

# Grace Lee Boggs: Introduction to Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century

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ROMARE BEARDEN. THE CITY AND ITS PEOPLE. 1973

I feel blessed that at ninety-three I am still around to tell a new generation of movement activists the story of why James and I wrote *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (RETC) in the early 1970s, and why I welcome its present republication by Monthly Review Press with its original contents and a new title: *Revolution and Evolution in the Twenty-first Century*.

James died in July 1993. We had been partners in struggle for forty years. He and his way of looking at the world are still very much with me. But the world and I have changed a lot in the last fifteen years as I have continued our struggle to change the world. i

RETC (as I will refer to the 1974 publication) is an example of the critical role that continuing reflection on practice and practice based on reflection need to play in the lives of movement activists.

In the late 1960s, in the wake of the urban rebellions and the explosive growth of the Black Panther Party, both before and after Dr. King's assassination, Jimmy and I decided that after our intense involvement in the Black Power movement, we and the American movement needed a period of reflection. This would enable us to figure out where we were and where we needed to go in order to transform the United States into the kind of country that every American, regardless of race, class, ethnicity, or national origin, would be proud to call our own.

So in June 1968 we got together with our old comrades, Lyman and Freddy Paine, on a little island in Maine to begin the annual conversations that continue to this day. ii

The first outcome of these conversations was our recognition that the ongoing rebellions were not a revolution, as they were being called by many in the black community and by radicals and liberals. Nor were they only a breakdown in law and order or a riot, as they were labeled in the mainstream media. A rebellion, we decided, is an important stage in the development of revolution because it represents the massive uprising and protest of the oppressed. Therefore it not only begets reforms but also throws into question the legitimacy and supposed permanence of existing institutions.

However, a rebellion usually lasts only a few days. After it ends, the rebels are elated. But they then begin to view themselves mainly as victims and expect those in power to assume responsibility for changing the system. By contrast, a revolution requires that a people go beyond struggling against oppressive institutions and beyond victim thinking. A revolution involves making an evolutionary/revolutionary leap towards becoming more socially responsible and more self-critical human beings. In order to transform the world, we must transform ourselves.

Thus, unlike rebellions, which are here today and gone tomorrow, revolutions require a patient and protracted process that transforms and empowers us as individuals as we struggle to change the world around us. Going beyond rejections to projections, revolutions advance our continuing evolution as human beings because we are practicing new, more socially responsible and loving relationships to one another and to the earth.

In the process of arriving at this evolutionary humanist concept of revolution, it became clear to us that Marx's revolutionary scenario (which so many generations of radicals, including ourselves, had embraced) represented the end of an historical epoch, not the beginning of a new one. Writing over one hundred years ago, in the springtime of the

industrial revolution and an epoch of scarcity, Marx viewed the rapid development of the productive forces and the more just and equal distribution of material abundance as the main purpose of revolution. In a period when industrial workers were growing in numbers, it was natural for him to view the working class, which was being disciplined, organized, and socialized by the process of capitalist production, as the social force that would make this revolution.

Since then, however, under the impact of the technological revolution, especially in the United States, the working class has been shrinking rather than growing. At the same time the material abundance produced by rapid economic development has turned the American people, including workers, into mindless and irresponsible consumers, unable to distinguish between our needs and our wants. Moreover, we, the American people, have been profoundly damaged by a culture that for over two hundred years has systematically pursued economic development at the expense of communities, and of millions of people at home and abroad. Our challenge is to continue the evolution of human race by grappling with the contradiction between our technological and economic overdevelopment and our human and political underdevelopment. iii

Armed with this new, evolutionary humanist concept of revolution, we presented the *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party* at the National Black Economic Development Conference meeting in Detroit in 1969, urging Black Power activists to recognize that blacks have been in the forefront of revolutionary struggles in the United States down through the years because their struggles have not been for economic development but for more human relationships between people.

The next year we gave a series of lectures "On Revolution" at the University Center for Adult Education in Detroit. We began by pointing out that, although Lenin and the Bolsheviks had been able to seize state power in 1917, they were unable, in power, to involve the workers and peasants in governing the Soviet Union because their "revolution" had been an insurrection or event rather than a protracted process involving empowerment and transformation. Fortunately, however, the leaders of subsequent revolutions in China, Vietnam and Guinea Bissau learned from the Russian experience, and struggled valiantly to make transformation, serving the people and self-criticism an integral part of the struggle for power, in the process enriching the concept of revolution.

Thus the historical development of revolutions during the twentieth century has been a dialectical process in the course of which revolutionary leaders have been constantly challenged by the contradictions created by earlier revolutions to keep deepening the theory and practice of revolution.

Our challenge as American revolutionaries is to carry on this legacy, always bearing in mind

that, unlike Russia in the early twentieth century and China, Vietnam and Guinea-Bissau in later decades, our country has already undergone a century of rapid industrialization and is in the midst of a technological revolution whose political and cultural implications are as far-reaching as those of the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture eleven thousand years ago and from agriculture to industry three hundred years ago. Our challenge, as we say at the end of the chapter on "Dialectics and Revolution" in RETC, is to recognize that the crises facing our economically overdeveloped society can only be resolved by a tremendous transformation of ourselves and our relationships to each other and to the rest of the world.

Only a few dozen people participated in the "On Revolution" series. But the process was so inspiring that we decided to use the materials as the basis for forming revolutionary study groups. So in Detroit and a few other cities we began to bring together black activists with whom we had worked during the 1960s. At the same time we arranged with Monthly Review Press to publish the series as *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*. iv

By the time RETC came off the press in 1974 we had formed revolutionary study groups of black activists in Detroit, Philadelphia, New York City and Muskegon, Michigan, some of whom went on to form local organizations. These groups were small because most blacks were taking advantage of the mushrooming opportunities for upward mobility that had been created by the rebellions. v Thousands of people bought copies of the *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party* and carried them around conspicuously in their dashiki pockets. But only a handful were willing to commit the time and energy necessary to begin thinking about revolution in a more evolutionary way. vi

In the early 1970s these study groups did not include whites because our focus was on developing black leadership for the American revolution. However, after blacks joined the coalition that elected Jimmy Carter president in 1976, we decided that, like labor and women, blacks had become a self-interest group. Therefore the period in which an American revolution might have been made under black revolutionary leadership had come to an end. The time had come to develop members of the many ethnic groups who make up our country so that together we could give leadership in the protracted and many-sided struggles needed to revolutionize the United States. vii

By the 1980s, through a carefully thought-out program for what we called national expansion, new, mostly white, locals had been founded in Milwaukee, Seattle, Portland, Oregon, Syracuse, Boston and the Bay Area, and had joined with the mostly black locals in Detroit, Philadelphia, New York, Muskegon, Newark, New Jersey, and Lexington, Kentucky, to form the National Organization for an American Revolution (NOAR). Each new local created its own founding document from a study of the city for which it was assuming responsibility.



Except for Detroit and Philadelphia, most locals consisted of only a half-dozen or even fewer members. But our output was prodigious, mainly because of the sense of empowerment that had come from the study of RETC. Each member felt called upon to go beyond protest and rebelling, and embrace and inspire in others the conviction that we have the power within us to create ourselves and the world anew.

To demystify leadership, we decentralized responsibility for writing and publishing pamphlets that explored the new concepts and institutions needed for our rapidly changing reality.

Thus Philadelphia assumed responsibility for publishing five printings of the *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party*. Detroiter Kenny Snodgrass, barely out of his teens, wrote the introduction to *The Awesome Responsibilities of Revolutionary Leadership*. The tiny Muskegon local wrote and published two pamphlets, one entitled *A New Outlook on Health* and the other, *Women and the New World*. The New York local wrote and published *Beyond Welfare*. Syracuse produced *Going Fishing*, a statement on the local environment. Seattle published *A Crisis of Values and A Way of Faith, A Time for Courage*, based on a talk on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by Rosemary and Vincent Harding. Detroit produced *Crime Among Our People* (five printings). *Education to Govern* (three printings). *But What About the Workers? What Value Shall We Place on Ourselves? Women and the Movement to Build a New America. Towards a New Concept of Citizenship. Manifesto for an American Revolutionary Party* (English and Spanish). *Look! A Nation is Coming! Native Americans and the Second American Revolution*.

In our internal development programs we studied American history and gained an appreciation and love for our country as a work in progress, constantly challenged by those excluded from its promise and by the contradictions of capitalism to keep deepening the concept of citizenship and what it means to be an American. While most radicals rejected this approach as “American exceptionalism,” we welcomed the uniqueness of our history as the key to the American revolution. viii

We explored what it means to think dialectically and to go beyond the scientific rationalism of Descartes. In propaganda workshops we analyzed the significance of the spoken and written word, and practiced writing preambles for community organizations, using the Preamble to the U. S. Constitution as a model.

We tried to create an alternative to charismatic leadership and a balance between activism and reflection. At annual conventions every member participated equally in evaluating the previous year’s work and in deciding the direction and structures for the next year. Our continuing conversations in Maine and in Detroit provided opportunities for the reflection necessary to give deeper meaning to our activism. ix

We were proud of our self-reliance. With no paid staff we had no need for grants or outside funding. Instead each local sustained itself by membership dues and literature sales.

Meanwhile, profound changes were taking place in the United States and the world because of new developments in transportation and communications. The fragmentation of the production process into a host of component operations was making it easy for corporations to abandon U.S. plants and cities and move to other parts of the country or the world where they could make greater profits with cheaper labor and fewer social or environmental regulations. Corporations were abandoning cities, and blackmailing city governments by demanding tax abatements and other concessions, making it increasingly difficult for municipalities to supply normal services.

To understand these developments and the changes they required in our thinking and our practice, in 1982 we published the *Manifesto for an American Revolutionary Party* in which we warned that capitalism had entered a new stage, the stage of multinational capitalism, which was even more destructive than finance and monopoly capitalism because it threatened our communities and our cities: Up to now, most Americans have been able to evade facing the destructiveness of capitalist expansion because it was primarily other peoples, other cultures which were being destroyed.... But now the chickens have come home to roost. While we were collaborating with capitalism by accepting its dehumanizing values, capitalism itself was moving to a new stage, the stage of multinational capitalism.... Multinational corporations have no loyalty to the United States or to any American community. They have no commitment to the reforms that Americans have won through hard struggle.... Whole cities have been turned into wastelands by corporate takeovers and runaway corporations....

That is why as a people and as a nation, we must now make a second American revolution to rid ourselves of the capitalist values and institutions which have brought us to this state of powerlessness - or suffer the same mutilation, the same destruction of our families and our communities, the same loss of national independence as over the years we have visited upon other peoples and cultures.

To move towards this goal we need a new vision of a self-governing America based on local self-government, strong families and communities, and decentralized economies. Therefore revolutionary leadership will:

project and assist in the organization of all types of community committees: Committees for Crime Prevention that will establish and enforce elementary standards of conduct, such as mutual compacts not to buy 'hot goods,' Committees to Take Over Abandoned Houses for the use of community residents who will maintain them in accordance with standards set by the community; Committees of Family Circles to strengthen and support parents in the

raising of children; Committees to Take Over Neighborhood Schools that are failing to educate our children or to take over closed down schools so as to provide continuing education for our children; Committees to Resist Utility Cutoffs by companies which, under the guise of public service, are in reality private corporations seeking higher profits to pay higher dividends to their stockholders; Committees to Take over Closed Plants for the production of necessary goods and services and for the training and employment of young people in the community; Anti-Violence Committees to counter-act the growing resort to violence in our daily relationships; Committees to Ban All Nuclear Weapons that will rally Americans against the nuclear arms race as the anti-war movement rallied Americans against the Vietnam war in the early 1970s.

These grassroots organizations can become a force to confront the capitalist enemy only if those involved in their creation are also encouraged and assisted by the American revolutionary party to struggle against the capitalist values which have made us enemies to one another. For example, in order to isolate the criminals in our communities, we must also confront the individualism and self-centredness which permits us to look the other way when a neighbor's house is being robbed.

The publication of the *Manifesto for an American Revolutionary Party* energized the organization. Talking about our country and our communities, working together to develop ideas and programs for building communities, listening to the stories of everyone's lives and hopes, comrades discovered a new patriotism, a deeper rootedness and sense of place both in their communities and in the nation.

This enlarged sense of ourselves was unmistakable at the second NOAR convention in 1982. It came across especially in the poem "We Are the Children of Martin and Malcolm," written by Polish American John Gruchala, African American Ilaseo Lewis, and myself for the June 1982 Great Peace March in New York, and read by John and Ilaseo at the convention:

*We are the children of Martin and Malcolm Black, brown, red and white  
And so we cannot be silent  
As our youth stand on street corners and the promises of the 20th century pass them by.*

*We are the children of Martin and Malcolm  
Our ancestors.  
Proud and Brave  
Defied the storms and power of masters and madmen.*

*We are the children of Martin and Malcolm.*

*So when money-eyed men remove the earth beneath our feet and bulldoze communities,*

*And Pentagon generals assemble weapons to blister our souls and incinerate our planet, We cannot be silent.*

*We are the children of Martin and Malcolm.*

*Our birthright is to be creators of history,*

*Our glory is to struggle,*

*You shall know our names as you know theirs, Sojourner and Douglass, John Brown and Garrison.*

*We are the children of Martin and Malcolm, Black, brown, red and white,*

*Our Right, our Duty*

*To shake the world with a new dream.*

It was a very moving convention. We felt that together, African American, European American, Asian American, female and male, gay and straight, we were beginning to create a more perfect union and carrying on the American revolutionary tradition of Sojourner and Douglass, John Brown and Garrison, Martin and Malcolm.

Inspired by the ideas in the *Manifesto for an American Revolutionary Party*, members of the Detroit local began organizing in the community. Some members organized the Michigan Committee to Organize the Unemployed (MCOU) and began a struggle to obtain continuing health insurance for laid-off workers. Others organized Committees to Resist Utility Cutoffs. After MCOU failed to rally laid-off workers, comrades began helping residents in the Marlborough neighborhood, where MCOU had been holding street corner meetings, to close down crack houses.

After Reagan and Bush won the 1980 election, we called on all Americans to "Love America enough to change it." "Our Communities and our Country are now up to us!" During Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign in 1984 we distributed leaflets challenging both white and black Americans to seize the opportunity to create a new movement. "We can't leave it all to Jesse!"

In 1984 we also joined the "cheese line," which during the Reagan years provided millions of Americans with basic commodities. On the "cheese line" in Detroit we discovered that the elderly and disabled were being trampled on by the young and able-bodied. So we organized them into a group calling itself Detroiters for Dignity and waged a successful campaign for an extra distribution day for elders. Detroiters for Dignity brought an elders' conscience to the struggle in our city. We wrote letters to the editor, organized and attended community meetings, hosted meetings against the military involvement in Central America, and in 1985 drove to Big Mountain in Arizona to support the resistance of the Dineh (Navajo) people to their forced relocation.

Then, suddenly, despite or perhaps because of all this external activity, NOAR began falling apart. Differences that had been viewed as enriching became sources of tensions. Members began resigning, citing personal concerns (family, jobs) that demanded their time and energy. But political questions, even if unspoken, were also at issue. For one thing, members had committed themselves to build an organization with people who shared their views. Going out into the community to try to build a movement from scratch required a different kind of commitment and preparation. Also, despite our efforts to decentralize and demystify leadership, we had not deconstructed Marxist-Leninist concepts of democratic centralism and the vanguard party. Organizations in the black community especially need to accept this challenge because it is too easy for them to adopt the topdown and male leadership patterns of the black church.

Another troubling undercurrent was the decision the organization had made to go beyond projecting black leadership of the American revolution. Theoretically it was clear that the black movement as a movement was dead, but for black comrades the concept of black leadership for the American revolution had been a very heady one and giving it up felt a lot like betrayal.

We never formally dissolved NOAR. Between 1985 and 1987 it just faded away as members resigned or became so much involved in community activities that they had no time for our meetings. Our total membership was never more than seventy-five to a hundred. But between 1970, when we first began organizing on the basis of the ideas in the *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party*, and 1985, when NOAR ran out of steam, these few comrades were incredibly creative.

The audacity of Jimmy's challenge to blacks to stop thinking like a minority and assume leadership for an American revolution had lifted black comrades beyond victim or minority thinking (Jimmy called it "thinking like an underling") and empowered them to use their anger in a positive way, uncovering talents and energies that otherwise might have been wasted.

Our emphasis on the contradiction between economic and technological overdevelopment and political and human underdevelopment enabled us to explore a wide range of social, political, cultural, and artistic questions and to tackle questions of crime and welfare with proposals and positive programs for building social responsibility, community and citizenship. As a result, we attracted people with imagination and artistic sensibilities from all walks of life. Between 1974 and 1984 few joined us as members, but thousands read our literature and hundreds attended our meetings.

Overall anyone who was a NOAR comrade or was exposed to its ideas felt that our humanity had been enlarged by the challenge to go beyond rebellion to revolution, beyond victim



thinking, and beyond our personal grievances and identity struggles to assuming responsibility for a new concept of citizenship and of a self-governing America. Almost everyone has continued some form of activism.

In retrospect, I think that the main reason for NOAR's demise is that it had outlived its usefulness and the time had come to let it go out of existence. That is one of the many important lessons I learned from the experience. Even though we went through various stages with different names, we had essentially come out of the rebellions of the late 1960s. Our goal had been to do what the Black Panther Party had been unable to do: develop evolutionary/revolutionary ideas and a new kind of leadership for the exploding black movement. When that movement came to an end, we kept trying to adapt ourselves to the changing situation. It is no accident that our internal development programs and our publications, which boldly explored visionary solutions for our rapidly changing reality, were our major achievements. x By contrast, our organization had been founded to correct the shortcomings of a movement that was already on the decline. A new kind of leadership would have to come out of a new movement whose hopes and dreams were still undefined.

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In Detroit we did not have to wait long for the opportunity to begin creating a new movement. It came in 1988 when Coleman Young, Detroit's first black mayor, began grasping at straws in his efforts to stop the violence that was escalating among black youth in the wake of de-industrialization.

Coleman Young was a tough and charismatic politician who had been a Tuskegee airman during World War II and a leader of the National Negro Labor Council and a state senator in the post-war years. He was elected Mayor in 1973 not only because the black community wanted a black mayor but because the massive rebellion in July 1967 had warned the power structure that a white mayor could no longer maintain law and order.

As the city's new CEO, Young acted quickly to eliminate the most egregious examples of racism in the police and fire departments and at city hall. But he was helpless against the relentless de-industrializing of the city and the widespread violence resulting from the drug economy that jobless blacks had created in the inner city. By the mid-1980s the school system was in deep trouble because Detroit teenagers were asking themselves "Why stay in school hoping that some day you'll get a good job when you can make a lot of money rollin' right now?" In the summer of 1986 47 young Detroiters were killed and 365 wounded, among them sixteen-year-old Derick Barfield and fourteen-year-old Roger Barfield. Their mother, Clementine Barfield, responded by founding Save Our Sons and Daughters (SOSAD) which received widespread local and national attention. I edited the SOSAD newsletter and Jimmy contributed a column: "What can we be that our children can see?"

For three years from 1989 to 1992, through the heat of summer and the sleet of winter, we participated in the weekly anti-crackhouse marches of WE PROS (We the People Reclaim Our Streets), chanting "Up with hope, Down with dope!" "Drug Dealers, Drug Dealers, you better run and hide, 'cause people are uniting on the other side!" In a few neighborhoods, especially Dorothy Garner's near the Linwood exit of the Lodge Freeway, we were successful in reducing crime and violence. But our marches did not attract young people, and we recognized that any program to rebuild and respirit Detroit had to be built around a youth core.

Meanwhile, Young had been trying in vain to keep or bring manufacturing plants in the city. xi Near the end of his fourth term, in 1988, he decided that casino gambling was the solution. Gaming, he said, was an industry that would create fifty thousand jobs. To defeat Young's proposal, we joined Detroiters Uniting, a coalition of community groups, blue collar, white collar and cultural workers, clergy, political leaders and professionals, led by two preachers, United Methodist pastor William Quick and Baptist pastor Eddie Cobbin, one white and one black. I was the vice-president. Our concern," we said, "is with how our city has been disintegrating socially, economically, politically, morally and ethically.... We are convinced that we cannot depend upon one industry or one large corporation to provide us with jobs. It is now up to us - the citizens of Detroit - to put our hearts, our imaginations, our minds, and our hands together to create a vision and project concrete programs for developing the kinds of local enterprises that will provide meaningful jobs and income for all citizens."

During the struggle Young denounced us as "naysayers." "What is your alternative?" he demanded. Responding to Young's challenge, Jimmy made a speech in which he projected an alternative to casino gambling: the vision of a new kind of city whose foundation would be people living in communities and citizens who take responsibility for decisions about their city instead of leaving these to politicians or to the marketplace, and who also create small enterprises that emphasize the preservation of skills and produce goods and services for the local community. xii

To introduce this vision, in November 1991 we organized a Peoples Festival of community organizations, describing it as "A multigenerational, multicultural celebration of Detroiters, putting our hearts, minds, hands and imagination together to redefine and recreate a city of Community, Compassion, Cooperation, Participation and Enterprise in harmony with the Earth."

A few months later, harking back to Mississippi Freedom Summer and drawing on our connections in the city and with nationally emerging environmental groups, we founded Detroit Summer, with a long list of endorsers, as a "Multicultural, Intergenerational Youth Program/Movement to Rebuild, Redefine and Respirit Detroit from the ground up." Detroit

Summer youth volunteers began working on community gardens with African American southern-born elders (they called themselves Gardening Angels) who were already appropriating vacant lots to plant these gardens, not only to produce healthier food for themselves and their neighbors, but to instill respect for nature and a sense of process in city youth. Detroit Summer youth also rehabbed houses, painted public murals in the community, cleaned up neighborhood parks, and engaged in both intergenerational and youth-only dialogues.

There was something magical about Detroit Summer as there had been about Mississippi Freedom Summer. In a city that had once been the national and international example of the miracles of the industrial epoch but had now become a sea of vacant lots and abandoned houses, people were moved by the sight of young people and elders reconnecting with one another and with the earth. Their community gardens created a new image of vacant lots, not as blight but as a treasure-house of health-giving food. Their murals established a positive youth presence in the community. Students from universities all over the country who participated in or heard of Detroit Summer began to see their own futures, the future of cities and the environmental movement in a new light.

The result since 1992 has been an escalating urban agricultural movement in Detroit: neighborhood gardens, youth gardens, church gardens, school gardens, hospital gardens, senior independence gardens, teaching gardens, wellness gardens, Hope Takes Root gardens, Kwanzaa gardens.

A few blocks from the Boggs Center, Capuchin monks have created Earthworks, a program which uses gardening to educate Detroit school children in the science, nutrition and biodiversity of organic agriculture and also provides fresh produce for WIC and the Capuchin Soup Kitchen's daily meals.

At the Catherine Ferguson Academy, a public high school for pregnant teens and teenage mothers, students raise vegetables and fruit trees. They also built a barn to house a horse, donkey, and small animals that provide eggs, meat, milk and cheese for the school community. xiii

Architectural students at University of Detroit Mercy produced a documentary called Adamah ("of the earth" in Hebrew), envisioning how a two and one-half acre square mile area not far from downtown Detroit could be developed into a self-reliant community with a vegetable farm to produce food, a tree farm and sawmill to produce lumber, schools that include community-building as part of the curriculum, and co-housing as well as individual housing. xiv

The National Black Farmers Union, whose mantra is "We can't free ourselves until we feed

ourselves," brought its annual convention to Detroit.

Inspired by Jimmy's speech, Jackie Victor and Ann Perrault worked in a bakery to learn the trade and then opened their own organic bakery in midtown Detroit as an example of the kind of small business that our cities need instead of big box and chain stores. xv

Every August the Detroit Agricultural Network conducts a tour of community gardens. In 2007 six big buses were not enough for the hundreds of people of all ethnic groups attracted by Detroit's mushrooming urban agricultural movement. After the tour, a retired city planner told me that it gave her a sense of how important community gardens are to a city. "They reduce neighborhood blight, build self-esteem among young people, provide them with structured activities from which they can see results, build leadership skills, provide healthy food and a community base for economic development. I see it as the 'Quiet Revolution.' It is a revolution for self-determination taking place quietly in Detroit." xvi

This quiet revolution has been preparing Detroiters to meet today's growing crises of global warming and spiraling food prices. Instead of paying prices we can't afford for produce grown on factory farms and imported from Florida and California in gas-guzzling, carbon monoxide-releasing trucks, we can grow our own food and not only achieve food security but grow our souls because we are creating a new balance between necessity and freedom. xvii

This revolution was also deepening our sense of the connections between our own locally based work and the new urban agriculture movement weaving a new future both in our own country and around the earth. From our growing conviction that something new was emerging, we began to look again at larger philosophical questions.

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During the 1960s Jimmy and I had paid little attention to the speeches and writings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Like other members of the Detroit black community, made up largely of former Alabamians, we rejoiced at the victories the civil rights movement was winning in the south. xviii But as activists struggling for black power in Detroit, we identified much more with Malcolm X than with Martin. In fact, we tended to view King's call for nonviolence and for the beloved community as somewhat naïve and sentimental.

Jimmy and I were also not involved in the fifteen-year campaign that Detroit Congressman John Conyers Jr. launched in 1968 to declare King's birthday on January 15 a national holiday. I recall holding back because I was concerned that a King holiday would obscure the role of grassroots activists and reinforce the tendency to rely on charismatic leaders.

Meanwhile I was troubled by the way that black militants kept quoting Malcolm's "by all means necessary," ignoring the profound changes that Malcolm was undergoing in the year following his split with the Nation of Islam. After his pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm was seriously rethinking black nationalism, and in December 1964 he had gone to Selma, Alabama, to explore working with Martin Luther King Jr. xix

As violence in Detroit and other cities escalated in the wake of the urban rebellions, I began to wonder whether events might have taken a different course if we had found a way to blend Malcolm's militancy with King's nonviolence and vision of the beloved community.

During this period my interest in King was also piqued by the little pamphlet *A Way of Faith, A Time for Courage* published in 1984 by the Seattle NOAR local. In this pamphlet our old friends, Vincent and Rosemary Harding, who had worked closely with MLK in the 1960s, explain that "Martin wasn't assassinated for simply wanting black and white children to hold hands, but because he said that there must be fundamental changes in this country and that black people must take the lead in bringing them.... Put simply, these problems are Racism, Materialism, Militarism, and Anti-Communism." xx

Meanwhile, in 1982, Reagan signed into law the decision to observe King's birthday as a national holiday, and scholars were beginning to re-evaluate his work and life. xxi In 1992, at the opening ceremony of Detroit Summer, I had noted the similarity between our vision and King's projections for direct youth action "in our dying cities." In the spring of 1998, when I was asked what I thought about the Black Radical Congress, I replied that in order to create a new movement, we must first understand the old. For radicals in this period this means grappling with the significance of the Black Panther Party, Malcolm X and King. xxii

As a result of all these developments, I began studying King's life and work from the perspective of RETC and our work in Detroit. To my delight I discovered that Hegel had been King's favorite philosopher. This reminded me of the influence that Hegel has had on my own life ever since I read his *Phenomenology* in my early twenties and learned that the process of constantly overcoming contradictions, or what Hegel called the "suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative," is the key to the continuing evolution of humanity. xxiii

I also discovered that in the last three years of his life King had viewed the American preoccupation with rapid economic advancement as the source of our deepening crises both at home and in our relationships with the rest of the world.

As King's life and ideas became more meaningful to me, I began speaking about him at MLK holiday celebrations and on other occasions. For example, at the University of Michigan 2003 MLK Symposium, my speech was entitled "We must be the change." At Union



Theological Seminary in September 2006, I spoke on "Catching Up with Martin." At Eastern Michigan University in January 2007, I emphasized the need to "Recapture MLK's Radical Revolutionary Spirit/Create Cities and Communities Of Hope." At the Brecht Forum in May 2007, my speech was entitled "Let's talk about Malcolm and Martin." xxiv

The more I talked about King, the more I felt the need for each of us to grow our own souls in order to overcome the new and more challenging contradictions of constantly changing realities.

The 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott, I realized, was the first struggle by an oppressed people in western society based on the concept of two-sided transformation, both of ourselves and of our institutions. Inspired by the twenty-six-year-old King, a people who had been treated as less than human had struggled for more than a year against their dehumanization, not as angry protesters or as workers in the plant, but as members of the Montgomery community, new men and women representing a more human society in evolution. Using methods including creating their own system of transportation that transformed themselves and increased the good rather than the evil in the world, exercising their spiritual power and always bearing in mind that their goal was not only desegregating buses but building the beloved community, they had inspired the human identity, anti-war and ecological movements that during the last decade of the twentieth century were giving birth to a new civil society in the United States.

The more I studied King's life and ideas, especially in the last three years before his assassination, the more I recognized the similarity between our struggles in Detroit after the 1967 rebellion and King's after the 1965 Watts uprising.

On August 6, 1965, nearly a decade after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King was among the black and white leaders who joined President Johnson in celebrating the signing of the Voting Rights Act, the result of the march from Selma to Montgomery.

Less than a week later, on August 11, black youth in Watts, California, protesting the police killing of a speeding driver, exploded in an uprising in which thirty-five people died and thousands were arrested. When King flew to Watts on August 15, he discovered to his surprise that few black youth in Watts had even heard of him or his strategy of non-violence and that, despite the loss of lives, they were claiming victory because their violence had forced the authorities to acknowledge their existence.

The Watts uprising forced King to recognize how little attention he himself had paid to black youth in the cities. So in early 1966 he rented an apartment in the Chicago ghetto and was able to get a sense of how the anger that exploded in Watts was rooted in the powerlessness and uselessness that is the daily experience of black youth made expendable by technology.

He also discovered the futility of trying to involve these dispossessed young people in the kinds of nonviolent mass marches that had worked in the South. And they gave him a lot to think about when they demanded to know why they should be nonviolent in Chicago when the U.S. government was employing such massive violence against poor peasants in Vietnam.

Thus, King's "A Time to Break Silence" speech against the war in Vietnam was the result of his wrestling not only with the Vietnam War but with the questions raised by these young people in what he called "our dying cities."

"The war in Vietnam," he recognized, "is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit. We are on the wrong side of a world revolution because we refuse to give up the privileges and the pleasures that come from the immense profits of overseas investment.

"We have come to value things more than people. Our technological development has outrun our spiritual development. We have lost our sense of community, of interconnection and participation."

In order to regain our humanity, he said, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values against the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism. Projecting a new vision of global citizenship, he called on every nation to "develop an over-riding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies." xxv

By drawing on the transformational ideas of Hegel, Gandhi and Jesus Christ, all of which had become more meaningful to him since the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King began to connect the despair and violence in the urban ghettos with the alienation which young people experience in today's world.

This generation is engaged in a cold war with the earlier generation. It is not the familiar and normal hostility of the young groping for independence. It has a new quality of bitter antagonism and confused anger which suggests basic values are being contested.

The source of this alienation is that our society has made material growth and technological advance an end in itself, robbing people of participation, so human beings become smaller while their works become bigger. xxvi

The way to overcome this alienation, King said, is by changing our priorities. Instead of pursuing economic productivity, we need to expand our uniquely human powers, especially our capacity for agape, which is the love that is ready to go to any length to restore community.

This love, King insisted, is not some sentimental weakness but somehow the key to ultimate reality. xxvii

In practice, taking this statement seriously requires a radical change or paradigm shift in our approach to organizing and to citizenship, which is the practice of politics. Instead of pursuing rapid economic development and hoping that it will eventually create community, we can only create community if we do the opposite, i.e., begin with the needs of the community and with creating loving relationships with one another and with the earth.

It also requires a paradigm shift in how we address the three main questions of philosophy: What does it mean to be a human being? How do we know? How shall we live? It means rejecting the scientific rationalism (based on the Cartesian body-mind dichotomy), which recognizes as real only that which can be measured and therefore excludes the knowledge which comes from the heart or from the relationships between people. It means that we must be willing to see with our hearts and not only with our eyes. xxviii

King believed that we could achieve the beloved community because he saw with his heart and not only with his eyes. We can learn the practical meaning of love, he said, "from the young people who joined the civil rights movement, putting on overalls to work in the isolated rural South because they felt the need for more direct ways of learning that would strengthen both society and themselves."

What we need now in our dying cities, he said, are ways to provide young people with similar opportunities to engage in self-transforming and structure-transforming direct action. xxix

King was assassinated before he could begin to develop strategies to implement this revolutionary/evolutionary perspective for our young people, our cities, and our country. After his death his closest associates were too busy taking advantage of the new opportunities for advancement within the system to keep his vision and his praxis alive.

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Meanwhile, as we continued our struggle to rebuild, redefine and respire Detroit from the ground up, I was keeping up with the new thinking taking place on a scale unparalleled since the Enlightenment which preceded the French revolution more than two hundred years ago. xxx

I was also very conscious of the new revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces that had been emerging since King's assassination.

In the wake of the civil rights, black power and anti-war movements of the 1960s, women, Chicanos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, gays, lesbians, and the disabled were creating their own movements for recognition and social change. The vitality and creativity of these movements reminds us that our country has not been and never will be just black and white.

Out of their experiences of sexism in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements, women were carrying on a many-sided philosophical and practical struggle against all forms of patriarchy. Activist intellectuals like Starhawk were exposing the sixteenth and seventeenth century witch hunts as the means by which the British power structure expropriated the land of the villagers and replaced the immanent knowledge of women with the scientific rationalism of the intellectual elite. Indian physicist and activist Vandana Shiva and German sociologist Maria Mies were explaining how the labor of western societies "colonizes" women, nature and the Third World. By a deeper appreciation of the work of women, peasants and artists, they suggested, we can get an idea of what work will be like in a new non-capitalist society: difficult and time-consuming but rewarding and joyful because it nurtures life. xxxi

Also, having discovered that the personal is political, women activists were abandoning the charismatic male, vertical, and vanguard party leadership patterns of the 1960s and creating more participatory, more empowering, more horizontal kinds of leadership. Instead of modeling their organizing on the lives of men outside the home, e.g. in the plant or in the political arena, they were beginning to model it on the love, caring, healing and patience which are an organic part of the everyday lives of women. These, along with an appreciation of diversity and of strengths and weaknesses, go into the raising of a family. xxxii

Transnational corporations were growing by leaps and bounds. By the 1980s factory jobs were declining as more and more capital was exported overseas to countries where more profit could be made with cheaper labor. National and local legislation establishing minimum social and environmental standards were being overruled by organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO). Global corporations were reducing the power of nation-states, turning people all over the world into consumers, and changing the relationships between people and with the earth into commodity relationships.

In response to this commodification and dehumanization, tens of thousands of individuals and groups, representing very diverse sections of society, including steelworkers and anarchists, mobilized to close down the WTO meeting in Seattle in November 1999. During the "Battle of Seattle" Starhawk and other activists created affinity groups to decide their own tactics democratically. At subsequent mobilizations, e.g. against Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA) in Quebec and Miami, these affinity groups also set up their own communal kitchens, street medic teams, and media centers. Out of these experiences local

activists began to see the possibilities for new forms of year-round, more democratic kinds of organizing in their communities.

Following mass mobilizations against corporate globalization in Seattle, Quebec, and Miami, thousands of individuals and groups from around the world gathered at annual World Social Forums and National Social Forums to declare that “Another World is Possible.”

In response to corporate globalization, people in communities all over the world began to create new ways of living at the local level to reconnect themselves with the earth and with one another. xxxiii

The best known of these are the Zapatistas, the indigenous peoples of Chiapas who took over Mexican cities on January 1, 1994, the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) legalized the power of transnational corporations over local economies and government. The goal of the Zapatistas is to create a participatory economy and a participatory democracy from the ground up by a patient process of democratic discussions and nonviolence. Since 1994 Chiapas has become the Mecca and model for revolutionaries all over the world. xxxiv

In the last four years, as a member of the Beloved Communities Initiative, I have been impressed with the diversity of the groups which are in the process of creating new kinds of communities in the United States. xxxv

These include Detroit-City of Hope; the Beloved Community Center and Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Greensboro, North Carolina; an annual fall gathering in New Mexico where Tewawa women share the wisdom of indigenous cultures with people of many different backgrounds; Growing Power in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a two and one-half acre farm with five greenhouses which is not only growing food for two thousand families but new multiethnic community relations; Access, a Center for Independent Living in Chicago, where the prideful struggle of individuals with disabilities is deepening our understanding of what it means to be a human being; Cookman United Methodist Church in North Philadelphia, where neighborhood residents are creating a loving, caring environment for young people to complete their schooling and also develop leadership skills; Great Leap in Los Angeles, where individuals from different faith backgrounds are expanding their individual identities through spiritual and physical rituals and exercises.

Since 1968 a counterrevolutionary movement has also been developing in the United States. It began with the election of Richard Nixon as president in reaction to the turmoil of the 1960s, e.g. the urban uprisings, the assassinations of MLK and Robert Kennedy, the police riot at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. In the 1980s, as the export of jobs created unemployment and insecurity among factory workers and with families also in



disarray, a growing number of Americans began to blame the anti-Vietnam war movements and blacks, feminists, gays, liberals and radicals for turning the American Dream into a nightmare. xxxvi

Around the same time a group of conservatives in the power structure with close ties to the arms and energy industries, including Dick Cheney, who was President Gerald Ford's chief of staff in the 1970s, and Donald Rumsfeld, who was Ford's secretary of defense, began developing a long-range program to restore U.S. hegemony. Their aim was to increase an already enormous military budget at the expense of domestic social programs, topple regimes resistant to U.S. corporate interests, and replace the UN's role of preserving and extending international order with U.S. military bases. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these neoconservatives felt that the main obstacle to unilateral U.S. actions had been removed, and in 1997 they founded the Project for the New American Century. xxxvii

The attacks of September 11, 2001, gave them the opportunity to launch the war in Afghanistan in 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

How do we overcome this shameful and shameless counterrevolution which has cost the lives of so many American servicemen and women in Iraq and Afghanistan, killed more than a million Iraqis, made refugees of other millions, used security as an excuse to destroy rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, and violated international law and dishonored our country by torturing detainees at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo? Because it is a movement, it cannot be defeated in the ordinary course of electoral politics. For the same reason, it cannot be eliminated by a seizure of power or insurrection like the Russian revolution in 1917. xxxviii It can only be overcome by a new kind of evolutionary humanist revolution.

In a speech entitled "The Next American Revolution," which I gave on March 16, 2008, at the closing plenary of the Left Forum in New York City, I explained how this revolution would differ from all previous revolutions. xxxix

I began by quoting from the chapter on "Dialectics and Revolution" in RETC, where, nearly 30 years before 9/11, Jimmy wrote:

"The revolution to be made in the United States will be the first revolution in history to require the masses to make material sacrifices rather than to acquire more material things. We must give up many of the things which this country has enjoyed at the expense of damning over one-third of the world into a state of underdevelopment, ignorance, disease and early death. Until the revolutionary forces come to power here, this country will not be safe for the world and revolutionary warfare on an international scale against the United States will remain the wave of the present - unless all of humanity goes up in one big puff."

It is obviously going to take a tremendous transformation to prepare the people of the United States for these new social goals. But potential revolutionaries can only become true revolutionaries if they take the side of those who believe that humanity can be transformed.

Thus the American revolution at this stage in our history, and in the evolution of technology and of the human race, is not about jobs or universal health insurance or fighting inequality or making it possible for more people to realize the American Dream of upward mobility. It is about creating a new American Dream whose goal is a higher humanity instead of the higher standard of living that is dependent upon empire. It is about acknowledging that we Americans have enjoyed upward mobility and middle class comforts and conveniences at the expense of other peoples all over the world. It is about living the kind of lives that will end the galloping inequality both inside this country and between the global North and South, and also slow down global warming. About practicing a new, more active, global and participatory concept of citizenship. About becoming the change we want to see in the world.

This means that it is not enough to organize mobilizations that call on Congress and the President to end the war in Iraq. We must also challenge the American people to examine why 9/11 happened and why so many people around the world who, although they do not support the terrorists, understand that terrorism feeds on the anger that millions feel about U.S. support of the Israel occupation of Palestine and Middle East dictatorships, and the way that we treat whole countries, the peoples of the world, and nature only as resources enabling us to maintain our middle class way of life.

We have to help the American people find the moral strength to recognize that, although no amount of money can compensate for the countless deaths and indescribable suffering that our criminal invasion and occupation have caused the Iraqi people, we have a responsibility to make the material sacrifices that will enable them to begin rebuilding their infrastructure. We have to help the American people grow our souls enough to recognize that, since we have been consuming 25 percent of the planet's resources even though we are only 4 percent of the world's population, we are the ones who must take the first big steps to reduce greenhouse emissions. We are the ones who must begin to live more simply so that others can simply live.

Thus, the next American revolution is about challenging the American people and ourselves to "form a more perfect union" by carrying on the revolutionary legacy of William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Audre Lorde, and Malcolm and Martin. It is about claiming this legacy openly and proudly, reminding ourselves and every American that our country was born in revolution. Therefore we are the real Americans while the un-Americans are the neocons, the homophobes, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and the anti-immigrant crusaders who, like

yesterday's slaveowners, General Custers, imperialists, and White Citizens Councils, are subverting what is best in the American tradition.

The courage, commitment, conviction and visionary strategies required for this kind of revolution are very different from those required to storm the Kremlin or the White House. We can no longer view the American people as masses or warm bodies to be mobilized in increasingly aggressive and more massive struggles for higher wages, better jobs, or guaranteed health care. Instead we must challenge them and ourselves to engage in activities at the grassroots level that build a new and better world by improving the physical, psychological, political and spiritual health of ourselves, our families, our communities, our cities, and our planet.

To my surprise and delight the two thousand or more people gathered in the Great Hall of Cooper Union responded to my speech with a standing ovation. It was, I believe, a sign that a new generation of Americans is ready to recognize that the next American revolution is not about reconstituting the welfare state but about making the radical revolution in values that Martin Luther King Jr. advocated. From the calamity of the Vietnam and Iraq wars they have learned that power does not come out of the barrel of a gun or from taking over the White House. Only right makes might. xi

I also believe that, in much the same way and for many of the same reasons that Detroiters have been forced by the devastation of de-industrialization to begin rebuilding, redefining and respiriting our city from the ground up, the American people are being forced by the interconnected crises of the Iraq war, global warming, floods, job insecurity, and a sinking economy to begin making a radical revolution in their way of life.

For example, a lot of Americans are furious these days because gas prices are soaring. But one hundred years from now our posterity may bless this period when high gas prices finally forced Americans to bike or take public transportation to work, to dream of neighborhood stores within walking distance, and to start building cities that are friendlier to children and pedestrians than to cars. xli

Likewise, as food prices skyrocket, hunger riots erupt, and obesity, diabetes, and other health problems caused by our industrialized food production system reach epidemic levels, the urban agricultural movement is the fastest growing movement in the United States. Americans are beginning to recognize that our health and the health of our communities and our planet require that we grow our own food closer to where we live.

This is how necessity and freedom have come together in Detroit, and how I see them coming together in other cities in the days ahead. It was not an abstract idealism but the real and deteriorating conditions of life in a de-industrialized Detroit that moved us to

found Detroit Summer in 1992, so that young people could begin taking responsibility for rebuilding, redefining and respiriting our city from the ground up.

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2007 was the fortieth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Break the Silence" speech and also of the July 1967 Detroit rebellion. To commemorate these historic events, the Boggs Center convened two meetings: one in April "To Transform Grief into Hope" and one in July to involve Detroiters in a conversation on "Where Do We Go from Here?"

At the July meeting people told so many inspiring stories of grassroots activities and projects that Detroiters are creating or want to create that we decided to launch a Detroit-City of Hope campaign to identify, encourage and promote these as a new infrastructure for our city. Among these activities and projects (which recall those in the *Manifesto for an American Revolutionary Party* in 1982 and in "Rebuilding Detroit: An Alternative to Casino Gambling" in 1988) are:

- expanding urban agriculture and small businesses to create a sustainable local economy.
- re-inventing work so that it is not just a job done for a paycheck but to develop people and build community.
- re-inventing education to include children in activities that transform both themselves and their environment.
- creating co-ops to produce local goods for local needs.
- developing peace zones to transform our relationships with one another in our homes and on our streets.
- replacing punitive justice with restorative justice programs to keep nonviolent offenders in our communities and out of prisons that not only misspend billions much needed for roads and schools but turn minor offenders into hardened criminals. xlii Over thirty years ago in RETC we projected a vision of two-sided transformation of ourselves and our institutions as the key to the next American revolution. In the last three years of his life, in response to the Vietnam war *and* youth despair in our dying cities, this is the kind of American revolution that MLK was also projecting in his call for a radical revolution of values. I believe that twenty-first century revolutions will be huge steps forward in the continuing evolution of the human race. But I also believe that, more often than not, these huge steps will be the accumulation and culmination of small steps, like planting community gardens and creating community peace zones. xliii We are all works in progress, always in the process of being and becoming. Periodically there come times like the present when the crisis is so profound and the contradictions so interconnected that if we are willing to see with our hearts and not only with our eyes, we can accelerate the continuing evolution of the human race towards becoming more socially

responsible, more self-conscious, more self-critical human beings.

Our country is also a work in progress. This is our time to reject the old American Dream of a higher standard of living based upon empire, and embrace a new American Dream of a higher standard of humanity that preserves the best in our revolutionary legacy. We can become the leaders we are looking for.

Towards that end we need to keep combining practice with reflection and urgency with patience. That is what I have learned after nearly seven decades of struggle for radical social change.

————— FOOTNOTES —————

i After Jimmy's death, friends and comrades founded the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership to continue our legacy of combining practice with reflection, and local groundedness with visionary strategizing. Some of Jimmy's most memorable speeches (Think Dialectically, Not Biologically; The Next Development in Education; Rebuilding Detroit: An Alternative to Casino Gambling) are posted on the Center's website at <http://www.boggscenter.org>

The naturalness and ease with which Jimmy thought dialectically never ceased to amaze me. It was rooted in his sense of himself as a black American, born and raised in the deep agricultural South, who then became a Chrysler worker for twenty-eight years, and was now wondering about the far-reaching cultural changes that the new informational technology was bringing.

Almost everyone who talked with him for only a few minutes realized that they had come into contact with an "organic intellectual," even if they had never heard of Gramsci. It was obvious that Jimmy's ideas came not out of books but out of continuing reflection on his own life and the lives of working people like himself.

Long before we met, he had decided that he was an American revolutionist who loved this country enough to change it. He was very conscious that the blood and sweat of his ancestors was in this country's soil and had already embarked on the struggle to ensure that his people would be among those deciding its economic and political future. That is why he was able to write paragraphs like the following that end chapter 6 on "Dialectics and Revolution" in RETC:

Technological man/woman developed because human beings had to discover how to keep warm, how to make fire, how to grow food, how to build dams, how to dig wells. Therefore human beings were compelled to manifest their humanity in their technological capacity, to



discover the power within them to invent tools and technologies which would extend their material powers. We have concentrated our powers on making things to the point that we have intensified our greed for more things and lost the understanding of why this productivity was originally pursued. The result is that the mind of man/woman is now totally out of balance, totally out of proportion.

That is what production for the sake of production has done to modern man/woman. That is the basic contradiction confronting everyone who has lived and developed inside the United States. That is the contradiction which neither the U.S. government nor any social force in the United States up to now has been willing to face, because the underlying philosophy of this country, from top to bottom, remains the philosophy that economic development can and will resolve all political and social problems.

ii The four of us, from very different backgrounds, had been members of the Johnson-Forest Tendency led by West Indian Marxist C.L.R. James and Russian-born Marxist Raya Dunayevskaya. One Alabama-born African American, one New England Yankee, one Jewish American and one Chinese American, we reflected the American experience.

To learn more about Lyman and Freddy and these conversations, see *Conversations in Maine: Exploring our Nation's Future*, South End Press, 1978; and my autobiography, *Living for Change*, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, pp. 146-157. Lyman died in 1978 and Freddy in 1999. Richard Feldman wrote the introduction to *Conversations in Maine*. Shea Howell has continued to host the conversations in Maine since Freddy's death. Both Rich and Shea reviewed this introduction and made helpful suggestions.

iii Decades before writing *Das Kapital* in the British Museum, a twenty-nine-year-old Karl Marx had anticipated this contradiction when he wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* that as a result of the "constant revolutionizing of production... all that is sacred is profaned, all that is solid melts into air, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his conditions of life and his relations with his kind."

iv Harry Braverman, whose classic *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was also published in 1974, represented Monthly Review Press in these arrangements. Monthly Review had already published two books by Jimmy, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*, in 1963 (brought to the attention of Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy by W.H. "Ping" Ferry); and *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker's Notebook*, in 1970. In *The American Revolution*, Jimmy had challenged the validity of Marx's nineteenth-century analysis for a technologically-advanced society like the United States in the midtwentieth century, and had also warned that to make a revolution in our country, all Americans, including workers, blacks, and the most oppressed, would have to make political and ethical choices. Soon after its publication, *The American Revolution* was translated and

published in five other languages (Japanese, French, Italian, Portuguese and Catalan. *Racism and the Class Struggle*, a compilation of Jimmy's speeches during the 1970s, has been widely read in Black Studies classes. At a twentieth anniversary celebration of *The American Revolution* in 1983, Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis linked RETC to Jimmy's earlier books by performing a LOVER-LOVE/REVOL-EVOL skit.

v For example, before the 1967 rebellion, there were only a few black foremen in the auto industry and few, if any, black tellers in Detroit banks or black managers in supermarkets. In 1965 we tried, unsuccessfully, to get a few blacks elected to the Detroit City Council by organizing a plunking ("four and no more") campaign. In 1966 Detroit high school students went on strike to demand Black History classes and black principals. After the rebellion, the white power structure was so fearful of a recurrence that it rushed to promote blacks to highly visible positions.

vi Shea Howell used to joke that an elephant could be born in the time it took to complete one of our study groups. *Living for Change*, p. 163.

vii This decision was explained in the new introduction to the fifth printing of the *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party*, published in April 1976.

viii Over the years it has been difficult for traditional radicals to develop a vision and praxis for an American revolution because any appreciation of the uniqueness of American history was shunned as "American exceptionalism." As a result, historical agency was displaced onto subjects in other countries, especially in the Third World. Jimmy began thinking about his first book *The American Revolution* when he saw how radicals in the plant would fumble around for an answer when workers asked "What is socialism and why should the people struggle for it?" *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Workers Notebook*, Monthly Review Press, 1963, p. 43. See the little 1976 pamphlet *Towards a New Concept of Citizenship* by James Boggs.

ix GM worker Jim Hocker, who co-authored *But What About the Workers?* with Jimmy in 1974, stopped by regularly after work for conversations in our kitchen. In 1982 NOAR published these conversations as *These Are the Times that Try Our Souls: Conversations in Detroit*, with an introduction by Rich Feldman who worked at the Ford truck plant.

x These publications can be ordered from the James & Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership at <http://www.boggscenter.org>.

xi In 1980 Coleman Young,

joined with General Motors to announce that the city was demolishing an entire

neighborhood, bulldozing 1,500 houses, 144 businesses, sixteen churches, two schools, and a hospital in Poletown so that GM could build a Cadillac plant, with Detroit assuming the costs of land clearance and preparation. The endangered community, an integrated neighborhood of Poles and blacks, carried on a heroic struggle to save their homes and their community, but the UAW supported Young and GM because they promised that the new plant would employ six thousand workers. Ralph Nader sent in a team of five members to work with the Poletown protesters for six months. But in vain. All the homes, businesses, churches, schools, and the hospital were leveled. After the demolition I could not bear to drive around the site that was not far from our house. It was like a moonscape, so desolate that I could not tell east from west or north from south.

When the new Poletown plant finally opened in 1984, it was so automated that it only employed 2,500 workers, and it has never employed more than 4,000 - this despite the fact that the two older Cadillac plants that the Poletown plant replaced had employed 15,000 people as recently as 1979. *Living for Change*, p. 179.

xii James Boggs: "Rebuilding Detroit: an Alternative to Casino Gambling."

<http://www.boggscenter.org>. xiii "The Emerald City" by Michele Owens, Oprah Magazine, April 2008.

xiv See "Down a green path: An alternative vision for a section of east Detroit takes shape" by Curt Guyette, Metro Times, October 31, 2001.

xv "On a roll: Avalon International Breads isn't just about making dough" by Lisa M. Collins, Metro Times, October 4, 2002.

xvi "Detroiters point way for twenty-first century cities" by Grace Lee Boggs, Michigan Citizen, November 25- December 1, 2007. Eight years ago I began writing weekly columns in the Michigan Citizen. The hundreds of columns I have written are posted on the Boggs Center website at <http://www.boggscenter.org>.

xvii "... it is unfair, or at least deeply ironic, that black people in Detroit are being forced to undertake an experiment in utopian post-urbanism that appears to be uncomfortably similar to the sharecropping past their parents and grandparents sought to escape. There is no moral reason why they should do and be better than the rest of us - but there is a practical one. They have to. Detroit is where change is most urgent and therefore most viable. The rest of us will get there later, when necessity drives us too, and by that time Detroit may be the shining example we can look to, the post-industrial green city that was once the steel-gray capital of Fordist manufacturing." Rebecca Solnit: "Detroit Arcadia: Exploring the post-American landscape." Harper's Magazine, July 2007.

xviii In June 1963, Dr. King, arm-in-arm with Detroit black power leaders and labor leader Walter Reuther, led a huge march down Woodward Avenue in Detroit. I was one of the organizers of the march. For the story of how and why it came about, see *Living for Change*, p. 124.

xix In the spring of 1964, together with Max Stanford of Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM); Baltimore Afro-American reporter William Worthy, and Patricia Robinson of Third World Press, Jimmy and I met with Malcolm in a Harlem luncheonette to discuss our proposal that he come to Detroit to help build the Organization for Black Power. Malcolm's response was that we should go ahead while he served the movement as an "evangelist." However, after Malcolm discovered during his pilgrimage to Mecca that revolutionaries come in all races, he realized that he had to go back to square one to do the hard theoretical work necessary to develop a new body of ideas. As he told Jan Carew in a conversation in London:

I'm a Muslim and a revolutionary, and I'm learning more and more about political theories as the months go by. The only Marxist group in America that offered me a platform was the Socialist Workers Party. I respect them and they respect me. The Communists have nixed me, gone out of the way to attack me, that is, with the exception of the Cuban Communists. If a mixture of nationalism and Marxism makes the Cubans fight the way they do and make the Vietnamese stand up so resolutely to the might of America and its European and other lapdogs, then there must be something to it. But my Organization of African American Unity is based in Harlem and we've got to creep before we walk and walk before we run.... But the chances are that they will get me the way they got Lumumba before he reached the running stage.

— Jan Carew *Ghosts in our Blood: With Malcolm X in Africa, England, and the Caribbean*, p. 36. Lawrence Hill Books 1994.

This kind of introspection, questioning and transformation, which were so characteristic of Malcolm, has been mostly ignored by black nationalists and Black Power militants.

xx Vincent wrote the first draft of MLK's April 4, 1967 historic anti-Vietnam war speech, "Time to Break the Silence." Years later, the ideas in the 1984 pamphlet were expanded and published by him in *Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero*: Orbis, 1996; revised 2007.

xxi For example, *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Freedom Movement*, ed. Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman, DaCapo Press, 1993, is a compilation of papers presented by an impressive group of scholars and activists at an October 1986 symposium convened in Washington, D.C. to reflect on King's life and work following the decision to make King's birthday an annual holiday.

xxii See my "Thoughts on the Black Radical Congress," Michigan Citizen, May 10-16, 1998. Bob Lucas, to whom my letter is addressed, led the 1966 march into Cicero, Illinois.

xxiii *The Phenomenology of Mind* by G.W.F. Hegel, translated with an Introduction and Notes by J. B. Baillie, p.81. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1931.

xxiv See <http://www.boggscenter.org> for these and other speeches by me.

xxv "A Time to Break Silence," reprinted in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. James M. Washington, p. 231. Harper Collins, 1991.

xxvi *The Trumpet of Conscience*, reprinted in *A Testament of Hope*, *ibid.* p. 641.

xxvii King's concept of love recalls Che Guevara's: "Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love." Exploring King's concept can help us understand why Che's statement has been so puzzling to traditional radicals and why Che lives on in the hearts of young revolutionaries.

For example, in a thought-provoking article, "King, the Constitution and the Courts," theologians and lawyers Barbara A. Holmes and Susan Winfield Holmes challenge us to think more expansively about King's concept of love. King's, agape love is a foundational principle for social change.... For King, love is synonymous with ethics. It is a moral principle that provides context, norms, rules of engagement, and a vision of moral flourishing.... The strength of King's belief in the law, his abiding faith in love as praxis, and the force of his performative acts forged crosscultural alliances and inspired even the courts to interpret the laws in a manner that for a time changed the face of the nation,,,,

King's higher-law values also challenge the theory articulated by W.E.B. DuBois that double consciousness separated the public and private lives of black people.... One cannot claim to be operating with higher-law values unless a constant self-critique is part of the process.... King knew that love crucified, but not broken, was the only model that could redeem the dignity of those who sought freedom and those who conspired to deny it....

When we are confronted by the infrastructures of malignant social systems, love seems frail at best and irrelevant at worst. Yet, the lessons of history teach just the opposite. In defiance of our logic, love has sustained whole communities. With nothing more than love, besieged people confront radical evil, endure losses, bury their dead, and console each other during and after the bereavement.... King believed that the future is love....He also believed that peaceful demonstrations were, in fact, love speaking to the nation....Using love's untapped potential, he awakened a nation to its shortcomings and African Americans to the fullness of their humanity.

*The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion.* Edited by Lewis V. Baldwin, Rufus Burrow, Jr., Barbara A. Holmes, and Susan Holmes Winfield, contributors. University of Notre Dame Press, 2002.

Jimmy Boggs talked about loving America enough to change it. "I love this country," he used to say, "not only because my ancestors' blood is in the soil but because of what I believe it can become." "Jimmy taught me," Shea Howell recalls, that revolutions are made out of love for people and for place. Love isn't just something you feel. It's something you do every day when you go out and pick up the papers and bottles scattered the night before on the corner, when you stop and talk to a neighbor, when you argue passionately for what you believe with whomever will listen, when you call a friend to see how they're doing, when you write a letter to the newspaper, when you give a speech and give 'em hell, when you never stop believing that we can all be more than we are. And he taught me that love isn't about what we did yesterday; it's about what we do today and tomorrow and tomorrow.

In *All about Love*, bell hooks refers readers to self-help psychiatrist M. Scott Peck who defines love as 'the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth.' *New Visions*, 2000. See Mitchel Cohen: "Revolution Guided by Feelings of Great Love, Learning from Che Guevara," *CounterPunch*, January 3 / 4; also Michael Hardt on Love, <http://www.boggsblog.org>.

xxviii See "Seeing Detroit with your heart" by Grace Lee Boggs, *Michigan Citizen*, June 15-21. 2008.

xxix *The Trumpet of Conscience*, p. 645, see note xxv.

xxx The historian I have found to be most insightful about the rethinking of radical strategies mandated by the movements of the 1960s is Immanuel Wallerstein, author of *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. Academic Press, 1974.

The movements of the 1960s culminated in what Wallerstein calls "the world revolution of 1968." Since that world revolution, he says, six premises that were accepted as axiomatic by revolutionaries since the French revolution have become questionable. The two-step strategy (first take state power, then transform society) is no longer self-evidently correct. We can no longer assume that political activity is most effective if channeled through one party. The labor-capital conflict is not the only fundamental conflict in capitalism; there is also gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Democracy is not a bourgeois concept but a profoundly revolutionary, anti-capitalist idea. An increase in productivity is not an essential goal of socialism. We need to consider its ecological and human consequences, including consumerism and the commodification of everything. We also need to reassess our faith in

science in favor of a 'willingness to think in terms of a more complex relationship between determinism and free will, order and chaos.' *After Liberalism*, The New Press, 1995, chapter 11.

Next, in his little 1998 book, *Utopistics: The Historical Choices of the Twenty-first Century*, Wallerstein explains how 1968 dethroned both the Leninists and the Social Democrats, the two anti-systemic movements that had emerged from and prevailed since the French Revolution. After 1968, people the world over, including Africa and Asia, no longer believed in the ability of state structures to improve the commonweal. This "resulted in a kind of widespread and amorphous antistatism of a kind totally unknown in the long period between 1789 and 1968. It was debilitating and aroused fear as well as uncertainty." The New Press, 1998, p. 29-32.

The next year, in *The End of the World As We Know It: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century*, Wallerstein assured us that uncertainty rather than certainty about the future provides the basis for hope. University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Also see Ilya Prigogine: *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos and the New Laws of Nature*. The Free Press, 1996.

In 2001, I had an interesting discussion with Wallerstein at Binghamton University. When I turned ninety in 2005, he emailed me that he was coming to Detroit for my hundredth birthday.

xxxi Starhawk: "The Burning Times: Notes on a Critical Period in History," *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*. Beacon 1982. Eco-Feminism by Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, Zed 1993. *The Subsistence Alternative* by Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies, Zed 2000, includes a section on Detroit Summer. *Working Inside Out* by Margo Adair, who was a member of the Bay Area NOAR local, provides both historical background and practical advice for bringing our hearts and minds together. Sourcebooks 2003.

See also *The Re-Invention of Work, A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time* by Matthew Fox, Harper San Francisco, 1994. Fox has also written "95 Theses" that begin with the statements that "God is both Mother and Father," and, "At this time in history, God is more Mother than Father because the feminine is most missing and it is important to bring gender balance back." *YES! Magazine*, Winter 2006.

xxxii I caught a glimpse of this new kind of organizing at the Allied Media Conference (AMC08), which met in Detroit over the weekend of June 20-22, 2008. The theme was "Evolution Beyond Survival." For three days, seven hundred activists from all over the U.S. and Canada, representing twenty-two youth organizations as well as intergenerational ones, consisting mostly of women and people of color, shared experiences and strategies and laughed, danced and sang together. The evolutionary/revolutionary energy of this gathering,

I recognized, came primarily from the way that most of these young people are actively engaged in rebuilding local communities, nurturing each other, patiently transforming themselves and their communities from the ground up. Unlike our gatherings in the 1960s, they are led mostly by women and are not primarily adversarial or focused on power. One of the most moving AMC08 presentations was by the SistaSista collective of “working-class young and adult Black and Latina women building together to model a society based on liberation and love.” See <http://www.sistaSista.org>. See also my column on “Another Amazing Allied Media Conference,” *Michigan Citizen*, June 29-July 5, 2008, and my closing remarks at the conference. <http://www.boggscenter.org>.

xxxiii In *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw it Coming*, Viking 2007, environmentalist Paul Hawken estimates that there may be more than a million of these self-healing civic groups in every country around the world, most of them small and barely visible but together creating the largest movement the world has ever known. This movement has no central leadership and is not bound together by any “ism.” Its very diverse and widely scattered individuals and groups are connected mainly by the Internet and other information technologies. But they are joined at the heart by their commitment to social justice, to caring for each other and for the earth, and to creating new forms of more democratic governance; and by their indomitable faith in our ability to create the world anew.

In two widely-read books on globalization (*Empire and Multitude*), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri emphasize the historical uniqueness of these groups. These “singularities” do not fuse into some unity like “the people” or “the workers of the world.” They are not connected in centralized organizations like the Second or Third Internationals, as in the Marxist-Leninist era. Instead they connect through networks. What they have in common is that they are each imagining and creating new social identities and new political subjects that will take the place of the cogs and consumers to which global capitalism is seeking to reduce us. Therefore they have “the potential to create a new, alternative society.” p. 159, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Penguin 2005.

Organizational consultant Margaret Wheatley explains the impact of these small groups in the light of modern science:

In a web the potential impact of local actions bears no relationship to their size. When we choose to act locally, we may be wanting to influence the entire system. But we work where we are, with the system that we know, the one we can get our arms around. From a Newtonian perspective, our efforts often seem too small, and we doubt that our actions will contribute incrementally to large-scale change. Step by step, system by system we aspire to develop enough mass or force to alter the larger system.



But a quantum view explains the success of small efforts quite differently. Acting locally allows us to be inside the movement and flow of the system, participating in all those complex events occurring simultaneously. We are more likely to be sensitive to the dynamics of this system, and thus more effective. However, changes in small places also affect the global system, not through incrementalism, but because every small system participates in an unbroken wholeness. Activities in one part of the whole create effects that appear in distant places. Because of these unseen connections, there is potential value in working anywhere in the system. We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. I have learned that in this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of 'critical mass.' It's always about critical connections.

*Leadership and the New Science*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999, pp. 44-5.

xxxiv See Rebecca Solnit: "Revolution of the Snails: Encounters with the Zapatistas," *Z Magazine*, January 16, 2008. This kind of transformational revolution obviously requires enormous patience. In *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, Vijay Prashad tells the story of how Tanzania President Julius Nyerere began with a policy of "transformation" but resorted to "commandism" and bureaucracy because, like other

Third World leaders, he was under pressure to develop the economy and in "too much of a hurry." *The Free Press*, 2007, p.196.

xxxv The Beloved Communities Initiative was inspired by a panel discussion on the significance of the last three years of MLK's life during a Spirituality and Activists Retreat at the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in October 2004. Besides myself, the panelists were John Maguire, a friend of MLK's since they roomed together as students in the 1950s, and my old friend Vincent Harding. Vincent and John both helped craft MLK's historic April 4, 1967 speech. See *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Laws that changed America* by Nick Kotz, Houghton Mifflin Company 2005. p. 373. Also "These are the times to grow our souls/ Call to the Beloved Community," <http://www.belovedcommunitiesnet.org>.

xxxvi *From Racism to Counter-Revolution*, NOAR statement, January 1981.

xxxvii The collapse of the Soviet Union also provided an opportunity for fresh thinking about the Soviet dictatorship. Instead of viewing this dictatorship as the result of communist ideology or of the personalities of Lenin, Trotsky or Stalin, it can be viewed dialectically as the contradiction that emerges when revolutionaries seize state power without having previously transformed the people. This means that instead of making a priority of the assault on power structures, as Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin had done, revolutionaries

need to shift our focus to constructing power from below by empowering the people and creating dual power structures.

Michael Hardt has written a fascinating little book (*Michael Hardt presents Thomas Jefferson the Declaration of Independence*, Verso 2007), in which he establishes a link between Lenin, the much vilified Bolshevik, and Thomas Jefferson, the icon of American democracy. Both saw self-rule (Lenin's "every cook can govern") as the goal of revolution and human evolution. Both were convinced that the means towards that goal was practice in self-rule. Both believed that "humanity can and must be transformed" through practice in self-rule after the event of rebellion, which lasts only a few days, and the historical process of transformation, requiring many decades and generations. (Lenin's Workers and Peasants Inspection, Jefferson's "wards" or "little republics"). That's why Lenin opposed anarchism and Jefferson was so interested in education.

xxxviii One of the reasons Lenin gave for the Bolsheviks seizing power in the fall of 1917 was the need to forestall another counterrevolutionary attempt by General Kornilov to overthrow the Menshevik government because it was wavering in the war against Germany.

xxxix Published in the Michigan Citizen, March 23-28, 2008. The speech has also been broadcast on the KPFA program, Against the Grain.

xl It was in the Great Hall of Cooper Union that Abraham Lincoln concluded his February 1860 speech with these words that anticipate MLK: "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

xli As I write this introduction, it is the Fourth of July weekend, and I have written the following for my next column in the *Michigan Citizen*:

...decades from now, if the human race survives, this year's Fourth of July may be remembered as the one when holiday celebrations went beyond beer and barbecuing to include stories of the steps that we and others are taking and can take to change the way we are living to stop global warming; the year we realized that we are the masters of our fate and the captains of our souls. Instead of viewing ourselves as subjects who can't stop driving SUVs, we began viewing ourselves as citizens with the right and responsibility to care for our planet and our posterity.

Decades from now, as our grandchildren and great grandchildren gather in backyards with friends, families and neighbors to celebrate their Fourth of July, I can imagine them toasting each other as Sons and Daughters of the Second American Revolution. Once upon a time, they'll be boasting, it was our grandparents and great-grandparents who began biking or taking the bus to work. It was our grandparents and great-grandparents who urged others

to do the same instead of just griping. It was our grandparents and great-grandparents who brought about a historic decline in the number of floods, hurricanes, droughts and wildfires by changing their own gas-guzzling way of life. It was our grandparents and great-grandparents who organized the demonstrations which persuaded city governments to create one or two carfree days every month and provide completely free public transportation to discourage people from driving cars.

I have little patience with the prophets of Doom and Gloom. I know as well as they do that our whole climate is changing, that water shortages, crop failures, increasing damages from extreme weather events, etc. threaten a breakdown in infrastructures and democratic processes.

But doomsayers breed and deepen despair. They apparently believe that the only way to avoid total collapse is by changing the whole system with one stroke – as if human beings were like a school of fish who all change direction at the same time or as if changing the whole system was as simple as rubbing out some misspelled words on a blackboard.

— “Independence day, 2008,” Michigan Citizen, July 13-19, 2008. xlii  
<http://www.detroit-city-of-hope.org>.

xliii See “Revolution as a New Beginning,” interview with Grace Lee Boggs, *Upping the Anti*, no. 1 & 2, Project of the Autonomy & Solidarity Network, at [http://auto\\_sol.tao.ca](http://auto_sol.tao.ca).

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## Grace Lee Boggs - Education: The Great Obsession

This essay was originally published in the September 1970 issue of [Monthly Review](#).



Education today is a great obsession. It is also a great necessity. We, all of us, black and white, yellow and brown, young and old, men and women, workers and intellectuals, have a great deal to learn about ourselves and about the rapidly changing world in which we live. We, all of us, are far from having either the wisdom or the skills that are now more than ever required to govern ourselves and to administer things.

In the present struggle for a new system of education to fulfill this pressing need, the black community constitutes the decisive social force because it is the black community that the present educational system has most decisively failed.

Shortly after the 1969 school term opened, James Allen, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, proclaimed a crash program for the 1970s that showed that he was not equipped to get this country out of its mounting educational crisis. Ten years from now, Allen solemnly promised (or threatened), no child will leave school without being able to read well enough to meet the demands of job and society. The United States has had free public education for over a century. For nearly half a century practically every youngster has been required by federal law to attend school until the age of sixteen. Enough teachers and school facilities exist to support this compulsion. Yet the only goal the U.S. Commissioner of Education has been able to set is the kind already surpassed by literacy drives in new nations where, prior to independence, the great majority of the people never even had schools to go to. For the world and country in which we live, Allen would have been more

relevant if he had promised that by the end of the 1970s every school child would be fluent in a second language like Chinese, Russian, or Spanish.

Like other administration programs, Allen's is, of course, a pacification program, aimed at cooling the complaints of personnel managers who are obsessed by the apparent inability of job applicants to fill out employment forms; high school and college instructors who tear out their hair over student errors in spelling and punctuation; and the great majority of Americans, including many vocal black parents, who are still naive enough to believe that if black children could only read they could get better jobs and stop roaming the streets.

Allen's ten-year program will not bring tangible benefits to these complainants. The people who stand to gain most from it are the professional educators who are already lining up for the million-dollar grants that will enable reading experts and testers to test black children, find them wanting, and therefore justify more million-dollar grants to these reading experts to repeat the same remedial reading and compensatory programs that have consistently proved useless.

Since these professional educators are the chief beneficiaries, they are naturally the chief propagators of certain myths about education, which are unfortunately shared by most Americans. Chief among these are the myths (1) that the fundamental purpose of education in an age of abundance is to increase *earning* power; (2) that the achievement level of children can be defined and measured by their response to words on a printed page; (3) that schools are the best and only place for people to get an education, and therefore that the more young people are compelled to attend school and the more extended the period that they are compelled to attend, the more educated they will become.

The rebellions in secondary schools and colleges during the past few years are a sign that young people, black and white, have already begun to reject these myths. Seventy-five percent of secondary schools have already experienced these rebellions to one degree or another. During the next ten years the struggle to destroy these myths root and branch will continue to escalate. In the black community the struggle will probably take place under the general umbrella of the struggle for community control of schools. In the white community it will probably be around issues of student rights to freedom of dress, speech, assembly, and press. But whatever the focus, any educators, black or white, professional or paraprofessional, who continue to try to run the schools by these myths, will find themselves increasingly resorting to force and violence and/or drugs like Ritalin to keep youth quiet in school and/or to keep so-called troublemakers and trouble out.

# How It Developed

The above myths represent the attempt of the public school system to adjust to the changing needs of the American capitalist system over the past fifty years. Because the present school system is so huge and so resistant to change, we tend to think that it has existed forever. Actually it is only about two generations old. In nineteenth-century America (and in Western Europe until the end of the Second World War), the school system was organized to prepare the children of the well-born and well-to-do to govern over the less well-born and not so well-to-do. Thus, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, only 6 percent of U.S. youth graduated from high school.

Early in the twentieth century the mass public school system was developed to assimilate an essentially immigrant working population into the economic, social, and political structure of the American Way of Life. According to this Way, known as American Democracy, those closest to the Founding Fathers in background and culture rule over those who have the furthest to go in achieving this ultimate goal and who meanwhile need to be inculcated with a Founding-Father complex.

To accomplish this objective the schools were organized:

1. To give the children of workers elementary skills in the three Rs that would enable them to function as workers in an industrial society.
2. To give these children proper reverence for the four As: American History, American Technology, the American Free Enterprise System, and American Democracy.
3. To provide a smoothly functioning sifting-mechanism whereby, as Colin Green has phrased it, the “winners” could automatically be sorted from the “losers”;<sup>1</sup> that is to say, whereby those individuals equipped by family background and personality to finish high school and go on to college could be selected out from among the great majority on their way to the labor market after a few years of elementary school, or at most a year or so of high school.

This automatic separator worked quite well during the first half of this century. It was acceptable to the European immigrants whose children constituted the core of the urban school population and who, in appreciation for the opportunity to come to the Land of Opportunism, felt the responsibility was *theirs* to become integrated or assimilated into the American Way of Life.

Proceeding from this premise, working-class children from Eastern and Southern European stock (the “losers”) dropped out of school quietly around the age of fourteen or fifteen, while the exceptions or “winners,” usually those from WASP or Northern European stock,

finished high school in preparation for college, which would qualify them to become doctors or lawyers or engineers or teachers. The high-school curriculum and staff were set up on the basis of this implicit stratification. With such elite, highly motivated students, high school teachers had only to know a subject well enough and drill it deep enough into the heads of students so that they would feed it back on college entrance exams.

Thus in 1911 only 11 percent of the high-school-age population was in school; in 1920 only 20 percent. Not until 1930 did the number reach the relatively mass proportion of 51 percent.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1930s, with the shrinking of the unskilled and child labor market, some kinks began to develop in this automatic sorting mechanism. But these were ironed out temporarily when the high schools expanded their skills curriculum to meet the needs of an increasingly technical society, including such subjects as typing and shop, and simultaneously putting greater emphasis on basketball and football in which the children of workers could excel and develop enough sense of belonging not to upset the applecart.

By 1940, 73 percent of high-school-age youngsters, hopeful of gaining higher skills and thus escaping the back-breaking, insecure jobs of their blue-collar parents, were attending high school. Those who dropped out before graduation—which for the last thirty years has averaged approximately one-half of all those entering ninth grade and at least two-thirds of black youth—could, if they were white, still find such useful jobs as delivery or stock boys, or helpers of various kinds in the many small businesses that still existed, thus adding to the family income. Or they could just make themselves useful around the house doing the chores not yet outmoded by labor-saving devices. During the war years, with a maximum of twelve million Americans in the armed services, there were jobs aplenty for their younger brothers and sisters.

It was not until after the Second World War, and particularly in the 1950s and '60s, that the American school system began to find itself in deep trouble. The Andy Hardy world of the 1930s was disappearing. Mechanization of agriculture and wartime work had brought millions of families to the cities from the farms and from the South—including blacks and Appalachian whites who had heretofore been getting their education catch-as-catch-can. With the automation of industry following the Second World War and the Korean War, the swallowing up of small family businesses by big firms, and the widespread use of labor-saving appliances in the average home, the labor of the dropout teenager became surplus and the adolescent became highly visible.

What now should be done with these “losers”? The obvious solution was to keep them in school. Thus, instead of the high schools acting as automatic sifters to sort out the “losers,” they were turned into mass custodial institutions to keep everyone in the classroom and off

the streets. If at the same time some could also be trained for white-collar jobs, that was a fringe benefit. For the great majority in the high schools, skills training played the same supplementary role that it plays in a juvenile detention home.

By 1960, 90 percent of high-school-age youngsters were attending school. From a relatively elite institution for the college-bound, the high school has been transformed within forty years into a mass detention home. The ideal teacher is no longer the college-entrance-exam-oriented pedagogue but the counselor type who can persuade the average youngster to adjust to this detention or the tough authoritarian who can force it down his or her throat. Since “winners” and “losers” are expected to stay in school until graduation, the high school diploma is no longer a sign of academic achievement but of the youngster’s seat-warming endurance over a twelve-year period. The success of the public school system itself is now measured in terms of its efficiency in persuading or compelling youth to extend their schooling indefinitely; if possible, not only through high school but on to junior college, with each higher institution acting as a remedial program for the lower.

Meanwhile, to sell the public on the new custodial role of the schools, the myths of education as the magic weapon to open all doors, particularly the door to higher earnings and unlimited consumption, and of the schools as the only place to get an education, have been propagated. Extended schooling has been made into an American obsession. As a number of observers have noted, faith in education has replaced faith in the church as the salvation of the masses. In the practice of this faith, education has become the nation’s second largest industry, expending upwards of \$50 billion a year. The professional educator has become the new religion’s practicing clergy, constituting the country’s largest occupational grouping. At the same time, in order to distract and placate the detainees and to create an outlet for the goods pouring off American assembly lines, the youth market has been created.

## **The Internal Contradiction Exposed**

The internal contradiction between the traditional separator and the new mass custodial roles assigned to the schools was bound to lead to conflict and disintegration: and this, in fact, is what has been taking place over the past twenty years. The black revolt has only brought out into the open and given focus to the mushrooming tensions between elite and average students, and between students and teachers, which first manifested themselves on a city-wide scale in the New York City strike of predominantly white high school students in 1950. No one knows these tensions better than the school teachers and administrators, white and black. But because they have a vested interest in the system, they have for the most part been willing to settle for higher (i.e., combat) pay and better working conditions, such as smaller classes and more preparation time. Teacher organizations to achieve these



demands have to some extent met the economic or class needs of teachers as workers. But the more teachers have gained as workers the less they have felt inclined to expose the bankruptcy of the educational system and to make fundamental proposals for its reorganization. They have made the fatal mistake of confusing their role as a special kind of worker engaged in the process of developing human beings with the role of production workers engaged in the process of producing inanimate goods.

It has thus been left to the black community to expose the fundamental contradictions within the system.

## **The Black Revolt**

Prior to the Second World War black youth had been concentrated in the South, not only separate and unequal but practically invisible, as well. With the war a whole generation came North to work in the plants. With rising expectations whetted by relatively stable employment, service in the armed forces, and the postwar nationalist movements in other parts of the world, black parents began to send their children to school in such numbers that black youth now constitute the major part of the school population in most of the big cities from which whites have fled. But the more black kids finished high school the more they discovered that extended education was not the magic key to upward mobility and higher earnings that it had been played up to be. On the job market they soon discovered that the same piece of paper that qualified white high-school graduates for white-collar jobs only qualified blacks to be tested (and found wanting) for these same jobs. Their teachers, parents, and preachers tried to placate them by explaining how even more education was now needed to qualify for the increasingly skilled jobs demanded by automation. But all around them black youth could see that the jobs that they were told required two or more years of college when occupied by blacks were actually being done by white high-school dropouts.

Accepting at face value the myths about education, black parents began to turn their attention to the schools, only to discover that instead of being places of learning, the schools had become baby-sitting institutions in which their children had been socially promoted year after year, regardless of achievement levels as determined by the schools' own tests.

When school administrators and teachers were challenged to explain this situation, they tried to explain away their own failure by shifting the blame to black children. Hence the theories of the "culturally deprived" and "culturally disadvantaged" child, which have been masquerading as sociological theory since the 1950s. In effect, these educators were saying: "There is nothing wrong with the system; only the wrong children have shown up." Through these alibis the professionals not only hoped to divert the attack back to the black

community; they also hoped to hustle more money for themselves in the form of compensatory, remedial, more effective school programs.

But the defense has boomeranged. Forced to defend themselves and their children against the thinly disguised racism of the theory of “cultural deprivation,” black parents and the black community have counterattacked. They have exposed the racism of school personnel and school curriculum, the unceasing destruction by the schools of the self-concept of black children so necessary to learning, and the illegitimacy of a system administered by whites when the majority of students are now black. From early demands for integration, the movement jumped quickly to demands for black history, black teachers, black principals, and then, in 1966, with the rising tide of Black Power, to demands for control of schools by the black community, beginning with the struggle over Harlem I.S. 201 in December of that year.

## Struggle for Control

During the next five to fifteen years the black community is going to be engaged in a continuing struggle for control of its schools. Sometimes the struggle will be in the headlines and on the picket lines, as in Ocean Hill-Brownsville in 1968. Sometimes it will be less dramatic. But the black community is now unalterably convinced that white control of black schools is destroying black children and can no longer be tolerated.

During the next five to fifteen years the black community will also be redefining education for *this* day, *this* age, and *this* country. The overwhelming majority of black students who are not succeeding in the present school system (estimated by New York teachers union President Albert Shanker at 85 percent) have in fact rejected a used, outmoded, useless school system.

Over the past ten years literally billions of dollars have been injected into the schools all over the country—even more than has gone into the moon race—in an attempt to make the system work. In New York City alone the school budget was raised 200 percent until it is now more than one billion dollars a year, or one-third of the entire city budget. The New York teacher-pupil ratio was lowered to an average of 1:17; \$70 million of Title I money was poured into the organization of two thousand innovative projects; experts from the twelve colleges in the area were endlessly consulted; money was spent like water; book publishers, project directors, educational consultants were enriched; teachers drew bigger salaries to compensate them for the nightmare of the school day. But the achievement level of black children has continued to fall.

The black community cannot afford to be wasting time fighting for reforms that have

already proved worthless. Every week, every month, every year that we waste means that more black children are being wasted. We must reject the racist myth that by keeping kids in school an extra day, an extra week, an extra month, we are giving them a chance to learn a little something or helping to keep them out of mischief. Not only are they not learning in the schools, but the schools in the black community today are little more than mass penal institutions, breeding the same kind of vice and crime that mass penal institutions breed, making the average child an easy prey for the most hardened elements. Day after day, year after year, the will and incentive to learn, which are essential to the continued progress and future development of any people, are being systematically destroyed in millions of black youth, perhaps the most vigorous and resourceful of those between the ages of ten and twenty.

## Redefining Education

The key to the new system of education that is the objective of the black movement for community control of schools is contained in the position paper of the Five-State Organizing Committee that was formed at a conference at Harvard University in January 1968. At this conference the black educators and community representatives agreed that *“the function of education must be redefined to make it responsive and accountable to the community.”*

The schools today are in the black community but not of it. They are not responsive or accountable to it. If anything they are an enemy force, a Trojan Horse, within it. The teaching and administrative staff come from outside the community, bringing with them the missionary attitude that they are bearing culture to backward natives—when in fact, like missionaries, they are living off the natives. The subject matter of the schools, beginning with the information about the policeman and the fireman given to first and second graders, is alien to the lives of the children. And, *most important*, students succeed only to the degree that they set their sights toward upgrading themselves as *individuals out of the community*, so that the schools are in fact an organized instrument for a brain drain out of the community.

American education, like American society, is based upon the philosophy of *individualism*. According to this philosophy, the ambitious individual of average or above-average ability from the lower and middle classes is constantly encouraged to climb up the social ladder out of his social class and community. To achieve this goal, like the black Englishman in colonial Africa, he must conduct himself in ways that meet the approval and social standards of those in power, that is to say, as much *unlike* those in his community and as much *like* those in the Establishment as possible. If he does this consistently to the satisfaction of those in power, who are always observing and grading his behavior, he is rewarded by promotion and advancement into the higher echelons of the system. This is what is known as “making

it on your own.” The more opportunistic you are, the better your chance of “making it.”

In the school system this means relating to the teacher and not to your classmates. It means accepting what is taught you as the “objective” or “gospel” or “immaculately conceived” truth which stares at you out of the pages of the textbook. (The textbook itself, of course, is by its very weight and format, organized to convey the impression of permanence and the indubitability of Holy Scripture.) You then feed these truths back to the teacher (“the correct answer”), evading controversial questions that require thinking for yourself or taking a position. If you are willing to do this year after year, giving the “correct answers” on exam after exam, for as long as is necessary to satisfy the “guild” standards of the Establishment, you have it “made.” You have proved yourself a sheep as distinguished from the goats. Your parents are proud of you. You can buy a big car to show off before the neighbors, and you become eligible to share in the benefits of high-level corruption in its various forms.

The overwhelming majority of black youth see no relationship between this type of education and their daily lives in the community or the problems of today’s world that affect them so intimately. They see automation and cybernation wiping out the jobs for which they are supposedly being prepared—while such jobs as are still available to them are the leftovers that whites won’t take (including fighting on the front lines in a war). The book-learning so honored by their teachers and parents seems dull and static compared to what they see on television and experience on the streets. In their own short lives they have seen what passes as truth in books being transformed into lies or obsolescence by living history, and what passes as objectivity exposed as racist propaganda. Through television they have discovered that behind the words (which in books looked as if they had been immaculately conceived) are human beings, usually white, usually well-off, and usually pompous intellectuals. The result is that as the teacher stands up front bestowing textbook culture on them, they are usually carrying on a silent argument with the teacher—or else turning off their minds altogether.

Not having the drive to succeed in the world at all costs, which is characteristic of the ambitious opportunist, and much more sensitive to what is going on around them, they reject the perspective of interminable schooling without practice or application, which is now built into the educational system. Besieged on all sides by commercials urging them to consume without limit and conscious at the same time of the limitless productivity of American technology, they have abandoned the Protestant ethic of work and thrift. So they roam the streets, aimlessly and restlessly, everyone a potential victim of organized crime and a potential hustler against their own community.

# Only One Side Is Right

There are two sides to every question but only one side is right, and in this case the students who have rejected the present system are the ones who are right, even if, understandably, they are unable as yet to propose concrete alternatives.

1. *The individualist, opportunist orientation of American education* has been ruinous to the American community, most obviously, of course, to the black community. In the classroom over the years it isolates children from one another, stifling their natural curiosity about one another as well as their potential for working together. (This process is what the education courses call “socialization.”) In the end it not only upgrades out of the community those individuals who might be its natural leaders, fragmenting and weakening precisely those communities that are in the greatest need of strengthening. It also creates the “used” community, which is to be successively inherited by those poorer or darker in color, and which is therefore doomed from the outset to increasing deterioration.
2. *Truth* is not something you get from books or jot down when the teacher holds forth. It has always been and is today more than ever something that is constantly being created through conflict in the social arena and continuing research and experimentation in the scientific arena.
3. *Learning*, especially in this age of rapid social and technical change, is not something you can make people do in their heads with the perspective that years from now, eventually, they will be able to use what they have stored up. By the time you are supposed to use it, it has really become “used.” The natural relationship between theory and practice has been turned upside down in the schools, in order to keep kids off the labor market. The natural way to learn is to be interested *first* and *then* to develop the skill to pursue your interest. As John Holt has written in *How Children Learn*, “The sensible way, the best way, is to start with something worth doing, and then, moved by a strong desire to do it, get whatever skills are needed.” A human being, young or old, is not a warehouse of information or skills, and an educational system that treats children like warehouses is not only depriving them of education but also crippling their natural capacity to learn. Particularly in a world of rapidly changing information and skills, learning how to learn is more important than learning specific skills and facts. A human being cannot develop only as a consumer. Depriving children of the opportunity to carry on productive activity is also depriving them of the opportunity to develop the instinct for workmanship, which has made it possible for humanity to advance through the ages. The experience of performance is necessary to learning. Only through doing things and evaluating what they have done can human beings learn the intrinsic relation between cause and effect, thereby developing the capacity to reason. If they are prevented from learning the intrinsic consequences of their own choices of ends and means and made

totally dependent on such extrinsic effects as rewards and punishments, they are being robbed of their right to develop into reasoning human beings.

4. Finally, you cannot deprive young people of the rights of social responsibility, and social consciousness, and the ability to judge social issues during the many years they are supposed to attend school and then expect them suddenly to be able to exercise these essential rights when they become adult.

Our children are not learning because the present system is depriving them of such natural stimuli to learning as exercising their resourcefulness to solve the real problems of their own communities; working together, rather than competitively, with younger children emulating older ones and older children teaching younger ones; experiencing the intrinsic consequences of their own actions; judging issues. It is because the present system *wastes* these natural human incentives to learning that its demands on the taxpayer are constantly escalating. It is because those who have succeeded under the present system have ended up as such dehumanized beings—technicians and mandarins who are ready to provide so-called objective skills and information to those in power—that students are in revolt on secondary and college campuses.

## Toward a New System

We should now be in a better position to make more concrete the meaning of the proposal to “redefine the function of education in order to make it responsive and accountable to the community.”

Instead of schools serving to drain selected opportunists out of the community, they must be functionally reorganized to become centers of the community. This involves much, much more than the use of school facilities for community needs—although this should certainly be expanded. In order for the schools to become the center of the community, *the community itself with its needs and problems must become the curriculum of the schools.*<sup>3</sup>

More specifically, the educational program or curriculum should *not* consist of subjects like English or algebra or geography. Instead the school must be structured into groups of youngsters meeting in workshops and working as teams. These teams are then encouraged to (1) *identify* the needs or problems of the community; (2) to *choose* a certain need or problem as a focus of activity; (3) to *plan a program* for its solution; and (4) to *carry out the steps* involved in the plan.

In the course of carrying out such a curriculum, students naturally and normally, as a part of the actual process, acquire a number of skills. For example, they must be able to do *research* (observe, report, pinpoint—all related to the social and physical geography of the

community); set *goals* or objectives; *plot steps* toward the achievement of these goals; *carry out* these steps; *evaluate* or measure their progress toward their goals.

Through such a curriculum, research becomes a means of building the community rather than what it is at present, a means by which the Establishment prepares counterinsurgency or pacification programs against the community. Through the solution of real community problems, students discover the importance not only of *skills* and *information* but also of the *ideas* and *principles* that must guide them in setting and pursuing goals. In the *struggle* to transform their physical and social environment, they discover that their enemies are not only external but internal, within the community and within their own selves. Thus the weaknesses or needs of the community become assets in the learning process rather than the handicap or drawback that they are presently conceived to be.

With the community and, at times, the entire city as a learning laboratory, students are no longer confined to the classroom. The classroom is an adjunct to the community rather than the reverse. Students have an opportunity to exercise responsibility by identifying problems and by proposing and testing solutions, with the teachers acting as advisers, consultants, and instructors in specific skills. Students from various teenage groups can work in teams on the various projects, with each contributing according to his or her abilities at the various stages, younger students learning from older ones, and those with the capacity for leadership having an opportunity to exercise it.

One of the most important community needs, and one that naturally suggests learning activities, is the need for community information that can be met by student-produced newspapers, magazines, TV news and documentary programs, films, etc.

## **Education to Govern**

No one should confuse this curriculum with a curriculum for vocational education—either in the old sense of preparing young blacks for menial tasks or in the up-to-date form in which Michigan Bell Telephone Company and Chrysler adopt high schools in the black community in order to channel black youth into low-level jobs. The only possible resemblance between these proposals and vocational education is the insistence on the opportunity for productive life-experiences as essential to the learning process. Otherwise what is proposed is the very opposite of vocational education. It is indeed education or preparation for the tasks of governing.

Concrete programs that prepare black youth to govern are the logical next step for rebellious black youth who, having reached the stage of Black Power in the sense of Black Pride, Black Consciousness, and total rejection of the present social system, are not sure

where to go. Young people whose *self-concept* has undergone a fundamental change must be given concrete opportunities to change their *actual* conditions of life. Otherwise, they can only exhaust and demoralize themselves in isolated acts of adventurism or in symbolic acts of defiance or escapism.

The fundamental principles underlying such programs are crucial to elementary as well as secondary school education. These principles are:

1. The more human beings experience in life and work, i.e., the more they have the opportunity to experience the intrinsic consequences of their own activity, the more able they are to learn and the more anxious they are to learn. Conversely, the more human beings, and particularly young people, are deprived of the opportunity to live and work and experience the consequences of their own activities, the more difficult it is for them to learn and the more they are turned off from learning.
2. The most important factor in learning is interest and motivation; and conversely the more you cut off motivation and interest, the harder it is to learn.

This principle is especially relevant to the question of reading. If you try to force children to read, you can turn them off from reading in the same way that generations of children have been turned off from music by compulsory music lessons. Actually reading is much less difficult than speaking, which kids learn pretty much on their own. Once the relation between letters and sounds is learned—a matter of only a few weeks the reading development of children depends almost entirely upon interest and self-motivation. Thus, almost every good reader is actually self-taught.

When young children are regimented in the average elementary school classroom on the false assumption that children of the same chronological age have the same attention span and learn at the same pace and rhythm, what happens is that the great majority stop learning altogether,<sup>4</sup> *becoming either passive or defiant*. Few parents know that in the average classroom most children are paying attention only about ten minutes out of the three-hundred-minute school day. The rest of the time they are trying to get into trouble or stay out of trouble. The few children in a classroom who can adjust to the rhythms arbitrarily set by the teacher become the “bright ones,” while the others are categorized from very early as the “dumb ones.” The tracking system is not the product of a particular teacher’s biases; it is built into the system of forced learning. Parents particularly must begin to try to envisage a classroom reorganized to provide the opportunity for children to move about freely, choose among activities, learn what they are interested in learning, learn from each other and from their own mistakes.

Obviously the range of choice and area of activity cannot be as broad for younger children as it is for teenagers. But once we get rid of the stereotypes of wild children who must be



forced to learn, we will be able to think in terms of curriculum and structure for elementary schools. For example, classroom space could easily be subdivided into sections, each of which is associated not with specific children but rather with activities: a library and writing space where “reading and writing will be in the air,” a rest and privacy space, an arts and crafts space, a play space. Children would be able to move from one area to another as they choose. The teacher could remain fixed at times—available for consultation—or at others move about from space to space. Children of different ages, within a particular range, could learn from each other.

## The Opposition

We must have no illusion that it will be easy to reorganize American education, and particularly education in the black community, along these lines. Vicious as well as subtle opposition will come from all those with a stake in the present system: teachers and administrators who have climbed up the social and economic ladder within the framework of the old system and who now think they have earned the right to make others undergo the same ordeal; the publishing industry, which is making such huge profits off the school system; city agencies like the Board of Health, the Board of Education, the Fire Department, the Police Department, the Sanitation Department; the building industries and the unions; the merchants and finance companies. Concerned only with their own vested interest in living off the black community, they can be expected to raise a hue and cry about “irresponsible youth taking over” and “child labor.”

Some very fundamental questions are posed here, questions that American society will have to face sooner rather than later, because it is obviously impossible to reorganize an educational system completely without reorganizing the social system it serves.

First of all, who are the irresponsible ones? The young people who will be trying to improve their communities? Or the institutions and agencies (supported by their parents’ taxes) who have been presiding over its deterioration? The issue here therefore is not young people but the same issue as that involved in the right of the black community to self-determination. Obviously what these opponents fear is not just youth but the threat to their continuing control, the exposure of their shortcomings, and programs that may end in their replacement.

On the question of “child labor,” it should be emphasized that what we are proposing is not “labor” at all. *Labor* is activity that is done for wages under the control of persons or organizations exploiting this labor for profit. What we are talking about is *work* that the young people choose to do for the purpose of improving the community and under their own direction.

However, the clash is unavoidable. Because labor has been the only means for survival and advancement in this society, and because increasing automation and cybernation have cut down jobs, any kind of productive activity has now become a privilege monopolized by adults and increasingly denied to youth. The whole process is now reaching the absurd proportions of older people doing jobs that could be more safely and easily done by youth, while youth are supposed to stay in school, expending their energies in play, postponing the responsibilities of work and adult life, on the promise that longer schooling will make them capable of better jobs. Meanwhile the skills they are acquiring become obsolete. The whole procedure is based on the false assumption that education is only for the young and that it must be completed before you start to work and live. Actually the time is coming when society will have to recognize that education must be a lifelong process for old and young. In the end a rational society will have to combine work and study for all ages and for people in every type of activity, from manual to intellectual.

Rallying to the support of all these vested interests we can expect the intellectuals, social scientists, and physical scientists, claiming that by such programs society will be drying up the supply of experts, intellectuals, scientists, etc. The charge is absurd. Such programs will increase the supply because they will stimulate the desire for learning in great numbers of youth who in the past were turned off from learning.

## **The Struggle**

In the long and the short run, the opposition of all these vested interests can be overcome only if black parents and black students begin to see that this is the only kind of education that is relevant in this country at this stage, particularly for black people, and that unless we embark on a protracted struggle for this kind of education, our children will continue to be wasted.

That is why the struggle for community control of schools is so important.

*The black community will have to struggle for community control of schools.* It can struggle most effectively, that is to say, involve and commit the greatest number of people from the community, if it can propose concrete programs for reorganizing education to meet the real and urgent needs of the black community.

The organic, inherent, irreversible weakness of the present educational power structure is its complete inability to develop such programs because it has been organized and is structured only for the purposes of producing an elite and detaining the mass. Hence the strategic importance of fighting them on this front by developing concrete programs for curriculums that the black community can regard as its own and therefore insist that the

schools implement. The time is especially ripe for such proposals because mushrooming decentralization programs are of necessity contradictory and confusing, creating areas in which no one is quite sure who has decision-making power.

## The Total Community

In the preceding I have concentrated on the needs of the black community because it is in the vanguard of the struggle for community control of schools and therefore more immediately faced with the question of how to redefine education. But this is not only a black question. During the next five to fifteen years, increasing numbers of white students are also going to turn their backs on the educational system, not only in college but in high school. At the present time the majority of white students still accept the system because their little pieces of paper are still a passport to jobs and college. But even if the white school front remains quiet, every concerned citizen should be asking: "Do we really want our children to end up, like Nixon's Great Silent Majority, ambitious only for their own financial advancement and security, apathetic except when confronted by blacks moving into their neighborhoods or competing for their jobs, afraid not only of blacks but of their own children and indeed of any fundamental social change to meet the needs of changing technology, acquiescing in the decisions of the Mayor Daleys, the Judge Hoffmans, the Spiro Agnews, and eventually the George Wallaces?"

These whites did not come from outer space any more than did the "good silent Germans" of Hitler's day. They are the products of the American educational system, which has been organized to fit the American Way of Life. It was in the public schools that Nixon's Great Silent Majority learned, through a systematized procedure, the values of materialism, individualism, opportunism, and docility in the presence of authority. It was in the schools that they were systematically indoctrinated with the myth that truth is what you read in books or hear from those in power, and with the ideology that this is not only the best of possible worlds but that it operates with the inevitability of natural law, making it futile to criticize or oppose its operations. ("What's the use? It's always been this way and it's always going to be this way.") It was in the schools that the seeds of their present fears and powerlessness to rebel against authority were systematically sown.

All these are the values against which today's youth, black and white, coming of age in a world of unprecedented technological and social revolution, are in revolt. Today's youth is determined to have power over its own conditions of life. But the public school system has failed to prepare today's Great Silent Majority to understand its own youth, let alone the need to transform itself to cope with the rapid changes taking place.

It therefore is the schools that must accept a share of the responsibility for creating the

contradiction that now threatens this country's destruction, the contradiction between being the technologically most advanced and the politically most undeveloped country in the world. They are also one of the weakest links in the system's chain of operations.

Before the present system of education was initiated some two generations ago, education was only for the *elite*, to prepare them to govern over their subjects. Then came *mass education*, to prepare the great majority for labor and to advance a few out of their ranks to join the elite in governing. This system is now falling apart as a result of its own internal contradictions, with the cost being borne at the present time by the black community. That is why it is so urgent that we develop a new system of education that will have as its means and its end the development of the great masses of people to *govern over themselves and to administer over things*.

## Notes

1. ↪ Colin Green, "Public Schools: Myth of the Melting Pot," *Saturday Review*, November 15, 1969.
2. ↪ James Coleman, *Adolescents and the Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1965).
3. ↪ See Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (New York: Delacorte Press), 1969.
4. ↪ Black parents who send their children to Catholic schools on the basis that in that "law 'n' order" environment their kids at least learn their three R's should reflect on what this authoritarian environment may be doing to their children's real, i.e., creative, learning potential.

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# James Boggs: The American Revolution

This essay was originally published in James Boggs' *The American Revolution: Pages from a negro worker's notebook*



Any social movement starts with the aim of achieving some rights heretofore denied. Sometimes a portion of these rights is achieved without a change in the social structure of the country. When this happens, the movement is not revolutionary, even though it has brought about social change. Such a movement was the CIO. At other times a movement is unable to achieve the rights it seeks without taking power from the existing government and creating a totally new order. When this happens, it is a revolution.

Very few revolutions start with a conscious attempt to take power. No revolution has ever started with everyone in the country agreeing with the goal of the revolutionary movement. It is clashes, both ideological and physical, among segments of the population and usually the whip of the counter-revolution which give the revolution its momentum. Sometimes the revolution is violent, sometimes it is non-violent, but always it is the revolution. Sometimes those in the revolution are conscious of the consequences of their actions, sometimes they are not, but always there is action.

Who will and who will not start a full-scale revolution cannot be foretold. The basis for a revolution is created when the organic structure and conditions within a given country have aroused mass concern. Sometimes the revolution is started by its opponents who by some act arouse the masses to anger and action. Sometimes a very marked improvement in living conditions inculcates in the masses a belief that there is no limit to what they should or can have. Sometimes it is just seeing one segment of the population living so much better than the rest.

No one has ever been able to predict which class or race would start a revolution or how many people would be required to do it. The only certainty is that the success of a revolution depends on the joining in of the working people who make up the bulk of the population.

Marx's theory of revolution was developed in relation to the advanced capitalist countries. The United States is the most advanced capitalist country in the world. Not only that. It is the citadel of world capitalism without which the other capitalist countries could not survive. Therefore any revolutionary who evades facing the specific conditions and realities of American capitalism is like the British workers in Marx's day who were so preoccupied with keeping the Irish workers down that they couldn't fight for their own advancement, or all the American socialists who have been so preoccupied with Stalinism, either pro or con, that they have not sought or been able to find the basis of the revolution that is here, right in front of their eyes, in the most advanced capitalist country in the world. American socialists have never been able to understand why there should be a revolution in the United States when there is such an abundance of commodities in this country. Rather than face this question squarely, they have become refugees in theory, if not in physical fact, from the American Revolution.

Preoccupied, while still living in America, with how revolutionary regimes live up to or fall short of their socialist ideals, American revolutionaries have failed to understand the problems actually faced by these regimes after they come to power. They have not understood the nature of the problem of accumulating capital enough for industrialization, and that the burden of this accumulation must be placed on the backs of the workers—just as it was in all capitalist countries, and especially on the backs of Negro workers in the United States— unless they can get the needed capital from already developed countries like the United States. But the United States will share its resources with the underdeveloped countries only if there is a social revolution in the United States. Which brings us right back to the question of the American Revolution.

The American Revolution does not necessarily have to start from economic grievances. Nor does it have to start with the American working class in the lead. The development of capitalism in the United States has generated more than enough contradictions to pose the question of the total social reorganization of the country. Some of these contradictions relate to sheer poverty and the workers' life in production. Others are just as important and have even wider bearing on the quality of social existence. Man is imaginative and creative. His needs go far beyond the realm of the material.

What is man's greatest human need in the United States today? It is to stop shirking responsibility and start assuming responsibility. When Americans stop doing the one and start doing the other, they will begin to travel the revolutionary road. But to do this they must use as much creative imagination in politics as up to now they have used in

production. The fact is that the more imaginative Americans have been in creating new techniques of production, the less imaginative they have been in creating new relations between people. Americans today are like a bunch of ants who have been struggling all summer long to accumulate a harvest and then can't decide how to distribute it and therefore fight among themselves and destroy each other to get at the accumulation.

The greatest obstacle in the way of the American people beginning to behave like human beings rather than like animals is the great American illusion of freedom.

Stop an American and begin to make some serious criticisms of our society, and nine times out of ten his final defense will be: "But this is the freest and finest country in the world." When you probe into what he means by this, it turns out that what he is really talking about is the material goods that he can acquire in exchange for his birthright of political freedom. That is, he is free to have an automobile, a TV, a hi-fi, and all kinds of food, clothing, and drink as long as he doesn't offend anybody he works for or anybody in an official capacity, and as long as he doesn't challenge the accepted pattern of racial, economic, and political relations inside the country or its foreign policy outside. On these questions most Americans absolve themselves from any responsibility by saying that all that is "politics" and "I am not interested in politics." What they really mean is that they are afraid to assume political responsibility because it would mean jeopardizing their economic and social status. No people in the world have more to say about the lack of free speech in Russia, China, Cuba, and Ghana. The reason is that as long as they have these other places to talk about, they can evade facing the silent police state that has grown up inside America. If you casually mention the police state to an American, the first thing that comes to his mind is some other country. He doesn't see his own police state.

That is because in the United States, more than in any other country in the world, every man is a policeman over himself, a prisoner of his own fears. He is afraid to think because he is afraid of what his neighbors might think of what he thinks if they found out what he was thinking, or what his boss might think, or what the police might think, or the FBI, or the CIA. And all because he thinks he has a lot to lose. He thinks he has to choose between material goods and political freedom. And when the two are counterposed, Americans today will choose material goods. Believing they have much to lose, Americans find excuses where there are no excuses, evade issues before the issues arise, shun situations and conversations which could lead to conflict, leave politics and political decisions to the politicians. They will not regain their membership in the human race until they recognize that their greatest need is no longer to make material goods but to make politics.

But politics today in the United States is not just ordinary politics made by ordinary politicians. Not since the 30's and the era of Franklin D. Roosevelt has there been political statesmanship in the United States. Roosevelt's problems and therefore his responsibilities,

as he made very clear in his First Inaugural Address, were extraordinary. But Roosevelt's problems were largely domestic. Today, in contrast, every issue, no matter how local or domestic it may seem, has international repercussions inherent in it from the very beginning.

In President Eisenhower's Farewell Address, he warned the people of the growing power of the "military-industrial complex" inside the country. Ike was speaking mainly of the actual military power and personnel. He did not go into the way this apparatus has been intertwined with those who control the economic processes of the country and with the various investigating agencies which at every level control the thought processes of the population. All together, these now constitute a military-economic-police bloc which was not elected by the people and cannot be held responsible to the people but which makes all the decisions controlling the life of the people.

This bloc has its present power because the United States actually does have its back to the wall both domestically and internationally. Domestically, it is dependent upon the war economy for economic survival as a capitalist country, and has been so dependent since the Great Depression of the 30's. Internationally, it is dependent upon the military for protection against the world revolutionary movement that is arising among the have-not peoples of the world, and has been so dependent since the 1949 Revolution in China and the Korean War. The United States has lost all the spiritual power which underlies political power of a peaceful kind.

It is the refusal of the American people to face this situation openly and to assume responsibility for tackling it uncompromisingly that gives the military-economic-police bloc its strength. If the secret police were not so secret and silent, it would be much easier to fight. An open enemy is the best enemy. But the fear of the American people of clashing openly with this bloc adds strength to it.

Most secret of all is the CIA, which even members of Congress do not dare question. Yet the CIA has the power to go into a country, organize a war or a revolution or a counter-revolution, recruit among the American people for its schemes; it has the funds and the staff at its disposal to fight an underground war not only against the Russians but against every country in the world.

The FBI is the secret police force closest to the lives of the people. Unlike the FBI of the 30's which used to be hailed as the great protector of the people against the criminal elements, the FBI today functions chiefly as a political police to pry into the private lives and thoughts of every American.

What the FBI does in complete secrecy, the House Un-American Activities Committee does



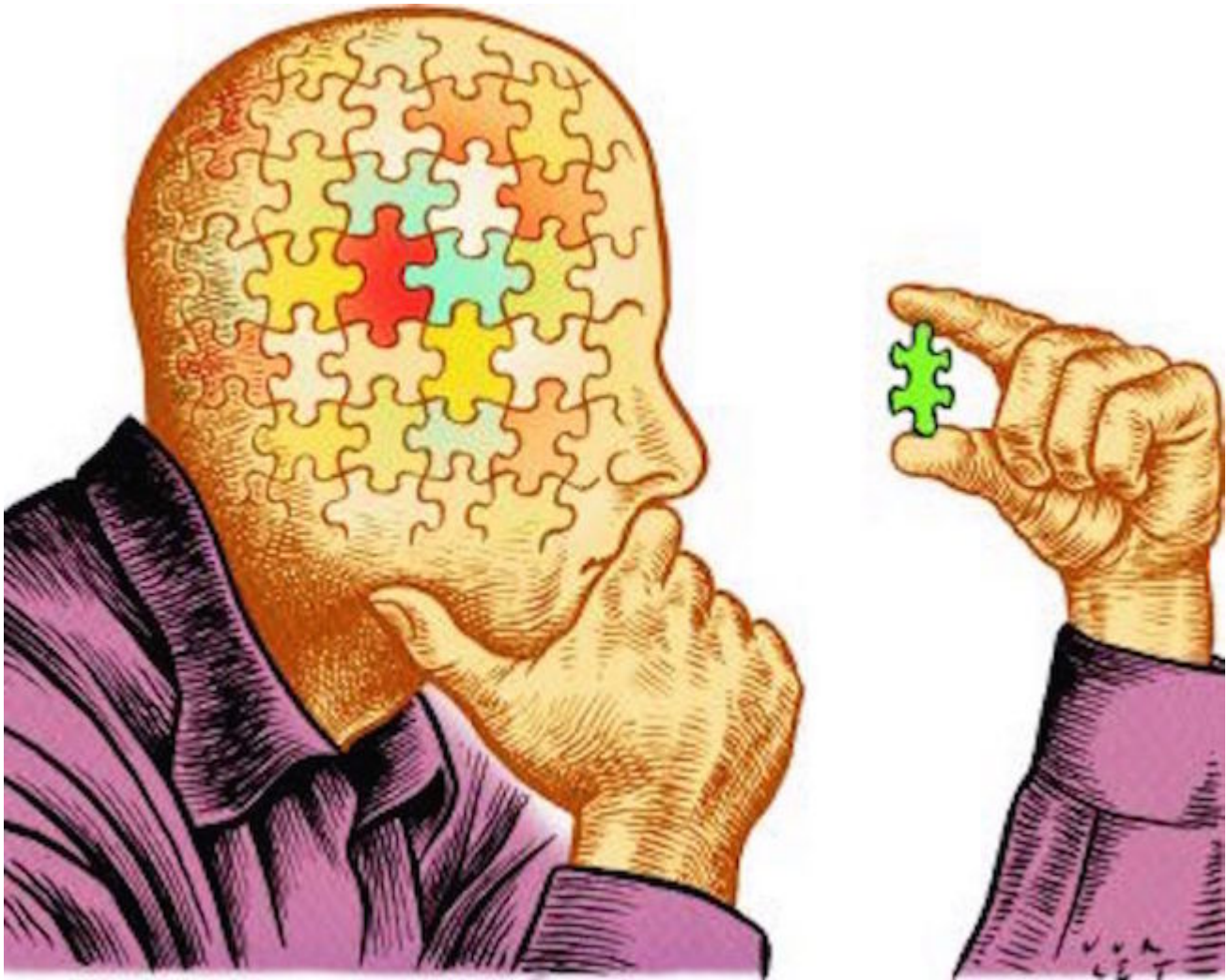
in semi-secrecy, having the power to drag before it any individual or group which actively challenges the status quo in this country. In this way it dangles over all whom it queries the kind of public suspicion and silent condemnation from which there is only one way for the individual to escape—to prove his or her loyalty to the police state by becoming an informer for it.

If the leap that the American people have to take in order to meet the problems of this new age of abundance were not so great, the powers of the secret police would likewise not be so great. In the 30's the problems were relatively simple. All that was required was that the poor struggle against the rich, who were the capitalists and whose failure was clear and obvious.

Today in the 60's, the struggle is much more difficult. What it requires is that people in every stratum of the population clash not only with the agents of the silent police state but with their own prejudices, their own outmoded ideas, their own fears which keep them from grappling with the new realities of our age. The American people must find a way to insist upon their own right and responsibility to make political decisions and to determine policy in all spheres of social existence —whether it is foreign policy, the work process, education, race relations, community life. The coming struggle is a political struggle to take political power out of the hands of the few and put it into the hands of the many. But in order to get this power into the hands of the many, it will be necessary for the many not only to fight the powerful few but to fight and clash among themselves as well.

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## **Theodor W. Adorno: Resignation**



“The happiness that dawns in the eye of the thinking person is the happiness of humanity. The universal tendency of oppression is opposed to thought as such. Thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness: by enunciating it. By this alone happiness reaches into the universal unhappiness. Whoever does not let it atrophy has not yet resigned.”

Read the full essay [here](#).

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## **Damian Carrington: Arctic Stronghold of World's Seeds**

# Flooded After Permafrost Melts

This article was originally published on May 19, 2017 in [The Guardian](#).



It was designed as an impregnable deep-freeze to protect the world's most precious seeds from any global disaster and ensure humanity's food supply forever. But the [Global Seed Vault](#), buried in a mountain deep inside the Arctic circle, has been breached after global warming produced extraordinary temperatures over the winter, sending meltwater gushing into the entrance tunnel.

The vault is on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen and contains almost a million packets of seeds, each a variety of an important food crop. When it was opened in 2008, the deep permafrost through which the vault was sunk was expected to provide "[failsafe](#)" protection against "the challenge of natural or man-made disasters".

But [soaring temperatures in the Arctic](#) at the end of the [world's hottest ever recorded year](#) led to melting and heavy rain, when light snow should have been falling. "It was not in our plans to think that the permafrost would not be there and that it would experience extreme weather like that," said Hege Njaa Aschim, from the Norwegian government, which owns

the vault.

“A lot of water went into the start of the tunnel and then it froze to ice, so it was like a glacier when you went in,” she told the Guardian. Fortunately, the meltwater did not reach the vault itself, the ice has been hacked out, and the precious seeds remain safe for now at the required storage temperature of -18C.

But the breach has questioned the ability of the vault to survive as a lifeline for humanity if catastrophe strikes. “It was supposed to [operate] without the help of humans, but now we are watching the seed vault 24 hours a day,” Aschim said. “We must see what we can do to minimise all the risks and make sure the seed bank can take care of itself.”



*Plastic boxes containing plant seeds inside the international Svalbard Global Seed Vault on Spitsbergen, Norway. Photograph: Jens Buttner/dpa/Alamy*

The vault’s managers are now waiting to see if the extreme heat of this winter was a one-off or will be repeated or even exceeded as climate change heats the planet. The end of 2016 saw average temperatures over 7C above normal on Spitsbergen, pushing the permafrost above melting point.

“The question is whether this is just happening now, or will it escalate?” said Aschim. The Svalbard archipelago, of which Spitsbergen is part, has warmed rapidly in recent decades, according to Ketil Isaksen, from Norway’s Meteorological Institute.

“The Arctic and especially Svalbard warms up faster than the rest of the world. The climate is changing dramatically and we are all amazed at how quickly it is going,” Isaksen **told Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet.**

The vault managers are now taking precautions, including major work to waterproof the 100m-long tunnel into the mountain and digging trenches into the mountainside to channel meltwater and rain away. They have also removed electrical equipment from the tunnel that produced some heat and installed pumps in the vault itself in case of a future flood.



Aschim said there was no option but to find solutions to ensure the enduring safety of the vault: “We have to find solutions. It is a big responsibility and we take it very seriously. We are doing this for the world.”

“This is supposed to last for eternity,” said Åsmund Asdal at the Nordic Genetic Resource Centre, which operates the seed vault.

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## Glen Coulthard: For Our Nations to Live, Capitalism Must Die

This article was originally published on [Unsettling America](#).



There is a significant and to my mind problematic limitation that is increasingly being placed on Indigenous efforts to defend our rights and our lands. This constraint involves the type of tactics that are being represented as morally legitimate in our efforts to defend our land and rights as Indigenous peoples on the one hand, and those which are viewed as morally illegitimate because of their disruptive and extra-legal character on the other.

With respect to those approaches deemed “legitimate” in defending our rights, emphasis is

often placed on formal “negotiations” - usually carried out between “official” Aboriginal leadership (usually men) and representatives of the Crown (also usually men) - and if need be coupled with largely symbolic acts of peaceful, non-disruptive protest that must abide by Canada’s “rule of law.”

Then there are those approaches increasingly deemed “illegitimate.” These include but are not limited to forms of protest and direct action that seek to influence power through less mediated and sometimes more disruptive measures, like the slowing of traffic for the purpose of leafleting and solidarity-building, temporarily blocking access to Indigenous territories with the aim of impeding the exploitation of First Nations’ land and resources, or in rarer cases still, the re-occupation of a portion of Indigenous land (rural or urban) through the establishment of reclamation sites that also serve to disrupt, if not entirely block, access to Indigenous territories by state and capital for prolonged periods of time.

Regardless of their diversity and specificity, however, most of these activities tend to get branded in the media in a wholly negative manner: as reactionary, threatening, and disruptive.

### Blockades and beyond

What the recent actions of the Mi’kmaq land and water defenders at Elsipogtog demonstrate is that direct actions in the form of Indigenous blockades are both a negation and an affirmation. They are a crucial act of negation insofar as they seek to impede or block the flow of resources currently being transported from oil and gas fields, refineries, lumber mills, mining operations, and hydro-electric facilities located on the dispossessed lands of Indigenous nations to international markets. These forms of direct action, in other words, seek to negatively impact the economic infrastructure that is core to the colonial accumulation of capital in settler political economies like Canada’s. Blocking access to this critical infrastructure has historically been quite effective in forging short-term gains for Indigenous communities. Over the last couple of decades, however, state and corporate powers have also become quite skilled at recuperating the losses incurred as a result of Indigenous peoples’ resistance by drawing our leaders off the land and into negotiations where the terms are always set by and in the interests of settler capital.

What tends to get ignored by many self-styled pundits is that these actions are also an affirmative gesture of Indigenous resurgence insofar as they embody an enactment of Indigenous law and the obligations such laws place on Indigenous peoples to uphold the relations of reciprocity that shape our engagements with the human and non-human world - the land. The question I want to explore here, albeit very briefly, is this: how might we begin to scale-up these often localized, resurgent land-based direct actions to produce a transformation in the colonial economy more generally? Said slightly differently, how might

we move beyond a resurgent Indigenous politics that seeks to inhibit the destructive effects of capital to one that strives to create Indigenous alternatives to it?

## Rebuilding our nations

In her [recent interview](#) with Naomi Klein, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson hints at what such an alternative or alternatives might entail for Indigenous nations. “People within the Idle No More movement who are talking about Indigenous nationhood are talking about a massive transformation, a massive decolonization”; they are calling for a “resurgence of Indigenous political thought” that is “land-based and very much tied to that intimate and close relationship to the land, which to me means a revitalization of sustainable local Indigenous economies.”

Without such a massive transformation in the political economy of contemporary settler-colonialism, any efforts to rebuild our nations will remain parasitic on capitalism, and thus on the perpetual exploitation of our lands and labour. Consider, for example, an approach to resurgence that would see Indigenous people begin to reconnect with their lands and land-based practices on either an individual or small-scale collective basis. This could take the form of “walking the land” in an effort to re-familiarize ourselves with the landscapes and places that give our histories, languages, and cultures shape and content; to revitalizing and engaging in land-based harvesting practices like hunting, fishing, and gathering, and/or cultural production activities like hide-tanning and carving, all of which also serve to assert our sovereign presence on our territories in ways that can be profoundly educational and empowering; to the re-occupation of sacred places for the purposes of relearning and practicing our ceremonial activities.

Although all of these place-based practices are crucial to our well-being and offer profound insights into life-ways that provide frameworks for thinking about alternatives to an economy predicated on the perpetual exploitation of the human and non-human world, at the micro-political level that these practices tend to operate they still require that we have access to a mode of subsistence detached from the practices themselves. In other words, they require that we have access to a very specific form of work – which, in our present economy depends on the expropriation of our labour and the theft of our time for the profit of others – in order to generate the cash required to spend this regenerative time on the land.

A similar problem informs self-determination efforts that seek to ameliorate our poverty and economic dependency through resource revenue sharing, more comprehensive impact benefit agreements, and affirmative action employment strategies negotiated through the state and with industries tearing-up Indigenous territories. Even though the capital generated by such an approach could, in theory, be spent subsidizing the revitalization of

certain cultural traditions and practices, in the end they would still remain dependent on a predatory economy that is entirely at odds with the deep reciprocity that forms the cultural core of many Indigenous peoples' relationships with land.

### Developing Indigenous political-economic alternatives

What forms might an Indigenous political-economic alternative to the intensification of capitalism on and within our territories take? For some communities, reinvigorating a mix of subsistence-based activities with more contemporary economic ventures is one alternative. In the 1970s, for example, the Dene Nation sought to curtail the negative environmental and cultural impacts of capitalist extractivism by proposing to establish an economy that would apply traditional concepts of Dene governance - decentralized, regional political structures based on participatory, consensus decision-making - to the realm of the economy. At the time, this would have seen a revitalization of a bush mode of production, with emphasis placed on the harvesting and manufacturing of local renewable resources through traditional activities like hunting, fishing, and trapping, potentially combined with and partially subsidized by other economic activities on lands communally held and managed by the Dene Nation. Economic models discussed during the time thus included the democratic organization of production and distribution through Indigenous co-operatives and possibly worker-managed enterprises.

Revisiting Indigenous political-economic alternatives such as these could pose a real threat to the accumulation of capital on Indigenous lands in three ways. First, through mentorship and education these economies reconnect Indigenous people to land-based practices and forms of knowledge that emphasize radical sustainability. This form of grounded normativity is antithetical to capitalist accumulation. Second, these economic practices offer a means of subsistence that can over time help break our dependence on the capitalist market by cultivating self-sufficiency through the localized and sustainable production of core foods and life materials that we distribute and consume within our own communities on a regular basis. Third, through the application of Indigenous governance principles to non-traditional economic activities we open up a way of engaging in contemporary economic ventures in an Indigenous way that is better suited to foster sustainable economic decision-making, an equitable distribution of resources within and between Indigenous communities, Native women's political and economic emancipation, and empowerment for Indigenous citizens and workers who may or must pursue livelihoods in sectors of the economy outside of the bush. Why not critically apply the most egalitarian and participatory features of our traditional governance practices to all of our economic activities, regardless of whether they are undertaken in land-based or urban contexts? Cities are on Indigenous land too, and a hell of a lot of us currently live in them.

### New alliances, new opportunities



The capacity of resurgent Indigenous economies to challenge the hegemony of settler-colonial capitalism in the long term can only happen if certain conditions are met, however. First, all of the colonial, racist, and patriarchal legal, political obstacles that have been used to block our access to land need to be confronted and removed. Of course capitalism continues to play a core role in dispossessing us of our lands and self-determining authority, but it only does so in concert with axes of exploitation and domination configured along racial, gender and state lines. Given the resilience of these equally devastating relations of power, our efforts to decolonize must directly confront more than just economic relations; they must account for the complex ways that capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and the state interact with one another to form the constellation of power relations that sustain colonial patterns of behavior, structures, and relationships. Dismantling these oppressive structures will not be easy. It will require that we continue to assert our presence on all of our territories, coupled with an escalation of confrontations with the forces of colonization through the forms of direct action that are currently being undertaken by communities like Elsipogtog.

Second, we also have to acknowledge that the significant political leverage required to simultaneously block the economic exploitation of our people and homelands while constructing alternatives to capitalism will not be generated through our direct actions and resurgent economies alone. Settler-colonization has rendered our populations too small to affect this magnitude of change. This reality demands that we continue to remain open to, if not actively seek out and establish, relations of solidarity and networks of trade and mutual aid with national and transnational communities and organizations that are also struggling against the imposed effects of globalized capital, including other Indigenous nations and national confederacies; urban Indigenous people and organizations; the labour, women's, GBLTQ2S, and environmental movements; and, of course, those racial and ethnic communities that find themselves subject to their own distinct forms of economic, social and cultural marginalization. The initially rapid and relatively widespread support expressed both nationally and internationally for the Idle No More movement last spring, and the solidarity generated around the Elsipogtog anti-fracking resistance today, gives me hope that establishing such relations are indeed possible.

It's time for our communities to seize the unique political opportunities of the day. In the delicate balancing act of having to ensure that one's social conservative contempt for First Nations doesn't overwhelm one's neoconservative love of the market, Prime Minister Harper has erred by letting the racism and sexism of the former outstrip his belligerent commitment to the latter. This is a novice mistake that Liberals like Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin learned how to manage decades ago. As a result, the federal government has invigorated a struggle for Indigenous self-determination that must challenge the relationship between settler-colonization and free-market fundamentalism in ways that refuse to be co-opted by scraps of recognition, opportunistic apologies, and the **cheap gift of**

political and economic inclusion. For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it.

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## Immanuel Wallerstein and Sasha Lilley: Wallerstein on the End of Capitalism

This interview was originally published by [Against the Grain](#).



“Our capitalist world seems mired in crisis, beset by low growth and instability. Immanuel Wallerstein, the father of world-systems theory, argues that the current malaise goes beyond the periodic fluctuations of the business cycle. According to him, capitalism’s days are numbered: in 20 to 40 years it will be gone. What replaces it may be something better

or something worse. Wallerstein discusses the end of capitalism, as well as resistance to Donald Trump and the recent attack on Syria.”

Listen to the full interview [here](#).

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## Institute for Precarious Consciousness: We Are All Very Anxious

This article was originally published on [Plan C](#).



Six Theses on Anxiety and Why It is Effectively Preventing Militancy, and One Possible Strategy for Overcoming It <sup>1</sup>

1: Each phase of capitalism has its own dominant reactive affect.<sup>2</sup>

Each phase of capitalism has a particular affect which holds it together. This is not a static situation. The prevalence of a particular dominant affect<sup>3</sup> is sustainable only *until strategies of resistance able to break down this particular affect and /or its social sources are formulated*. Hence, capitalism constantly comes into crisis and recomposes around newly dominant affects.

One aspect of every phase's dominant affect is that it is a public secret, something that everyone knows, but nobody admits, or talks about. As long as the dominant affect is a public secret, it remains effective, and strategies against it will not emerge.

Public secrets are typically personalised. The problem is only visible at an individual, psychological level; the social causes of the problem are concealed. Each phase blames the system's victims for the suffering that the system causes. And it portrays a fundamental part of its functional logic as a contingent and localised problem.

In the modern era (until the post-war settlement), the dominant affect was *misery*. In the nineteenth century, the dominant narrative was that capitalism leads to general enrichment. The public secret of this narrative was the misery of the working class. The exposure of this misery was carried out by revolutionaries. The first wave of modern social movements in the nineteenth century was a machine for fighting misery. Tactics such as strikes, wage struggles, political organisation, mutual aid, co-operatives and strike funds were effective ways to defeat the power of misery by ensuring a certain social minimum. Some of these strategies still work when fighting misery.

When misery stopped working as a control strategy, capitalism switched to *boredom*. In the mid twentieth century, the dominant public narrative was that the standard of living - which widened access to consumption, healthcare and education - was rising. Everyone in the rich countries was happy, and the poor countries were on their way to development. The public secret was that everyone was bored. This was an effect of the Fordist system which was prevalent until the 1980s - a system based on full-time jobs for life, guaranteed welfare, mass consumerism, mass culture, and the co-optation of the labour movement which had been built to fight misery. Job security and welfare provision reduced anxiety and misery, but jobs were boring, made up of simple, repetitive tasks. Mid-century capitalism gave everything needed for survival, but no opportunities for life; it was a system based on force-feeding survival to saturation point.

Of course, not all workers under Fordism actually had stable jobs or security - but this was the core model of work, around which the larger system was arranged. There were really three deals in this phase, with the B-worker deal - boredom for security - being the most



exemplary of the Fordism-boredom conjuncture. Today, the B-worker deal has largely been eliminated, leaving a gulf between the A- and C-workers (the consumer society insiders, and the autonomy and insecurity of the most marginal).

2: Contemporary resistance is born of the 1960s wave, in response to the dominant affect of *boredom*.

If each stage of the dominant system has a dominant affect, then each stage of resistance needs strategies to defeat or dissolve this affect. If the first wave of social movements were a machine for fighting misery, the second wave (of the 1960s-70s, or more broadly (and thinly) 1960s-90s) were a machine for fighting boredom. This is the wave of which our own movements were born, which continues to inflect most of our theories and practices.

Most tactics of this era were/are ways to escape the work-consume-die cycle. The Situationists pioneered a whole series of tactics directed against boredom, declaring that “We do not want a world in which the guarantee that we will not die of starvation is bought by accepting the risk of dying of boredom”. Autonomia fought boredom by refusing work, both within work (using sabotage and go-slows) and against it (slacking off and dropping out). These protest forms were associated with a wider social process of countercultural exodus from the dominant forms of boring work and boring social roles.

In the feminist movement, the “housewife malaise” was theorised as systemic in the 1960s. Later, further dissatisfactions were revealed through consciousness raising, and the texts and actions (from “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm” to the Redstockings abortion speak-out) which stemmed from it. Similar tendencies can be seen in the Theatre of the Oppressed, critical pedagogy, the main direct-action styles (carnavalesque, militant, and pacifist), and in movements as late as the 1990s, such as the free party movement, Reclaim the Streets, DIY culture, and hacker culture.

The mid-century reorientation from misery to boredom was crucial to the emergence of a new wave of revolt. We are the tail end of this wave. Just as the tactics of the first wave still work when fighting misery, so the tactics of the second wave still work when fighting boredom. The difficulty is that we are less often facing boredom as the main enemy. This is why militant resistance is caught in its current impasse.

3: Capitalism has largely absorbed the struggle against boredom.

There has been a partial recuperation of the struggle against boredom. Capitalism pursued the exodus into spaces beyond work, creating the *social factory* - a field in which the whole society is organised like a workplace. Precarity is used to force people back to work within an expanded field of labour now including the whole of the social factory.

Many instances of this pursuit can be enumerated. Companies have adopted flattened management models inciting employees to not only manage, but invest their souls in, their work. Consumer society now provides a wider range of niche products and constant distraction which is not determined by mass tastes to the same degree as before. New products, such as video-games and social media, involve heightened levels of active individual involvement and desocialised stimulation. Workplace experiences are diversified by means of micro-differentials and performance management, as well as the multiplication of casual and semi-self-employed work situations on the margins of capitalism. Capitalism has encouraged the growth of mediatised secondary identities - the self portrayed through social media, visible consumption, and lifelong learning - which have to be obsessively maintained. Various forms of resistance of the earlier period have been recuperated, or revived in captured form once the original is extinguished: for instance, the corporate nightclub and music festival replace the rave.

4: In contemporary capitalism, the dominant reactive affect is *anxiety*.

Today's public secret is that everyone is anxious. Anxiety has spread from its previous localised locations (such as sexuality) to the whole of the social field. All forms of intensity, self-expression, emotional connection, immediacy, and enjoyment are now laced with anxiety. It has become the linchpin of subordination.

One major part of the social underpinning of anxiety is the multi-faceted omnipresent web of *surveillance*. The NSA, CCTV, performance management reviews, the Job Centre, the privileges system in the prisons, the constant examination and classification of the youngest schoolchildren. But this obvious web is only the outer carapace. We need to think about the ways in which a neoliberal idea of success inculcates these surveillance mechanisms inside the subjectivities and life-stories of most of the population.

We need to think about how people's deliberate and ostensibly voluntary self-exposure, through social media, visible consumption and choice of positions within the field of opinions, also assumes a performance in the field of the perpetual gaze of virtual others. We need to think about the ways in which this gaze inflects how we find, measure and know one another, as co-actors in an infinitely watched perpetual performance. Our success in this performance in turn affects everything from our ability to access human warmth to our ability to access means of subsistence, not just in the form of the wage but also in the form of credit. Outsides to the field of mediatised surveillance are increasingly closed off, as public space is bureaucratised and privatised, and a widening range of human activity is criminalised on the grounds of risk, security, nuisance, quality of life, or anti-social behaviour.

In this increasingly securitised and visible field, we are commanded to communicate. The

incommunicable is excluded. Since everyone is disposable, the system holds the threat of forcibly delinking anyone at any time, in a context where alternatives are foreclosed in advance, so that forcible delinking entails desocialisation - leading to an absurd non-choice between desocialised inclusion and desocialised exclusion. This threat is manifested in small ways in today's disciplinary practices - from "time-outs" and Internet bans, to firings and benefit sanctions - culminating in the draconian forms of solitary confinement found in prisons. Such regimes are the zero degree of control-by-anxiety: the breakdown of all the coordinates of connectedness in a setting of constant danger, in order to produce a collapse of personality.

The present dominant affect of anxiety is also known as precarity. Precarity is a type of insecurity which treats people as disposable so as to impose control. Precarity differs from misery in that the necessities of life are not simply absent. They are available, but withheld conditionally.

Precarity leads to generalised hopelessness; a constant bodily excitation without release. Growing proportions of young people are living at home. Substantial portions of the population - over 10% in the UK - are taking antidepressants. The birth rate is declining, as insecurity makes people reluctant to start families. In Japan, millions of young people never leave their homes (the hikikomori), while others literally work themselves to death on an epidemic scale. Surveys reveal half the population of the UK are experiencing income insecurity. Economically, aspects of the system of anxiety include "lean" production, financialisation and resultant debt slavery, rapid communication and financial outflows, and the globalisation of production. Workplaces like call centres are increasingly common, where everyone watches themselves, tries to maintain the required "service orientation," and is constantly subject to re-testing and potential failure both by quantitative requirements on numbers of calls, and a process which denies most workers a stable job (they have to work six months to even receive a job, as opposed to a learning place). Image management means that the gap between the official rules and what really happens is greater than ever. And the post-911 climate channels this widespread anxiety into global politics.

5: Anxiety is a public secret.

Excessive anxiety and stress are a public secret. When discussed at all, they are understood as individual psychological problems, often blamed on faulty thought patterns or poor adaptation.

Indeed, the dominant public narrative suggests that we need more stress, so as to keep us "safe" (through securitisation) and "competitive" (through performance management). Each moral panic, each new crackdown or new round of repressive laws, adds to the cumulative

weight of anxiety and stress arising from general over-regulation. Real, human insecurity is channelled into fuelling securitisation. This is a vicious circle, because securitisation increases the very conditions (disposability, surveillance, intensive regulation) which cause the initial anxiety. In effect, the security of the Homeland is used as a vicarious substitute for security of the Self. Again, this has precedents: the use of national greatness as vicarious compensation for misery, and the use of global war as a channel for frustration arising from boredom.

Anxiety is also channelled downwards. People's lack of control over their lives leads to an obsessive struggle to reclaim control by micro-managing whatever one can control. Parental management techniques, for example, are advertised as ways to reduce parents' anxiety by providing a definite script they can follow. On a wider, social level, latent anxieties arising from precarity fuel obsessive projects of social regulation and social control. This latent anxiety is increasingly projected onto minorities.

Anxiety is personalised in a number of ways - from New Right discourses blaming the poor for poverty, to contemporary therapies which treat anxiety as a neurological imbalance or a dysfunctional thinking style. A hundred varieties of "management" discourse - time management, anger management, parental management, self-branding, gamification - offer anxious subjects an illusion of control in return for ever-greater conformity to the capitalist model of subjectivity. And many more discourses of scapegoating and criminalisation treat precarity as a matter of personal deviance, irresponsibility, or pathological self-exclusion. Many of these discourses seek to maintain the superstructure of Fordism (nationalism, social integration) without its infrastructure (a national economy, welfare, jobs for all). Doctrines of individual responsibility are central to this backlash, reinforcing vulnerability and disposability. Then there's the self-esteem industry, the massive outpouring of media telling people how to achieve success through positive thinking - as if the sources of anxiety and frustration are simply illusory. These are indicative of the tendency to privatise problems, both those relating to work, and those relating to psychology.

Earlier we argued that people have to be socially isolated in order for a public secret to work. This is true of the current situation, in which authentic communication is increasingly rare. Communication is more pervasive than ever, but increasingly, communication happens only through paths mediated by the system. Hence, in many ways, people are prevented from actually communicating, even while the system demands that everyone be connected and communicable. People both conform to the demand to communicate rather than expressing themselves, and self-censor within mediated spaces. Similarly, affective labour does not alleviate anxiety; it compounds workers' suffering while simply distracting consumers (researchers have found that requirements on workers to feign happiness actually cause serious health problems).



The volume of communication is irrelevant. The recomposition - reconnection - of liberatory social forces will not happen unless there are channels through which the public secret itself can be spoken. In this sense, people are fundamentally more alone than ever. It is difficult for most people (including many radicals) to acknowledge the reality of what they experience and feel. Something has to be quantified or mediated (broadcast virtually), or, for us, to be already recognised as political, to be validated as real. The public secret does not meet these criteria, and so it remains invisible.

6: Current tactics and theories aren't working. We need new tactics and theories to combat anxiety.

During periods of mobilisation and effective social change, people feel a sense of empowerment, the ability to express themselves, a sense of authenticity and de-repression or dis-alienation which can act as an effective treatment for depression and psychological problems; a kind of peak experience. It is what sustains political activity.

Such experiences have become far rarer in recent years.

We might here focus on two related developments: pre-emption, and punishment by process. Pre-emptive tactics are those which stop protests before they start, or before they can achieve anything. Kettling, mass arrests, stop-and-search, lockdowns, house raids and pre-emptive arrests are examples of these kinds of tactics. Punishment by process entails keeping people in a situation of fear, pain, or vulnerability through the abuse of procedures designed for other purposes - such as keeping people on pre-charge or pre-trial bail conditions which disrupt their everyday activity, using no-fly and border-stop lists to harass known dissidents, carrying out violent dawn raids, needlessly putting people's photographs in the press, arresting people on suspicion (sometimes in accord with quotas), using pain-compliance holds, or quietly making known that someone is under surveillance. Once fear of state interference is instilled, it is reinforced by the web of visible surveillance that is gridded across public space, and which acts as strategically placed triggers of trauma and anxiety.

Anecdotal evidence has provided many horror stories about the effects of such tactics - people left a nervous wreck after years awaiting a trial on charges for which they were acquitted, committing suicide after months out of touch with their friends and family, or afraid to go out after incidents of abuse. The effects are just as real as if the state was killing or disappearing people, but they are rendered largely invisible. In addition, many radicals are also on the receiving end of precarious employment and punitive benefit regimes. We are failing to escape the generalised production of anxiety.

If the first wave provided a machine for fighting misery, and the second wave a machine for

fighting boredom, what we now need is a machine for fighting anxiety - and this is something we do not yet have. If we see from within anxiety, we haven't yet performed the "reversal of perspective" as the Situationists called it - seeing from the standpoint of desire instead of power. Today's main forms of resistance still arise from the struggle against boredom, and, since boredom's replacement by anxiety, have ceased to be effective.

Current militant resistance does not and cannot combat anxiety. It often involves deliberate exposure to high-anxiety situations. Insurrectionists overcome anxiety by turning negative affects into anger, and acting on this anger through a projectile affect of attack. In many ways, this provides an alternative to anxiety. However, it is difficult for people to pass from anxiety to anger, and it is easy for people to be pushed back the other way, due to trauma. We've noticed a certain tendency for insurrectionists to refuse to take seriously the existence of psychological barriers to militant action. Their response tends to be, "Just do it!" But anxiety is a real, material force - not simply a spook. To be sure, its sources are often rooted in spooks, but the question of overcoming the grip of a spook is rarely as simple as consciously rejecting it. There's a whole series of psychological blockages underlying the spook's illusory power, which is ultimately an effect of reactive affect. Saying "Just do it" is like saying to someone with a broken leg, "Just walk!"

The situation feels hopeless and inescapable, but it isn't. It feels this way because of effects of precarity - constant over-stress, the contraction of time into an eternal present, the vulnerability of each separated (or systemically mediated) individual, the system's dominance of all aspects of social space. Structurally, the system is vulnerable. The reliance on anxiety is a desperate measure, used in the absence of stronger forms of conformity. The system's attempt to keep running by keeping people feeling powerless leaves it open to sudden ruptures, outbreaks of revolt. So how do we get to the point where we stop feeling powerless?

7: A new style of precarity-focused consciousness raising is needed.

In order to formulate new responses to anxiety, we need to return to the drawing board. We need to construct a new set of knowledges and theories from the bottom up. To this end, we need to create a profusion of discussions which produce dense intersections between experiences of the current situation and theories of transformation. We need to start such processes throughout the excluded and oppressed strata - but there is no reason we shouldn't start with ourselves.

In exploring the possibilities for such a practice, the Institute has looked into previous cases of similar practices. From an examination of accounts of feminist consciousness raising in the 1960s/70s, we have summarised the following central features:

- Producing new grounded theory relating to experience. We need to reconnect with our experiences now - rather than theories from past phases. The idea here is that our own perceptions of our situation are blocked or cramped by dominant assumptions, and need to be made explicit. The focus should be on those experiences which relate to the public secret. These experiences need to be recounted and pooled — firstly within groups, and then publicly.
- Recognising the reality, and the systemic nature, of our experiences. The validation of our experiences' reality of experiences is an important part of this. We need to affirm that our pain is really pain, that what we see and feel is real, and that our problems are not only personal. Sometimes this entails bringing up experiences we have discounted or repressed. Sometimes it entails challenging the personalisation of problems.
- Transformation of emotions. People are paralysed by unnameable emotions, and a general sense of feeling like shit. These emotions need to be transformed into a sense of injustice, a type of anger which is less resentful and more focused, a move towards self-expression, and a reactivation of resistance.
- Creating or expressing voice. The culture of silence surrounding the public secret needs to be overthrown. Existing assumptions need to be denaturalised and challenged, and cops in the head expelled. The exercise of voice moves the reference of truth and reality from the system to the speaker, contributing to the reversal of perspective - seeing the world through one's own perspective and desires, rather than the system's. The weaving together of different experiences and stories is an important way of reclaiming voice. The process is an articulation as well as an expression.
- Constructing a disalienated space. Social separation is reduced by the existence of such a space. The space provides critical distance on one's life, and a kind of emotional safety net to attempt transformations, dissolving fears. This should not simply be a self-help measure, used to sustain existing activities, but instead, a space for reconstructing a radical perspective.
- Analysing and theorising structural sources based on similarities in experience. The point is not simply to recount experiences but to transform and restructure them through their theorisation. Participants change the dominant meaning of their experience by mapping it with different assumptions. This is often done by finding

patterns in experiences which are related to liberatory theory, and seeing personal problems and small injustices as symptoms of wider structural problems. It leads to a new perspective, a vocabulary of motives; an anti-anti-political horizon.

The goal is to produce the *click* — the moment at which the structural source of problems suddenly makes sense in relation to experiences. This click is which focuses and transforms anger. Greater understanding may in turn relieve psychological pressures, and make it easier to respond with anger instead of depression or anxiety. It might even be possible to encourage people into such groups by promoting them as a form of self-help — even though they reject the adjustment orientation of therapeutic and self-esteem building processes.

The result is a kind of affinity group, but oriented to perspective and analysis, rather than action. It should be widely recognised, however, that this new awareness needs to turn into some kind of action; otherwise it is just frustratingly introspective.

This strategy will help our practice in a number of ways. Firstly, these groups can provide a pool of potential accomplices. Secondly, they can prime people for future moments of revolt. Thirdly, they create the potential to shift the general field of so-called public opinion in ways which create an easier context for action. Groups would also function as a life-support system and as a space to step back from immersion in the present. They would provide a kind of fluency in radical and dissident concepts which most people lack today.

Anxiety is reinforced by the fact that it is never clear what “the market” wants from us, that the demand for conformity is connected to a vague set of criteria which cannot be established in advance. Even the most conformist people are disposable nowadays, as new technologies of management or production are introduced. One of the functions of small-group discussions and consciousness raising is to construct a perspective from which one can interpret the situation

One major problem will be maintaining regular time commitments in a context of constant time and attentive pressure. The process has a slower pace and a more human scale than is culturally acceptable today. However, the fact that groups offer a respite from daily struggle, and perhaps a quieter style of interacting and listening which relieves attentive pressure, may also be attractive. Participants would need to learn to speak with a self-expressive voice (rather than a neoliberal performance derived from the compulsion to share banal information), and to listen and analyse.

Another problem is the complexity of experiences. Personal experiences are intensely differentiated by the nuanced discriminations built into the semicapitalist code. This makes the analytical part of the process particularly important.

Above all, the process should establish new propositions about the sources of anxiety. These propositions can form a basis for new forms of struggle, new tactics, and the revival of active force from its current repression: a machine for fighting anxiety.

### *Footnotes*

1. The discussion here is not fully relevant to the global South. The specific condition of the South is that dominant capitalist social forms are layered onto earlier stages of capitalism or pre-capitalist systems, rather than displacing them entirely. Struggles along the axes of misery and boredom are therefore more effective in the South. The South has experienced a particular variety of precarity distinct from earlier periods: the massive forced delinking of huge swathes of the world from global capitalism (especially in Africa), and the correspondingly massive growth of the informal sector, which now eclipses the formal sector almost everywhere. The informal sector provides fertile terrain for autonomous politics, as is clear from cases such as the city of El Alto (a self-organised city of shanty-towns which is central to social movements in Bolivia), the Zapatista revolt (leading to autonomous indigenous communities in Chiapas), and movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo (an autonomous movement of informal settlement residents in South Africa). However, it is often subject to a kind of collectivised precarity, as the state might (for instance) bulldoze shanty-towns, dispossess street traders, or crack down on illicit activities - and periodically does so. Revealingly, it was the self-immolation of a street trader subject to this kind of state dispossession which triggered the revolt in Sidi Bouzid, which later expanded into the Arab Spring. Massive unrest for similar reasons is also becoming increasingly common in China. It is also common for this sector to be dominated by hierarchical gangs or by the networked wings of authoritarian parties (such as the Muslim Brotherhood).

2. Affect: emotion, bodily disposition, way of relating

3. When using the term *dominant* affect, this is not to say that this is the only reactive affect in operation. The new dominant affect can relate dynamically with other affects: a call-centre worker is bored and miserably paid, but anxiety is what keeps her/him in this condition, preventing the use of old strategies such as unionisation, sabotage and dropping out.

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# Sergio Ferrari: El 1% de los propietarios en América Latina posee más de la mitad de las tierras agrícolas

Originalmente publicado en [Aldhea](#).



El 1% de los propietarios de [América Latina](#) concentra más de la mitad de las tierras agrícolas. La Organización de la [ONU](#) para la Alimentación y la Agricultura (FAO), retomó estos datos de un informe de la ONG OXFAM para describir la enorme desigualdad que atraviesa al continente .

El tema de la concentración de las tierras junto con la reflexión sobre el impacto de las reformas agrarias de la región, constituyó el tema central de la Reunión de alto nivel sobre “Gobernanza Responsable de la Tenencia de la Tierra, la Pesca y los Bosques en América Latina y el Caribe”, realizada en Santiago de Chile en el transcurso de la primera semana de abril.



La región de **América Latina y el Caribe** tiene la distribución de la tierra más desigual del mundo. La **FAO** destacó que esa distribución es aún más inequitativa en Sudamérica, mientras que en Centroamérica es levemente inferior.

La región tiene la distribución de tierras más desigual de todo el planeta: el **coeficiente de Gini** -que mide la desigualdad- aplicado a la distribución de la tierra en el continente alcanza al 0,79, superando ampliamente a Europa (0,57), África (0,56) y Asia (0,55).

El organismo de la ONU sostiene que administrar mejor los derechos de la tierra, así como el acceso a los bosques y la pesca es fundamental para reducir la pobreza en las zonas rurales y proteger los recursos naturales. E instó a mejorar el reconocimiento de los derechos de tenencia.

Mejorar el reconocimiento de los derechos de tenencia de la tierra y su distribución es un paso necesario para erradicar el hambre y avanzar hacia los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible en América Latina y el Caribe, subrayó la FAO en Santiago de Chile.

Otro problema significativo, según el organismo de la ONU: cada vez es menor el porcentaje de la tierra en manos de pequeños propietarios. Fenómeno que conspira, en particular, contra las mujeres. En Guatemala, por ejemplo, sólo el 8% de las mujeres es propietaria. En Perú, sólo el 31%. En la mayoría los casos, estas propiedades son de menor tamaño y calidad que las que poseen los hombres.

A fines del año pasado OXFAM publicó “Desterrados: Tierra, Poder y Desigualdad en América Latina”, uno de los informes más completos realizados hasta ahora sobre la situación agraria del continente. El mismo centraliza su análisis en 17 países latinoamericanos.

“El 1% de las fincas acapara más de la mitad de la superficie productiva. Es decir, este 1% concentra más tierra que el 99% restante. Esta situación no ofrece un camino para el desarrollo sostenible, ni para los países, ni para las poblaciones ” , indica el informe de la ONG, retomado ahora por la FAO.

La **desigualdad económica** y social es uno de los mayores lastres que impiden a las sociedades latinoamericanas alcanzar el desarrollo sostenible y supone un obstáculo para su crecimiento económico. “En la región, 32 personas privilegiadas acumulan la misma riqueza que los 300 millones de personas más pobres. Esta desigualdad económica está íntimamente relacionada con la posesión de la tierra, pues los activos no financieros representan un 64% de la riqueza total”, subraya OXFAM.

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# Roland Denis - El milagro Kurdo: Ocalam y el sentido de la revolución 1

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El mundo en todo el transcurso de la era moderna ha estado plagado de luchas guerrilleras, estallidos rebeldes y luchas socio-políticas de cualquier dimensión pero solo en muy pocas insurgen realmente los pueblos, cobran vida e identidad como máquinas de liberación que se constituyen desde el escenario de su propio levantamiento. La relación lucha-pensamiento-trascendencia de un pueblo, tríada expresada en una política que se afianza desde los acontecimientos producidos en una determinada situación, se logra muy raras veces. Esta vez, bajo el escenario de las terribles guerras que el imperialismo ha generado directa o indirectamente en las últimas décadas en el Medio Oriente, esa tríada vuelve a brotar de una manera casi milagrosa alrededor del sur montañoso de Turquía y su caída sobre los valles verdes al norte de Siria. Es la región kurda de Rojava donde nuevamente se presenta esta síntesis, sostenida política y militarmente por las milicias y partidos revolucionarios allí organizados, extendidos desde el estallido de la guerra civil en Siria, e inspirados por lo que ha sido la evolución del pensamiento político de su líder histórico



preso en Turquía desde hace 17 años Abdula Ocalam; personaje clave en esta historia lograda.

Este trabajo pretende adentrarse en lo que podamos dentro de este acontecimiento, tratando de entender los nudos esenciales de un pensamiento que se ha traducido en política y estrategia del pueblo kurdo revolucionario. Sostenemos que es desde estas tierras donde se libra una de las batallas libertarias más importantes del mundo, ya que se trata de un escenario de guerra central donde intervienen todas las potencias imperiales del mundo actual, en una durísima lucha de hegemonía y control estratégico del territorio por donde transcurre el mayor comercio petrolero y gasífero del mundo, además de los puentes que ligan a Asia y Europa. El “Medio Oriente” es en realidad el centro estratégico de la humanidad, lugar donde por cierto nacieron las primeras civilizaciones humanas, las primeras ciudades, los Estados centralizados y la escritura, es decir un centro estratégico desde siempre. Estamos hablando entonces de una batalla clave para el futuro de la humanidad, cuyos elementos sustanciales solo los hemos conocido por medio de las grandes corporaciones noticieras limitados a sus aspectos fenoménicos exteriores: las batallas, las destrucciones, los agentes políticos, militares y religiosos implicados, sus alianzas y enfrentamientos, las migraciones poblacionales que huyen de la guerra. Pero sin tomar en cuenta que en esta confrontación general subyace una dura lucha de clases entre pueblos empobrecidos que por lo general han sido utilizados en provecho de las políticas mercenarias internas, las barbaries religiosas aupadas por los grandes Estados y la Otan, y los agentes de dominio que desde distintas posiciones e intereses sirven para reforzar la presencia imperial.

Es aquí donde toma una importancia clave y trascendental la lucha del pueblo kurdo, expresión de una larga resistencia política y guerrillera al interno del Estado turco que termina extendiéndose en estos últimos años de guerra generalizada hacia el norte de Siria, Irak hasta las zonas kurdas de Irán. Un vasto pueblo sin Estado, de más de 40 millones de seres y una enorme diáspora de exilio hacia Europa de cerca de 5 millones que (apartando sus agentes colaboracionistas, ligados a los intereses de las castas dominantes, que siempre ha tenido) ha logrado configurar un complejo laberinto político-militar sustentando políticamente en las líneas estratégicas que emanan de una organización madre fundamental: el PKK (Partido de los Trabajadores del Kurdistan), desde cuyo avance podemos verificar en qué medida la tríada mágica de la política revolucionaria: lucha-pensamiento-trascendencia de un pueblo, se está logrando, creando un enorme eco que ya se extiende sobre el mundo entero.

El falso e hipócrita dilema que pretenden vender la Otan y los EEUU de una supuesta democracia confrontada con las dictaduras locales y el terrorismo islámico, aspecto que se deshace todos los días al ver los niveles de alianza estrecha entre los regímenes de despotismo puro como el de Arabia Saudita, Catar, Emiratos, y la misma Turquía, en este

caso es develado por una verdadera política de liberación de los pueblos, de la mujer, de la naturaleza, en confrontación abierta con los despotismos de Estado, el imperialismo y las barbaries islámicas. La política de liberación kurda, expresada en todos sus meandros de partidos, guerrillas, milicias territoriales y urbanas, de hombres y mujeres,, frentes sociales y confederación de comunidades, poco a poco va atrayendo otros pueblos garantizando no solo las grandes y pequeñas victorias militares en el norte de Siria, sino generando un bloque hegemónico revolucionario, que supera todo chauvinismo nacionalista y se convierte en una línea de liberación válida para todos los pueblos y culturas del Medio Oriente. No por casualidad, mientras se ejercen acciones laterales de solidaridad por parte de EEUU hacia las milicias kurdas en Siria, al mismo tiempo se ha utilizado al régimen de Erdogan en Turquía como el perro sucio y rabioso, punta de lanza para atacar la verdadera revolución social que representan los kurdos dentro y fuera de Turquía, provocando actualmente un verdadero genocidio sobre la zona kurda de turca (llamada Bakur o Kurdistán del norte), e impidiendo su presencia en las conversaciones de Ginebra, así como lo ayudan a la actual invasión del ejército y aviación turca en el norte de Siria, con el pretexto de atacar al ISIS . Se hace bajo una acusación de “terroristas” que tiene larga data con respecto al PKK, y que todos los países europeos reiteran abiertamente, siendo víctimas de ello militantes y periodistas particularmente españoles que han sido encarcelados en su país por su colaboración con los kurdos.

Se trata sin duda de una revolución en curso que es temida por todos aunque por razones tácticas en algún momento la necesiten en el terreno de la batalla. Ni siquiera los rusos, después de la contundente prueba de poderío militar que han demostrado en Siria han sido claros respecto al movimiento de liberación kurdo mas allá de las ambiguas declaraciones a su favor, y por lo visto no se han sentado cara a cara, dejando que sean atacados por el propia ejército Sirio en Hasaka y Qamishla, por tropas apoyadas por los turcos y el ISIS. No obstante el ejército y gobierno Sirio en algunos lugares como Alepo hoy luchan junto a los kurdos y kurdas de las milicias apodadas YPJ, YPG y el Ejército Democrático de Siria (frente militar con otras naciones al interno de Siria -árabes, turcomanos, asrios, etc- construido desde las milicias kurdas) mientras son apoyados tácticamente por los EEUU en su avance sobre Al-Raqa y la estratégica ciudad de Manbij que ya ha sido tomada por el Ejército Democrático de Siria. Son diversos frentes de batalla que por razones tácticas en unos lugares se enfrentan en otros se alían, pero ni el gobierno sirio ni el turco dan su mano a torcer frente a la propuesta federativa constitucional que le proponen los kurdos y la formación de la confederación democrática del norte de Siria, lo que los ha llevado a dichos enfrentamientos y declaraciones encontradas, además del rechazo explícito e “inaceptable” por parte de Turquía de dicha confederación ya asumida por los pueblos kurdos de las montañas del sur de Turquía (Bakur) en su guerra interna con el Estado turco. El nacionalismo burgués, reaccionario y de castas dominantes le teme mucho más a esta propuesta revolucionaria que a los propios islámicos que usa y a la vez ataca. Es decir, es una guerra de pueblos contra los gobiernos de las clases dominantes sirias y turcas que

pareciera va proseguir indefinidamente, con posibilidades de extenderse sobre Irak e Iran donde ya se ha hecho presente el movimiento revolucionario kurdo, en contra incluso de los jefes feudales, chovinistas y proimperialistas que aún reinan en la zona kurda de Irak. Es importante ver lo que fue a toma de Shenjal en el norte de Irak y la salvación de miles de pobladores por parte de las milicias kurdas YPJ-YPJ, luego de la traición de Barzani y todas estas fuerzas feudales kurdas al pueblo Yaizidie (pueblo kurdo de raíces religiosas zoroástricas) entregándolo a la barbarie del ISIS.

Por todas estas razones nos interesa conocer y divulgar los aspectos esenciales de una lucha y el pensamiento adjunto a ella que le ha dado este poder a la lucha de liberación kurda. Es la historia de una de las tantas células de combate libertario que día a día se forman en el mundo con los más diversos destinos pero que en este caso ha logrado una trascendencia extraordinaria.