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

- Become a citizen journalist; write a news story or opinion piece.
- Make a tax-deductible contribution.
- Help distribute the public i around the Champaign-Urbana area.
- Help with fund-raisers.
- Join the editorial board.

## EVENTS

### NCAAM Dinner

The National Council of African American Men (NCAAM) dinner will be Saturday, February 10 at the Holiday Inn in Urbana. Doors open at 6pm for social hour, dinner will begin at 7pm. Tickets are \$25 per person, \$200 per table. For more information, or for tickets contact Daryl Yarber at 363.3333, ext 23.

For upcoming events in the community check out the following organizations and websites:

#### Urban League of Champaign County

<http://www.prairienet.org/urban-league/>

#### Champaign Public Library

<http://www.champaign.org/whats-happening/index.html>

#### University YMCA

<http://www.universityymca.org/>

#### Sisternet

<http://www.sisternetonline.org/>

#### NAACP-University of Illinois Chapter

<http://www2.uiuc.edu/ro/NAACP/index.html>

### Black Women's Achievement Dinner

The Black Woman's Achievement Dinner is February 9 at the Clarion Hotel from 5 to 9pm. The Cultural Marketplace opens at 5:00, the dinner will be from 6 to 9pm, featuring three categories of awards; five awards for "Forgotten Achievers", one "Lifetime Achiever" award for a woman fifty or over, and the "Trailblazer Award" for a woman active on campus and in the community. Tickets are \$30 per person, or for a real bargain \$200 for a table of 8. For ticket information contact a YWCA Board member or call Ann at the YWCA 344.0721.

### Adult Education

The Urbana Adult Education Spring Brochure for Community Education Classes has been posted at <http://www.cmi.k12.il.us/Urbana/aded/>. This session, you can choose from a diverse list of over 100 classes. The site also gives information on a variety of pro-

grams available free of charge to the community. The Urbana Adult Education Program is offered through the Urbana School District 116 and provides lifelong learning opportunities to persons 16 years of age and over who reside in Urbana, Champaign, and surrounding communities. Please call 217-384-3530 for more information.

## Sustaining Contributors

The *Public i* wishes to express its deep appreciation to the following sustaining contributors for their financial and material support:

**SocialistForum:** An Open Discussion and Action Group, Meets 3rd Saturdays of the month, 3-5 pm, at IMC, 218 W. Main St. (U)

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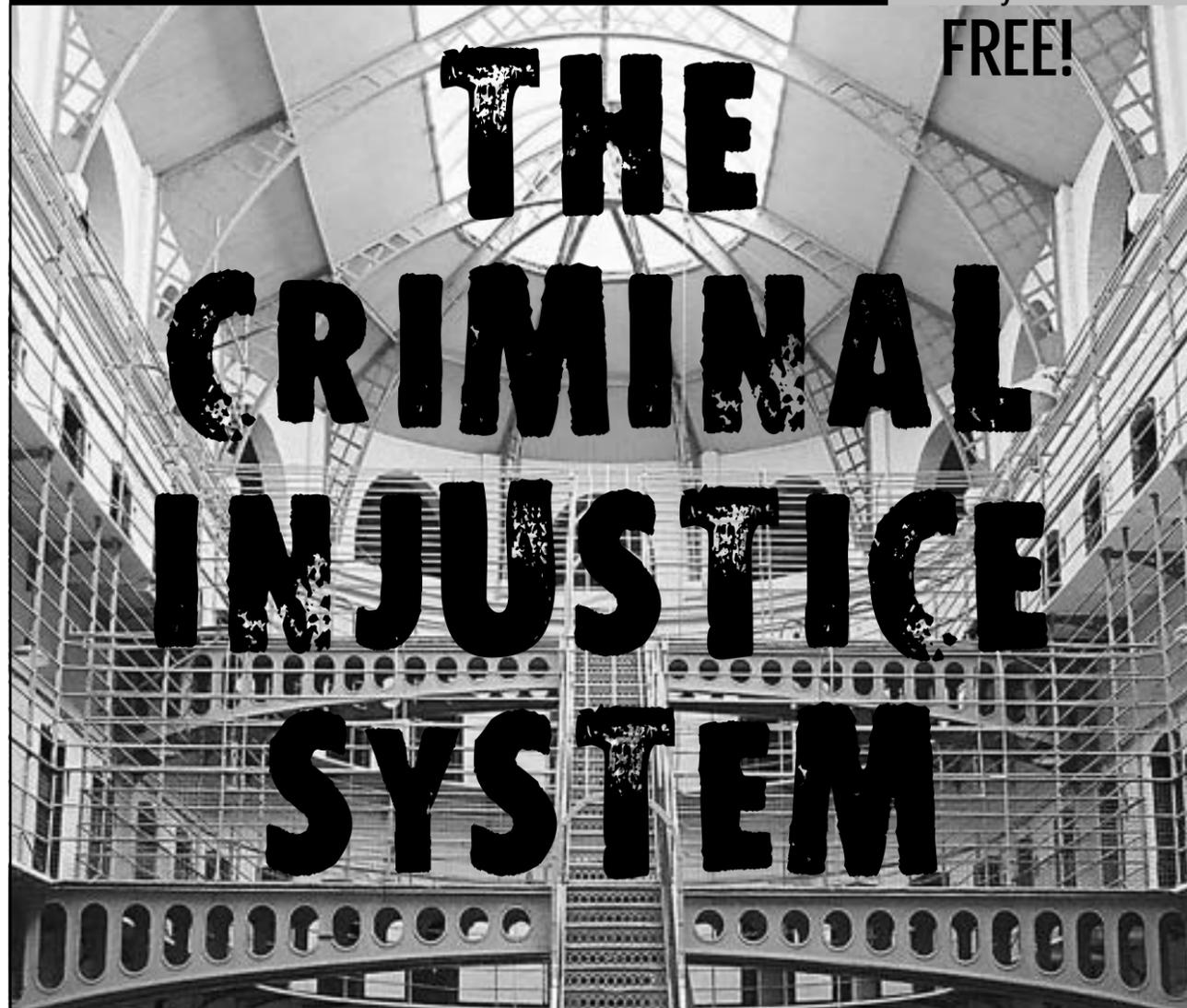
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A Paper of the People

Published by the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center

February 2004 • V4 #1

FREE!



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# The PUBLIC



## Why Do I Care About Convicts?

February 2004 • V4 #1

By Sandra Ahten



Why do I care about convicts? Why do I care about our injustice system? "There but for the grace of God go I." Being a recovering addict and having community with similar others, I know so many people who today are therapists, community leaders, librarians, responsible parents, etc., but could have, given just a slightly different circumstance, been convicts.

I also recognize my want and need to be "known." I love living in a community where I will go to a restaurant and be recognized by someone. I love knowing that I can knock on a friend's door and it will be opened. I love having this paper, and WEFT, and my artwork. I love having a partner who values me. These are avenues where I can be heard – where I can be "known."

Convicts are not known. They are forgotten as though they are not human beings; not part of our community. Locking them up, hiding them away, forgetting that they exist is wrong. I offer these letters from Michael Youngren, an inmate with whom I correspond, so that the reader can know, just for a moment, one of the two million people who are imprisoned in the United States right now.

I have sympathy with victims. I have sympathy with convicts. One does not negate the other.

JUNE 26, 2003

Dear Sandra,

...stepping out the door into a light cool rain. Yes, rain. Happens all the time, but I can never be out in it because, other than a chow line or a call pass, they cancel yard when it rains.

Sure I've had to walk in the rain to a meal or on a health care pass. But this morning's rain was different. All my focus was drawn to it. I could feel each cool, wet drop hit my exposed head and arms. A few drops on the back of my neck. I slowed my steps to the bare minimum. I felt the air just a bit cooler on my flesh where drops had hit.

My mind raced over the myriad of things I could be doing other than letting something as simple as rain break my heart. Other things if I were a free man that is. That hurt has settled in my heart and I've carried it all day.

OCTOBER 29, 2003

You wrote of how very few inmates show their excitement/anxiousness upon and before their entering the visit. I sat and spoke to Jay. I told him that you were right... That when they call me for a visit I'm tremendously excited. I'm all "hurry up get ready" and anxious. I'm ecstatic! I want to be sure I'm clean and neat and shaved etc.

The entire walk from here to there my head is spinning with wonder and excitement... trying to think of things I wanted to share or hear your opinion on. Wondering

what you're wearing. Full of anticipation for your smile, for your hug. Yet I walk through the door with none of these emotions upon my face or in my step.

Jay and I came to the conclusion – after lengthy discussion – that it's because we are so accustomed to keeping our emotions hidden in here. If you show joy, happiness, pride, or appreciation for something, then there is always the chance that one or more of the miserable wolves in here will seek to destroy it, or degrade it. They are miserable and empty and do their best to recruit as many into their realm of sorrow as possible. If you show distaste or anger then there are those who will do their best to antagonize the situation into some form of confrontation for the sheer entertainment value of it!

We struggle... even practice the "stone face" in our youth – youth on the streets and figuratively our youth in prison. We master it for survival.

NOVEMBER 1, 2003

I found a leaf on the yard that must have blown in from the grouping of trees just beyond the fences. It wasn't completely dried out but was not fresh either. It had just the faintest trace of green at its center. The rest of it was brown, gold, and orange/red. It was beautiful. It tore my heart apart and filled it with hope all at once. Found me sitting in the park with Katie just two years ago...

We were sitting in Rem Park at about 1:00 in the morning. It was dark and quiet and altogether a perfect night. Leaves were falling off of the trees where we walked and as we made love in a cluster of them, I had whispered in her ear "It's just me, you, and the Autumn Moon, Katie, the sweetest threesome I've ever had." And we giggled like little kids.

I couldn't help but wonder despite my efforts not to – what my life would be like today had I made just one different choice. The very same leaf inspired me to hope for some autumn in my future. Some wrestling in a pile of leaves with laughter. Some midday walk along a path with leaves crunching beneath my steps. Another threesome with me, my love, and the moon.

NOVEMBER 29, 2003

I guess I just need to write... need to communicate beyond these walls and fences... gain the comfort in knowing that whatever part of me I leave upon these pages will leave this place. Keep putting pieces of my soul in the mail and catch up to it someday with my body. Put it all somewhere safe, in trusted hands.

...I can sometimes feel an indescribable

insanity at the edges of my mind... the end of a thread. I don't know exactly what would happen if I tugged at it. I just know that it holds many things in place. Sometimes I wonder... imagine that if I pulled it and allowed all to scatter, then I wouldn't have to think or feel or rationalize or organize, etc. I could just stay lost for awhile in the piles of thoughts scattered about in incoherent heaps.

DECEMBER 11, 2003

I sat to finish the letter to my Mother. I had a clear thought as to where I was going... but as soon as the first sentence hit the paper from where I'd left off, my head just went somewhere dark and far away. My heart and my soul followed my head and it has taken me weeks to resurface.

I wonder if being so close to the holidays plays a role. I wonder if I just turned a stone that I hadn't looked under before. I can't pin it down and to be honest I'm scared to try because I fear venturing back to the place I was when I got lost.

I want to describe my pain. I want to express my sorrow. I want to vent my rage. I want to cradle my fears. I want to take you to where I sat for these last few weeks since our visit... since that letter, but I cannot. There aren't words, but could you have laid a hand upon my heart you would have known.

DECEMBER 24, 2003

Christmas isn't really a big deal to me these days – but you are. You are more to me than all the holidays combined. I hope you are happy, healthy, and in good spirits now and ever. You are a greater part of me each day Sandra.

DECEMBER 26, 2003

...Yet for the last few weeks I've sat in one of the darkest depressions I've seen in many years. I've lost 10 lbs., I haven't written a letter, I haven't spent much time with Jay. Hell I haven't even masturbated in almost a month. Going to work has just been "get it done" & get back to the cell.

I'm so sorry I've cut you out of this time but you are a great deal in my heart and in my life, Sandra. I know, KNOW, that you are a true friend and love me. I KNOW that you would've done anything to remove me from where I sat. But I have a special box in my soul where all of my time, experience, joy, love, etc., with you is kept. The darkness was long before you and has greatly faded because of you sitting with me in it. Somehow I feel like this was something I had to ride out by myself. I feel so much better. I found so many little pieces of Michael. I was a boy, Sandra. I ran, I laughed, I loved. I was naive. I was innocent. I had excited and nervous curiosity.

I wasn't always bitter, cruel and calculated. So much of what I've lived has been so dark that I often lose those pictures of when I was just a plain simple boy, blonde hair falling into my eyes, finding a smile for every new discovery. Pedaling my bike to explore a little further beyond my boundaries each time. Listening to my Grandfather's tales of woe from his childhood. Helping the old lady next door sweep her porch and pick cucumbers from the patch in her back yard. Sneaking kisses with puppy loves.

I was clean and pure and no different than any other boy. I forget that, with all the dirt on my skin in years to come. But today I know – and all the dirt will never come off, Sandra, but it doesn't matter because all of it, good and bad, is why I can be who I am today... is why I will become the man I will.

You have seen my soul and can love me anyway – so there must be something worth loving. I will not forget anymore.

Are you sure you want the letter – the one to Mom? I don't want to analyze it. I don't want to hash it out. I wrote it down. I let it go. I sent it, it's gone! Though I'm not going to send it to her, I'd send it to you because I trust you. I'd send it to you because there is no other place on earth I'd be comfortable with it going to.

I'm not saying we never talk of it – I'm just saying we let it be gone for awhile. Let me thicken back up a bit. Because truth be told, Sandra, I'm as thin as it gets and my emotions are pretty flimsy where that's concerned.

JANUARY 10, 2004

I keep looking for what I want. It's like something I can sense but can't see enveloping me. My deepest thoughts seem trapped inside this unseen shell or pressure that surrounds me. Inside I am oblivious to what I have and can only see to what I want. Need doesn't even reside here. This place will never be filled within me. This place will never know contentment.

I'd once thought that I had grown so great that I could no longer fit into this place.

I'd once thought that I had shrunk so small that this place could swallow me whole.

I'd once thought that I had condensed this place so neatly that even "want" couldn't live here. But "want" does live here and I live in "want" and when I am here there is plenty of space for neither of us to be cramped.

Infinitely I am bound to "want," to fill this space even though I know that hollow can't be held and hollow can't be filled. How can nothing weigh so much?!

With Love,  
Michael

Families of those in the "correctional system" – or those who may want to be in contact with inmate can find useful information at [www.prisonlife.com](http://www.prisonlife.com).

To find information on a specific Illinois inmate or facility you can visit the Illinois Department of Correction web page at [www.idoc.state.il.us](http://www.idoc.state.il.us).

## COMMUNITY FORUM



# Ode to Al

## (Or Confessions of a White Liberal)

by Peter Rohloff



ALMOST EXACTLY one year ago, on a cold January Saturday morning, I sat down in front of my computer and tuned in the Pacifica newstream covering the Washington, D.C., anti-war protest. Rev. Al Sharpton had just taken the stage. Although I don't remember much of what he had to say, I do remember being struck by his charisma, undiminished even by my crackling speakers and slow internet connection. And I remember thinking, "This man should be president" – of course, then and now, it was and is quite clear that Al Sharpton would not win the Presidency in 2004. But as I sit here writing, the question as to why Sharpton will not or cannot win – and others questions like it – are foremost in my mind.

Watching the Democratic primary race unfold over the past few months has been an interesting affair. Of the seven candidates still in contention at the time of this writing, four – Joe Lieberman, John Kerry, Wesley Clark, and John Edwards (and, to a lesser extent, Howard Dean) – share a strong set of controlling features, including a mild token liberalism, a general inability to say anything very strong about the current state of affairs as it relates to poverty, health care, the continuing demise of the middle class, or racialization, and an unwillingness to transcend the foreign policy terms set to them by the political right (they all "strongly support our troops in Iraq"). In light of these unifying themes, all supposed "differences" recede, and the candidates appear virtually indistinguishable.

But above this generalized, undifferentiated political noise rise the clear, progressive voices of Al Sharpton and Dennis Kucinich. Both are solidly and consistently liberal in their thinking, and neither exhibits the fatal Democratic flaw of retracting or qualifying under pressure. Both their campaigns raise many interesting issues. However, much is often said about the role of progressive politics and

grassroots campaigns in transforming national culture, so that doesn't need to be repeated here. Instead, I want to focus on a less obvious, more reflective – but by no means less pressing or critical – question: namely, the relationship between Al Sharpton and the white liberal caucus.

The question goes something like this: If a forceful, well-spoken, charismatic African-American candidate with roots in the civil rights movement and a decades-long career demonstrating continued commitment to human rights, international diplomacy, and a myriad other "liberal issues" were to come along, we would all jump aboard...Right? The importance of this phenomenon, the repeated disregard that white liberals have had for Sharpton and his "serious" political candidacy, cannot be ignored and demands analysis.

I am aware of two objections that are repeatedly employed to dismiss Sharpton. The first is that he is power-hungry and egotistical – that his "decades long career in civil rights" has been motivated by his desire for influence and attention. This however, in all honesty, is not any real objection at all, since calling a politician egotistical is about as insightful as calling a banana yellow; its superficiality alone, or the fact that Sharpton alone among politicians is referred to as egotistical, suggests that something deeper is at work.

This leads directly to the second, more substantive objection: namely, that Sharpton "lacks integrity," as evidenced by the Tawana Brawley imbroglio. And here we reach what seems to me to be the very heart of the matter. White liberals, by and large, have felt free to denounce Sharpton at this point, because they have mostly misunderstood the true radicality of the worldview

espoused by Sharpton, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the whole civil rights movement, and therefore have not properly interpreted Sharpton's actions. Justice, as articulated by King and advocated by Sharpton and others, is not merely the "raising up of the oppressed" – it is a raising up at the expense of others. In other words, it is absolute, preferential treatment of the oppressed – even and especially when this means offending the privileged – at all levels of society without apology. Practically this means – and this is where Sharpton comes in – that one always believes the word of a young black woman over that of a white police officer and that one doesn't

**The repeated disregard that white liberals have had for Sharpton and his "serious" political candidacy, cannot be ignored and demands analysis**

apologize when one turns out wrong. Therefore, in my view, it seems as if Sharpton's refusal to apologize at this point indicates rather than negates his integrity and consistency – he understands what the civil rights movement really meant, and his white liberal detractors do not. One final factor which seems to me decisive in the white liberal dis-

missal of Sharpton and misapprehension of the civil rights movement is discomfort with the sometime source of its motivation. In his decisive formulae King, for instance, talked about sister- and brotherhood under God. It is a great historical hack-job, and the source of much misunderstanding, that many refuse to interpret King along the lines which he chose to interpret himself. It is therefore an open question to me whether the out-of-hand dismissal of Sharpton's political candidacy has something to do with the fact that he is Reverend Sharpton. Another way to ask this question is to wonder whether the general lack of interaction between white activists and black activists might not have

something to do with the fact that, historically, much of black activism has happened "in church."

What then remains to be said about the other progressive candidate, Dennis Kucinich? Mainly this: That, with great respect for his integrity, consistent advocacy for progressive concerns, and political platform in general, he is, notwithstanding, boring. He is quiet, level-headed, uncharismatic. These might be great qualities in a legislative official, but not in a national leader. And qualitative judgments aside, there are also strategic advantages to supporting Sharpton over Kucinich. For example, progressive politics generally has a particularly hard time making inroads into the deep South, where the two key voting populations are the African-American and the conservative white communities. Kucinich, whose political base consists almost entirely of white, liberal folks not from the South, has very little chance of building a movement in this region – and, historically, presidential elections are not won without making inroads into the South. Sharpton, on the other hand, has a strong, committed following in Southern African-American communities.

So reflections on the Kucinich campaign, for my purposes here, serve up the same demanding question. Why do we white liberals generally prefer him to Sharpton? Sharpton, in addition to being "right" on the issues, is charismatic, exciting, and would, if properly supported, certainly have a better chance at shaking things up than traditional white liberal candidates. For me, the answer to this question has something to do with the way in which white liberal culture and white liberal preferences (for instance, the preference to avoid all religious rhetoric) defines and limits the progressive political discourse. The result for white activists, of course, is lost opportunities and failed coalitions. More serious still, however, is the continued disregard for minority voices and minority agendas in our political culture.

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Professor Goldman's publications include *Privatizing Nature: Political Struggles for the Global Commons* (Rutgers/Pluto, 1998) and *Imperial Nature: The World Bank and the Making of Green Neoliberalism* (Yale, forthcoming). He teaches courses in Global Inequality and Social Change, Transnational Politics, Environmental Sociology, and Urban Sociology.

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## HUMAN RIGHTS



# Moratorium to Abolition: Living without Death in Illinois?

by Daniel Larson



Daniel Larson is a graduate student at the University of Illinois. His interests include the drug war and the prison system of the United States.

ON JANUARY 20, 2004, GOVERNOR ROD BLAGOJEVICH ended months of delay by signing into law the remaining section of Illinois' death penalty reform legislation. The final provision set the disciplinary standards for police officers accused of lying in homicide cases, which would result in their decertification only if the Illinois Labor Relations Board could prove the testimony to be false. This provision completed a legislative package that called for stringent new rules for conducting police line-ups, greater access to police field notes by the defense, abolishing executions of the mentally retarded, a reduction in the number of situations that qualify a convicted murderer for the death penalty, and greater power to the Illinois Supreme Court to overturn a death sentence if justices determined it was not called for in a particular case. Despite the passage of these reforms, Blagojevich did not lift the state's moratorium on executions enacted in 2000 by former Governor George Ryan.

"What's important here is that we do justice, and doing justice means that we make sure that the system doesn't make mistakes, particularly when you're talking about something that is literally life and death," Blagojevich stated. "We have to give these reforms a chance to be put into practice, and then we'll evaluate them over a period of time." Therefore, the citizens of Illinois must wonder not if, but when the death penalty will resume in the state.

When the moratorium is lifted, it will be an extension of the people's will, as recent polling of the state has found support for the death penalty fluctuating between 58% and 65%. This fits cozily with the October 2003 Gallup Poll that found national support for the death penalty at 64%. Illinois opinion is not unlike the 55% of our neighbors in Michigan, the 57% of Minnesotans, or 54% of Wisconsin residents, who support the death penalty. Yet, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin abolished the death penalty in the late 19th and early 20th Century.

This discord among states exposes many promises for Illinois to become the thirteenth state to outlaw executions by following the example of Alaska, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, and complete the transition from moratorium to abolition. First, we are reminded that most modern polling data is generated in the abstract, and when people actually consider the death of another human being, their support for the death penalty wanes. This is evident when alternatives are given to the death penalty. National support for the death penalty drops to 50% if the alternative of life without parole is an option – in Illinois it drops to 43% and in Michigan it drops to 35%.

More importantly, the difference among states between sentiment and action demonstrates the fundamental facet that continues to propel the debate over the death penalty: emotion. This is clear as we remember that the arguments surrounding capital punishment have remained the same for hundreds of years. In 1764, Cesare Beccaria pronounced "the death penalty cannot be useful because of the example of barbarity it gives men, it is absurd that the laws, which are an expression of public will, which detest and punish homicide, should themselves commit it."

In the years that have followed, the dominant arguments have been clouded in gray. Our pious leaders and scriptures produce confusion and contradiction. Research has attempted to show that the death penalty

deters crime, or conversely teaches violence to the public – but both theories have never been credibly substantiated. Advocates of the death penalty are told that it brings "closure" to the worst pain and sorrow. Yet, closure is not a midnight event in a room devoid of humanity and suffocated by its silence; closure is a constructed mirage of false justification that prosecutors and politicians sell to victims' families. No one ever returns to normal after personal tragedy, our only means of survival can be found by fighting the anger and bitterness, and transcending the pain to find a positive place that helps us lead a healthy life. Thus, all that we know with certainty is that the sentence of death has been doled out arbitrarily in the United States for crimes committed, but not arbitrarily to the condemned, who are overwhelmingly our poor and/or minority neighbors gravely misrepresented at trial by inadequate and often incompetent defense.

The death penalty debate rolls on, fueled by the power of anger, hatred, bitterness, and vengeance. So, why has this emotional juggernaut not consumed the twelve states that have abolished capital punishment? A legislative term seldom goes by in all of these states without introduction of legislation for the reinstatement of the death penalty, which is summarily defeated by an overwhelming majority. Not too long ago after the horrific discovery of Jeffrey Dahmer's Milwaukee apartment in 1991, the dairy farmers and Packer fans heard calls on the capital floor of Madison demanding justice, demanding death. One Republican member of the assembly conducted an informal telephone poll of voters, and claimed 84% favored a return to capital punishment. Those arguments were silenced in the following months as Milwaukee's crime rate dropped sharply in nearly all categories of crime. Likewise, Alaska and Michigan are consistently at the top of states with the highest murder rates, but legislation for reviving the death penalty never finds widespread support in either state.

Politicians in abolitionist states have the burden of capital punishment lifted by their constituencies as generations of citizens have been weaned off the numbing culture of death that develops in states that employ capital punishment. The publication of *America without the Death Penalty* in 2002 by John Galliher and his colleagues supported this conclusion through a combination of exhaustive periodical research, historical review of government documents, and extensive interviews that produced a rich mosaic of each states' history, cultural tradition and resolve to abolish the death penalty, which is carried from generation to generation. This is Illinois' greatest hope; as the moratorium continues, our citizens can begin to live and learn of life without the death penalty.

However, the passage of death penalty reform legislation and the recent lawsuit filed by Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan to overturn Governor Ryan's mass purging of Illinois' death row threatens this opportunity. Fortunately, the Illinois Supreme Court upheld Ryan's clemencies on January 23, 2004; yet, this is not an end but the beginning to reinstate the death penalty. The paradox of death penalty reform is that execution of such a penalty requires that which humanity can never offer: perfection. There are no policies or laws that ensure an innocent life will not be put to death under any system of capital punishment.

To date, the continuing cycle of death in Illinois has been halted for over three years. Over the same period, nine countries around the world have abolished the death penalty including Chile, Poland, and Georgia – 42 countries in the last 15 years. Still, countries including the United States, Nigeria, Egypt, and Iran continue killing its citizens in the name of justice. The state of Illinois has an opportunity to turn off the switch for good, and strengthen a new covenant for humanity.

## What's It Like on Death Row?

By Al Cunningham

The real hell is in the cells, where we are alone with ourselves and our thoughts. . . I am told when to shit, to shower, to shave; I am fed slop not worthy of pigs; I am psychologically abused and misused, sometimes beaten, and all the while waiting, waiting to be killed. The cell is not large enough to stretch your arms out in, yet you are placed in it for years on end. For the lucky guys whose families can afford to buy and send them a TV or a radio, they will at least have these items as a great time-killing device, as something to help you forget that you too are here for a killing.

I am overwhelmed by the psychological changes and physical humiliations of death row. But amidst the daily degradations, the constant harassment, and the perpetual denial of my human rights, the thing I think about the most is the fear. The fear. It is always here, just around the corner. This is a world of violence, hostility, loneliness, and SADNESS. . . I only hope that I can maintain my sanity and endure.

## Ponderings from the Eternal Now

by Sr. Carol Gilbert, O.P.

Alderson Federal Prison, WV

As I wait for my medical clearance before I begin my "landscaping" job, I thought you might be interested in the costs of life here at Alderson:

1. Issued one pair of steel-toed shoes (men's)
  - Shower thongs - \$1
  - Tennis shoes - \$50-70
  - Boots - \$70 and up (special order)
2. No lock is provided for our small lockers. Stealing is rampant.
  - Cost of lock - \$7
3. Issued one thin cap and garden gloves OR wool green army mittens with thumb & trigger finger
  - Hat, gloves, scarf - \$20
4. Issued one pair of men's long underwear
  - Long tops - \$8
  - Long bottoms - \$5
  - (both men's)
5. 24 over the counter meds are sold. This is where you are sent to treat yourself.
  - Yeast infection medication - \$13
6. Grey sweat-shirts and sweat-pants are allowed after 4:00 p.m. and on weekends.
  - Cost - \$14.20 each
7. Fruit and fruit juices are sold weekly for those who can afford them
8. Fans, alarm clocks, watches, and typewriter ribbon all must be purchased.
9. Only issued clothing is done in the main laundry. In the housing units,
  - Wash - \$.50, Dry - \$.50, Laundry soap - \$3-7.
10. And, of course, selling one's body for pay is the last resort for some of these women.

*Excerpts from a letter dated October 2003, compiled by Laura Stengrim*

## Clamor Magazine Party

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# The Iron Cages of Capitalism (Literally)

by Jeremy Engels



Jeremy Engels is a PhD. student in the Department of Speech Communication at the University of Illinois. Interested in language and discourse, he studies state violence, discipline, and dehumanization in early America, and also the rhetoric of contemporary piracy. He can be reached at [jengels@uiuc.edu](mailto:jengels@uiuc.edu).

IN HIS FAMOUS BOOK *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which exposed the psychologies that helped numerous Europeans believe that the accumulation of money (which Saint Paul had called the root of all evil) would lead to spiritual salvation, Max Weber argued that capitalism had become an “iron cage” – one that coerced humans into selling their bodies for wages, slaving in assembly lines, and many other evils. For him, the problem was not so much that humans were exploited, it was that they had no choice in the matter; they were born into a system with certain expectations they could not change. Exactly one hundred years later, we find that Weber was correct, but perhaps not in the way he intended. Today, capitalism is an iron cage, figuratively (and increasingly, with globalization) for most, but also literally for the two million (YES, THAT IS 2 MILLION) Americans locked behind the cold, iron bars of prisons.

On January 22-24, 2004, scholars, activists, and poets from across the nation met at the Levis Faculty Center at the University of Illinois to discuss, debate, problematize, and confront the very real cages that bar many citizens from leading normal lives. The title of this conference was “Education or Incarceration? Schools and Prisons in a Punishing Democracy,” and it was made necessary by some alarming facts – which are delineated in the sidebar (facing page).

Given these startling facts, it was necessary for scholars and poets to meet with local activists, community members, and formerly incarcerated individuals to make some sense out of the machinery of the prison-industrial-complex. The result was nothing less than inspiring. Though the problem is gargantuan, and there are no easy solutions, there are things that community activists can do that will have a very real impact on the local level. In the spirit of the conference, then, I will do three things in this article. First, following Weber, I will consider the problem of prisons as a structural problem embedded in the social facts of capitalism we must live with every day. Second, I will consider the impact of the prison-industrial-complex on education. And third, I will discuss local options for critical resistance against this leviathan that cages so many mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Indeed, this



conference made me want to both cry in indignation and slam my fist through a wall in anger. At the same time I also found that what made me so upset could be a rallying cry for change.

## TO QUELL THE MODERN HYDRA: PRISONS AND CAPITALISM

One of the most important aspects of capitalism is wage labor. It was not always the case that humans labored for wages; in fact, it was only in the 16th and 17th centuries that wages were offered for work – which occurred when merchants in cities such as London, Boston, and New York discovered the fundamental law for valorizing capital: they could make the most profit for themselves by underpaying workers for their labor. But to turn farmers and peasants into workers was a difficult task, and it required the state to expropriate these peasants, farmers, and Native Americans – meaning that it had to steal their land so that they had no other choice than to labor for a wage. There was massive resistance to the re-structuring of society along capitalist lines, and the most potent, deadly instrument in this shift was state violence. Indeed, the first police system in England was created for two goals: to prevent theft, and to enforce a wage system of labor. And along with the police came prisons, executions, and schools.

To enforce wage labor, capitalists needed new methods of discipline and surveillance; in short, they had to force workers into obeying their commands, and to constantly watch over them to make sure that they were obeying. Those that did not, or would not, were great dangers to the system – and as such, they had to be punished. The state made an example out of rebels by executing them or, after the 1740s in Pennsylvania, by incarcerating them. The idea was to remove the danger while making an example of it; the message being that pirates or workers who resisted the iron cages of capitalism would be brutally murdered.

Thus, there was this peculiar contradiction that developed. Capitalists needed laborers, but at the same time they hated and feared them because they were numerous and had the power to rebel (as was demonstrated repeatedly in England and America). One potential way to avoid this was to enslave Africans and Native Americans, thereby raising the profit margin because slaves deserved no pay – indeed, they were not even human. Here, the many margins of the story collapsed into a truly globalized system. Workers were offered substandard wages, just enough to be better off than the jobless; then they were drugged with imported sugar and alcohol from the slave market economy of the

Caribbean. Workers, slaves, Indians, all stoned on sugar and rum and yet hostile to the emerging cruel capitalist realities, were bullied by emerging police states into accepting their fates.

There was no way to avoid the contradictions of the system, however. Slaves rebelled; crews mutinied; pirates stole slaving ships and returned slaves to Africa; farmers rose up against local and national governments. Other methods of discipline were necessary to quell the many-headed monstrous Hydra, which is how capitalists viewed the base of proletarians on which their profit was built. The prison was effective; lock up those who might make trouble. We have seen, since Ronald Reagan’s conservative initiative to lock-up all drug users, the perplexing effectiveness of this strategy. The keynote lecturer of the conference, Ruthie Gilmore, professor of African-American studies at Berkeley, made a stinging yet subtle point: why is it that no one protests when it is stated that 2 million Americans are in jail? It is because the prison-industrial-complex has become so embedded in the fabric of our society that we don’t even see it anymore. The premature death inflicted by the prison-industrial-complex it becomes no big deal. But we can see by looking at its effects on education that Americans should be paying more attention.

## ANOTHER ARM OF THE STATE: PRISONS AND SCHOOLS

Christine Clark, a professor of Human Relations from the University of Maryland, made one of the most obvious yet provocative points of the conference: education in America has always been two-tiered. There has been education for the leaders, the managers, the bourgeoisie, and then separate, unequal education for the workers, the wage-laborers, the proletariat. Building on Clark’s point, we can add that this is the point where racism enters the picture, because the managers were all white, and the workers a motley crew of various ethnicities. Clark’s argument is thus important for the ways we consider prisons and schools. On the one hand, the managers have been educated to rule over workers; they are taught to buy into the American dream of unlimited wealth; they are connected through elite fraternities and sororities to other managers; they are given financial resources to make the American Dream come true. Indeed, we see this in our president, George W. Bush, whose Yale degree in history has taught him very little about past American human rights abuses that might pollute the Dream, and everything about positioning himself so that other elites give him the opportunity to manage workers and common Americans. Elites are

## Nephewz

by Anthony Bankston

Our visits are my only quality-time.  
Fate demands your speedy growth.  
My dream is to see you turn 18-years old.

Visits are what I long for.  
To reveal all that my soul has stored.  
My choices created a barrier between us –  
My guilt demands that from this day forward  
I do only GOOD DEEDS.

I pray that you feel my love for you,  
And regret that I’m not there  
To teach you, to school you,  
To hold you when you’re scared,  
To laugh with you when you’re happy.

Spiritually, you’re my ‘lil bro, my nephew.  
You and your brother are the 8th and 9th  
Wonders of the world,  
Manifestations of the beauty  
That life offers.



socialized into a culture of rulers through their schools.

On the other hand, workers have learned nothing better than the lessons of discipline in their schools. Though Michel Foucault argues convincingly that the function of any school is discipline, the types of discipline imposed will be different based on the class of pupils. One function of blue-collar modern schools has been to teach workers to enjoy wage-labor: the schedule is routinized with bells and breaks; learning is kept at a basic level of memorization; teachers invoke authority as the ultimate manager; and pupils must mediate on the American Dream, inevitably reaching the most important ideological conclusion: if they work hard enough, they can become the manager, the leader, the president. Yet they rarely do – not because they don't work hard enough, but because the system is rigged. Their dreaming is a form of discipline endowing the merit of hard work.

And they are also conditioned to accept that state violence underlies the whole system of wage-labor. We can see this especially in early 19th Century America. In May 1833, Jacob Abbot, a school principal, argued in his "Description of the Mount Vernon School," that discipline was the sole function of schooling: "My duty is to take measures to prevent future transgression, and to lead those who have been guilty of it, to God to pardon." To prevent future transgression meant corporal punishment: beating a child who misbehaves. In September 1849, an article in *The Massachusetts Teacher* claimed that a teacher "is forced into a conflict before the school, with one or more of his pupils, and the struggle is for the supremacy." One of the functions of schools, then, as many of the presenters at the conference argued, was to educate workers to accept their lot in life.

Schools became one method whereby the contradictions of capitalism could be mediated. Wage-laborers are necessary for profit, but in order to increase the profit to its maximum, workers have to be assimilated into factories – and this entails cooperation between workers from different backgrounds who nevertheless shared the common concern of exploitation. Schools became a beacon of hope for the ruling classes. Capitalists hoped that educating workers to enjoy work would make them less likely to rebel, and the leviathan thus became more subtle. Workers were schooled to love work; if they did not, instead choosing to rebel, they were either executed, thrown into jail, or impressed into the military (which enforced slavery and the logistics of capitalist trade). The options were not, and have not been, very good for workers.

What this conference demonstrated is that there is a profound link between schooling and prisons in our post-industrial age. As a third-industrial revolution has led to more automated jobs, and as globalization coups such as the FTAA have led to the movement of jobs across borders where labor is cheaper, there is a decreasing need for educated workers in the manufacturing and service sectors. Why, then, are we educating the poor working class these days? The answer is suggested by the shocking fact that states like California are planning prisons that will not open until 2040. The facts suggest, as every conference presenter agreed, that we are teaching poor, predominately black males that their only option is prison – and we will build prisons to contain these not-yet-born convicts we create. History has taught that roving classes of unemployed workers, what Marx called the lumpenproletariat, can cause immense trouble, perhaps revolution. Thus, prison is no longer a holding place for criminals; it is now housing for a whole class of workers who are no longer needed, and in their idleness, can cause nothing but trouble.

Certain schools, as Tonya McClary from The American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia argued, actually funnel students into prisons. These students are disciplined by ripped, outdated textbooks, broken windows and desks, security lines that result in two-hour waits to enter the school, and teachers who impress upon them that they have no future. Thus, to prison they go.

#### THE TEETER-TOTTER OF CHANGE: ACTIVIST OPPORTUNITIES

This is indeed a sad state of affairs. Yet one of the most important messages of the conference was hope. As Ruthie Gilmore argued, though the PIC is far-reaching and thus imposing, the very girth of the system means that there are many, many opportunities for activism. One peculiar thing about systems of domination is that

they have created, and do create, the very conditions for their destruction. The very egregiousness of the problem has made it visible, and the fact that it affects 25 million Americans means that there are multitudes of indignant individuals waiting to protest in ways that can change or alter the system. Protests often seem futile when fighting something so large as the prison-industrial-complex.

Yet as Robert Schultz, a prominent member of the Midwest chapter of Amnesty International, argued at the conference, politicians want you to believe that resistance is futile, but it is not – indeed, only through resistance is change possible. Amnesty International has demonstrated the real impact organizations of protest can have here in Illinois by pushing former Governor Ryan to place a moratorium on all death sentences. The power of resistance is also bright in California, the worst of all prison states. There, activists such as Craig Gilmore of the Education not Incarceration Coalition, and Rose Braz, the Director of Critical Resistance – a movement created to fight the prison-industrial-complex – have successfully protested their way to a decreased prison budget. The struggle is pushed on in Illinois by activist scholars such as Erica Meiners, from Northeastern Illinois University, and, Stephen Hartnett, here at the University of Illinois who has been an inspiration to many fledgling activists in training.

Change is a teeter-totter, and by applying force at one end, we can shift the balance to a situation that is more fair, more equitable, and more amenable to the pursuit of happiness, to recall Professor Gilmore's apt phrasing. Here is where the conference reached its stride, for its final panel, entitled "Practical Utopias," moderated by Professor of Education Policy Studies James Anderson, stressed three things that we can all do on a local level to fight the prison industrial complex.

First, we must go to our local courthouse and observe trials. As Victor Goode, from Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Tonya McClary, Ruthie Gilmore, James Anderson, and many local community members stressed, packing a courthouse in support of a defendant demonstrates to judges, juries, and prosecutors that the community is watching and cares about who is sent to prison. Doing this alters the strategies used by prosecutors, and the sentences imposed by judges, because they are accountable to the community rearing its beautiful head. In fact, many judges seek harsh punishment for criminals because they think it will get them re-elected. We must show them that this is not the case.

Second, we can begin a cop-watch program, as one local community member stressed. Programs of community members following cops around the community to make sure they do not racially profile, manufacture evidence, or abuse defendants have been implemented in Berkeley and in Eugene Oregon. Again, it is important to show them that we are watching.

Third, we must establish trust, or what the political scientist Robert Putnam calls "social capital," in our communities and schools. "Zero tolerance" policies are not a cure, but a cause of imprisonment. Many of the normal behaviors of children that were once handled by community members are now handled by cops who have no patience for adolescent behavior. As Rosa Braz pointed out, we call the cops too much – and often when we call them on someone else, they end up arresting us.

Doing these things can upset the system. If it taught nothing else, the "Education or Incarceration?" conference taught that even among the despair of a monstrosity such as the prison-industrial-complex, there is hope in activism and coalition building. If we band together and make our voices heard, even those who shut the doors on the iron cages of capitalism cannot afford to ignore them.

#### For More Information, Please See:

James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Scott Christianson, *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998).

Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

Sidney Willhelm, *Who Needs the Negro?* (Cambridge, Mass: Schenkman Press, 1970).

## How the Prison-Industrial-Complex Threatens Democracy in America

by Stephen Hartnett

- The prison-industrial-complex has expanded dramatically over the last generation, becoming one of the fastest growth industries in the United States of America; housing over 2 million prisoners and supervising almost 5 million parolees and probationers, America's prison systems controls the lives of 6,781,637 Americans. This means that 1 out of every 32 adults – and 1 in 3 black males – is incarcerated in some form. Considering that each prisoner or parolee's hardships are shared by his or her family members, we can safely assume that as many as 25 million Americans find their lives dramatically hampered by our nation's obsession with crime and punishment.

- The rise of this punishment industry has caused a terrible decline in America's education system. For example, the State of California now spends more money on its prison system than on its once-celebrated universities and state colleges combined. One result of such political choices is that there are now more African-American men in America's prisons than in its colleges. Furthermore, we know that 68% of state prison inmates did not finish high school, meaning there is a direct relationship between declining schools and expanding prisons, between one's access to education and one's chances of becoming incarcerated. Young people who do not finish school are so much more likely to enter prison than students who complete high school that some scholars have begun referring to a "schools-to-prison pipeline."

- Like the educational system, so the health system in America has begun to suffer at the hands of the prison-industrial-complex. It has been estimated that as many as 1-in-4 prisoners of maximum security prisons suffer psychological illnesses that require treatment, not incarceration. So instead of healing the sick we turn to the prison-industrial-complex to punish the criminal.

- Despite both domestic and international outcries, many U.S. states continue to practice the death penalty, an ancient punishment that wastes tax dollars, does not lower the crime rate, often kills innocent people, and teaches citizens to accept brutality as a daily part of what governments do.

- Amounting to over \$20 billion per year, the Drug War fueling the prison-industrial-complex wastes tax dollars, does not lower usage rates, leads to militarized police forces, clogs prisons and courts with non-violent offenders, and disproportionately incarcerates people of color, thus supporting the widespread assumption that the prison-industrial-complex is a racist machine.

- *Figures from The Bureau of Justice Statistics, Probation and Parole in the U.S., 2002 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2003), 1 and The Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S., 1974-2001 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2003), 1; for overviews of the problem see Joel Dyer, The Perpetual Prisoner Machine (Boulder: Westview, 2000) and Christian Parenti, Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in The Age of Crisis (New York: Verso, 1999).*

- *On California's dilemma see "Education Not Incarceration," a report by The Education not Incarceration Coalition available on-line at [www.may8.org](http://www.may8.org); in general, see the documents collected as Reconstructing the School-to-Prison Pipeline, including papers from a May 2003 conference hosted by The Civil Rights Project of Harvard University and The Northeastern University Institute on Race and Justice.*

- *See Paul von Zielbauer, "Report on State Prisons Cites Inmates' Mental Illness," New York Times (22 October 2003): A25, and the four-part series of exposes by Mike Ward and Bill Bishop, entitled "Sick in Secret: The Hidden World of Prison Health Care," The Austin American-Statesman (16, 17, 18, and 19 December 2001), available on-line at [www.statesman.com/special/reports](http://www.statesman.com/special/reports).*

- *For a quick overview of these issues see Stephen Hartnett, "Important Death Penalty Information," Broken Chains (Summer 2001), 14-15; for a guide to the best information on the subject see Kate Klehr, "Want More Death Penalty Information?," Ibid., 16, both available on-line at [www.noprison.org](http://www.noprison.org) (see vol. 17).*



## Police encounter

By Lori Serb

I know a type of discrimination. I know how it feels to be unwanted in a space; to be perceived as not normal. I have felt stares of hate that have burned through my exterior as well as had my physical safety threatened.

On May 3rd I was involved in an altercation while demonstrating against the invasion of Iraq. How that altercation was handled by Champaign Police and later by the City of Champaign was not only inappropriate, but biased.

Officer Wills ran 15 yards at me from out of my line of sight. At no point did he identify himself as a police officer or give a command to desist behavior. I hit the ground without knowing who my attacker was and my left arm was pinned under my body. I was yelled at to give my left arm and I was repeatedly hit in my left side with a fist or baton because I failed to produce my left arm for him. My right arm was jerked up my back. I was not fighting my attacker back and I repeated over and over that my left arm was pinned under my body and I was trying to get up to give him my left arm. I heard people around me state things like "don't hurt her!" "don't hurt, Lori" which was the only thing keeping me calm at that moment. I saw and heard nothing that indicated a police presence; I thought I had been attacked by an extremely heavy, enraged individual who opposed my right to demonstrate against US policy.

When I was finally allowed to lift my torso and surrender my left arm to my attacker, I was cuffed and lift-

ed to my feet to be escorted to a police car. I completely cooperated with the officers, though I was never told I was being arrested. I was never asked for my side of the story. I was told that I had violated a city ordinance: Section 23-21 Resisting/ obstructing a peace officer. I had two options: plead guilty and pay the \$175 ordinance violation fee or fight the ticket in court.

Before any physical act, which could escalate a situation, an officer is supposed to identify him or herself as such and give a command to desist. This gives all involved a chance to comply and cease all action or reflexive behavior. In a non-violent altercation, an officer should be able to break up the situation with verbal instructions without ever touching any of the individuals involved.

I had nine witnesses to my attack. I hired a lawyer. I had friends and community members who were willing to donate various resources including sitting down to discuss the incident with a lieutenant at the station. And these are the things that separated my situation with many people of color who find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, scared and acting reflexively, or financially unable to fight the injustices done to them.

I had a bench trial. The officers lied on the stand, claiming that they had announced their presence, that I pulled my arm away from Officer Wills and that I lost my footing and fell. According to all three officers, I was never tackled. Despite the testimony from four witnesses, Judge Ford ruled against me, but admitted that if I had been charged at the state level, the outcome would have been different because more than a preponderance of evidence would have been needed to prove I

resisted a peace officer.

My lawyer submitted a post-trial motion to reverse Judge Ford's decision on the grounds that I was not proven to have "knowingly resisted." That the City did not prove that I knew that the individual addressing me was a peace officer for the City of Champaign (nor was it supported by the facts surrounding the situation) and that the finding that the statement "Police," whether said once or more than once would not have been sufficient in the situation that presented itself. The court ignored the fact that all officers testified that no other commands or directions were given to me and without directing specific commands to cease and desist, it cannot be said that I "resisted the breaking up of the altercation" when I was never directed by the police to do so. The conclusion reached by the Court that the officer could not do more is not supported by the evidence or reasonable inference drawn there from.

The decision was not reversed and I paid my \$175 fine with additional court costs which came to a grand total of \$245. After losing a total of five days of work, paying my fees and a lawyer, and experiencing much resistance from clerks both at the Champaign City building and at the Champaign Police Department in my efforts to obtain a copy of the police report – (they don't readily offer a Freedom of Information Act form for citizens and discourage information seekers, claiming that only lawyers can obtain copies of police records) it is no mystery to me why someone who is wrongly charged or mistreated by police due to their race, beliefs, or sexual orientation does not fight the corrupt system that is in place.

## HUMAN RIGHTS



# Iraq, Black Folks, and the Crisis of the White Left

By Erik S. McDuffie

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THE WAR IN IRAQ IS A DISASTER. Close to 400 US troops have been killed since President Bush declared major combat operations over on May 1st, 2003. Roadside bombs regularly kill US service personnel. News reports flash gory scenes of Iraqi police, politicians, clerics, and bystanders killed or maimed by suicide bombers. Much of the Iraqi infrastructure continues to lay in ruin. 18-year old US soldiers with their fingers on the trigger stare nervously at Iraqis protesting for food, unpaid wages, and the right to rule their country as they see fit. Much of the international community, especially in the Arab and Muslim world, deplors the US-led war against Iraq. Domestically, the economy is still in shambles. The so-called "jobless recovery" has left millions of people wondering how they are going to pay the bills, cloth their children, and make ends meet.

The war has produced another significant crisis: the failure of the white Left to realize that African Americans constitute the vanguard of the progressive anti-war movement. Despite efforts by such groups as Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (A.N.S.W.E.R.), white radicals too often come short of linking the anti-

war movement to struggles around affirmative action, the criminal justice system, reparations, and other issues critical to Black people. The American Left has suffered an incalculable set back due to their inability to forge real and sincere connections with Black people and their long-standing struggle for freedom, dignity, and respect. Until white anti-war activists make anti-racism a priority, the Left will continue to be a marginal force in the US.

Poll after poll has showed that the majority of Black folks oppose the war on Iraq, while the majority of white Americans support it. Put simply, Black people overwhelmingly oppose American imperialism and white people enthusiastically support it. As an oppressed people who have experienced the nightmare of the "American Dream," it is no wonder that African Americans so strongly opposed the war. Black people aren't stupid. They know people of color will disproportionately shoulder the cost of the war. They know that the most vociferous supporters of the war were the Trent Lotts, Tom Delays, and the extreme right wing of the Republican Party. The Right that has stridently opposed affirmative action and all government programs benefiting people of color.

Opposition to the war also stems from fear for the well-being of loved ones serving in Iraq. Since the US armed forces are disproportionately filled with Black and Latino people, it's not surprising that people of color are doing a disproportionate amount of the dying in Iraq. Most young Black and Brown (and some whites) did not enlist in the armed forces

"to serve their country." Rather after they graduated from decrepit high schools, joining the military made the most economic sense. Besides going to prison or working a dead end job, what other option do large numbers of young people of color (as well as many whites) have but to join the military? Most enlist hoping they will not have to fight in a war. If they had been given the right opportunities, most of these Black and Brown youths would have gone on to live productive lives here at home, instead of returning home in a body bag or physically and/or emotionally scarred by the Iraq war. Like their counterparts from the Vietnam era, a large segment of an entire Black generation will be annihilated in a war that is not their own.

The tax cuts coupled with the \$87 billion that the Bush administration will spend this year on the war will exacerbate a general crisis that has been taking place in communities of color across the country for years. Cities including: New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, have announced massive cuts in public services. Public transportation fares have been raised and for many working-class people of color, the bus is their life-line to



their job located an hour or two from their home. Raising fares for tokens and monthly fare cards will only stretch their limited resources. Unions have been wrestled into shouldering more health care costs. African Americans and a new wave of immigrants, especially from Latin America, comprise the growing ranks of the American labor movement. It's these people who are going to lose their jobs, homes, and dignity as unions give in to the demands of management and big city governments. In addition, recent reports show that close to 43 million people are without health care insurance, nearly two million more than a few years ago. Money that could be spent on building a real social safety net is being diverted to wars overseas that cannot be won.

At the state level, public secondary schools and universities across the country have seen their budgets slashed by as much as 10%. Some schools have raised their tuition by more than \$1,000. At the

## HUMAN RIGHTS



University of Illinois, more than 338 courses were cancelled this past academic year. Several large lecture classes no longer have teaching assistant-led recitation sections that provide undergraduate opportunities to discuss classroom materials in small settings. This is occurring in universities across the country. The ranks of food service, physical plant, clerical, and custodial workers at American colleges and universities are increasingly filled by of color. As schools trim their budgets, administrators look to outsource college services to non-unionized labor. With these changes in higher education coupled with the disappearance of higher-waged unionized jobs, increasingly more people of color will find themselves trapped in dismal, low-paying service jobs. This reckless war has caused a financial crisis. A crisis which will continue the decline of communities that have already been devastated by police brutality, the criminal (in)justice system, de-industrialization, absence of free health care, and a war on the poor and working people.

Considering these issues, it is unconscionable that we often hear white Leftists ask: "Why don't more Black people come to protests, events, or meetings?" This question should be reversed. Where have white progressives been when Black people have staged protests for reparations or against police brutality? Where have white anti-war activists been when Black community groups have organized campaigns for better schools and safer streets? Indeed, organizations and individuals of color at the national, regional, state, and local level have been fighting everyday for survival in this country for the last 20 (400) years. In light of these developments, quips about Black people's absence from peace demonstrations reflects little more than white anti-war activists' arrogance, ignorance, and racism.

White leftists need to ask themselves why a Black person would want to attend an anti-war protest. Attending a two-hour demonstration might mean that someone has to take a whole day off from work. For a young Black mother working a low-paying job at the check-out counter of a grocery store, losing even a few hours from work can mean not having enough money to pay the bills or buy food for that week. In addition, demonstrations are often surrounded by well-armed, scared white police in riot gear. Considering that a significant portion of people in the Black community have criminal records or have friends, relatives, or neighbors in prison, why would an African American want to put themselves in a situation where they could be thrown in jail or violate probation? Above all, the threat of being targeted as "un-American" at this historical moment has much more negative consequences for Black and Brown people than it does for their white counterparts. For example, with the exception of John Walker Lindh, the so-called "American Taliban," all of the high-profile cases of people detained by the Justice Department for having alleged ties to "terrorist" organizations have been people of color. With these facts in mind, it is amazing that any Black, Brown, and people of Arab and Middle Eastern descent attend protests.

Additionally, the culture of demonstrations and peace groups is often alien to most Black people. Too often in meetings white radicals use wooden obscure language instead of speaking in a way that most people can easily understand. By doing so, they drive away people who might very well wish to become more involved in anti-war organizing. Language in this sense becomes oppressive in itself. Few people of color are going to feel comfortable around funky looking white people or aged white folks singing 1960s-era folks songs. It's hip hop, not Peter Seeger, that speaks to young people of color and can be used to mobilize them for progressive causes.

White leftists too often have a preoccupation with prioritizing "the class struggle" over fighting white supremacy. For instance, how many times have Black activists heard white peace activists ask: "Won't focusing more on anti-racism dilute our message about the war?" What they fail to realize is that class in the US has always been and continues to be racialized. What scholar/activist W.E.B. Du Bois called the "psychological wage" of white supremacy, which allowed white working people of the 19th century to feel that their interests

lay with white capitalists, continues today. The American working-class is disproportionately comprised of people of color. The brunt of US state terror at home has been historically directed against Black and Brown communities. This is not to say that activists should reject building working-class movements. But white progressives need to appreciate that the white working-class in this country has historically been a site of reaction, while the Black working class has been at the forefront of progressive change.

The goals of the anti-war movement also need to be rethought. Large marches have their place. They show power brokers that people reject the war, and demonstrations provide anti-war activists with a sense of community. But instead of focusing most of their energy in mobilizing people around large, one-day demonstrations, where throngs of spirited marchers take to the streets of Washington, DC or New York and then go home, peace activists need to concentrate more on building sustained, mass-based, social justice movements. This involves the grunt work of organizing: door to door canvassing, distributing leaflets on street corners, listening to everyday people's ideas about what issues are important to them, and forging organic ties to community groups. This means prioritizing anti-racism struggles and forging ties with communities of color that are on the front lines in struggles against police brutality, HIV/AIDS, the prison industrial complex, and the indifference of white America.

Perhaps the most egregious problem facing the white Left is its failure to accept Black leadership. White leftists' cool support for Rev. Al Sharpton's bid for president is the clearest example of this tendency. From the war to health care to education, Al Sharpton has promoted the most progressive line of any of the major Democratic candidates. When asked to elaborate on the specific issues they have with Sharpton, they start stammering. Of all the candidates, only Sharpton seems to have the courage to stand up to Bush and critique him from the Left. When Wesley Clark, John Kerry, and even the "darling of the white Left," Howard Dean, criticize Bush, they do so mostly from the right. "The war has been mismanaged," quips Kerry. "We should have worked closer with our European allies before starting the war," Clark often exclaims. Instead of flocking to Al Sharpton white Leftists are running in droves to Howard Dean and to a lesser extent to Dennis Kucinich. Kucinich, a former mayor of Cleveland and congressperson representing mostly white voters (who overwhelmingly supported the war), has no real political base. What's the appeal of Howard Dean? As governor of Vermont, a state that is almost 95% white, Dean embraced a centrist, Bill Clinton-like political agenda. His campaign is geared almost exclusively toward white, urban, middle-class 20/30-somethings. Slick internet-based campaigns and national bus tours that resemble "Road Rules" and the "Real World" have a lot of white folks ecstatic. How many people of color do you see at these rallies?

In my view, Sharpton is the only candidate who could easily shred Bush in a presidential debate and build a viable, grassroots, diverse progressive political movement. Sharpton is not without his problems. Over the years, he's been accused of being egotistical or opportunistic. True, perhaps, but are Dean, Edwards, Clark, or Kerry any less so? Above all, Dean's inability to energize Black and Brown voters means he doesn't stand a chance in beating Bush. Instead of supporting another Walter Mondale-like candidate, the white Left would be better suited in jumping on board the Sharpton campaign before it's too late.

We can't place too much of our faith in electoral politics as the solution to the multiple problems facing this country and the world. It is possible for the white Left to find common ground with communities of color. Indeed, there are some white progressives who are sincerely grappling with their own white privilege and who have recognized that fighting racial injustice is central – not tangential – to all the major social justice campaigns in this country and indeed the world. The ball rests not in Black folks' court but in the white Left's. Communities of color are going to continue moving forward in their struggle against all forms of oppression with or without the white Left.

## A Bread and Roses Event: The March Primaries

Socialist Forum, the UCIMC Media Center Steering Group, and the Independent Media Center (UIUC Chapter) will present a panel on the issues and candidates in the March primary elections. Speakers will analyze these issues and candidates for the perspectives of war and peace, civil rights, the environment, health care, labor, and public education. There will be plenty of time for open discussion. Thursday, February 26, 2004, 7 pm, Room 404, Illini Union at the U of I, 1401 W. Green Street, Urbana.

## Project Goodstart

Back in 1979, Annabelle Anderson came to the Christian Social Action Forum upset because the government had eliminated the school breakfast programs. She had a modest request. Would we agree to supply the funds for milk and graham crackers for two first grade classes at Columbia school so the children could still have their midmorning snack? We readily agreed to do that and Project Goodstart was born. Twenty-four years later, Ms. Anderson's request (she passed away two years ago) has blossomed into a program now encompassing 26 schools and programs and about 5,000 students a day. The process is simple. Representatives of the involved programs contact the Eastern Illinois Foodbank to order their snacks at the very low cost the foodbank affords. Then the bills are sent to the Project Goodstart Committee who pays EIF with funds raised from area churches, agencies, and community members. The school reps then get the snacks to the schools where they are made available to teachers, of mostly younger students, so the children can do better throughout the day. Over the years, teachers have testified that this snack makes a tremendous difference in the amount of learning and on task attention. Recently, however, Project Goodstart has less organizations and individuals able to give funds just as the demand has risen. If you would like more information on Project Goodstart, please contact Vern Fein at vfein4@yahoo.com. Anyone reading this article who would like to help is encouraged to send a check made out to Project Goodstart, C/O Chris Friedhof, 604 Evergreen Ct., Urbana, IL 61801. Thank you.

## The Relationship Between Human Rights and Democracy

**Belden Fields** will deliver the Friday Forum lecture on this topic at the University YMCA at noon Friday, February 20, 2004 at in Latzer Hall of the YMCA, 1001 S. Wright St., Champaign. Lunch can be brought or purchased there.

### LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL PROBLEMS: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL HUMAN RIGHTS

A free and public conference at which presenters will include Mark Weisbrot, Belden Fields, Michael Goldman, Molly Gena of Amnesty International, representatives of Champaign County Health Care Consumers and the Mexico Solidarity Network, and a film by our local Paul Hixon. Join scholars, activists, and students for discussion, brainstorming, and local action! Co-sponsored by Amnesty International, the UIUC Chancellor's Office, SORF, the University YMCA, the YWCA, and AWARE. Saturday March 6 (registration begins at 9 am) and Sunday March 7 (10-3:30) at the University YMCA, 1001 S. Wright St.

## HUMAN RIGHTS



# The FTAA, Globalization, & The Future of Democracy

by Laura Stengrim and Stephen Hartnett



Laura Stengrim is a graduate student in the University of Illinois's Department of Speech Communication. She has written on the so-called anti-globalization movement and the struggle for responsible media, researched and written on the rhetoric of weapons of mass destruction, and is currently studying the politics of free trade, American empire and the Iraq War. This article is fueled by her anti-corporate activism and concern for workers' rights worldwide, and inspired by years of living in rural and farming communities.



Stephen Hartnett is Associate Professor of Speech Communication at the University of Illinois, a Research Fellow of the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities, and an Advisor to the Center for Democracy in a Multiracial Society. In addition to his activism and anti-prison work, he is the author of *Democratic Dissent & The Cultural Fictions of Antebellum America*, *Sweet Freedom's Song: 'My Country 'Tis of Thee' and Democracy in America*, and *Incarceration Nation: Investigative Prison Poems of Hope*.

IF AGREED UPON IN ITS CURRENT FORM, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) will lower environmental standards, force workers to compete across borders for the lowest wages, enable transnational corporations to slash health care benefits and eliminate generic drugs, facilitate speculative and predatory investment in developing nations, and throw out existing laws regarding mergers and monopolies. In short, the FTAA will usher in a new era of capitalist exploitation on a hemispheric scale. Moreover, as the unprecedented display of military hardware and police forces during the FTAA protests in Miami in November 2003 demonstrated, the international elites backing the FTAA rely on local, regional, and national police forces to keep their actions secret and to spare them the wrath of protesters. Indeed, "protecting" the FTAA ministers from the tens of thousands of protesters who had gathered in Miami turned that city into an armed enclave where free speech was curtailed, schools were closed, public transportation was shut down, and civil liberties were literally beaten into submission. When combined with state funds, corporate grants, and private donations, Miami raised a total of \$12 million to fund these paramilitary operations. Protesting against the FTAA meetings in Miami thus also meant defending democracy against an encroaching police state.

### THE FTAA AS "NAFTA ON STEROIDS"

The FTAA proposes to encircle the entire western hemisphere, from the Arctic Circle to the southernmost tip of South America; it will encompass 800 million people in 34 nations in North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean, covering everybody but Cuba. The FTAA thus amounts to an enlarged version of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was a point for debate in the 1992 elections and came into effect two years later in 1994. Championed as a crucial step in triggering a new era of globalization, NAFTA was supposed to build a global economy concurrent with U.S. interests, increase development, and create more jobs in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. But if the FTAA follows NAFTA's legacy, the outlook for American labor is bleak; since the implementation of NAFTA, nearly one million U.S. workers have lost their jobs, mainly in manufacturing industries that produce textiles and apparel, vehicles, computers, and electrical appliances. Here in Illinois, according to a November 2003 brief issued by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), NAFTA enabled companies to shift production elsewhere, thus costing 44,325 jobs between 1993 and 2002. Moreover, as higher-paid, skilled workers move from declining industries to the service sector, which pays on average only 81% of manufacturing jobs, wages are driven down across the board. The AFL-

CIO thus reports that, when adjusted for cost of living, wages for non-college-educated workers in the U.S. have decreased steadily since NAFTA and that nearly 75% of the entire workforce is comprised of this group. If NAFTA is any indication of what the FTAA might do, we can anticipate it leading to lost jobs and lower wages.

While we should be alarmed about what NAFTA has done to the U.S., its effects on Mexico, presaging the FTAA's effects on the rest of Latin America, are equally frightening. Since NAFTA was passed, eight million Mexicans have fallen into poverty, Mexican wages – which were a whopping \$5 dollars a day in the first place – have gone down, and American subsidies on agriculture have decimated small farmers. In fact, one million Mexican peasant farmers have been driven into poverty since the passage of NAFTA. "NAFTA on steroids," as the FTAA is described, will follow a similar trajectory and drive down wages, cost jobs, and shatter local communities.

While subsidized U.S. agricultural products destroy local farmers in Mexico, goods made in Maquiladora zones – often by women under terrible factory conditions – undercut U.S.-made products, or simply take over the production of goods once made in the U.S., triggering a massive trade imbalance. In fact, the EPI reports that "growth in imports of 195.3% from Mexico and 61.1% from Canada overwhelmingly surpass export growth," meaning that we are buying more from our NAFTA partners than we are selling to them. The U.S. economy is thus left with a tremendous NAFTA-fueled international trade deficit in goods and services of almost \$40 billion. Given the likelihood that the FTAA will accelerate the trends begun by NAFTA we may expect the FTAA to expand our national trade deficit, thereby further weakening the chances of economic growth and recovery in the U.S.

Furthermore, the FTAA proposes to override local governance, literally creating a supra-national set of rules made by,

enacted for, and enforced for the interests of the few. For example, the FTAA's Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), modeled after NAFTA's little-known Chapter 11, protects foreign investors by allowing them to bypass and sometimes overturn local environmental and public health laws. Ralph Nader's Public Citizen explains that the MAIs will allow investor-to-state suits, where corporations sue governments and localities for lost profits. One example is U.S.-based Metalclad Corp., which claimed that environmental zoning laws in one Mexican state were unfairly restrictive and so forced the government to pay \$16 million in damages to the corporation. Chapter 11 does more than just enable U.S. companies to pick on poor Mexicans, however, as the Loewen Group, a Canadian funeral home chain, won \$750 million from the U.S. government after a Mississippi court held the chain responsible for malicious and fraudulent business practices. Imagine, a U.S. state court's findings being overruled by the NAFTA star court! What U.S. law calls fraud, NAFTA calls good business. Such findings foreshadow a world in which the rule of checks-and-balances and representative government are trampled by the rush for profit.

Fortunately, the most recent round of negotiations in Miami in November 2003 slowed the pace of the FTAA. Pressure from Brazil, a country that sees the FTAA as U.S.-annexation and that led the dissension that broke down WTO talks in Cancún two months prior, led to what some call FTAA-*a la carte*. Rather than creating a hemispheric trade bloc by 2005, the Ministerial Conference agreed on a lighter version of the FTAA that includes more bilateral and sub-regional agreements such as CAFTA, the Central American Free Trade Agreement passed in December of 2003. Critics say such actions simply give the U.S. more puppet strings to pull. Indeed, because President Bush has been granted Fast-Track ability to strike agreements without congressional consent, he is able to use NAFTA,



Riot-gear-clad police formed human walls blocking intersections and narrowing the path of marchers down to slices of pavement sometimes just two or three people wide. They warned marchers not to linger in groups, then created physical impediments to marching, and then arrested those who broke their command not to linger. In this photograph we see outraged marchers confronting riot-clad police. In preparation for the expected gassing, some marchers in the image wear bandanas.



While the corporate mass media portrayed us as violence-prone malcontents and anarchists, the vast majority of marchers were good natured folks out to have some fun while defending democracy. When not being harassed by police, marchers sang, danced, played hacky-sack, ate giant bratwursts cooked up by the AFL-CIO, traded stories, and engaged in the public conversations that make democracy work. This creative protester spent the day riding his souped-up bike, complete with a Tom Paine hat, American flags, and his wonderful sign: "We the People—No Kings, Corporate or Otherwise."

# HUMAN RIGHTS



Marching is fun—wear a costume, bring a drum, sing as you go. . . These marchers drove down from Boston and spent the day in their bio-hazard suits, thus drawing attention to the fact that the FTAA would be a major environmental hazard. While their appropriation of scientific and medical images is creative and powerful, they also confessed that their bio-hazard suits, complete with medical masks, helped them withstand gassings at previous marches, so the costumes were both symbolic and functional.

CAFTA, and other smaller trade agreements to make deals that are sure to be friendly to big investors and harmful to human rights. The official Ministerial Declaration nevertheless announces that it remains committed “to a comprehensive and balanced FTAA that will most effectively foster economic growth, the reduction of poverty, development, and integration through trade liberalization.” As we have demonstrated here, such claims are little more than lies.

## THE FTAA AND THE FATE OF DEMOCRACY

While the fight against the FTAA is crucial for protecting jobs, wages, and local governance, the recent protests against the FTAA in Miami also demonstrated how the FTAA is leading to the production of a police state where civil liberties are crushed in the name of national security. Indeed, the \$87 billion approved by Congress for President Bush’s War on Iraq in early November actually included \$8.5 million for Miami to arm and train its police to fight what it assumed would be hundreds of thousands of violent anti-FTAA protesters. Miami used the post-Seattle and post-9/11 fear of public disturbances to raise

an additional \$3.5 million. Mayor Manny Diaz proudly announced that Miami’s FTAA-spawned police state was “a model of homeland defense,” despite widespread outrage over the city’s tactics in repressing protesters. Relying on such War Against Terrorism terminology to describe protesters turned those of us exercising our constitutional rights into potential terrorists. In anticipation of our “terrorism,” Miami leased fire trucks to use as water cannons. It bought saws, jackhammers, stun guns, bicycles, pepper gas, rubber bullets, and tasers for police who at one point called themselves “RoboCops.” Galloping in groups of a hundred and more, police rode giant horses along the march route, shadowing our peaceful actions with a veritable cavalry. The city police were reinforced by U.S. Marshals, the Coast Guard, the Federal Protective Service, and forces from surrounding towns. In short, the FTAA meetings enabled Miami to experiment with a wide array of paramilitary techniques, directed at protesters, meant to curtail free speech, and which trampled on civil liberties.

Nonetheless, the corporate mainstream press portrayed events in Miami



Wearing a wolf’s mask to indicate the predatory nature of the FTAA’s supporters, this protester carried a sign that captured what many in Miami were feeling. As noted above, the charge that the FTAA will fuel predatory capitalism has been proven by the consequences of NAFTA. In fact, the *New York Times* reported that since the implementation of NAFTA “real wages in Mexico are lower. . . [and] income inequality is greater.”

as yet another struggle between the forces of good (police) and evil (crazed anarchists like us). As we demonstrate below in commentary on photographs we took at the main march in Miami, that narrative is as full of holes as the promises offered by NAFTA and FTAA supporters.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES:

On the foul results of NAFTA, see Celia Dugger, “Report Finds Fewer Benefits for Mexico in NAFTA,” *New York Times* (18 November 2003): A9; Down on the Farm: NAFTA’s Seven-Years War on Farmers and Ranchers in Alabama, a 2001 report by Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch, available at [www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org); and Robert Scott, *The High Price of ‘Free’ Trade*, a report from the EPI, available at [www.epinet.org](http://www.epinet.org).

For coverage of the FTAA protests, see Tom Hayden, “FTAA Ship Runs Aground, But Party Goes On,” posted 30 November 2003 and “Miami Vice,” posted 20 November 2003, both on Alternet, [www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org); Rebecca Solnit, “Fragments of the Future: The FTAA in Miami,” posted 25 November 2003 on Alternet; Jeremy Scahill, “The Miami Model: Paramilitaries, Embedded Jour-

nalists and Illegal Protests: Think This is Iraq? It’s Miami,” posted on 24 November 2003 on CounterPunch, [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org); and Indymedia’s stories and links on [www.ftaa-icmc.org](http://www.ftaa-icmc.org) and Meghan Krausch’s article in the December 2003 issue of *The Public i*, archived at [www.publici.ucimc.org](http://www.publici.ucimc.org).

For the big picture of how the FTAA fits into globalization, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (Verso, 2003), 130-168 and Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (Anchor, 2003), 229-294.

For websites full of information on these topics, see Ralph Nader’s Public Citizen, [www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org); the economic and human rights clearinghouse of Global Exchange, [www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org); debt and deficit information at [www.epinet.org](http://www.epinet.org); and union and labor perspectives at [www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org).

The Official FTAA site, with links to Ministerial Declarations, is [www.ftaa-acla.org](http://www.ftaa-acla.org); see materials posted by the World Trade Organization at [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org); the World Bank’s reports on “development” are available at [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org).



The Future of Democracy? From 9:00 in the morning until late into the night of the main march, the sky above Miami was full of helicopters, some of them military, some of them police, some of them local news teams covering the event. All day long, the numbing buzz of surveillance droned overhead, reminding us that Big Brother was watching. This photograph catches one of the choppers through the tails of a peace-puppet blowing in the sweet breeze. There you have it: the grassroots creativity and hope of the marchers layered against the mechanical dread and military overkill of the police state.



The University of Illinois Teachers for Peace and Justice sign, held aloft by Emilie Falc (Minnesota), Max Schnurer (New York), and Rose Jergens (Missouri). Ten other members of our contingent were diverted by police road blocks—we didn’t find each other until later than night, after the march and the post-march violence had ended. But all day long, as we marched through Miami, folks came up to us to say “hey, Illinois, my cousin goes there” or “dude, 86 that mascot” or “right on, teachers for peace!”



# Peril In UFCW Strike!

by Mike Griffin

NOBODY DESERVES TO WIN A LABOR DISPUTE more than locked-out and striking United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) members involved in the West Coast struggle that idled thousands of grocery workers. The grim reality is, however, that victory is unlikely and more tragically, many workers will never get their jobs back. Consider the history of the UFCW leadership in struggles where the International Union caved in with little more than a whimper, then allowed scabs to permanently replace long-term, loyal union members. No one questions the necessity of this struggle; it is extremely important to every UFCW union member in the retail grocery industry in the U. S. and Canada.

Most problematic is UFCW leadership (or lack of it) and their inability to strategize or to provide leadership. Soon, the question of their resolve must be raised as well. Well before negotiations began, UFCW leadership should have been developing a strategy to deal with the enemy on a number of fronts. Coalitions with union and legislative allies, as well as the shopping public should have been formed. The UFCW should have understood the serious threat of the Wal-Martization of their industry. That threat is the vehicle driving the powerful coalition determined to win at any cost. That is not to say that this struggle was unwinnable; far from it. You must know your enemy and where to apply the thousand points of pain it takes to defeat a determined enemy; and above all else, you must recognize your enemy. For years, the UFCW has assumed those major retail grocers were allies and that rank and file needs came second. Labor leaders know there are no "silver bullets" in labor disputes, as local Teamster leadership perceived their valiant but poorly timed efforts when they refused to haul from grocery warehouses. Thus far, UFCW and Teamster leaders have engaged a powerful, well-educated enemy with tactics that have not worked for decades, if ever. Unfortunately, they sent their troops into battle nearly unarmed and with no credible battle plan.

Looking back in UFCW history, UFCW Local P. 9's, struggle with Hormel Meats in Austin, Minnesota, in the 1980s comes to mind. The fight with Hormel turned into a major fracas that drew nation-wide support, support the international union could not control. Assisting the struggle was independent labor consultant, Ray Rogers and

his staff at Corporate Campaign, brought on board by Local P. 9 leadership. The funds and national support raised by Rogers made it difficult for the national UFCW to throw in the towel. In spite of that support and the hopes of hundreds of thousands of union supporters, the UFCW cut a deal with Hormel, took over local P. 9, and replaced the local leadership. Many dedicated UFCW members watched in shock as their lifelong jobs were permanently filled by scabs.

There have been many valiant struggles by UFCW members, but the results are nearly all mirror images with rank and file members suffering the losses. Organizing attempts by the UFCW have been as feeble as their efforts to win struggles. Many UFCW members live with poor wages, little representation, and unjust working conditions.

The recent gathering of AFL-CIO leaders on the West Coast may appear as a gathering of eagles to desperate striking workers who have needed their support since the beginning and who deserve it. But even buzzards gather and soar before they feast on their prey. Make no mistake, "the dog and pony show" has begun and while the house of labor makes militant speeches and engages in a little street theatre, the national UFCW is quietly planning an "Exit Strategy." That's what labor calls it when betrayal is in the works. The movement will be told through the bureaucratic labor news about the victory they scored. They "saved the union," they will tell us, and they will spend several years re-writing the history of their betrayal. But, the truth will burn forever in the hearts of the members and their families who suffer the losses.

Recently, mainstream media have been touting the involvement of Richard Trumka, Secretary-Treasurer of the National AFL-CIO, suggesting that his leadership will bring more militant strategies. Nothing could be farther from the truth. My experience tells me that the AFL-CIO will spend some money, make a few seemingly militant demonstrations, and then Trumka will enter the negotiations and cut a deal. It will be far from victory and none will be spared the

losses except the suits in the central offices of the UFCW and the AFL-CIO.

The examples are endless and not restricted to the retail food industry. The Detroit News strike is another example. After being shamed into a national rally in Detroit, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney led more than one hundred thousand supporters through downtown to the biggest block party in Detroit's history; no militancy, no sit-down, and no real effort to win that struggle. The result was a stunning loss that allowed scabs to replace most of the valiant union workers.

The WarZone struggles in Decatur, IL, that idled more than four thousand working families at Firestone, Caterpillar, and Staley is another example. When the AFL-CIO refused to engage in those struggles under the feeble leadership of former president Lane Kirkland, the Staley local loaded up

busses and went to Bal Harbor, Florida, to challenge the AFL-CIO. After Kirkland and his band of bureaucrats descended on Decatur a few months later, it was learned that Kirkland was not going to offer any real support for the Decatur unions. The Staley local put together a strategy with the help of supporters across the country to indict Kirkland's leadership. That

effort culminated in Chicago after protests from the floor led to Kirkland resigning the following day. At the 1995 convention in New York, after Sweeney claimed the throne, a meeting was set up between local leaders from the Decatur struggles and top officers of the new national AFL-CIO leadership team, which called itself the New Voice. Included in this meeting was Richard Trumka. The New Voice leadership promised massive support for the Decatur struggles, support that never came. The New Voice developed laryngitis almost immediately. President Sweeney was supposed to accompany the Staley local president to meet directly with Neil Shaw, CEO of the Staley parent, Tate&Lyle PLC, in London. Instead, Sweeney went without the local leader and cut a deal that betrayed the local union. No support was ever provided to the Caterpillar workers or Firestone workers and they were

ultimately forced to work side by side with scabs, just as the few Staley workers who returned to their jobs were.

But there was another betrayal suffered by the Staley workers. In this case it was their own national organization, the United Paperworkers' Industrial Union (UPIU). To protest that lack of support, Staley workers on two occasions went to the UPIU's headquarters in Nashville and were locked out of the building by security. Local members and leaders were brought up on dozens of bogus charges and most damningly, the entire membership and most of the local leadership was evicted from their own union hall by the same police that gassed and terrorized them on the picket lines. Trumka was confronted at a labor forum at the University of Illinois a few months after the betrayal in a painful lesson in accountability. Months later Sweeney was picketed in Madison, Wisconsin, as a large contingent of Decatur workers carried a large black coffin in front of the speakers stand, signifying the death by betrayal of their struggle. In a meeting with Sweeney after the demonstration, Sweeney promised a letter explaining why he withheld support from the struggle. That letter never came.

The AFL-CIO secretly, or so they thought, flew Father Martin Mangan, the local priest who supported the struggling workers and was arrested at the gates of Staley, to Washington in an effort to stop the protests. When that did not work and Father Mangan continued his support, Trumka flew into Decatur unannounced to the media and met with about 50 plus angry workers at St James Church, Father Mangan's parish. It was a tumultuous meeting and Trumka was quizzed several times about breaking his promises. Each time he responded that the AFL-CIO, a confederation with which national unions are affiliated, cannot render support unless it is requested by the national affiliate. Translation: the New Voice leadership lied to us in New York, but only after we played a key role in their election. Trumka left Decatur with no credibility.

Knowing this, how would you rate the chances of humble grocery workers? Once again, it is time for the big show. How do I know? I saw the show before; I lived with the betrayal. I am a former locked-out Staley worker from the "War Zone," Decatur, IL. mgriffwzef@aol.com

**The recent gathering of AFL-CIO leaders on the West Coast may appear as a gathering of eagles to desperate striking workers...But even buzzards gather and soar before they feast on their prey.**

## THE STALEY LOCKOUT

Belden Fields

In the above article, Mike Griffin tells of his disillusionment with the lack of support he feels that he got from both the AFL-CIO and his local's own national union in the Staley lockout. This was perhaps the most important and hard-fought struggle by labor in Central Illinois in recent years. It began after Tate and Lyle, a London-based multinational corporation in the sugar refining industry, bought out the Staley operation in Decatur in 1988. Up to that time, Staley had been a family owned operation.

What the workers first noted about the changeover was an increased disregard for safety issues. The workers made complaints to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that investigated and found 298 violations of the safety code. Staley (the name was retained by Tate and Lyle) was fined \$1.6million. Even after this, the workers complained that unsafe procedures continued in a dangerous industry that uses highly toxic

chemicals such as propylene oxide and runs the risk of explosion from starch dust as it converts corn into sweetener. Labor relations continued to degenerate until 1993.

The straw that broke the camel's back came in the summer of that year when Staley demanded maximum "flexibility" over the workforce. They insisted that workers sign a contract that obliged them to give up the normal 8 hour work day and to work 12 hour days (with an additional 4 hours overtime when the company felt it was needed), three and four consecutive days in alternating weeks. All workers would also be obliged to rotate between day and night shifts. When the company would not budge from this position in contract negotiations, the workers became more militant. They began to rebel by working to rule, i.e., doing no more than their jobs technically called for. Staley claimed that they were going further and sabotaging the work process by disposing of useable product. The workers denied this, but the National Labor Relations Board found that Staley's charge was credible. Workers who complained to the company were retaliated against.

On June 27, Staley locked out approximately 760

workers. Following the example set by President Reagan during the air controllers' strike, Staley placed advertisements in newspapers in other areas of the country and hired replacement workers to take the jobs of the workers it had locked out. Some of the workers, like Mike Griffin, became "road warriors" and traveled around the U.S., Canada, and even Europe publicizing what had been done to them and warning other workers that this is what they too could find themselves up against. They held meetings in Decatur that many of us from the C/U area attended. Socialist Forum held support meetings in Champaign-Urbana where Mike and other road warriors came to speak. The workers held marches and demonstrations in Decatur that attracted supporters from around the country. Some of these supporters blocked the gates of Staley and were pepper sprayed and arrested by the police. The lockout and militant resistance lasted approximately two and one-half years. The giant capitalist multinational won. But as readers can see, Mike Griffin is still fighting both the capitalist system that treated him and his fellow workers so badly and the organized labor leadership that he felt betrayed them.



# Urbana-Champaign IMC turns 3

by Meghan Krausch

ON JANUARY 19, the Independent Media Center celebrated its third anniversary with a party at 218 W. Main St. in Urbana. Over one hundred people attended the party, and a great time was had by all. Eight new members signed up with the IMC, and we took in over \$450, thanks to those who donated money and renewed their memberships.

Over the last three years, the IMC has grown from an organization with 100 members in January 2002, to an organization of about 225 members that has outgrown its rental space on Main St. With an annual operating budget of about \$20,000, the IMC continues to produce more and more media; IMC projects include a regular radio show (Monday at 5:30 PM on WEFT 90.1 FM), a monthly paper (*The Public i*), a television program (every second and fourth week of the month, on Wednesday at 8 PM and on Thursday at 10 PM, on UPTV, Insight Cable channel 6), a radical library open to the public, frequent all ages shows, and of course, the website ([www.ucimc.org](http://www.ucimc.org)). The IMC, a registered 501(c)3, is the fiscal sponsor of the global indymedia network and of many individual IMCs and other like-minded organizations.

With all this activity, the major project of 2003 has been the Capital Campaign, the IMC's initiative to raise \$100,000 toward purchasing a building of our own. We currently have \$55,000 in the bank. The goal of the Capital Campaign is to have \$100,000 by April 30, 2004. With our continued efforts and collective energy, this is an attainable goal. Once a new building is pur-

chased, the IMC has plenty of ideas for filling and utilizing the new space. One of our first goals will be to reopen a performance space (the space at our current location was closed by the city in May 2003) in order to start bringing people into the IMC again for all ages shows and independent music. We will also be fostering a number of cooperatively-run initiatives, as well as possibly renting space to other local organizations.

In 2004, the IMC will also be focusing on building a new low-power FM radio station. Socialist Forum received word from the FCC in December that their request for a low-power FM radio permit, submitted in the fall of 2000, has been approved. While the permit is in Socialist Forum's name, it has always been their intention to share the new station, WRFU, and its governance with the IMC as a community

resource. A specific agreement has not yet been worked out, but one proposal is to form a consensus-based governing board made up of 50% Socialist Forum members and 50% IMC members. The station will be a complement to WEFT, as there is enough interest in the community to sustain two station schedules. Furthermore, as

a low-power FM station, WRFU will be able to use automation and will not have substantial funding needs once it is on the air. The station must be built by June 19, 2005, and it is estimated that this will cost no less than \$10,000 (for a very basic station) and no more than \$20,000 (for a state-of-the-art station).

Ideally, the station will be inside the IMC's new building, so fundraising for WRFU will begin in

May, once the Capital Campaign is finished.

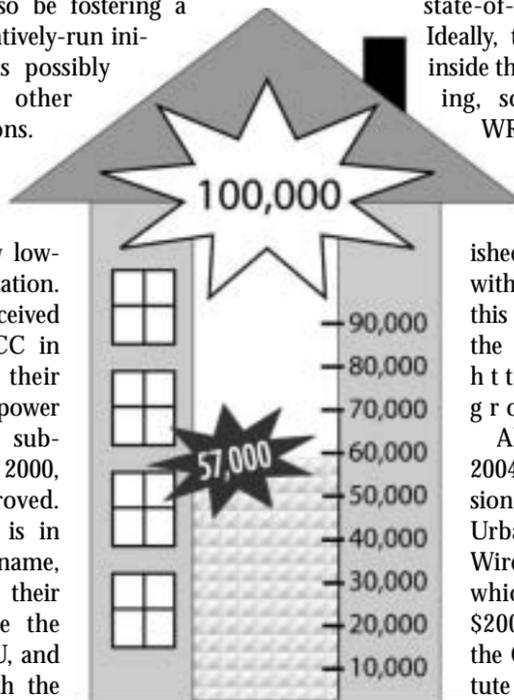
To get involved with the planning for this new initiative, join the RFU email list at <http://lists.cu.groogroo.com>.

Also in the works for 2004 is a major expansion of the Champaign-Urbana Community Wireless Network, which received a \$200,000 grant from the Open Society Institute this year. The project seeks to build a free

wireless network in Champaign-Urbana and to offer an alternative to the local tele-duopoly by placing wireless nodes on subscribers' rooftops at no cost to individuals, though donations are always welcome. The goal is threefold: to connect more local citizens to the Internet; to develop open-source hardware and software for

use by wireless projects around the world; and to build and support community-owned, not-for-profit broadband networks in cities and towns throughout the world. The Community Wireless Network is a project sponsored by the IMC. For more information, go to <http://www.cuwireless.net>.

2003 was as eventful as any other year for the IMC. We overcame the closing of our performance space by succeeding in getting our points across to the local media, holding a benefit that raised over \$1,600 for the Shows group and the Capital Campaign, and forging a new relationship with the Channing-Murray Foundation, where we continue to put on shows that are open to every member of the community. 2004 looks to be even busier, as we look toward purchasing a building, constructing a radio station, and continuing our expansion of community media resources. To join the IMC, fill out a membership form at the front table or contact Faith Swords at [faith@ucimc.org](mailto:faith@ucimc.org). To donate to the Capital Campaign, send a check made out to UCIMC with "Capital Campaign" in the memo line, to UCIMC, attn: Treasurer/Capital Campaign, 218 W. Main St., Ste. 110, Urbana, IL 61820, or go to <http://capital.ucimc.org>. To get involved, all you have to do is show up. Meetings of *The Public i* are every Thursday at 5:30; check out the schedule at the IMC or send an email to [meghan@ucimc.org](mailto:meghan@ucimc.org) for info on other groups. Most importantly, stop by every once in awhile and check out what your community has been up to.



## Zine Review: The East Village Inky

by Adam ?

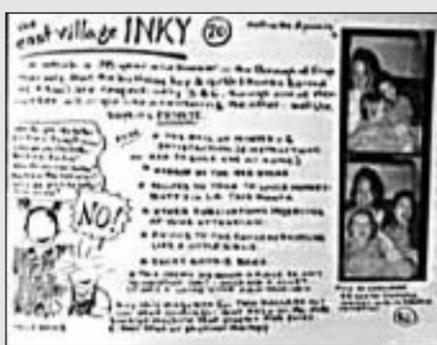
You're lucky that you live in the U-C area. The Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center has one of the Midwest's largest zine libraries. What exactly is a zine? According to another one of the IMC's fabulous zines, *Stolen Sharpie Revolution*, "A zine is an independently created publication containing anything you want it to... Zines can be put together by one person or a group of people and they are usually photocopied but can also be printed offset, letter press or mimeographed."

One of the IMC's newest zine acquisitions is called *The East Village Inky* (numbers 17-19). *The East Village Inky* is the story of a 38-year-old accordion-owning, insomniac Hoosier city-dweller with a 5-year-old daughter and a 2-year-old son who live in a 340 square foot apartment in Brooklyn. Parents, kid lovers, and zine fanatics will absolutely love reading the goings-on of Ayun and her kids. Follow the three of them as they trudge through the February 15th New York City anti-war march of 100,000 people, and as they make their own DIY costumes out of the recycled goods that can't be recycled (because Mayor Bloomberg decided to trash the city's recycling program).

*East Village Inky's* are complete with illustrations and photos of the threesome, Soul Food (reviews of everything from children's music to coloring books to zines), and updates on this not-so-ordinary family. Each issue is guaranteed to make you laugh at the

sheer insanity of being a radical parent of two adorable kids. Of course, if you're a parent, then you know what it's like, and it might make you cry!

My favorite issue is number 19. Ayun begins this issue by relaying her fears of the horrors of a possible doomsday scenario (Code Red by Bush standards)... no electricity means no cappuccino machine! So what is a mother supposed to do? You find out later that Ayun brings her children out to the February 15, 2003 anti-war demo in New York, only to have cops slam down a metal barricade in front of them in the middle of the march. This unfortunate occurrence separates Inky (Ayun's daughter) from her best friend. One can



only imagine the waterworks that came out of such a child! To make matters worse, Inky begins to panic because her feet are so cold that she claims not to be able to feel her feet. If only the closest subway station wasn't surrounded by riot cops!

On another outing, Ayun and the kids take a short trip to the Astor Place K-Mart where mothers and their children are protesting their new Easter baskets that are filled with more than just Easter eggs. Apparently, K-Mart thought it would be oh-so-patriotic to include "a Military Action Figure who was blister packed with enough ammo to take on at least one axis of evil." Read on to find out what Ayun's ideas for alternative boyish Easter basket stuffings include.

Are you hooked yet? Check out *The East Village Inky* (catalogued under "Personal Zines") and other zines at the IMC library. The IMC Library is home to a large collection of zines, books, periodicals, and videos. For information on how you can check out such materials, remember to become a member of the IMC and ask a staff person for assistance.

## Grand Reopening of the Open Stage!

The Channing-Murray/IMC Open Stage - It's all you: Tell that joke, sing that song, bring your string quartet, juggle those chainsaws, read that zine, bring that unicycle, play that bassoon, read your poem, act that scene, break that board in half with your head.

Join Host Darrin Drda and others at 8pm Thursday, February 19th at the Red Herring 1209 W. Oregon Urbana, Illinois.

It's time. You're ready. Bring friends and your own bassoon.