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The Thought & Action Review Panel invites you to submit articles for future issues of the journal.

Thought & Action, NEA’s peer-reviewed journal of higher education, seeks to provide its readers with theoretical and practical information on issues in higher education that are important to faculty and staff. We are interested in good writing in any form—from personal essays to scholarly discourse, from empirical studies to passionate polemics—about all aspects of academic life.

Submissions are blind-reviewed by members of the Thought & Action editorial board and the six-member Thought & Action review panel.

Contributors to Thought & Action should follow the Chicago Manual of Style (15th edition) in the preparation of manuscripts, using the “humanities style” for endnotes and an alphabetic list of works cited. Submissions should be emailed as Word attachments to the editor. Please include name and email address on the title page only. Manuscripts typically should not run more than 15 pages or 4,000 words, including tables, footnotes, and references.

Manuscript submissions are welcome throughout the year. Visit Thought & Action at www.nea.org/thoughtandaction to see the latest issue and most recent calls for papers.

For more information, contact:
Mary Ellen Flannery, Editor
NEA Center for Communications
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-3290
Phone: 202-822-7913
E-mail: MFlannery@nea.org
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Overview

By Mary Ellen Flannery

When I think about the election of Donald Trump and the recent confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary, I think about the 7.6 million students who relied on federal Pell Grants to go to college this year. Or the roughly 50 million who have borrowed from the federal government to attend.

Does President Trump know their stories? Does he understand the sacrifices our students make to go to college, to invest in their own futures, and in our collective future, too? These students are our teachers-to-be, our future pharmacists and firefighters, the ones who will expand our technologies, write our histories, cure our cancers, and invent and innovate a path through the 21st century.

The answer is obvious. Inside his cosseted, winter White House on Palm Beach, where Trump has angrily defended his Muslim ban that stranded grad students and researchers outside our borders, as well as his stupefying appointment of the billionaire, anti-public education DeVos, Trump doesn’t see, hear, or recognize our students.

Does he know your stories? Does he understand what you do in your classrooms, offices, and research labs to prepare students to be citizens, to improve our communities, to underwrite the common good?

Telling these stories is a start. Protesting is a means. But, as the next four years unfold, further action will be necessary. In this issue of Thought & Action, pay particular attention to the article by United Faculty of Florida (UFF) president Jennifer Proffitt and UFF-University of North Florida chapter president John White about the swift progression of guns-on-campus legislation in the Florida Capitol.

It’s a cautionary tale about what happens when wealthy special interests, like the NRA, put their money and lobbying power into local and state
politics. What can you, regular citizen, do about it? Not much, unless you
magnify your voice with others, show up to hearings to participate in
policy and law making, and stand with the candidates who share your
values. (This, by the way, is what unions do…)

Use real data, like the numbers shared by Thought & Action authors
Anthony Bernier and Mike Males, which give the lie to popular impres-
sions of our campuses as dangerous to students. (Bernier and Males also
courage their colleagues to consider libraries as places for information
sharing and community building.)

Or, use the power of art, as Salem State University curator Ken Reker
has and explains in this issue.

And take inspiration from another UFF member: the recent National
Book Award winner Ibram X. Kendi, who says in these pages about
anti-racist efforts in the U.S. “If you’re involved in the struggle, there
always remains the capacity to win. The only way in which an anti-racist
America could never come to be is if anti-racists themselves decide it’s
impossible and they stop fighting for it.”

Stay involved. Don’t stop fighting.

What’s at stake here isn’t just the federal government’s ability to send
poor and middle-class students to college. That’s part of it, but the bigger
issue is the public good served by public higher education. We laughed at
Hillary Clinton’s talk of vast right-wing conspiracy decades ago, but it has
become clear that corporate interests are collaborating to privatize the
greatest public institutions of America, including our universities and
community colleges.

For their playbook, see Wisconsin, where public unions have been
dismantled, and now attacks on tenure and academic freedom are de rigueur.

As union members, you will lead the resistance.

“What could be done, and always has been done in history, is by people who are
organized.” —NOAM CHOMSKY

Mary Ellen Flannery is Thought & Action’s editor. She has worked for the National
Education Association as a senior writer and editor since 2004. Previously, she reported on
education for The Miami Herald.
Preventing Violence or Promulgating Fear? ALEC, the NRA, and Guns on Campus

by Jennifer M. Proffitt and John Wesley White

The euphemism that Florida, the nation’s third most populous and politically powerful state, is a battleground is an apt description—and more than just every four years. Every year, every day in the state’s capital, Florida has become high ground for pro-corporate, special-interest lobbyists who seek to instill a far-right legislative and social agenda, specifically the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and the National Rifle Association (NRA). Armed with seemingly endless cash from their billionaire supporters and a slick but distorted focus on individual rights, and facing a mostly uninformed and unorganized citizenry, the far right has found in Florida the perfect Petri dish for passing self-serving laws. Nowhere is this lopsided ideological battle more evident than in the recent NRA- and ALEC-supported attempts to pass legislation that would allow

Jennifer M. Proffitt is the president of the United Faculty of Florida, the statewide union representing more than 20,000 faculty and graduate assistants in the Sunshine State. She is also a professor of communication in the School of Communication in the College of Communication and Information at Florida State University. Her teaching and research focuses on the political economy of media, tracing the interconnections between big money, politics, media, and the broader society.

John W. White is president of the University of North Florida’s chapter of the United Faculty of Florida. He is also an associate professor of English education and reading in the College of Education and Human Services. His scholarship focuses on reforming middle and high school English curriculum so that it better engages young readers and encourages counter-hegemonic thinking. White is also policy director of the college’s Center for Urban Education and Policy. For more information, visit johnwesleywhite.net.
concealed weapons on the state’s public college and university campuses.

As faculty and union leaders in Florida’s state universities, we have seen from the front lines how our recent fight against a guns-on-campus movement demonstrates the extent to which many state legislators ignore the will of the experts, the will of almost all affected stakeholders, and, worse yet, the will of the vast majority of their constituents so that they can kowtow to the interests of deep-pocketed lobbyists and campaign contributors. This fight also reveals the retribution that wealthy and powerful interests levy against those who resist even one component of the far right’s wide-reaching agenda. From our vantage point, we also have seen how state legislators’ effort to court favor with the gun industry highlights the broader, right-wing attack on public higher education.

Our part of this cautionary tale began in the fall of 2014 when Florida House Representative Greg Steube and State Senator Greg Evers, both NRA-endorsed Republicans and staunch gun advocates, introduced companion bills (HB 4001 and SB 68) to repeal the state’s ban on firearms on public college and university campuses and prohibit institutions from creating or maintaining policies that in any way discourage the carrying of concealed weapons anywhere on campus (except in places where alcohol is sold and sports stadiums). Steube and Evers, backed by NRA ratings of A and A+ respectively, used almost verbatim the model legislation produced and disseminated by ALEC.2

The bills were touted as imperative and inevitable after a November 2014 shooting on the steps of Strozier Library on the Florida State University campus that left three wounded and the shooter killed by police.3 Ignoring compelling research-based evidence to the contrary (see for example two comprehensive studies on the issue: one by Stanford Law Professor John Donahue and the other by a consortium of faculty at Johns Hopkins), these lawmakers posited that having more armed students

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2 The bills were touted as imperative and inevitable after a November 2014 shooting on the steps of Strozier Library on the Florida State University campus that left three wounded and the shooter killed by police. Ignoring compelling research-based evidence to the contrary (see for example two comprehensive studies on the issue: one by Stanford Law Professor John Donahue and the other by a consortium of faculty at Johns Hopkins), these lawmakers posited that having more armed students
would miraculously counter what they portrayed as un-poled and crime-infested college campuses. Thus, their bills contained no exemptions for such places as university hospitals, counseling centers, dormitories, student unions, etc. Averse to even the appearance of forcing government regulations on private industry, their proposed law would not affect private institutions of higher education. Nor, ironically, would it alter long-extant bans on concealed weapons in Steube and Evers’ own workplace—the Florida Capitol.

While Republican lawmakers had been unsuccessful in seeing their pro-guns agenda passed in the 2015 legislative session, their 2016 legislative effort, which began in the summer of 2015, launched with new momentum provided by a thinly veiled NRA “grassroots” movement. Two years earlier, the NRA and Florida Carry, a gun rights group that focuses on gun legislation and litigation in Florida, had, in Florida Carry, Inc. and Alexandria Lainez vs. the University of North Florida (2013), won the right to have guns on state university campuses—but only in locked cars. In that case, Florida’s First District Court of Appeals had agreed with Florida Carry’s claim that “UNF had no authority to adopt the regulation in question because the Florida legislature had expressly preempted the entire field of firearms regulation” in the Florida Statutes (790.33(1)). The university declined to appeal for financial and pragmatic reasons, leaving open the door for further legal and legislative action by gun advocates. Not surprisingly, in 2014, Florida Carry, Inc. filed a new lawsuit (Florida Carry, Inc. vs. University of Florida) that sought to allow students and others to carry concealed guns in campus dorms and other university housing. The plaintiff’s argument in these “campus carry” cases revolved around the notion that public campuses were rife with rapists and would-be mass shooters.
terrorists, crazies” running rampant on college campuses, argued Marion Hammer, former NRA president and current NRA lobbyist in Florida.⁸

These arguments would soon be the primary talking points of the most vocal pro-guns on campus advocates: “Florida Students for Concealed Carry.” This group ran a hyperbolic and factually-selective but nonetheless well publicized public relations campaign in favor of the bill. At the time (2015-2016), the group’s website showed it to have eleven student members, all students at Florida State University. Its faculty sponsor was Samuel Staley, director of the DeVoe L. Moore Center—a think tank funded by a Tea Party millionaire “committed to free enterprise.”⁹ Florida Students for Concealed Carry now claims that “As of spring 2012, we have chapters at five major universities in the state with close to 1,000 members.”¹⁰ And though the group claims no affiliation with the NRA, it nonetheless boasts of receiving help and support “from long time advocates like former NRA President Marion Hammer.”¹¹

HYPERING FEAR AND IGNORING FACTS

To drum up public support for the guns on campus bills, their sponsors and Florida Students for Concealed Carry embarked on a campaign of false fears and empty promises. First, they claimed mass school shootings were reaching epidemic proportions, and that criminals were already (and illegally) carrying weapons on our campuses. Then, they pivoted to their proposed solution to their invented crisis: armed students in our classrooms would dissuade would-be campus shooters and more quickly end shooting rampages via intervention by armed students. Note that Steube, the House sponsor, was at least consistent in that he also introduced legislation—euphemistically called the “School Safety Bill” (HB 19)—to allow public school teachers, principals, and other school personnel to carry concealed weapons in Florida’s K-12 schools.¹² At the same
time, Steube and Evers also claimed that the bill would cost nothing from the state and its cash-strapped colleges and universities. Their argument was timely in that it coincided with Oregon’s Umpqua Community College shooting and followed by a year the Florida State University library shooting. In a guest editorial to The Gun Writer (2015), Steube first cited John Lott, a champion of the pro-gun movement and former academic whose most notable research (that more guns equal less crime) has been critiqued and discredited, writing: “Umpqua Community College, scene of a recent mass shooting, was yet another gun-free zone. Oregon law allows permitted concealed handguns on university property, but public educators have undermined the law by putting bans in faculty and student handbooks.” Steube then asked his readers, “why would we want to make our colleges and universities in Florida targets for terrorism, murderers and rapists [by disallowing concealed weapons]?” This is a rhetorical tactic common to those pushing a far-right agenda: If you’re against them, you must be on the side of terrorists and rapists.

Representing Florida’s public college and state university faculty, the United Faculty of Florida—in concert with the nonprofit Keep Guns Off Campus and the nonpartisan Florida League of Women Voters—took a lead in fighting the gun lobby and helped bring together a heterogeneous association of groups in opposition to guns on campuses: a conglomerate of student union members, faculty union members, faculty senate leaders, state college and university presidents, a vast majority of parents, and campus police chiefs from each of Florida’s state colleges and universities. In letters to state legislators, editorials in local papers, online discussions, and in numerous public forums, the bill’s opponents used facts to discredit the argument that concealed weapons discourage crime or that armed students would lessen the damage wrought by a would-be campus shooter,

The United Faculty of Florida took a lead in fighting the gun lobby and helped bring together a heterogeneous association of groups in opposition to guns on campuses.
or even that students were at great to personal harm on our campuses.\textsuperscript{18} We rebutted their argument that mass school shootings have become epidemic. While any school shooting is one too many (and is unimaginably tragic), national crime statistics clearly show that schools (K-12 and college campuses) are far safer places than their surrounding communities. In addition, national longitudinal data demonstrate that schools today are safer than in the past.\textsuperscript{19} We also rebutted the gun lobby’s claims that more guns would equal more safety by using expert testimony of campus police officers concerned that more guns would lead to more chaos. As Florida State University Police Chief David Perry stated regarding the shooting on his campus, having multiple people with guns “would have exacerbated and made our situation even worse…To have two or three or more people with weapons yelling commands, people firing rounds that can’t be accounted for, that’s just not a good mix.”\textsuperscript{20} With the gun lobby’s false argument outweighed by these facts and by the revelation that some students on the Umpqua campus had been armed but chose not to respond to the shooter there, the bill’s advocates changed their approach.\textsuperscript{21} Replacing the notion that campuses were Wild West-like environments was the claim that our campuses are magnets for rapists who would magically disappear were their victims armed. The gun lobby framed the argument as one in which anyone who fought against guns on campus was anti-woman and pro-rape.\textsuperscript{22}

Once Steube and Evers started using this argument, it gained significant traction via the efforts of Florida Students for Concealed Carry. This small but very vocal group gave the bill’s advocates a significant and powerful voice: that of student victims and potential student victims. The ostensible leader of Students for Concealed Carry, FSU’s Rebekah Hargrove, engaged in a media campaign using the Internet and, more importantly, a serial letter to the editor that was published by newspapers throughout the state.\textsuperscript{23} Stating that “Florida’s proposed ‘campus carry’ legislation…is not only about restoring a constitutional right, it is funda-
mental to the safety of college students, especially women,” Hargrove argued that college campuses are rife with rapists because they ban guns. Ignoring the data showing that Florida’s college and university campuses are exponentially safer places than their surrounding communities while simultaneously citing the true and serious problem of campus rape, Hargrove used hyperbole rather than a meaningful, contextual presentation of the statistical data. She claimed, for instance, that “A college campus is not holy ground that is free from alcohol, drugs, guns, rapists and violent criminals. Rather, as a gun-free-zone, it is a safe-haven for rapists and violent criminals, leaving law-abiding students defenseless.” Absent from Hargrove’s argument was any mention of the fact that most sexual assaults against college students happen off campus, that most on-campus rapes are committed by perpetrators known by the victim and involve alcohol consumption (thereby making weapons all the more dangerous), and that personal weapons are more often used against rather than in defense of their owners.

Hargrove also engaged in a sophomoric but nonetheless popular tactic of the political right: a focus on individual rights as sacrosanct rather than as limited. Citing her Second Amendment rights, Hargrove claimed that “We want the right to defend ourselves…The instant we decided to go and get an education, we lost that right.” Hargrove’s argument rests on her fallacious belief that an individual’s right to carry guns is limitless when, in fact, there are well established limits on our constitutional rights. Similarly, in citing her Second Amendment rights, Hargrove readily ignored the rights of others by suggesting that her personal right to carry a firearm trumps the rights—and stated desires—of the vast majority of her college peers to feel safe in a gun-free environment. Fortunately, despite Hargrove’s successes in getting her views onto the airwaves and into editorial pages, most of the public who heard or read

The fact is most sexual assaults against college students happen off campus, and most on-campus rapes are committed by perpetrators known by the victim.
them were not swayed. Throughout the guns-on-campus debate and its slow but steady passage through various Florida House and Senate committees and subcommittees, public sentiment consistently ran in opposition to pro-gun efforts. In fact, one poll found 73 percent of Floridians opposed the measures.\(^{31}\) Helping in this regard were public opposition to the bill by student and faculty governments at Florida’s colleges and universities, university presidents and chiefs of police, and the Florida Board of Governors (a group of political appointees—and thus overwhelmingly conservative—that governs the entire state university system): “The State University System and all 12 state universities are united in the belief that Florida should maintain the long-standing Florida law that prohibits concealed weapons on university campuses.”\(^{32}\) Opposition to the bill was also fueled by the efforts of The Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus, the Florida League of Women Voters, and public appearances by the authors of this article in local television and radio media.\(^{33}\) Unfortunately, the views of the public and the stakeholders most affected by the proposed legislation—students, faculty, staff, administrators, and police officers from the state’s public colleges and universities—were largely irrelevant to the NRA- and ALEC-backed and bought legislators who pushed the legislation forward.

The views of the public and the stakeholders most affected by the proposed legislation were largely irrelevant to the NRA- and ALEC-backed and bought legislators.

The Legislative Fight, the Power of the NRA, and a Party-Line Vote

Once HB 4001 and SB 62 were introduced, House and Senate leadership assigned them to various subcommittees as part of the bill-vetting process. The fact the bills were put on the legislative agenda was troubling enough, given their rationale was rejected by Florida’s citizens and ran counter to any valid research data. What was worse for faculty and students to witness, however, was the legislation’s steady progress despite
overwhelming public and private opposition at each and every committee hearing and in private meetings between citizens and committee members.

The House bill’s first stop was the Criminal Justice Subcommittee, where it passed by a vote of 8 to 5. Interestingly, one of the no votes was voiced by a lifetime NRA member and Republican who was concerned not only about the effects of guns on campuses but also that the bill did not advocate for higher standards for concealed carry holders.\(^{34}\) (Indeed, in Florida, one can use a Groupon to get a concealed carry permit).

The House bill’s second stop was the Higher Education and Workforce Subcommittee, where the authors of this article and others saw its swift promotion through an egregious assault on the democratic process. More than 70 people attended this meeting, reported The Tampa Bay Times, eager to speak against guns on campus.\(^ {35}\) However, the first hour and 20 minutes of the two-hour meeting consisted of a panel of five people who discussed, at length, textbook affordability. During this time, the subcommittee chair encouraged questions for the workshop panelists, waited patiently for people to ask questions, and asked many questions of her own. At the conclusion of the panel, the chair added 15 minutes to the meeting, leaving less than an hour for the subcommittee members to debate the critical public–policy issue of guns on campuses, and for dozens of citizens to testify. It was impossible. The people directly affected by the proposed legislation—faculty, staff, students, parents, campus police officers, including many who had traveled across the vast stretch of the state—were told they each had just a minute to speak, and then, as the clock ticked down, only 10 seconds. Meanwhile, legislators also were discouraged from asking questions of the bill sponsor or the speakers, though a few did. Because the chair—a Republican with an A-rating and an endorsement from the NRA—had imposed such constraints on open debate, dozens of people who wanted to speak were silenced altogether. It became clear to us that their testimony wouldn’t have mattered anyway—
the members of the House subcommittee had made up their minds on this life-or-death matter before anyone ever stepped in the room. The bill passed 10 to 3, largely along party lines. (An exception: Rep. Michelle Rehwinkel-Vasilinda, then an NRA A-rated Democrat from a Tallahassee district that includes Florida State University, not only supported the bill but was a co-sponsor. She has since quit the Democratic Party.) The bill then passed the House’s Judiciary Committee by a vote of 13 to 5.

Despite so many varied voices speaking out against the bill, ranging from college students and their parents to Democratic state legislators, the House version nonetheless made it to a floor vote on February 3, 2016, barely a month after its original filing date. It was passed—by the entire House—in yet another largely party-line vote of 80 to 37.

To become law, the legislation depended upon passage of the Senate bill, which got a quick start in the Criminal Justice Committee, chaired by the bill’s Senate sponsor. It passed there by a 3 to 2 vote, along party lines, and then passed the Higher Education Committee by a vote of 5 to 3. Then it hit the Judiciary Committee, a mandatory committee for the bill, where the committee chair, Republican lawmaker Miguel Díaz de la Portilla, a concealed-carry permit holder who had been rated A-plus by the NRA, stopped its progress. After listening to his constituents and examining the data, Díaz de la Portilla refused to hear the bill, saying, “I don’t think this is a Second Amendment issue… I think what we’re talking about here is campus safety and the best way to address that issue.” He went on to note that the proposed legislation “is worse than the disease.”

Were it not for this lone legislator, who also thwarted the guns-on-campus legislation in 2015, the bill would have become law, quickly signed by Republican Gov. Rick Scott, also a NRA A-rated lawmaker. Since then, however, Díaz de la Portilla has paid a steep price. Once a friend, now an enemy, the NRA lowered his approval rating to a mere

It became clear that their testimony wouldn’t have mattered anyway—the members had made up their minds on this life-or-death matter before anyone ever stepped in the room.
seven percent—the same level as the most progressive Democrat in the Florida Senate—and targeted his 2016 Senate reelection bid. In fliers and emails to de la Portilla’s campaign contributors, the NRA labeled the lawmaker “a traitor,” and a newly-formed anti-Díaz de la Portilla group began a movement to impeach what it labeled a “traitorous, Communist, Anti-American bastard.” In November, he lost his seat to a Democrat. And the new chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee? Florida’s newest state senator, Greg Steube, the author of the House’s guns-on-campus bill.

The relative success of these gun bills—the speed in which they traveled unadulterated through committees, despite citizen sentiment, and their unchallenged momentum until they hit a single stubborn legislator—speak to the power of the NRA and ALEC in conservative states, swing states, and increasingly in traditionally blue states, like Wisconsin and Michigan, where ALEC has increasingly sought influence over state legislatures. In the journey of this guns legislation, we saw that Florida’s NRA and ALEC-backed state legislators were more than willing to ignore their voting constituents to remain in favor with their major financial patrons.

Our experience shows how well-connected, deep-pocketed special interests can hijack the legislative process in ways that subsume facts, reasoning, and the will of the people.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In 2016, lawmakers in 19 states filed bills to allow more guns on our campuses. It’s not just Florida. But our experience is illustrative—and potentially useful to faculty, staff, and their allies—in other states. First, it shows how well-connected, deep-pocketed special interests can hijack the legislative process in ways that subsume facts, reasoning, and even the will of the majority of the populace. The NRA, which has been one of the most powerful lobbying groups at Florida’s capitol for decades, created the political urgency for this legislation. They harnessed their network of NRA-supported legislators to advocate for the bill. Simultaneously, they
created and disseminated overly simplistic narratives that ran contrary to the facts; these narratives, in turn, compelled otherwise wary legislators to action.

Second, this experience shows that in such contexts as those described above, citizen involvement is critical to focusing the argument on factually substantiated claims. Citizen involvement in states like Florida—and in the “post truth” and “alternative facts” era—is increasingly less likely without union involvement. The fight against guns on campus was led not by faculty governments, students, or even those entities lobbying for gun control; it was led by our faculty union. The union provided the essential network of people with a shared mission, with established communication avenues, with allies across the state, and with the resources needed to counter the tremendous power of the gun lobby. While some gun lobbyists claimed that the guns on campus issue was not a union issue, they ignored the fact that working conditions are the main focus of faculty unions. Nothing could be more critical to working conditions than safe campuses wherein faculty and students can openly engage in difficult and contentious topics.

Individually and collectively, citizens must shape a well-researched and well-communicated narrative that speaks to both fellow citizens and to legislators. Now, more than ever, this means the union. At the same time, legislators need cover from special interests like the NRA. They can get some by heeding the demands of their constituents and by having a comprehensive rationale for their decisions. Third, this case shows that groups outside the legislative bubble, those not entrenched in the inner workings of power, must marshal their own political power to protect lawmakers from retaliation when they choose their constituents’ interests over special interests. Groups sharing a similar goal must come together, organize, and communicate effectively with each other to counter the power, money, and influence of ALEC, the NRA, and others of their kind.

The issue today is guns. The issue tomorrow may be the very exis-
tence of our public institutions. As wealthy interests expert in lobbying and rich in political power begin to look at higher education as a source for corporate revenue, through the privatization of educational content and the outsourcing of academic research and the products of that research, faculty and their unions must become more organized and more sophisticated in political maneuvering. To be effective against a well-financed onslaught of special interests, we cannot rely on others to make our case for us. University administrators serve at the pleasure of governors and/or politically appointed boards of trustees and are thus constrained in their public battles, and in what they can and cannot say and do (assuming that administrators concur with faculty on these issues). And while union lobbyists fight on our behalf, they are disadvantaged in the vast majority of states with Republican-controlled legislatures where faculty concerns often fall on deaf ears. Faculty must seek allies within and across campuses, across regions, and even across the nation. They must share in each others’ resources. Faculty must also be willing to speak out publicly, even in seemingly hostile environments. This means visiting state legislators, visiting the state house, and speaking out to the media. Our experience shows that even in the so-called battleground of Florida, sensible people are likely to support voices of reason when those voices are informed, impassioned, and backed by evidence.

END NOTES

1. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) is a far right ‘think tank’ that originated in the 1970s, primarily in opposition to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and laws governing corporate income taxes. Now largely controlled by billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, ALEC provides “model” conservative and pro-corporate legislation to state houses. For more information, see Mayer’s Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right.


5. Responding to this hypocrisy, Steube filed a bill that would allow guns in meetings of the Legislature. It died in its first committee stop. See Irby, “Sarasota State Rep. Greg Steube Answers Hypocrite Calls by Filing Bill to Allow Guns in Government Meetings.”


7. Per the public statements of John Delaney, president of the University of North Florida (where the second author works).

8. Evans, “Senate Committee Passes Campus Guns Bill on Party Lines.”


10. Zalneraitis, “Welcome to Florida Students for Concealed Carry.”

11. Ibid.


13. This is an inaccurate claim. University of Central Florida Police Chief Richard Beary said concealed carry on campus would cost $1.1 million in the first year. The Association of Florida Colleges estimated a cost of $74 million over three years for the 28 state colleges. See Russon, “Campus-carry Bill Comes with Hefty Price Tag, Schools Say.”


15. National Review article by John Lott, a nationally recognized researcher.


17. See for example, Lakoff, Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think.

18. John Delaney, president of the University of North Florida and former mayor of Jacksonville, Florida, repeatedly used the hypothetical situation of police responding to an “active shooter” situation only to find multiple armed and ununiformed people and thus being unable to know who the perpetrator was.


21. For a list of the facts presented in opposition to the bill, see http://unf-uff.org/guns-on-campus

22. See also Schwarz, “A Bid for Guns on Campuses to Deter Rape.”

23. We say ostensible leader because a) Students for Concealed Carry, Inc. had at that time been newly created and listed only 11 members and b) Hargrove presented herself as its leader but was not even listed amongst those 11 members.

24. Hargrove, “Do You Support Campus Carry or Do You Support Rape?”

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. See, for example, Culp–Ressler, “Rape Survivors Tell the NRA to Stop Speaking for Them.”

28. Williams, “College Students Who Support Campus Carry Want Their Voices Heard.”

29. Even Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia noted that there should be limits on gun ownership. See Rosenthal, “Justice Scalia’s Gun-control Argument.”
30. Student unions at Florida’s state college and state university system overwhelmingly voted in opposition to allowing guns on campus. Similarly, polling on individual campuses revealed widespread opposition to the measure (2:1 against).


32. Hicks, “Florida has Proposed Allowing Concealed Weapons to be Carried on University Campuses.”

33. For more specific information about the fight against guns on campus, see United Faculty of Florida, University of North Florida, Guns on Campus.

34. Dunkelberger, “Local Reps Divided on Campus-Carry Bill.”

35. Clark, “Guns-on-campus Bill Continues to Move Ahead in the Florida House.”

36. Klas and Auslen, “Senate Panel Chairman Says Bill to Open Campuses to Gun Toting Students is Dead.”

37. 24 Spies “Meet the Florida Republican who Single-Handedly Killed Two of the NRA’s Top State Bills.”

38. See Impeach Miguel Diaz de la Portilla.


40. Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus, State Legislation.

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PREVENTING VIOLENCE OR PROMULGATING FEAR?
ALEC, THE NRA, AND GUNS ON CAMPUS


The Ways of White Folks: A Love Letter to the National Education Association

By Bill Lyne

“As long as you insist on thinking of yourself as white, I am forced to think of myself as black.”
—James Baldwin

POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE

The two things that preoccupied the National Education Association and its Board of Directors in 2016 were the U.S. presidential election and race. That preoccupation was probably not coincidental, as the two things turned out to be deeply intertwined. Donald Trump’s divisive campaign took much of its most potent nourishment from long traditions of U.S. racism. More importantly, the White working class voters who gave Trump his electoral college majority (both those who voted for him and those who stayed home instead of voting for Hillary Clinton) found his version of race more persuasive than NEA’s. A significant minority of Trump voters were educators, and most of the rest were from our side of the labor/capital divide.¹ They are working people that NEA—as the country’s

Bill Lyne is professor of English at Western Washington University, president of the United Faculty of Washington State and a member of the Board of Directors of the Washington Education Association and the National Education Association. His email is bill_lyne@hotmail.com.
largest labor union—should be able to speak to. And they weren’t buying what we were selling, be it Secretary Clinton or a less racially divided vision of the United States. Our inability to convince working people that they have more in common with us than they do with a blowhard billionaire bully should lead us to reconsider a variety of things, not the least of which is our managerial version of race.

In July 2015, on the recommendation of the NEA Executive Committee and the NEA Board of Directors, the NEA Representative Assembly unanimously passed New Business Item B (NBI B), in which we declared ourselves ready to combat “institutional racism.” This put us only slightly behind the latest fad in the ongoing tortured and hand-wringing discussion of race in the U.S. We declared the existence of institutional racism and committed to spend more than $250,000 to combating it through “internal dialogue” and the preparation of plans of action.

Ten years ago, the thing that every undergraduate knew to say about race was that it is a social construction, that race is not a meaningful biological category, that the perceived differences between races are not, as Thomas Jefferson thought, “fixed in nature,” but rather the product of social, economic, and cultural narratives. Today, the thing that every undergraduate knows to say about racism is that it is institutionalized, that the patterns, practices, and policies woven into the fabric of the institutions that rule us (banks, schools, police departments) can and do deny rights, access, and opportunity to those perceived to be something other than White. Both of these things are, of course, banally true. And both concepts are useful in trying to understand the warp and woof of race across U.S. history. But racial inequality statistics, the alarming rate of police killings of black people, and the destructive use of race in the 2016 election all make it clear that the inculcation of these concepts in college curricula and union resolutions has made little to no dent in race as a
divisive and destructive force in U.S. society. For even as we name racism as an institutional force, we still abstract it away from the historical and class-based origins of race that make it so powerful. NBI B defines institutional racism as “the societal patterns and practices that have the net effect of imposing oppressive conditions and denying rights, opportunity, and equality based upon race,” making no mention of the origin or function of those patterns and practices.

As the NEA set out to implement NBI B in 2016, we focused on revealing and seeking to eradicate the often-invisible pattern and practice of “White privilege.” Hunting and shooting White privilege, showing White folks how much they unconsciously benefit from being perceived as White, is a staple of anti-racist training. A day after the passage of NBI B, NEA Executive Director John Stocks declared the centrality of fighting White privilege to our war on institutional racism:

I personally believe that we cannot challenge institutional racism without understanding the insidious entitlements of White privilege in America. White privilege is something that those of us who have benefitted from it, like me, need to spend time confronting if we truly believe in racial equality. Delegates, let us vow, in the year 2015, 239 years after the American revolution, 150 years after the end of the Civil War, and nearly 50 years after Selma and Stonewall, let us vow, that as long as there is breath in our bodies, we will not allow racism or intolerance or injustice to extinguish the light of hope and opportunity in America.

Stocks very quickly reduces the institutional to the personal, admonishing White people like himself to turn inward and confront their own privilege. This is straight out of the corporate anti-racist playbook, which
always leaves the question of how the United States became institutionally White unanswered.

The study of whiteness has its origins in a rich scholarly tradition that includes the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, Theodore Allen, Noel Ignatiev, and David Roediger. These writers all explore, in great detail, the intricately imbricated relationship between whiteness and labor in the U.S. But by the time it reaches most of our classrooms and almost all anti-racist training, it has been cleansed of its politics, history and class consciousness and devolved into a privilege walk or a list in Peggy McIntosh’s knapsack. Instructing White people about how to see that they don’t automatically trigger security in department stores or aren’t regularly asked to speak for their entire race creates the illusion of engaging institutional issues, but it is about as politically effective as attending a rally against racism. Pointing in the abstract toward White privilege shorn from its origins in labor history tends to lead White listeners from the privileged economic classes to unproductive guilt and smug lectures directed toward other, less enlightened White people. And, in the devastated regions of capital, preaching White privilege verges on the silly. Telling unemployed steel workers from western Pennsylvania that they are awash in privilege is, at best, incomprehensible and, at worst, reinforcing of racist behavior and attitudes. Whiteness is always a presence up and down the socioeconomic ladder, and it is always at the heart of racist oppression, but usually it is more a wedge than a privilege.

**Whiteness is always a presence up and down the socioeconomic ladder, and it is always at the heart of racist oppression, but usually it is more a wedge than a privilege.**

THE ALCHEMY OF RACE AND CLASS

In the 17th century, the bosses in the colonies that would become the United States took the first steps on the road that leads to Donald Trump. Soon after White working class voters in the economically battered Midwestern states gave him an Electoral College majority, pundits and
bloggers rushed to declare that none of the old rules applied to the twittering Mr. Trump. But the fundamental dynamic that led those voters to vote against their own interests is as old as tobacco in Virginia. The ready-made lies about Latinos, Blacks, and Muslims that Trump deployed to convince struggling Rust Belt workers that they had more in common with a Park Avenue rich boy than they did with workers of color were created centuries ago by colonial planters bent on controlling labor rebellions in the New World.

Race has become such a naturalized part of U.S. culture and politics that the labor origins of racial division have been all but forgotten. References to slavery as some version of the nation’s “original sin” in our curricula and our popular media leave most Americans believing that racial hierarchies arrived in the Americas fully codified instead of inchoate and evolving. The early capitalist exploitation of the fertile land of the New World was carried out by laborers imported from both Europe and Africa, and those laborers were subject to varying degrees of indentured servitude and bondage. But those degrees were not initially determined by race. Both Africans and Europeans were sometimes freed after serving their terms of servitude and working conditions were equally brutal for both. Those brutal conditions and the lack of distinction between Black and White workers led to labor solidarity across racial lines in the numerous workers rebellions from 1660 to 1680 (the most significant of which was Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676).

Recognizing that hyper-exploitation of a large working class that perceived itself as a class with common conditions and interests created the conditions for perpetual resistance and rebellion, the owning class began making moves to divide workers by trying to convince European workers that they were White. From 1680 to 1710, the notion of whiteness begins to appear in colonial law and custom as a property right for the propertyless. At the same time, hereditary chattel slavery for Black Africans becomes firmly institutionalized. White workers are afforded
privileges that no slave has and are told that even free Blacks have no rights that even the lowliest White worker is bound to respect. Whiteness and White privilege become the tools deployed to convince European workers that because of their skin color they have more in common with the owners on the veranda sipping mint juleps than they do with the Africans with whom they share laboring and living conditions.\footnote{9}

The alchemy of turning genuine class differences into false racial ones (what the historian Theodore Allen calls the “invention of the white race”) has proven to be an extraordinarily effective social control device across U.S. history. It is certainly one of the main reasons why U.S. working class struggle and upheaval have never metamorphosed into long-term working class political organization. White working class capitulation to slavery, the failure of northern White labor to make common cause with southern newly freed Black labor during Reconstruction, organized labor’s collaboration with Jim Crow and New Deal racism in the early 20th century, and the distance between White labor and the Black Freedom movement in the latter part of the century are all testament to the power of White supremacy to keep working people pitted against each other.\footnote{10} Ruling class production of racial narratives has continuously recreated and reinforced this division across U.S. history. The myth of the Black rapist led to the White working class Ku Klux Klan and lynching. The racist suspicion of Black workers that was created in the 17th century virulently infected the U.S. labor movement in the early 20th century and derailed any genuine labor solidarity. Despite the fact that affirmative action disproportionately benefited White people, the narratives surrounding those programs always colored them Black and routinely presented working class Black people, not ruling class people, as the biggest impediment to working class White people getting ahead.\footnote{11} Since at least the middle of the 20th century, race baiting (from Richard Nixon’s “south-
ern strategy” to George Bush’s Willie Horton ad to Bill Clinton’s Sister Soulja attack to Trump’s effervescent racial stream of consciousness) has been virtually *de rigueur* in U.S. presidential campaigns as a way to keep White working class voters looking away from the actual arrangements of capitalist power and voting against their own material interests.

The inextricable link between race and class oppression must be one of the most significant reasons for the lack of a labor party and a relatively weak labor movement in the U.S. compared to other industrialized Western countries. It also explains the shifting valence of race in different class contexts. Proclamations of racial “progress” are almost always followed by a “so much more to do” caveat. Those formulations would be so much more useful and accurate if we added that progress is usually confined to the privileged classes, while the poor and working classes are always left with little more than so much more to do. Because its primary job is to divide the working classes, race plays out differently up and down the socioeconomic ladder. Racism is always at its most virulent and violent within and among the working classes. Individuals within the ruling and managerial classes certainly harbor and often manifest both latent and blatant racist thoughts and behaviors, but they tend not to perceive Black people as a class as a threat to their economic and social well-being.

Thus, Frederick Douglass can become a best-selling author, statesman, and ambassador within a northern elite that tacitly sanctions and benefits from southern racialized convict leasing and the transition from slavery to Jim Crow. Zora Neale Hurston and Duke Ellington were welcomed and celebrated in rich White parlors while lynching grew and Black workers were excluded from White labor unions. In the 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. was embraced by the White House as the Black Panthers were murdered by the FBI. When Rush Limbaugh or Donald

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The painting, “Untitled #1,” by former Missouri high school student David Pulphus, depicts police and protesters in Ferguson, Missouri. After winning the 2016 Congressional Art Competition, the painting was installed last year in a U.S. Capitol hallway, where it has been unscrewed from the wall at least three times by Republican lawmakers. It now hangs in the office of Rep. William Lacy Clay, D-MO, who says he will challenge its removal from the Capitol on Constitutional grounds. (AP Photo/Zach Gibson)
Trump spew their race-baiting bile, they are aiming squarely at White working class people, not at the millionaires and billionaires they work and play with. Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, and Barack Obama all enjoy relatively raceless daily lives among their ruling class friends and colleagues, but on blogs and in barrooms are subjected to relentlessly racist anger and hatred from people who the security details never let near them.

At an infamous 2008 fundraiser in San Francisco, then-Senator Obama put his finger squarely on the predicament of the White working class: “they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy toward people who aren’t like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations.”

The rebuke from the ideological state apparatus to Obama’s pulling back the curtain was swift and severe: the future president was an elitist snob whose wine-sipping ways blinded him to the intrinsic value of God and guns, and put him out of touch with “real Americans.” He was the one who had been duped, not the White working class. Senator Obama was, of course, accurate in his description, but what he left out was the way that situation had been created and his own participation in its perpetuation. He spoke as if the disgruntled White working class was the victim of natural forces, immutable economic tides, and not the product of Western capitalist arrangements. And he certainly didn’t mention how, as a graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Law School, and as a U.S. senator and future U.S. president, he worked both consciously and unconsciously to keep the racialized divisions of working class control in place.

In the context of this history, it is not a contradiction that Obama’s successor is both the landlord who discriminated against Blacks in low- and middle-income apartment rentals in Brooklyn and Queens in the 1970s and irritated wealthy White Palm Beach residents by allowing wealthy Black people into his club at Mar-a-Lago in the 1990s.

In his 2015 NEA Representative Assembly speech, Stocks ends his

When Rush Limbaugh or Donald Trump spew their race-baiting bile, they are aiming squarely at White working class people, not the millionaires they work and play with.
discussion of racism by calling for us to create a country “where the light burns so brightly that racism dare not enter its radiance.” He then turns to the problem of income inequality. This separation of race and class unconsciously replicates exactly the naturalization of whiteness that Stocks associates with White privilege. Racism is a matter of individual hearts and moral bright lights; economic inequality is by default a White thing. This opposing binary of race and class is a dominant U.S. tradition that has easily been co-opted by the neo-liberal paradigm that includes Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Congressional Black Caucus. When Bernie Sanders’ genuinely progressive campaign drew fire from Black elites and their constituencies, it was at least in part an attempt to police the border between race and class and to maintain what Kenneth Warren calls those elites’ “managerial authority over the nation’s Negro problem.” Adolph Reed nicely summarizes the work that separating race from class does for the ruling class:

This separation of race and class unconsciously replicates exactly the naturalization of whiteness associated with White privilege.

That is to say, as is ever clearer and ever more important to note, race politics is not an alternative to class politics; it is a class politics, the politics of the left-wing of neoliberalism. It is the expression and active agency of a political order and moral economy in which capitalist market forces are treated as unassailable nature. An integral element of that moral economy is displacement of the critique of the invidious outcomes produced by capitalist class power onto equally naturalized categories of ascriptive identity that sort us into groups supposedly defined by what we essentially are rather than what we do.

Encouraging White people, especially working class White people, to look into their souls and confront the racists they truly are only discourages them from actually doing something that might create the interracial class solidarity needed to oppose the U.S. neo-liberal political order.
Insisting on the imbrication of race and class often leads to the sort of attack that Bernie Sanders received from the Black managerial class and their followers in the cultural studies wing of academia. And while such race baiting did play a big role in helping Hillary Clinton beat back Sanders’s challenge in the Democratic primaries, it did not carry over to the general election, where young, Black, and Latino voters did not come out for the longtime neo-liberal Clinton the way that they did for the Black neo-liberal Obama. Imagining that the spectrum of Black thought is contained in the bourgeois voices of John Lewis and Melissa Harris-Perry, and that all authentic Black politics must be identity politics, ignores the strong support of people like Cornel West and Adolph Reed for Bernie Sanders. More importantly, it also ignores a vibrant, though suppressed, tradition of what Cedric Robinson, in his epic study, calls “Black Marxism.”

That tradition includes the mature work of writers like W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, and Angela Davis. It also includes the last years of the lives of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Du Bois evolves from a naive uplift notion of the “talented tenth” whose hard work and accomplishment will bring racial equality to the eight hundred pages of *Black Reconstruction*, which sees the failure of working class solidarity as the primary threat to Black equality. Langston Hughes holds both the Black middle class and the whiteness they chase in contempt. James Baldwin loses the critical approbation he received early in his career when he turns to investigations of whiteness and solidarity with the Marxism of the Black Panthers. Both King and Malcolm X, shortly before their murders, evolved toward seeing race as deeply entwined with class and poverty. The radical aspects of all of these writers’ careers have mostly been expunged from the academic and popular imagination. Their understanding of
whiteness has been reduced to “I, too, sing America” and neo-liberal whimpering about privilege. But even a cursory examination of the full trajectories of their careers shows that they ultimately all understood race as a capitalist tool and they all probably would have broken with the NEA and voted for Sanders over Clinton.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{THE NBI B BLUES}

As well-intentioned as it is, NBI B does not fall into this tradition, as it does not recognize race as a tool invented to divide labor and deployed to perpetuate and protect inequality. It feigns toward radicalism with the introduction of the word “institutional,” but it ignores U.S. racial history and continues to treat racism as a disease in an otherwise healthy body (the big insight being that the disease has spread from individuals to institutions) that must be eradicated with the medicine of programs, actions, and trainings around the clichés of cultural competency, diversity, and social justice. For the NEA Board, at our meetings and conferences, most of this medicine has been delivered by the anti-racist consultants and companies who have emerged to exploit the growing diversity market. The primary job of these usually well-paid consultants is to, as Robin D.G. Kelley puts it, “shift race from the public sphere to the psyche” and make it safe for the prevailing political order.\textsuperscript{19} The programs and trainings, along with the NBI that spawned them, imagine racism as a freestanding malady, independent of socioeconomic forces, that has infected otherwise raceless institutions. The NBI’s claim to innovation is its discovery of \textit{institutional} racism, but the institutions in that formulation remain inert. The assumption is that scrubbing these institutions of their racist “patterns and practices” will open the gates to the “opportunity and equality” that is the goal of NBI B. As long as we refuse to interrogate those institutions as the
servants of capital and refuse to see race as the invention of capital, not much will change.

We can see this limitation most clearly in the signature effort of the NEA’s crusade against institutional racism: the *Report of the NEA Committee on Discipline and the School to Prison Pipeline*. This report is thorough, well-documented, and makes clear what almost all Black American parents already know: in most institutional settings their kids are treated worse than White kids. But it confines itself to that statistical analysis, never really asking why schools and prisons ended up this way. And it goes out of its way to fully separate race from class, asserting that poverty doesn’t matter when it comes to school discipline:

Critically, the shocking disparities in school discipline rates recounted at the outset of this report are not due to poverty or different rates of misbehavior. While poor students are disciplined more frequently, when data takes the role of poverty into account, children of color are still over-represented in suspension rates. *New and Developing Research on Disparities in Discipline* notes that no evidence has been found that discipline disparities are due to poverty and discusses previous investigations that found that Black-White differences in out of school suspension persist regardless of the level of poverty.²⁰

Construed in this truncated and limited way, and swallowing whole the studies that treat race and poverty as distinct variables, the claim here is easy enough to believe. The few Black students at a rich suburban school are probably more subject to scrutiny and discipline than their many White classmates, in the same way that the many Black students at an impoverished inner city school are treated worse than their few White classmates. But school discipline is where the report’s consideration of poverty ends—there is no discussion of the relationship between poverty

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and the prison end of the pipeline.

More importantly, the very next sentence after the passage quoted above again slides away from the institutional part of institutional racism: “Rather, we need to look at our responses to student behavior and our preconceptions, both conscious and unconscious, to find the cause of these disparities.” Here, institutional racism gets implicitly conflated with “unconscious” behavior, and once again the solution becomes more multicultural and cultural competency training for individuals who are unconsciously treating students of color badly. This would no doubt be a net positive, but stopping there leaves two institutions that are crucial to the history of racial division in the U.S. utterly unexamined. In the wake of the Civil War and the loophole in the 13th Amendment, prisons became a primary method of re-enslaving Black labor, and mandatory public schooling was, in part, a warehousing-working-class-children response to child labor laws. The NEA Report does not argue for fundamentally examining the institution of school or the institution of prison. Instead, it calls for the creation of “a supportive and nurturing school climate” to smooth out racial disparities in discipline. Ultimately, the logic of the report implies that if we get to the point where White children are disciplined and imprisoned proportionally at the same rate as Black children, then we will have solved the problem of the school to prison pipeline. As Reed points out, “within that moral economy a society in which one percent of the population controlled 90 percent of the resources could be just, provided that roughly 12 percent of the one percent were black.”

In his recent farewell address in Chicago, Barack Obama summed up the point of this essay. Buried among the recitations of his administration’s accomplishments, the soft jabs at Donald Trump, and the return to the siren call of “Yes We Can” was a relatively straightforward statement of the role of race in U.S. capitalism. “If every economic issue is framed,”
said the lame duck president, “as a struggle between a hardworking White middle class and an undeserving minority, then workers of all shades are going to be left fighting for scraps while the wealthy withdraw further into their private enclaves.”

In eight years as president, Obama was able to do virtually nothing about the problem he so clearly states. In some ways, he may have made things worse, clearing the field for Trump’s unadorned appeals to racial division. This failure tells us very little about Barack Obama, but a lot about the institution of President of the United States. It suggests that all of our work on behalf of Hillary Clinton for president was utterly beside the point when it comes to institutional racism. Race will continue to do its work on behalf of capital, no matter who sits in the White House. If the election of Donald Trump has taught us anything, it is that we should spend less time supporting and speaking to the implacable face of power, no matter whether that face is Black or female or spray tanned with a bad comb over. We should spend less time worrying that Betsy DeVos could be even worse than Arne Duncan, and more time recognizing that no Secretary of Education will ever truly put the interests of working educators first. We should start from the material and historical fact that every time a White cop shoots a Black person, it is worker on worker violence that is fully sanctioned by the ruling class. And then we should strive to get working people to stop voting against their own interests, starting with ourselves. When we have come to have more in common with a K Street lobbyist than we do with a dispossessed factory worker in Michigan, how can we blame that worker for choosing to identify with a billionaire bully?

**END NOTES**

1. See Toppo, “Teacher Unions Smarting After Many Members Vote for Trump.”

2. See the full text of NBI B at: [http://ra.nea.org/business-item/2015-nbi-b/](http://ra.nea.org/business-item/2015-nbi-b/) Full disclosure: I have been a member of the NEA Board for the last three years and happily voted in favor of NBI B.

4. NBI B, op cit.

5. See Reed, Jr., “The Limits of Anti–Racism.”

6. Watch Stocks’ entire speech at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3Wro9a15uA


8. See McIntosh, “Privilege Walk Lesson Plan.”


13. When asked what would be the first thing he would do if he were elected president, Noam Chomsky once replied, “Have myself arrested for war crimes.” Chomsky’s comment points to the power of the office to box in whatever individual might occupy it. Obama’s failure on banking and immigration policy and his racist education policy all reveal the constraints his office put on him.


16. Reed, “From Jenner to Dolezal: One Trans Good, the Other Not So Much.”


18. Full disclosure, part 2: The NEA Board’s endorsement of Clinton over Sanders was a fraught process, with a variety of thumbs on a variety of scales. In the end, I voted to endorse Clinton and, unless I could somehow know then what I know now, I would probably do it again.


22. NEA, op cit., p. 19.


24. Obama, “Farewell Address.”

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Needed: A Fresh Perspective on Campus Violence

Anthony Bernier and Mike Males

Educational administrators take pride in promoting standards of scholarly rigor, systematic and evidence-based analysis, fairness to all groups, challenges to stereotypes, and critical thinking—and, of course, providing healthy, safe, and secure environments. Yet, when it comes to discussing violence on campuses, their failure to apply these principles is disturbing.

On the one hand, some administrations stand accused of downplaying and concealing cases of violence on their campuses. Pennsylvania State University and Baylor University are recent, prominent examples but are hardly alone; 21 schools were fined by the U.S. Department of Education from 2000 through mid-2014 under the Clery Act for failing to report campus crimes. In this unfortunate regard, some administrators have behaved like leaders of other institutions such as the Catholic Church, the U.S. military, prisons, civic organizations, and corporations by prioritizing their public image over the well-being of victims. On the other hand, campus leaders, journalists, and others often spotlight campuses and students, especially undergraduates, for supposedly suffering and perpetrati

Anthony Bernier is professor at California’s San José State University School of Information and teaches research methods courses in history and library science. He is project coordinator for YouthFacts.org. Mike Males is senior researcher for the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, San Francisco, and formerly taught sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz.
administrators, counselors, and parents are urged to intervene to forestall alleged propensities of undergraduates to risks.³

That campuses suffer unacceptable levels of violence is undisputable; they are part of a larger American society in which family, community, and institutional violence far exceed levels found in comparable Western nations.⁴ And yet, amid the finger-pointing and scapegoating of students as violent, we note a critical lack of evidence-based analysis, which is the basis for reasoned solutions. Are our students in imminent danger on our campuses? Are our campuses dangerous places?

This investigation finds that, in fact, campus areas are considerably safer places for young adults than non-campus areas, although certain campus populations do suffer high rates of violence. This more complex profile of campus communities requires a new research perspective to better understand the simultaneously encouraging, troubling, and unexpected patterns of violence, crime, and risk today.

**Amid the finger-pointing and scapegoating of students as violent, we note a critical lack of evidence-based analysis, which is the basis for reasoned solutions.**

**VIOLENT AND SELF-INFLICTED DEATHS ON AND AROUND CAMPUSES**

For this analysis, violent death rates by age, race, gender, and cause are calculated for the 15 ZIP codes that include the 10 University of California residential campuses and campus-adjacent areas, with a total adult (ages 18 to 64) population of 488,000, for the five-year study period.⁵ These are divided into “campus” areas (that include six ZIP codes with an adult population of 158,000, of whom 62 percent are ages 18 to 24) with concentrated populations of undergraduate age, and “campus adjacent” areas (nine ZIP codes, adult population of 230,000, 28 percent ages 18 to 24). The remaining “non-campus” areas of the 10 counties (adult population, 13.3 million, 16 percent ages 18 to 24) are used for comparison.
What we discovered undermines the common perception of campuses as violent or dangerous places for young adults. (See Tables 1 and 2.) The higher the concentration of 18- to 24-year-olds, the lower the violent death rate of young people, we found. In fact, the violent and self-inflicted death rate of 18- to 24-year-olds on or near a university campus is just one-ninth the rate for 18- to 24-year-olds who live in non-campus areas. For those living in campus-adjacent areas, it’s one-third. This holds true across all reported races and genders: young people are much safer in university environs from every category of violent death, including suicides, shooting deaths, and drug and alcohol overdoses. Among the different races and genders, some small variations of rates on and near campus exist; however, those rates are much more sharply different in non-campus areas.

The safety umbrella of campus and campus-adjacent areas applies less to 25- to 44-year-olds and not at all to those 45 years and older. Overall, younger adults are much safer in campus and campus-adjacent areas than older adults, who suffer violent death at rates more than 20 times higher than 18- to 19-year-olds in campus settings. But, in non-campus settings, those 45- to 54-years-old suffer violent death at only slightly higher rates. In fact, over the five-year study period, in campus areas with the most concentrated populations of young adults, more older adults ages 35 to 64 with advanced degrees died from violent or self-inflicted causes than all young people of undergraduate age. These findings are consistent with those of the “Big Ten Student Suicide Study,” which found suicide rates lower for campus than non-campus populations and, on campuses, considerably higher for older than younger students.⁶

We also examined violent death trends over time among adults ages 18 to 24 in the three counties most impacted by the growth of major University of California campuses: Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and Yolo (home to University of California, Davis).⁷ Universities in these three areas have experienced a more than tripling of their student population
from around 20,000 in the 1960s to more than 70,000 today. During the same time (from the early 1960s to 2014), the rate of young adults, ages 18 to 24, who died violently in these three counties fell by 85 percent overall (compared to a 52 percent decline statewide). This includes specific declines in suicide (down 52 percent, compared to seven percent statewide); homicide (down 33 percent, compared to a 71 percent increase statewide); and accidental deaths (down 89 percent, compared to a 70 percent decline statewide). Before the massive growth of their campuses, these cities were uniquely hazardous for 18- to 24-year-olds; today, they are notably safer.

### VIOLENT CRIME IN AND AROUND CAMPUS

The story is similar when we look at criminal arrests.\(^8\) Arrests understate actual incidence of crime, because many offenses go unreported (a caveat that applies to both campus and non-campus areas and to all ages and time periods) and should be used to compare various groups, areas, and eras rather than to establish absolute rates of crime.\(^9\) As with violent deaths, the problems do not lie with undergraduates. In Santa Cruz, Davis, and Berkeley, the three cities most dominated by the Universities of California, student populations comprise more than one-fourth of each city's total

**TABLE 1. VIOLENT DEATHS PER 100,000 POPULATION BY CAMPUS LOCATION, AGE, AND RACE IN CALIFORNIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Campus location</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Campus-adjacent</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Non-campus</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>122.6</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>65.7*</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>Campus-adjacent</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>149.3</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>Non-campus</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>233.6*</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>Campus-adjacent</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>110.4</td>
<td>102.3</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>Non-campus</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on small population (<1,000).
Sources: Centers for Disease Control; Bureau of the Census.
population and 18- to 29-year-olds comprise 47 percent of all adults.

As the number of undergraduate students in these areas doubled over the last three decades, we found that arrest rates for 18- and 19-year-olds for violent crimes fell by 71 percent, while those ages 20- to 29 declined by 47 percent, and those of 30- to 39-year-olds fell by 40 percent. (See Tables 3 and 4.) Arrests for rape and other sex offenses, as well as drug/alcohol offenses, also fell sharply among younger adults. However, violent crime arrest rates for 40- to 69-year-olds rose by 13 percent over the same period in these communities.

In 2015, in these three campus communities, where nearly half the adult population is under the age of 30, it’s not young people who are often arrested. Rather, criminal suspects ages 30 and older comprised 55 percent of violent crime arrests, including seven in 10 arrests for rape or sexual assault, as well as six in 10 for drug and alcohol offenses. Overall, students under age 30 in campus areas have considerably lower arrest rates in campus areas than their peers living across California; ages 30 to 39 have somewhat lower rates; and ages 40 and older have higher arrest rates (see Table 4). Arrest levels peak among adults in their 30s in campus districts, with ages 40 to 69 showing higher arrest rates for all violent offenses (and especially for rape/sexual assault) than ages 18 to 19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Population</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>98,545</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>10,465</td>
<td>3,686,463</td>
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<tr>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34,870</td>
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<td>41.7</td>
<td>192</td>
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<td>46.2</td>
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<td>63.6</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>24,716</td>
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<tr>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>71,122</td>
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<tr>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>27,425</td>
<td>8,818,012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on small population (<1,000).

Sources: Centers for Disease Control; Bureau of the Census.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Death subtypes and age groups</th>
<th>Violent deaths per 100,000 population</th>
<th>Ratio, non-campus vs. campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td>Campus-adjacent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All violent deaths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>20.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>30.2</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
<td>48.5</td>
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<td>45-54</td>
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<td>55-64</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicides</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
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<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>15.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun deaths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
<td>4.6</td>
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<td>Drug/alcohol overdoses</td>
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<td>18-19</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<td>55-64</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-64</td>
<td>158,131</td>
<td>230,077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Centers for Disease Control; Bureau of the Census.
SAFE SPACES

These patterns of violent crime arrests, as well as of violent deaths, appear consistent with other communities that host large campuses. They also are consistent with Office of Justice Program’s (OJP) comparative victimization survey, which indicate campus women are safer than non-campus women from rape and assault. However, the statistics, studies, and OJP survey are not consistent with the impressions of campus violence fostered by coverage of high profile incidents such as the recent stabbings at Ohio State University in November or 2015’s mass shooting at the Umpqua Community College in Oregon. Nor are they consistent...
with the image of high levels of campus violence fostered by several surveys. These inconsistencies appear to result from focusing on the victimization experiences of younger, undergraduate students on campus to the exclusion of higher rates of violence in non-campus settings and among older campus populations, and to the broader definitions of violence used in self-reporting surveys.

While the best comparative evidence suggests that campus and campus-adjacent violence levels are not higher, and may be lower, than elsewhere in society, none of this analysis is intended to minimize the violence on campus that does occur, or that threatening behaviors can include actions other than rape and assault. To the contrary, the findings here argue for broadening discussion of campus violence and its solutions beyond today’s narrow, limited perspective that fails to address the changing, larger, and more complex nature of the problem.

University of California campus violence today—though much less frequent than UC campus violence in past decades or in non-campus areas—is mainly an issue involving older adults, not traditionally aged students. Even in UC campus areas, residents ages 35 to 64 (who account for less than one-fourth of the adult population) now account for 53 percent of traffic deaths, 57 percent of murders, 67 percent of drug/alcohol overdoses, 70 percent of suicides, 79 percent of gun fatalities, and half or more of all arrests for violent crimes, especially for rape and sex offenses.

This pattern is not unique to the UC system. The sharp increase in educational attainment among younger adults in recent decades has accompanied historic decreases in violence, criminal arrests, and related risks across the country. Meanwhile, older adults suffer rising rates of troubled behaviors.

In light of these trends, rather than the typical approach by faculty, staff, and other professionals, which generally singles out students for interventions, a much more comprehensive, integrated strategy is required...
to address campus violence and risks. Such a strategy would begin at square one: rigorous analysis of why violent deaths and arrests have plunged among college-age students to historically low levels, the sources of older adults’ problems, and how sustaining student trends may lead to expanded and sustained initiatives to encompass all ages.

The Library’s Role Moving Forward

Because the notion of “space” has emerged as an important feature in creating a healthy campus environment, one recommendation is to enhance the role of the college or university library as a location to house and organize current information, facilitate the difficult discussions necessary to grapple with the new thinking these issues provoke, and curate exhibits and other media to promote evidence-based information. Libraries define the center of university culture. They are the single most important location for one of the institution’s core missions: to produce and disseminate knowledge.

The new research suggested here requires the collection, assessment, and distribution of original statistical and empirical research specific to violence and crime on and near that campus. University police and other evidence-based information sources, including qualified surveys, counseling reports, surveys, and program studies, could be collected, maintained, and housed at the university library and provided on its website. This information could be made readily accessible for the campus community’s scrutiny, particularly that of faculty, students, and independent researchers to build studies and classroom assignments from diverse perspectives.

What is most needed now is not repetition of prevailing ideas from interest groups and politicians, but syntheses of original information to create challenging new assessments of today’s campus violence and risk realities.

As part of its role in grappling with the new thinking that innovative

Rather than the typical approach, which generally singles out students for interventions, a much more comprehensive, integrated strategy is required to address campus violence and risks.
As part of its role in grappling with the new thinking that innovative research provokes, the library also could host open community conversations informed by scholarship.

research provokes, the library also could host open community conversations informed by scholarship. An example from this paper, applicable to UC campuses and perhaps across the country: Why, contrary to public perception, are modern campus experiences so much safer for younger students than older adults? In this example, films and local speakers, along with the presentation of evidence emerging from scholarly information sources to personal narratives, could prompt conversations that challenge popular images and stereotypes. The library also is an ideal site for recording live webinars and other faculty and staff training opportunities that would focus discussion not on common moral panics and age-based, finger-pointing at undergraduates, but on the pertinent populations who, evidence shows, are both more at risk and more dangerous to the community.

Libraries also curate exhibits on issues of concern to their communities. Such an exhibit about community safety, beyond merely posting the phone number of the after-hours escort service, might offer a vital opportunity to raise the consciousness of library visitors, whether they’re physically in the library or accessed remotely. Images, charts, and the promotion of publications and research findings could all play supportive roles in drawing the community’s attention away from the harried headlines and bumper-sticker mentality, and toward evidence-based analysis of actual violence and crime on today’s college campuses. Informing and challenging prevailing narratives are not easy tasks, but they are ones uniquely suited to the scholarly roles of universities, their faculties, staffs and students—and their libraries.

END NOTES
2. Center for Public Integrity, “Rape—News and Investigations.”
3. White House Council on Women and Girls, “Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action.”
4. Quealy and Sanger-Katz, “Compare These Gun Death Rates: The U.S. is in a Different World.”

5. Violence on campus can be assessed through various sources, with varying strengths and weaknesses. Murder, suicide, gun-related deaths, drug and alcohol poisonings, and other forms of violent death are reliably tabulated by the Centers for Disease Control under a death registration system that statistical models show captures more than 98 percent of all such mortality. Other forms of violence such as rape, sexual assault, robbery, and nonfatal assault are significantly undercounted in crime statistics compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and California’s Criminal Justice Statistics Center. Self-reporting surveys of victimization, such as the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ National Crime Victimization Survey and various interest-group polls, are often cited but have weaknesses of their own. See also Center for Health Statistics, Death data files; and U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder.


7. Centers for Disease Control, “Compressed Mortality File.”

8. Criminal Justice Statistics Center, Criminal Justice Profiles.

9. See the discussion in note 5.

10. FBI, Crime in the United States.

11. Office of Justice Programs, “Rape and Sexual Assault Victimization among College-age Females, 1995–2013.”


WORKS CITED


Racist Ideas in America

*A Q&A with NEA Higher Ed member Ibram X. Kendi, winner of the 2016 National Book Award*

Q: This book challenges a common perception about racism, specifically that racist ideas propel racist policy. You say it’s the opposite—racist policies have propelled racist thinking. Can you explain that?

A: That was something I certainly believed, going into the book, that racist ideas drive policy, and I didn’t think I was going to turn it on its head. That wasn’t my intent… I wanted to write a history of racist ideas, a history of America, and show how the historical context produced these people, who produced these racist ideas. That led me to figure out the motives behind why they were producing these racist ideas. I found, over and again, that these producers were not ignorant. They were not hateful. Many of them were the most brilliant minds in American history. And they typically were producing these ideas to defend existing racist policies. The disparities were in place, their effects were profound, and these racist ideas were an attempt to normalize and justify those racist policies.

Q: In the book, you describe three kinds of people: the segregationists, who are racists basically; the anti-racists, who actively reject any idea that Black people are inferior in any way; and the assimilationists.

In his 2016 National Book Award-winning work, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, NEA Higher Ed member Ibram X. Kendi dives into the world of racist ideas. Recently, Kendi, an assistant professor at the University of Florida, talked with Thought & Action about the evolution of racism in the United States, how it continues to impact public education, and how educators can create anti-racist spaces.
This group includes people like Abraham Lincoln and Barack Obama. Can you describe them better?

A: The reason I wrote a history of racist ideas, as opposed to a history of racists, was because I realized very early on that there are people who hold racist and anti-racist ideas. These are the assimilationists. You can simultaneously believe that the racial groups are biologically equal, that they were created equal, but that they have become behaviorally unequal [because of environment, poverty, etc.]. Assimilationists will argue that Black people are capable of development, and they believe that this belief is progressive but it also is racist.

Q: Is the book written mostly with an audience of assimilationists in mind? You write that it’s difficult, if not impossible, to move the segregationists from racism to antiracism, but the assimilationists sound like well-intentioned people. Can they be moved to self-reflect, to catch themselves?

A: Yes. That is more or less the story of W.E.B. Du Bois. Early in his life, he was basically an assimilationist. The more he studied race in America, the more he developed an anti-racist consciousness.

Q: If you take this filter of segregationists, assimilationists, and anti-racists, and apply it to public education, who comes out on top?
If we accept that assimilationists got the upper hand after *Brown vs. Board*, are they still running the show?

A: Yes. The effect of *Brown vs. Board* was basically to state that the reason Black schools are inferior is not because they are under-resourced, but because White students aren’t in them, and so what we need to do is usher Black students into schools with White students. That’s why you had busing in the 1960s and 1970s and why you have racial reformers, ever since, thinking that the way to create a better school system would be to bring more Black students into White schools.

Q: What can teachers, and their unions, do to make their classrooms, their schools, and their school systems more anti-racist?

A: Instead of so many teacher activists who care about racial justice issues focusing on closing the achievement gap, I think we should focus on closing the school resource gap. There is certainly a problem with the amount of resources dedicated to certain schools. And while it doesn’t result in those children being intellectually inferior, it does lead to a different type of education and a different type of intelligence, which is not a type of intelligence necessarily valued in our economy. We need to focus on that resource gap, and teachers need to be at the forefront of that, because they can speak to how difficult it is for them to do their jobs in an under-resourced school. Those resources are based on local and state policies, and those policies can be changed.

In terms of the achievement gap, I’ve stated the achievement gap is a racist idea. The academic achievement gap is based on standardized tests, and those tests have been proven again and again to not measure intelligence. For us to believe that there is a racial gap, and that black children are achieving at a lesser level, basically means believing that white children are intellectually superior. The assimilationists say no, it’s not that. They’ll say Black children are capable, it’s just about putting different teachers in
those classrooms… We need to say that we don’t accept that gap because the tests are not valid, and intelligence is subjective.

Q: How about what teachers do in their own classrooms? There are studies showing how educators’ racial biases affect school discipline rates among 4-year-olds even.

A: Clearly one of the most dangerous racist ideas about Black people is that their children have a behavioral problem that White children don’t have, which manifests in schools and leads to children becoming criminals. So the first thing is that teachers need to not think that Black children have behavioral problems. They need to see their Black students as complex individuals, and recognize their Black children’s lives in the same way that they recognize their White children’s lives. You try to understand them. You recognize them as individuals. You individualize your approach to each child to accommodate their interests, their culture, who they are. You become an expert on your students’ lives.

Q: What if you apply this lens to higher education? How do we move our higher-ed policies, including admissions and affordability policies, to make them anti-racist?

A: At the higher-ed level, you have historically White institutions. You have disparities in student bodies, and faculty bodies, and administrative bodies. What institutions typically say is that we can’t get more Black students because Black students are not qualified. Even the selective institutions say we’d be able to recruit more Black students if more Black students were applying or qualified. So the blame is placed on the students, on the faculty, and on the administrators. Those are racist ideas. Racist ideas have historically placed blame on Black people, as opposed to the policies that lead to racial disparities. These institutions have no problem recruiting the best Black athletes, but they turn around and say

**Teachers need to see their Black students as complex individuals, and recognize their Black children’s lives in the same way that they recognize their White children’s lives. You become an expert on their lives.**
they can’t recruit the best Black students. Look at the resources allocated to recruiting the best Black athletes and compare them to the resources allocated to recruiting the best Black students and faculty, and there’s no comparison. And that’s if we accept the existing standards of quality, which actually discriminate against Black students.

Q: There was a lot of talk about how in our quote-unquote “post-racial society,” there was no need for race-conscious admissions policies, but the Supreme Court recently affirmed the benefits of diversity in higher ed. Would you characterize that as an anti-racist ruling, or was it a little more complicated than that?

A: It was a little more complicated. The Supreme Court decisions and rulings and cases regarding affirmative action, which I talk about in *Stamped from the Beginning*, essentially come down to racists versus racists. The concept that emerged in 1978 is that standardized tests are race neutral policies, while affirmative action is deemed race conscious. We ask, how is it that SATs are race neutral when there are racial disparities in SAT scores, and when we simultaneously know that SAT scores do not measure students’ success in college or even their profession? We begin to question why are we using these tests? And the only thing I can come up with is that they benefit White students, and rich students, and male students. That’s what to me has been problematic about affirmative action debate. This dichotomy is false to me.

Q: Let’s talk about the election. Early in the book, you describe a pendulum swinging between anti-racist and racist reformers, so that the outlawing of slavery is followed by Jim Crow laws. Where are we swinging now?

A: If Obama’s presidency is a sign of anti-racial progress, as so many people argued, then Donald Trumps’ presidency is going to symbolize the progression of racism.
Q: In the book’s epilogue, you describe the one percent, the straight White, Protestant men, who hold the vast majority of the world’s power and money, and who use racism to control any threats to their hold, including threats by poorer Whites. It’s almost like you were describing a Make America Great Again rally. Did you know he was going to win? Was it predictable to you?

A: It should have been predictable. The reason it was shocking to many people, was that even though many people on the left have challenged post-racial ideology over the last eight years, post-racial ideology had seeped into the left’s consciousness. Consumption of post-racial ideology, the idea that we’ve literally moved past this type of mass manipulation and bigotry, caused people to be shocked.

Q: How do the anti-racists strike back? You describe the act of protesting against someone or some idea as a waste of time.

A: Racist powers will change policies when it serves their self-interest, and when the protest threat disappears they’ll change them back. It’s a short-term solution. The long-term solution is for anti-racist people to get into positions of power.

Q: The book strikes a very hopeful note in the end, saying that there will come time when Americans realize that the only thing wrong with Black people is that they think there is something wrong with Black people, and maybe that time is now. What makes you hopeful?

A: What has always made me hopeful is the resistance to racist ideas and racist policies. Basically the continuing presence of anti-racists in American society makes me hopeful. What has always made me hopeful is the resistance to racist ideas and racist policies. Basically the continuing presence of anti-racists in American society makes me hopeful.
The Intersection of Art and Politics

By Ken Reker, Garry Harley, and Catherine Leisek

Editor's note: In November 2016, one day after the presidential election, faculty at Salem State University’s Winfisky Gallery opened an exhibit called “THE STATE OF THE UNION.” Almost immediately, some students took to social media to complain about the art work on display. In particular, a digital painting titled, Meeting Under a Black Moon on the Plains of Despair, which depicted a ghostly assembly of Ku Klux Klan members, generated offense. In an open forum hosted by the university, students called it “painful” to see. Consequently, the university closed the exhibit, a move that prompted equal outrage from other community members. Discussions around questions of free expression and academic freedom ensued. In late November, Salem State re-opened the exhibit with expanded artist statements, a public comment board, and a drape around the painting that had provoked such powerful response. Here, we have gathered statements from the faculty member who curates and directs the campus gallery, the artist, and an observer of art and politics.

THE CURATOR: KEN REKER

Last year’s STATE OF THE UNION exhibition at Salem State began as a call for visual work that addressed concerns and hopes for our future after the 2016 presidential election. The artwork also reflected the feelings of individuals during the campaigns. The request for artwork

Ken Reker is a professor of Art + Design at Salem State University, where he also is curator and director of the Winfisky Gallery. Garry Harley is an artist in Lowell, Massachusetts, who works in various media, including OP-ART (archival prints on paper and canvas.) Catherine Leisek is a professor in the Visual and Performing Arts Department at Broward College in Florida, where she has served as president of her campus union and faculty senate, a former NEA Board of Directors member and National Council for Higher Education director-at-large, and a visual artist whose works have been exhibited all over the globe.
went out in September, locally and regionally, with an October 26th deadline for submission. Artists could digitally submit up to two works, and were required to include a brief statement about how their work reflected their hopes and concerns. Eighteen artists submitted work; 13 were selected and 19 art works exhibited. STATE OF THE UNION opened on November 9, the day after the presidential election. While the exhibition constructed a climate of its own, student reactions also were predicated upon the climate that was evolving outside of the gallery.

I included most of the artists’ submissions in an attempt to assemble an exhibition that represented a wide breadth of issues. My intent was to establish an exhibition that would elicit a community dialogue. The following statement by art critic Roberta Smith sums up what I hoped this exhibition would provide: “The world is a mass of intractable ills on which art must shed light…. This is not the time for art as an object of contemplation or delight, much less a market commodity—certainly not in a public exhibition whose chief responsibility is to stimulate debate.”

A debate was indeed stimulated on our campus, but in ways that I hadn’t expected. Rather than generating a positive community dialogue, several of the art works in the exhibit alienated certain students. As an artist and educator, I am aware of the power that images have to communicate ideas and emotions, but still I was surprised by the extent of outrage and vitriol. These students seemed to be viewing and interpreting the artworks in such literal terms. Judgments were made without a critical assessment or historical context for the work. In a culture in which individuals are inundated with visual images daily, the response to this exhibition demonstrated the need for a broader application of visual literacy within our academic institutions.

The artwork that drew the greatest degree of condemnation was a digital image by Garry Harley titled *Meeting Under a Black Moon On the*
Plains of Despair, which depicts a group of Ku Klux Klan members. Inside Higher Ed editor Scott Jaschik describes it as such: “[Harley] took (with permission) a photograph of the journalist Anthony S. Karen and portrayed a group of members of the Ku Klux Klan, to show the kind of hate Harley believes has been given respectability by the Trump campaign. To Harley, portraying hatred is not the same thing as promoting hatred.”

As the atmosphere grew more heated, Harley offered to remove his image to allow the exhibition to continue. But students rejected this offer.

After the opening, a student representative of “Black, Brown and Proud,” an on-campus movement, wrote a letter to the Art + Design Department, requesting a meeting between faculty and concerned students and, a few days before the Thanksgiving break, the meeting convened in the Winfisky Gallery. The gallery had never seen so many visitors, and the crowd filled the exhibition space and spilled into the lobby of Ellison Campus Center, the university student center where the Winfisky has been housed for more than 30 years. Students, faculty and administrators were present, including Salem State’s President Pat Meservy and Lisa McBride, its new vice president of diversity and inclusion. Artist Garry Harley arrived early and posted examples of art works by Goya, Picasso, and Lasansky, whose works opposed and committed to memory the inhumanity that they observed around them. In his presentation to the students, Harley positioned his work within this historical lineage of provocative art works. He also stated clearly his intentions for the work in the STATE OF THE UNION exhibition. Nevertheless, the anger that the image had originally elicited from the students remained the focus of the meeting as it unfolded.

As the atmosphere grew more heated, Harley offered to remove his image to allow the exhibition to continue. But students rejected this offer, pointing out other art works in the exhibition that they also found objectionable. The meeting ended abruptly, a formal apology from the Art + Design Department was posted on the gallery doors, and the Winfisky Gallery suspended operation until after the Thanksgiving break, giving...
everyone involved an opportunity to step back and take a breath. Immediately after the holiday break, 15 students, Art + Design faculty, and university administrators met in a closed-door meeting to determine how to move forward. In this final three-hour meeting, Vice President McBride thoughtfully navigated the group through very difficult discussions and negotiated concessions that resulted in the reopening of the Winfisky Gallery in late November for the artists’ reception. The opening was well attended by both advocates and detractors of the artwork in the exhibit.

Upon reflection of these events, there seems no clear blueprint for the application of artistic and academic freedom toward its most equitable benefit for all involved, especially in a climate where conversations about race and ethnicity are utilized in divisive ways. A concession that was especially difficult for me to accept was the demand to curtain Harley's work for “intentional viewing only.” But it was this modification to the exhibit that brought back the ostracized students to the gallery and started a new dialogue about the exhibition that, at that moment, seemed to be moving forward.

**The Artist: Garry Harley**

It is often difficult and unnecessary to offer overly detailed explanations of one's art, as the language of emotion in the painting can be different than that of the spoken or written word, and the word can fail to fully explain the heart.

I have had many discussions with viewers of art who struggle to explain their emotional response to a work of visual or performance art, and who sometimes end up saying, “I just like it,” or “I hate it,” or “my child could do that.” Sometimes tears or a smile reveal a viewer’s reaction. Other times, the reaction is silence. I have attended major museum exhibitions, crowded with visitors, with nary a comment uttered as the many of us walk around viewing artwork by the masters. Yes, it is the “rule of
the place,” but we often are thankful for the quiet, as we are not certain if it is really necessary to speak to feel.

Pablo Picasso, when asked to explain his painting *Guernica*, said, “this bull is a bull and this horse is a horse… If you give a meaning to certain things in my painting it may be very true, but it is not my idea to give this meaning. What ideas and conclusions you have got I obtained too, but instinctively, unconsciously, I make the painting for the painting. I paint the objects for what they are.”

For the Salem State exhibit, my artist statement was: “These digital paintings were stimulated by the various ‘fringe groups’ attracted to the message of the ‘Trump Campaign’ and the use of violence and intimidation of immigrant and minority citizens as one of the central organizing principal by the candidate. These paintings have been created, at this time, since I feel artists have a special capacity and opportunity to offer social commentary to our fellow citizens as to our observations and fears or what some might call presenting the ‘brutal truth.’”

In creating *They Came for My Brother and I Turned Away, Then They Came for Me on a Sunny Day in October*, I had two things very much on my mind. The first is a poem by Pastor Martin Niemöller about the cowardice of intellectuals during the rise of the Nazi Party in 1930s Germany.

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”
They Came for My Brother and I Turned Away, Then They Came for Me on a Sunny Day in October, 2016, 30” x 36”, pigment ink on canvas, by Garry Harley.
Meeting Under a Black Moon on the Plains of Despair, 2016, 32” x 42”, pigment ink on canvas, by Garry Harley.
The second is a quote from Adolph Hitler: “By the skillful and sustained use of propaganda, one can make a people see even heaven as hell or an extremely wretched life as paradise....”

The poem and this statement of Hitler’s lingered in my mind, as I watched a presidential candidate preach division and, yes, even hate, while using the body and verbal language of the street. What I saw were the techniques of 1930s propaganda being employed before my own eyes and in my time.

This painting, which was created using historic photographic sources, was intended to raise a cry and objection from my studio, from my memory, from my heart. When this painting was first displayed in 2016 in a gallery in Denver, Colorado, some viewers suggested I was over-reacting, exhibiting a lack of patriotism, and using visual reference not worthy of the actual meaning of Trump’s promise to “ban” or “count” entire religious populations. Yet, very recently, I have seen Donald Trump halt the Syrian refugee program and block entry to our country by Muslims.

I will not raise my arms in defeat, will you?

In creating Meeting Under a Black Moon on the Plains of Despair, I was placing a personal marker of complaint, an expression of rebellion, disgust and mutiny against the recent legitimization of David Duke and his racist followers.

As for technique, the predominance of black and grey were intended to create a somber and forbidding mood. A lack of sharp line and the presentation of elongated figures is intentional. The presence of a black sky (under a black moon) with bright sunshine on the landscape, plus the elongated figures with transparent legs and no feet, conveys that this is not a normal scene. The central and most imposing figure has rings on most fingers and his wife is ready to subscribe notes of the meeting, a very normal and real life situation. The round hay bale is a distinct reference to
the everyday view that one might see while driving down any country road in the American Midwest or South. These figures are taking a pose somewhere between reality and mystery, somewhere between yesterday and today, somewhere in the Twilight Zone of hearing and seeing but not wanting to believe that hate is in front of us, that hate is of us, and that the past is again and in the open, where it has been blessed by media attention and back-slapping from a major political party.

This digital painting is based upon the work of photojournalist and humanitarian Anthony Karen and has been used as a source with permission.

AN OBSERVER: CATHERINE LEISEK

The intersection of art and politics is occasionally explosive, but more often creates a chain reaction, a multi-car pileup. It has been both the bane and the delight of those in power. Portraits and landscapes of idealized, bloodless battles are accepted and revered, while art of political dissent—art that provides a window onto societal truths—is not so accepted.

When colliding with politics, modern art has historically carried the message and the outrage of the suppressed, the unrepresented, and the disenfranchised against the authoritarian tactics of governments. Art remains a means of protest and resistance based on its immediacy to communicate with the viewer on a visceral level.

In times of censorship and suppression of speech, art can rely on symbolism, iconography and metaphorical narratives to push home the underlying message. In democratic leaning societies, art can be used as a blunt instrument to shock the viewer through realistic and expressionistic content into questioning reality, personal morals or values, and views of the status quo.

Quite often the reactions to political art can range. It may provoke an immediate urge to censor, out of a sense of morality, fear or political outrage,
or it may invigorate and motivate a course of counter-action. Unfortunately, the power of art in museums and galleries is usually contained and defused by its privileged settings. At present, there is more artistic freedom in social media.

In totalitarian or Fascist takeovers of free societies, the arts and the press almost always are the first forms of expression to be suppressed and controlled, as seen in Nazi Germany or Stalin’s Soviet Union. This also can happen in liberal democracies. Examples range broadly from Daumier’s imprisonment for political cartoons by a fearful 19th century French government, to the realm of the absurd efforts by the U.S. Congress in 1990 to withhold $1.6 million from the University of the District of Columbia after it received a gift of Judy Chicago’s feminist Dinner Party, to ongoing efforts by Republican lawmakers to remove from the U.S. Capitol a high school student’s Congressional Arts Competition prize-winning painting of police violence in Ferguson. Such examples show the power images have to challenge repressive political ideology.

Like free speech, freedom of artistic expression is protected by the U.S. Constitution. But unlike free speech, much of the art consumed by the public is subject to defunding by governments and wealthy patrons. When political powers and wealthy interests oppose freedom of expression, the barriers to censorship in art, as in life, can quickly be blurred and dissolved.

Above all, art is a reflection and a forecast of the society and culture in which it was created. As in the art of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, and countless other politicized artists, art does not change political reality. But art that provokes thoughts of a political, progressive or radical nature has its dangers and virtues. All intersections of art and life are political when made public.
END NOTES

1. Smith, “Review: Art for the Planet’s Sake.”
2. Jaschik, “When Art Offends (And Isn’t Understood).”
4. Multiple versions of this statement were created by Niemöller during the late 1940s and 1950s. This text is the one shared by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in its Holocaust Encyclopedia.
5. Falls, Ordeal by Battle.
6. For more from Anthony Karen, see www.anthonykaren.com.
7. See Mahler, “The Battle of Chicago: Art: Feminist Artist Judy Chicago Fires Back at Critics who call her ‘Dinner Party’ Obscene and Withdraws her Gift of it to a University.” The painting mentioned here, Untitled #1, is by former Missouri high school student David Pulphus and it is a colorful, chaotic landscape that depicts police as uniformed pigs. First displayed in June 2016, it was removed in early January by Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-CA. Weeks later it was rehung by Rep. William Macy, D-MO, who said, while flanked by members of the Congressional Black Caucus: “This is really not about a student art competition anymore. It’s about defending the Constitution.” For more, see Davis.

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Getting Something for Nothing: Trump, Fraud, and the Tea Party

By David Bordelon

In her recent portrait of Tea Party America, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild sifts through four years of interviews with conservatives to find the answer to what she calls “the great paradox:” why people vote for politicians whose policies hurt them. She nods to Thomas Frank’s similar exploration in *What’s the Matter With Kansas*, but shifts from the polemic of that book to a more reflective tone, inspired in part by her focus on “why” instead of “what” and by her source material—over 4,000 pages of interviews.¹

Interested in deep research instead of a surface sampling, she focused on one area of the country, Louisiana, because it exemplified the paradox of a citizenry which hated the federal government yet ranked 49th “on life expectancy, school enrollment, educational degree attainment, and median personal earnings,” and last on “overall health,” all factors that an embrace of federal programs could improve.²

Hochschild sketches out the red staters’ self-portrait: a belief that they are hard-working citizens who have played by the rules and patiently waited in line for their piece of the American pie. The problem now is that the line isn’t moving forward—in fact it feels like it’s moving backward. And, by and large, that part of the self-portrait is true. Household

David Bordelon is an associate professor of English at Ocean County College in Toms River, New Jersey, where he teaches a variety of composition and literature courses. His academic scholarship focuses on 19th century American print culture. Links to his blogs on literature, higher education, and politics can be found at https://davidbordelon.wordpress.com.
incomes for the top one percent have skyrocketed since 1980. For the 99 percent it’s more of a fizzle. Where the self-portrait starts to look more Salvador Dali than Norman Rockwell is their view of what’s kept them in line for so long.

According to most Tea Partiers, the main problem is that the federal government has been giving their hard earned money to assorted welfare queens, moochers, and layabouts. Representative of this view is Lee Sherman, a staunch Tea Partier who told Hochschild that those on welfare “lazied around days and partied at night.” In other words, that they were getting something for nothing.

That’s the story these people tell themselves, and it is a story fed by constant exposure to their favorite—and in some cases only—information source, FOX News, which sends out regular doses of reports on welfare abuse designed to feed Sherman’s habit. In fact, if you’re jonesing for a hit of misdirection, they have a web page devoted to uncovering stories like “Minnesota Couple Who Lived on Yacht Accused of Welfare Fraud” and “Refugee Kids Get Food Stamps at Higher Rates than U.S. Born Kids.” This regular stream of anti-government propaganda leads Hochschild to conclude that for red staters, “at the heart of the deep story . . . is the local welfare office and the mailbox where undeserved disability checks and SNAP stamps arrive.” Key is “undeserved.” The definition for that?

Whoever isn’t you.

Exhibit A is Jackie Tabor, who tells Hochschild that her poor Irish-Catholic mother, “had to get on welfare to support us,” after being abandoned by their father. She was the deserving poor. Tabor “had worked hard. She had waited in line. She’d seen others ‘cut ahead,’ and this had galled her and estranged her from the government.” The “others”? Let’s just say they stand out in a White crowd.

In case you’re ready to dismiss this as a lost Southern cause, consider
John Gaguzis, of Ambridge, Pennsylvania, who voted for Trump because “We’ve got to get rid of the Democrats that support people that don’t want to work.” And then there’s Iowa resident Jackie Furman, who complained to a New York Times reporter that “The welfare system needs to be reorganized,” because “Chicago people’ were moving to Burlington to receive higher benefits and bringing crime.” Ignoring the race baiting of “Chicago people,” let’s focus instead on the larger myth of a system rife with corruption. Hochschild reports that “When I asked one couple what proportion of people on welfare were gaming the system” one person guessed 30 percent and another 80 percent. The facts show the opposite. SNAP (the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, better known as food stamps), the most common welfare benefit, had an error rate (which includes fraud) of 3.42 percent in 2012—and most of this was due to caseworker error.

And what about the classic image of the loafer sitting on the couch while the welfare checks roll in? Hochschild notes that in 2011, for the bottom 20 percent, welfare accounted for 37 percent of their income. The remaining 63 percent? Work. That means that a majority of people receiving government assistance are already working—just at a job which doesn’t supply a living wage. What about the big one—that so much of our tax dollars are “wasted” on welfare? Again, Hochschild comes to the rescue, showing that income-needs based benefits accounted for eight percent of the 2014 budget. Health care? 26 percent. Defense? 22 percent. Pensions? 24 percent.

The problem here is that while the Tea Partiers readily recognize personal welfare, they miss the elephant in the room: corporate welfare. In 2013, it’s estimated that Americans paid $6,000 each in “taxes” that went, not to the government, but to corporations in the form of grants and subsidies, according to a statistic from a Cato Institute fellow—a libertarian organization that’s not exactly a friend of big government.
Then there’s the orange elephant, Trump. At every turn he has cheated his way to the head of the line. In fact, Trump’s net worth is based in no small part on bankruptcy laws, the most unequal form of welfare that favors the wealthy. This inequality can be illustrated by two scenarios.

Consider a college student who works hard, does well at school, graduates with student debt, but has trouble finding a job. Can he shrug his shoulders, say “sorry” to the banks, and walk away from his financial obligations, leaving all the people touched by that debt in the lurch?

Of course not, that would be unfair—and illegal. He has to work it off until it is paid, even if it means garnishing his Social Security.

Now consider a wealthy real estate developer who overpays for a property, lacks a clear business plan, and thus ends up $916 million in the hole. Can he shrug his shoulders, say “sorry” to the banks and walk away from his financial obligations leaving all the people touched by that debt in the lurch?

Of course. He can even become president.

While Trump shrugs off bankruptcies as “us[ing] the laws of this country,” he ignores the harmful ripple effect such practices have when contracts are ignored and small businesses end up with pennies on the dollar. But his shabby treatment of people extends beyond the pages of Chapter 11 rulings; this man of the people just flat-out stiffs workers and small business owners—the same people that form the backbone of the Tea Party. People like Philadelphia cabinet maker Edward Friel Jr., whose small business went bankrupt after Trump refused payment. Other workers? Dishwashers, bartenders, glass workers, carpenters. . . name the profession and you’ll find a representative stiffed by Trump. USA Today found more than 3,500 lawsuits against Trump for failure to compensate for completed work.

And what about the red state outrage over fraud? Two words: Trump University. Trump agreed to pay $25 million in November 2016 to settle
class action lawsuits from one of his many failed business ventures, which again preyed on the very people waiting in line for the American Dream. Where’s the red state outrage over that? Where’s the calls to lock him up? Instead the “mad as hell” line at his rallies—“Everybody is ripping us off”—was a cheer machine. Unfortunately, his adoring crowds never realized that the “everybody” engaged in fraud included himself.
These examples all lead to my paradox. How could people like Lee Sherman, Jackie Tabor, John Gaguzis, and Jackie Furman, who hate moochers and cheaters, elect Trump—the king of getting something for nothing? How, for instance, could Jackie Tabor, who believed Jesus was the sole provider of her good fortune, ignore her own reliance on the federal government she felt so estranged from? It was the feds who provided funding for the loans and grants, to the tune of $76 billion (about three times the state’s annual budget), that enabled Louisiana to rebuild after Katrina. This, in turn, helped finance the construction which her contractor husband turned into a tidy profit that lifted her family to comfortable upper middle-class existence. It is clear that Tea Party Louisiana welcomed tax dollars from liberal America. This conforms with the long established finding that blue states redistribute more of their federal taxes to red states . . . the very states which profess a hatred of all things federal and all things taxes.

Like the majority of Americans who voted to keep Trump out of office, I’m left confused by the Tea Party’s inability to recognize fraud in the orange-tinted flesh.

END NOTES
2. Ibid. p. 9.
4. Hochschild, op cit., p. 35.
5. See Fox News Insider, “Minnesota Couple Who Lived on Yacht Accused of Welfare Fraud” and “Report: Refugee Children Get Food Stamps at Higher Rate Than U.S.-Born Kids.”


7. Gabriel, “A Pennsylvania Town in Decline and Despair Looks to Donald Trump.”

8. Gabriel, “In Iowa, Trump Voters Are Unfazed by Controversies.”


10. Kertscher, “On Average, 20 to 25 cents of Every $1 Spent on Four Government Assistance Programs is Lost to Fraud, Sen. Ron Johnson says.”


14. Lobosco, “When Unpaid Student Debt Leads to a Smaller Social Security Check.”

15. Barstow et al., “Donald Trump Tax Records Show He Could Have Avoided Taxes for Nearly Two Decades, the Times Found.”


18. Ibid.


22. Albert, “$120 Billion in Katrina Federal Relief Wasn’t Always Assured.”


24. Leonhardt, “Clinton’s Substantial Popular-Vote Win.”

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Capital and Labor in the 21st Century: The End of History

By Peter Rachleff

Editor’s note: The following is an excerpt of From Against Labor: How U.S. Employers Organized to Defeat Union Activism, edited by Rosemary Feurer and Chad Pearson. Copyright 2017 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press.

Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the contours of neoliberalism took shape, as individual corporations implemented new strategies seeking to shift the frontier of control in their favor and increase their profits. Their actions began to shape the political and economic practices of both major political parties, and the orientation of capitalists as a class towards their workers and their workers’ unions. This included free trade; deregulation; privatization; a new central-ity of financial instruments and transactions; the commodification of services and goods which had formerly been available on the basis of citizenship or community membership; the combination of privatization and commodification to facilitate a new round of capital accumulation; the reduction of labor costs, including benefits; the reduction of the social wage and the provision of services. Not surprisingly, the pursuit of these practices challenged unions, undercut workers’ economic status and security, and fueled inequality.¹

Peter Rachleff is the founding co-executive director of the East Side Freedom Library in St. Paul, Minnesota. Previously, he taught labor, African American, and immigration history for more than 30 years, primarily at Macalester College and Metropolitan State University. His publications include Black Labor in Richmond, 1865-1890 and Hard-Pressed in the Heartland: The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement.
Over these two decades, these shifts in corporate strategy, with the assistance of the state, turned the unionized segment of the private sector workforce into a shrinking island within the workforce as a whole. This journey was marked by dramatic yard posts: IBP, Hormel, the Detroit newspapers, BE&K, International Paper, the Chicago Tribune, Staley, Caterpillar. Each signaled a further shift in the frontier of control, a further weakening of union power, a further decline in working class economic security and living standards.

After three decades of regaining their power in their relationships with private sector workers and their unions, capitalists turned their attention to public employees. And, as they gained ground in the public sector and shifted the frontier of control in their favor, they renewed their attack on private sector unions, even dusting off the shibboleth of right-to-work laws. Neoliberalism’s displacement of Keynesianism and the “social contract,” secured by the late 1980s, had shifted the political and ideological terrain to the right by the birth of the 21st century. This shift had sunken such deep roots that not only had both political parties accommodated to neoliberalism’s principles, but that the crisis of 2007–2008 did not shake their hegemony. Calls for a “new New Deal” found little echo, especially in Washington, D.C., and in state houses across the country, even as the country elected its first African American president. Grassroots protests—the Madison Uprising, Occupy Wall Street, the anti-eviction movement, and, later, Black Lives Matter—show that ideological hegemony has not yet been completely secured, but electoral politics have remained the playground of the capitalists, from the Koch Brothers’ American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) to the corporate donors given a free hand by the Citizens United Supreme Court decision.

The Republican Party at the state level has been the primary implementer of the capitalists’ strategy to shift the frontier of control from the shop floor to the White House.
class terms, from the shop floor to the White House. They now control a majority of state legislatures and governors’ chairs. The remaining power of unions in both the private and public sectors is squarely in their cross-hairs. Where 30 percent of the private sector workforce was once unionized, barely seven percent hold union cards today. With this decline in density has come a decline in economic power, from the workplace to the bargaining table, and a similar decline in political influence, even among labor’s former “allies” in the Democratic Party. More than a century ago, Samuel Gompers laid out a political strategy for organized labor: “Punish our enemies and reward our friends.” At present, not only is it difficult to identify “friends,” but labor seems to have little clout with which to punish “enemies.”

The capitalists’ offensive has unfolded on a state-by-state basis, even though organized at a national level, a reminder that capitalists and their political allies still take the local and the national as well as the global context of their power seriously. Wisconsin’s Governor Scott Walker led the way in January 2011, when he introduced his “budget repair” bill, stripping public employee unions of the right to collective bargaining over wages and benefits, requiring them to collect dues member-by-member, and ordering them to hold an annual election to renew their diminished legal status. In Indiana, Governor Mitch Daniels, who had used his executive powers in 2005 to take away collective bargaining rights for public employees, called for bills to cut teachers’ wages and benefits even further. In Ohio, John Kasich, whose resume includes stints in the U.S. House of Representatives and as a Fox News broadcaster, promised to “break the back of labor unions in the public schools” and introduced Bill SB 5, which took collective bargaining rights away from teachers, firefighters, and other public employees, proscribed strikes, and gave state bureaucrats the right to
mandate terms of employment. The Michigan legislature handed new Governor Rick Snyder the power to declare any municipality in default and appoint a fiscal receiver, who could nullify union contracts, cut wages and benefits, and contract out work.

Measures of all sorts—to require unions to gain members’ permission to spend dues money on political activities, to eliminate automatic dues collection or agency fees, to deny college professors at public universities and colleges the right to unionize, to hamstring home healthcare and day care workers seeking to organize—were introduced, trumpeted, and, in some cases, passed. In California and New York, Democratic Governors Jerry Brown and Andrew Cuomo, who had been elected with the support of organized labor, announced their intent to cut state employees’ wages, benefits, and numbers. In Maine, Governor Paul LePage, elected with 37 percent of the vote in a three-way race in November 2010, introduced bills to strip public employees of their collective bargaining rights and to make the state a “right-to-work” state. In what became a national cause celebre for artists as well as trade unionists, LePage ordered a labor history mural on the walls of the State Department of Labor taken down. Midway through 2011, the National Conference of State Legislatures announced that it was tracking 744 bills that targeted public sector unions.

While these attacks have drawn sustenance from the macroeconomy’s shift to neoliberalism, they have deep historical roots. Historians of labor law and the labor movement, including contributors to this volume, have demonstrated that as soon as the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the National Labor Relations Act in 1937, corporate interests and their political representatives went to work to limit the rights this law extended to workers and unions. They pressured executive branch agencies to restrain their enforcement efforts, filed suits in courts to block specific union campaigns, promoted antiunion images in media and popular culture, negoti-
ated contracts which limited the terrain for union voice and inscribed management rights, and lobbied for state and federal legislation that might limit the impact of the NLRA. They were able to tap into deep values and assumptions in American labor law, prioritizing management’s right to manage and the continuity of production as being in the public interest. Organized by the National Association of Manufacturers, the Chamber of Commerce, various state Employers’ Associations, and, of course, in some states and cities, the Republican Party, these corporate interests sought the introduction of mandatory cooling off periods and mediations, fact-finding boards, prohibitions on industry-wide bargaining, limits on the right to strike, boycott, and picket, and the proscription of “unfair labor practices” on the part of workers and unions.³

Many of these employers’ goals would be incorporated into the Taft-Hartley Act, itself a series of critical amendments to the 1935 NLRA, passed by Congress over President Truman’s veto in 1947. This was the first step by capitalists, after the labor upsurge of the late 1930s and World War II, to pull the frontier of control back in their favor. The new law empowered the president to intervene in a strike and order a cooling-off period. It redefined an “employee” who could seek union representation so as to exclude independent contractors, foremen, and supervisors, while management was redefined as “any person acting as an agent of any employer” rather than “any person acting in the interest of an employer,” thereby excluding the Chamber of Commerce, vigilante groups, and other voluntary organizations from the purview of the act. Employers’ speeches to workers on company time were granted protection as “free speech.” Taft-Hartley prohibited sympathy strikes and secondary boycotts, the two major expressions of solidarity within the labor movement. It required union officers to sign an affidavit that they did not belong to the Communist Party or any organization which advocated the

They were able to tap into values and assumptions in American labor law, prioritizing management’s right to manage and the continuity of production as being in the public interest.
overthrow of the government “by force or violence.” It also bureaucratically separated the NLRB’s General Counsel from its politically divided board, making him/her directly accountable to the sitting president and his labor agenda. In its Section 14(b) the law banned closed shops and allowed state governments to pass laws which would weaken “union security.” Misleadingly called “right-to-work” by their advocates, these laws protected the rights of individual workers to refuse to join a union and pay dues, even in a unionized facility with a collectively bargained contract.\(^4\)

The “right-to-work” component of Taft Hartley was central to the ideological battle that would be waged over workers’ rights and unionism. Most of the discourse in support of Section 14(b) revolved around the advocacy of “voluntary” unionism in contrast to “compulsory” unionism. While many employers were on record as proponents of the law, ministers, academics, journalists, and politicians were its most visible advocates. They urged states to protect the rights of individual workers who, “out of conscience,” did not wish to join unions. Twelve states, mostly in the South, passed laws in short order, and within a decade (at the height of the McCarthy period) they were joined by another seven. Only a handful of states (there is a total of twenty-two now) would be added to their ranks in the half century since. The “right-to-work” states—Southern, Southwestern, and Midwestern—share important characteristics beyond geography. Agriculture is a significant share of their economy, manufacturing a minor share. Their working class, in the 1940s and 1950s, included a large disenfranchised segment. Their popular and political cultures featured generally conservative views on race, class, gender, and the role of government. This discourse about the rights of individual workers quickly became interwoven with narratives of “labor monopoly,” “labor trust,” and “Big Labor.”\(^5\)

For the first two decades after Taft-Hartley’s passage, not only were corporate interests in “right-to-work” states well-served by the mobiliza-
tion of this ideological dimension of Section 14(b) to delegitimize unions, but the creation of these zones pressured workers in other states to hold down their demands under threat of corporate relocation. The location of these “right-to-work” states underpinned a regional focus in federal government defense and highway spending that encouraged a population shift (and consequent shift in political power) to the “sunbelt.” “Right-to-work” laws weakened existing unions and helped to suppress the level of unionization in the states which adopted its principles. Workers were screened for pro-union sentiments and experiences at hiring, while existing unions had more difficulty collecting dues and thereby sustaining themselves. The results have not been insignificant. A recent study notes that unionization rates in “right-to-work” states are 7.6 percent in contrast to 18.6 percent in non-“right-to-work” states, while all forms of compensation—wages, employer-sponsored health insurance and pensions—are markedly lower in “right-to-work” states. An October 2011 article on Bloomberg.com provides data suggesting that while “right-to-work” might lure jobs to particular states, these jobs have had a downward pressure on wages, thereby exacerbating poverty.

Corporate behavior in “right-to-work” states in the 1950s and 1960s has provided a template for capitalists’ standard operating procedures in the 21st century. Corporate behavior in “right-to-work” states in the 1950s and 1960s has provided a template for capitalists’ standard operating procedures nationwide in the 21st century. Employers mobilized the image of “compulsory” unionism in order to undermine many union activities. When employers were confronted by a strike, they went to court to challenge picketing as “coercive.” They supported nonunion employees in law suits against union pressures. They went into courts to challenge unions’ quest for recognition as “exclusive” representatives of workers, which led them to delay, defer, and undermine collective bargaining itself.

In the aftermath of the labor upsurge of the late 1930s and World War II era, years of strategic networking, institution-building, and mes-
sage shaping work has moved conservative ideological arguments to the center of U.S. society. Funding think tanks and academic programs, buying media outlets, and carefully cultivating state legislators has paid off. Ideas which were once dismissed as “fringe”—that individuals can provide fully for their own retirement, that individual workers can negotiate their own employment bargains with corporate employers, that markets fairly allocate such resources as healthcare and education—have met the new world order of neoliberalism and taken root; despite the Great Recession of 2008, this ideology has remained entrenched. The neoliberal agenda of free markets, deregulation, privatization, anti-unionism, shredding the safety net, and eliminating government services has deep roots and new legitimacy, currency, and power.

As the essays in this volume have demonstrated, the capitalists have had to work hard to accomplish this ideological triumph, because their agenda has often been resisted, sometimes successfully, by workers and their unions. Identifying this resistance is an important contribution of this book; it is an important element of the present scene, and it could well shape the future. “Right-to-work” did not spread beyond its initial beachhead because of the resistance it faced. In 1955, at the height of McCarthyism, RTW measures were on the ballot in six states. It passed only in one, Kansas. In 1958, when conservative forces pushed RTW in Ohio, thousands of rank-and-file workers distributed literature, organized debates, voted contributions to the labor coalition leading the “anti” campaign. They reached out to the unemployed, who were being appealed to by the “pro” forces. They went to farmers and explained how agricultural income is dependent on the standard of living won by organized labor and they went to African Americans and explained that the same forces promoting “right-to-work” were opposing fair employment practices. The final vote against “right-to-work” was 2,007,291 to 1,080,266.

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In Missouri in 1978, early polls gave pro-RTW forces a 2-to-1 majority, and the mainstream labor leadership seemed resigned to their fate. But activists launched a member-oriented campaign which depended on small donations raised at meetings at which rank-and-file workers learned about what was at stake and were encouraged to become registered voters. Activists used phone banks and direct mail to pressure the media to tell their side of the story. They organized public debates in which rank-and-file workers presented the “labor” position. They also built a coalition, the United Labor Committee, which linked activists from non-AFL-CIO unions like the UAW, Mine Workers, and the Teamsters with those whose unions were affiliated. The ULC also reached out to farmers, arguing, as in Ohio twenty years earlier, that farmers’ prosperity depended on workers’ purchasing power. In November the “no” vote took 60 percent while the 1.6 million ballots cast set an off-year election record. Not only did they defeat RTW, noted activist Jerry Tucker, who chaired the United Labor Committee, but “new member organizing spiked upward for several years afterward.”

We have also seen impressive resistance to the capitalist agenda from public sector workers and unions. The public sector—now more than 26 percent organized around the country—has always manifested key elements of a “right-to-work” environment, from the right of workers to pay “agency fees” rather than full dues to significant restrictions on the right to strike, even after many states granted collective bargaining rights to public employees. Public employees—teachers, social workers, firefighters, etc.—have been able to organize, win a voice in the workplace as well as improved wages and benefits, and have been able to maintain their organizations. When Governor Walker’s law passed the Wisconsin legislature, the faculty at
seven branch campuses of the University of Wisconsin system voted, campus by campus, in favor of union representation! In the summer of 2012, 44,000 Transportation Security Administration workers, scattered at airports all across the country, voted overwhelmingly to unionize. Public employees can teach private sector workers that RTW need not spell the end of their ability to organize themselves and act collectively.

Early in the unfolding of the Wisconsin struggle, Fox News crowed: “Wisconsin Union Battle Could Set Stage for National ‘Right-to-Work’ Debate.” The upheaval in Madison suggests the kind of broad-based, creative, democratic movement that can be mobilized when conservative forces and corporate interests set about taking away workers’ rights. Tens of thousands of protesters from across the state and across the country came to the state capitol, experienced the power of solidarity, and challenged the power and agenda of the advocates of neoliberalism, those who would cut services, cut wages and benefits, weaken public institutions (“the commons”), and push workers into a “race to the bottom.” While it was public employees who were in the neoliberals’ crosshairs, private sector union members, nonunion workers, retirees, students, welfare recipients, immigrant rights activists, peace and justice activists, and thousands more rallied to the cause.

Similar coalitions came together in Ohio and Michigan in response to antiunion attacks, while elements of such coalitions appeared in many states on April 4, 2011, when state AFL-CIO leaderships, the Communication Workers of America (which includes both private and public sector workers among its members), and the NAACP called for marches to mark the anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, assassinated while supporting a public sector workers’ strike in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968. Labor Notes magazine has sponsored a series of well-attended “Troublemakers’ Schools” from New York and Los
Angeles to Chicago, Minnesota, and beyond. Verizon strikers in the summer of 2011 were greeted with public support which surprised even their union leadership, while longshoremen in the Pacific Northwest galvanized public attention with dramatic direct actions against the contracting out of union work. The NAACP’s “Moral Mondays” campaign, which began in North Carolina and has spread from Georgia to Wisconsin, has linked civil rights with labor rights, interjected nonviolent civil disobedience tactics, and infused a new energy into the movements against the capitalist agenda.

Far from taking lightly Republican threats to push “right-to-work,” or being demoralized by Democratic willingness to countenance and accommodate other limitations on workers’ rights to organize and bargain collectively, labor activists in the second decade of the 21st century might well find fighting these challenges provides a rallying cry for a broad-based campaign around a rights discourse, a discourse that resonates with a wide audience of working and middle class women and men who are struggling not only to understand the causes of the Great Recession and find their way out of it, but also to root out deeper inequities along racial, gender, national, and class lines, inequities which have shaped the American experience since its origins. From the shop floor to the modern office, from the grievance hearing to the bargaining table, from knocking on doors to circulating petitions, and from Black Lives Matter to $15 NOW, working people continue to confront the values and practices which have informed the antiunion cause in the United States.

ENDNOTES

1. Noble, Force of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation.


8. To purchase From Against Labor: How U.S. Employers Organized to Defeat Union Activism, see http://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/catalog/86xx9kn9780252040818.html.

9. An email message from Jerry Gordon to David Riehle on January 19, 2011, in the author’s possession, which describes the Ohio campaign against Right to Work.


WORKS CITED


Reviews

What Really Matters

They Can’t Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America’s Racial Justice Movement

by Wesley Lowery

LITTLE BROWN & CO., 2016

Reviewed by Dave Iasevoli

Wesley Lowery, a Washington Post reporter, has transformed his Pulitzer-Prize-winning coverage of Ferguson, Baltimore, and Cleveland into an engrossing narrative that can serve us all well as a historical reference through our nation’s next chapters of violence and civil disobedience. Lowery reveals his hand immediately as an entrenched reporter in the Black Lives Matter movement. He calls for further mobilization in a journalistic voice that manages to sound impassioned yet fair-minded.

Even though we “all know the story” of Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, and too many others, we tend to blur together the details of their deaths. Lowery does not proceed in a linear fashion to “set the record straight” so much as to build a case for a new incarnation of the half-century-old Civil Rights movement—one whose leaders do not step out from behind pulpits, but from blogs and tweets and posts. His book begins with his arrest in Ferguson, for not complying with orders to vacate a McDonald’s quickly enough. This happened immediately after the horrible details surrounding the shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager, began to unfold.

The book’s real point of origin, however, is Obama’s election in 2008.

Dave Iasevoli, Ed.D., is an associate professor with SUNY Plattsburgh, and runs its M.S.Ed. Program in Teaching & Learning. His current research delves into matters of so-called “diversity” and integration. He is also a published poet and writes about the Adirondacks.
Lowery notes “the headlines of the Obama years often seemed [to be] a yearbook of black death” (15). The possibility of a “post-racial” era for our United States quickly transformed into a tease, then a myth, and finally, a lie, with a growing roster of Black deaths at the hands of police and others: unarmed Oscar Grant, shot by an Oakland transit officer on New Year’s Day 2009, and then, in 2012, the unarmed Trayvon Martin, shot by neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman as the former talked on his cellphone to his girlfriend. These two notable deaths polarized our nation into protest camps vs. supporters of “law and order.”

Even though many U.S. citizens are at least dimly aware of the statistic, “one unarmed black person [is] shot and killed by police every ten days,” the death of Brown in Ferguson served as the catalyst for both the creation of Black Lives Matter and the even greater rallying cry, “the fire next time”—as James Baldwin prophesied (16). Lowery writes with care in disentangling critical aspects of the Ferguson situation, such as the falsehood that Brown shouted “Hands up, don’t shoot!” He connects the current waves of protest and riot with those of the past century, and notes that “… of the more than 100 such race riots since 1935, almost all have been sparked by some type of police incident” (29). We expect police officers to serve and protect our lives and homes, and, further, many of our citizens share the fundamental understanding that, on occasion, the police officer’s discharge of this duty demands deadly force. Yet we also expect that the police need to be held accountable for the murder of an individual who poses no immediate threat to the former’s life.

Lowery adds to the growing literature about Black Lives Matter with brief, incisive portraits of the leaders who created, named, and emerged from this movement. His interviews with Alicia Garza and DeRay Mckesson show this reporter’s avocation for fair, unbiased description. For example, Lowery extols Mckesson’s passion and diligence, while also identifying his more egocentric behaviors. But the book’s true revelation may be the importance of Twitter and Instagram in journalism today. (This aspect of the book is especially relevant in light of our new Commander-in-Tweet’s dependence upon his often-incendiary hashtags to communicate.) Lowery constantly refers to the ubiquity of hashtags devoted to a social cause (e.g. #ferguson—“tweeted more than 27 million times”) (90), the number of followers behind select tweeters (“DeRay
[Mckesson] had amassed tens of thousands of followers on Twitter” (103), and the status of certain leaders’ messages (“I’m one of the big tweeters here”) (150). What results is the paradox of the book itself: *They Can’t Kill Us All* is sustained testimony that may survive as a document of record—in the face of social media’s ephemera.

Lowery inserts numbers—typically death tolls—with a quiet precision: 10,000 police killings over the course of a decade resulted in only 54 officers charged with a crime, with most of the latter exonerated. But the author’s goal is not to indict police departments; rather, he collates his reports here so that the reader can re-visit and re-consider—without the clamor of media hysteria—the most significant events in the context of a nation whose racial currents constantly re-form:

For most of the year after Michael Brown’s death, my reporting focused on policing policy—tactics, best practices, and reform—with race serving as an ever-present subplot. My goal was and is to pull back the veil over a profession that had become among the least accessible and least transparent corners of government (190).

What do police officers make of the past few years’ unrest and protest and even riots headed by Black Lives Matter? Lowery does not have much to offer in this respect. His hundreds of interviews include the voices of attorneys, as well as activists and the families of those killed, but not the police. If we ignore the trumpeted headlines to listen for unmediated opinions from police forces, we are likely to hear only The Blue Wall of Silence. In my educational institution, a public university in upstate, rural New York, where I teach a diversity course to prospective teachers, several students have averred that “Blue Lives Matter” in the context of our discussions of race and resistance to oppression today. And back in my original Brooklyn neighborhood, I just recently noticed the bizarre take on the American flag that has become a banner for police support: it is colored black, white, and blue, with 50 white stars on a black field. As the bluelivesmatter.blue website describes the flag:

> When you display a thin blue line flag in front of your house, you’re making a statement that Blue Lives Matter, and you support law enforcement.
You are sending a message that you believe in personal accountability and that you won’t stand silent as criminals victimize our communities. On this flag, one black bar below represents the criminal element in society. One black bar above represents the innocent citizens. What stands in the middle is a thin blue line of committed Police.

Lowery’s book closes with the attacks of retribution against police—in Dallas and Baton Rouge—and he takes pains to describe the nation’s anger and confusion, especially within the law-enforcement community. Many blamed the rhetoric, tactics, and physical protests of Black Lives Matter for these attacks. Some of the students I teach, and many of my current neighbors in Upstate New York, ascribe the deaths of police to Black activists. In They Can’t Kill Us All, the author connects the current opponents of Black protest to historical episodes in the Civil Rights movement, such as when the FBI blamed Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., for the riots of the ‘60s (226). But again, Lowery does not provide insight into the reactions of middle- and working-class Whites. Finally, Lowery leaves us thinking about the imminent “transfer of power” from Obama to his successor—still unknown at the time of this book’s publication—and the pressing need for continued activism in the face of un-checked authority.
“#YesAllWomen”: Countering Everyday Sexism in Academe

Gender Shrapnel in the Academic Workplace
by Ellen Mayock
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2016

REVIEWED BY SHARON ELISE

Despite centuries long protests, we still lack common agreement on the centrality of women’s oppression and the systemic nature of sexism. Misogynist messages by the perpetrator of the 2014 Isla Vista killings generated a public discussion of whether all men are sexist (#NotAllMen) and a counter protest on and off social media (#YesAllWomen) that expressed the idea that all women experience misogyny in myriad forms. In her new publication—Gender Shrapnel in the Academic Workplace—Ellen Mayock tells us that any time one woman in the academic workplace experiences sexism, all women are impacted, as they share a position as members of the same class. This is what she calls “gender shrapnel” in academic environments, “a series of small explosions

Sharon Elise is professor of sociology at California State University San Marcos, where she has served as department chair since 2012. She also is the Affirmative Action Council representative to the California Faculty Association (CFA) Board of Directors and co-chair of the CFA African American Caucus. Her teaching and research center on her interests in critical race studies, Black Studies, Black feminism, Intersectionality, women of color and sociopoetics.
in the workplace that affect women and men and reveal an uneven gender dynamic at all levels of the organization” (6).

Mayock suggests that stories can tell us about how gender shrapnel at work is manifest. These stories can be gathered through interviews but they are also embedded in our mission statements, brochures, and student newspapers. Our “talk” in all its forms tells stories as well. If we look critically, they reveal prevailing gender attitudes, practices, and ideologies that privilege men. These stories can also help us create transformational knowledge from the margins of society. Knowledge from spaces outside of power and privilege reveals the practices that create and maintain subordination and marginalization, indeed, oppression. Mayock situates women’s stories of their experiences as academics in the context of data that reveal the impact of gender shrapnel. She is critical of how laws created to protect us from sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination are invoked in academe. Along the way she makes suggestions for further study, teaching, and strategies to counter gender shrapnel.

As a White woman, Mayock writes from a particular position in academe and in society. She is a humanities professor in a private university that has a tradition of male dominance in power, position, and number. Her experience working in the humanities and with women’s studies, serving on campus committees and task forces, and working with administration also frame this work. The problems she enumerates through a series of stories supported with data from contemporary research and reference to anti-discrimination laws are shaped by this context.

The guiding principle of Mayock’s feminist treatise argues that a critical gender consciousness must frame how we look at academic workplace practices and culture, and the strategies we undertake to make progressive changes. She says sexual harassment, which she views as a form of male violence against women, is minimalized in our talk, referencing the recent national election when we heard that descriptions of sexual harassment were just “locker room talk” and should not be seen as harmful or misogynist. Central to her examination are the stories of women’s everyday experiences in the academic workplace, including her own.

Although all women experience gender shrapnel, experiences vary, as do their views of these. As Mayock’s own narrative shows, women are not automatically imbued with a critical feminist reflexivity despite
their experiences. And though gendered values and practices prevail, the silence on these is deafening. Consider Mayock’s work a response to that silence and to acts of silence-ing. Like the #YesAllWomen campaign, her work insists we recognize the prevalence of sexism and the harm it causes, intentional or not.

Gender Shrapnel is Mayock’s response to what she sees as a “professional mystique” that is akin to the “feminine mystique” dubbed by Betty Friedan. This is another “problem with no name”—a deep silence that obscures the dissatisfaction marginalized academics experience at work and the systems that produce their dissatisfaction with their roles and treatment. Mayock cautions us to consider that gender shrapnel is not the only thing exploding on campus. She advocates, but does not fully develop, an intersectional perspective that sees gender shrapnel as one form of the “intersectional explosions” impacting us in particular ways due to our gender, race, and sexual orientation, among others. A central problem in recognizing gender shrapnel, and other forms of shrapnel, lies in our tendency to cast any form of discrimination only in overt, individualist terms. We have yet to establish a practice of attending to the systemic forms of discrimination and oppression embedded in our daily interactions and practices, as well as the cultural values that maintain these.

STORIES BACKED BY DATA

While some may dismiss Mayock’s stories as mere anecdotes, the data she presents demonstrates the prevalence of misogyny and sexism on college campuses. Given that, the stories that illustrate different forms of gender shrapnel should help readers understand how these phenomena are produced, experienced, and contested. Mayock’s concept of gender shrapnel incorporates the idea that gender micro-aggressions—everyday insults and denigrations based on group membership, like racial micro-aggressions—are part of our everyday life. The notion of these as little explosions that wound all members who share membership in that gender (and race and sexual orientation) class is a compelling and useful metaphor that links individual experiences of discrimination and abuse to wider systems of sexism, racism, and heterosexism.

So, what are some examples of gender shrapnel at work? Individual stories and data illustrate how women advance more slowly than men,
enjoy lower salaries than their male counterparts, have their scholarly contributions ignored or minimalized as is the scholarship that focuses on gender and women in society, and confront the persistent stereotypic notions of women as nurturers and less-than-men, not to mention sexualization and sexual harassment. Women are also encouraged to be compliant rather than complaining by a system of rewards and sanctions that privileges men. “Hard workers” are those who are visibly still on campus after 5 pm—not those who have to rush to pick up children from school and daycare. Space is gendered: women’s bodies shouldn’t take up a lot of space, nor should their voices, but men’s voices can be prevalent and loud and authoritative. Positions of power are masculinized and made apparent by the greater import, space, and time accorded to those—mostly men—at the top. A practice of what she calls “academic ventriloquism,” where some voices are ignored and others (apparently) speak for them, keeps those voices marginalized. Even if all women don’t have all these experiences, the concept of gender shrapnel suggests all women are negatively impacted.

Limited choices are available for academics marginalized by their gender, race, sexuality, nationality and other dimensions of inequality to contest bad treatment without risking further abuse, Mayock shows. Many faculty prefer to “turn a blind eye” to the micro-infractions in our everyday work lives. It is easier to ignore maltreatment, than to risk identification with those marginalized, even for those who share that group membership. Legal protections don’t do what they were purportedly designed to do, as Title VII and Title IX are not firmly reinforced in a climate framed by “risk management” policies designed to protect the institution first and foremost. This is why some women experience a “feminist fuse” when the accumulation of shrapnel makes them go off!

Mayock devotes attention to sexual harassment, an extreme form of gendered violence against women that cycles unabated through all levels of campus life. Because men still occupy most of the managerial positions and women are prevalent in temporary, part time academic assignments, their marginalization impacts the attention, import, and protection afforded to women victims of sexual harassment. Those who are victims of harassment often don’t report it. If and when they do, further victimization is common in a climate of silence. When sexual harassment is covert
(one on one), it is hushed up and a shame-game targets victims. The more prevalent form of sexual harassment, that which creates a hostile work environment for all women, is not uncovered because of the widespread refusal to see sexism as prevalent and systemic. This is why Mayock argues that we should see “talk as action” and silence as an expression of fear. If this is so, then it follows that campus culture is one laced with fear.

PRIVILEGE RUNS DEEP

Mayock relays signs of the privilege White men gain from campus cultures steeped in sexism and racism. Some men are privileged over other men because of their sexuality, marital status, and race. Married men earn more than single men, men earn more than women, and there is still a bias seen in the expectation for women to be nurturing while they are punished for their family responsibilities and associated obligations. Mayock argues that White women still confront a glass ceiling that prevents their promotion to top positions, White men ride a glass escalator of opportunity, and women of color face a concrete wall.

To deepen our understanding of gender shrapnel—this “series of small explosions”—we need to ask who sets off these “explosions.” In the cases advanced by Mayock, individual men and institutional policy and practice are the culprits, but so are the compliant members of our institutions who, by turning a blind eye or acting as silent witness, or even as practitioners of “academic ventriloquism,” contribute more shrapnel to our wounded selves. If women as a class are wounded, then White men as a class are privileged by the onslaught, even if only by its absence in their work experience. If we understand wounding and being wounded as two aspects of our collective dehumanization, it follows that we are all damaged by our participation in such a system. We all should be invested in making change.

Mayock’s social and academic position at a particular kind of academic setting should suggest that we read her work as an invitation to turn the same critical lens on our academic settings and use our own positionalities—our particular group memberships and work situations—to consider different experiences of shrapnel—as bombers and victims, as those who contest and those who stay silent.

As a Black woman professor, I am a member of an underrepresented
group at a comprehensive public university where women faculty and students of color are a majority. How do my experiences as a woman from a racialized group with only token (3 percent) representation on the campus compare to those of women faculty from groups with greater representation, such as Latinos at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (with more than 25 percent)? We need to examine how gender shrapnel is interwoven with racial shrapnel, as well as understand how this varies for sexual minorities.

A recent report, “Equity Interrupted”¹, from my union, the California Faculty Association, notes that as the California State University (CSU) system has grown darker, funding has grown lighter. The transition from a predominantly White student body to one that is “majority minority” has been accompanied by diminished per capita funding for student education in the CSU—the largest public system of higher education. At the same time, the number of “temporary” faculty has mushroomed to become the majority of faculty positions. It is of no surprise that the majority of them are women. The accumulation of gender shrapnel is becoming a common experience of faculty life in a profession that is increasingly feminized and temporized, and deserving of our concern and attention.

We also need to give as much attention to the “concrete wall” (as opposed to “glass ceiling”) that Mayock says confronts those women faculty who are racialized, as the gender shrapnel they experience is shaped by hegemonic perceptions of their failure to conform to White, heteronormative prescriptions for gender performance. While Mayock presents a spate of examples, stories, and data to show how gender shrapnel operates in everyday interactions, established institutional culture and policy, in a climate of silence and suppression of righteous anger and indignation, in the prevalence of sexual harassment and the perpetuation of stereotypes that tell us how to perform gender, there are more stories to be told.

How are these experiences different for women of color who often view their reality through the prism of race, one further specified by our historically and culturally contingent racial/ethnic group membership? What are the particular experiences of lesbian and transgender women? Given the compelling argument Mayock makes for the widespread harm to women as a class, do solutions like adopting a “tempered” form of radicalism and satisfying ourselves with “small wins” appeal to those who
dwell deep within the margins? Most problematic, when those marginal voices are squelched so effectively by the “blind eye” and “academic ventriloquist” responses, when power resides outside the margins, how do we mount forms of resistance that will lead to transformation in our institutions?

THE PACE OF CHANGE

Academic change is slow when it is cultivated through organizational channels. The solutions that Mayock presents are important step-by-step means for changing ourselves and our practices, but these require buy-in from both administration and faculty, and face obstacles in a climate of silence and fear. When, however, we move outside the established channels and cultivate change through social protest and collective struggle, change can be swift and dramatic! We are witness, in recent days, to the power of collective protest. Feminists across all social groups responded to the election of a candidate who boasted of sexual conquests with a #PussyGrabsBack campaign that led to a Women’s March on Washington and has galvanized the nation back to movement time.

The most activist elements of our campuses are not to be found in the administration, though periodically visionaries are hired and may make progress toward change. Nor are they to be found among the faculty when formal and informal rewards accompany conformity, and formal and informal sanctions follow complaint and protest. Radical change that boldly names and takes action against systems of oppression built into the fabric of academic institutions has always come first from students, those most vulnerable to all the forms of shrapnel that may be exploding around and into them. Change by committee and task force, by new academic policies and workshops, is unlikely to be the panacea that will stem the onslaught of gender shrapnel.

Mayock’s treatise on gender shrapnel should not be criticized as failing to serve up the end-all and be-all on sexism in academe. It should be heralded, however, as a good starting point for us to explore the metaphor by gauging the forms and extent of gender shrapnel. To do this, we need to collect more stories from faculty in diverse social contexts. This will allow us to build a base for the development of a deeper intersectional analysis of faculty experience and thus, of our academic environments.
To analyze these stories, we also need to make connections between the situations they describe and the students we teach. If it is true that, as the California Faculty Association insists, “faculty working conditions are student learning conditions,” we must ask how gender shrapnel and other forms of shrapnel shapes student learning experiences. We must ask what they are learning about contesting inequality, abuse and oppression when our prevalent responses are silence and silencing. Perhaps this will spur us to attend to our working conditions so that we may move further toward a transformational educational experience for our students. Or perhaps they will take the lead.

ENDNOTES

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On Violence