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SANA Race and Justice Plenary I

No Justice, No Peace?

By Brett Williams

The following is a written version of the talk I gave at the SANA Race and Justice Plenary 2008

Abstract: The inequality that fueled the 1960s uprisings has grown worse, but where has the anger gone? This paper builds on the work of historian Michael Katz to suggest blending the political economy and ethnographic of a debt-based society, and to explore the ways in which over-investing in selling debt ravages poor communities, the coping strategies based in the informal economy, and the harsh incarceration of young men of color to explain why in the United States we have no justice but a semblance of peace.

Keywords: prison, debt, marijuana, uprisings

Americans live with a great contradiction. Fifty years after Civil Rights activists won access to segregated places and formal equality before the law, racial inequality is harsher than ever. Since the postwar period, whites as a group have accumulated advantages, and blacks have accumulated disadvantages. For example, in 1967 blacks earned 54 cents/dollar compared with whites; in 2005 that number was 57 cents

(Brown and Wellman 2005). Today's racial inequality is different from the inequalities of the postwar period, because black women have fared better than black men, and some individuals have accomplished limited mobility by slipping through a lifetime of screens or moving into more fluid occupational niches such as public service. And race is only one modality through which people experience class. But blacks and Latino/as still experience excruciating inequalities: most cannot slip through those screens, and individual mobility occurs within a rigid structure of inequality that grows starker and more punishing by the day. Forty years ago, after dogged community organizing, civil disobedience, and legal battles, frustrations remained so high that many American cities burned. Because conditions have only grown worse, where has that anger gone?

In his 2008 Presidential Address to the Urban History Association, Michael Katz asked "Why Don't American Cities Burn Very Often?" Acknowledging the speculative perils of asking why something *did not* happen, Katz seeks to understand social control. He thus distinguishes between criminal, or individualized, sometimes

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random violence, and civil violence, which makes demands on the state. His question was inspired by the 2005 riots in Paris, where immigrants and people of color expressed their rage about police brutality, poor schools, crowded, dilapidated housing, and unemployment—the same conditions that plague the poor here (although the French poor have health care).

Katz answers his own question in part by referring to the different experiences and

perceptions of immigrants in the United States and France. He argues that immigrants here are divided: some feel they can trust the state and even look to the state to redress injustice; but others live in terror of the state, often in rank poverty, under the radar and with no rights at all. Neither group is in the position or frame of mind to burn down a city.

Katz also looks to postcivil rights history. He describes an ecology of power in cities to which whites fled following legal integration, so that the new black mayors inherited a hollow prize: cities with increasing needs but starved for resources, weakly posed against powerful financial institutions and state and federal governments. Still, the appearance of power provided by black and brown mayors and police chiefs may have deflected civil violence. Pretend reforms, such as citizens' advisory councils, gave some people the illusion of influence. Katz notes that the selective incorporation of some individuals into positions of relative privilege also allows pundits to blame those who remain poor. Blaming the poor makes it easier to brutalize and pathologize them, so that Adolph Reed argues that the "underclass" may be ascribed its own race-like status (forthcoming). Militarizing the police to derail the Black Panthers, the drug laws of the 1980s and 1990s, and the glut of incarceration since, fueled anew by the war on terror, has meant harsh surveillance and repression for many, including those would-be immigrants in detention centers. Finally, Katz argues that the shift to an economy based on consumption has mollified us all, because we are entranced by things to buy that we cannot really afford, live a pretend life beyond our means, and accept consumption as a substitute for citizenship.

This provocative piece gave me pause, because of its nuanced and persuasive insights about political power, unadorned by political economy or ethnography. An urban anthropologist might wrongfully neglect to pay fine-grained attention to the government, but would ask other questions both more expansive and more

particular. In the rest of this paper, I elaborate on two of Katz's arguments through political economy and ethnography to produce a more nuanced analysis of why American cities do not burn, of why we experience criminal but not civil violence, of why we have no justice but a semblance of peace. The redistribution of wealth that is central to the neoliberal project has relied in many ways on freeing the wealthy from the regulations that might prevent unlimited access to more wealth. Their quest for profits through selling debt to the rest of us both reflects and creates increasingly harsh inequalities, which push poor people into the informal economy. Rather than expand the social safety net or create jobs that might ease inequality, our government has expanded incarceration, which targets young men of color in the informal economy in particular and makes inequality worse. I begin with a reexamination of Katz's portrait of consumption to argue that understanding racial inequality requires understanding the political economy of a debt-based society.

Consumption

Most urban anthropologists, or observant city bus riders, could argue that the excessive tacky display often attributed to poor black people is ludicrous: they ride the bus carrying recycled grocery bags rather than expensive briefcases or back packs, shop at thrift shops, supplement their groceries through fishing and gardening, lift and lug rather than go to gyms, suffer through heat waves without air conditioning, treat illnesses over the counter with medicines bought on the street or through traditional remedies, operate in an informal economy without infrastructure, rent, double up, and live on the streets. I just do not see the waste, excess, or carbon footprint that make me fear for my soul in the wealthy Washington suburbs burdened by mighty self-contained estates. The kernel of truth in the consumption critique may rely on taking some flashy teenagers to stand for whole groups. Ethnography, in contrast, captures more fine-grained differences,

including those produced by age and gender.

But the real issue is the whole wretched business of building an economy whose health rests on cajoling us to buy things we do not need with money we do not have, when owning something means promising somebody that maybe someday we will be able to pay for it. The economic context that makes consumption the engine of the economy also makes many people poor. The profits finance capital makes from selling debt allow the wealthy unimaginable credit resources for wild capital accumulation, mirrored in an upside down way by the debt that the poor accumulate as they subsidize free credit for others through the swollen interest they pay.

Since the 1970s, financial institutions have invested heavily in selling debt, saturating demographic markets and then moving on to edgier ones. After their shameful, profitable move into predatory lending in the 1990s, I thought there was nowhere else for them to go. But several pieces of deregulation and innovation opened a new path. First, the growth of derivatives (packages of chopped-up, recombined loans, both good and bad) allowed banks and subprime loan peddlers to reach out to people with low incomes or weak credit. They were no longer interested in making solid loans, but simply in selling debt—first to people hoping to buy or improve their homes, and then to wealthy investors. The subprime mortgages they indulged in were perfectly ludicrous, but it didn't matter. The repeal in 1999 of the Glass-Steagall Act (designed to curb the wild speculation that brought on the stock market crash of 1929 by banning commercial banks from investing on Wall Street) removed the firewall between investment and commercial banking. One branch of the business could pool and package debt while the other branch could evaluate the package, which allowed reckless, ruthless speculation, and invited ever-larger global players into the fray, including wealthy pools of investors who operated virtually unregulated. So most banks could quickly sell off

their mortgage or home equity loans. They became dedicated merchants of debt.

Because of all the activity in the global markets, the subprime industry could continue to grow and go after riskier markets—as long as housing prices rose, borrowers in trouble could refinance their homes or resell them, which continued to fuel the housing bubble until 2006. The bubble swelled as investors borrowed from other investors to buy other people's debts, including dirty mortgages and the bubble money produced by home equity loans based on the imaginary value of people's houses. All value grew completely out of whack, based on the belief that houses, or debts, or bonds to insure debts, would continue to grow.

When the bubble burst, as bubbles always do, we were besieged by lies, mostly to the effect that lenders had relaxed their standards too much and borrowers had reached thoughtlessly beyond their means. Everyone pretended to be surprised, as though they didn't know that the perfect loans they had been hawking were bound to go sour. But the truth is that this industry has always had to grow—to look for more potential and vulnerable debtors, to look for borrowers who would not be able to pay their loans in full. The quest for capital accumulation, the need to grow and eliminate competitors in this quickly moving, high-profit industry, spurred dogged efforts to acquire more debtors, to sell more debt. Briefly stymied in the 1990s, industry leaders fretted over whether to go deeper into poor neighborhoods (through more debt shops) or spread themselves more broadly over more places. Subprime lending allowed them to do both, especially after bankruptcy reform in 2005 made it nearly impossible for debtors to fight back. This is the political economic context that best explains inequality, for the very wealthy invest in buying and selling debt. Financial services produce at best low-wage, no-benefits jobs, consumption becomes the engine that drives the economy, and we are urged to shop. Productive investment, or even regulated, affordable credit, would give

more people a chance at decent work and less chance of being dragged down by the debt they take on to make ends meet in an economy without many good jobs. Debt also demobilizes people politically, for it confuses and frightens people and tangles them in webs of self-blame, criminal harassment, and the enormous loss of wealth in neighborhoods where there is very little to begin with.

Taking political economy into account in exploring racial inequality also involves looking at poor neighborhoods, which have been wracked by the mortgage crisis. We need to know more about how the subprime business operated on the ground: Through a pyramid-like franchising structure? For warehousing properties for future gentrification as part of the abandonment and investment cycles through which speculators add and remove value from neighborhoods? To trap people in schemes that were bound to displace them? We also need to know more about how the cluster bombing by predatory lenders has affected the options and strategies of poor people, how the wave of foreclosures will lay waste to places where the loan hawkers were particularly active, and how these processes have been racialized. Because bubbles always burst, the value of an over-priced house drops, leaving the hapless owner with what is called an underwater mortgage (eerily reminiscent of New Orleans). To be underwater is to be stuck with a house worth less than you owe for it: you cannot sell it, borrow against it, or pay the mortgage. You can only walk away or be evicted.

Unlike Wall Street, risk in neighborhoods is concentrated. Like an epidemic, the foreclosure crisis hits the poor first, and may help to do some of the work of disappearing them. But the pain will spill out to whole cities, decimating the tax base, eroding social services, exacerbating homelessness and unemployment—but if Katz is right, stopping short of civil violence. Hurricane Katrina provides the template here; like a wrinkle in time, New Orleans moved precipitously through processes that affect many

other cities as they become smaller, whiter, and richer, and the poor disappear. As the poor are displaced, their social and political networks are strained, as is their health, which makes it harder for them to meet the mounting needs of friends and relatives and for activists to mobilize from farther and farther away. Thus, the economic context of a debt-trap society must be taken into account in explaining racial inequality and apparent civil peace beyond the fashion choices of the poor.

Living with Repression and Surveillance

Because government has not regulated or fairly taxed the businesses that invest unproductively in debt and suck wealth out of poor neighborhoods, people who live in poor neighborhoods confront onerous screens that demobilize them: starved schools, an extra vulnerability to harsh weather and environmental toxins, confusion and anxiety about predatory lending, a necessary reliance on the informal economy, and recurring displacement which decimates social and political networks. Ethnography offers perspectives on the confluence of these forces in people's lives, and, for my purposes here, on a once-activist demographic group, who did the hard work of community organizing and ethnography as well as rioting.

Many of those in the early civil rights movement were teenagers or in their early twenties (e.g., Diane Nash, Julian Bond, James Foreman, Vivian Malone Jones, Stokely Carmichael/Kwame Toure, the Little Rock Nine, James Meredith, Leroi Jones/Amir Baraka, Bobby Seale, Huey Newton, and the participants in the Birmingham children's march). They faced police dogs and fire hoses, and often acted as anthropologists and community organizers as they learned about social relations and followed social networks to organize freedom schools, voter registration drives, and breakfast programs. Many grew more radical as the

movement argued for a more social democratic and less imperialist state. Today, many people still do the hard work of organizing, but observers have noted the increasing predominance of women, and the emergence of a gender gap in activism. What has happened to the young men of color who *also* helped lead social movements?

What has happened to the young men is that they attend schools with graduation rates lower than 50 percent, where they do not learn to demand justice or even to read and write in the worst cases. Bad debt, big bills, and closed opportunities may push them into the military (although black enlistment has plummeted since the beginning of the Iraq War). Many navigate a tangled life course of low-paid work (although pundits may claim they are too uppity to do it), drug tests, which reveal mostly marijuana use but keep them out of many jobs, work in the informal economy, lying low to avoid the police and the state, and sometimes rehab or jail, which creates more obstacles to work. The policing of young men of color (as well as upswings in criminal violence) often accompanies gentrification (Perez 2004). In the summer of 2008, the Washington, DC police instituted checkpoints in the neighborhood of Trinidad, which led activists to compare the already grossly over-bunkered city to Baghdad. It is as though youth are playing the Game of Life with no way to move forward or get out. This is particularly true for young men, who are incarcerated at grim rates, creating a gender imbalance in many poor communities of color. This may mean that they are more active participants in illegal economic activities.

The key problem is incarceration and the key force behind incarceration is the war on drugs (and increasingly, immigration). For the first time in our history, more than one out of every one hundred adults are locked up, including one out of 36 Latino men over 18, and one in nine black men between 20 and 34 (Pew Center on the States 2008).

Crack-cocaine sentencing disparities are well

known and emblematic of these racist laws, but quietly in the 1990s arrests for (mostly) possession of marijuana began increasing faster than arrests for any other drug. This seems strange, because smoking marijuana is an everyday practice, Kentucky's leading cash crop, practically legal, especially for privileged people, and is well known for its mellowing, feeling-normal, dulling-the-pain, taking-the-edge-off effects. Smokers widely refer to smoking marijuana as "chilling," which distinguishes it from those drugs that give you energy or hallucinations or make you mad. So why do the criminals focus on marijuana? Is this serious drug policy or just petty? Is it just a way of harassing young people of color through quality of life policing?

Certain neighborhoods are more likely to be penalized and certain people more likely to be arrested and locked up. Men are ten times more likely than women to be incarcerated (The Pew Center on the States 2008). Although African Americans comprise only 12.2 percent of the population and 13 percent of drug users, they make up 38 percent of those arrested for drug offenses and 59 percent of those convicted of drug offenses causing critics to call the war on drugs the "New Jim Crow." The higher arrest rates for African Americans and Latinos do not reflect a higher abuse rate in these communities but rather a law enforcement emphasis on inner city areas where drug use and sales are more likely to take place in open-air drug markets where treatment resources are scarce. Thirty percent of all marijuana arrests are of African Americans, although they make up only 14 percent of users (Mauer and King 2007). Many users also sell to supplement incomes that they cannot live on. Weed may make users feel less anxious but in fact it makes them (if they are poor) *more vulnerable* because of selective, racialized arrests and incarceration; it also, perhaps, makes users less politically inclined not only because it is a mellowing drug but also because users often have to lie low to avoid the police.

The argot, paraphernalia, traditions, good times, memories, relationships that demand trust, and construction of a huge cash economy outside of surveillance by credit card companies could be a kind of culture of resistance. But it comes with too much blowback, not only in deflecting rage and indignation, but also in making people vulnerable to the state. Marijuana has become a racialized drug that in several different ways derails young people of color—which is not to imply that the rest of us don't numb ourselves: as a middle-class white woman said to me, "Without Prozac we'd have a revolution." But we will not go to jail for it.

Harry Belafonte sees young men of color differently, as political actors, and has dedicated himself to negotiating a truce between the Bloods and the Crips, taking them to Venezuela to meet Chavez, and to Ghana to organize a trade agreement. Anthropologist Jennifer Tilton takes youth activism seriously as well, and she is writing a book exploring when and how it emerges and how it gets blocked. Tilton works in Oakland, where the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights started a program that trains low-income workers in how to weatherize homes and install solar panels while fighting the potential of these improvements to in turn displace them. But still, the widespread rage, disappointment, and hope that energized the civil rights movement have been dampened at least in part because so many youth who might be leaders of a social movement are locked up.

Hurricane Katrina, the spate of intense storms in Mexico, Bangladesh, and Burma, the dramatic dialectic between flood and drought as the world's water is rearranged, all point to a reckless linear model of growth and a cruel regime of neoliberal redistribution resting on racial inequality whose end point will be climate catastrophe. The poorest, most vulnerable people who have done the least to fill the atmosphere with greenhouse gases will suffer the most. If capitalism has not destroyed itself, if we must accept it as inevitable (and must we?) we should at least regulate capital gone mad. To prevent

climate catastrophe, we will need a big state but we will need to live small lives. So we can hunker down in stilted houses, hybrid cars, and gated communities, throw up more walls like those in Palestine/Israel, Northern Ireland, and the Texas–Mexico border, which keep vulnerable people in vulnerable places; or we can figure out new ways to live together, different relations to money, property, the land, and each other, and demand that the state take control of renewable energy politics and provide living wage, full benefits, substantial green jobs. But it may be that first things first, we must end the war on drugs, and free youthful political actors from the contradiction that they must but cannot rely on the informal economy. The criminalization of the informal economy, especially drugs, the risk and racialization, as well as the mellowing effects, of marijuana, may free participants from the tyranny of the debt-for-sale economy, but makes them more vulnerable to the carceral state and thus demobilizes them politically as well. Along with the political changes described by Michael Katz, these conditions may help explain why American cities do not burn.

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SANA Election Results

Congratulations to the following, who have been elected to the SANA Board:

President (two-year term): **A. Lynn Bolls**.

Lynn "look[s] forward to serving SANA by promoting its efforts of collaboration and advancing new ideas for social justice and equality."

Member-at-large #1 (three-year term):

Brett Williams. Brett is "excited about being part of the SANA board, because it offers the kind of progressive community experience I value. I support Sandy Morgen's aim of increasing membership to earn more time for our sessions at the AAA meetings. I'm also interested in ensuring that, wherever we meet, we reach out to local activists and do what we can to make our meetings inclusive and diverse."

Member-at-large #2 (three-year term):

Ann Bookman. Ann has a broken arm and so couldn't make a statement, but she's glad to be on board.

The Politics of Antiracism & Social Justice: The Perspective of a Human Rights Network in the U.S. South

By Faye V. Harrison

Abstract: Since 9/11 the sociopolitical and legal climate of the country has deteriorated, engendering a moral panic over national security and intensifying a longstanding trend of violating the human rights of a portion of the citizenry and immigrant population. These segments of the

populace lived under de facto conditions of a police state long before the War on Terror and the USA Patriot Act. This repression implicates the War on Drugs and a racially- and class-biased system of criminal (in)justice with which Homeland Security intersects. Problems such as these have attracted the attention of both social scientists and activists mobilizing for social justice. Among the latter is a southeastern network of human rights organizers who map their region as part of the Global South. A multiracial group organized around the vision of three African American women, the Southern Human Rights Organizers Network promotes consciousness and praxis shaped by the vernacularization of international human rights discourse and the reclamation of the history of African American and broader Afro-Atlantic struggles for expanding the terms of what it means to be human.

Keywords: antiracism, human rights, gendered activism, US South

Setting the Context: Moral Panics, Legislated Patriotism, and Racially-Biased Mass Incarceration

Since September 11, 2001 the United States has undergone what many of its citizens and residents are experiencing as a major shift during which the sociopolitical and legal climate has deteriorated in some significant respects. State power has grown more authoritarianized as a result of the legal circumscription of civil liberties that the USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) has permitted. Racial profiling has intensified and been extended beyond the harassment of the “usual suspects,” traditionally African Americans, Latinos, or Native Americans, depending on the specific local or regional contexts in which the nation’s social and economic crisis is policed (cf. Hall et al. 1978). Now the demographic profile of targeted arrests is even more ethnically diverse, and includes Arabs, South Asians, and other immigrants whose phenotypes roughly fit the image of the imagined Muslim terrorist who threatens national security. The moral panic (Cohen 1972; Hall et al. 1978) that has emerged – or been politically orchestrated – has licensed the

state to deprive the citizenry of constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties that provide protection from state intrusions on the freedom to express political convictions—especially when those convictions criticize and contest dominant expressions of patriotism.

Exercising the constitutionally protected right to free speech can get you into trouble as an “un-American” advocate of criticizing—or in even more polemical terms, “God-damning”—America for the kinds of domestic and foreign policies that impelled the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and, more recently, the highly controversial Reverend Jeremiah Wright, to castigate the United States for its ethically, structurally, and legally problematic role as a leading purveyor of violence and militarism throughout the world. In King’s perspective, the world community should and could be a common ground of shared values and goals for cooperatively building a “World House” in which there would be no room for the “triple evils” of racism, poverty and militarism (King 1967). While the expansion of the parameters of law enforcement can potentially affect all of us adversely, it is disproportionately inclined to target particular segments of the populace deemed most likely to threaten Homeland Security, as it is broadly and troublingly conceived. Homeland Security and the U.S. military’s presence in Afghanistan and war in Iraq are two sides of the same coin. Ironically and sacrilegiously, upon that coin is inscribed the national motto, “In God We Trust.”

The moral panic over homeland security, the purportedly menacing role of Islam, particularly radical, militant Islam, and the need to authorize the expanded policing of the national crisis mark a troubling shift in intranational and international directions. However, the current state of affairs can also be viewed as an intensification of a long-standing trend of violating the human rights of a portion of the citizenry and immigrant population. There are minoritized and immigrant communities, especially poor working class and working poor

communities, that lived under *de facto* conditions of marshal law or a police state long before 9/11 and the USA Patriot Act. This repression implicates the War on Drugs and a racially and class-biased system of criminal (in)justice (see Harrison 2002 on the domestic and international workings of the War on Drugs). While American anxieties over demonized Muslims intensify, providing a commonsensical rationale for U.S. policies in the Middle East, from Israel to Iraq, the national security crisis is being dramatically staged across a number of home fronts—from the humanitarian-centered transnational voluntary associations of Arab Americans to the streets, housing projects, and political formations within ghettos, barrios, and the country's Little Haiti's, where the national borders for illegal drugs, illegal immigrants, and unrecognized refugees are intensely militarized. Here Homeland Security intersects with the longer-established War on Drugs, whose social cleansing campaign is credited with, among other things, a marked reduction of New York City's crime rate since 2001 (Marable 2002).

Political analyst Manning Marable, however, has translated Guilian's achievement in making the streets of New York safe again into the rising rate of mass incarceration in the neighborhoods that poor, racially marked folk inhabit. In those neighborhoods the boundary between the prison industrial complex and inmates' heavily policed home communities is, in many respects, nebulous. Well beyond the City and State of New York, however, the racial, class, and gender economy of the penal system across the entire country has put Uncle Sam and the feminine symbol of Liberty on the global map for the highest rate of incarceration in the world, exceeding the unconscionable records of China, Russia, and other states against which the United States tends to measure its achievements as the world's leading paragon of democratic freedom. The magnitude of incarceration cannot be attributed to the crime rate; harsher sentences for even small offenses related to the War on Drugs, with its built-in racial/class bias, unequal access

to fair legal representation, and inadequate rehabilitation programs for both prisoners and reentrants are the more likely reason. Particularly in the context of poor communities, which bear the brunt of unemployment and other socioeconomic distress, these trends contribute to the criminalization of survival (Harrison 2007).

Another factor to take into account is the growing significance and value of inmates' labor power in the accumulation of corporate profit, a legacy of the convict leasing system that forced freed people to work without the benefit of wages under slave-like or neo-slavery conditions permissible under the very amendment (the 13th) that granted freedom to the formerly enslaved (Davis 2003, 2005). The 13th amendment allows for involuntary servitude under the condition of imprisonment for crime. In *Slavery by Another Name*, Douglas Blackmon (2008) documents that in many cases during the late 19th century and early 20th century, African Americans were sold into a human labor trafficking system supported by agriculturalists, railroads, mining companies and other corporate interests "intent on achieving the most lucrative balance between the productivity of captive labor and the costs of sustaining them" (Blackmon 2008: 57).

While Blackmon's research ends the neo-slavery era at around the time of World War II, recent analyses suggest that there are contemporary forms of neo-slavery, among them the prison industrial complex, with which we should be concerned. The present population of inmates has been converted to what Pem Davidson Buck (1992) has characterized as "concentrated labor" for corporations that collaborate with the state, and vice versa, to exploit prisoners as a "fourth world" labor force. This fourth world domain, situated in both public and private prisons, can also be viewed as a realm of neo-slavery. Contemporary abolitionists are so named not just for the rhetorical power of a historical metaphor; their campaign to abolish the currently existing prison

system and its collateral damage is a struggle to eradicate slavery and achieve a Second Emancipation.

With privatization as such an important trend in current neoliberal economic restructuring, some firms are building and managing prisons as private enterprises. The phenomenon of company prisons (e.g., Corrections Corporation of America and Wackenhut Corrections Corporation) is highly developed in the United States, but it is also a growing trend in Great Britain, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand (Davis 2003: 85). The distinction between private and public prisons may not be particularly useful, because even public prisons have become intensely corporatized, "saturated with ... profit-producing products and services of private corporations" (Davis: 100). Major transnational corporations (e.g., IBM, Motorola, Compaq, Texas Instruments, Microsoft, and Boeing) have stakes in the prison industry (Davis 1998). Angela Y. Davis argues that it is in these corporations' interest to have a ready supply of prison workers. Criminal justice policies, therefore, ensure that there are sufficient numbers regardless of whether crime rates are rising or incarceration is necessary.

Mass incarceration and what Tony L. Whitehead calls the "prison-community-prison continuum" (Whitehead, personal communication, February 2008) have created the conditions for neo-slavery as a factor in capital accumulation in the United States as well as globally. The incarceration epidemic, another of Whitehead's (1997) concepts, represents a major problem and contradiction for U.S. democracy, because the predicament of neo-slavery accompanies felons even when they are released. In many states, they lose their right of franchise, a basic civil right guaranteed to African Americans only 40 years ago as a victory of the Civil Rights Movement. Now, sizable portions of black and brown communities are disenfranchised, displaced from legitimate forms of wage work, discriminated against in housing markets, and denied access to funding for higher education

because of the prisonization syndrome, which affects both males and females.

A recent Pew Center report indicates that one in nine black males between the ages of 20-34 are in jail or prison (Pew Center 2008). If we include the youths under the correctional supervision of juvenile authority and men entangled in the wider criminal justice nexus (probation and parole), then the figures are even more severe, indeed devastating. According to the Sentencing Project, if current trends persist, "[o]ne of every three black males born today can expect to go to prison" (Sentencing Project n.d.). Black males, however, are not the only "endangered species." Black women are now going to prison at astronomically soaring rates that are higher than the rates for men (Davis 2003, 2005). The incarceration of both males and females has serious implications for the socialization of children, the viability of families and households, and the integrity and sustainability of community life.

These are problems that are capturing the attention of social scientists and activists organizing for justice both here in the United States and abroad (Harrison 2007; Sudbury 2005; Whitehead 2007). In what follows I focus on a specific group of activists, whose sociopolitical consciousness is being shaped by their translation, or vernacularization (Merry 2006), of transnationally transmitted human rights discourse as well as by their reclamation of an important chapter in the sociopolitical and intellectual history of African Americans and other Afro-diasporic activists who have long struggled over what it means to be human, to enjoy human dignity, and to have black people's claims to human rights seriously acknowledged and respected. The debate over black dehumanization, raised in the mid-19th century when abolitionist Frederick Douglass contested American anthropology's scientific racism by invoking the notion of human rights (Douglass 1950), was continued well into the 20th century. During the 1940s and 1950s, radical African American activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois and

William Patterson took human rights petitions to the newly established United Nations (Anderson 2003; Civil Rights Congress 1951; NAACP 1947). In so doing, they resisted pressure from liberal proponents of civil rights, notably the NAACP's Walter White and Eleanor Roosevelt, a member of the civil rights organization's Board of Directors. The human question, albeit usually implicit, remains at issue today in the age of mass incarceration, in the midst of what João Costa Vargas (2008) argues is a *genocidal continuum* in contemporary Black Diaspora communities. One of the contexts within which the social, economic, and political implications of these issues are being confronted and mobilized around is that in which a human rights praxis is being deployed.

Antiracist Organizing for Human Rights in the Post-Civil Rights South

For a little more than a decade, a multiracial yet African American women-centered network of activists, working largely but not exclusively in the southeastern region of the country, has been building bridges (cf. Robnett 1996) among a number of interrelated struggles against racism and hate crimes, the exploitation and, in some instances, enslavement of migratory agricultural workers, health disparities (particularly those resulting in disproportionate rates of HIV/AIDS), environmental racism, flagrant inequalities in public education, police brutality, and the death penalty. These multiple yet overlapping struggles are being rethought and reframed in terms of an interrelated web of connection based on international human rights. Human rights violations tend to be most stark in the Global South (or in other peripheries and semi-peripheries like the former Yugoslavia), but the activists working in the Southern Human Rights Organizers Network (SHRON; www.shroc.org) map the U.S. South (along with allied regions such as the southwest) as part of this structural, transbordered, and existential

geography, given its long association with flagrant human rights abuse, specifically antebellum slavery, now acknowledged to have been a crime against humanity (WCAR NGO Forum Secretariat 2002:10), Post-Reconstruction era lynching, and the varying forms of everyday violence that marked Jim Crow race relations.

In continuity with this tragic past, the South still "leads the country in the unfair application of the death penalty and in environmental racism. Underdeveloped educational systems, a massive prison industrial complex and lack of unions ... for low waged workers perpetuate a caste system, the remnant of a slave based economy. The exploitation of sharecroppers and migrant farm workers, and the brutality of police repression characterize living conditions for many Southerners"—both old and new (National Center for Human Rights Education 2003).

SHRON is organized around the shared vision and praxis of three African American women who are veterans of the civil rights movement and active in the post-civil rights era black women's health and reproductive rights movement, the labor movement, and now the more encompassing and internationalized movement for human rights. At a moment when civil rights and civil liberties are under assault and national borders militarized, SHRON's constituencies have grown particularly cognizant of the importance of thinking beyond the limits of civil rights "bestowed by nations on those within their territorial boundaries" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_rights; also see Steiner and Alston 2000: 594).

In recent years, SHRON has joined allied organizations (e.g., Alianza Indígena sin Fronteras [Indigenous Alliance without Borders], Haitian Women of Miami, etc.) in taking direct action against Homeland Security's repressive policies and practices in increasingly militarized border zones in the southwest and Florida. It has sought to bring greater attention to the declining political climate threatening the human rights of both citizens and immigrants in Mexican American, Native American, and Haitian

transnational communities. The collusion between the state and paramilitary vigilantes fighting against the “invasion” of illegal aliens is a serious problem especially in the southwest, where undocumented immigrants, many of whom are indigenous, are hunted like wild animals in desert territories that are often part of American Indian reservations. In the Florida context, SHRON has worked with Haitian American activists on the maltreatment of “boat people,” who are often retained indefinitely without access to legal counsel or recreational and educational facilities for children, who are separated from their parents. SHRON has also brought the predicament of Haitian refugees in the United States into conversations on conditions in Haiti and among Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic. SHRON has helped to establish a transborder network that links activists and their subaltern constituencies on both sides of the Haitian diaspora where anti-Haitian, anti-black discrimination operates in parallel but culturally and politically distinct ways.

SHRON’s constituent organizations, among them the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and the Mississippi Center for Workers Rights, have brought to it a concern for economic justice—a working wage and safe, non-hostile working conditions. Workplace hate crimes, harassment, both racial and sexual, inadequate wages, restraints on unionization, and, in the worse cases, slavery-like work and living conditions have occupied the attention of human rights organizers. SHRON has emphasized that human rights are holistic, based on the complementarity that civil and political rights have with the economic, social, and cultural rights that are barely recognized in the U.S.’s bourgeois democracy.

Another of SHRON’s important foci has been the largely anti-black human rights violations that internally displaced people, a category protected by humanitarian and human rights law, have faced as a consequence of Katrina’s *unnatural* disaster in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast. These mobilizations have been

informed by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which the UN developed in 1998 (UN doc.E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2 of February 11, 1998).

Finally, transnational and intercultural alliances are also key to the network’s political identity; hence, SHRON has made an effort to cultivate allies in India (e.g., Dalit women’s organizations) as well as in the Caribbean and Latin America. The network of allies includes a strong representation of Afro-diasporic and continental African women (e.g., in South Africa) with whom members of, and organizations within, the network have collaborated in antiracist, HIV/AIDS prevention, economic justice, and women’s empowerment projects. SHRON is also embedded in a national nexus that brings activists, educators, and students from other parts of the country as well as from abroad to its biennial “regional” conferences.

The Regional Face of Globalization

Central to SHRON’s political project is the impact that globalization and its interrelated transnationalisms (demographic, economic, and political) are having on the south (Cobb and Stueck 2005; Harrison 2005; Peacock et al. 2005). The southern population has grown more diverse from new immigration. Latinization (Mohl 2005; Murphy et al. 2001; Smith 2005) is having a tremendous effect, but migration from other parts of the world, including the Anglo- and Francophone Caribbean and Africa, is also noteworthy. On the economic front, the region’s economy is being reconfigured by capital movements both in and out of the country. The region is attractive to foreign capital, because it offers First World amenities without First World costs (Smith 1998).

The region’s transnationalization is bringing the experiences of old and new southerners into interaction *and tension*. In response to the conflicts that have arisen, especially between blacks and new immigrants—from the lowly-paid Latino migrants to affluent Asian business proprietors and professionals (Subramanian

2005)—SHRON is attempting to provide popular education and consciousness raising that elucidates how the rights of immigrants and refugees and those of citizens (often second class in the way they have been treated) can be understood as interrelated and reconcilable within the international human rights framework.

Demographic Diversification, Restructuring Race, and the Crisis of White Identity

The southeast's demographic, cultural and economic diversification is having an interesting effect on relations of race and racism, which—despite ideological claims of colorblindness—are being restructured rather than dismantled. Since the outset of the post-civil rights period, white privilege has been undergoing a reorganization to accommodate antiracist reforms as well as the changes brought about from recent inflows of immigrants. White privilege has also had to accommodate an inflow of foreign capital that includes investments from Asian countries such as Japan (Kurotani 2005; Shimizu 2005). The national economy's growing dependence on Asian capital and professionals means that white Americans no longer hold the same level of economic clout that was traditionally the bottom line of racial domination. Also, the declining economic security of the white middle and working classes has engendered a crisis of identity that intensifies resentment against the substantive advances that African Americans and other people of color make. Racial others are convenient scapegoats whom racist whites can blame and punish for getting out of their proper place in the normative racial order. The intensification of racial tensions under these circumstances, which are not at all restricted to the South (e.g., the recent incident at Columbia University), has led to ugly conflicts over racially demarcated turfs, noose hangings on school grounds and the imposition of racially differentiated punishments by the courts. The flagrant racism that gave rise to Jena Six and that

has led the Ku Klux Klan to diversify the populations its hate crimes target (Harrison 2008a: 250) co-exists alongside more subtle and diffuse forms of everyday racism. These range from interpersonal microaggressions (Sue 2003) that diminish morale and undermine mental and physical health to the institutionalized mechanisms that sustain racially coded privileges and disadvantages across a number of societal domains, from academia (Harrison 2008b) to housing and banking.

Situating SHRON in Space and Time

Beyond the factors related to its immediate history and regional context, SHRON has been influenced by the general post-Cold War trends that have led many social justice struggles around the world to adopt or appropriate the language and instruments of the international human rights movement. Human rights talk has come to be one of the most intelligible political discourses in the world, in some ways filling the vacuum left by the “demise of [the former] grand political narratives” (Wilson 1997: 1).

The regional and world conferences sponsored by the UN have provided another important international influence. Since the 1985 Nairobi Women's Conference, SHRON's founders have participated in UN “prep coms” (preparatory conferences) and international conferences on the rights of women and the racially oppressed. These experiences have exposed them to the transnational construction and mobilization of human rights discourse and a wide spectrum of nationally specific cases of translating and incorporating ideas about those rights into antiracist and antisexist terms amenable to particular on-the-ground struggles. SHRON has conveyed its transnational knowledge and consciousness to community-based audiences through its biennial conferences. For example, one of the main purposes of the 2000 SHROC (Southern Human Rights Organizers Conference) was to publicize the significance of and prepare delegates for the 2001 World Conference against

Racism, specifically the parallel NGO Forum, in Durban, South Africa. The workshops offered on applying for NGO certification and preparing shadow reports were extremely helpful.

SHRON's leading activists are also quite aware of influences that predate the transition from the Cold War. They know of political antecedents whose articulations of human rights have constituted important chapters in the history of the Black Experience. For example, a constituent organization's annual report notes that Frederick Douglass addressed the human rights of Negroes in the 1850s (National Center for Human Rights 2000). Later during the post-World War II years, a human rights agenda was at the center of the antiracist campaigns of the NAACP and other more leftist civil rights organizations, notably the National Negro Congress and the Civil Rights Congress (Anderson 2003). These organizations prepared UN petitions documenting human rights violations, including genocide (Civil Rights Congress 1951). The NAACP eventually moved further to the right as it aligned itself to the Truman administration and against the radical positions of WEB Du Bois, William Paterson, Paul Robeson and other black leftists who, by the 1950s McCarthyist era, were deemed to be "un-American" and deserving of severe penalties. These were the push factors that led Du Bois to emigrate to Ghana, where he died just before the 1963 March on Washington.

The following year, Malcolm X continued to echo the call for human rights. In a 1964 interview with *Monthly Review* magazine, he stated the following:

Now my address to [the civil rights leadership] was designed to show them that if they would expand their civil rights movement to a human rights movement it would internationalize it. Now, as a civil rights movement, it remains within the confines of American domestic policy and no African independent nations can open up their mouths on American domestic affairs, whereas if they expanded the civil rights movement to a human rights

movement then they would be eligible to take the case of the Negro to the United Nations the same as the case of the Angolans is in the UN and the case of the South Africans is in the UN. Once the civil rights movement is expanded to a human rights movement our African brothers and our Asian brothers and Latin American brothers can place it on the agenda at the General Assembly that is coming up this year and Uncle Sam has no more say-so in it then. (Spellman 1964)

The significance of this history continues to reverberate in African American and Black Atlantic politics and theorization. For instance, post-colonial theorist Sylvia Wynter (2002) has called for an *after-man* phase of formulating the terms of what it can mean to be and become human. She advocates an ontology and epistemology that are premised on conceptual grounds other than those established in the image and within the parameters of the legacy of the Western Enlightenment. She argues that the model of Man derived from that universalism-claiming trajectory presumes the radical othering and inferiorization of the African and African-derived. As a consequence, full humanity cannot be achieved without the fundamental reconstruction of the terms and conditions of what is human. This theorization has implications for thinking critically about the historical development of and epistemological struggles over the philosophical, legal, and political constitution of the current human rights regime.

Will the vernacularization of human rights discourse among SHRON's constituents and kindred spirits penetrate beneath the text of declarations and conventions to the subtexts, to the underpinnings and deep structural realm of implication? Will debates within SHRON lead to a critical reflection on the human rights system so that its positive possibilities can address the predicaments of the racially oppressed more effectively? Will SHRON be successful in applying a "grounded interpretation of

international human rights standards [that will] offset the decontextualizing, top-down approach that [often] inhibits well-intentioned NGOs from sufficiently taking into account the complex political dynamics and structural processes that shape the specific contours of human rights cases” [that emerge within historically contingent and politically variable contexts]? (Harrison 2005: 247)

Conclusion

SHRON’s vision of racial justice is predicated on its notion that human rights, both civil/political and socioeconomic, are necessary if not completely sufficient conditions for social justice, reconciliation, and peace. SHRON also understands that achieving racial justice is inextricably entangled in the pursuit of equality along the lines of interlocking axes of inequality and power, particularly those of gender, sexuality, class, nation and, at this juncture of demonizing Islam, religion. SHRON is making a concerted effort to deploy an intersectional or multi-axial strategy to organize for shared dignity and rights across salient differences in a regional, national, and global context in which pluricultural, multiracial complexity and tensions are growing. These organizers seek to follow a humane path toward ideals of equality, liberty and commonweal rather than succumb to the logic of being divided and conquered once again in the Second Post-Reconstruction. They are working to achieve a Second Emancipation – perhaps the first with a robust repertoire of substantive and balanced rights, especially for the most vulnerable and violated among us, who, as Frederick Douglass clearly understood, have been relegated to the margins of the human family.

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Commentary

The Obama Victory, Asset-Based Development and the Re-Politicization of Community Organizing

By Susan B. Hyatt

Abstract: In this commentary, I argue that Obama's victory in the recent Democratic primary was largely a consequence of his early experiences as an Alinsky-style community organizer in Chicago. I compare the nature of the broad-based organizing that Obama was trained in to a newer model of "community building" called Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). ABCD promotes the belief that communities suffering the effects of economic restructuring, such as abandoned housing, crime, and deindustrialization among others, can "heal themselves" by looking within for resources—or "assets"—rather than by making demands on the state, a stance its proponents stigmatize as evidence of a "client" mentality. I argue that however chimerical its promises of redemption are, ABCD illustrates an important shift in contemporary understandings of citizenship, away from the possibilities for collective action that characterize Alinsky-style organizing and toward a view that is both radically neoliberal and potentially totalitarian in its homogenizing notions of its two key concepts—"community" and "assets." I suggest that the grassroots nature of the Obama campaign may have the potential to reanimate an interest in broad-based organizing toward the end of creating a more just distribution of resources.

Key words: community organizing, neoliberalism, inequality

"He Community Organized the Nation"

One of the more intriguing aspects of this year's Democratic primary race was the way in which it brought widespread attention to the Alinsky model of community organizing. Both of the final candidates claimed it as part of their personal histories. Hillary Clinton wrote her senior thesis at Wellesley College on Saul Alinsky. Entitled, "'There is Only the Fight': An Analysis of Saul D. Alinsky," the existence of the thesis has been used by the right wing as evidence of Clinton's untrustworthy "radicalism" and by her supporters in the recent race against Obama as proof that Clinton's organizing credentials are on par with his. (See the MSNBC site <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17388372/> for an analysis of the thesis.)

For his part, Obama actually walked the walk; for three years (1985-88), he was employed by the Developing Communities Project, an Alinsky-style organization in South Chicago that still exists and whose mission is described as follows on its Web site:

Developing Communities Project (DCP) exists for the purpose of effective church based grassroots organizing. Our mission continues to be the development of indigenous community residents and institutions for the purpose of solving urban neighborhood problems. (<http://www.dcpincorp.org/>)

In his autobiography, Obama describes the arduous work of entering a neighborhood as an organizer, of going door-to-door to set up what organizers call "one-on-ones"—conversations with neighborhood residents intended to give organizers insight into neighborhood concerns, alliances, oppositions, local networks, and resources. He recounts the frustration of a failed community meeting he set up early on with a local police District Officer and of being initially summarily dismissed by a local pastor suspicious of "outside agitators" (Obama 1995). Toward the end of his organizing career, Obama wrote a short article that first appeared in a magazine called

Illinois Issues in which he reflected on the importance of his organizing experiences. As he wrote:

... organizing teaches as nothing else does the beauty and strength of everyday people. Through the songs of the church and the talk on the stoops, through the hundreds of individual stories of coming up from the South and finding any job that would pay, of raising families on threadbare budgets, of losing some children to drugs and watching others earn degrees and land jobs their parents could never aspire to—it is through these stories and songs of dashed hopes and powers of endurance, of ugliness and strife, subtlety and laughter, that organizers can shape a sense of community not only for others, but for themselves. (Obama 1990; available on-line at <http://www.edwoj.com/Alinsky/AlinskyObamaChapter1990.htm>)

Obama borrowed from Alinsky's principles during the primary in the way he mobilized "everyday people" at the level of the grassroots, particularly in caucus states. While he has generally eschewed Alinsky's emphases on polarization and on the use of confrontative tactics, he has built on Alinsky's tactics for *personalizing* the issues, thereby creating a sense among his followers that they are intimately connected to him and to other supporters. He set up a campaign structure that replicated at the national level the kind of local-level "block captain" formations characteristic of Alinsky groups in urban neighborhoods. In the *Seattle Times*, columnist Danny Westneat (quoting from an interview he had conducted with well-known Seattle organizer Jim Diers) writes, "He somehow community organized the nation ... 'It's such local work, neighbor by neighbor,' ... 'It's tricky—you can't do it from the top down. It never works if it comes from the parties, or establishment groups'" (Westneat 2008; see also Moberg 2007).

Obama's use of organizing strategies has revived public interest in the work of Saul Alinsky following a long period of neglect. The heyday of Alinsky organizing was actually in the 1970s and

'80s, when neighborhoods in cities across the country mobilized as part of a campaign to fight the pernicious practices associated with redlining—that is, practices that denied conventional mortgages, home improvement loans and insurance to residents of minority, low-income, and racially changing neighborhoods. The anti-redlining campaigns brought people together across racial boundaries and became a lively presence in many neighborhoods and cities across the country; collectively, they resulted in significant legislative victories at the federal level, including passage of the "1975 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, the 1976 Equal Credit Opportunity Act and the 1977 Community Reinvestment Act" (Medoff and Sklar 1994:27), and they left behind a host of organizations, many of which have endured to this day. Unfortunately, the banking deregulation acts of the 1980s have largely made the notion of local banks obsolete, thereby rendering the Community Reinvestment Act much less potent (see Williams 2004 and in this issue).

It has been difficult to repeat the success of the anti-redlining campaigns in the context of the problems that plague many neighborhoods today. Foremost among them is the overabundance of credit that has been offered on predatory terms to residents of low-income and minority communities and that—along with other deceptive lending practices—has been responsible for the current foreclosure crisis. Furthermore, since the 1990s, the privatization of many services and utilities, ranging from telecommunications and electricity to schools to public health (what is left of it) to basic city services to welfare provision (what is left of that as well) has made it much more difficult to mobilize people against clearly defined targets—indeed, it is often the case that, in addition to disempowering the citizenry, privatization has also undermined the authority that city and state governments can exert over these new entities (see Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003). As Goode and Maskovsky (2001:9) have written, "Privatization removes the poor from a direct relationship with the state, a relationship that historically has been essential to the expression of collective agency for poor communities." I would extend their insight to say that this is also true for working and middle-

class neighborhood.

The sharp decline in union membership over the past 20 years has also compromised the efficacy of community organizing. Not only did labor unions provide the template for political action that Alinsky built on in developing his own philosophy of community action, but it was often unionized workers—who understood very well the principles of direct action and of group solidarity—who served as the backbone of many Alinsky groups.

In addition to these factors, a new model for community organizing emerged in the 1990s that has now gained ascendancy in many locales, both nationally and internationally. This newer model, known as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), reflects the neoliberal environment within which it was born and has been widely embraced by many municipalities and foundations. ABCD promotes itself as a strategy for rebuilding communities from within; it embodies a view of citizenship that is both radically neoliberal and potentially totalitarian. It is institutionalized at Northwestern University, where its two founders, Jody Kretzmann and John McKnight, hold faculty appointments. As Aigner et al. (2002:87) write, “The asset-based community development (ABCD) approach, as the Kretzmann and McKnight collaboration has come to be known, has garnered the attention of community residents and practitioners throughout the world.”

An analysis of the basic values of ABCD, derived from its Ur-text, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993), suggests that it is not so much a blueprint for community action as it is part of a much broader political trend, aimed at discrediting both the power of government to change people's lives and those social movements that are striving for a more fair allocation of resources. Especially in minority and impoverished communities, where public sector amenities including schools, public hospitals, community centers, parks, and libraries continue to be grossly underfunded and disproportionately de-funded, ABCD acts as a palliative, serving as a rationale for maintaining the status quo, rather than as a genuine catalyst intended to spur social change.

Reinventing Community Organizing

In many respects, *Building Communities from the Inside Out* is to community activism what Osborne and Gaebler's 1992 book, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* was to government in the Clinton era. *Reinventing Government* argued for a reshaping of the public sector to make it more like a business and it embodied all of the key values and recommendations that have come to exemplify “high neoliberalism” including: displacing the responsibility for the provision of services from government onto the shoulders of already beleaguered community residents and their local organizations, creating competitive “free” markets for service delivery, and emphasizing what they call “leveraging change through market-oriented incentives.”

Anyone who has stood in line at the Post Office or at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles can understand the frustration with public sector bureaucracy. Yet, the adulation of the now-deregulated and often globalized private sector is even more difficult to fathom—reports abound of wide-spread customer dissatisfaction with the airlines, with private insurance companies, with credit cards, banks, and a host of other services. Despite the rampant corruption that has discredited many a private sector enterprise, from the Enron scandals of the 1990s to the current disarray in the mortgage banking and real estate industries, the proponents of public sector reforms continue to insist that the private is always superior to the public. More than a question of “customer satisfaction,” this is an ideological claim with serious political implications. As Kearney and Hays (1998:48–49) write, “Privatization ... weakens [political] accountability by restructuring the delivery of various services from a single public provider to parastatal, corporate, or nonprofit entities.”

The ABCD model shares much with Osborne and Gaebler's prescription for reinventing government, particularly in its disdain for public sector entities and in its wholesale rejection of the potential of government as a possible agent for redressing the injuries created by structural inequality. Instead, they advocate an approach to community

development that, as they put it, “starts with what is present in the community, the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and intuitional base of the area—not with what is absent, or with what is problematic, or with what the community needs.” They also characterize their approach as “internally focused” and “relationship driven” (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993:9).

They contrast their asset-driven approach with what they describe as, “The traditional approach—A needs-driven dead end” (1993:2). They begin their discussion of this approach with the following highly offensive—if not overtly racist—description of impoverished communities:

For most Americans, the names “South Bronx” or “South Central Los Angeles” or even “Public Housing” call forth a rush of images ... They are images of needy and problematic and deficient neighborhoods populated by needy and problematic and deficient people ... Once accepted as the whole truth about troubled neighborhoods, this “needs” map determines how problems are to be addressed, through deficiency-oriented policies and programs. Public, private and nonprofit human service systems, often supported by university research and foundation funding, translate the problems into local activities that teach people the nature and extent of their problems and the value of services as the answer to their problems. As a result, many lower income urban neighborhoods are now environments of service where behaviors are affected because residents come to believe that their well-being depends on being a client. They begin to see themselves as people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders. They become consumers of services, with no incentive to be producers. (McKnight and Kretzmann 1993: 2)

Note that the names “South Bronx,” “South Central Los Angeles” and “Public Housing” all gloss communities that are, in the American imaginary, predominantly African American. References to African American communities as disproportionately “dependent” on public provision and as a burden to be borne by (white, hard-working) middle-class taxpayers have a long

and unholy lineage, resonating most strongly with President Reagan’s repeated invocation of the figure of the (black) “welfare queen” as justification for his oft-cited slogan, “Government is not the solution to our problems—Government is the problem.” This mantra, along with changes in the tax code during his presidency that began the process of redistributing wealth upward, set the stage for the “reinventing government” moment and later for Clinton’s passage of welfare reform, with its heavily racialized sub-text. As Davis (2004:276–277) notes, although Black women were in fact historically denied access to the program once known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children and although the benefits provided through this program to women and children were minimal compared with similar programs in other Western welfare states, passage of Clinton’s welfare reform bill was politically palatable to large numbers of the American electorate “because welfare was viewed first and foremost as a ‘Black’ program” (277). Can it be coincidental that Kretzmann and McKnight’s exemplars of “environments of service” are also clearly coded allusions to black neighborhoods?

Furthermore, one wonders just where Kretzmann and McKnight are finding these “environments of service” unless it is in neighborhoods in Copenhagen or Stockholm. In my many years working in low-income and modest working-class communities, both as an organizer and as a researcher, and in the extensive ethnographic literature on poor communities, I am at a loss to imagine any neighborhood in any American city that was ever so replete with such an array of publicly-financed social services; it is hard to imagine that Kretzmann and McKnight really believe that the South Bronx and South Central Los Angeles ever were the beneficiaries of such generous government largesse. Their charge that the residents of such neighborhoods have “no incentive to be producers” completely disregards a long and rich history of participation in non-paid volunteerism and self-help in poor communities. In addition to the covert racism in this passage, one might also note their misogynist characterization of poor neighborhoods, given the fact that social welfare programs in the US, such as they were,

primarily served—however inadequately—women and children. Furthermore, the array of voluntary activities that sustained such communities through periods of critical privation were also initiated and upheld largely by African American women.

But, beyond these unsavory elements of this document, just what are the political implications of Kretzmann and McKnight's description of neighborhoods populated by "clients" and "consumers of services, with no incentive to be producers" and what do they have to do with the undermining of community organizing and with the Obama campaign?

Which "Clients" and Whose "Needs?"

In a series of incisive essays, published during the transitional interregnum between the Reagan-Bush I era and the Clinton period, Nancy Fraser took on the issue of "needs talk," noting that "the interpretation of people's needs is itself a political stake, indeed sometimes *the* political stake" (Fraser 1989a:145 emphasis in original); Fraser (1989a:151) also makes explicit the gendering of social programs, noting that, in contrast to public provision aimed at women, which construes them as "dependents," "masculine" social insurance schemes position recipients primarily as "rights-bearers." As she goes on to state in her critique of political theorists,

First, they take the *interpretation* of people's needs as simply given and unproblematic; thus they occlude the interpretive dimension of needs politics, the fact that not just satisfactions but *needs interpretations* are politically contested. Second, they assume that it doesn't matter who interprets the needs in question and from what perspective and in the light of what interests; they thus overlook the fact that *who* gets to establish authoritative thick definitions of people's needs is itself a political stake. Third, they take for granted that the socially authorized forms of public discourse available for interpreting people's needs are adequate and fair; they thus neglect the question of whether these forms of public discourse are skewed in favor of the self-interpretations and interests of dominant

social groups and, so, work to the disadvantage of subordinate or oppositional groups—they occlude, in other words, the fact that the means of public discourse themselves may be at issue in needs politics. (Fraser 1989b:164; emphases as in original)

This quotation captures brilliantly Kretzmann and McKnight's characterization of whose "needs" are legitimate and whose are not. In their view, the needs of the poor are evidence of pathological dependency and of their failure to live up to their obligation of good citizenship, whereas the "needs" of others pass unnoticed because they are not even constituted by Kretzmann and McKnight as "needs."

At present, there is only one neighborhood I know of in my home city of Indianapolis that presumes so unreasonably on the generosity of the public purse; as is the case in most other American cities, it is not a poor black community nor is it comprised of public housing. It is, in fact, our rapidly gentrifying downtown. According to the *Indianapolis Star*, a newspaper no one would accuse of harboring a politically liberal bias, "The city of Indianapolis is willing to spend as much as \$48.5 million of *taxpayer money* to help build a mega-hotel of up to 1,000 rooms to service the expanding Indiana Convention Center" (July 1, 2007; emphasis added).

This article goes on to describe other private projects that have received generous public subsidies including the original Marriott/Convention Center (city investment \$98 million), Circle City mall (city investment \$187 million), and the Conrad Hotel (city investment \$29 million). The assumption that these undertakings are worthy uses of public funds stretches across the political spectrum. They were championed by Indianapolis' former Democratic Mayor, Bart Peterson, and even by one of the more progressive members of our city-county council, who is quoted in the same article as saying that "the city should gain from the hotel deal because it will create jobs and a larger tax base." What jobs? Concierges? Chambermaids? Front desk attendants? Doormen? These are all minimum wage jobs for people with no benefits, whose

meager paychecks will, like everyone else's, be garnished to pay for these amenities. In the wake of recently substantial property tax increases and ever-declining city services (potholes galore!) there has been a rumble of discontent about the disproportionate allocation of resources to such projects but the insatiable demands of corporations—like the Marriott—are not described as “needs;” rather, they are *investments*, intended to make Indianapolis “competitive” with other second tier Midwestern cities (St. Louis, Cincinnati, Louisville) as a tourist destination for out-of-town and suburban visitors.

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993:5) offer ABCD as a corrective to what they describe as “the dominant deficiency model” of organizing. The fact that there is really no such thing as “deficiency” or “needs-based” organizing has not prevented their vision from being widely embraced. The social movements they characterize as based on “deficiencies” and “needs” are, in many cases, actually progressive movements aimed at bringing about a more just distribution of resources in a time of rapidly growing inequality through collective action.

According to a Bureau of Census chart, reproduced on a National Public Radio site (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7180618>), between 1975 and 2005, “U.S. households in the bottom 80 percent income bracket saw their share of national income actually fall... Only the top 20 percent of households experienced an increase in their share of the total national income; much of that went to households in the highest 5 percent of the income bracket.” Is it so unreasonable for that bottom 80 percent of the population to want a greater share in the country's prosperity and is it accurate to describe that aspiration as “needs?”

Despite Kretzmann and McKnight's assertion to the contrary, *all* community organizing depends on building relationships of trust and *all* organizing always builds on local assets. In my years working as a community organizer in Chicago (1982–89), we relied on the support of several local individuals and institutions, including churches, businesses, and unions. Otherwise, how else would we have mobilized large numbers of people to fight for such

causes as an end to racially discriminatory real estate practices, reform of the Chicago Public Schools, and a reallocation of development monies from downtown to the neighborhoods? Proponents of ABCD are prone to trumpeting that they “see the positives without dwelling on the negatives”; they refer to themselves not as organizers but as “community builders.” The attraction of ABCD, for rather conservative cities like Indianapolis and for charitable foundations, many of which also tend to be conservative in their investments, is that it uses the language of Evangelical Christianity to promote the notion that people “joining together” in a cooperative fashion can move mountains. It is a model that explicitly discourages the confrontative and direct action tactics advocated by Alinsky, establishing its own legitimacy by relying on a kind of caricature of community organizing as a constant series of unreasonable battles, fought in the public sphere between community residents and their elected officials.

In their homage to ABCD, Aigner *et al.* (2002:96) offer just such a critique of Alinsky-style organizing, arguing that, “Neo-Alinsky organizers rely on othering when they dehumanize the adversary, stir up anger and resentment during their door knocking and in one-on-one conversations when they try to recruit residents to the cause.”

To be sure, in my organization back in the 1980s, we did have confrontative moments but in the big picture, they were actually few and far between. The backbone members of many Alinsky-style community organizations are church-going, working-class Catholics who are not particularly prone to fits of wild-eyed radicalism or to public demonstrations. In the Catholic parishes where I worked, most of our strongest neighborhood leaders and members were middle-aged and elderly Reagan Democrats. Building a campaign always depended on establishing relationships based on mutual trust, on careful research and on holding an escalating series of multiple meetings at the level of the neighborhood, the city and sometimes the state, and with a range of public officials and other people in power, others of whom were allies, some of whom were opponents. Local priests were also important participants and

their approbation or disapproval could easily make or break a campaign. Many of our most memorable undertakings involved distinctly non-militant issues such as advocating for a new library, for an abandoned elementary school to be turned into a community center, for safe street crossings for children and for an end to gang violence. These are hardly subversive goals but sometimes they did involve confrontations with elected officials and mass mobilization. They also resulted in important victories that did not ask people to settle for what they had but that motivated them to use existing assets to create new ones.

And here is where it becomes clear that however much funding ABCD groups receive, however many politicians and religious leaders (and universities) embrace its promise, it is a model that can never succeed in building a social movement because of its commitment to long-outmoded and heavily critiqued definitions of “community.” The asset-based, internally focused and relationship-driven model advocated by ABCD reifies symbolic boundaries that then become a *cordon sanitaire* around individual neighborhoods. Moreover, this model creates an image of neighborhoods as homogeneous and static spaces, rather than encouraging the formation of broadly based alliances and coalitions across community boundaries, processes which are integral to the creation of lasting social change.

Counting Assets and Creating Boundaries: The Coming Failure of ABCD

The method for asset-based development includes the following recommendation:

Each community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. A thorough map of those assets will begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills and capacities of the community’s residents. Household by household, building by building, block by block, the capacity mapmakers will discover a vast and often surprising array of individual talents and productive skills. (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993:6)

The diagram on the page opposing these instructions shows a map that assumes clear-cut and discrete neighborhood boundaries; moreover, all of the worksheets and projects associated with ABCD take for granted the fact that among neighborhood residents there will be close to 100 percent consensus on what exactly these local assets are. There is no recognition that neighborhoods are often contested arenas where sometimes racial and economically diverse constituencies (as in the case of gentrification) joust for preeminence or where different populations might have very different visions of just what constitutes an asset (or a community “need”). In the racially divided community of Grays Ferry in Philadelphia, for example, where I carried out fieldwork in the mid-to-late 1990s, whites and blacks would rarely have been in agreement on these points. The local churches were segregated as were the playgrounds and community centers where residents congregated.

Furthermore, community assets are not stable entities. Despite the best intentions of community residents, they can (and often do) disappear overnight. Local businesses close. Factories relocate. Cities seize homes using eminent domain. It is alarming to see neighborhoods in Indianapolis which, as in other cities, were once generally stable congeries of working-class homeowners, becoming eviscerated by vacant and boarded up houses due to foreclosure. And it is even more disturbing to see this city’s communities relatively paralyzed in the face of this calamity because its residents have not been provided with the kind of leadership skills required to find and implement systemic solutions across neighborhood (and even across city and state) boundaries.

And this is yet another inadequacy of the ABCD model: it does not allow for an analysis of the external forces that change and sometimes destroy neighborhoods. The building of the inter-state highways in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, was notorious for displacing neighborhood residents. Gentrification sometimes produces the same results as does its opposite phenomenon: community disinvestment. Because ABCD suggests that all problems can be addressed by residents from within, it saddles them with the

responsibility for redressing the causes of these difficulties themselves, without encouraging any analysis of larger processes at work.

The true cynicism of the Kretzmann-McKnight vision emerges most clearly in their argument for why communities should adopt their model for what they call, "capacity-focused development." First, they argue, "significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort" (p. 5). Again, I would note that all organizing depends on that very same principle. Their second argument is far more duplicitous. As they write,

The second reason for emphasizing the development of the internal assets of local urban neighborhoods is that the prospect for outside help is bleak indeed. Even in areas designated as Enterprise Zones, the odds are long that large-scale, job-providing industrial or service corporations will be locating in these neighborhoods. Nor is it likely, in the light of continuing budget constraints, that significant new inputs of federal money will be forthcoming soon. It is increasingly futile to wait for significant help to arrive from outside the community. The hard truth is that development must start from within the community and in most of our urban neighborhoods, there is no other choice. (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993:5)

This description, of urban neighborhoods abandoned by the state, directly contradicts their previous characterization of these same areas as "client communities." Furthermore, although they are correct that (passively) waiting for help *may be* futile, many communities have not waited for change but have fought memorable battles on their own behalf, some of which have been quite successful even when the odds were stacked against them. Hertz (2002), for example, recounts the story of a community in Chicago that, when faced with a factory closure, fought for and won a Costco store which, though not ideal, provided living wage jobs for local people and prevented the construction of the alternative and

less desirable project, consisting of luxury housing, high-end retail, and a movie theatre. More recently, community organizations in other cities have had some measure of success in addressing the damages caused by the foreclosure crisis. On May 31st of this year, for example, another national network of community organizations, Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO), announced that one of its affiliates, Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization (CCISCO), located in Antioch, CA, had succeeded in negotiating an agreement with one of their lenders, Washington Mutual, mandating the following: face-to-face meetings with borrowers facing foreclosure, lower interest rates, convert adjustable rate loans to fixed rate loans, and asking them to "reduce the amount of money owed in order to stabilize families" (<http://www.piconetwork.org/news/washington-mutual-agrees-to-negotiate-with-homeowners.html>). If this kind of settlement were to be replicated in communities around the country, this would have huge implications for stemming the tide of vacancies and displacement that plague so many neighborhoods.

At the beginning of this commentary, I remarked that ABCD advocated a vision of citizenship that not only was anti-democratic but also potentially totalitarian. I make this claim for the following reasons. First, there is its complete disengagement from politics and from the state: everything people need was right in their own backyard all along. To expect anything from government is to be a dependent client and therefore, to lose the claim to citizenship. These values are also associated with neoliberalism but even in its most pure form, neoliberal ideology still acknowledged that there was a role for government to play, even if that role was essentially to facilitate the emergence of a completely marketized social economy. As Maskovsky and Kingfisher state,

Indeed, modes of neoliberal governance have been introduced into the lives of the poor largely through state action. It is thus inaccurate to say that downsizing, deregulation, privatization, welfare state retrenchment... and other neoliberal austerity

measure have simply removed the state from the lives of the poor; rather, these policies have brought the poor into new relations with the state (and the private sector). (Maskovsky and Kingfisher 2001:112)

Second, the call for people to look to themselves for their own salvation has become an appeal to a kind of vigilante moralism that suggests its affinity with communitarianism. ABCD groups advocate such practices as “sharing circles,” “dream paths,” and “visioning sessions” (see Rans 2005). There is no mention of such forces as racism, sexism, homophobia, or xenophobia that might interfere with these activities and that might also need to be addressed by the group.

It is the complete privatization of morality and of social relations, the denial that there is any entity bigger than a sharing circle that might draw people together in a common interest, and the complete disavowal of the utility of social movements and political organizing that makes me argue that ABCD has moved even beyond the boundaries of conventional neoliberal thought to embody a kind of grassroots authoritarianism. Its success is a frightening symptom of the disenfranchisement of the vast majority of the American public that has characterized the past three decades and that has accelerated dangerously during the period of the Bush II presidency.

In the general election, Obama has continued to invoke his organizing experiences in Chicago. In fact, his campaign workers are now referred to as “Obama organizing fellows.” According to Peter Dreier, long-time scholar of community organizing, “Obama isn’t just catalyzing young people to vote or volunteer for his campaign. Professors report that a growing number of college students are taking classes in community organizing and social activism” (<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=1215>).

Back in the late 1980s, after Obama had left his job in Chicago for Harvard Law School, he indicated that he was aware of the emergence of Kretzman and McKnight’s new ideas about organizing. In his *Illinois Issues* article, Obama wrote:

Finally community organizations and organizers are hampered by their own dogmas

about the style and substance of organizing. Most still practice what Professor John McKnight of Northwestern University calls a “consumer advocacy” approach, with a focus on wresting services and resources from the outside powers that be. Few are thinking of harnessing the internal productive capacities, both in terms of money and people that already exist in communities. (Obama 1990)

It is hard to know whether Obama would still embrace Kretzman and McKnight’s critique of what they called “consumer advocacy” or not. What we can say is that, in keeping with elements of the Alinsky tradition, it has been Obama’s capacity to mobilize large groups of people and to make them feel connected to a collective movement larger than themselves that remains the hallmark of his triumph in this remarkable political season.

Whatever happens next, let us hope that Obama’s primary victory demonstrates that there is still an important role for broad-based community organizing to play in restoring local democracy and in fighting collectively, across community boundaries and beyond the axes of race and class, for a more just and equitable future. We are at the start of a long road ahead—let the confrontations begin.

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Report from the Editor

By Catherine Kingfisher

It is with great pleasure that I take on the job of editing NAD for the next three years. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Alisse Waterston for the stellar job she has done in putting together a fine newsletter over the years, and for the guidance she has provided me over the past several months.

The only change I have decided to make to NAD is to set up an editorial board of four people, one each whose work is situated in Canada and Mexico, and two whose work is situated primarily in the United States. (This will do doubt change as SANA's relative focus on Canada, Mexico, and the United States becomes increasingly balanced.) Beginning with the April 2009 issue, each submission will be reviewed by a relevant person on the editorial board as well as by me. The following have generously agreed to serve:

Donna Patrick (Carleton University) will be the editorial board member for Canada. Patrick's areas of expertise are First Nations and Inuit, language and political economy, and the intersections of language with culture, politics, race, ethnicity, class, and gender.

Shannon Speed (University of Texas—Austin) has agreed to serve as the board member for Mexico. Her areas of research include human rights, indigenous rights, gender, and activist research.

Karen Brodtkin (UCLA) will be one of the board members for the United States. Her research areas include social movements, gender, work and kinship, political economy, theory, migration, race, and contemporary North American cultures.

Jane Collins (University of Wisconsin—Madison) will be the other board member for the United States. Her research focuses on gender and work, the political economy of development, and cultural studies in the United States, Mexico, and other Latin American countries.

In this issue, I have the pleasure of including two pieces that were presented in the Race and Justice plenary at the last SANA conference, Faye Harrison's *The Politics of Antiracism & Social Justice*, and Brett Williams' *No Justice, No Peace?* Not coincidentally, both pieces touch on soaring rates of incarceration among African Americans in the United States. In addition, this issue also includes a commentary by Susan Hyatt on approaches to community organizing in the Obama campaign as they relate to the neoliberal-inflected Asset-Based Community Development model.

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SANA Book Prize

The Society for the Anthropology of North America awarded the Delmos Jones and Jagna Sharff Memorial Book Prize for the Critical Study of North America at its 2008 joint conference with the American Ethnological Society at Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina, April 3–5.

The winner, *Local Democracy Under Siege: Activism, Public Interests, and Private Politics*, is a collaborative work of seven authors—Dorothy Holland, Donald M. Nonini, Catherine Lutz, Lesley Bartlett, Marla Frederick-McGlathery, Thaddeus C. Guldbrandsen, and Enrique G. Murillo, Jr. Two honorable mentions were also given.

Local Democracy Under Siege focuses on how citizens of five North Carolina communities—

rural, suburban, and urban—engage or disengage with political processes at the local level. In particular the authors examine how neoliberalism sculpts the practice of local governance by encouraging the redistribution of public resources toward private ends and how citizens are differently constrained or empowered by this paradigm. An effective and powerful political intervention, *Local Democracy Under Siege* defetishizes the language of neoliberalism and its critics through a clear and persuasive argument that is accessible to a broad audience. It is also an important methodological intervention within anthropology, fielding a team of researchers across multiple communities to produce a representative sample.

Honorable mention was given to Ann Aurelia Lopez's *The Farmworkers Journey*, a transnational ethnography of the ecology of migrant agricultural labor in central California and westcentral Mexico, especially Jalisco. With an ecologist's eye, Lopez explains what NAFTA has meant for Mexican peasants in terms of agricultural practice, diet, and exposure to dangerous pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. With a labor-rights activist's concern the author reveals how Mexican immigrants experience agricultural work in California, giving voice to the often voiceless backbone of industrialized agribusiness.

Honorable mention was also given to David Valentine for *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Valentine's ethnography makes a strong theoretical statement about the emergence of "transgender" as a category of identity and activism in late 1990s Manhattan. Looking to the individuals on the margins of the modern gay and lesbian movement, Valentine problematizes the formation of knowledge around the figure of "transgender" by exploring what its institutionalization has meant for those who don't understand themselves through its terms, especially among young and frequently poor people of color who have to learn how to represent themselves as such in order to receive particular social services.

An elated Don Nonini of the Anthropology Department of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was present on behalf of his six co-

authors to accept the award. Ann Lopez of the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at the University of California at Santa Cruz was also in attendance and was very grateful to have found an association of activist anthropologists to identify with. David Valentine of the Anthropology Department of the University of Minnesota was disappointed that prior commitments kept him away and sent a letter of thanks.

The Delmos Jones and Jagna Sharff Memorial Book Prize for the Critical Study of North America is awarded every other year for a single or multiple-authored book (but not edited collection) that deals with an important social issue to the discipline of anthropology, that has broader implications for social change or justice, and that is accessible beyond the discipline of anthropology. The award was conceived by SANA's Executive Board to complement the Prize for Distinguished Achievement in the Critical Study of North America, a lifetime achievement award for senior scholars that has been given each year since 1994. The spirit of the book prize is to honor early and mid-career scholars and infuse SANA with their leadership and enthusiasm.

The 2008 SANA Book Prize committee was chaired by Gina Perez, recipient of the 2006 award for *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families*. Committee members also included John Jackson, Cheryl Rodriguez, and Matthew Thompson. The committee eagerly began its work with a field of nearly 40 entries, up substantially from 2006. The selection criteria favored skill in crafting narrative, theoretical, and methodological innovation, the ability of the work to speak to audiences beyond professional anthropology, and a commitment to social justice for which SANA and the prize's namesakes are so well known.

Eleven other books were also given serious consideration by the committee, but could not be recognized at the conference award ceremony.

Battered Black Women and Welfare Reform: Between a Rock and Hard Place, Dana-ain Davis.
Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal

Dissidents and their African Allies Are Reshaping Anglicanism, Miranda Hassett.

From the Kitchen to the Parlor: Language and Becoming in African American Women's Hair Care, Lanita Jacobs-Huey.

Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability and Survival, Daniel Jaffee.

Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico, Jake Kosek.

Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Indian Resurgence, Valerie Lambert.

The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico, Joseph Masco.

Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity, and the Politics of Place, Gabriella Modan.

Catching Hell in the City of Angels: Life and Meanings of Blackness in South Central Los Angeles, Joao Costa Vargas.

Out of the Pits: Traders and Technology from Chicago to London, Caitlin Zaloom.

Differences that Matter: Social Policy and the Working Poor in the United States and Canada, Dan Zuberi.

The SANA Book Prize will be awarded next in 2010 for books published in 2009 and 2010, other publication dates will not be considered. Multi-authored books that are not edited collections of essays are encouraged apply. Books should be set in Canada, the United States, or Mexico; transnational studies that engage these and other nations or that consider "empire" in the broadest sense of the term will be given full consideration.

Invited Sessions Sponsored by SANA for the November AAs

I. Urban Subjects of Value: Ethnography in the Neoliberalizing City

Organizers: Julian Brash & Jeff Maskovsky

Anthropologists have devoted a great deal of attention to the concept of neoliberalism as a means to explain and describe disparate if interrelated forms of policy, economic restructuring, subjectivity, and political ideology. Using ethnographic methods and analysis, they have teased out the lived effects, contradictions,

and instabilities of processes of neoliberalization in a variety of contexts. Meanwhile, in interdisciplinary urban studies, particularly critical geography, there has been a sustained focus on the intersection of the neoliberalization and urbanization processes. A seminal 2002 special issue of *Antipode* made clear that cities have played a crucial role in the neoliberalization process, serving as platforms for and targets of neoliberal interventions. There has been much debate in interdisciplinary urban studies since on the best way to conceptualize neoliberalism, a debate that has generally been structured around two positions: one insisting on the commonalities and hegemony of urban neoliberalism across space and another focusing on its contingent, contested, and constructed qualities.

These papers use ethnographic analysis to produce a more nuanced understanding of urban neoliberalization. Urban scholars have long demonstrated that cities are constantly made and remade by human and non-human activity and thus are arenas where the dynamism, processual quality, and complexity of social and cultural life becomes especially apparent. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that ethnography in urban contexts has often been in tension with some of the axioms of anthropological theory and method, it has provided an essential tool for the analysis of urban lives, and has forced the rethinking of taken-for-granted assumptions and theoretical near-certainties about the nature of culture and society: examples include work that has challenged stereotypes about the urban poor or undermined linear and dualistic models of urbanization and modernization.

These papers demonstrate that ethnographic analysis of neoliberal policy, economic restructuring, and subject formation occurring in an urban context characterized by diversity, difference, conflict, and the historical sedimentation of uses, identities, cultural practices, and built environments can generate new insights into the process of urban neoliberalization. Hopefully, these insights will help us overcome debates over contingency vs. commonality, hegemony vs. contestation, and so on. In particular, the papers focus on how certain

categories of people, the processes of cultural and material production in which they are engaged, the spaces they inhabit, and the social networks of which they are a part, are valorized, devalorized, and revalorized in the neoliberalizing city. In this context, urban subjects of value may not be who or what we might expect. They may intersect in unexpected ways. We might find that neoliberalization actually undermines urban subjects explicitly recognized as valuable by neoliberal discourse. Moreover, the papers explore how this uneven valorization of identities is experienced by the varied denizens of the neoliberal city: many are undermined by neoliberalization, but others experience neoliberalization as affirming or even constitutive of identity. In all these ways, these papers call attention to the complexities and lived effects of the urban neoliberalization process.

II. Transnational Lives, Political Practices

Organizer: Miranda Cady Hallett

The turbulence and mobility of the past 30 years have seen the development of vibrant communities of transnational migrants across North America. Many of these diasporic communities have been active politically, both in the hostland context and in homeland settings. The response of nation-states has often been one of exclusion or exploitation, though there are examples of restructuring of political institutions to facilitate the participation of migrant voices. Within academic and popular discourses, political participation has been dichotomized and a trade-off assumed between identification with homeland and “assimilation” and participation in the country of settlement. Recent research questions this assumption and posits a more complex and complimentary relationship between such differently sited political practices.

This panel explores the practice and signification of transnational migrant political action, with particular attention to factors of (il)legality, political capital, “translations” of political commitments, and place-based politics. How are the political practices of migrants related to their own lived experiences of racialization, ethnicity,

class, and gender? How are these experiences transforming through the process of migration itself, and shaped by the diverse urban and rural geographies of settlement? How do various sociolegal institutions, including the construction of “illegality,” impact the lives of (im)migrants residing in North America? What practices of signification set the limits—and push the boundaries—of (im)migrant enfranchisement? In the case of homeland politics, how does (e)migrant action impact political practices and institutional forms? What is the role of (e)migrant nostalgia, remittance practices, and legal status in shaping the efficacy and orientation of homeland-directed political action? What kinds of international and transnational institutions and campaigns are emerging or transforming to engage with migrant activism?

Finally, the panel will reach beyond dichotomies of political orientation and encourage more complex theoretical debate regarding the relationship between identity, mobility, and citizenship. Bringing together ethnographic work on migrant experiences in the United States and Mexico, with diasporic communities from countries as diverse as Nigeria and El Salvador, this panel seeks to further a dialogue on the diversity of migrant experience as well as repeating patterns of legal exclusion, racialized subjectivities, and political activism. From transnational migrant practices, we gain insight into the future problems and opportunities of political belonging and participation under neoliberal globalization. We do not inhabit a “post-national” world, but one in which states as well as subjects creatively re-imagine and re-assert their identity and agency in relation to multiple geographic orientations.

III. Inclusion, Collaboration, and Engagement in the Research and Praxis of Karen Brodtkin

Organizers: Sandra Morgen & Synthia Strathmann

As we interrogate and envision processes that “promote inclusion, collaboration, and engagement for positive human outcomes” in our discipline, it is important to recognize those among us who have devoted their careers to these principles and challenges. This session honors Karen Brodtkin, whose career as a scholar, teacher, and leader has emulated each of these practices. Brodtkin, who retires this year from UCLA, has produced scholarship on the cutting edge of anthropology, from the critical study of the United States to feminist anthropology. She literally “cared by the hour” about an anthropology animated by social justice. And like “center women,” whose social movement leadership she has theorized, she has modeled collaborative ethnographic practices and contributed significantly to critical theory, especially about racism, gender, labor, and political economy. Echoing and slightly turning the title of her newest book, *Making Democracy Matter*, this panel of contemporaries, colleagues and students reflects on what we can learn from her work that has the potential to make anthropology matter even more in the future than in the past as we individually and collectively step up to the challenges of our times.



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North American Dialogue (NAD) is the newsletter of the Society for the Anthropology of North America. NAD provides a forum for North Americanist scholars, activists, and practitioners to share works-in-progress, to disclose findings, raise issues, describe fieldwork, and offer political and theoretical analysis as it is happening. Readers learn what their North Americanist colleagues are worrying about now and working on today.

NAD publishes two issues per year, in the spring and fall. Members of the Society for the Anthropology of North America receive NAD as a benefit of their membership. Please visit <http://sanet.org> to learn about becoming a member.

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