BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE, JUSTICE, AND ECOLOGY. Compiled by Dick Bennett
(#1 March 26, 2008; #2 2009; #3 Jan. 7, 2013). Thanks Marc.

What’s at stake:

For his first presidential campaign Barack Obama wrote a book entitled *The Audacity of Hope*. A chief campaign slogan was Change, Hope for Change, We Can. I shared the enthusiasm of the millions who voted him into office, believing or hoping he would strive for the changes he promised. Many of us need a leader, someone to reassure them, give direction, achieve changes for a better world Obama like Ronald Reagan tapped into that yearning for optimism and dynamism—Reagan’s “It’s morning in America” slogan.

But had I just paused to think, I would have been spared disappointment. What is truly audacious is not to say what people want you to say because it makes them feel good (which some people mistake for leadership), but to say, or at least never to forget, what Thomas Hardy wrote in his poem “In Tenebris II”: 'If a way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst'. Because OMNI’s Newsletters attempt to represent the realities of each subject, and many explore alternatives, all are positive. But by its subject this newsletter is directly, deliberately, entirely upbeat.

My blog:
War Department/Peace Department

http://jamesricharbennett.blogspot.com/

Newsletters

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

Index:

http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/

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justice, King, liberalism, Nobel Peace Prize, nonviolence, peace heroes, progressivism, resistance,

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Recent Newsletters
Hope in Informed Citizens by Dick Bennett

All of OMNI’s newsletters build hope, because the **search for knowledge, for reality, and the truth** discovered and achieved is positive, while ignorance and fear (misology, misoneism, many causes) and their consequences--absolutes, arrogance, concealment, denial, evasion, covering up, illusion, wishful thinking--leave us where we were or worse. Thomas Hardy said it well: we must not fear even the worst: “if way to the Better there be / it exacts a full look at the Worst” (“In Tenebris II”). In our HOPE and ACTIVISM and other newsletters we focus on some people, organizations, actions, and plans, grounded in such truth, in reality, and reconstituting the present for or imagining a better world.

Breaking the Frozen Darkness

"Dark and cold we may be, but this
Is no winter now. The frozen misery
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul we ever took.
Affairs are now soul size."
-Christopher Fry, A Sleep of Prisoners

Informed Citizens in Action

The Bottom-Up Democratic Approach: "Were citizens around the world armed with shared and reliable information, their pressure, country-by-country, could be as effective as a top-down inter-government agreement.” (PAUL COLLIER, *The Plundered Planet*, 239).

--Dick

5 Reasons Why 2013 Was the Best Year in Human History
Zack Beauchamp, News Investigation, NationofChange, Dec. 12, 2013: Between the brutal civil war in Syria, the government shutdown and all of the deadly dysfunction it represents, the NSA spying revelations and massive inequality, it’d be easy to for you to enter next year thinking the last year has been an awful one. But you’d be wrong. We have every reason to believe that it was, in fact, the best year on the planet for humankind. Contrary to what you might have heard, virtually all of the most important forces that determine what make people’s lives good—the things that determine how long they live and whether they live happily—are trending in an extremely happy direction.

THREE CHRISTIANS

THREE CHRISTIAN FIGURES OF HOPE: DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, POPE JOHN XXIII, MURIEL MOORE

Thomas Cahill ends Heretics and Heroes with three Christians—a German Lutheran Protestant, an Italian Catholic, and a U.S. Episcopalian—who represent some of the best in Christianity.

“Christians must not only ‘bandage the victims under the wheel, but jam the spoke in the wheel itself.’” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, qtd. By Thomas Cahill, Heretics and Heroes (307, referring to Hitler’s Nazis).

Pope John XXIII believed that “Jesus cam to break down barriers [between people]; he died to proclaim universal brotherhood; the central point of his teaching is charity—that is, the love that binds all human beings to him. . . .” (308).

Muriel Moore organized free meals for the poor and treated all the same. “‘We are all the same.’ That was Muriel’s credo.” (310).

--Dick
Gandhi’s Hope: Learning from Other Religions as a Path to Peace
(review) by Christopher Chapple

From: Buddhist-Christian Studies Volume 26, 2006

This book by prominent Protestant theologian Jay McDaniel suggests that Mahatma Gandhi challenged the modern world by publicly revealing that which he learned from other faith traditions and advocating this path as a way for intercultural understanding. The wisdom of Gandhi holds special poignancy today, when the processes of globalization and migration have placed followers of different faiths in closer proximity than can be remembered in the past five hundred years.

Jay McDaniel writes with crisp clarity and organizes his insights into bite-sized pieces. He lays out five challenges that face all the world’s faiths: compassion, self-criticism, simple living, ecological awareness, and welcoming religious diversity. In approaching this decidedly postmodern list of issues, McDaniel draws from two primary resources: the experiences shared by his students at Hendrix College and the writings of Alfred North Whitehead. Along the way, he invokes the Buddhist teacher and leader Thich Nhat Hanh and several progressive Catholics, including Sister Joan Chittester and theologians Hans Küng and Paul Knitter.

Continuing with a style developed in his earlier books, McDaniel latches onto a metaphor and extends it to illustrate his central point—in this case, the value of diversity. In past books, he has used the image of the hunter and the hunted to underscore the need to respect animals. In Gandhi’s Hope, the metaphor he employs is that of a jazz concert, with all different manner
of instruments pooling their resources to create a tapestry of diverse yet harmonious music.

Although the title of the book may seem to indicate that Gandhi will serve as the focus, in fact, Whitehead anchors McDaniel's approach. Through an updated approach to Whitehead, McDaniel seeks to answer the questions regarding diversity and compassion that he has posed. He suggests that an experience of concrescence will result in the sort of heightened awareness needed to increase one's conscience and to make the ethical changes needed to respond to the current state of the world. McDaniel identifies twelve "planks" that will usher Whitehead's vision into the contemporary world. These twelve aspects seem also to be heavily influenced by McDaniel's own encounter with Buddhism: interdependence, impermanence, indeterminism, mind/matter, deep listening, value, God, creativity, persuasive power, divine empathy, many forms of salvation, and life after death. These broad categories embrace key notions found in all religious traditions.

Amy Goodman | Mandela: The Man and the Movement

Amy Goodman, Op-Ed, NationofChange, Dec. 12, 2013: Nelson Mandela's passing last week at the age of ninety-five has been met with a global outpouring of remembrance and reflection. A giant of modern human history has died. Mandela is rightly remembered for his remarkable ability to reconcile with his oppressors and the political prescription his forgiveness entailed for the new South Africa. Mandela has passed, but what he has passed on to succeeding generations is his deep belief in the power of movements to make change. "When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both."

THREE MAGAZINES

YES! MAGAZINE SUPPORTS BUILDING A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE WORLD. Each issue focuses on a different theme. The Fall 2010 theme was:

A Resilient Community
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: Seeds of Resilience by Sarah van Gelder

New Visions
Solving today’s big problems will take more than a quick fix. These authors offer clarity about the roots of our problems and visions of a better way.

Crash Course in Resilience
With the economy still shaking and peak oil and climate change on the horizon, it’s hard to plan for the future. Here’s a no-regrets strategy for building resilience into your life.

“In the Face of This Truth”
How to have honest conversations about climate change, the future, and our hopes and fears.

by Robert Jensen

by Sarah van Gelder

- Just the Facts: Why Build Resilience?
- 3 Big Ideas for a Resilient Future
New models that foster justice and real prosperity, and sustain the Earth's living systems. How can we bring these models to life and put them to work?

**Skill Up and Party, Too**

Transition Towns celebrate, get skilled, go green, and kick the oil habit.

*In U.S. Transition Towns, the Big Challenge Is Bringing People Together*

*Pam Chang blogs about Transition Town Albany*

**From Vacant City Lot to Food on the Table**

We’re here. We’re growing food in the city. And we’re not going away.

*Madeline Ostrander*

**51 Ways to Spark a Commons Revolution**

Care for and celebrate the places we share, and value what’s free.

*Jay Walljasper*

**How Kindness Trumped Chaos in New Orleans**

Lessons of dedication, solidarity, love, and recovery, five years after Katrina.

*Rebecca Solnit*

*PHOTO ESSAY: Graffiti artist Banksy left his mark on New Orleans*

*Read an excerpt from Rebecca Solnit’s latest book*

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**The Power of One**

Stories of people who find their courage, open their hearts, and discover what it means to be human in today’s world.

**Share Your Stuff**

Invest in the sock exchange, share a bike, swap your skills, and reduce your environmental footprint.

*Jeremy Adam Smith*

*VIDEO: Score clothes at a Brooklyn pop-

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**Can You DIY?**

Your grandparents knew how to do these things. 5 handy skills.
Breaking Open
Humor, story-telling, and the arts—taking you into unexpected spaces where business-as-usual breaks open into new possibilities.

Stories that Light Up the Dark
What your ancestors knew can help you navigate today's uncertainties.

By Sanjay Khanna

A Hand-Built Home, and 9 Other Resilient Ideas
Ten ideas for building resilience from communities across the country: a house made of cob, low-impact urban living, bike as you are, the general store, process food locally, bees on city roofs, scrappy rebuilding, making fruit public.

How Resilient Are You?
Take this quiz to find out.

Features

Can Mushrooms Rescue the Gulf?
Inventor Paul Stamets says mushrooms can eat oil, help clean up the BP mess, and rid the world of toxics—and he’s got proof.

by James Trimarco

Free Yourself from Wall Street
How to avoid the finance industry’s games and create real wealth.

Doug Pibel interviews author David Korten

Multimedia
Ecovillages, fallen fruit, and how to build a cob house:
It's all on our Multimedia Page.

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10 Ways to Solve the Jobs Problem
Imagine a no-holds-barred “summit” that comes up with ideas to solve both our job and environmental problems. What might it come up with?

by Fran Korten

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COMMENTARY:

Clear Act: A Climate Bill That Can Pass

by Peter Barnes

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- Canada-to-Texas Pipeline Plans Draw Criticism
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- Students Score Victory for Honduran Workers

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**Jim Hightower** spotlights a Texas woman taking on TransCanada.
WRITERS: JOANNA MACY/CHRIS JOHNSTONE AND REBECCA SOLNIT

JOANNA MACY AND CHRIS JOHNSTONE, ACTIVE HOPE (also noted in Newsletter #3)

† Joanna Macy - Active Hope
www.activehope.info/joanna-macy.html
Ecophiosopher Joanna Macy, PhD, is a scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology. A respected voice in the movements for peace, justice, ...

† Chapter outline of Active Hope
www.activehope.info/contents.html
Information about the book by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone. ... finding and offering our unique contribution, which we describe as our 'gift of active hope'.

REBECCA SOLNIT


Lessons of dedication, solidarity, love, and recovery, five years after Katrina.

PEEK INSIDE THE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES ISSUE OF YES! MAGAZINE

The taxi driver called me “girlfriend” and “sweetheart” with the familiar sweetness of New Orleanians, so I figured I could ask a few personal questions. He was from the Lower Ninth Ward, one of the neighborhoods inundated by Katrina—a mostly poor, mostly black edge of
the city isolated and imperiled by two manmade canals—and it had taken him three and a half years to return to New Orleans. He still wasn’t in his neighborhood, but he was back in the city, and his family was back, and they were determined to come back all the way.

What happened in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is more remarkable than almost anyone has told. More than a million volunteers came to New Orleans to gut houses, rebuild, and stand in solidarity with the people who endured not just a hurricane but a deluge of Bush Administration incompetence and institutionalized racism at all levels of government, which temporarily turned the drowned city into a prison. Supplies were not allowed in by a panicky government; people were not allowed out, and a wholly unnatural crisis ensued.

Even so, an astounding wave of solidarity and empathy arose. At Hurricanehousing.org more than 200,000 people volunteered to shelter evacuees, often in their own homes. And then there were those legions of volunteers, many of them white, working in a city that had been two-thirds black.

**A disaster is actually threatening to elites, not because the response is selfish but because it often unfolds like a revolution, in which the status quo has evaporated.**

I have again and again met passionate young activists who intended to come for a week or a month and never left. In the Lower Ninth, my taxi driver’s neighborhood, things looked better than even six months before. Brad Pitt’s Make It Right Foundation now has dozens of solar-powered homes, built on stilts for the next inundation, scattered across the lowlands of the neighborhood. New businesses have opened on St. Claude Avenue, the main thoroughfare, and children play in the once-abandoned streets.

It’s hard to say that there is a recipe for solidarity across race and class lines. During crises, the official reaction from government and media is often widespread fear—based on a belief that in the absence of institutional authority people revert to Hobbesian selfishness and violence, or just feckless conduct. Scholars Lee Clarke and Karon Chess call this fear of the public, particularly the poor and nonwhite public, “elite panic.” Because these “elites” shape reaction as well as opinion, their beliefs can be deadly.

**But the truth is that most people are altruistic, resourceful, and constructive during crisis. A disaster is actually threatening to elites, not because the response is selfish but because it often unfolds like a revolution, in which the status quo has evaporated.**

Civil society improvises its own systems of survival—community kitchens, clinics, neighborhood councils, and networks of volunteers and survivors—often decentralized and deeply empowering for the individuals involved. What gets called recovery can constitute the counter-revolution—the taking back of power.
Perhaps the biggest question for a disaster like Katrina is to what extent this transformed sense of self and society lasts and matters: Can it be a foundation for a stronger civil society, more solidarity, and grassroots power? It has been so in many ways in New Orleans, with groups like the Common Ground Clinic—a free health clinic that was started days after the hurricane and is still going strong five years later.

One important tool for future disasters, and social change in the absence of disaster, is simply knowledge of what really happened: how many people in the hours, days, weeks and months after Katrina behaved with courage, love, and creativity, and how much they constituted the majority response. Such human capacities can be an extraordinary resource not just in crisis but in realizing our dearest hopes for a stronger society and more meaningful lives.

**What gets called recovery can constitute the counter-revolution—the taking back of power.**

Katrina is hardly a happy story. More than 1,600 people died. The racism on the part of the media, the authorities ready to believe any rumor, and the vigilantes who took it upon themselves to regard any black man as a looter and to administer the death penalty for these imagined minor property crimes were a reminder of how ugly this country can be and how much remains to be done. The city used the disaster as an excuse to shut down most of the public housing even though much of it was undamaged and intact housing was desperately needed.

Poverty continues, and so does racism; the South did not stop being the South or America America. And the BP spill menaces the region in a way that is even more ominous than Katrina. The hurricane was after all a kind of event that has come ashore for tens of thousands of years, and when it was over people could rebuild. What can be done to ameliorate the spill is still a mystery, and the coastal edge of Louisiana, with its diverse fishing and foraging cultures and its abundance of wildlife, is poisoned.

Read an excerpt from Rebecca Solnit's latest book: *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*.

New Orleans will never be quite the city it was. People there lost what many of us have not had for generations: deep roots in place, a strong sense of culture, and an intricate web of social ties to family and community, whether it’s a church, Mardi Gras krewe, musical group, black social aid and pleasure club, or neighborhood group. Much was reclaimed; many returned, but some did not or cannot.
The taxi driver took us to the New Orleans Convention Center, where so many people, mostly African American, had been stranded in the days after Hurricane Katrina. But that day in July, it was hosting the Essence Festival, a black music festival at which tens of thousands of people in summer splendor circulated. Among the mix of booths were several from organizations founded during the weeks and months after the storm but still going strong.

Traveling through a vibrant New Orleans not quite five years after the city was pronounced dead means understanding what dedication, will, solidarity, and love can achieve. This year of disasters—the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, the volcano in Iceland, the spill in the Gulf, the floods and heat waves and droughts and rising waters—remind all of us that we are entering an era where disaster will be common and intense. Survival will be grounded in understanding our own capacity for power and resilience, creativity, and solidarity.

(The book Shock Doctrine offers a contrasting picture of corporate exploitation of catastrophes. –Dick)

Rebecca Solnit wrote this article for A Resilient Community, the Fall 2010 issue of YES! Magazine. Rebecca is the author of twelve books, including A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster and Hope in the Dark.

Header photo by N. Krebill

Welcome to Peace News, the newspaper for the UK grassroots peace and justice movement. We seek to oppose all forms of violence, and to create positive change based on cooperation and responsibility. See more

"Peace News has compiled an exemplary record... its tasks have never been more critically important than they are today." Noam Chomsky

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Rebecca Solnit, 'Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities'

Review by Theresa Wolfwood

Nation Books, 2004; ISBN 1 5602 5828 4; £8; 182pp

“It's always too soon to go home. And it's always too soon to calculate effect.” Activists who feel despondent and or just plain tired will read this book and take heart in our work and find purpose in the creative search for a better world. Solnit believes we've had many successes; we can and should rejoice - and then carry on. [See Solnit's A Paradise Built in Hell in Hope Newsletter #3. –Dick]

“I once read an anecdote by someone in Women Strike for Peace, the first great antinuclear movement in the United States, the one that did contribute to a major victory: the 1963 end of aboveground nuclear testing with its radioactive fallout that was showing up in mother's milk and baby teeth. She told of how foolish and futile she felt standing in the rain one morning protesting at the Kennedy White House. Years later she heard Dr Benjamin Spock - one of the most high-profile activists on the issue then - say that the turning point for him was seeing a small group of women standing in the rain, protesting at the White House. If they were so passionately committed, he thought, he should give the issue more consideration himself.”

This is one of Solnit's many stories of the unforeseen effect of activism - the work for peace and justice - and it sets the tone for her passionate commitment to a life of social action.

Her social history of the successes of social movements and their unpredictability give great hope to us all. She uses many well-known and some obscure examples to make her point: the possibilities of sustained social action, the results we dream of are what make it possible for us to find joy, purpose and creativity in our lives, and that by recognising our successes we don't quit, but find strength to continue.
I looked a bit askance at the chapter heading “A Dream Three Times the Size of Texas”, and then found it was about indigenous peoples, including the formation of Nunavut, the Inuit homeland, formerly part of the North-West Territories of Canada. It covers one-fifth of Canada and represents a major accomplishment for the Arctic indigenous people who were decimated by first contact with the Europeans and then had to resist assimilation into the dominant culture. Like the Mayan leader, Rigoberta Menchu, Solnit sees the resurgence of indigenous populations in Canada and around the world as a source of great hope to us all when we consider that historians predicted the obliteration of indigenous culture by the end of the 20th century. She asks, “How do you measure the space between a shift in cultural conversation and a landmass three times the size of Texas?” We can't measure but we can certainly recognise and learn from this wild possibility that became a reality.

She details the progress of the resistance to the World Trade Organisation since 1999, as social movements give information and encouragement to many governments to stand up against the bullies of the world. The resistance to the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1996-1998 and the failure of that agreement formed the basis of wild possibility in Seattle, Cancun and now Hong Kong - the latest WTO fiasco.

In Solnit's hometown of San Francisco, USA, there are murals of social leaders, a statue of Bolivar, and a starting place for rallies and demonstrations at Market Square where the UN Charter was born. She says, “...for now this is a place where history is still unfolding. Today is also the day of creation.”

Read this book, take heart, take comfort and stand together in all social action. We make history and change history as we stand; the results are for future historians to record. We will have to make sure they are not untold; we need more activist historians everywhere like Solnit to illuminate our activism.


The experiences of our ancestors offer us wisdom for surviving today's crises.
Beginning in 2004, the Norwegian government and a group of international agricultural research organizations decided to invest in an idea they hoped would help humanity endure big future unknowns. It's called the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. Nicknamed the Doomsday Vault, it sits inside a mountain on an Arctic archipelago and contains the seeds of more than half a million of the world’s crop varieties—in case civil strife, natural disasters, climate change, or other calamities destroy local and regional seed stocks.

The vault’s contents represent a fraction of the results of one of humanity’s greatest endeavors, thousands of years of agriculture, but key ingredients are missing—the values, knowledge, creativity, tenacity, and endurance that motivated people to maintain and propagate millions of plant varieties. It’s that kind of wisdom that has, as importantly as the actual seeds, allowed cultures to endure and innovate over the course of millennia.

Much of that knowledge is disappearing, either because of the spread of consumer culture or because of the increasing loss of cultural and linguistic diversity. But a wealth of life-affirming knowledge and wisdom can still be found in stories—that is, in the cultural and family stories we may have learned as children or that were shared across generations. These stories can provide lessons to help us weather the unknown with our kindness and benevolence intact.

Stories, I’d argue, can help us to become resilient people.

"Our stories tell us that we didn’t become real human beings until we became communities, until the welfare of the whole became more important than the welfare of the individual."

When I realized, through my work as a futurist, that the global economy and climate were on an unpredictable path, I began searching for stories, personal and cultural, that can encourage all of us to band together and work in service of the common good as the civilized world runs up against ecological limits.

Through this process, I had the good fortune to meet some remarkable people whose oral histories go back thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of years.

Adapting to the Changing Climate

Today, we’re already witnessing major shifts in our climate, and greenhouse gases that
industrial nations have pumped into the atmosphere guarantee that we’ll see more change in our lifetimes, even if the world makes a transition away from fossil fuels. It’s hard to imagine what such a massive upheaval of our weather patterns will look like.

But some cultures have stories about change that occurred long ago. According to George Edwardson, 63, president and elder of the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope in Alaska, elders in his community retain an oral history across a period of “seven ice ages” (up to 350,000 years), when the regional landscape underwent dramatic climate changes that, in turn, affected the human experience.

Iñupiat stories explain how communities got through this hardship and change. Victoria Hykes Steere, an Iñupiaq human rights advocate, recounts:

_Our world was green and then it snowed. It was warm and then it got cold. The few who didn’t die worked together. Snow and ice taught us to be human and think beyond our individual selves. In our legends and our history, snow and ice made us better people and led us to use our minds._

_Our stories tell us that we didn’t become real human beings until we became communities, until the welfare of the whole became more important than the welfare of the individual._

_We learned from the animals, such as the wolves, to see how they took care of each other._

Hykes Steere’s people are already suffering as warming temperatures break up the permafrost and literally melt the ground beneath their homes. The cost of relocating Alaska Native communities, according to Hykes Steere, has been estimated at between $100 million and $300 million per village.

Furthermore, spikes in the cost of electricity are forcing many Alaskan Natives to go without light or heat during winter evenings, so they can use the little money they have to procure enough food.

“We’re being hit hard now with climate impacts,” says Hykes Steere. “Now with the Bering Strait opening up because of melting Arctic ice, industrial shipping and fishing are additional threats to our food sources.”

Though the situation is grave, Hykes Steere’s family stories remind her how to find strength:

_We do not control the environment, but we do control how we respond. … My grandmother said that when you lose hope, you lose everything._
My grandfather used to tell me I could keep certain sunrise moments alive in my memory. My grandfather trained me to look for moments when I was seeing something that would some day help me to remember the goodness.

He taught me to keep them vivid—smell them, taste them, and see them—so that when things got really bad, I could go back there. I remember the first time I did that, there were a bunch of moments that meant nothing to anyone else where the world was filled with beauty.

When things get really bad, I go into those moments … and I’m okay.

To help us carry on as economic and ecological conditions continue to deteriorate, more of us may need to draw on vivid memories of unspeakable beauty.

Writing Visions of Hope: Teaching Twentieth-Century American Literature and Research


This nine-chapter book narrates a writing-centered approach to the teaching of literature and literary research. As the title suggests, the book also embraces a thematic approach to reading and writing about twentieth-century American literature, focusing on the grounds for hope in an age of despair.

The first five chapters explore in detail the teaching of the twentieth-century American literature course at the University of Pristina in Kosovo, where the author served as Fulbright Professor of American Literature in the spring semester of 2012. Throughout, these chapters narrate students’ in-class interactions to illustrate writing-to-learn strategies for teaching the literature. Chapter six then follows the same cohort of 22 students as they learned to ground their literary research in their own questions about American and Balkans narratives of oppression and liberty, of despair and hope.
The last three chapters document the responses of students and their professors to this American theme of liberty and hope as seen through the Balkans lenses of ethnic violence and emerging republican government. Specifically, chapter seven focuses on students’ participation in a blog featuring Balkans literature that explores the same issues of liberty and justice examined in the American literature they have read. Chapter eight then celebrates student writing, the fruit of the writing-to-learn strategies narrated in earlier chapters. Finally, chapter nine narrates professors’ and students’ responses, gathered through surveys and interviewing, to questions about their country’s violent past and the value of literary study in preparing citizens to shape a new republic.

Viral Love by Abel Tomlimson

"A human being is a part of the whole, called by us, "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest -- a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.

This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

~ Albert Einstein

"Illusion works impenetrable
Weaving webs innumerable,
Her gay pictures never fail,
Crowds each other, veil on veil,
Charmer who will be believed,
By man who thirsts to be deceived."

~ "Maya" by Ralph Waldo Emerson
While gardening recently, a recurrent theme kept tugging at my mind. If it is wise for us to love everything, even our "enemies", how do we love destructive invasive species like the Amur honeysuckle that is sucking the light and life from Fayetteville's understory? To take this further, how do we love pathogenic viruses? Or even further, how do we love the wealthiest rulers of the corporate-military-political complex that incessantly cause massive human and planetary suffering?

A new report from the humanitarian relief organization Oxfam titled "Working For The Few" analyzed data from Credit Suisse and Forbes, and concluded that half of the world's wealth is controlled by 1 percent. Additionally, it was found that the 85 richest people owned as much as the poorer half of the entire human species.

The report states that the consequences of this inequality are troubling:
"This massive concentration of economic resources in the hands of fewer people presents a significant threat to inclusive political and economic systems...people are increasingly separated by economic and political power, inevitably heightening social tensions and increasing the risk of societal breakdown."

Due to this immensely detrimental wealth imbalance, the richest few seemingly control the world. Not only do we have perpetual war for corporate profit and exploitation of people, but we are also facing a wholesale destruction of Nature. We are causing the first self inflicted mass extinction event, and apparently committing collective suicide by destroying the real sustainable economy in pursuit of unsustainable cancerous "growth."

Under relentless assault, over half the world's rainforests are razed and impoverished of biodiversity largely for the mere taste of cow flesh. Vast regions of our oceans are filled with collections of plastic particles from our cheap, disposable culture of mindless consumption. Our ability to feed ourselves is being diminished by ignorant, unsustainable factory farming of plants and animals. Millions of tons of soils are eroded and salinized while waters are polluted and made hypoxic with immense volumes of unwelcome chemical fertilizer and animal feces. Thanks to Fukushima, the Pacific Ocean is increasingly antibiotic with large volumes of radioactive waste. This list goes on ad infinitum without even mentioning global warming.

In addition to Fukushima, another glaring issue that has arrested my attention is oil spills. A recent report from McClatchy News found that in 2013 more crude oil was spilled from train
wrecks than in the previous forty years. Oil is constantly being spilled in rainforests, oceans, soils and waters everywhere, not to mention the recent chemical spill that polluted water for 300,000 people in West Virginia.

It is safe to say something is very wrong with our current economic and social order when we have near biweekly oil spills and shootings at schools and other public places. Our society is very sick and needs medicine. What is the cause of our viral pandemic of violence and destruction? What is the cure?

Individual humans are not the disease. The sickness is caused by specific infectious ideas and institutions. We can point to the most fundamental political pathogens of democracy corruption by wealth and corporations, and solutions exist to remove the corrupting influence of money from our elections.

We can also isolate the economic vectors of suffering in neoliberal corporate capitalism, free trade, the International Monetary Fund, and a corrupt banking system. Additionally, measuring wealth and societal well being by looking at GDP, growth and stocks instead of happiness, health, education and environmental beauty is simply dumb.

Many alternative models exist for curing our economic disease, including democratizing corporations into worker cooperatives operated in the public interest, and not for profit to a minuscule minority of millionaire capital investors. These investors from foreign countries turn their eyes and hearts from the slave-like conditions and pollution in poorer countries where manufacturing was outsourced to dictatorships with no labor or environmental laws. Effective unions help.

These types of evolutionary measures must be contemplated, but on a deeper level what is the virus within all of us? The primary root cause is our egocentric feeling of separation from others and nature. In Eastern Wisdom, this is known as Maya. We have a culture of violence, fear, hate and greed because we so intensely identify with our apparently separate physical bodies only, and not the deeper unified Self (or Consciousness or G-d) that exists within all. We fail to see our Self in other people and creatures, and consequently fail to have empathy.

Ultimately, the deepest cure for our deadly disease is to realize humans, plants and animals are interconnected not only as one family, but even more fundamentally as one organism.
We must start focusing on the positive and similarities in others, while also learning from dark behaviors and events.

We need not imprison the corporate rulers and waterboard them with toxic slime from Fukushima, West Virginia, the Mississippi Dead Zone, or the BP Horizon. Most Americans also take part in reaping the "benefits" of corporate imperialism, so in that sense we are all liable. However, it is specific institutions that oppress us all, and keep us chained to self destructive behavior.

We must all learn that we are all connected and true wealth is happiness, and the current system causes incredible unhappiness, even for the ultra-wealthy. We must all work to purify fear, greed, and violence from all economic and political laws and institutions with increasingly universal Love. Internally, Love has always been the one eternal law that truly matters. It is time to fully externalize it.

I have hope for drastic political and economic progress for peace and environmental sanity, but there is something more powerful than hope. It is faith, and I do not mean a dogmatic religious faith in ancient words, but in the most powerful force in the universe. It is Love here and now, nonjudgmental and unconditional. This is the cure, and when Love goes viral all the prison bars, bombs, bullets, and bulldozers will rapidly melt into gardening tools.

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END HOPE NEWSLETTER #4

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Dick Bennett

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