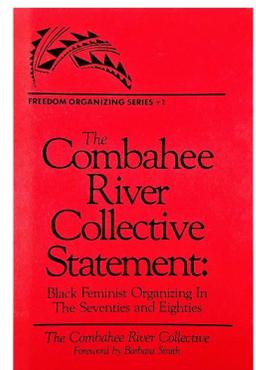
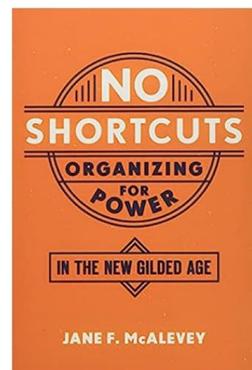
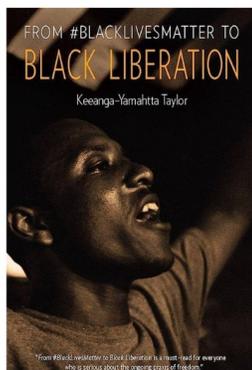
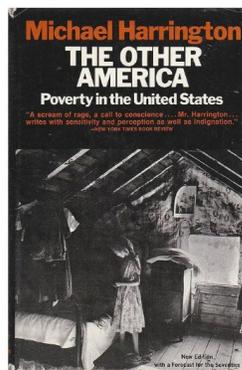
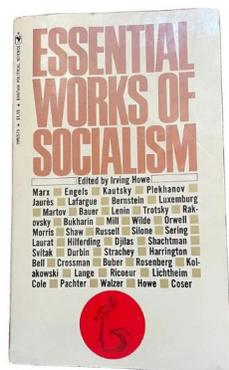
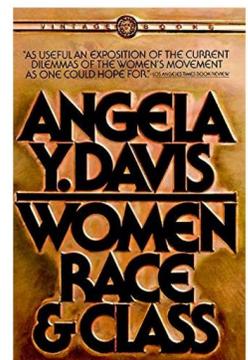
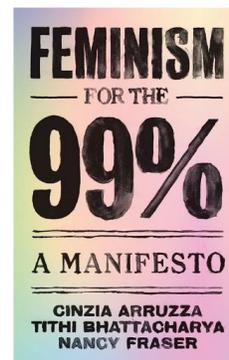
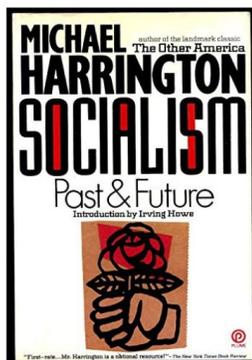
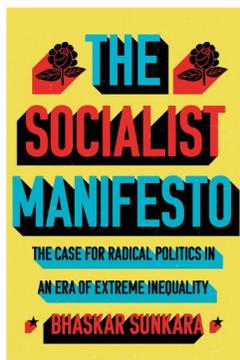


RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review Socialism 101

by Michael Bennett



TOGETHER WE GROW A NEW PATH BY ANDREA NARNO VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG (2021)

There are many reasons why I took early retirement from my career as an English professor in 2016. Among them was my desire to engage in the kind of teaching I wanted to do, instead of the kind of teaching I was required to do, which was mostly composition and introduction to literature. During an historical moment featuring an urgent conflict between authoritarianism/fascism on the rise in the US and abroad (Casey and Nexon) and a socialist movement in the U.S. that is more vibrant than we've seen in recent memory, it seemed like the ideal time to leave behind the constricted space of a classroom for a broader public sphere.

The sphere to which I am most connected is the Democratic Socialists of America, which had rapidly grown of late to nearly 100,000 members, galvanized by Bernie Sanders's two campaigns for president and the election of more socialists to Congress than ever before. I had been a member of DSA since the late 1980s, a supporter of the DSA Fund (DSA's 501c3 sister organization focused on political education) beginning in the 1990s, and part of the editorial collective of *Radical Teacher* starting in the early 2000s. I opted to devote my time and talents as an educator to these national organizations that have done important work in socialist education since the 1970s. I stepped up to become Managing Editor (now co-editor) of *Radical Teacher* and Chair of the DSA Fund Board. I joked that I had made the wise decision to retire so that I could do just as much work for absolutely no pay. But at least now my labor was in alignment with my desires (a noble socialist goal); instead of spending time on lesson plans for 60 or so students and marking their essays, it was my "job" to think about how to engage with a national (or even international) group of students and educators who either already wanted to build the socialist movement or who might learn that this was what they wanted without knowing it.

The question I asked myself and others over and over was, "How can political education build the socialist movement?" More specifically, "What is the best way to teach about socialism?" Even more narrowly, "If you could teach anything you wanted on your syllabus for Socialism 101, what would it be?" In the essay that follows, I'm going to focus on the last question in hopes of providing a useful way of operationalizing the former questions.

When it comes to curriculum planning, I've always been a pragmatist. I don't claim that the following texts, films, and other educational tools are the best available, but only that they are the ones that grabbed my attention based on what neo-Pragmatist Richard Rorty used to call our "webs of beliefs and desires." These are tools that I either have used or thought about using as I constructed in my head, and sometimes in reality, my version of Socialism 101. I should point out that this version is subject to my predilections and limitations: my training as an African Americanist, my location in and focus on the US, and my belief that socialism must be "social" in theory and in practice, meaning that I am focusing on democratic socialism and not on authoritarian socialism and/or sectarian groups.

In the case of *Radical Teacher*, deciding what to focus on as managing (co-)editor was not much of an issue because the choice is made by an active and activist

collective that hews fairly closely to the self-description of our subtitle: "A Socialist, Feminist, and Anti-Racist Journal on the Theory and Practice of Teaching." We don't see these adjectives as discrete but as connected. As I explained in a previous contribution to this journal for the issue called "Totally Radical," "I guess you could say that we are anti-racist and anti-ableist feminist eco-socialists, but I think it's easier to say that we believe in intersectionality" (2). The current issue is obviously most explicitly connected to the topic "Teaching About Socialism" since that is its title, but every issue involves socialist analysis, even when the issue is focused on climate change, Human Rights, #BlackLivesMatter, Migration/Immigration, or War & Empire (to mention the themes of recent issues). My ideal Socialism 101 course would definitely include essays from or entire issues of *Radical Teacher*.

When I became chair of the DSA Fund board in 2016, I inherited some educational materials that might be considered a bit dated, but these materials also contained some real gems. Most of these materials make up the category "External Links" on the DSA Fund website under the heading "Resources" (<https://fund.dsausa.org/links/>). They include a 2012 reading list called "Introduction to Socialism" (https://www.dsausa.org/strategy/introductory_reading_list/) and several essays on DSA's most famous founder and first co-chair, Michael Harrington, and his legacy. To these resources, I added "The Best Books for Understanding Socialism," which lists books that a writer for *New York Magazine* compiled based on interviews with several famous socialists (Schneider). Among these books were three favorites and one I had been meaning to read for a long time.

My three favorites include two classics: Volume 1 of Marx's *Capital* and Irving Howe's edited volume *Essential Works of Socialism*, a collection of Greatest Socialist Hits almost entirely by White males (shout out to Rosa Luxemburg!) from Marx to Howe himself. And one modern classic: Angela Davis's *Women, Race, & Class*. The mention of the latter had me reaching for my well-thumbed copy that was essential to my own work on the Radical Abolitionists of the 19th-century as the most significant anti-fascist, feminist, anti-racist, and often implicitly or explicitly socialist forbears of modern socialism. Moving to the present moment, Davis is an advocate for a different kind of feminist abolition, as evidenced by her co-authored collection *Abolition. Feminism. Now*. Let's add this to Socialism 101.

And then there is Michael Harrington's *Socialism: Past and Future*. I knew a fair amount about him, like most democratic socialists, as one of the founders of DSA. I had read his first book, *The Other America*, which is often credited with helping launch Lyndon Johnson's anti-poverty Great Society programs, and I had encountered various of his essays. I was not prepared for his brilliant and engaging final book. Written with a sense of urgency after Harrington was told he had inoperable cancer, it is a distillation of his understanding of and advocacy for socialism. I was awestruck by its distillation of Marxian, as opposed to Marxist, thought. For me, as for Harrington, this is a crucial distinction. His Marxian analysis distills Marx's thoughts and accepts most of his premises but falls short of taking his

words as gospel, while warning against those who seek an authority figure to catalyze their own authoritarian movements.

Harrington's book begins with three premises: socialism is "*the major hope for freedom and justice*" (1); "*the fate of human freedom and justice depends upon social and economic structures*" (3); and the socialist movement, "*if it is not subjected to democratic control from below, will subvert the possibilities of freedom and justice*" (7). I was impressed with this succinct description of democratic socialism, and its evocation of one of the most important concepts for understanding socialist analysis: the dialectic between structure and agency. If one sees human actors as free agents neither restrained nor shaped by socio-economic structures, you have classic liberalism/neoconservatism. If your theory and practice are all structure and little agency, you have wandered into authoritarian territory. Democratic socialism requires a balance of the two.

Harrington proceeds to analyze fundamental socialist concepts and challenges. He is particularly good at translating some of Marx's terminology and other socialist terms into a language that is accessible to non-specialized readers, explaining and sometimes critiquing such concepts as class formation, the labor theory of value, socialization, pre-Marxist utopian socialism and post-Marxist democratic socialism, economism, Post-Fordism, dialectical materialism, the social wage, social reproduction, and more. Harrington outlines what he sees as the policies of a then-contemporary socialist agenda: internationalism (in contrast and conflict with globalization), redistribution, countering financialization, qualitative rather than quantitative growth, democratic participation of workers, social movements, mass education, and anti-fascism (145-151). Actually, that still sounds contemporary today. Harrington warns against what the third chapter calls "authoritarian collectivism," Leninism's transformation into Stalinism through "the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' turning into the dictatorship of the majority of the Bolshevik Party" (66) and the rise of "one-party states" like China and other parts of what was then called The Third World.

In the final three chapters of his book, Harrington talks first about the importance of blending the Old and New Left, as symbolized by the socialist image of a fist ("proletarian power") holding a rose ("an inheritance from the youthful revolt of 1968"), in new social movements (189). He then suggests in Chapter 8 that socialist democratic planning includes markets and "decentralized forms of social ownership" (242). He even maintains that markets are actually more compatible with socialism, which is interested in real needs, than with capitalism, which is based on artificial needs (246). And in the final chapter, Harrington argues that even Marx himself recognized, in *The Theories of Surplus Value*, that he was wrong when, in *The Communist Manifesto*, he theorized that a united working class meant that revolution was imminent and "there was no need to worry about the question of democracy since economic development was creating a homogenous and conscious majority, that is, an inherently democratic force" (249). Instead, Harrington argues for a "Gramscian strategy, with its emphasis on alliance between classes and strata" (253), what some would call coalition politics, what

Andre Gorz labeled a movement for "non-reformist reforms" (Engler and Engler), and what Harrington calls, in the title of his final chapter, "Visionary Gradualism."

I would definitely make room for Michael Harrington's final work on my Socialism 101 syllabus, though some of the other older resources listed on the DSA Fund website, while strong on political economy, were not always as good at realizing the intersectional nature of class, race, sex, gender, and other factors. Thus, the DSA Fund turned its attention, during most of my tenure on the Board, to supporting and promoting more inclusive texts, particularly the book *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style* and the documentary film *The Big Scary "S" Word*. A Study Guide for the former is available at: <https://fund.dsasusa.org/files/sites/10/2020/02/WE-OWN-THE-FUTURE.Study-Guide-1.pdf>.

Of the twenty or so chapters in the book *We Own The Future*, we (and by "we" I mean a coalition planning committee with several of us from the DSA Fund and representatives of The New Press and *Dissent* magazine) created virtual events focused on eight chapters dealing with topics of major importance for democratic socialism: labor, education, race, banking, voting rights, health, and reproductive justice. Each event featured the chapter's author(s) and various workers/intellectuals/activists. I recommend checking out the full list, as any of these authors/speakers would be excellent resources for Socialism 101:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4mwqijxtqBGOFWxDwxOKNt9CVc6EPfx0>. In 2021, we presented three virtual and one in-person event focused on the film *The Big Scary "S" Word*, with an equally diverse group of panelists and co-sponsors who would also be at home on our syllabus: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4mwqijxtqBFevJel6iuZPPpc2TWdBlj>. The final event was an in-person screening of the whole film in NYC, followed by a Q & A with director/producer Yael Bridge and producer/actor Morgan Spector, which discussed several of the topics raised in the film, including the need for ecosocialism to combat climate change, universal healthcare, and economic democracy. The fact that the film spurred such diverse and interesting discussions indicates that it does a remarkable job of touching on crucial issues for the democratic socialist movement, and does so while interviewing an array of workers, academics, and activists. My one critique of the film is that it doesn't adequately talk about the ways in which DSA and other socialist groups worked for decades to shift the public discourse and keep alive the flame of socialism even during rough times. A major oversight is that the film doesn't interview Maria Svart, the National Director of DSA, or any of the staff leadership of recent years.

In addition to *Dissent* magazine, which co-sponsored all of these events, and The New Press, which sponsored all those connected to *We Own The Future* (a book that they published), there were a variety of co-sponsors for these events and the How We Win series (more about this below).¹ I've listed the various entities that made these events possible in an endnote to make an important point: democratic socialist education, and the movement as a whole, goes nowhere without coalition building. The Right has WAY more money than we do, so we depend, both by

necessity and based on our political and philosophical commitments, on people power. The organizing committee for these events took seriously the need for coalition building, which requires thinking in terms of true intersectionality, diversity, equity, and inclusion (not just the corporate DEI that is mostly window dressing). The panelists and organizations involved were diverse in terms of race, gender, region, sexuality, and ideology. We took seriously what Harrington calls the democratic socialization ("the possibility of a democratic, bottom-up control by the majority") that is the antithesis of capitalist socialization ("the growing centralization and interdependence of capitalist society under the control of an elite") (8). We were able to do so because we weren't working in a traditional academic environment, but working collectively as socialists committed to building the movement.

Probably the closest I came to this ideal situation when I was a professor at Long Island University (Brooklyn) was working with the Gender Studies Committee to reshape and implement a more active learning version of our course on feminist theory. I taught the course a few times, always with a small but enthusiastic group of students. We read about different kinds of feminist theory (Tong) and applied them to various topics, with the help of a reader (Kolmar and Bartkowski, or Jaggar and Rothenberg) and additional photocopied (this was the old days) essays: some of my choosing and some chosen by students. My favorite section was on socialist and Marxist feminism, including Tong's introduction to each and essays from the readers.² I would also add photocopies of some of my personal favorites by Angela Davis, Barbara Ehrenreich (the first co-chair of DSA, with Michael Harrington), and (always) *The Combahee River Collective Statement*.

As I wrote in the introduction to an issue of *Radical Teacher* called "Totally Radical," the *Combahee River Collective Statement* is for me a crucial starting point for thinking about the intersectional analysis that is inherent to socialist feminism, as the very designation calls for us to think about the relationship between class and gender. I had planned to update a version of my feminist theory syllabus focused on socialist feminism, but it turned out that wasn't necessary as I ran across two wonderful syllabi that already accomplished this goal: one for the Socialist Feminist Day School Organized by Alexandra Walling for the Socialist Feminist Working Group of the Democratic Socialists of America (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1szEZOecSrpCZZC_kbWem6omSomJ_pnrK_xi2IZ_mSc0/edit) and another Intro to Socialist Feminism Syllabus by the NYC-DSA Socialist Feminist Working Group (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-cCpIHZC-Zae3GpEGxX6nrZ4CabBqP-cDbHE2DAV24Y/edit>). The latter syllabus has a large section on "Socialism and Intersectionality," which includes the Statement; however, I found the former syllabus more congenial to my politics and used it to create my own reading group. It also includes the 1977 Combahee Statement and a 2020 reflection on this document and the movement out of which it came written by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. Taylor notes that the Statement introduces the concept of intersectionality, without using the term, because it is about how race, class,

gender, and sexuality must be seen as simultaneous identities to understand the specificity of queer Black women's experience. She goes on to argue that if intersectionality is central to understanding these women's agency, then solidarity is the structural political practice needed in response. This analysis is developed at greater length in Taylor's book *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, in which she argues that "solidarity is not just an option; it is crucial to workers' ability to resist the constant degradation of their living standards ... [it] is standing in unity with people even when you have not personally experienced their particular oppression" (215).

For me, the real find of the former syllabus is Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser's *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto*. It is concise, clear, and engagingly written, as evidenced in the 10 theses laid out in the first half of the manifesto:

- 1) A new feminist wave is reinventing the strike.
- 2) Liberal feminism is bankrupt. It's time to get over it.
- 3) We need an anticapitalist feminism—a feminism for the 99 percent.
- 4) What we are living through is a crisis of society as a whole—and its root cause is capitalism.
- 5) Gender oppression in capitalist societies is rooted in the subordination of social reproduction to production for profit. We want to turn things right side up.
- 6) Gender violence takes many forms, all of them entangled with capitalist social relations. We vow to fight them all.
- 7) Capitalism tries to regulate sexuality. We want to liberate it.
- 8) Capitalism was born from racist and colonial violence. Feminism for the 99 percent is anti-racist and anti-imperialist.
- 9) Fighting to reverse capital's destruction of the earth, feminism for the 99 percent is eco-socialist.
- 10) Capitalism is incompatible with real democracy and peace. Our answer is feminist internationalism.

These theses are supported with cogent analysis and clear examples. The document is especially good at explaining the crucial concept of social reproduction (20-25); the material causes of violence against women (25-33); and the containment of liberatory sexuality by both conservatives and liberals (33-40).

There are, of course, many other syllabi on socialist feminism, Socialism 101, and other topics circling in and around DSA. The NYC-DSA Socialist Feminist Working Group offers more reading lists than the one provided above: <https://www.nycdsasocfem.org/political-education>. Several local chapters of DSA have book clubs and/or Night Schools and/or other political education opportunities. New York City (which now has 8 DSA locals in various boroughs) is particularly active in this regard, but locals across the country have been as well, including those in Asheville, Duluth, Northeast Tennessee, San Francisco, Washington,

D.C., and the list goes on. And there is the DSA Fund's sister organization devoted to education, DSA's National Political Education Committee (NPEC). The NPEC's Resources page (<https://education.dsausa.org/resources/>) includes a very useful New Curriculum Website; their old Curriculum Guide; their podcast; and modules from DSA chapters in Austin, Chicago, East Bay, Olympia, Philadelphia, and Seattle. And be sure to check out the links on the main page of the NPEC (<https://education.dsausa.org/>), including a very insightful panel on Confronting the Far Right, with amazing speakers: Bill Fletcher, Jr., John Huntington, and Nancy McLean (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_HkXAp0a3Y). The main DSA webpage (www.dsausa.org) also includes a list of "Resources," though the real gems are under the heading "News": The magazine *Democratic Left* and its blog, plus the publication *Socialist Forum*.

When I originally envisioned this review essay, it was going to end right about here, with references to, and in some cases critiques of, several other books about socialism.³ Then I realized that I wanted to focus on less conventional components of Socialism 101: tools for organizing, policy advocacy, and pop culture interventions.

However, I do want to single out one more book as particularly noteworthy: Bhaskar Sunkara's *The Socialist Manifesto*. There is something charming about the way it makes, as the subtitle suggests, "the case for radical politics in an era of extreme inequality" through a combination of a very brief personal narrative in the preface about what drew the author into the socialist movement; an introduction that provides an exercise in creative writing about "A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen," offering a fun journey in which readers imagine themselves working for Jon Bon Jovi's pasta sauce company in a capitalist economy and alternatives to this scenario; Part One's informed discussion of the history of socialism from Marx to the present; and Part Two's exploration of strategies of building socialism. The penultimate chapter, "How We Win," lays out a road map for "challenging capitalism and creating a democratic socialist alternative to it" (21) in fifteen not-so-easy steps which I am going to summarize as: 1) Be Radical; 2) Win elections; 3) Build power; 4) Combat opposition; 5) Make reforms; 6) Move beyond social democracy; 7) Recruit socialists; 8) Engage the working class; 9) Embed within the working class; 10) Democratize unions; 11) Build a party; 12) Democratize elections; 13) Democratize political institutions; 14) Make universal demands; and 15) Make history matter. All of this is, of course, easier said than done, but as plans go it's a pretty good one, and there is more to it than I can convey in one paragraph. The concluding chapter summarizes various answers to the question "Why create a socialist system?" that have been offered throughout the book. Empirically, we are surrounded by great suffering, so anything we can try to do to relieve it is a positive goal. Ideologically, capitalism is "built off wage labor, which rests on the exploitation and domination of humans by other humans" (240), so let's try an ideology not based on such subordination. Historically, we've learned that reforms will be continually "undermined by capital's structural power" (240), so a socialist transformation is required. Teleologically, capitalism has headed us into a climate crisis, so we need a way out. And pragmatically,

nationalism leads to war, so we need internationalism as the best guarantee of peace.

Let's return to the DSA Fund's website for resources relevant to the three topics that would have been difficult to address if my Socialism 101 syllabus had to focus on conventional academic texts: tools for organizing, policy advocacy, and pop culture interventions. The first task I undertook when I joined the board of the DSA Fund was writing a study guide for Jane McAlevey's *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*: <https://fund.dsausa.org/files/sites/10/2019/07/No-Shortcuts-Discussion-Guide-for-DSA-Fund-Website.pdf>. This was not a text I would ever have encountered when I was an English professor and my approach was not that of a literary critic but of an activist trying to understand how to create and nurture other activists. As the first two introductory paragraphs state:

Jane McAlevey's book *No Shortcuts* is about how and why unions need to focus on building "actual power" through organizing rather than "pretend power" through advocacy and mobilizing.

This Study Guide is focused on understanding McAlevey's analysis and applying it to democratic socialist organizing inside and outside unions. It is suitable for everyone, whether for the general public at a community event, an entire DSA chapter, coworkers wishing to consider organizing their workplace, a labor working group, or other working groups.

The Study Guide then raises a series of questions particularly useful for socialist organizers, keyed to chapters and specific pages in the book, and follows up with possible answers that could be utilized by Discussion Leaders. In the process of writing this study guide at the request of Maria Svart (National Director of DSA and Executive Director of the DSA Fund), I recognized some of the tools that Maria had used to "organize" me, recruiting me to the Fund Board and seeing that I might be the kind of "organic leader" who could chair the Board. I also found these same tools to be helpful in recruiting new DSA Fund Board members and in making sure that there were viable options for someone to replace me when I left the Board last year.

The DSA Fund also introduced me to thinking about how to provide educational tools for organizers in terms of groups and events we supported with financial and logistical support, including what had always been one of our biggest expenses: the annual Conference of YDSA (the youth section of DSA composed of college-aged students/activists). DSA also provides tremendously helpful Leadership Training Workshops. During my tenure as DSA Fund Chair, I had the opportunity to see the useful curriculum of the DSA New England Leadership Training hosted by Southern Maine DSA in 2018. The weekend included trainings on Building a Healthy Working-Class Organization, Power Mapping & Coalition Building, Core Building and Member Engagement, and readings/trainings on DSA's national priorities: Medicare for All, Labor, Policy Campaigns, and Fighting for Racial Justice and Socialist Feminism. After I left the Board, the DSA Fund also supported the inaugural Multiracial Organizing Institute, a project of the Multiracial Organizing

Committee (MROC), as is described on the home page of the website: <https://fund.dsausa.org/>

One of my final tasks as DSA Fund Chair was to help launch a new series of events focused on policy advocacy, all but the first of which have happened since I left. The series, entitled *How We Win*, has so far hosted four online events (each featuring a mix of elected officials, DSA activists, and activists from other groups working in coalition with DSA) on a variety of topics, including Workers Rights Campaigns, Housing Campaigns, and Harnessing Collective Power (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4mwqijxtqBHBjq4Dr0AvYS4S5iZqbN_T). Most importantly, the DSA Fund worked with *Jacobin* and *The Nation* to organize and host *How We Win: The Democratic Socialist Policy Agenda* in Office, the first gathering of socialist elected officials in decades. The event opened on June 16, 2023, with 80 democratic socialist elected officials and their aides hearing remarks from Rep. Cori Bush and a dialogue with Bernie Sanders hosted by John Nichols. Sessions over the course of the weekend addressed socialist policy in regard to labor, housing, and the environment; Socialist in Office formations (formal groupings that coordinate between the DSA chapters and elected officials); and messaging to working-class constituents (Duhalde). This historic event should definitely appear on our Socialism 101 syllabus, especially when videos become available to the public in the near future.

The final category I want to make sure is represented in Socialism 101 is popular culture interventions. For as long as I knew her, my dear departed friend Urvashi Vaid reminded everyone within earshot that “culture matters” (197). She argued that “Progressive think tanks generally do not communicate beyond a narrow elite base”; instead, we need to be “brave or sophisticated enough to articulate a competing cultural vision of America that counters the right” (199).

The DSA Fund’s foray into this territory beyond included contributions to and promotion of the aforementioned documentary *The Big Scary “S” Word*, as well as the film *Sixteen Thousand Dollars*, a narrative comedy short film that imagines a world in which a struggling black college grad wakes up to find that reparations have finally been paid to descendants of slaves in America. With this new found capital, they will decide how best to spend their reparations, totaling a mere \$16,000. Receiving reparations opens up old wounds of slavery, Jim Crow, and systematic oppression. One of the events we organized for this award-winning film, co-sponsored with DSA Afrosocialists and Socialists of Color Caucus (AFROSOC), included a discussion afterwards of the reparations movement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etwT7mTIEEq>. We also got into the business of graphic narratives (i.e., fancy comic books) by supporting to varying degrees texts edited by Paul Buhle with various co-authors and artists: *Eugene V. Debs: A Graphic Biography*; *Red Rosa: A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg*; *A Graphic Biography of Paul Robeson: Ballad of an American*; and *W. E. B. Du Bois Souls of Black Folk: A Graphic Interpretation*. The Fund also distributed a Debs Study Guide to accompany the first of these: https://fund.dsausa.org/files/sites/10/2019/02/Study-Guide-2_18_2019.pdf. We co-sponsored an interview with

popular science fiction writer and DSA member Kim Stanley Robinson, author of the Mars Trilogy (among other books): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEMTfLoUJgw>.

I understand that even these efforts will not reach a large audience, which is why Socialism 101 has to reach not just beyond traditional classrooms but beyond niche markets of already existing socialists and into the mainstream. Since I retired, the three social formations that have received most of my attention other than the DSA Fund and *Radical Teacher* are groups of friends who get together to watch or read and then talk about and promote left-leaning popular culture: Study Group, Sci Fi Sunday, and FFF.

Study Group is a book group that often has authors attend for great conversations over dinner. An array of anti-fascist and/or socialist and/or fellow traveler authors have discussed their writing with us, including Masha Gessen, Anand Giridharadas, Sarah Schulman, and Gloria Steinem. We have read selections from *The ABCs of Socialism* and *Imagine Living in a Socialist USA* (though the consensus during Study Group was that we preferred the more developed analysis and engagement of whole books or collections with more substantive entries) and all of Joseph Schwartz’s *The Future of Democratic Equality* (which we loved for its cogent political analysis of how substantive, as opposed to merely formal, democracy cannot exist without equality and solidarity, and because Joe is a great person).

At the most recent gathering of Study Group, Alan Jenkins (a former member) came to talk to us about the first volume of his and Gan Golan’s comic book, which will eventually be published as part of *1/6: The Graphic Novel*. This comic book/graphic novel imagines a world in which the Jan. 6, 2022 insurrection succeeded. The comic book is amazing, with its arresting front cover of the Capitol Building on fire behind an angry mob that has apparently just lynched Vice President Pence; a compelling narrative about the multiethnic and multitendency Left group that is fighting back; beautiful artwork by comics veterans Gan Golan, Will Rosado, Lee Loughridge, and Tom Orzechowski; and a useful Education and Action Guide compiled by the Western States Center:

<https://www.westernstatescenter.org/onesixcomics#Action>. Alan Jenkins’s discussion of the project was equally impressive, focusing on his long-held belief, shared with my pal Urv, that though the Left has the best arguments and analysis, it does a bad job of getting those narratives out to the general public. It was this belief that led to Jenkins co-founding The Opportunity Agenda, an organization devoted to “building narrative and cultural power to move our nation toward a vision of justice, equity, and opportunity for all” (<https://opportunityagenda.org/>), and eventually to co-creating this comic book to try to reach a larger audience about the dangers of Trumpism’s authoritarianism and the need for a Left movement to combat it.

During the ensuing discussion, the question arose of which Left voices do the best job of reaching a large audience. I argued, and have since done the research to support my argument, that the most popular socialist filmmaker in the US is Adam McKay, a former head writer for *Saturday Night Live* who is perhaps most famous for the

films he has made with fellow SNL alum Will Ferrell: *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, *Talladega Nights*, and *The Other Guys* (Jax). McKay is probably not the first name that comes to mind when one thinks of US socialists, but he is a member of DSA, supporter of Bernie Sanders, and contributor to *Jacobin* magazine, which published an insightful profile of him in 2019. In this profile, Adam Davidson, an economist and frequent collaborator of McKay's, describes McKay's political movies as "Jacobin essays in movie form" (Kilpatrick).

Adam McKay's most recent film *Don't Look Up* logged 111 million viewing hours on Netflix, which "translates to around 48.3 million viewing sessions on Netflix worldwide. Multiply 48.3 million times the average U.S. ticket price (\$9.16), according to the National Association of Theatre Owners, and you get \$442.2 million" (Frankel). His three previous explicitly political films (*The Campaign*, *The Big Short*, and *Vice*) all grossed around \$100 million, which, given the average ticket price cited above, means these films were each seen by about 11 million people. Did everyone, or even a majority of people, who saw these films know they were learning about antifascism and/or socialism? No. But it's a lot easier to teach people to become aware of and perhaps appreciate the political import of something they have already watched or read and enjoyed than it is to get them to plow through all three volumes of *Capital* or watch, for example, the documentary *American Socialist: The Life and Times of Eugene Debs* (worldwide gross, according to IMDB: \$12,609).

I realize the irony of citing gross sales to discuss the impact of socialist cultural productions. But we live in a capitalist world, and our message can't reach people who aren't able to hear it. As my beloved socialist friend and colleague Joe Schwartz always used to say at DSA fundraisers, "You need socialist cash to fight capitalist trash." I'm suggesting that we need to think beyond traditional classroom texts to reach people where they are—everywhere they are: not only in classrooms or DSA meetings or union halls, but in movie theaters, watching TV at home, or at comedy shows. So, Adam McKay, welcome to the Socialism 101 syllabus.

Meanwhile, my two film groups that meet online have gravitated to a similar political orientation. Sci Fi Sunday, what my husband refers to as my "church" (and group therapy), met in our living room most Sundays starting back in 2006 and has continued to meet online since 2020. Many of the shows we have watched lately are some of the best anti-fascist cultural interventions, with touches of socialism or something like it, that I have ever seen. In *His Dark Materials*, our heroes from different worlds band together in solidarity to take on The Authority and eventually kill God. *The Boys* gives us protagonists who are trying to take down Homelander, a fascist amalgamation of Captain America and Donald Trump and (just in case we missed the fascism part) his "girlfriend" Stormfront, a character who fought on behalf of the Third Reich and whose superpowers have kept her alive long enough to continue the fight for the Fourth Reich (spoiler alert: for a while anyway). The struggle against Nazi-like authoritarians is central to the various television series set in the Star Wars universe, and likely will be for the promised Harry Potter series (with Voldemort and his "pure

bloods"). The various streaming versions of Star Trek continue the series' space socialism in which a United Federation of Planets that has abolished money strives to fulfill an anti-colonial prime directive. Meanwhile, *Made for Love* and *Fired on Mars* give us working-class protagonists who are continually screwed over by their Elon Musk-like partner, in the case of the former show, or boss, in the latter.

By contrast, my FFF group, meeting online most Tuesdays, focuses on more esoteric fare. This group began when our most beloved NYC movie theater, Film Forum, had to close its doors during the height of the pandemic, and so began to offer its arthouse films online. Film Forum Friends (our publicly facing name, though the impact of the pandemic on NYC and beyond also gave us our private moniker: Fuckity Fuck Fuck!) began with whatever movies Film Forum offered for streaming that caught our attention, including many anti-fascist and/or socialist offerings: *Capitalism in the 21st Century*, based on Thomas Piketty's book; my favorite director Vittorio DeSica's *Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, about the effect of the rise of fascism in Italy on a well-to-do Jewish family; Ken Loach's indictment of the gig economy *Sorry We Missed You*; Lee Grant's documentary *Down and Out in America*; Bill Duke's *The Killing Floor*, highlighting the plight of workers fighting to build an interracial labor union in the meatpacking industry in the years leading up to the Chicago race riot of 1919; Margarethe von Trotta's *Rosa Luxemburg*; Barbara Loden's *Wanda*; *A Thousand Cuts*, about the effects of the rise of authoritarianism in the Philippines on freedom of the press; *Collective*, set in Romania; *Mayor*, set in Palestine; *Dear Comrades!*, set in Russia; *Bacurau*, set in Brazil; *Night of the Kings*, set in Ivory Coast; and more. We also watched some silly things like the *Quarantine Cat Festival* and *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* because even diehard socialists aren't focused on socialism all the time. After Film Forum reopened (Hurray!), we continued to meet, mostly watching films from the Criterion collection, and usually focusing on the oeuvre of various left-wing directors, including Chantal Akerman, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach, and Satyajit Ray.

But popular culture is not, of course, composed only of movies and television. Some very funny comedians, including David Cross, John Early, and Sarah Silverman have declared their membership in DSA and talk about socialism in their acts. David Cross even helped the fundraising efforts of the DSA Fund by making a video for us (Thanks, David!). I'm not very familiar with the world of podcasts, but I'm told that there are some great socialist ones: *The Dig and Know Your Enemy*, as well as those of *Jacobin* and *Democratic Left*. A number of socialist artists, musicians, actors, and other cultural workers have participated in the annual Socialism Conference held in Chicago over Labor Day weekend (this would be an ideal Socialism 101 fieldtrip): <https://socialismconference.org/>. These conferences, along with the People's Summit, held in Chicago in 2016 and 2017, have served as veritable socialist universities/concerts/performance spaces, the latter including particularly moving productions of *The People Speak*, performances of speeches by historical figures featured in Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. (<https://www.howardzinn.org/people-speak-2016->

[peoples-summit/](https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/people-speak-extended-edition-contents/)). Live performances of *The People Speak* happen periodically around the world, and it is also available as a film (<https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/people-speak-extended-edition-contents/>).

This essay has covered a lot of ground, perhaps too much. But this is how you build a socialist movement, making connections between various individuals and groups that are constantly working to think, create, and build bridges to a future beyond capitalism. Looking back over the individuals, presses, journals, and organizations mentioned in this essay, any of them would fit well on a Socialism 101 reading list. A couple of them even have their own reading lists to offer: Haymarket Books' Socialism 101: A Reading List (<https://www.haymarketbooks.org/blogs/107-socialism-101-a-reading-list>) and The New Press's We Own the Future: A Democratic Socialist Reading List (<https://thenewpress.com/blog/reading-lists/we-own-future-democratic-socialist-reading-list>). Not surprisingly, these lists focus on their own books because another theme of this essay is that though we may be fighting for socialism, we live under capitalism. Even as we fight against capitalism, we need to take advantage of opportunities when socialist ideas break into the mainstream, from my favorite sci fi shows to the surprising socialism of *Teen Vogue*: <https://www.teenvogue.com/tag/socialism>. We are constantly fighting for a bigger share of the marketplace of ideas, whether what people are "buying" from us is Marx or McKay.

Friends say that I do a good job of "putting the social in socialism" because I constantly try to make connections between people and books and movies and ideas that I love. This effort is based on the socialist truth that we can do more collectively than individually, our organizations can do more in coalition than on their own, and society functions best when it is not atomized but exists in solidarity. With that focus in mind, I have tried to join my personal narrative with the story of the various groups of which I am a part. The result is that after several close-to-all-nighters (just like in my college days) I am exhausted writing this and you may be tired of reading it, but I hope that there is plenty here about the journey that will be of interest and help build the socialist movement. The best way to develop Socialism 101 is to build it in confluence with others. And with that thought, I'm going to head to bed and listen to the audiobook of Barbara Ehrenreich's *Had I Known: Collected Essays* (published just before she passed away in 2020). I will fall asleep listening to the beautiful narration by Suzanne Toren and dream socialist dreams. I hope we can dream these dreams together.

Notes

1. Co-sponsors of these DSA Fund events included various publications and publishers (*Dissent*, The New Press, *In These Times*, *Labor Notes*, *American Prospect*, *Lux*, *Left Voice*, *Dollars & Sense*, *Jacobin*, *Convergence*, *The Nation*, the University of Pennsylvania Press, Haymarket Books, and Verso); DSA and DSA entities, Afrosocialists and Socialists of Color Caucus (AFROSOC), National Labor Commission (NLC), National Electoral Committee (NEC), Medicare for All campaign, Ecosocialism Working Group, Green New Deal Campaign, Health Workers Collective, Housing Justice Commission, Charlottesville (VA) DSA, NYC-DSA's Housing Working Group, and NYC-DSA's Labor Branch and Debt & Finance Working Group); and other activist organizations (Save Our Postal Service, NYC for Abortion Rights, Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), Sunrise Movement, Housing Justice for All, Housing Equity Now St. Paul, Housing Justice Center (MN), Local Progress, the Center for Working Class Politics, and the Sustainable Economies Law Center).
2. Favorite essays from the Feminist Theory readers included Heidi Hartmann's "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union"; Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto"; Juliet Mitchell's "Woman's Estate"; selections from Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*; selections from Alexandra Kollontai's *Working Woman and Mother*; selections from Emma Goldman's *Anarchism and Other Essays*; Evelyn Reed's "Women: Caste, Class, or Oppressed Sex"; Mother Jones's "Girl Slaves of the Milwaukee Breweries"; The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Chapter of the New American Movement's "A View of Socialist Feminism"; and selections from *Women and Economics* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself.
3. I had considered including references to books by John Nichols, Danny Katch, and Gary Dorrien; a book by Bernie Sanders and one about his impact (Day and Uetrict); and Zillah Eisenstein's slender book of mini-essays on *Abolitionist Socialist Feminism*. Readers may want to explore these on their own.

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Michael Bennett is Professor Emeritus of English, Long Island University (Brooklyn). He is the Managing Co-Editor of *Radical Teacher* and the Former Chair of the Democratic Socialists of America Fund Board.



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