

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

News for Educational Workers

By Leonard Vogt



U.S. TROOPS ESCORT AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS FROM CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS, OCTOBER 3, 1957. PHOTO COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Race and Education

"Yes, It's a Racial Thing" by Gary Younge (*The Nation*, May 12, 2014) reports on the Network for Public Education's conference in March, 2014 and its panel on "Grassroots Organizing." An audience member made it clear to the all-white panel that the concerns of the conference (to "give voice to those opposing privatization, school closings, and high-stakes testing") disproportionately affected people from poor and minority communities who, because of the all-white panel, were given no voice as to how they might contribute to the discussion and the resistance.

May 17, 2014 celebrated the 60th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 U. S. Supreme Court decision that prohibited states from segregating schools by

Organizations about her brutal injustices when trying to vote and about the forced sterilization of African American women in Mississippi. Freedom Summer 50th was a five day conference held from June 25 to 29 in Jackson, Mississippi at Tougaloo College to explore present-day struggles for justice not only in Mississippi, but globally (info@freedom50.org). *Radical Teacher* published the Mississippi Freedom Schools curriculum in issue # 40, available on JStor.

Charter Schools

After Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana seized 102 of the city's 117 schools and transformed them into charter schools under the watch of the Recovery School District. *The Washington Post*



race, overturning the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of "separate but equal." As successful as *Brown* was for inspiring freedom rides, sit-ins, voter registration drives and other actions leading ultimately to the civil rights legislation in the late 1950s and 1960s, it "was unsuccessful in its purported mission [of undoing] the school segregation that persists as a central feature of American education today" (portside.org, May 13 and 16, 2014).

Another celebration in the summer of 2014 was the June 50th anniversary of Mississippi's Freedom Summer, launched to end the systematic and violent disenfranchisement of African Americans in Mississippi by registering them to vote and also to cultivate the organizing skills of local leaders. Fannie Lou Hammer, one of these leaders, is also celebrated on this 50th anniversary for her testimony at the Council of Federated

recently wrote an article praising the success of this 100% charter school system which was rebutted by Mercedes Schneider in her blog of May 20, 2014 ("On the 'Success' of a 100% Charter Recovery School District").

Even when charter schools have more honest success than the ones in New Orleans, they can create a toxic dynamic when traditional public schools and charter schools exist under the same roof. This is the case with the Harlem Success Academies, New York City's most successful and well-funded charter school network. For a dozen years under ex-mayor Bloomberg, charter schools were offered free rent in city-owned school buildings, creating a highly visible disparity between the "have" charter school students and the "have-not" public school students. As the new New York City mayor Bill de Blasio attempts to oppose charter schools and create a more equitable public school system for all New York's children,

he is being accused of incompetence and called a fumbling amateur (portside.org, April 27, 2014 and "Framing de Blasio" in *The Nation*, April 14, 2014).

Testing and the Common Core

"How Bill Gates Pulled Off the Swift Common Core Revolution" (portside.org, June 8, 2014) chronicles how Gates' "money solves all problems" mentality pulled off one of the swiftest and most remarkable shifts in educational policy in the history of the United States by not only funding the development of the Common Core State Standards but also, with an additional \$200 million, building political support across the country and persuading state governments to make systemic and costly changes in curriculum.

Four years later, the Gates Foundation wants a two year moratorium on test results being used for teacher evaluation or student promotion. Teacher and parent revolt against high-stakes testing and the Common Core may have helped Gates reach this decision. In Chicago, through the efforts of pro-public education and anti-testing activists, a boycott of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test has spread across the city. Some states such as Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina have already dropped the standards and states like Missouri and North Carolina are making moves to drop the standards. Perhaps another reason for this reconsideration of the value of high-stakes testing and the Common Core is the growing public awareness that the only people who actually benefit from these tests are the people at Pearson, the for-profit company that creates them (portside.org, June 8 and 15, and August 3, 2014; *In These Times*, June 2014; Daily Kos, May 5, 2014).

The Walmart heirs have now joined the Gates Foundation in pouring \$1 billion into shaping American education by funding charter schools, voucher policies, and legislative attacks on teachers. The Waltons hired an education program officer who had worked at a conservative business group, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), gave money to help close Chicago public schools and expand charter schools, and are now attacking New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio for daring to turn down a handful of applications by charter schools to take over public school building space (Daily Kos, April 30, 2014).

Sexuality and Education

In April, 2014, students at the all-women's Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, protested against Smith's policy of not admitting transgender women if their earlier records identify them as "male" (*In These Times*, July 2014).

"Campus Rape Crisis: The system is broken. Can it be fixed?" (*The Nation*, June 23/30, 2014) reveals that 1 in 5 women is sexually assaulted in college and asks if the universities are capable of providing justice.

The Economics of Education

"Never in the history of the developed world has an entire generation had to go into debt just to get an education and a job. Until now" (truthout.org, May 22, 2014). It is almost common knowledge now that tuition costs have more than doubled over the past generation, that student debt now exceeds \$1 trillion, and that 40 million people in the United States have education debts that often reach into the tens of thousands of dollars. What may not be so well known is how much money is spent on university amenities with costs passed on to the students in the form of additional tuition. A new study from the Debt & Society Project on debt across the higher education system details the millions of dollars being spent on gleaming new football stadiums, shiny dorm buildings, and restaurant-like dining halls (*The Nation*, May 23, 2014).

Another reason the costs of higher education have soared is because the salaries of higher education presidents and administrators have soared. In 2011, the last year figures are available, 42 private college and university presidents received more than a million dollars a year each for their work, with the University of Chicago's president making well over \$3 million. At public colleges and universities, nine top administrators made more than \$1 million each. Between 1993 and 2009, the numbers of campus administrators increased by 60 percent, ten times the rate of growth of the faculty (portside.org, July 25, 2014).

Unions

In schools, a new teacher union movement is building, as seen by the success of some progressive union contract struggles across the nation. In Los Angeles, Union Power, an activist caucus, won leadership of the United Teachers of Los Angeles, the second-largest teacher local in the country.

In cities like Portland and St. Paul, union contracts reflected a vision patterned after the Chicago Teachers Union. Social justice unionism seems on the rise (Common Dreams, May 23, 2014). In May of 2014, Barbara Madeloni was elected union president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. Madeloni refused to participate in a standardized teacher-licensing program at the U. of Mass/Amherst and is part of a growing teacher insurgency movement. She is a member of the progressive caucus Educators for a Democratic Union (portsidelabor.org, May 14 and portside.org, June 24, 2014). On May 1, 2014, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a new contract with the United Federation of Teachers. The nine-year agreement ended a bitter five-year conflict between the city's teachers and the previous Mayor Michael Bloomberg (democracynow.org, May 2, 2014).

At the college and university level, unions are also active. On April 16, 2014, The University of Illinois at Chicago reached a tentative contract agreement. Hundreds of University of Illinois educators formed a union as non-tenure track faculty in Champaign-Urbana joined

the national movement to improve university working conditions. The 2,100 graduate assistants at the University of Connecticut have voted to form a union. Buzzfeed (May 8, 2014) published "Top Ten Consequences of Unions on College Campuses":

1. Service Workers Are Being Treated Fairly and Paid Living Wages
2. Adjunct Professors Don't Die in Poverty
3. Graduate Teaching Assistants Can Afford Education and Health Insurance
4. Colleges Stop Supporting Sweatshop Labor
5. Cafeteria Workers Are Allowed Sick Days
6. Reduced Risks of Sports-Related Traumatic Brain Injury
7. Guaranteed Medical Coverage
8. Higher Graduation Rates
9. Scholarships That Fully Cover the Cost of Attending College
10. A Say on Rules that Govern Athletes' Lives

University Divestment in Fossil Fuels

Stanford University joined the student-led movement to divest from the fossil fuel industry by pulling its money from coal companies (democracynow.org, May 7, 2014). The Board of Trustees of Pitzer College, a top-ranked undergraduate liberal arts and sciences college and a member of the Claremont College system, unanimously approved a new Fossil Fuel Divestment Climate Action Model which was announced at press conference by actor Robert Redford, a member of the Pitzer Board of Trustees (www.pitzer.edu, April 23, 2014).

Education and Israel

Professor Steven Salaita had accepted a position at The University of Illinois as a professor of American Indian Studies but, after making comments on Twitter about his responses to the current attack of Israel on Gaza, he lost the position. The university says his job was "rescinded" but many feel he was "fired." As a matter of fact, a number of academic activists for Palestinian justice, such as Tithi Bhattacharya and Bill V. Mullen, ask in their article "Is the Firing of Steven Salaita the Beginning of a New Blacklist?" (portside.org, August 13, 2014). In response, nearly 300 scholars have signed petitions pledging to stay away from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign until it rescinds its decision not to hire Salaita (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 13, 2014).

Martin R. Federman, former executive director of Northeastern University's Hillel Foundation and its university Jewish chaplain, is speaking out against the restrictions placed on Palestine solidarity activists ("Jewish Educator Speaks Out – Why Jews Must Oppose Muzzling of

Palestine Solidarity Activists," *The Electronic Intifada*, April 9, 2014).

The American Studies Association, following its vote of last year to boycott Israeli universities, has now called on the United States government to withdraw all support from the state of Israel, stating "Israel's continued attacks on identifiable academic institutions are part of its campaign of collective punishment that . . . goes well beyond the denial of academic freedom to further escalate Israel's longstanding practice of denying an entire people the basic necessities of life and freedom" (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 4, 2014).

For a sense of the academic experiences of people in Palestine from kindergarten through college under Israeli occupation, read "Challenging Bullets, Not Boycotts: Education Under Occupation in Palestine" on truthout.org, May 15, 2015.

Resources

Bullfrog Films has two new films usable in either schools or colleges. In *The Human Scale*, influential Danish architect Jan Gehl argues that we can build cities in a way which takes human needs for inclusion and intimacy into account. 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas, and by 2050 it will be 80%. Cities have become the primary human habitat. According to Gehl, if we are to make cities sustainable and livable for people we must re-imagine the very foundations of modern urban planning. Rather than examining buildings and urban structures themselves, Gehl and his team meticulously study the in-between spaces of urban life, the places where people meet, interact, live, and behave.



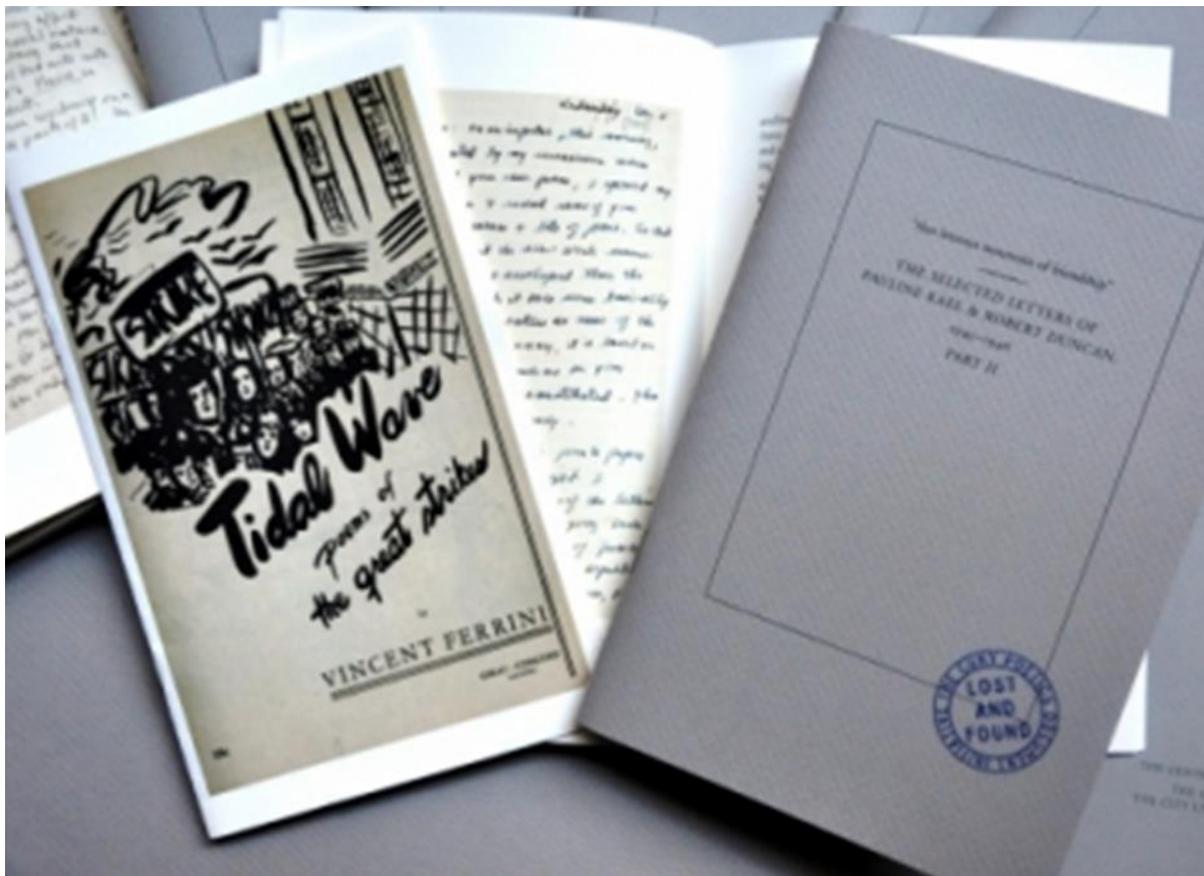
THE HUMAN SCALE. COURTESY OF BULLFROG FILMS

In *Standing on Sacred Ground*, a 4-part series, indigenous people from eight different cultures stand up for their traditional sacred lands in defense of cultural survival, human rights and the environment. Indigenous communities around the world and in the United States resist threats to their sacred places—the original protected lands—in a growing movement to defend human rights and restore the environment. For more information, for prices, or for a preview copy, contact bullfrogfilms.org.



STANDING ON SACRED GROUND. COURTESY OF BULLFROG FILMS

The special joint issue of *Cultural Logic* and *Works & Days* on the topic "Scholactivism: Transforming Praxis Inside and Outside the Classroom" has become a double issue with an extension of the deadline for proposals to October 1, 2014 and a complete paper deadline to June 1, 2015. To request a call for papers or to submit a proposal, email jgramsey@gmail.com.



LOST & FOUND: THE CUNY POETICS DOCUMENT INITIATIVE SERIES IV CONSISTS OF EIGHT BEAUTIFULLY PRINTED CHAPBOOKS (600 PAGES IN ALL), FEATURING RARE AND UNPUBLISHED TEXTS, INCLUDING LATE WORK BY HARLEM RENAISSANCE POET HELENE JOHNSON, ADRIENNE RICH'S TEACHING MATERIALS, A NEWLY DISCOVERED FILM SCRIPT BY EDWARD DORN, THE FORMATIVE CORRESPONDENCE OF PAULINE KAE & ROBERT DUNCAN, AND A FACSIMILE REPRODUCTION OF VINCENT FERRINI'S 1946 TIDAL WAVE: POEMS OF THE GREAT STRIKES. FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO WWW.CENTERFORTHEHUMANITIES.ORG.

COURTESY OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK'S CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

Is there a news item, call for papers, upcoming conference, resource, teaching tool, or other information related to progressive education that you would like to share with other Radical Teacher readers? Conference announcements and calls for papers should be at least six months ahead of date. Items, which will be used as found appropriate by Radical Teacher, cannot be returned. Send hard copy to Leonard Vogt, Department of English, LaGuardia Community College (CUNY), 31-10 Thomson Avenue, Long Island City, New York 11101—or email items to lvogt@nyc.rr.com.



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