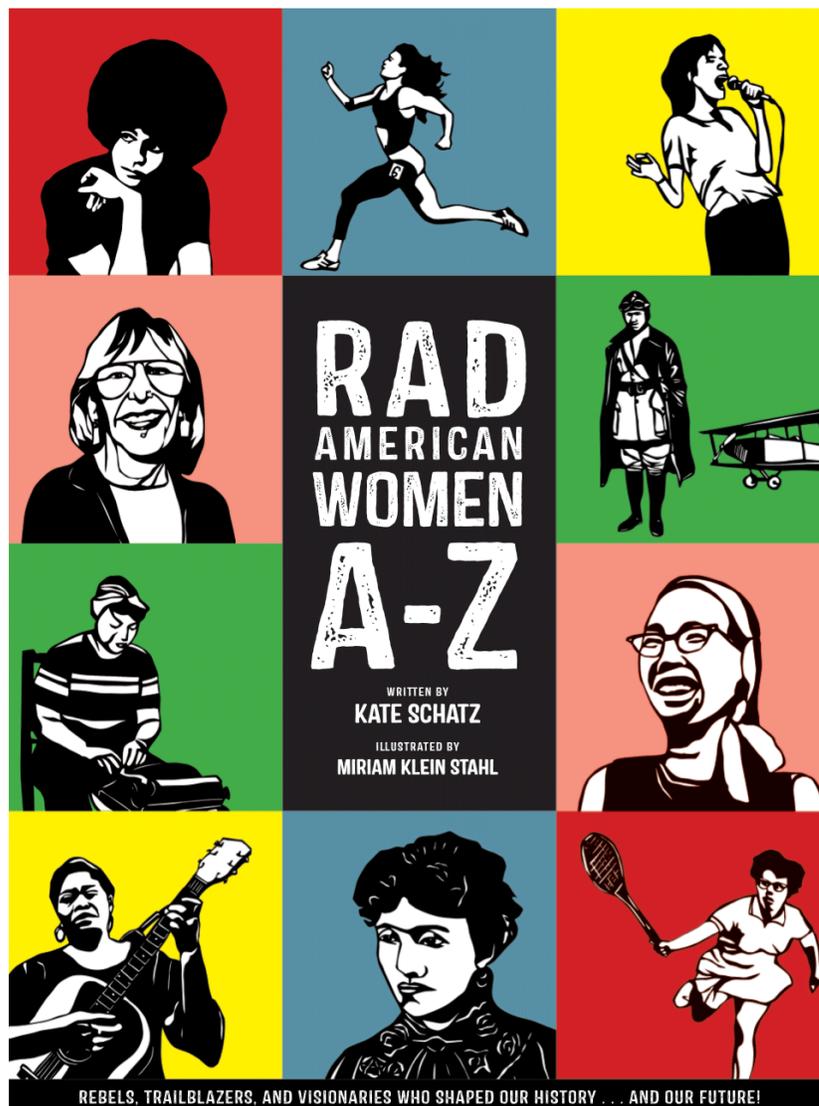


# RADICAL TEACHER

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

News for Educational Workers

by Leonard Vogt



## Fossil Fuel Divestment

Thousands of students across an estimated 400 U. S. campuses are calling on their institutions to divest in coal, oil, and natural gas companies. Twenty-seven colleges and universities across the globe, as well as dozens of cities and religious institutions, have already divested, thus encouraging an entire new generation of skilled organizers (*In These Times*, May 2015).

Alumni of Oxford University in Britain occupied a building in March, 2015, after the university refused to make a decision to divest in fossil fuels. Meanwhile, *The Guardian*, one of Britain's leading newspapers, launched its own divestment campaign, partnering with 350.org to petition two philanthropic groups—the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust—to end their investment in fossil fuels (democracynow.org, March 16, 2015).

Also in March, 2015, 37 students and 6 alumni at Swarthmore College occupied the finance and investment office, with great support from nearly 100 faculty and about 1,000 alumni. In addition, in December 2014, two-thirds of Swarthmore's 1,500 students signed a petition to divest in coal, oil, and gas stocks (portside.org, March 26, 2015).

In April, 2015, Wesleyan University students in Connecticut occupied the office of the President to demand divestment not only in fossil fuels, but also the prison industry and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Almost simultaneously, students at Harvard University demanded fossil fuel divestment by blocking the entrance to an administration building (democracynow.org, April 17, 2015).

On a highly successful note, Syracuse University joined the growing list of institutions divesting in fossil fuels when, in April Of 2015, the Board of Trustees voted to divest the university's \$1.8 billion endowment from fossil fuel corporations (democracynow.org, April 1, 2015).

"The Divestment Dividend" (truth-out.org, April 27, 2015) explains that joining money to climate change can pay dividends. "MSCI, a leading global stock market index company, tracks fossil-free performance. It determined at the end of March [2015] that stock portfolios without exposure to these industries had outperformed investments that included fossil fuels . . . over the prior five years. Since November 2010, MSCI's fossil-free index . . . has gained 13 percent on an annualized basis, eclipsing conventional investment approaches by 1.2 percentage points."

## Adjunct Faculty

Academia relies heavily on adjunct, or contingent, faculty labor. The number of tenured faculty has fallen, the number of college and university administrators has risen, and academia employs more than half its teaching faculty as adjuncts, paying on the average \$2,700 per course with, usually, no benefits. Even if they are lucky

enough to get three classes per semester, spread perhaps over two campuses, they will earn only around \$20,000 a year. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) is pushing to triple that minimum sum and, in the case of Tufts University, SEIU has won an adjunct salary schedule that will build to a minimum of \$7,300 per course in 2016, plus benefits (*Washington Post*, February 6, 2015).

February 23-27, 2015 was National Adjunct Action Week, with February 25 set aside as National Adjunct Walkout Day. On this day, *Democracy Now!* interviewed Louisa Edgerly, an adjunct instructor at Seattle University, who explained the poverty-level wages and poor working conditions suffered by well over half of all college and university faculty.

## Community Colleges

President Barack Obama's America's College Promise Proposal is hardly radical but it could help by not only allowing students to receive free their first two years at a community college but also possibly not have to graduate under tons of student loan debt. Such a program already exists in Tennessee and two generations ago free tuition was the case for four year colleges in the University of California system until the late 1960s and the City University of New York system until the 1970s ([www.care2.com](http://www.care2.com), January 14, 2015 and [truth-out.org](http://truth-out.org), January 18, 2015).

## Israel and Palestine

"Inside American Students' Right for Justice in Palestine" (AlterNet, April 13, 2015) describes how the organizing of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) "has creatively highlighted and challenged Israel's ongoing apartheid" by demanding that college administrations do not silence criticism of Israel but rather allow and encourage open inquiry and critical thinking. Most significantly, SJP's Open Hillel movement is growing across U. S. campuses.

The Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) Movement has taken many forms since its creation in 2005, from boycotting companies such as SodaStream that benefit from the occupation of the West Bank to prohibiting investment in any company that is not involved in peaceful pursuits, but the BDS tactic that has drawn most attention and perhaps most controversy, especially since the 2013 American Studies Association vote to join, is the academic boycott of Israel. In "Do Academic Boycotts Work?" (*In These Times*, March 2015), three academics discuss the merits of the academic boycott: Nada Elia, a Palestinian and professor of global and gender studies; Jackson Lears, a professor of history; and Noam Chomsky, professor emeritus of linguistics.

The Graduate College University of Massachusetts at Amherst is raising the ire of civil rights advocates and the campus community by restricting Iranian students from key graduate programs like microbiology, chemistry, and physics. The Graduate School maintains that it is only applying the sanctions imposed by the "Iran Threat

Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012” but civil rights groups insist that the sanctions are violations of academic freedom and educational equality. Virginia Commonwealth University and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute also impose such sanctions against Iranian students (portside.org, February 18, 2015).

Journalist Chris Hedges was invited to speak at a conference on April 3, 2015 sponsored by U. of Pennsylvania’s International Affairs Association, but says he was uninvited after comparing Israel’s founding fathers to ISIS radicals on Truthdig.org.: “[ISIS’s] quest for an ethnically pure Sunni state mirrors the quest for a Jewish state eventually carved out of Palestine in 1948. Its tactics are much like those of the Jewish guerrillas who used violence, terrorism, foreign fighters, clandestine arms shipments and foreign money, along with horrific ethnic cleansing and the massacres of hundreds of Arab civilians, to create Israel.”

New York University Professor Andrew Ross, who researches labor conditions for migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), was barred from flying to and entering the UAE after his harsh criticisms of the conditions of laborers who had built NYU’s recent campus there (democracynow.org, March 16, 2015).

Four American Jews (Mark Levy, Larry Rubin, Dorothy Zellner, and Ira Grupper), all in their 70s, all civil rights movement veterans, all freedom riders to the South 50 years ago, were banned from speaking at the Jewish campus organization, Hillel, because they were on campus tours to speak about Palestinian rights. Only with the support of the Open Hillel Movement, and other progressive Jewish student organizations, were they able to successfully complete their tour. For bios on these four Americans, see portside.org, April 1, 2015.

One thousand students attended a forum on Free Speech after a Connecticut College philosophy professor compared Palestinians to “rabid pit bulls” (medowweiss.net, March 31, 2015).

## Student Debt

Over 41 million Americans are burdened with student debt to a sum of \$1.3 trillion. In February of 2015, 15 students of Corinthian Colleges, the for-profit system across the United States and Canada which has now gone bankrupt, are refusing to pay back their federal loans as an act of civil disobedience. One hundred additional Corinthian students have joined the movement to demand debt forgiveness from the Department of Education for “predatory loans to purchase degrees.” For the full story on this student debt forgiveness story, see *In These Times*, May 2015; *The Nation*, March 16, 2015; portside.org, March 20, 2015; and DemocracyNow, February 25, 2015.

## GLBT Educators

In “Pride and Professionalism Shape the Lives of Gay and Lesbian Teachers” (truth-out.org, January 11, 2015), Catherine Connell references a recent *Atlantic* article which considers the difficulties of being an LGBT teacher in the contemporary United States. These stories are mirrored in Connell’s new book *School’s Out: Gay and Lesbian Teachers in the Classroom*, in which she interviews 45 teachers, from California (with multiple legal protections) to Texas (with no legal protections), in various school levels (elementary to high school), communities (rural, suburban, urban), and school size (small to large). Across these various settings, she found a common theme: “gay and lesbian teachers struggle to integrate the dictates of gay pride with the demands of teaching professionalism.”

A track coach and substitute teacher at Dowling Catholic High School in West Des Moines, Iowa, was offered a full-time teaching job, which was then revoked, not because he is gay, according to the bishop of Des Moines, but because he has been open and honest about it. As a result, hundreds of students walked out of class in protest (faithfulamerican.org, April 9, 2015).

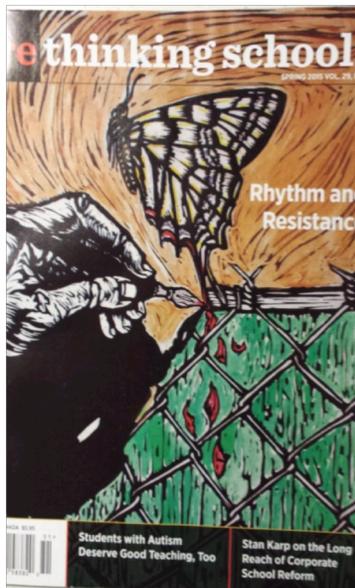
After two volleyball players came out at a Christian South Carolina college, they were surprised at the overwhelming support of their teammates, but shocked at the reaction of the Erskine College administration which then adopted a resolution banning homosexuals from the school (DailyKos, March 2, 2015).

## Standardized Testing

“A Brief History of the ‘Testocracy,’ Standardized Testing and Test-Defying” (truth-out.org, March 26, 2015) is an excerpt from Jesse Hagopian’s *More Than a Score*, which introduces the students, parents, and educators who make up the resistance movement against the corporate “testocracy,” the “elite stratum of society that finances and promotes competition and privatization in public education rather than collaboration, critical thinking, and the public good.”

In New York, this pushback against the “testocracy” takes the form of Governor Andrew Cuomo facing off against Bill De Blasio, mayor of New York City, and Carmen Fariña, New York City schools chancellor. Cuomo wants fifty percent of teachers’ evaluations to be based on student test scores, with the other half coming from a one-time outside observer visit. The mayor and the school chancellor repeatedly question the value or usefulness of state-test results in evaluating teachers, students, or schools (*New Yorker*, March 17, 2015).

Governor Cuomo’s education agenda is being challenged as seen by the tens of thousands of parents in New York State who had their students boycott the last annual English Language Arts exam. In some school



districts, abstention levels reached 80 percent, with over 155,000 students opting out of the exams (DemocracyNow, April 17, 2015).

## K-12

Stan Karp's "A Tale of Two Districts: The Long Reach and Deep Pockets of Corporate Reform" is a study of the path of corporate school reform in two New Jersey cities, Newark and Montclair. Although two very different communities, with Montclair suffering a much less destabilizing influence, the effects on education are strikingly similar (*Rethinking Schools*, April 16, 2015).

The Pearson testing corporation, which makes almost 40 percent of all standardized tests in the United States, was caught spying on students through their social media during the time they were taking their Common Core standardized tests ([e-activist@aft.org](mailto:e-activist@aft.org), March 17, 2015).

The National Center for Education Statistics' latest data collected from across the United States shows that 51 percent of the students in U. S. public schools are from low income families. Only Romania, out of 35 developed countries, has a higher child poverty rate (*The Guardian*, January 17, 2015).

"The True Cost of Teach For America's Impacts on Urban Schools" ([portside.org](http://portside.org), January 12, 2015) explores yet another area of controversy in the Teach For America (TFA) program: the start-up costs of hiring a TFA teacher, and the program's impact on the retention of veteran faculty, who feel their profession is diminished by preferring TFA teachers over teachers who have prepared themselves as education majors often with advanced degrees.

## Resources

Bullfrog Films has produced a large number of excellent documentaries easily usable from K-12 through the college and university level. Below are some of the most recent:

*DamNation* explores the sea change in national attitude from pride in big dams as engineering wonders to the call for dam removal as awareness grows that our own future is bound to the health of our rivers.



DAMNATION

In *The Homestretch*, three homeless teens in Chicago fight to stay in school, graduate, and build a future.



THE HOMESTRETCH

*Code Black* offers unprecedented access to the Emergency Room at Los Angeles County Hospital and provides a doctor's-eye view into the heart of our complex and overburdened healthcare system.



CODE BLACK

*Green Fire* explores the life and legacy of famed conservationist Aldo Leopold (*A Sand County Almanac*) and his land ethic philosophy.



GREEN FIRE

In *The Hand That Feeds*, shy sandwich-maker Mahoma López unites his undocumented immigrant coworkers to fight abusive conditions at a popular New York restaurant chain.



THE HAND THAT FEEDS

A fiery octogenarian activist in *Divide in Concord* spearheads a grassroots campaign to ban the sale of single-serve plastic bottled water in Concord, MA.



DIVIDE IN CONCORD

*Racing To Zero* follows San Francisco's innovative efforts towards achieving zero waste, thereby dramatically reducing the city's carbon footprint.



RACING TO ZERO

*After Winter Spring* is an intimate portrait of an ancestral way of life under threat in a world increasingly dominated by large-scale industrial agriculture.



AFTER WINTER SPRING

For complete information on all of these films, go to [www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com) or call toll-free 1-800-543-3764.

*Rad American Women A-Z* (City Lights Press) gives children a chance to not only learn the alphabet but also women's history. The book was created to fill the feminist absence in children's literature and goes from A (Angela Davis) to Z (Zora Neale Hurston) and has an equal proportion of woman of color and representatives from the lesbian community.

*Out at Work* is the classic, and only existing, documentary about GLBT workplace discrimination. For full information, contact [kellyjmanderson@gmail.com](mailto:kellyjmanderson@gmail.com).

The Education Opportunity Network gives online news and views for progressive change in education. Top stories include the resistance to standardized testing, student loan debt, criminalizing black teachers, charter schools, rich versus poor school districts, and education budgets. For more information or to subscribe, go to: [info@educationopportunitynetwork.org](mailto:info@educationopportunitynetwork.org).

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](mailto:lvogt@nyc.rr.com).



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