone.

If I'd signed on as a human shield, I would have met Kathy Kelly and other Catholic Workers and international peace activists a bit sooner. Having been ready to risk my life, going all out for local and regional peace and political activism seemed the least I could do. And so I did – fielding and publicizing antiwar activities from Wilkes-Barre, PA, to Binghamton, NY, to Sullivan County and even NYC and DC on occasion. Activism became my passion and my obsession. I spent virtually all my time (when not working as a mobile therapist) agitating against war, then for impeaching President Bush (after two stolen elections), and, as I prepared to move to Buffalo, against fracking. (Susquehanna County, where I lived, was the hub of U.S. fracking activity.)

I worked for the WNY Peace Center (WNYPC) from 2008, teaching "Peaceful Conflict Resolution" through experiential learning, and doing community-building work. I quickly saw that extreme racism and economic injustice were deeply entrenched locally, and I've always believed in the adage, "Think globally, act locally."

The WNYPC had traditionally been an antiwar, antimilitarism group. It was started in 1967 as part of Rev. Dr. King's Clergy and Laity Concerned [about War]. The WNYPC has a history of working hard against nuclear weapons, for "Peace through Justice at home and abroad" (its mission statement), and working in the schools helping to spread peaceful conflict resolution skills. I proudly continued that work. However, the WNYPC was a mostly white, middle class group, despite stellar intentions and being located deep in Buffalo's East side.

In the community building work I did, I concentrated on being a good ally, and getting involved in our local racial, criminal justice, economic, educational, and environmental issues. It seemed an important part of our evolution to a higher level in serving the local community. That has been key to much of my work there, including later as Executive Director (2015-21) and Board Chair (2022-current). The interns, staff, board members, and membership have become more diverse by race, ethnicity, gender and age.

My stepping aside in 2021 so we could hire our then-Office Manager, lifetime Buffalonian Activist Deidra EmEl as Executive Director was a big step forward. It was clear to me, that position needed to be filled by someone with more experience of marginalization than I have, and Deidra doing a wonderful

job, serving the community and following the principles and the spirit of Peace through Justice so desperately needed now. She has focused on education, especially of children and youth, and on having people tell their own story. She's worked on peace on all the levels, including sharing mind-body skills for our own self-care (also key to activism!). Her "grace and dignity ... moral integrity and universal solidarity," in the words of Dr. Cornel West, make her the leader we need today.

Kathy Kelly has also had a great influence on me and my activism. She is a person of great compassion, clarity, and courage. She's been arrested more than 60 times, and has been jailed in the U.S. for protesting. She has fearlessly stood up to the U.S. war machine, to the drone program in particular, and worked tirelessly for children and all others in harm's way in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and Gaza. I first met her in Scranton, PA, at a Fellowship Of Reconciliation event, and we stayed in touch.

Following Kathy's lead, I joined her in becoming one of Hancock 38 in April 2011 in Syracuse. This was civil resistance - an attempt to get the U.S. government to follow the law (rather than civil disobedience - i.e., breaking an unjust law). Our die-in and resulting arrests was useful in awakening the U.S. populace to the dangers and illegality of the U.S.'s drone program's extrajudicial assassination and terrorizing of communities.

I was arrested yet again the following year outside Hancock Air National Guard Base. Putting one's body and freedom on the line puts our activism at another level (although due to the grave risks involved, it should always be part of a well-thought-out plan).

Integrity and consensus are required to make necessary changes for genuine justice and to grapple with the challenges we face. Governmental push to control, intimidate, incarcerate, and even kill has gotten the lion's share of resources (locally and nationally), while nurturing, educating, healing, and fulfilling basic human needs subsist on bake sales. We struggle to make sure that people and the planet are put first. That will take communication, cooperation, and, when the powerful won't cooperate, courage.

Political activism is a call to the heart of those who feel deep compassion and commitment to the well-being of the majority, and who also see it will benefit us all to do so. The arenas and opportunities are many. And never give up on someone's becoming a political activist just because they're not there yet. You never know when a small chink will appear, opening the floodgates of a lifetime obsession with working for the common good. Onward!!



REMAINING SILENT IS NOT AN OPTION: AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN MAVROUDIS

INTERVIEWED BY GABRIEL ERTSGAARD

John Mavroudis is the co-creator of three New Yorker covers including the 5th Anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. It was named Cover of the Year by the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) and named one of the 10 Best Covers of the Year by *Advertising Age*. He won his second Cover of The Year award for his 2018 typographic portrait of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford for *TIME* magazine. His cover portrait of Joan Didion for *Alta* magazine won the 2020 Los Angeles Press Club National Arts & Entertainment Cover Art Award.

Various other work includes multiple covers for *The Nation* magazine, over two dozen posters for the legendary Fillmore series, dozens of posters for Moonalice, and the 60th Anniversary poster for the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in Greece. He has created work for his hometown teams (San Francisco Giants and the Golden State Warriors), and recently completed a limited-edition typographic portrait screenprint for the brand new Bob Dylan Center in Tulsa, OK

GE: You're known for your magazine cover illustrations on political topics, and especially for your text-based portraits. What led you toward this type of artistic work?

JM: I've wanted to be an artist since I was a kid. My uncle was an artist, and I always liked looking at his work. I used to trace comic books and practice drawing on my own. I was also interested in politics from an early age and started doing political cartoons for my high school newspaper. When I went to college, political cartooning was basically my sole interest. I was very lucky that we had a paper where the publisher wanted cartoonists to have free reign. I was getting outraged about everything – some of which, looking back, might not have been so big a deal. But there was still stuff that I think holds up.

From there I learned to draw on the computer and tablet. I started working on film and music posters, but mostly I did illustrations for all sections of a local newspaper. Still, I was always sending out ideas to either the *New Yorker* or *The Nation* magazine. I did some work for the *New Yorker* where they paid me for just the ideas,

not the artwork. Then in 2009, my political big break came. I sent *The Nation* a cover illustration idea about Obama being inaugurated by Thurgood Marshall while surrounded by Civil Rights figures from throughout history. *The Nation* wanted it. That was a pretty intense drawing. There were over 60 historical figures that surrounded him. That got a lot of good response.

I did a couple other covers for *The Nation*. One was on the US torture in Iraq. Then in 2016, I was really exercised about the idea of Donald Trump becoming president. I decided to make a portrait of Trump with basically every word that I thought applied to him. That took me a few months to do, and when I was finished with it, I submitted it to *The Nation*. They ended up running it as the cover of their election special issue in November. I still think that's one of the best things I've done. I'm not Nostradamus (and you didn't really need to be to see what kind of personality he was), but I think every word I put on there holds up.

A couple years later, I got a call from *Time* magazine to do an illustration in the same type of style. I call them typographic portraits – where you fit different words and phrases together like a puzzle to form the image. But you also want to be able to dive deep and have it be something that you can look at

multiple time and get more out of. I did one for Christine Blasey Ford when she was testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee for the Kavanaugh nomination. I did a couple other covers for *Time* as well, but those were the big landmarks for my career.

GE: Our theme for this issue is “activism.” What are your thoughts on the relationship between art and activism?

JM: For me, it's in the DNA. Now, not everything I do is political. I love doing music posters. I'm working on a series of songwriter typographic portraits. But I think it's a lost opportunity when artists won't comment on what's happening in society. There are a lot of artists whom I admire just for the beauty of their work, but my favorite artists made statements one way or another. I'm a huge fan of Francisco Goya because he had his portraits, but he also had his *Disasters of War* series and his Black Paintings. In his own way, he was a political artist. I don't think it's strange at all to reflect on what I see, since that's a big part of my being. Especially in the time of Trump, I don't know how people can remain silent. I think the parallels to 1930s Germany are too stark. If I'm wrong, then at the end of the day, good! I hope I'm wrong. I hope nothing horrible happens. But we've already seen a lot of horrible stuff happen. To remain silent in these times is not really an option for me.

GE: Could you talk a little more about your typographic portraits? What does this type of visual wordplay offer to an artist-activist?

JM: I'm pretty opinionated. One of the good things about that style of art is that you can put extra things in there that you otherwise might not. I've seen some pretty devastating political portraits done by masters like Ralph Steadman and Marshall Arisman. They can do a political cartoon or illustration which is completely devastating to the intended victim. I really admire that. Sometimes I can come in the general zip code of something like that, but my style is a little bit different.

Since I can be verbose (sometimes to my own detriment), I'm able to think about a portrait and what words it needs. The simple thing would be to just call a bunch of names, but I try to put some thought into the words that go into the portraits. The beauty of a typographic portrait is that you can actually say a lot through the position of a particular word, or by making an especially applicable words stand out more than others. Hopefully, when I'm done with a piece, if someone has a question about it or wonders why I used a certain word, I can back it up with all the evidence that is necessary to defend that word choice. The more you read about certain situations and see parallels in history, the more you want the art to reflect that. You want it to be a little deeper than just a mean

portrait and have something that will stick like a tattoo.

GE: How does the interplay between art and commerce affect the choices you make? How does that impact art as activism?

JM: At one point I was doing design work for a couple different places. Although I got to work in the field, I couldn't really be a voice for anything. But even when I was doing that kind of work, I was still submitting my ideas to publications because I needed an outlet for my feelings. If you said, "You're going to do this job, and you'll never be able to comment on what's going on in the world," I would find that difficult. I would feel like a caged animal at that point. One of the things I'm pleased about is that if somebody picks up an idea, usually there's not a lot of editing that goes on. Sometimes there is, but most of the art directors I've worked with have been really amazing about not defanging the point of the illustration.

I've also been lucky to find patrons. There's a venture capitalist named Roger McNamee, and he's in a band called Moonalice. He's given a lot of artists opportunities to do artwork for their concerts. In 2023, I felt really strongly about the Tyre Nichols situation where he was beaten and killed by police in Memphis, Tennessee. Roger gave me a call and said, "If you want to do something, let me know, and I'll help you publish it."

I've never been good financially. It's never been my strong suit. I've been basically paycheck to paycheck, or trying to find work where I could get it. A lot of the ideas that I have I'll bank and maybe use them later. If at some point I can get paid for an idea, that's fantastic. It's tough, and it's certainly not just me. There are a lot of artist who are doing wonderful work, and they're juggling multiple things to make a living. You can just add me to the can of soup of artists who are like that.

WESTERN NEW YORK AND THE NEW WAVE OF LABOR ORGANIZING

DEREK SEIDMAN

Western New York is a union stronghold. Around 23.5% of workers in the Buffalo Niagara region are union members. As the rate of union density has declined in the U.S. and even in New York State as a whole, it climbed over three percentage points in the Buffalo area from 2021 to 2022.

The region has a strong institutionalized labor movement. The Western New York Area Labor Federation represents 165 unions with 140,000 members across five counties in the region. The annual Labor day parade in Buffalo is a huge event. In recent years, homecare workers have unionized and nurses waged a successful major strike. From auto to telecommunications, construction to grocery stores, labor unions are entrenched throughout Western New York.

But the big story in the Buffalo area over the past half-decade -- and the local story that has had truly national repercussions for labor -- is the rise of a new, bottom-up unionism, led by a layer of young and militant worker-

organizers, that has swept through the coffee service industry and is spreading to other sectors.

Democratic and worker-led, this wave of new unionism has gained its greatest fame by kicking off the historic and ongoing union drive at Starbucks, a global corporate behemoth that is the eighth biggest private employer in the U.S.

The emergence of this new unionism has been driven by a network of radical activists, including a fresh generation of "salts" who took jobs with the intention of organizing their workplace. They have been supported by steeled advisors like Richard Bensinger, the former organizing director for the AFL-CIO and founder of its Organizing Institute. This new union wave has found a home within Workers United, a plucky affiliate within the mammoth Service Employees International Union.

There was promise and excitement when, around a decade ago, the Fight for \$15 ascended in New York State. In Buffalo, the campaign took off, gaining a foothold in several fastfood shops, especially a downtown Wendy's. But while the Fight for \$15 campaign was arguably victorious in New York State in terms of the wage demands, fastfood workers remained almost entirely unionized.

The half-decade from 2015 to 2020 saw a major politicization of thousands of young people. Those years witnessed two Bernie Sanders presidential runs, the 2020 uprisings after the murder of George Floyd, and the explosive growth of the Democratic Socialists of America. Meanwhile, many so-called millennials saw futures that promised mostly endless student debt payments, rising rents, and precarious work.

Amidst this conjuncture, a new organizing boldness emerged in the Buffalo area around a very specific sector: coffee shops. In 2019, workers at SPoT Coffee, a local chain well-known to many Western New Yorkers, decided to unionize. Some were inspired by the 2017 example of Gimme! Coffee baristas in Ithaca, just over a two drive from Buffalo. The SPoT union drive, affiliated with Workers United, reached several stores in Buffalo and Rochester.

But SPoT was just the beginning. Several veterans of the SPoT union drive were on the ground floor of efforts beginning in 2020 to organize Starbucks. According to Labor Notes, "Buffalo Starbucks workers, including several who had helped organize SPoT Coffee, started talking about organizing early in 2020. They reached out to Workers United and gradually formed a committee of about 50 workers from almost all of the 20 stores in the area."

For example, Jaz Brisack, who had become a "protege" of seasoned organizer Richard Bensinger, and who would emerge as perhaps the most visible figure of the Buffalo Starbucks union drive, had worked on the SPoT union drive with Workers United before getting a job at Starbucks in Buffalo with the intent of organizing.

Brisack was among at least ten "undercover activists," wrote *Bloomberg* reporter Josh Eidelson, who "landed jobs at Starbucks cafes in the Buffalo area, where they quietly laid the groundwork for the first successful organizing campaign among the company's US employees in decades."

The Starbucks union drive in Buffalo, which stretched across several stores in the area, immediately captured national attention, but few expected the initial spark in Western New York to transform into a blaze that engulfed the nation. As of late November 2023, 463

Starbucks stores in 46 states have filed for unionization.

None of this could have happened without the example that Buffalo baristas established. With inspiring boldness and media saviness, they punctured the seeming invincibility of a corporate giant and modeled what a new wave of store-by-store, worker-driven unionization in the service sector could look like. For radicalizing young workers across the nation, the model was irresistible. With stores across the U.S. reaching out to Starbucks Workers United's Buffalo headquarters, it spread nationwide.

Behind the scenes, Buffalo area baristas and organizers cultivated and supported a growing number of worker leaders to spread the union drive far and wide. As labor scholar John Logan wrote, the success of the Starbucks campaign "was always dependent on the dynamism of rank-and-file worker-organizers," with Bensinger, Brisack, and others "mentor[ing] and support[ing] worker-organizers in other coffee shops, primarily through Zoom."

A critical thing that continues to drive Western New York's new wave of union organizing is the growing layer of seasoned organizers -- the region's own "militant minority" -- who have accumulated experiences and lessons that they can pass on to others. Through world-of-mouth, criss-

crossing employment patterns, and shared social circles, they find each other.

For example, workers at the iconic Buffalo food shop Elmwood Taco and Subs, who announced their union in October 2023, were supported by Workers United organizers who themselves had been Starbucks workers who organized the first wave of union Starbucks stores in Buffalo. ETS workers also had friends at the Lexington Co-op, a grocery store down the street that unionized in 2022.

This self-reproducing network of organizers, ranging from salts to the newly converted, and committed to worker self-organization, has not just kept Buffalo and Western New York's new union movement growing, but spread its influence nationally.

The union surge has not been without significant challenges. Starbucks has used its billions in revenue to engage in a truly epic union-busting campaign. Because of this, a first contract still eludes Starbucks Workers United. Many of the early leaders of the Starbucks union drive have been illegally fired. A union drive at the Buffalo Tesla plant fizzled out. Tensions exist between Buffalo's old guard of labor leaders and the new generation of Wobbly-style organizers.

But the new wave of labor organizing continues in Western New York. Elmwood Taco and Subs workers won their union in

November. And workers at the city's flagship art museum, the Albright-Knox, are unionizing with -- who else? -- Workers United.

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FREEDOM COMES AT THE COST OF ACCOUNTABILITY

KARTIKA CARR

"Forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?" - bell hooks

The first time I recall processing internal accountability was when I found myself in a situation pointing my fingers at others, during a critical time in organizing, but failing to hold a mirror to myself. Where was my compassion even when I disagreed with strategy in social movement spaces? Will I have forgiveness if the outcomes the community wants aren't achieved in the way I believe they should be? And how will I hold myself accountable to my values during the process? Thinking back into my call to activism work, it truly came naturally. I was always advocating for myself and the people around me regularly. I never thought of myself as an organizer or an advocate during this time, I was just doing what was fair and

just. Even during elementary school I found myself getting phone calls home because the teacher treated someone wrong and I felt the need to say something. I never understood why I felt like I had to, it just always felt like it aligned with who I was and ultimately who I was becoming.

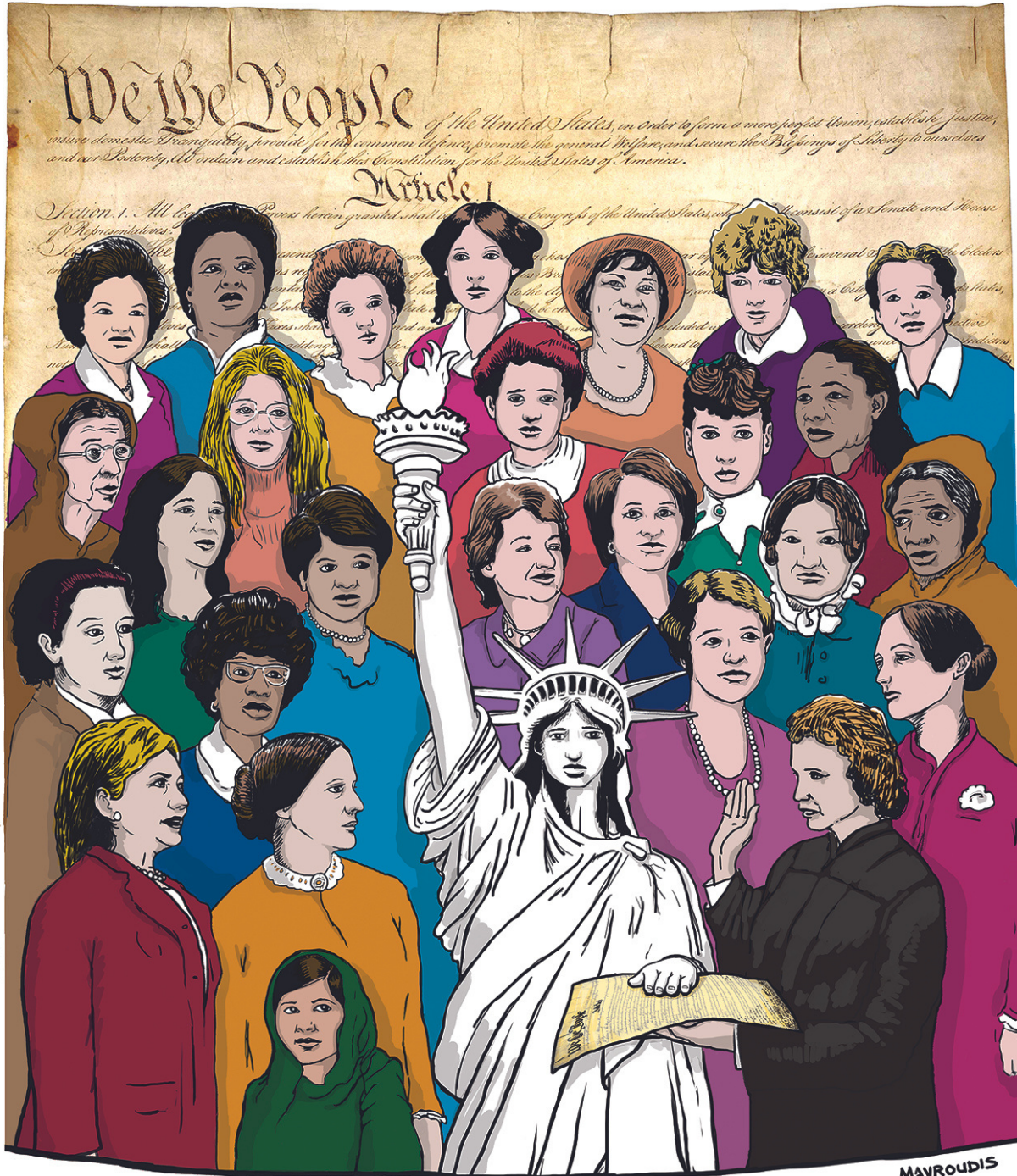
Speaking out can be scary. Sometimes, it can be down right dreadful. When the internal disruption happens it can trigger the whole fight or flight response. For me, it was always the need to do a quick assessment and then to fight. I think that brief internal assessment was actually my core telling me to be accountable. In those moments, I had a line of questions for myself; Do you see what is occurring? Does it sit well with your values? And If it didn't, what was I going to do about that? And I would spring into action. Sometimes it was just a need to point what had been done or said out, sometimes it led to further discussions, and there were even times where I would throw my physical body

in between folks, to protect someone more vulnerable than I. It was like I felt the need to be Wonder Woman and throw my cape on and go. Accountability, no matter where I was or who I was with, my values led me to act.

I believe that the work that we do here for our communities should be rooted in revolutionary love but in order to truly move the work forward we must continually come back to ourselves and evaluate our purpose in doing this work. This type of love of self and others that causes us to act unapologetically, boldly, and with pure intentions. Accountability is the sibling in that. Not just when the crowds are watching, but also in one to one conversations with our peers. In social justice spaces, we do a lot of what we call one to ones which are meetings with others to get to know their self interest and how we may align. There are also times where it is needed to meet with people we may necessarily not align with at all, including people in power. During these times, it's very easy for folks to put on performative acts and forget the purpose of why we are showing up in these spaces. Fear sometimes lead us to not show up as bold as we should. We get lost in being in rooms with people in suits, with titles, and resources that we forget that we are leading with revolutionary love and we must be accountable to our people and not waiver in these spaces. And in many cases we forget to

hold ourselves with a standard of integrity and accountability.

Oftentimes I get posed the question of how do we activate new voters, new activists, new bases of people to mobilize, and honestly it is beyond just being strategic during polarizing moments. It is really about finding the thing that connects people to their core values and giving them tools to help them stay accountable to themselves. We can hold meetings and use tactics at the center of them, but if a person isn't going to be rooted in their own level of accountability and alignment that won't work either. If the goal is collective liberation, rooted in revolutionary love, accountability serves a meaningful purpose in the work we need to do. The fight towards freedom will be won at the cost of accountability and we have to start with the internal work first. It is going to take a radical shift in how we organize moving forward to stand firm in this believe which is subsequently rooted in our values. But what will our community look like if we don't?



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ART IS MY WEAPON

MIKE KLEIN

We must envision our work as a creative act, more akin to the artistic endeavor than the technical (Lederach, 2005)

During Panel 5C “Peacebuilding and the Arts” at the 2023 PJSA Conference, participants explored integrating art pedagogies into peacebuilding by making art together. The session began with these instructions:

- Create a swarm of insects for an art installation with .38 caliber shells, wire, pliers, cutters.
- Use wire to explore different sizes, forms, variations on the theme with legs, wings, stinger/proboscis.
- Express emotion, meaning, intentions, impressions



As participants were busy making art, I presented a case study – Art is My Weapon – and an approach to integrating art pedagogies by considering tensions between structure and freedom.

Case study description:

Art is My Weapon MN is a 501(c)3 that aims to use art and creativity to spark social change. We hosted a gun buy-back in the Twin Cities. Supported by the Minneapolis Police Department and The City of Minneapolis the weapons were decommissioned and distributed to Minnesota artists to create statements about the impact of gun violence in our community. We have been able to engage the public, community leaders, organizations, elected officials, the media, etc. in respectful nonpartisan conversations around gun violence that ultimately lead to greater public awareness, conscientious community action, and responsible solutions to reducing gun violence (Art is My Weapon, 2023).

Addressing art pedagogies, we examined a broad concept related to creating the conditions for collaborative art, the tension between pedagogical structure and freedom. When there is less time for the art intervention and/or less artistic experience in participants background, more structure in the activity is required. In our session, we had only fifteen minutes and limited knowledge about the artistic background of participants, so the activity was highly structured. The instructions were very prescriptive, the context for the project explicit, and the end result carefully defined. With more time for artwork and more experienced artists, structure might be minimized, and freedom expanded to allow for more creative expressions within a theme or development of a shared vision.

For the PJSA Conference session, the end result was a collaborative installation or assemblage addressing guns as a root cause of a public health issue, grounded in the seemingly sacrosanct second amendment of the US Constitution.

The number 2 is constructed of solid steel and bolted together in a rather permanent form. Yet it suggests that the constructed might be deconstructed or otherwise constructed as is the case with even foundational legal precedence. Suspended from the 2 is a handgun, reconstructed to convey the form of an insect. Around it hang



Disease Vectors from 2, Mike Klein and peace studies collaborators © 2023

smaller insects made of .38 caliber shells created during the PJSA Conference and during an undergraduate Justice and Peace Studies course at the University of St. Thomas. These insects and the title of the piece reference the public health concept of disease vectors:

Disease vectors are organisms that can transmit infectious diseases between humans... Many of these vectors are bloodsucking insects, which ingest disease-producing microorganisms during a blood meal from an infected host and later inject it into a new host during their subsequent

blood meal. The burden of these diseases is highest in [urban] areas and they disproportionately affect the poorest populations. Major outbreaks have afflicted populations, claimed lives and overwhelmed health systems in many [communities]... Distribution of vector-borne diseases is determined by complex demographic, environmental and social factors... re-alignment of vector control programmes is required, supported by increased technical capacity, improved infrastructure, strengthened monitoring and surveillance systems, and greater community mobilization. (World Health Organization, 2020)

This work was exhibited in an Art is My Weapon group exhibition called "Beauty from Ashes" on November 4-11, 2023 at Nine Mile Gallery in Edina, Minnesota. Typically our exhibitions happen in the predominantly Black and economically struggling neighborhood of North Minneapolis that is plagued by gun violence. This time the show was in a predominantly white and wealthy suburb, bringing the conversation to a new audience, through an approach I have heard described as "inclusion through disruption" (Rea-Fisher, 2020). Due to the tireless work of curator and Art is My Weapon Executive Director Nikki McComb, the exhibit was covered by five local news outlets, expanding the audience significantly.

To follow up on this work, Mike and Nikki will teach an undergraduate seminar in Spring 2024, "Making Art for Social Justice." This topics course in Justice and Peace Studies will focus on making and reflecting on art as the primary learning assessment, complemented by the writings of scholars, activists, and artists. It will conclude with a student-constructed art installation exhibited on our campus, and in an Art is My Weapon exhibition in June 2024.

I am grateful to all who participated in our PJSA session, to Justice and Peace Studies students, and for the peace studies practitioners who make room for creative peacebuilding through the arts.

What we cannot imagine cannot come into being (hooks, 2018)

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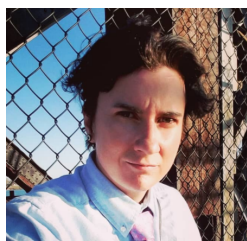
CHADWAY ADDRESSING VIOLENCE

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CONTRIBUTORS



Dave Reilly is chair of the Political Science Department and Director of International Studies at Niagara University. He is the faculty union (NULTA-AAUP) president, and is a faculty co-advisor for the Center for Justice – a program that fosters student engagement in justice initiatives. These include supporting migrant populations in WNY; student-led initiatives for diversity, equity and inclusion on and off campus; and fighting environmental racism. He has served as faculty advisor for a variety of student organizations including the Black Student Union, the Club for Animal Rights Education and Sustainability, PeaceAction Network, and Model UN. In addition to taking students to Cuba to learn about revolutionary politics, Ireland and Northern Ireland to learn about conflict resolution, and Puerto Rico for disaster relief, he has been responsible for Niagara University's Social Justice Speaker Series, a compilation of activists, educators, and resisters across a spectrum of political and social issues. His research centers on the rise of the surveillance state in the US and activist responses to recent strategies of government repression, and the new space race and coordinated assaults against commons globally and galactically. Outside the academy, Dave is co-founder of the Citizen Coalition for Wildlife and Environment, a non-profit that protects and educates about wildlife and habitat, and runs a nature center on Grand Island with his wife and muse Nicole Gerber. He currently serves on the PJSA Board as Co-Liaison to Activists and as Conference Co-Chair.



Bridge Rauch, they/them, has been an Environmental Justice Organizer at the Clean Air Coalition of WNY since 2021, and they have lived on Buffalo's West Side since 2009. They have a master's of Regional Planning from SUNY Albany and have volunteered and worked extensively in Buffalo's non-profit sector, including at The Service Collaborative of WNY, Preservation Buffalo-Niagara, and the Coalition for Economic Justice, where they currently serve as a board member and volunteer for the Buffalo Transit Riders United and Buffalo Mutual Aid Network campaigns.

Tish O'Dell is currently the Consulting Director for CELDF (Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund) and has been working as a Community Organizer since 2011 assisting residents to organize rights based initiatives in their communities in order to help them “make real” the just and sustainable communities they envision for the future. CELDF has assisted hundreds of communities across the country to develop “first in the nation” laws recognizing Rights of Nature and others addressing environmental harms, worker's rights, homeless rights, immigrant rights, fair election rights, including the first in the nation law recognizing the rights of a specific ecosystem, the Lake Erie Bill of Rights in 2019. Tish has conducted workshops, taught CELDF's Democracy School and given talks all over the country, as well as been featured in the documentaries *We the People 2.0*, *Invisible Hand* and appeared on *The Daily Show* and is one of the editors of the 2021 book *Death by Democracy: Protecting Water and Life – Frontline stories from Ohioans fighting corporate and state power*. She has written articles published in the *Ecologist*, *TruthOut*, *Common Dreams*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Columbus Free Press* and appeared on many podcasts and webinars including *Damages*, *The Julie Rose Show* (NPR), *Living on Earth*, and a 4-part European Parliament webinar “Towards a European Recognition of the Rights of Nature”.

Emma Cook is a Political Science and Environmental Science double major at Niagara University, where she is also pursuing a minor in Law and Jurisprudence. She is active in the Pre-Law Association and with the Mock Trial team, and is a lifelong resident of Niagara Falls in the neighborhood adjacent to Love Canal.

Luella N. Kenny is a 1958 graduate of Niagara University, earning her bachelor's of science degree in Chemistry. After graduation she went to work for Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, where she spent more than 40 years as a research scientist. Luella and her family moved to the Love Canal neighborhood in Niagara Falls in 1969. In 1978 her seven-year-old son Jon Allen died as a result of exposure to chemicals from Love Canal. Luella became a key member of the Love Canal Homeowners Association, the grassroots movement bringing together residents in response to the Love Canal crisis. Drawing on her scientific expertise, Luella helped to design and conduct groundbreaking epidemiological studies showing the prevalence of miscarriages, birth defects, cancers, neurological diseases, and other serious illnesses among residents of Love Canal. In the midst of the Love Canal crisis, Luella went to California to address the shareholders meeting of Occidental Petroleum to deliver a powerful message: "I am determined that no other child will die because of corporate irresponsibility." Teaching about Love Canal and the dangers of environmental harm has become Luella's mission in life. For more than 40 years Luella has informed and inspired millions of people around the world.

Kevin A. Hinkley is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and Director of the Pre-Law Advisement Program at Niagara University. Hinkley serves as Co-Director of Justice House at Niagara University, together with Dr. Dave Reilly and Dr. Chris Lee. Hinkley co-teaches the Justice House learning community's first-year seminar, which has introduced hundreds of students to the story of Love Canal and to Luella Kenny.



Kartika Carr is a proud Niagara Falls native who loves coffee, politics, art, and social theory. Her family has roots in Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana and Arizona. She believes in the liberation of her people through collective action, restructuring of systems, and embodying the boldness of her ancestors. Kartika has her Bachelors in Sociology and Marketing from Niagara University. She is currently completing her Masters in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on social theory, policy, and communal impact. Kartika is the co-founder of Black Box Political Consulting Firm, a Black owned political consulting firm that handles government relations, strategic planning, and policy creation. She is a mother to her amazing daughter Khari. Kartika is also a board member for Voice Buffalo, a fundraising specialist, and a strong mental health advocate. She can be found rooting for the Buffalo Bills, NY Knicks, and most importantly the Alabama Crimson Tide teams.



Gabriel Ertsgaard is the Interviews Editor for The Peace Chronicle. He earned his Doctor of Letters from Drew University with a dissertation on environmental themes in a medieval legend. He previously taught university English courses in the United States and China. His criticism, poetry, and fairy tales have appeared in various print and digital publications.



Shelly Clay-Robison, PhD is an assistant professor teaching Negotiations and Conflict Management at the University of Baltimore. As an ethnographer, she relies on her training in conflict analysis and the visual arts to examine how communities use visual culture to make meaning and to create social change during violent conflict and after a mass atrocity. Shelly's current research is in Indonesia where she works with 1965 mass killing survivors, arts-based peacebuilders, artists, and activists who are contributing to environmental, feminist, and other social movements. Before working in higher education, her career focused on international human rights policy and protection of civilians during armed conflict. She is also the lead facilitator for the Women's Leadership Initiative at the University of Delaware.



James Coughlin is a historian and activist who studies the history of racial segregation and housing discrimination, with a focus on Buffalo, NY. He holds a MA in History from the University at Buffalo, and his thesis "City of Distant Neighbors: The Proliferation and Entrenchment of Segregation in Buffalo, New York (1934 to 1961)" was awarded best masters thesis, and has been published as a zine to ensure Buffalo's history of racial segregation is publicly accessible. Previously, James has worked at Burning Books, on several progressive, local Democratic campaigns, and worked as a Legislative Aide to Erie County Legislator April Baskin, where he assisted in the passage of the 2018 Erie County Fair Housing Law. Currently, James works as a Fair Housing Specialist with Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME), a Western New York based Fair Housing group, founded in 1963 to fight housing discrimination. At HOME, James assists clients with reporting and investigating alleged housing discrimination, providing guidance and advocacy to tenants on their fair housing rights, and speaks on HOME's behalf about the legacy and ongoing consequences of residential segregation and redlining.



Mike Klein, Ed.D. is Associate Professor of Justice and Peace Studies and Department Chair of Justice and Society Studies at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota USA. His teaching, research, and consulting focus on democratizing leadership, critical pedagogy, peacebuilding and the arts, intersectionality, and racial justice. He is a public artist working in sculpture, murals, and photography. Klein is part of the artist collective Art is My Weapon using de-commissioned weapons from community gun buy-backs to creatively address violence. He works to develop personal and collective agency for structural and cultural transformation.



Victoria Ross has a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Tufts University, a Diplome from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva Switzerland, and an MSW from Boston University. She is also a Licensed Master Social Worker and a Qualified Clinical Social Worker. She was awarded a Doctorate of Humane Letters from Medaille University, as well as numerous other local awards for her community work. Her spiritual journey and interfaith work has always been important to her. As a social worker, Vicki uses a normative rather than a medical model, helping people to understand the role played by people's "broken alert systems," resulting from trauma, shame (the subtle trauma), and/or stress. As a political activist, she focuses on the interrelatedness of all of our issues, and our solutions, as well as on following the principles and the spirit of Truth and Love, which, as Rev. Dr. King said, "will have the final word in reality." She is currently the Board Chair of the WNY Peace Center, and the Chair of the Public Issues Committee of the Network of Religious Communities. She likes to play jazz (strings, keyboards, and/or percussion), and loves our four-legged and flying siblings, and the Creation.



Saladin Allah is an educator, author, community organizer, and the third-great grandson of underground railroad Freedom Seeker Josiah Henson whom Harriet Beecher Stowe used as the primary narrative for her famous 19th-century novel Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Saladin has authored twenty-three books; five of which are part of a Curatorial Activism archive in the British Library. In 2019/2020, Saladin was a featured historian in the IMAX film 'Into America's Wild' narrated by Morgan Freeman and hosted by Ariel Tweto and John Herrington, and a featured historian in the six-part award-winning docuseries 'Enslaved' executive produced by and starring Samuel L. Jackson, and directed by three-time Emmy award-winning journalist Simcha Jacobovici. In 2022/2023, Saladin was globally featured in a United Nations short documentary for the International Day of People of African Descent, a co-host in The Nature of Things CBC documentary 'Secrets Agents of the Underground Railroad', and co-producer of the award-winning Buffalo & Erie County Naval Park documentary 'Two Wars: The Road to Integration'.

Saladin is Director of Community Engagement at the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center, Public Art Project Coordinator at the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, and Founder of the Atlantis School For Gifted Youngsters.



Michael Loadenthal, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of the Peace and Justice Studies Association, and also serves as an Assistant Professor of Research in the School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Cincinnati, and the Executive Director of the Prosecution Project. He completed his PhD in 2015 at George Mason University, and previously completed an MLitt at the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews in 2010. Dr. Loadenthal has taught courses on political violence, terrorism and sociology at Georgetown University, George Mason University, the University of Cincinnati, the University of Malta, Miami University, Jessup Correctional Institution and the DC Jail. Michael has served as the Dean's Fellow for the George Mason's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, a Practitioner-In-Residence for Georgetown's Center for Social Justice, a Research Fellow at Hebrew Union College's Center for the Study of Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems, and a Senior Research Associate with the Better Evidence Project. His work has been published in a variety of venues including Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Critical Studies on Terrorism, Journal for the Study of Radicalism, Perspectives on Terrorism, Journal of Applied Security Research, Journal of Feminist Scholarship, Journal of Radical Criminology, Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies and other social movement and political theory journals and books.



Derek Seidman is a writer, researcher, and historian living in Buffalo, New York. He worked as a research analyst and then research director for the corporate watchdog group LittleSis from 2017 through 2022. His writings have appeared in In These Times, Jacobin, Truthout, Washington Post, and other outlets, and his research has been referenced in the Guardian, Houston Chronicle, Politico, and other media. Seidman has a PhD in History from Brown University and has taught at Brown, Trinity College, D'Youville College, and Rutgers University. He's currently a contributing writer for LittleSis and a regular contributor to Truthout.

