

Radical Teacher
102
Teaching About Climate Change



MAN EATING TREES
COURTESY OF JOHN SOKOL

RADICAL TEACHER

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

In Memoriam: Pepi Leistyna

by Editorial Board



1963-2015

~ Remembering Pepi Leistyna ~

We mourn our *Radical Teacher* colleague, beloved educator, admired scholar and friend, Pepi Leistyna. Pepi's work and passionate commitment to progressive politics are our cherished legacy, joined with many others.

Pepi's students' blog comments regarding news of his death are heartfelt in their grief but also in love and admiration for him—for his compassion, wisdom, vast knowledge, and wit. The passion which fed his teaching also nourished his writing, lectures, his film *Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class*, which won the Studs Terkel Award for Media and Journalism (2007), and his winning the Peace Maker Award for photography in Palestine (2013). Teaching, researching, and activism were all of a piece for Pepi. He was a founding member of the International Institute for Critical Pedagogy and Transformative Leadership, and published widely, including the books *Breaking Free: The Transformative Power of Critical Pedagogy*, *Presence of Mind: Education and the Politics of Deception*, *Cultural Studies: From Theory to Action*. Pepi brought to *Radical Teacher* the same unflagging energy and commitment to social justice that inspired all he did. Among other things he compiled for *Radical Teacher* an excellent filmography on social class (RT 81) and he co-edited the cluster "Teaching Post-Colonial Literatures in the Age of Empire" (RT 82).

Pepi was Professor of Applied Linguistics Graduate Studies at the University of Massachusetts—Boston, where he taught courses in language acquisition, critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and media literacy, and directed the Center for World Language and Cultures.

Like his students, we at *Radical Teacher* remember with affection Pepi's ability to connect our humanity and joy to the cause of social justice. One of his students includes in his blog highlight quotes from Pepi's teaching:

- What if I came in wearing a dress?
- So what If I like to wear deodorant that smells like flowers?
- If you came here to listen to my clothes, you have the wrong guy.
- There goes Pepi, that raving Marxist.



PHOTO TAKEN IN PALESTINE BY PEPI LEISTYNA



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/press/).

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Introduction: Teaching About Climate Change

by James Davis and Bob Rosen



IN *MAN EATING TREES*, JOHN SOKOL EMPLOYS HUMOR TO COMMENT ON OUR SELF-SERVING DESTRUCTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT. THE ARTIST USED TAR DILUTED WITH VARNISH TO CREATE A DARK, NIGHTMARISH QUALITY. AKRON ART MUSEUM. WITH PERMISSION OF JOHN SOKOL.

The Arctic ice cap is melting. The seas are rising. Extreme weather events—droughts, floods, hurricanes, massive snowstorms—are becoming the norm. World grain production is declining, and resource wars are intensifying. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a sober group, predicts “severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts” in the very near future.

Depressed yet?

The oil and gas industry wields immense power; its funding decides elections; it spends \$400,000 a day on lobbyists. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) is undercutting state environmental regulations and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, like trade agreements before it, promises to do the same nationally and internationally. Round the clock cable news coverage sensationalizes weather but rarely mentions climate change. Over one third of U.S. Senators deny that human activity causes global warming.

Demoralized?

If we think too much, and too self-indulgently, about climate change, we can start to feel like nine-year-old Alvy Singer in *Annie Hall*, who sees no point in doing his homework since the universe is expanding and will some day break apart. For the more deeply we look into the problem of climate change and the more radical a view we take of its causes, the more intractable it can seem. And who wants to fight a fight that can't be won?

Still, let's spend a little time going through some of the reasons to despair, if only to get them out of the way.

One problem, of course, is denial. Fossil fuel corporations obviously have their own reasons —and a great deal of money—for promoting the view that the climate is not warming, or that if it is, it's not because of human activity, or if it is anthropogenic, then the threat is exaggerated and, besides, we can easily fix it. But many of our students, and we too, may be in denial at some level, averse to thinking about it, perhaps out of a belief that disaster is unavoidable, or that it will only strike somewhere else, or perhaps that taking steps towards averting it might mean uncomfortable changes (or worse) to our life styles, whether reduction in automobile and plane travel, or limits to our diet¹, or other assaults on our consumption. One can easily envision a world with sustainable transportation and food, but between here and there (if we're to have a chance of making it there) lies a lot of unpleasantness.

We also can't put much faith in those who do acknowledge the magnitude of the problem but offer only liberal solutions. More efficient light bulbs, hybrid or electric cars, solar panels and wind farms, even governmental action such as stricter regulation or a carbon tax are at best inadequate. Nor do grander technological fixes like nuclear energy or geo-engineering offer much hope. After all, who can be trusted to run the nuclear plants safely or to tell the truth about the risks of grandiose geo-engineering schemes like Solar Radiation Management, which would disperse vast quantities of

particles into the atmosphere to reflect sunlight away from the earth?

And how much hope can we really invest in national environmental groups, when we learn that so many of them have taken money from fossil fuel corporations, have endorsed “natural gas” as a healthy alternative to oil, or have pushed carbon trading and other doomed market-based solutions? (See Naomi Klein, chapter 6, for details on this kind of cooptation.²)

The momentum of the systems—both the earth's biosphere and the political economy—that need to be turned around immediately is enormous. The carbon dioxide that has already been added to the atmosphere will be there and will continue to increase global temperatures for centuries. And the carbon that needs to stay in the ground if we are to have a chance represents billions of dollars of wealth to powerful fossil fuel corporations—wealth they're not about to let anyone turn into “stranded assets.” For them, climate effects are an “externality.” And as the actions of their agents in governments around the world have shown, they are determined to make sure that the kind of international cooperation needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will be forever postponed and, in fact, undermined further by trade agreements.

The momentum of the systems—both the earth's biosphere and the political economy—that need to be turned around immediately is enormous.

Naomi Klein sums up the predicament clearly: “We are stuck because the actions that would give us the best chance of averting catastrophe — and would benefit the vast majority — are extremely threatening to an elite minority that has a stranglehold over our economy, our political process, and most of our major media outlets” (p. 18).

And yet . . . there is growing resistance. In September 2014, an estimated 400,000 protestors joined the People's Climate March in New York City, a broad coalition of groups representing students, union members, indigenous peoples, environmentalists, peace and justice workers, LGBTQ activists, and more. Prominent among the chants was “system change, not climate change.” Tar sands extraction in Alberta, Canada is being fought by actions against the Keystone XL pipeline and by Nez Perce lawsuits blocking the transport of equipment through tribal lands in Idaho. Demonstrators are sitting down in front of trains carrying coal from Montana and Wyoming for export to China. Student-led divestment movements are forcing colleges to rid their portfolios of fossil fuel corporations. (Though this may not have any direct effect on the bottom line of these corporations, it will tar their reputations, and they may soon be as morally tainted as tobacco companies have become.) Now even the Church of England is divesting, and the Pope is expected to deliver an encyclical on the harm climate change does to the poor. And, of course, plans are already in the works for massive

demonstrations around the UN climate talks scheduled for December in Paris.

Optimists on the left have argued that we should see climate change as an opportunity to do something about capitalism. We are not persuaded that capitalism is as susceptible to reform as Naomi Klein and others suggest, but we agree that there is something very important here for radical educators, because the same things that make climate change so enormous a challenge— it is so systemic; it connects so many of the dots—also make it an excellent subject for the classroom. Teaching about climate change can mean, for example, teaching about class (who suffers the consequences?), about racism (how did the government and the media respond to Hurricane Katrina?), about sexism (is our patriarchal relationship to nature central to the problem?), about global inequality (who's been most responsible for all that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere?), about imperialism ("what's our oil doing under their sand?"), and on. The climate crisis offers us an almost unending "teachable moment."

Depressed yet?

Demoralized?

And yet . . . there is growing resistance.

Optimists on the left have argued that we should see climate change as an opportunity to do something about capitalism.

* * * * *

The five articles in this issue of *Radical Teacher* describe the work of educators who are confronting the challenges and discovering the rewards of teaching about climate change.

In "Resource Wars: An On the Ground Understanding of Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining in Appalachia, West Virginia," Nicole Fabricant describes a surprise encounter with one of the complications of teaching about climate change. In her Towson University anthropology course, Resource Wars of the 21st Century, she and her mostly working-class students study the "explicit links between Big Energy, extractivism, and the climate crisis" and analyze the consequences of privatization and deregulation, as well as the social movements fighting back around the globe. A key component of the course is a four-day field trip to Kayford Mountain, intended to give students "first hand" exposure to the nature and consequences of one particularly destructive extractive process, mountaintop removal. An unexpected encounter with Families and Friends of Coal, a group supported by the coal industry but also genuinely connected to local people

whose immediate livelihood depends on coal mining, forces Fabricant and her students, some of them already environmental activists, to take a more complex view of potential alliances and possible solutions, for what is needed to make possible a safe future may be in serious conflict with the immediate interests not only of big capital but of segments of the working class.

The struggle to present a clear-eyed vision of reality without smothering hope can also arise in teaching about climate and the law. In "Ignorance/Denial-Fear/Paralysis-Engagement/Commitment: Reflections on a Decade of Teaching Climate Change Law," Eleanor Stein describes her work with pre-law students at the State University of New York at Albany and with law students at Albany Law School. The law can certainly be an instrument of the powerful but, through studies of local, state, and federal legal battles over the environment as well as in-class simulations of global climate negotiations, Stein hopes to offer her students not only an understanding of the enormous obstacles ahead but also the tools and the optimism to carry on.

In "Teaching and Practicing Climate Politics at College of the Atlantic: Student-Inspired, Student-Driven," Doreen Stabinsky helps those she teaches engage directly with the kinds of global negotiations that may very well shape our fate. Students from her Global Environmental Politics and her Practicing Climate Politics courses travel abroad to attend sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in hopes of advocating for "climate justice." They quickly learn that "you cannot leave change up to climate negotiators" and that some of the most important action takes place outside the convention halls. For this select and somewhat unusual group of students, already committed to engaging with climate issues, encountering the intransigence of the powerful and the power of that intransigence leads not to resignation but to greater activism, including local anti-pipeline protests back home.

At Arizona State University, Breanne Fahs encourages her students to confront environmental issues in a much more personal way. In "The Weight of Trash: Teaching Sustainability and Ecofeminism by Asking Undergraduates to Carry Around Their Own Garbage," she describes a component of her women's studies course, "Trash, Freaks, and SCUM," which requires her students to collect and in some sense *own* the garbage they produce, leading them to question their lives as consumers and their aspirations to earn a lot of money so they can consume even more. What might seem like a mere gimmick, or an endorsement of lifestyle changes as the solution to environmental problems, in fact leads many of them to understand the need for broad social change and to take on responsibility for working towards it. "At its core," Fahs writes, "global warming is a problem of consuming more resources than we can sustainably create."

Finally, in "Bringing Climate Into the Classroom: Inside a Teaching Retreat Around Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything*," Bill Bigelow, Alex Kelly, and Katie McKenna describe a three-day retreat led by Bigelow and Linda Christensen, of *Rethinking Schools*, in which eighteen

teachers, mostly high school but also middle school and elementary teachers as well as college teachers in education schools, used Klein's best-selling book (and a companion film) as a foundation for developing new curricula. The creativity unleashed by the retreat and the educational efforts that will follow as these teachers bring their plans to their classrooms suggest that maybe hope is worth holding on to after all.³

* * * * *

As we write this (May 2015), hundreds of activists have taken their kayaks and small boats into the port of Seattle to protest the presence there of Shell Oil's Polar Pioneer drilling rig. Shell plans to tow this 400 by 355 foot monster, over 300 feet tall, out from Seattle this summer in order to drill in the Arctic waters off Alaska's North Slope, a major step in opening up an entire new region for fossil fuel extraction. The outcome of the "Paddle in Seattle" protest is uncertain, but the image of hundreds of tiny boats confronting this behemoth should inspire us.⁴

NOTES

1. Fossil fuel use for transportation and electricity generation gets most of the attention, but according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, animal agriculture is responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions: <http://www.fao.org/ag/magazine/0612sp1.htm>. Other studies indicate an even higher percentage. See, for example, <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/6294>. Obviously, we need to eat something, but our individual and collective choices matter.

2. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (Simon & Schuster, 2014).

3. A valuable resource is the new book from *Rethinking Schools*, *A People's Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis*, edited by Bill Bigelow and Tim Swinehart. A good, simple introduction to climate change science is available at: <https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~franker/SustainableTompkins/FrankeGlobalWarmingBasicsST.pdf>.

4. The threat of climate disaster will no doubt be with us for some time, and *Radical Teacher* welcomes other articles on how to teach about it.



ACTIVISTS IN SEATTLE PROTESTING SHELL OIL'S POLAR PIONEER DRILLING RIG.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Resource Wars: An On the Ground Understanding of Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining in Appalachia, West Virginia

by Nicole Fabricant



STUDENTS HIKING TO SEE AN ACTIVE SITE OF MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL COAL MINING, KAYFORD MOUNTAIN, 2015
PHOTO: ALEXIS ADELSBERGER

This article sketches student responses to directly witnessing the tragedy of mountaintop removal mining (MTR) on Kayford Mountain in West Virginia, where we began traveling in 2011. This engaged anthropological curriculum is part of Resource Wars of the 21st Century, an upper-level anthropology course at Towson University examining global political and economic shifts such as privatization, liberalization of borders, and deregulation, which have wreaked havoc on our built environment and affected access to critical resources in Latin American and the US.¹ We link critical resources to intensified practices of mineral/resource extraction, using case examples from the Niger Delta, West Virginia, and the Ecuadorian Amazon. As well, we consider how community members and social movements have organized to reclaim “the commons” and rethink social and productive economies. We move from land, food, and water to coal, gas, and oil as key extractive industries. Our trip to West Virginia follows significant exposure to theories of global political economy, environment, and natural resources: students have grappled with David Harvey’s *Spaces of Global Capitalism* and written about the political economy of land, food, and water. In collaboration with Keepers of the Mountain, a grassroots organization seeking to educate and inspire people to end mountaintop coal mining, the engaged curriculum exposes students first-hand to the human, social, and environmental consequences of coal extraction, and seeks to move them from learning, listening, and documenting to active engagement.²

These links between Big Energy, extractivism, and the climate crisis emerge in my classroom, but for students it all feels somewhat abstracted from daily life. Traveling to Coal Country exposes them first-hand to the relationship between macro economics and micro realities and establishes connections between our consumptive lives in urban centers (energy demands) and those living in communities in West Virginia (productive zones).

In this article, I address how students move from passive witnessing to active civic engagement, with special attention to the visible and the invisible. The visible represents what we see and hear from community activists who live close to active MTR sites, while the invisible is what happens to working-class students as they transform from passive listener to active learner. Many anthropology majors at Towson University work jobs in the service sector (some work 35 to 40 hours a week) and most are full-time students.³ Spending time on Kayford Mountain provokes a shared vulnerability and heightened consciousness, encouraging them to transcend individual histories and envisioning a collective struggle. I believe this sense of vulnerability and even discomfort allows students to connect to one another and to the residents of West

Virginia, and to begin to move towards a shared activism. However, my article ends by recounting a terrifying learning experience in 2013, which complicated this model of collective vulnerability and led us to new questions and further analysis.

With respect to climate change, the relationship between extractive industries and CO₂ emissions is critically important. Extractive industries have devastated biodiversity, destroyed fertile lands, and deforested large portions of the globe. Much of the work on climate change has addressed the “processing end” of coal, the coal-fired power plants which have released exorbitant amounts of CO₂ into our atmosphere. However, recent research has demonstrated the significant impact of mining coal on CO₂ emissions and global warming. A 2012 study by scientists at the University of Kentucky and the University of California emphasized the climate implications of coal extraction by mountaintop removal. If coal mining continues at its current pace—particularly by blowing up mountains—the Southern Appalachian forests will likely switch from a net carbon sink to a net carbon source within the next 12 to 20 years, meaning the area will emit more carbon than it takes in, with adverse consequences for our atmosphere. The researchers found that mountaintop removal is not only more damaging than underground mining to rivers, biodiversity, and human health; it also exacerbates the climate crisis (Campbell, et al., 2012).

For this very reason, organizations like Keepers of the Mountain are joining with indigenous peoples and leaders in other parts of the globe fighting transnational oil and gas giants and calling for climate justice. Activists from Keepers of the Mountain joined 400,000 others to mobilize in New York City in September of 2014, marching to the United Nations Climate Summit to spectacularize the climate crisis and hold international leaders accountable for a binding agreement on CO₂ emissions. The march made visible the links between extractive projects and CO₂ emissions, particularly the non-renewable fossil fuel giants blocking progressive legislation. In its important 2011 report, “Outing the Oligarchy: The Billionaires Who Benefit from Today’s Climate Crisis,” the International Forum on Globalization compiled a who’s who of the ultra-rich who benefit from the climate crisis. For example, the Koch brothers spent vast personal wealth – \$12.6 million – on campaign contributions to both houses to support minimal emissions standards (Fabricant and Hicks 2013).

These links between Big Energy, extractivism, and the climate crisis emerge in my classroom, but for students it all feels somewhat abstracted from daily life. Traveling to Coal Country exposes them first-hand to the relationship between macro economics and micro realities and establishes connections between our consumptive lives in urban centers (energy demands) and those living in communities in West Virginia (productive zones). For students to move from classroom theory to civic engagement, questions regarding the environment or even eco-systemic ruptures have to personally and emotively touch them. Let me take you on our journey.

History, Political Economy, and Geography in Action

We left Towson University— a large public university in the suburbs north of Baltimore, Maryland— at 8:45 a.m. on a warm April morning. The students piled into the 12-seat passenger van with their sleeping bags, tents, book bags, and snacks. We were headed on a 7-hour journey toward Beckley, West Virginia. Many couldn't imagine the radical geographical, economic, and cultural transformations from Baltimore to West Virginia. The contours of our tires marked the complex terrain from zones of coal consumption to zones of production.

While the use of coal to produce electricity in the United States has been declining in recent years, primarily due to the price of natural gas, most states are still heavily dependent on coal-fired power. Thirty-seven states were net importers of coal in 2012, paying a total of \$19.4 billion to import 433 million tons of coal from other states and even some foreign countries. Most of the nation's coal comes from just three states: Wyoming, West Virginia, and Kentucky, which together accounted for 60 percent of U.S. coal production in 2012. These three states are also the source of 82 percent of the coal that gets exported by barge, rail, or truck to other states. While we tracked the movement of coal in the classroom from extraction and processing to consumption, our own physical movement through distinct socio-economic and geographic regions brought the theory to life.

In the classroom, we learn that the Coal industry has dominated the political and economic landscape of the Appalachian communities for more than a century. While our vehicles approached Beckley, students noticed that every radio station announced, "This program was made possible by Friends of Coal." Others pointed to the large, flashy billboards: "Coal Supports Our Schools, Do You?" or "Coal is America's Energy: It's Good for America and It's Good for West Virginia." But is it really? The students in the vans discussed the "hegemony of Big Coal."

The coal industry has transformed the region from globally noteworthy natural diversity to an increasingly polluted, degraded landscape where future economic possibilities are few. As anthropologist Bryan McNeil has so powerfully indicated, "[E]conomic development in West Virginia, especially southern West Virginia, is still guided by a coal-first philosophy. Beyond actual mining, coal's extractive industry model profoundly influences economic development in general. West Virginia's economic

development policies follow a pattern in which the state systematically favors industries over citizens, regardless of consequences" (141). It is based on the idea of comparative advantage, and after 150 years of industrial coal extraction, West Virginia is ranked at or near the bottom of every economic category. McNeil has compared West Virginia to the banana industry in the Caribbean, with locally fixed production tied to the fate of one industry that is dependent on unpredictable distant consumers. Ultimately, in both contexts, this has led to intense poverty and inequality.

The economic devastation of the Appalachian West Virginia is real for the students. Along our journey, we make several stops at local gas stations: students point out that some of these areas look like "food deserts," the only food available highly-processed, high carb, high in sugar. Some stop to take pictures of the arrangement of foods at local gas stations while others point out the young men dressed in mining apparel. They also narrate back in the vans the landscape of broken down houses, boarded up buildings, and trailer park after trailer park, commenting

often about the intensity of poverty. One student from Central America said, "I would not have thought that there was such an enormous gap in wealth by just crossing state borders. As we drove down these dirt roads, it seemed like we were entering a whole different country. It looked like some parts of my hometown in El Salvador. This was shocking to me."



ACTIVE SITE OF MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL COAL MINING KAYFORD MOUNTAIN, 2015
PHOTO: ALEXIS ADELSBERGER

From its beginning in 1863, the state of West Virginia mined coal. But it was not until after the Civil War, with new interest in the state's valuable coal reserves, that the industry actually grew. When the Civil War ended, the United States entered a tremendous industrialization period, and coal was desperately needed to feed the factories and railroads that were spreading across the country. Entrepreneurs from the industrial centers of the Northeast, South, and Midwest descended upon rural areas such as Southern Appalachia to tap into their human and natural resources. In the 19th century, railroaders and other industrial scouts developed plans and infrastructure for harvesting Appalachia's rich natural resources. Created alongside the company towns and steel rails was an economic system whose distinctive relationships shaped and continues today to shape the region. As World War I escalated, the demand for coal from Southern Appalachia grew to unprecedented heights. At the height of the coal boom, there were nearly 12,000 mines operating in the region, employing over 700,000 men. Men worked in much more primitive and dangerous circumstances then than they do today, as mines are now

more mechanized. There were all sorts of environmental and health hazards, including black lung disease.

As a result of these exploitative conditions, miners in the region built the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) and fought back against coal companies. UMWA represented one of the most powerful unions in the United States throughout the 20th century. However, the assault on unions starting in the 1980s has left miners without this critical leverage to negotiate and thus quite vulnerable. The CEO of Massey Energy, Don Blankenship, who took a militant approach to union busting, said “Unions, communities, people – everybody’s gonna have to learn to accept that in the US you have a capitalist society and capitalism, from a business standpoint is the survival of the most productive” (Goodell 2010). Blankenship not only broke down the radical union structures, he also popularized the style of mining known as mountaintop removal coal mining.⁴

Mountaintop removal (MTR) is a method of surface mining that entails the literal removal of 800 feet of a mountain’s top to gain quick access to the coal deposits that lie beneath. MTR is the preferred method of mining coal today, particularly in Appalachia. The process is methodical, rational, and efficient. It is the perfect brew for businesses like Massey that wanted to accumulate capital in a relatively short period of time. Several advances in technology facilitated the rise of MTR, among them computer engineering, large machinery such as draglines—\$100 million machines that can move one hundred tons of material with each scoop—and powerful explosives of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil (McNeil 20). The explosives are used to remove up to 400 vertical feet of mountain to expose the underlying coal seams. Excess rock and soil laden with toxic mining byproducts are often dumped into nearby valleys. Although valley fills are supposed to be carefully terraced and engineered with water diversion ditches, they frequently bury both intermittent and permanent streams. More than 1,200 miles of streams have been buried in the Appalachian region, and possibly as many as 700 miles in West Virginia alone (Cook 142).

Local community residents and environmentalists argue that MTR has directly affected water and air quality. Residents have emphasized that burying the headwaters of streams causes irreversible damage to regional ecosystems and blasting away layers of mountains removes layers of the aquifer. Strip mining also increases the possibility of flash floods. Further, coalfield residents point to the excessive dust in their communities. And there have been instances when rocks from blasts fall into people’s yards and damage property.

As mentioned earlier, the pedagogical intent of our four-day trip to Kayford Mountain is to expose students first hand to the social, economic, and environmental effects of mountaintop removal by living on an active blasting site. Simply getting up this mountain in our university vehicles is a terrifying endeavor. Students are shocked. An active site of MTR activity, Kayford has one very twisty road where a slight mistake could send a vehicle over the edge. For many students who have never left the United States, this is the greatest adventure of

their life. A cacophony of screams and shouts often accompany our maneuvers to avoid veering too close to the edge of the cliff. This physical sense of vulnerability sets the tone for the trip as we attempt to make our way up this mountain range.

The first day is mainly spent getting settled. Students bring their own camping gear. Some students know how to pitch a tent; others don’t. Some are terrified by the rural environment, having grown up in urban Baltimore; others have camping experience. Once we construct our campsite, Elise Keaton (Director of Keepers of the Mountain) and Junior Walk (a young man who volunteers for Keepers) set up a space for discussion. Junior grew up in Eunice, West Virginia, where he worked as a security guard on top of an MTR site. Disgusted with what he saw, he started volunteering with Coal River Mountain Watch and Keepers to assist in educating students, environmental activists, and community groups on Kayford Mountain.

The pedagogical intent of our four-day trip to Kayford Mountain is to expose students first hand to the social, economic, and environmental effects of mountaintop removal by living on an active blasting site.

During the second and third days of our trip, we toured Kayford Mountain. We hiked to an active blasting site with Junior Walk, who told us his history. Students looked over the edge at what appeared to be a bombed out city, a crater in the middle of the Appalachian Mountain Range. Students sat with journals jotting observations, while some were so saddened by this altered landscape that they simply meditated. While we gathered on top of the crater, Junior said, “West Virginia was bought and sold by coal companies. What you are looking at here was and still is today a Resource Colony. Whether it was timber or coal or electricity, we have provided the raw material for the rest of the nation. These practices we have today of blowing up mountains have had detrimental consequences. I was drinking water that was red and smelled like sulphur. I have lots of health problems; you are looking at someone here who was poisoned by the coal companies” (Walk 4/6/2013). Elise Keaton added, “These are the headwaters for the entire Eastern Seaboard. This water reaches from Maine to Georgia . . . this Appalachian region is the water source. And nearly 40 percent of these rivers have been compromised; it is recommended that we eat less than 2 fish per year” (Keaton 4/6/2013).

We all walked back to our campsite in silence and took part in a water workshop in which community residents shared different water samples. We looked at water contaminated by coal slurry, the byproduct of coal processing. Another sample from Raleigh, West Virginia showed particles floating in water. Other samples revealed iron, mercury, and arsenic. As students passed the jars of water around, they heard from other local community activists. One long-time activist asked the students, “What

should water look like?" Someone responded, "Clear." He turned to the student and said, "Yes, but our water is green, black and brown and it smells putrid." He then said, "Well if your water was dirty . . . How would you protect those you love? How would you protect something that doesn't have a price tag on it? To what extreme would you go?" These kinds of workshops challenged students not only to suspend regional, ethnic, and class barriers as they related to the activists and residents, but also to begin to reflect upon *their* own challenges and struggles.

Around a campfire that evening, students shared some of their economic woes. One student talked about working 40 hours a week; another discussed the consequences of not having health care coverage. Others chimed in about inter-personal violence and traumatic experiences, which all affected their studies. But the "collective" commentary was that we are so privileged compared to local residents in West Virginia. In part students began to connect with activists around a shared sense of struggle—many of our working-class students have certainly struggled, particularly in an era when education is becoming more and more expensive and they are working more and more. One student spoke about how she too grew up without running water and plumbing and said many of these "activists remind me of my father!" But most of our Towson students do not live in "toxic zones" or "contaminated environments," so they gained immediate insight into the segmented system of capitalism: in spite of their struggles, they are privileged compared to their West Virginian companions. Not only that, but there is also a realization that their comfort—their heat, electricity, hot water—are fueled by extracted coal, leaving this human and environmental devastation in its wake. That sense of connection—that we are all connected across segmented and uneven divides—proved fodder for future conversations. "Others" pay the price for our comforts, but they aren't really others after all. There is a recognition that through coal—through our consumption of energy—not only are we connected to MTR but our energy practices also enlarge the power of the coal industry.

On the last day of our trip, we visited the Upper Big Branch mining memorial site and the Marsh Fork Elementary School, both in Raleigh. The Upper Big Branch mining explosion occurred on April 5, 2010, killing twenty-nine of the thirty miners on site. The accident was the worst in the United States since 1970. Because Massey Energy cut corners on safety regulations—in this case, failing to provide appropriate ventilation for methane—the company essentially created the tragedy of Upper Big Branch. The Mine Safety and Health Administration found that flagrant safety violations contributed to a coal dust explosion. It issued 369 citations in 2011, assessing \$10.8 million in penalties. Alpha Resources, which had recently purchased Massey Energy, settled its corporate criminal liabilities with the U.S. Attorney for \$209 million. The distance between the theory of neoliberalism and the practice becomes quite visible to students as we tour Upper Big Branch. We read geographer David Harvey and theorize about neoliberalism, the intellectual/political stance that presumes that capitalist trade liberalization or the deregulation of businesses, and indeed the end of all

state-run businesses, will lead to market growth and optimal social ends (Collins, et al., 5) In the classroom, we illustrated the discrepancy between neoliberalism as theory and practice. For corporations like Massey or Alpha, when the bottom line is economic profitability, their incentive is to cut corners to enhance their economic opportunities. In this case, they failed to provide appropriate safety regulations, which could have saved their lives. The theory says that the "liberalized" market creates the rising tide that lifts all boats out of poverty, but if the practice curtails critical provisions, including worker safety, then certain populations are left increasingly vulnerable. Here we see first-hand how neoliberalism benefits some, while miners become "collateral damage" in a broader landscape of capital accumulation. The miners' hats from the Upper Big Branch memorial serve as a powerful symbol of the bodies left unprotected by our political and economic system.

The Marsh Fork Elementary School in Raleigh County was the next stop on our journey to understand the consequences of MTR. And here again, we found other vulnerable bodies left unprotected by expansive capitalism. The school sits next to a coal silo and just 400 feet downslope from an impoundment that holds back billions of gallons of coal slurry. Beyond the immediate threat of this impoundment being breached by rainstorms, there were concerns about air quality within the school as a result of coal dust. The school was at the center of a controversy that led to protests, arrests, and national publicity. Local residents, especially parents of Marsh Fork students, were concerned about the health impacts of exposure to coal dust and the threat of a disaster at the impoundment owned initially by Massey Energy. Due to sustained civil disobedience and protest, the community managed to relocate students to a new site. When we returned in 2013, we were invited to see the school and speak with local activists. The school was equipped with smart board presentation stations, computer labs with the fastest internet connection in the area, and a freshly painted gym.

Towson University students were profoundly affected by the stories we heard at this school. After we headed back to Kayford Mountain, many sat silently and simply reflected. The stories unfolded in a rather poetic way and the physical destruction of the landscape served as a backdrop to the horrors of poisoned waters, toxic waste, increased levels of death as a result of cancer and other illness. So as the late Larry Gibson said in 2011, "We are not collateral damage." For many, it was hard to conceptualize these people and communities as anything but collateral damage for large transnational corporations seeking to profit from coal. As one Massey representative said, "I don't give a damn about nobody or nothing up that holler. I only care about coal . . . You're the diamond, we're the ring" (quoted in Antrim Caskey's *Dragline*, 2010). In this vicious quest for coal, families and communities are simply in the way of a new extractive industry that blows up mountains, poisons water, and makes whole towns uninhabitable.

Building Empathy and Collective Solidarity: from Passive Witness to Active Engagement

As a researcher, I had studied the Landless Peasant Movement (El Movimiento Sin Tierra, or MST) in Brazil and Bolivia, taking inspiration from their Freirian model of education, where campesinos teach one another, using experience to build political consciousness through small reading and discussion groups about the state of agriculture. Inspired by this model of “educational nucleus” from my work with MST, we had a series of small group conversations on Kayford Mountain about MTR to help us process different parts of our trip. After Upper Big Branch and Marsh Fork Elementary, we sat around a campfire to talk about what we had seen.

These students came back to Baltimore transformed by this trip. They began to see how their consumptive lives linked to zones of production and wanted to change attitudes and behaviors in cities. They collectively decided to organize an anti-coal forum on campus in Fall 2012.

These were some of the reactions. One student said, “I’m so angry with Massey Energy!” Another added, “For me . . . it’s the mountains . . . that’s what makes me the most upset. The Appalachian Mountain range should not look like this.” Others powerfully spoke about how the process of mountaintop removal literally obliterates long family histories. One student exclaimed, “The walk to Stanley Heir cemetery on Kayford Mountain was the most powerful for me. It really illustrated how easy it is to erase these histories, people’s sense of community, family ties, and territorial claims.”⁵ Someone else put in, “They really are treated as collateral damage.” Another lamented, “This is all such a dehumanizing process. It seems as though these people are saying over and over, We are not collateral damage. But they certainly seem like they are simply disposable.” This montage of voices and insights defined the evening. The students talked about how learning in the classroom feels like a contradiction. One exclaimed, “We engage in a kind of armchair anthropology, so far removed from the actual communities we are studying.” Others chimed in, “So much of these tales of extractive industries are about seeing, tasting, touching, and feeling the poverty.” Now, they were part of a larger group that local activists describe as “bearing witness to the tragedy of Appalachia.”

The students from my 2011 group were moved towards activism and civic engagement. Many were part of activist groups in Baltimore fighting for economic, racial, and social justice. However, for many of the students of color, a transformation occurred during the trip. Many started the trip pointing out all the Confederate flags on houses close to Kayford Mountain. Others talked about

“racist tendencies” of rural whites. However, as many got to meet Larry Gibson—powerful orator and fierce activist—they began to shed some of their own fears and anxieties about white Appalachia. Larry made them feel comfortable and asked students to talk about their own struggles in Baltimore. Students began to see urban and rural issues as connected. Some argued that these might seem like radically different problems: urban poverty, homelessness, institutional racism, and the gutting of public education, on one hand, and environmental problems such as contaminated water, poor air quality, and flooding, on the other. But as one student so powerfully articulated, “It’s all the workings of a capitalistic system: people, local communities and social structures must become disposable in order to create profit.”

These students came back to Baltimore transformed by this trip. They began to see how their consumptive lives linked to zones of production and wanted to change attitudes and behaviors in cities. They collectively decided to organize an anti-coal forum on campus in Fall 2012. I was officially on maternity leave but provided assistance from afar. These students connected with other environmental and activist groups on local campuses, such as Johns Hopkins, University of Maryland – Baltimore County, Morgan State University. They built an elaborate database of all their friends and allies and began a major publicizing campaign, including a logo and a slogan: “Coal Kills.” With their own money and resources, they produced stickers and fliers to distribute on campus with facts about coal. They managed to trace the ways in which local zip codes in the Baltimore area directly connected to MTR on Kayford Mountain. The kick off to the anti-coal forum was the film *The Last Mountain*, including a screening and follow-up conversation. Students invited the activists to the anti-coal forum and brought their creative work, such as photography and documentary films, to display and use as educational tools. The teach-in was a great success and they mapped out an agenda for how Towson students can begin to bring Mountaintop Removal to an end.

A Scary Encounter: From Witnessing to New Questions and Analysis

The journey my class made in 2013 to Coal River Valley ended abruptly as we were intercepted around 8 p.m. on the third evening of the trip by Families and Friends of Coal, a right-wing group that represents the interests of coal industries and promotes coal as the only reliable energy source to help the United States achieve energy independence. Ten pro-coal supporters, who claimed to be armed, blocked our Towson University vehicles with their large trucks. One woman stepped forward and asked to speak to the person responsible for all these kids. I came forward and said, “I’m responsible.” She said to me, “Do you know that you are putting these kids at risk . . . we have come to tell you unless you leave . . . someone is going to get hurt.” They also pointed to our guide Junior from Keepers of the Mountain and said, “Do you know you are with a criminal? Many people are looking for him.” I could see that she was angry and tried to calm her before gathering students to head off Kayford

Mountain. She kept referring to us as “environmentalists.”⁶ I explained that we were here for purely educational purposes. Once they understood the nature of the class and the intent of the trip, many of the Pro-Coal supporters calmed down significantly. They gathered as a group and came to me to say, “We would like to tell students *our* version of the story.” I was anxious, and as an instructor I immediately thought about protecting the students and getting everyone down the mountain to safety. I gathered all thirty-five students around their trucks and immediately the students wanted to film these testimonials. While cameras were running during some of the verbal threats, in an ethically conscientious way, students asked if they could run their cameras during the conversation. One woman said, “We would prefer cameras to be off because I’m sure you will misrepresent us. They all do.”

A slender woman with straight blonde hair stepped forward and said, “Let me tell you all something . . . All my husband knows how to do is mine coal.” Others told us that coal fuels this local economy. Another pro-coal supporter argued that “radical” environmentalists want to see them work jobs like Walmart because that is the only employment alternative. Many students tried to jump in and ask questions, but in order to avoid any further conflict we encouraged students to simply listen. After they told a rather depressing story about the economic woes of miners, I asked if they would kindly move their vehicles. However, they would not move until we exited the mountain. Students packed up their tents and belongings while Friends and Family of Coal watched from their vehicles. Since they continued to threaten Junior, we took him with us, anxious that he get back safely. Friends and Families of Coal trailed our university vehicles all the way to the local McDonalds at Beckley, where Junior’s colleagues retrieved him. These threats are part of his everyday life of organizing against MTR, he said. He told students that they would never hurt them, but they certainly intimidate and threaten anyone involved in challenging the coal companies.

We did a lot of work in and out of the classroom to make sense of this experience. We did independent research on Friends and Families of Coal, and students wrote responses to the trip, revealing their fears. One wrote, “The first night we were all terrified. We heard a huge truck rev up their engine and someone shouted, ‘We love coal. Tree huggers go take a shower.’ We all huddled closer together in our tent.” But I think this “scary” experience forced all of us to see the complicated layers of coal: our dependency upon this key resource has historically pitted distinct working-class groups against one another. Those working in the mines worry about making a living, but bigger issues are at stake: the lack of economic diversification creates a downward spiral for West Virginians (current plans for development include more Walmarts, private prisons, casinos, and NASCAR race tracks). All of this represents “failed development,” more of the same service-sector, minimum wage jobs without access to healthcare. Additionally, much of the revenue from these industries is funneled out of the local community and toward big businesses. The all-out attack upon labor in the neoliberal period and the failure in this

era to maintain strong unions like United Mine Workers may have pushed miners farther right, supporting Big Energy and Big Coal. Meanwhile, in other geographical hubs of radical extractivism, like Bolivia, where much of my research has focused, workers have moved farther left.

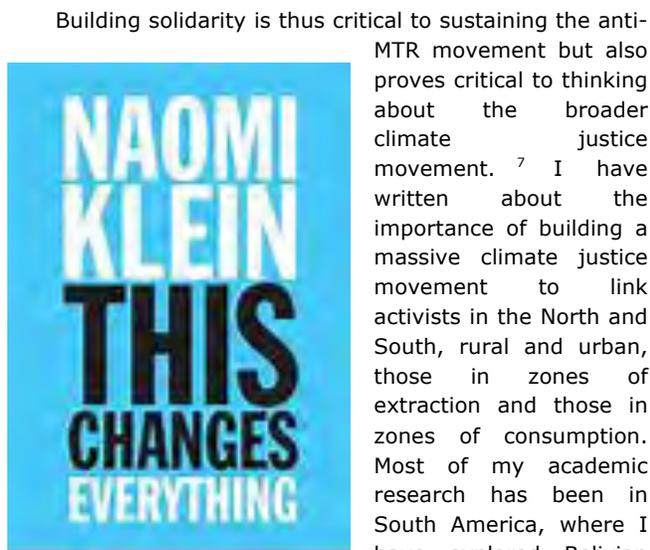
Despite the fact that we were there to learn about mountaintop removal coal mining, these pro-coal supporters provided an alternative education on the challenges of overcoming the Resource Curse. My 2011 group did not hear directly from miners and this led to more of a black and white narrative; either you are for coal or against it. My students, who had existing activist tendencies, grabbed onto this narrative and transformed their experience into civic engagement. However, many from 2013 felt shell-shocked and entangled in the complicated webs of power, dependency, and coal consumption. Many argued that there are no neat and tidy answers to this problem. They began to analyze and think differently about the environmental narrative: “The solution of wind and other renewables,” said one, “might not bring necessary jobs to everyone.”

This was a powerful moment for me as an instructor as well. I was forced to rethink my curriculum. If social class has been essential to my teaching about West Virginia (collateral damage; linking students’ working lives to the lives of Appalachians), how did I omit some critical voices in West Virginia? What about all those miners who historically depended upon coal to feed their families? How could I expose students to the history of unions, the assault on unions, and the miners of today without alienating the environmentalists? Is it possible to bring these two groups into conversation and have a productive dialogue with the intent to educate students?

As I develop this curriculum for future classes, I ask: How can we think in subtler ways about resource conflicts and social class? Poor people in West Virginia who live in blasting zones are dying from coal dust and dirty water while miners are dying from unsafe working conditions. They no longer have the protection of unions and might see these problems through a radically different lens than the environmentalists. In some cases, they have been “bought out” by the coal companies. But these populations are tied into the broader engines of global capitalism: labor and ecosystems might seem like different ends of the spectrum, but they are not. Anthropologist Eric Wolf once talked about the accumulation regime pitting distinct ethnic groups against one another in the 19th and 20th centuries: “Accumulation thus continues to engender new working classes . . . It recruits these working classes from a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds, and inserts them into variable political and economic hierarchies. The new working classes change these hierarchies, and are themselves changed by the forces to which they are exposed.” (Wolf 383) This is precisely what we see in West Virginia, that the capitalist system has segmented and divided “disposable” populations, those working inside the mines and those dealing with the consequences of new forms of extractivism. If we begin to look at the broader “accumulation regime” as responsible for contemporary environmental and economic problems, instead of blaming distinct groups for their socio-economic conditions, vilifying

the environmentalists who perform radical actions or the goons bought out by coal companies, then we can begin to build solidarities across these historic divides. When students can link their own working-class experiences, another layer of solidarity emerges, as urbanites begin to see their lives as inextricably connected to those living in rural areas.

We end our resource journey with Naomi Klein's new book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus The Climate* in order to inspire students to "break every rule in the free-market playbook," to envision what reigning in corporate power, rebuilding local and national economies, and reclaiming democracies could look like in the future. Since we have seen explicit links between extractive industries and climate change, the intent of our last unit is to speak directly to the cumulative effects of large-scale agriculture, underground mining, and surface mining, to inalterable ecosystem ruptures such as global warming, and to the responsibility of this generation to confront the climate crisis.



Building solidarity is thus critical to sustaining the anti-MTR movement but also proves critical to thinking about the broader climate justice movement.⁷ I have written about the importance of building a massive climate justice movement to link activists in the North and South, rural and urban, those in zones of extraction and those in zones of consumption. Most of my academic research has been in South America, where I have explored Bolivian social movements and how questions of land and sustainability involve bigger questions of climate change and climate justice. Bolivian activists have a lot to teach the North about mobilization: in the resource-based movements of the 2000s, indigenous and mestizo protestors used their bodies to block capital flows and occupied key spaces of production. Resource-based movements managed to halt plans to privatize water and gas and overthrow a neoliberal President in 2003. Activists in West Virginia are beginning to create critical alliances with indigenous peoples in the South, exchange ideas about activism, and even implement more sustainable economic systems.

We are at a political and organizing moment of great import. Cross-border, cross-community learning must attempt to maximize the potential for progressive change. One of my great hopes is that the South can teach the North how to translate long histories of militant and embodied politics into new spaces and places. While some of this is already happening, the key question is how to sustain young people and involve those who have benefitted historically from these extractive systems in

order to building a long-term movement with the potential to stand up to non-renewable fossil fuel giants and create meaningful international legislation.

References

- Bigelow, Bill (2011). "Scholastic Inc, Pushing Coal." Electronic Resource http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/25_04/25_04_bigelow2.shtml, Accessed May 8, 2015.
- Campbell, J. Elliott, James F. Fox, and Peter M. Acton (2012). "Terrestrial carbon losses from mountaintop coal mining offset regional forest carbon sequestration in the 21st century." Electronic Resource http://iopscience.iop.org/1748-9326/7/4/045701/pdf/1748-9326_7_4_045701.pdf, Accessed March 19, 2015.
- Caskey, Antrim (2010). Dragline. Appalachian Watch and Climate Ground Zero.
- Cook, Samuel (2008). "You Can't Put a Price on It: Activist Anthropology in the Mountaintop Removal Debate." *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1(2008): 138-162.
- Collins, Jane, Micaela DiLeonardo and Brett Williams (2008). *New Landscapes of Inequality: Neoliberalism and the Erosion of Democracy in America*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School for Advanced Research Press.
- Fabricant, Michael and Nicole Fabricant (2015). "Neoliberal Myths: Legitimizing Discourse and the Remaking of the Welfare State," under review with *Critical Policy Studies*.
- Fabricant, Nicole and Kathryn Hicks (2013). "Bolivia vs. the Billionaires: The Limitations of the Climate Justice Movement in International Negotiations." *NACLA: Report on the Americas* 46(1): 19-21.
- Goodell, Jeff (2010). "The Dark Lord of Coal Country." *Rolling Stone*. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-dark-lord-of-coal-country-20101129>, accessed January 20, 2015.
- McNeil, Bryan (2011). *Combating Mountaintop Removal: New Directions in the Fight against Big Coal*. Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Wolf, Eric (1982). *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Notes

¹ International Studies, Latin American Studies and Political Science students are drawn to the course, but most students in Resource Wars are anthropology majors. While it is a requirement for our major, they take this topics course because it is of interest.

² Twenty percent of the student's grade is tied to creative work from our West Virginia trip. They choose from photography, documentary film, creative writing, and popular writing. The assignment challenges them to creatively document the social, economic, and environmental effects of MTR. If students cannot make the trip, they receive an alternate assignment.

³ As faculty, we often do not have an opportunity to hear about the economic lives of our students. However, this trip is an opportunity to get to know my students on a personal level, which then informs my teaching. Further, the hierarchies of a classroom are also broken down on the mountain, which gives students a certain amount of confidence to share their intimate thoughts.

⁴ A.T. Massey Coal Company evolved from a family-run business based on Coal River in West Virginia in the 1920s to a transnational corporation dedicated to processing, shipping, and selling bituminous coal for international markets (Fabricant and Fabricant 2015).

⁵ Larry Gibson's family has lived on or near Kayford Mountain since the late 1700s. More than 300 relatives are buried in the cemetery there. In 2011, he took students to the cemetery and talked about how gravesites had been destroyed by MTR.

⁶ RAMPS, a group of which Junior is a member, is a non-violent direct action campaign where environmentalists from all over the country come to Kayford Mountain to perform civil disobedience (living in trees; hanging off of MTR machinery) to spectacularize the problem of MTR. The pro-coal supporters assumed we were there as part of an environmental action.

⁷ For many students it is the very first time they have heard about the human, environmental, or social costs of coal extraction. Much of this has to do with the influence of non-renewable fossil fuel giants in our public spheres, particularly in politics, government, and education. Big coal has not only reshaped politics through lobbying but has also redefined curriculum in elementary education. For instance, Scholastic partnered with the American Coal Foundation (www.teachcoal.org) to publish elementary teaching materials designed to hide the "processes" behind and the consequences of coal extraction (see Bigelow 2011). This omission looks very much like a propaganda campaign. But this is not the only example of critical omission of "scientific facts" from our curriculum. While on the mountain in the Spring 2015, we learned from Elise Keaton that climate change has been written out of elementary and secondary education in the state of West Virginia. These two examples illustrate the ways in which non-renewable fossil fuel giants have influenced (through money, politics, and power) the public about our energy and climate future. Much of the responsibility then falls upon grassroots movements to rebuild this knowledge base.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Ignorance/
Denial-Fear/
Paralysis/
Engagement/
Commitment:

Reflections on a Decade Teaching Climate Change Law

by Eleanor Stein



COCHABAMBA, BOLIVIA, CLIMATE CONFERENCE, 2010
PHOTO: JEFF JONES

Teaching about climate change at any level means introducing students to the fearsome realities of our rapidly changing earth. But more than transmitting curriculum content, this teaching requires opening a space where students can investigate, research and interrogate the logic of the media, corporate, and government discourse on climate change.

In this process, we uncover the underlying systemic causes of climate change and its disparate effects on different populations, as well as our individual responsibilities and the moral imperative and potential for action. There are always moments, after learning about the science of climate change and the intransigence of the United States in countering it, when students ask two questions: "Isn't climate change really caused by capitalism?" and "Isn't it unfair that the countries that are suffering most from climate change aren't those that caused the problem?" Reaching that point in the course then leads ineluctably to the follow-up question: "What can I do about it?" These are the teachable moments.

Teaching climate change law requires teaching climate science; teaching the world—simulating the global climate change negotiations as a way to teach the global picture; teaching law as one practical tool for challenging the refusal of the United States to constrain its greenhouse gas emissions; teaching the intersection of climate change, environmental justice, and human rights; and enabling student participation in climate change movements. The starting point is that teaching climate change is a moral imperative: young people have a right to know that our generation and those before us have left them a deadly legacy, and they have a right to hold us collectively accountable. And they also will need the tools not just to understand this legacy but to demand responsible action from government.

Embrace the Science: Learning and Teaching the Truth

In the last decade the warnings of the world's climate scientists have become more and more grave, until the most recent global report card, the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), leaves no doubt that the rapid transformations in weather are due to global climate change.¹ And the report establishes beyond any doubt that the change in the world's climate is the result of anthropogenic (human-made) activity. At the core of this destructive human activity is the burning of fossil fuel for energy, heat, and transportation.

The year 2014 closed as the warmest year on record since humans started keeping track and in February 2015 the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere exceeded 400 parts per million for the first time in human history. The warmest years in our records are 2014, 2010, and 2005. However, the much older natural archives—such as Arctic ice-core samples—reveal a trend toward warming beyond any temperatures evidenced in the last 800,000

years. And we no longer need to rely on climate modeling to see the results. They are before our eyes in every part of the globe. Just in the United States, the American Midwestern breadbasket is moving to Canada, as warmer temperatures make growing wheat less viable over the next 20 years. If you are a gardener, a glance at the back of your seed packet will reveal that you no longer live in the zone you are accustomed to: for New Yorkers, we have been moved to zone 6— where peaches grow—from zone 5. Species are becoming extinct at a rate not seen in millions of years, as the combination of climate change and habitat destruction literally drives them off the planet. There are hundreds, thousands of examples like these, chronicled in Elizabeth Kolbert's remarkable *Sixth Extinction*. As Bill McKibben demonstrates in *Eaarth*, we no longer live on the planet where we were born. That planet will never return. Earth is, quite literally, a different place.

Teaching climate change law requires teaching climate science; teaching the world—simulating the global climate change negotiations as a way to teach the global picture; teaching law as one practical tool for challenging the refusal of the United States to constrain its greenhouse gas emissions; teaching the intersection of climate change, environmental justice, and human rights; and enabling student participation in climate change movements.

In addition, we are feeling the devastating effects of climate change in our cities and towns: Superstorm Sandy in October 2012 killed 50 New Yorkers, toppled trees in neighborhoods, plunged 400,000 into darkness for over a week, forced the evacuation of hospitals. Lower Manhattan's streets reverted to the canals they had once been in Dutch and early English times, and power distribution infrastructure was devastated. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina led to almost 2,000 deaths and the permanent disappearance of African-American communities. These climate catastrophes will become more and more severe. Even were we to stop burning fossil fuel tomorrow, the accumulated carbon in the atmosphere and in the ocean would continue to generate disruption at least at the levels we are seeing now, and very likely quite a bit more for generations to come. And clearly we will not stop burning fossil fuel tomorrow.

Critical as these facts are, they are largely unknown or ignored by a significant proportion of Americans. While some teachers and some schools are teaching the history and science, and television and news coverage—especially the weather reporting—has improved over the last couple of years, the impact of fossil fuel industry-financed climate denial has set climate science and policy education back a generation in the United States. Recent polling indicates this trend is reversing, with a majority of Republican

respondents acknowledging climate change. Fortunately, climate denial is our homegrown product: the debate in the rest of the world has long been over.

Teaching climate change begins with the fundamentals of the science. Nothing is more valuable than using an interdisciplinary approach and teaming with climate scientists to bring the first-hand science into the classroom. In my classes, experienced practicing climate scientists have generously given their time to political science and liberal arts majors, and to law students, to introduce them to climate science and its methods. Find the climate scientists in your institution or your community and bring them into your classroom to explain the simple fundamentals of climate science and to answer the tough questions with authority. From these scientists students learn (1) that there is no real dispute about climate change—the discourse of scientific dispute is purely a construct to distract and confuse; and (2) there is no argument to be had with physics: introduction of carbon into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels has raised and will continue to raise global temperatures. To keep that



PEOPLE'S CLIMATE CHANGE MARCH, SEPTEMBER 21, 2014, NYC. PHOTO: LEONARD VOGT

increase below 2 degrees Centigrade, as measured since pre-industrial times, has been defined as the urgent limit by the world's countries. Yet that agreed-upon limit—which many scientists agree is itself far too high and therefore dangerous—is slipping or has already slipped from our grasp. In order to stay below that limit, humanity as a whole has to live within its carbon budget, which is 565 billion tons of carbon to last us until the end of this century. Every increase beyond that number will put us on a planet unlike any humanity has lived on before. It is, as McKibben says, a science experiment where no one knows the outcome. What we do know is that the world's fossil fuel corporations and oil-producing countries are already banking on, and have assured their shareholders—in their proven reserves—more than six times that amount. Scientists predict a range from 4 degrees to 6 degrees warming if all the world's countries manage to fulfill to the letter the greenhouse gas reduction pledges they made in Copenhagen in 2009, even as nations are retooling similar

pledges for the critical Paris climate summit in December 2015.

The science brings home both the scale of the catastrophe and, critically, the disparate global and domestic impacts. This provides the basis for a climate justice approach. From the science, the history emerges as a striking indictment of Western imperial capitalism. Energy from coal provided the foundation for the industrial revolution; oil fueled the growth of U.S. post-war domination and the oil monarchies of the Middle East supported by the West.

From this industrial revolution grew an environmental catastrophe on an unimaginable scale, one caused directly by the industrialization of the global North and suffered disproportionately by the developing global South. Climate change would be an allegory if it weren't real.

Students can't be forced to learn this meta-lesson. It must be revealed one step at a time. So the introduction to the science is an essential first step. They will raise serious questions: What about sun spots? What about El Niño? Isn't it already too late, too difficult, too expensive to do anything about it? Isn't it impossible to remove the emissions once they are in the atmosphere? Why not geo-engineering: a giant umbrella around the planet? Man-made winters or dust-storms that shelter us from ultraviolet radiation?

But as they take in the profound seriousness of the crisis, students are angry and disillusioned that these truths have been kept from them. They realize the irresponsibility of previous generations, they get angry with their teachers, and they begin to despair about their own futures.

Who Are the Students and How Do They Learn?

I teach this course to undergraduates at the State University of New York at Albany (SUNYA), a public university with roughly 13,000 undergraduates. Most are New Yorkers—Long Islanders predominate—from lower-middle-class or working-class families and half receive financial aid; half are white, with 15 percent African-American, 14 percent Hispanic, and about 8 percent Asian students. Students come to the course primarily because they are pre-law political science majors or, often, atmospheric science majors adding a law and policy component to their science studies. Many graduates go on to teaching, social work, and criminal justice. I also teach a similar course at Albany Law School, where the legal component is far stronger and more rigorous although the same political questions are at issue. At the law school my students developed final projects involving legal research papers for Salvadoran non-governmental organizations tackling climate adaptation and sustainable agriculture.

The work of this course is lawyer work: students read primary sources, including Supreme Court decisions and treaties. They represent client nations in the treaty

negotiation simulation and U.S. clients in other parts of the course. Their writing assignments are briefing a case or writing a memo to a client. The course opens with climate science, and then surveys climate change law in four modules. The first is international law focused on the global treaty negotiations; the heart of this module is the treaty negotiation simulation discussed below. The second is U.S. federal law, and this module is organized around the following construct. A room full of like-minded legal advocates against climate change cannot agree on one single strategy: one third favors seeking comprehensive climate change legislation in Congress; another third seeks judicial action to force the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to take aggressive action on climate and regulate greenhouse gases the same way it regulates air pollution under the Clean Air Act; and the final group also seeks redress from the courts, but they want to go directly after the nation's largest polluters—the big coal-burning power plants—rather than sue the executive branch to do something about them. Based on this construct, students read and we explore two Supreme Court decisions on climate change, the Obama administration's clean power plan and other EPA action, and Congress's failure to act.

In the third module we read and analyze New York and California state and local law demonstrating initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect residents by climate adaptation, and study the catastrophic consequences of Katrina and Sandy and the imperative to adapt our cities to unavoidable climate impacts. If time allows, we do a simulated litigation of a case about siting a windmill farm in a scenic local area, with students representing the power company that wants to build the windmill farm, an environmental group that supports the windmills because they will reduce the use of electricity generated from fossil fuels, and a local opposition coalition which includes the area's oldest families as well as environmental opponents of marring the landscape in any way.

Finally, the fourth module addresses the human rights dimension of climate change, both internationally and domestically, and we learn about the Inuit challenge to the United States at the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights in 2005, and current lawsuits brought by children against state governments, claiming that the states are violating their obligation to hold the natural resources of the state, including climate, in trust for future generations.

Teaching the World

A practice-based curriculum will bring to life the international context. In December 2015, the world's nations will meet in Paris to consummate—or not—a lengthy negotiation process that began in Rio with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) more than two decades ago. The Kyoto Protocol to that framework treaty obligated the participating wealthy nations (the United States was not among them) to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions consistent with given targets. Developing countries had no emission

reduction obligations. Those targets were to lead cumulatively to a 5% reduction worldwide. Although some countries and regions met their targets, most did not, and today's largest emitters—China and the United States—evaded the obligation. This December the world will meet in Paris, to consider a new kind of global agreement built upon greenhouse gas reduction goals established by each country, based on its domestic potential and political process.

We have great opportunities to bring this rather remote world process home to students. First, they must read the Framework Convention and the Kyoto Protocol—these are short documents, 20 to 30 pages, but deconstructing them empowers students to grasp the tools of global discourse, compromise, and the exercise of power.



PEOPLE'S CLIMATE CHANGE MARCH, SEPTEMBER 21, 2014, NYC.
PHOTO: LEONARD VOGT

The United Nations process is transparent: at <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>, all the participant nations' positions and proposals are available, and students can watch the negotiation process unfold. After simulated negotiation games, students thrive by inserting themselves into this real drama. Students are assigned in groups of 4 or 5 to represent one country or a group. Some combination of the United States, China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Bolivia, Europe (which negotiates collectively in this simulation), and the Small Island States provides a good range from which to choose. These countries offer the whole range of positions: the United States opposes a legally binding emission target, preferring to self-police, and would prefer to eliminate the distinction between developed and developing countries that has been the defining characteristic of the earlier treaties. The Small Island States face near-term destruction of their land mass from rising sea levels, and are already experiencing salinization of their water supplies. Bolivia urges creation of a global Climate Justice Tribunal to prosecute nations for their failures to reduce emissions.

To bring the global climate negotiations to life in the classroom, simulating the actual talks with a climate negotiation game has proved effective in my classes.

Students research the next international climate meeting (preparatory meetings are held in Bonn every spring and in December summits convene at designated locales). Students divide into groups representing the nations and blocs of nations currently engaged in the global climate negotiations. They study the substance of their nation's actual positions on climate change issues through the United Nations climate change treaty website. Based on this learning, they negotiate with other nations on their country's behalf. During and after the People's World Congress on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia in April 2010, students representing Bolivia soon learned about the country's devotion to Pachamama—sacred mother earth—and Bolivia's call for the developed world to commit to reduce emissions drastically, to pay its climate debt to the developing countries, and to indemnify the world's poorest nations against the loss and damage caused by climate-related disasters. This practice reveals the fundamental conflicts between the United States and the developing world; the radical view of Bolivia; and the complex antagonism between the wealthy developing nations and the most vulnerable.

There are resources in every community to bring local climate change issues into the classroom and to demonstrate the power and practice of work on all levels and in all spheres. My classroom has welcomed the university's sustainability coordinator, young regional organizers for community energy use, representatives of the fossil fuel divestment campaign, Capitol Hill lobbyists on climate change, delegates to the global negotiations, and climate justice leaders.

Weeks of preparation, including an exercise in negotiation skills, culminate in one negotiation session where one or two issues that are before the summit are addressed, with opening and closing statements by each country, and some rousing horse-trading in between. The students learn concretely about the devastating effect of climate change in the global South. They often devise more creative solutions than the actual summit negotiators, and they take away the awareness that this common problem can only be tackled meaningfully on the global stage.

Unfortunately, the most likely outcome in Paris is an agreement that the world's heaviest emitting nations will make modest and non-binding pledges to reduce emissions, with a cumulative target falling far short of what the science requires. This realization can have a paralyzing effect on students as they realize how little their government is doing to protect their future. They can turn to cynicism, or despair.

So the next challenge is to reveal to students tools and examples of engagement for taking the future into their own hands.

Teaching That Law Can Be a Tool for Change

Legal strategies have been developed to challenge the U.S. failure to act on climate change since the petroleum-based George W. Bush administration. These strategies included failed attempts at passage of a comprehensive climate change law in Congress in 2009, as well as the challenges to EPA inaction that resulted in a resounding 2007 U.S. Supreme Court victory: the decision that the EPA was required to regulate greenhouse gases should it find they endangered human health and welfare. Specific current disputes and cases can be studied in depth to bring the climate issues home directly. A case study of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath provides an object lesson in environmental racism and the urgency of climate justice; a close examination by environmental justice advocates of New York City's responses to Superstorm Sandy reveals uneven recovery and disparate treatment. A local fight over the siting of a wind farm reveals the difficulties in developing renewable resources in a fossil-fuel dominated economy and culture.

The study of international human rights challenges can also enlighten us about climate effects and their causes, even when just causes lose in court. In 2005, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, an indigenous alliance spanning polar communities in Alaska and Canada, brought a petition against the United States before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission in Washington, D.C. The Inuit Petition detailed the devastation to coastal and subsistence hunting communities by the rapidly warming Arctic. The accompanying Arctic Climate Impact Assessment detailed, for the first time, the impacts of climate change on a single region, establishing that the climate change impacts at the pole were twice as severe as elsewhere on earth. Changing sea ice, freezing patterns, and melting permafrost exposed Inuit towns to winter storms and made subsistence hunting perilous. The Inuit petition charged the United States with failing to discharge its responsibility to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, resulting in the dire conditions they now face. Although the petition was dismissed, the charges put the Inuit plight and their case against the United States before the world.

There are resources in every community to bring local climate change issues into the classroom and to demonstrate the power and practice of work on all levels and in all spheres. My classroom has welcomed the university's sustainability coordinator, young regional organizers for community energy use, representatives of the fossil fuel divestment campaign, Capitol Hill lobbyists on climate change, delegates to the global negotiations, and climate justice leaders. Some students participated in the 2014 New York City Climate Justice March and brought back their experiences. Climate change is not a remote problem: it is on your block as well as at the U.N.

Finally, it is valuable to provide opportunities for students to work on behalf of communities or climate organizations as class projects. In my last class, six students wrote papers researching legal issues of concern to community climate adaptation organizers in rural El Salvador. They analyzed a U.S. aid program that threatened the food security and sustainability gains of a Salvadoran movement to sell indigenous corn and bean seeds to the government of El Salvador for distribution to poor farmers. With periodic conference calls to our Salvadoran principals, what the students learned was the sagacity and determination of the Salvadoran organizers. And in the end the United States agreed to a hands-off policy regarding the indigenous seed program.

Combating Despair

During the Cold War, Dr. Benjamin Spock advised parents that in his incomparable experience, the best way to address their children's fears of nuclear warfare was by demonstrating that they, the parents and the children, were taking action to prevent it. Seeing our engagement, and being encouraged to find their own ways to participate, is the only way to bring solace to students moved by and grappling with the enormity of climate change..

Other than that, we have only historical experience to draw upon. We know that there can be seismic upheavals in cultural values and in what our nation thinks is right and wrong. The stranglehold of slavery made abolition appear inconceivable for generations; but with the abolitionist movement and leadership of freed slaves, slavery itself began to be seen as inconceivable. It takes massive mobilization of opinion to make such a sea change, but it has happened in the past and perhaps we are beginning to see it happening in the United States today. We need to look, with our students, to the dozens of cities and towns with zero-carbon goals, to the emergence of climate activists in local politics and as national spokespeople, to the development of the movement to divest fossil fuel holdings on campuses and by state pension funds, and to the third of a million people who took their message to the streets of New York City in September 2014.

By the end of the semester, almost all students comprehend the exponentially increasing danger of climate change and the human actions and decisions that fuel it. Many have become committed to changing their own or their families' carbon footprint and some realize the need for collective action to pressure government. The course lays bare the corporate and historical capitalist and imperialist roots of the climate crisis. However, only a relatively small fraction of the class considers this something they can act upon; for others, it is a source of cynicism. For these, as for the minority who remain climate deniers, the social and economic cost of making fundamental changes in our society is too daunting to contemplate.

In the classroom these differing views are the subject of an open and ongoing discourse, although a know-nothing approach to the science is not tolerated. Everyone reads and learns the same science, yet each brings her

own worldview into the classroom and often out of it as well. When students raise the cost of taking action on climate, I see my role as revealing the real and disparate costs of inaction, which has brought us to the precipice on which we teeter today. In that process, we can also see that weaning our society from fossil fuel dependence and a rapacious economic growth culture can free us to develop sustainable communities and to develop cooperative values.

My teaching is rooted in my own long-time experience as a participant in the movements for civil rights and against the Vietnam War. We had some understanding that the world's resources were rapaciously wrested by the First World from the Third, and consumed in waste. Yet, like mainstream society, we assumed that earth's bounty was infinite: our concern was with inequitable distribution. To study and to teach climate change is to experience a rapid disabusing of that idea. The carrying capacity of the earth is not only limited: it is shrinking rapidly. And the societies and populations that benefited least from industrial development are now suffering the greatest from its consequences. This is not only a historical issue, or a legal issue, or a political or scientific issue. It is profoundly a moral issue. In the final analysis, this is what we hope our students come to see and what they take away from our classes.

NOTES

¹ IPCC Fifth Assessment Report (2014), <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg1/> .

BASIC CLIMATE CHANGE RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Michael B. Gerrard and Jody Freeman, eds. *Global Climate Change and U.S. Law* (2d Ed American Bar Association, 2014) (for concise summaries of legal areas).

Mark Hertsgaard. *Hot: Living Through the Next Fifty Years on Earth*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011).

Naomi Klein. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

Elizabeth Kolbert. *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change*. (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2015).

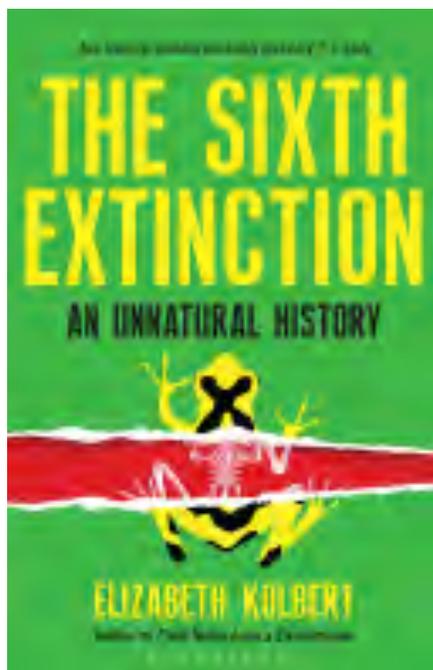
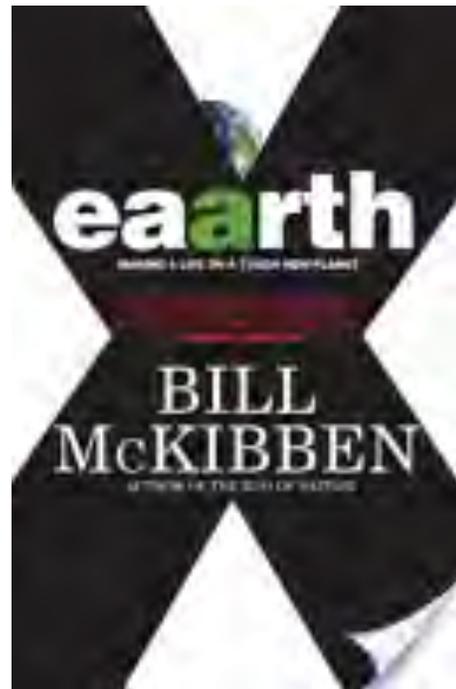
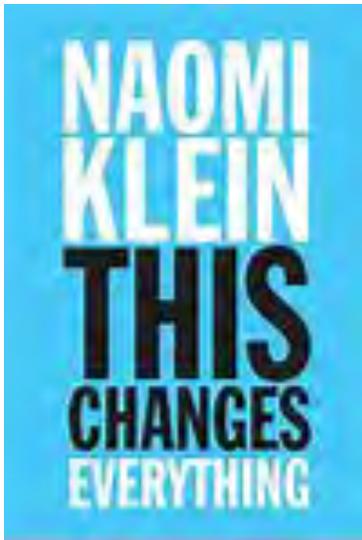
Elizabeth Kolbert. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. (New York: Henry Holt, 2014)

Bill McKibben. *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*. (New York: Times Books, 2010).

Bill McKibben. "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math." *Rolling Stone*, July 19, 2012. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719>.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>— to keep track of the global

climate negotiations.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching and Practicing Climate Politics at College of the Atlantic: Student-inspired, Student-driven

by Doreen Stabinsky



PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH IN NYC, SEPTEMBER 21, 2014
PHOTO: LEONARD VOGT

College of the Atlantic (COA) is a small, alternative liberal arts college located on Mount Desert Island in Maine. The flexibility of our curriculum, a student-centered philosophy, and an emphasis on practical engagement provide the conditions for a unique learning laboratory for students seeking to practice climate politics.

Founded in 1969, COA admitted its first class in 1972 with a focus on active learning and the relationships between humans and the environment. All students follow a single major, Human Ecology, taking courses in our broad curricular areas of Arts and Design, Environmental Sciences, and Human Studies. There are few required courses, meaning that students in effect create their own interdisciplinary trajectory through the curriculum, and earn an interdisciplinary degree tailored through their interests and passions.

Our students are from across the United States and from around the world. A unique scholarship program from the Shelby Davis Foundation for students graduating with an international baccalaureate from United World Colleges contributes to COA having one of the highest proportions of international students of any small college in the United States. Many of our international students are very interested in global environmental politics. The 13-person COA delegation to the last climate conference in Lima, Peru, had students from Bolivia (2), Chile, Colombia (2), Ecuador, Guatemala, India, Mexico, Switzerland, the US (2), and the UK.

Active and activist students are attracted to COA and many will have already been involved in some form of politics: recent U.S. students have come to us with experience from participating in model United Nations at their high school, Occupy, and the Sierra Student Coalition. Our students want to change the world.

Students Take on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

In 2005, a small group of COA students decided to attend the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 1st Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, held in Montréal, Canada.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is the global treaty that governs climate change action by all the 194 countries that are members of the treaty—technically called Parties. Parties meet annually at COPs to discuss, debate, and decide on means to implement the provisions of the convention.

This initial engagement of COA students, facilitated by the U.S. youth organization SustainUS, sowed the seeds for a whole range of courses in global environmental diplomacy at COA. The majority of the course offerings combine theory and practice, preparing students for and enabling their participation in global multilateral environmental negotiations, principally but not exclusively the UNFCCC.

The following year, 2006, a group of students decided they would return to the UNFCCC in December for COP11 in Nairobi. Students were enrolled in my course, Global Environmental Politics, which provided some foundational knowledge about the climate regime through a term-long role-play on the negotiations of the Kyoto Protocol.

In addition, the delegation attending COP11 developed a “group study” on the negotiations. Group studies are unique elements of COA course options, where a group of 5 to 8 students can decide to teach themselves material not covered in other COA courses. Group studies must be approved by the Academic Affairs Committee, and have a faculty sponsor and a means for evaluation of each member of the group by the group. The students attending the Nairobi COP focused their group study on the main issues under negotiation for this particular COP, reading, among other texts, the tome of official preparatory documents and country position statements.

Active and activist students are attracted to COA and many will have already been involved in some form of politics: recent U.S. students have come to us with experience from participating in model United Nations at their high school, Occupy, and the Sierra Student Coalition. Our students want to change the world.

It was in the lead-up to COP11 that the student organization Earth in Brackets, or [earth], was conceived (www.earthinbrackets.org). The students going to Nairobi worked together with other students in SustainUS, as well as a handful of other youth organizations around the world, to prepare to engage as a youth constituency at the COP. As part of their contribution, COA students designed a t-shirt with a logo that has stood the test of time: a picture of the earth, enclosed in a pair of brackets. In UN negotiations, brackets symbolize text that is disputed, that is not yet agreed. As the students say on their website, the idea of the logo is to reflect the fact that the future of the planet is contested.

Climate Justice and the UNFCCC

That contestation is profound within the UNFCCC. The Convention was negotiated in the lead-up to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. At that time, the level of multilateral cooperation on the environment was much greater than today. Important provisions of the agreement recognize both the historical responsibility of developed countries for atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide and their responsibility to lead in addressing the problem. For example, in the preamble, the Parties note that “the largest share of historical and current global emissions has originated in developed countries, that per capita emissions

in developing countries are still relatively low and that the share of global emissions originating in developing countries will grow to meet their social and development needs." A fundamental principle of the Convention is that "developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof."

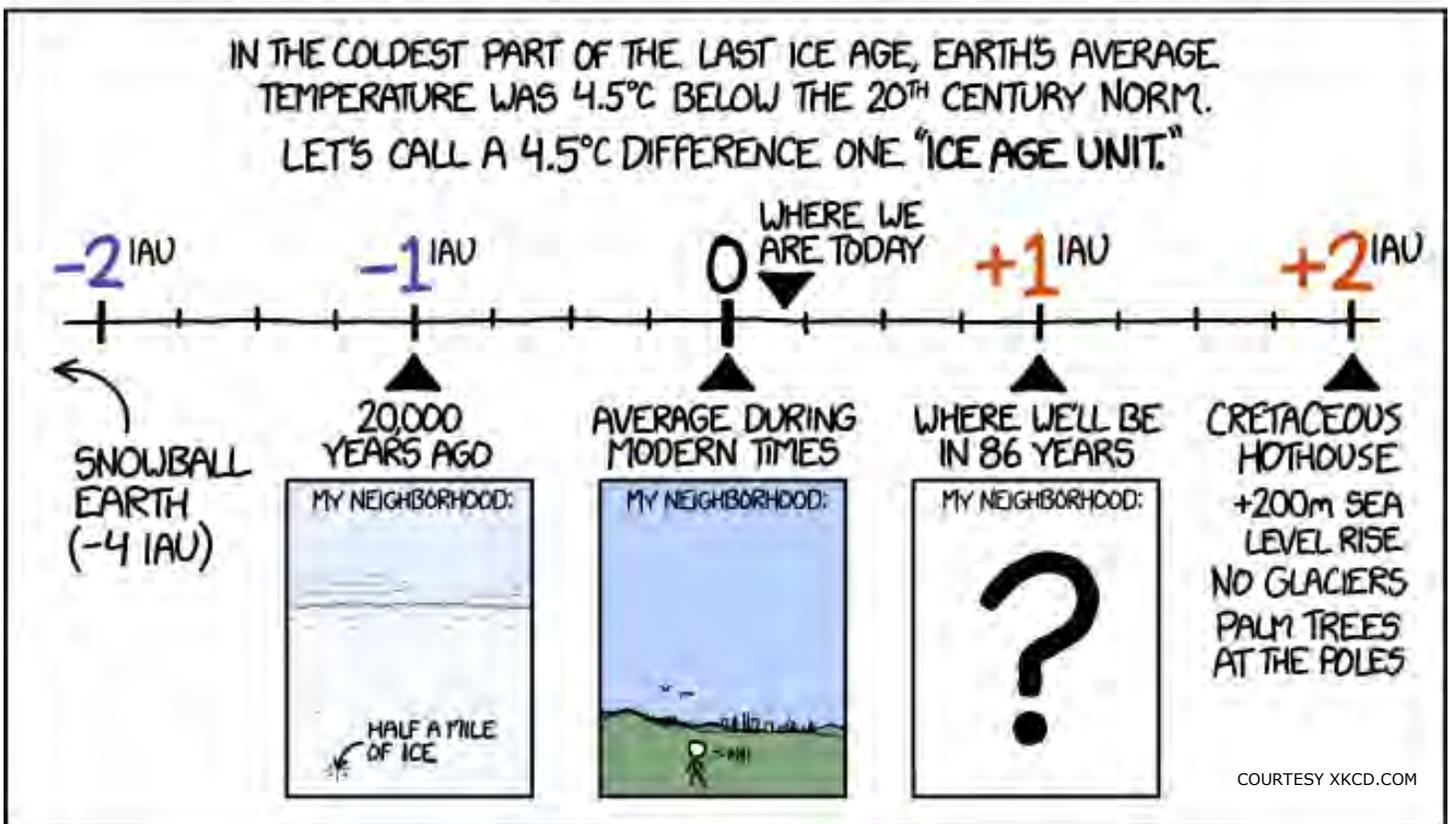
Unfortunately, there has been little leadership by developed countries over the intervening 20+ years, leading to our current situation: global CO₂ concentrations past 400 ppm, with estimates of warming this century, above pre-industrial levels, expected between 4-6°C at our current levels of emission reduction ambition from both developed and developing countries. How big a change is 4°C? Look at <https://xkcd.com/1379/> for a humorous graphic interpretation.

emitted by rich countries. Alongside the question of how to divide up the remaining atmospheric space is one of financing developing country efforts—or as some might term it, paying off developed country "climate debt."¹

Atmospheric Space, Climate Debt, and Climate Justice

A climate justice analysis puts front and center consideration of those who are most responsible for the climate problem (historically the developed countries) and those who will bear the brunt of climate impacts (developing countries and the poor in developed countries—those least able to bear the impacts). It considers the historical responsibility of developed

WITHOUT PROMPT, AGGRESSIVE LIMITS ON CO₂ EMISSIONS, THE EARTH WILL LIKELY WARM BY AN AVERAGE OF 4°-5°C BY THE CENTURY'S END.
HOW BIG A CHANGE IS THAT?



The central struggle in current climate negotiations is how to divide up the remaining "atmospheric space" for gases that cause global warming— settling the question of who gets to emit how much more while we collectively aim to keep warming below 2°C. Unfortunately for all of us, what matters is the cumulative emissions over time of carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide stays in the atmosphere for hundreds to thousands of years, and much of the carbon we can emit and still stay below 2°C has already been

emitted by rich countries for current levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the differential capacities of developed and developing countries to undertake necessary transformations in energy production to decarbonize their economies, the development legacies of colonialism, and continuing economic and social inequities across the world.

Climate "fair shares" (climatefairshares.org) are a way to think about how to apportion the remaining limited atmospheric space – taking into account historical responsibility, current level of development, and ability to

take on investments in the transformation of energy systems. A climate justice or “fair shares” analysis shows what must happen globally in order over the next century to reduce carbon emissions equitably.

While rooted in the language of the Convention, climate justice sits outside the current dominant frame of negotiations, where developed countries and mainstream Northern environmental organizations promote a narrative that obscures developed country responsibility for current greenhouse gas concentrations by shifting focus and blame towards developing country economic competitors, such as China, India, and Brazil. Instead of a frame that acknowledges how full of carbon dioxide the atmosphere is already, and why, this narrative just looks at current contributions. To be very clear, limits on atmospheric space are limits on development space, recognized in the preamble to the Convention. The current dominant, ahistorical frame is very much understood by developing countries, large and small, as a means to constrain their development.

Wicked Politics of the UNFCCC: No Winners on the Road to Paris

As noted, the UNFCCC space is highly contested, and North-South economic proxy wars will continue to be fought in the halls of the climate negotiations. Indeed, action on climate change that is adequate to prevent dangerous levels of warming will require deep and rapid decarbonization of economies, changes at a level that *no* country in the negotiations is yet willing to undertake. Although a climate justice analysis lays much of the responsibility for action at the feet of developed countries, the fact is that most countries will bear some burden, and most are unwilling at present to take on their fair share, particularly in the context of a legal international regime. Indeed, only Bolivia continues to argue for a fair shares approach; the rest of the countries in the negotiations are happy for an outcome which binds them to as little emissions reduction as possible, and greater relative reductions for their economic competitors.

Countries are now in the final round of negotiations towards a new climate agreement under the Convention, which is set to end in Paris in December 2015. Unfortunately the Paris outcome is unlikely to bind countries to collective actions that are fairly apportioned, nor indeed to actions that will limit warming to below 2°C. Instead of a rational and fair division of remaining atmospheric space, countries are voluntarily pledging actions they are willing to take. Together those actions add up to a pathway towards 4-6°C warming in this century. “[B]ased on many (and ongoing) discussions with climate change colleagues,” says Kevin Anderson, Deputy Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change research, “there is a widespread view that a 4°C future is incompatible with any reasonable characterisation of an organised, equitable, and civilized global community.”²

So no fair shares and no commitment to action that will save people and the planet. How to give students tools

with which to understand, challenge, and change this outcome?

Teaching Climate Activists

Since 2009, I have developed a series of courses, taught each fall, that are designed to prepare students to participate on the COA delegation to UNFCCC COPs, which typically take place every December. The courses have varied in level and content, depending on the cohort of students that will attend and their previous preparation and participation in multilateral negotiations. Each course has been a little different, but the core intent the same: to give students a solid grounding in the content and politics of the most important issues that will be addressed during the COP.

For example, in the fall of 2013, in preparation for COP19 in Warsaw, students focused on a set of the most prominent and difficult issues that would be addressed at that meeting: carbon markets, loss and damage, and fair shares. Students also learned about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), as the first element of the Fifth Assessment Report was published during the term. Students read the book *Climate Capitalism*, and learned about cap-and-trade systems, the Clean Development Mechanism, carbon markets, and the limitations of market-based approaches to reducing emissions.

During the group study in the fall of 2014, students divided into three working teams, each focusing on one topic to delve into more deeply, with the task of leading learning on those topics for the rest of the class. The three broad topic areas were: climate finance and markets; land use and forests; and the negotiations towards the 2015 agreement.

This fall my course is entitled Practicing Climate Politics. Students will have weekly Skype meetings with me and close colleagues of mine who work within the UNFCCC space — leading climate justice activists from around the world— to discuss the main issues in the negotiations, positions and politics of various blocs, and expected results. We will also participate in an 8-week MOOC offered by the FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany, titled “Climate Change: a question of justice?” which will feature lectures from justice-oriented academics and activists on key questions— climate science, climate governance, carbon markets, north-south relations and eco-colonialism, climate refugees, climate wars and geopolitics— and on solutions: unburnable carbon, renewable energies, and degrowth. Students will attend the Paris summit and then proceed to Uppsala, Sweden for a week of conversation, debriefing and answering for themselves the question: *what next?*

I add a special component to their coursework: direct interaction with some of the major figures struggling for climate justice within the UNFCCC. I work with a small network of climate experts from around the world, the Equity and Ambition Group (EAG), with an express focus on a justice framing of the fights within the UNFCCC. These colleagues in the EAG developed the idea of climate fair shares. The group works strategically with social movements and climate justice organizations outside the

UNFCCC space, through the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice, as well as governments with a strong justice orientation within the UNFCCC negotiations, such as Bolivia. Through my courses and other modes of interaction with members of EAG, such as internships, students have direct exposure to key climate justice actors in the negotiations.

I am explicit in my objectives for student preparation through coursework with me: COA students should be the most knowledgeable undergraduates in attendance at the COPs. They develop a good foundation in the principles of climate justice, and I ensure they have as much technical background as possible to be able to understand, interpret, and explain the politics behind particular positions countries have taken. The rigorous introduction to the main negotiating issues enables our students to assume leadership and spokesperson roles in the youth climate justice movement.

My students' preparation to attend the COPs benefits significantly from the concurrent preparatory work students do as members of [earth]. Often students devote two courses of their three-course term to climate politics, creating a group study alongside my course. In this case, students use the group study to prepare themselves to work together as the [earth] delegation, with emphasis on coordinating blog posts and other social media; liaising with other youth and climate justice organizations; developing deeper content expertise in smaller groups; and all the logistical details of their participation. In fact, I do not stay with the students at the COP – the delegation is almost completely autonomous, although we attempt daily delegation debriefs and special sessions with my colleagues.

Earth in Brackets at the UNFCCC

Students in the organization [earth] represent the diversity of students at the college. As noted, we have many international students, and delegations are often multinational. Our 13-person delegation to Lima for the last COP included students from 11 different countries, many of whom spoke Spanish as their first language.

By the time students arrive at a COP, they have been introduced to key players in the climate justice movement, have had strategic and tactical conversations with my colleagues and their colleagues in the youth climate justice movement, and have identified multiple avenues for their work at a COP. Since my own input into their preparation is primarily content— an intensive background in issues under negotiations and the politics behind those issues— my colleagues provide a direct means of active participation in the politics within the negotiations. Many of our graduates have gone on to become leaders in their own right of the radical wing of the climate justice youth movement, which is another primary avenue for their activity at the COP. One college alumnus is currently a lead negotiator for the G77 and China.

The [earth] delegation participates in the official youth (YOUNGO) constituency, as well as both parts of the ENGO (environmental NGOs) constituency: Climate Action

Network and Climate Justice Now! Earth in Brackets has significant name recognition within the UNFCCC space as one of the most prominent, active, and informed youth organizations. As is evident on their website, during a COP they are active bloggers as well as organizers of, and participants in, press conferences, side events, and actions. It is not just coincidence that [earth] t-shirts are often seen in photos from climate actions, such as a photo from the Lima COP that was used by Al Jazeera alongside a recent article on climate politics.

On the Road to Paris and Beyond: Active Participation in the Struggle for Climate Justice

When students begin participating and trying to make change in the UNFCCC they are forced to face two crucial aspects of that work: first, that the UNFCCC is absolutely a contested space, riven with struggles over apportioning responsibility for action on climate change, not least among non-governmental environmental organizations; and linked to that, second, that contestation constrains what effective action can come from within the legal regime at this point. Indeed, many radical civil society organizations and social movements contend that the space is dead and should be abandoned for action outside the rarified negotiating halls.

I am explicit in my objectives for student preparation through coursework with me: COA students should be the most knowledgeable undergraduates in attendance at the COPs. They develop a good foundation in the principles of climate justice, and I ensure they have as much technical background as possible to be able to understand, interpret, and explain the politics behind particular positions countries have taken.

Students want to make a difference and in this situation they are challenged to examine their own theories of change: who are the actors that can bring it about, and how does it happen. With a climate justice frame, their work with social movements and grassroots organizations outside the UNFCCC provides a vantage point to consider how work on the outside can be used to generate power to move government positions inside the negotiations, to recognize links between the inside and the outside with a potential to change power dynamics in both spaces.

Work on the outside also helps them recognize the clear and profound limitations of working only at the intergovernmental level. The international diplomatic space can be very alluring and seductive— exotic people, negotiating in many languages in exciting locations all around the globe. The need for urgent action to address

climate change, and the very evident lack of that action from the intergovernmental space, is grounding that helps students realize that change within the UNFCCC at this point in time is very slow to non-existent, inside politics are dictated by entrenched power, and you cannot leave change up to climate negotiators. Therefore, if they are seriously committed to stopping climate change, they must also engage their efforts in other spaces. For at least some COA students, this has meant doing work such as connecting with organizations across Maine working to stop a new pipeline from Canada to Portland, or interning with the Philippines Movement for Climate Justice in their work to stop extractive mining and coal-fired power plants or the International Forum on Globalization in their high-profile challenging of the Koch brothers.

I expect profound disappointment after the Paris COP. There is much hype about the summit as the last chance to turn around a planet hurtling towards 4-6°C of warming.



PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH BY LEONARD VOGT

And we already know, given current geopolitics, political will, and pledges on the table, that the outcome of the summit will not deliver what is needed. Hence the week-long debrief of my course this fall: to answer the question "What next?" and to explore alternatives as the limitations of multilateral negotiation and intergovernmental cooperation become clear.

One of the best textbooks I have found to guide students intellectually through these thought processes is *Global Environmental Politics: Power, Perspectives, and Practice*, by Ronnie Lipschutz. The book uses a three-part

analytical framework— historical materialism, ontology, and power— to understand why environmental problems exist and what means we have to address them. Its focus on power, and specifically on the power of acting in the political space— Hannah Arendt's "space of appearance"— gives us an opportunity to theorize what they are indeed doing— to consider the praxis of action and the power of mobilization of people who care about their communities and the planet.

Conclusion

Global environmental politics at COA has been transformed over the past ten years, principally due to the climate activism of our students. The biggest celebrity moment, manifesting both their academic and activist preparations, came in 2011 when COA student Anjali Appadurai addressed COP17 in Durban, South Africa, and told negotiators, "You have been negotiating all my life." She wrote her speech with four other youth, including two other COA students. The YouTube video of the speech went viral; Anjali and the speech get special mention in the introduction to *This Changes Everything*, by Naomi Klein.³

The climate impacts that we anticipate in the years and decades ahead will be profoundly disruptive and deadly. The struggle to justly transform energy systems and decarbonize our economies as quickly as possible to prevent the worst of these impacts will be the fight of their lives for these young climate justice activists. It has been, and continues to be, incredibly rewarding work to build the capacity of students who are on the frontlines of these climate change struggles, inside and outside the halls of the UNFCCC negotiations.

NOTES

1 What Next Volume III: Climate, Development, and Equity, published by the What Next Forum, provides a broad range of articles on questions of equity and climate justice in the context of the UNFCCC negotiations.

http://www.whatnext.org/Publications/Volume_3/Volume_3_main.htm

2 http://www.whatnext.org/resources/Publications/Volume-III/Single-articles/wnv3_andersson_144.pdf.

3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ko3e6G_7GY4



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



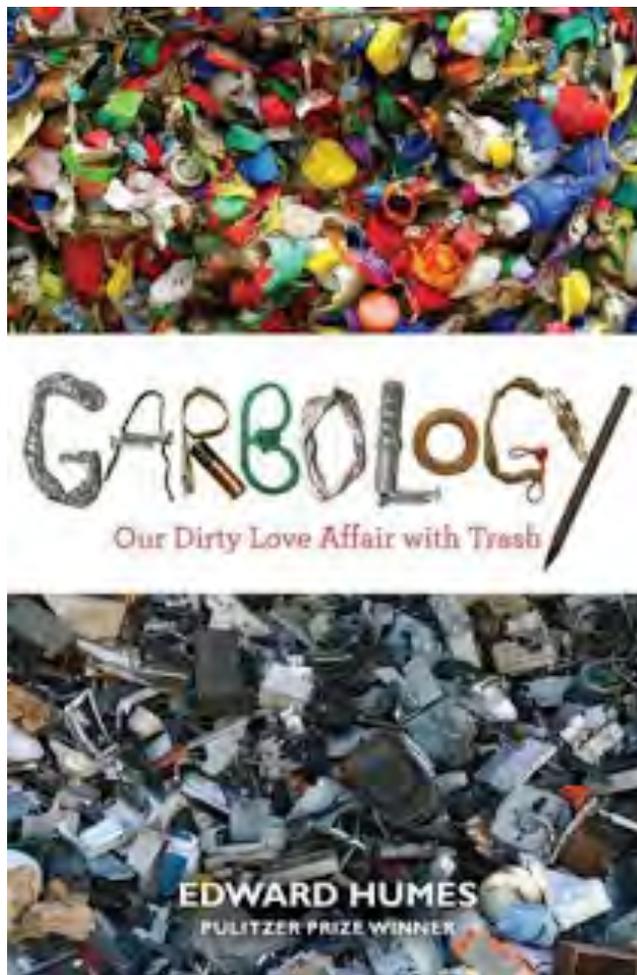
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

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

The Weight of Trash: Teaching Sustainability and Ecofeminism by Asking Undergraduates to Carry Around Their Own Garbage

by Breanne Fahs



EDWARD HUMES'S *GARBOLOGY*

Introduction

The university classroom presents unique opportunities to engage in daring, creative, politically engaged, and experiential learning. As a platform for students to explore, refine, and transform their political beliefs, women's studies courses in particular have sought to shed light on gender roles, patriarchal power, the inequalities that drive social relationships, and the importance of progressive social change. As a professor of women and gender studies, my assignments push the edges of the traditional classroom and showcase the importance of *doing* and *engaging* rather than more passively learning. For example, I have asked women students to grow out their body hair for extra credit and to write about their experiences, and men to shave (Fahs 2014), and I have assigned groups of students to engage in menstrual activism. Students in my courses have designed interventions to redistribute resources away from the wealthy and have written (and sometimes performed) their own political manifestos. These assignments prioritized action and activism, progressive political thought, and community building.

This essay outlines a recent assignment I designed for an upper-division cross-listed women and gender studies/social justice and human rights course called Trash, Freaks, and SCUM. In the context of the students reading Edward Humes's *Garbology* (2012), the assignment asked that students carry around their trash for two 48-hour periods and present it to the class. This assignment aims to make trash visible and to help students learn about climate change, sustainability, and how their individual carbon footprint contributes to the "big picture" of environmental strain. I describe this assignment and its goals in this essay, followed by an assessment of its role in teaching about social justice, in order to underscore the importance of experiential learning with trash and to highlight how this assignment fits the mission of my courses on feminism and social justice.

Trash, Freaks, and SCUM

Ecofeminism has as a key goal the development of politically engaged students who will extend their efforts beyond the classroom by fighting for environmental causes and critically assessing their own behaviors (Russell & Bell, 1996). As such, feminist classrooms must also become key sites of challenging climate change, urban sprawl, compromised water, and ever-growing garbage dumps (Gardner & Riley, 2007; Somerville, 2008). The feminist classroom should map the ways that individual students and small communities can address seemingly overwhelming environmental problems. My new course at Arizona State University, Trash, Freaks, and SCUM, includes the trash assignment alongside readings about garbage and the production of trash. This course focuses on "theorizing from the gutter," that is, looking at the world not from a lofty "Ivory Tower" but from the slime, the muck, the dumpster, the trash heap, the wasteland, the discarded, and the downtrodden. Its inspirations include the radical 1960s *SCUM Manifesto* (Solanas, 1968)

and the French feminist Julia Kristeva, who theorized the abject as a relationship with the grotesque that reveals the deep-seated fear of death. In short, the course uses these two positions—different from each other in tone, affect, and style, but similar in the central principles—to examine trash abstractly and literally. Students work through a variety of concepts, ranging from actual trash—garbage, waste, toxic sludge, pollution, and dirt—to more abstract notions of trash: knowledge produced on the fringe in circuses, amusement parks, "trailer trash" zones, freak shows, and the bodies of those marked as "Other" or different. The reading list includes work that builds upon Solanas and Kristeva: James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Dorothy Allison's *Trash*, Rachel Adams's *Sideshow U.S.A.*, Edward Humes's *Garbology*, Andrew Ross's *Bird on Fire*, and a wide variety of supplemental texts, such as Jennifer Nash's "Black Anality," and Marie-Monique Robin's work on dioxins and rBST.

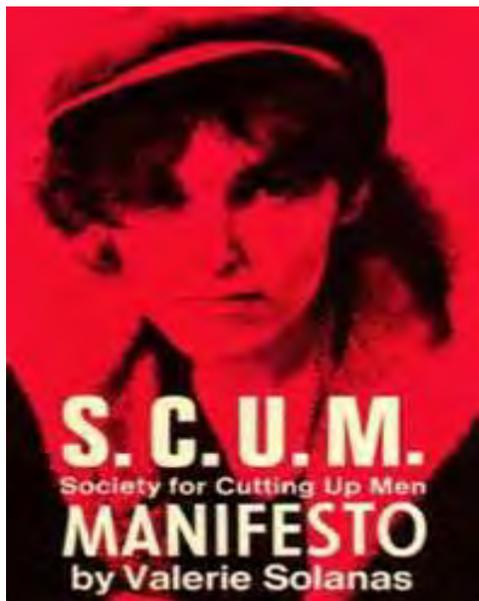
Ecofeminism has as a key goal the development of politically engaged students who will extend their efforts beyond the classroom by fighting for environmental causes and critically assessing their own behaviors.

The primary goal of Trash, Freaks, and SCUM is to understand the sorts of knowledges—of one's self and of the world—that can be produced from and within trash. This course asks: If, as Valerie Solanas suggests, SCUM is for "whores, dykes, criminals, and homicidal maniacs" and is largely aversive to polite society, what can be learned, seen, and experienced from that subjective position? Amidst trashy bodies, trashy words, trashy thoughts, and trashy sexualities, how are the self and the "Other" produced or demarcated? How is trash something that informs the core of race relations, gender relations, and the production of "freaky" bodies and "freaky" sexualities? How do we *know* something is of "trash," and how are we *made* trashy as we occupy the fringe of society? What is at stake in examining trash from a "non-trashy" place such as academia? What sorts of energies do we expend avoiding the label of "trash" and how does this relate to our literal production of actual trash? Going beyond simplistic notions of "sustainability," how might the project of understanding trash undermine, reinforce, and resituate our self-understanding as students and scholars?

The Assignment

Students in this course have diverse backgrounds in feminist and sustainability issues; most have had some coursework in feminist or critical studies material, but few have had exposure to ecofeminist or sustainability material. My campus, Arizona State University's West campus, attracts many students who work full-time or have family commitments; some are the first generation in their families to attend college. Many self-identify as "liberals," and most have an interest in activism but only

about a third have ever engaged in activism prior to entering the course. Most of my courses have 30-50 percent students of color, and women outnumber men roughly three to one. On the first day of class, I distribute the trash-bag assignment, which asks that students collect the trash that they personally produce for two periods of two days each and carry the bag of trash with them at all times for those 48-hour periods. This assignment emphasizes the importance of thinking about trash as a social and political pathology. With the exception of used toilet paper, students must carry all of their garbage, including product wrappers (e.g., tampon wrappers, granola bar wrappers), anything produced as a result of the food they eat in and out of the home, and all personal trash items including cups, lids, straws, plastic bags, containers, cans, bottles, gum wrappers, Ziploc bags, magazines, tissues, napkins, paper towels, and any and all other items they produced during the 48-hour period. Further, students are required to carry their trash to social events, work, other classes, and throughout the house as they move from room to room. Students should not leave the house without their bag of trash for each 48-hour period.



I ask the students to set different goals and guidelines for each of the two 48-hour periods. For the first, students should collect the normal amount of trash they produce and should not try to minimize their trash output. For the second, students should try consciously to produce as little trash as possible. I advise students that this may take some preparation so that they have reusable items on hand. At the end of each two-day period, students bring their trash to class and present it, showing others the items they produced and discussing what surprised them (e.g., items they did not realize they produced, or produced so much of, trash they never thought about, the volume of trash involved in processed food, and so on).

Finally, students are asked to write a paper about these two occasions of “excavating” and to explore the predictable, surprising, and challenging aspects of the assignment. I ask them: What sorts of trash were you

conscious of producing and what sorts of trash were hidden or obscured? What trash did you feel the most shame or embarrassment about? What trash did you expect to produce more of? Less of? How does your production of trash map onto others’ production? And, finally, identify at least *three lifestyle changes* you would like to make to produce less trash in your life. As sustainable living and the recognition of (and reduction of) global warming will become more important over time, what specific changes do you anticipate making? What could you reuse or make non-disposable? What could you consume less of or go without? How could you rearrange your habits or sense of your needs? How could you personally impact climate change and global warming by consuming less?

Goals of the Assignment

This assignment has three primary goals: 1) To move our personal production of trash from a largely invisible and unconscious problem to a visible and more conscious problem that connects to broader issues of climate change and the irresponsible behaviors of corporations and governments; 2) To encourage students to discuss trash and the production of trash with others, particularly in contexts outside of academia (I call this “ripple effect pedagogies”); and 3) To focus students’ attention on the relationship between their own personal behaviors and choices and broader issues, like climate change, toxic dumps, the great ocean garbage patch (now more than a patch), and the increasing number of endangered species. The assignment is designed to push students beyond thinking about their own individual role in climate change, and instead imagine their own thought processes and pathologies around trash to reflect similar processes and pathologies seen in corporations, governments, and polluters worldwide.

This assignment draws upon the principles of early radical feminist consciousness-raising as well, in that the phrase “the personal is political” applies also to the production of trash. Seeing the routine minutiae of trash creation—straws and straw wrappers, plastic bags, cups and lids, packaging of food, take-out containers, and so on—as connected to larger political struggles plays an essential role in changing attitudes and behaviors. Further, by utilizing “ripple effect pedagogies” where students are encouraged to discuss their trash openly with others inside and outside of the classroom, the potential impact of uniting the personal and political can also expand outward into students’ social circles. They may, for example, have a conversation about trash with a coworker, a sibling, a roommate, a boyfriend/girlfriend, or with a parent. Trash, then, moves from invisible and largely unacknowledged to visible not only for the students themselves but also for people in their social networks and circles.

Trash, Feminism, Race/Class, and Social Justice

The results of the assignment often vividly show the links between trash, feminism, race/class, and social

justice. Students present their trash to the class often with a deep sense of self-consciousness and, at times, embarrassment. (As the professor, I, too, participate in this assignment and consider it a powerful reminder of how far I have to go with my own relationship to trash.) For example, one student last semester realized only when presenting his trash that he had consumed roughly ten bottles of coconut water per day and had produced an enormous amount of trash as a result of this habit. Another student realized that, by not using reusable menstrual products, her trash production for tampons, tampon packages, and tampon applicators was sizeable; doing this assignment made her switch to reusable menstrual pads immediately. Still another student, conscious of the number of diapers she threw away while raising her new baby, felt alarmed by her trash output related to caretaking and caregiving. Nearly all students felt alarmed by how much trash they produced in a mere two days, even for students who engage in recycling and sustainable practices already.

At its core, global warming is a problem of consuming more resources than we can sustainably create; this lesson is essential for college students, who often take out massive student loans, work low wage jobs, and consume mindlessly.

Students also became more conscious about the politics of food and what they put into their bodies. The amount of food packaging from frozen pizzas, soda, bags of chips, candy, containers of nuts, and similar items, presented an overwhelming picture of their largely unhealthy food choices. Along these lines, many students realized how little they actually cooked for themselves and how much they relied upon women to cook for them, whether in restaurants, at home, or with roommates/mothers/sisters; this realization about the sexist division of labor permeated student narratives. The links between food and social justice became vivid, as students recommitted to doing more cooking with actual food and healthy ingredients, and as they recognized the costs of having others cook for them, freeing up their time but burdening other women with the responsibilities of cooking.

Issues of race, class, and “respectability” also appeared during this assignment, as students reflected on how their trash made them feel self-conscious because of their racial identity or class identity. Not being able to afford certain items, or eating differently than other students, appeared in some students’ response papers. For example, one student ate frozen pizzas each night and described feeling embarrassed that she could not afford to eat better food. Further, after students saw the practices of their classmates, the divide between the eating and trash habits of the more privileged white students and the less privileged students of color also appeared strongly in the response papers. While white students often had some

“training” from parents or mentors in how to eat more healthy foods or why they should go to farmer’s markets, many students of color described how they did not have such backgrounds and did not know how to prepare many raw or healthy foods. The “whiteness” of sustainability culture appeared in students’ narratives and revealed that they connected trash production with intersections of race and class as well.

Further, the social class divides, often compounded with race, were clearly visible in how students discussed trash and their relationship to it. For those who had grown up without as much money and had to learn to reuse clothing or conserve money or reduce waste, the trash assignment felt like a familiar problem. “Doing more with less” represented a common reality for students with less money (even if that did not always translate into healthier food practices). For those who had never had to worry about waste, and who frequently purchased whatever they wanted, the assignment raised their consciousness in different ways. In this way, privileged students had to confront their wasteful habits, often related to consumption, and had to work to become more efficient and less wasteful. Making matters more complicated, students reflected on how expensive it is to be poor; for example, during one class discussion after the presentation of the trash, some female students balked at the upfront costs of buying a DivaCup or Lunapads instead of conventional tampons or pads even though these options cost more in the long run. Ultimately, social class and its many intricacies played a major role in reflecting on this assignment and its meaning.

Teaching about Climate Change and Sustainability

Ultimately, the trash assignment sought to teach students about sustainability and the relationship between their personal choices and larger social problems like environmental degradation and climate change. This framing is *not* meant to suggest that individual lifestyle adjustments are “the answer,” but rather, to push students to imagine their own relationship to trash (e.g., denial, silences, invisibility, lying to themselves, pushing away larger conversations about abuse of the environment) as a microcosm of the sorts of decisions and priorities that occur within institutions, corporations, governments, and industrial organizations. In their reflection papers students were asked to discuss how they could consume less and how they could personally affect climate change; these conversations prompted students to imagine themselves as complicit in more systematic problems around waste, environmental destruction, and carelessness/invisibility. This sort of thinking required a radical reframing of the links between consumption, success, and wealth. Many students wrote that they equated having a job and income with the need to consume, and that consumption became, in part, the *reason* they worked at all. In short, students admitted that they wanted “something to show for all the work I do” at their underpaid (and often dull) jobs. Consumption became the way that they justified putting in long hours of doing terrible work, mirroring the problem of

conspicuous consumption, as people show their social class status by buying things they do not need. The trash assignment asked that they rethink these assumptions and reimagine their consumption habits.

Throughout the course of this assignment, I worked with students to detach consumption from notions of "success." I posed to them a challenge to consume nearly nothing, reminding them that if they did not consume as much, they would not need to work as much. Related to this discussion, we explored the connection between overconsumption and climate change. Specifically, we discussed overconsumption of one-use items like plastic bags and the impact of plastics on the health of the oceans. Students expressed a clear commitment to reducing the number of things they consume, specifically for items they use only once (e.g., bottles, coffee cups, forks, napkins, tissues, straws, food containers, etc.). This serves the dual purpose of helping the environment and allowing them to better detach consumption patterns from their low-paid work. It also pushes them to critically examine consumption as a cultural priority and what the (over)valuing of consumption does on a mass scale (e.g., gas-guzzling cars; fracking; fossil fuels, etc.).

At its core, global warming is a problem of consuming more resources than we can sustainably create; this lesson is essential for college students, who often take out massive student loans, work low wage jobs, and consume mindlessly. Critically examining this mindset—especially as students look at corporations like Monsanto and governmental choices like pipelines and fracking—connects their own lives to broader contexts of consumption and global warming. I also find it essential to explore and discuss the ironies of doing an assignment about consumption and trash in the context of universities, as college campuses often consume vast resources, rarely employ ethical and sustainable practices, and encourage students to live beyond their means and acquire debt. (The recent push toward elaborate gyms, fitness centers, and water parks on campus that students must pay millions of dollars for speaks to universities' lack of concern for operating sustainably.) Directing a critical eye toward the irony of examining trash in such a space of upward mobility and exclusion is a key task. This assignment represents a small step toward helping students reimagine a different future, one in which personal accountability and individual change matter, but also one in which they can critically question ideas about success, money, happiness, consumption, and sustainability for themselves and their social world.

References

- Fahs, B. (2014). Perilous patches and pitstaches: Imagined versus lived experiences of women's body hair growth. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 38*(2), 167-180.
- Gardner, C. V., & Riley, J. E. (2007). Breaking boundaries: Ecofeminism in the classroom. *Radical Teacher, 78*, 24-33.
- Humes, E. (2012). *Garbology: Our dirty love affair with trash*. New York: Penguin.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Russell, C. L., & Bell, A. C. (1996). A politicized ethic of care: Environmental education from an ecofeminist perspective. In K. Warren (Ed.), *Women's voices in experiential education* (pp.172-181). Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.
- Solanas, V. (1968). *SCUM Manifesto*. New York: Olympia Press.
- Somerville, M. J. (2008). A place pedagogy for "global contemporaneity." *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 42*(3), 326-344



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



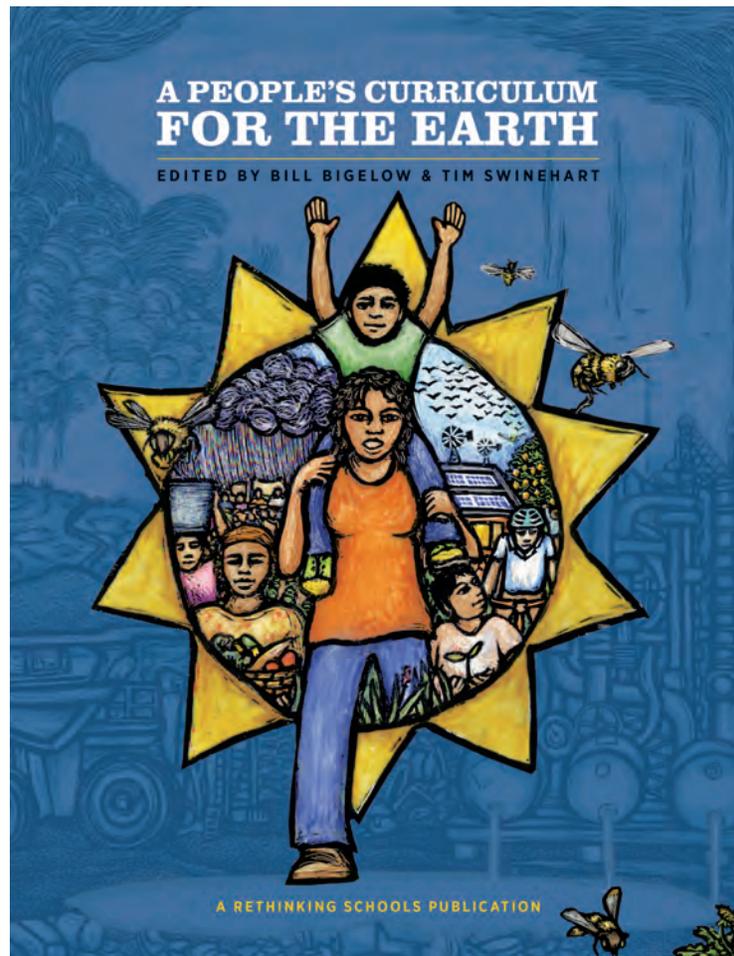
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Bringing Climate Into the Classroom: Inside a Teaching Retreat Around Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything*

by Bill Bigelow, Alex Kelly, and Katie McKenna



PEOPLE'S CURRICULUM FOR THE EARTH COVER
ART: RICARDO LEVINS MORALES; DESIGN: NANCY ZUCKER

Jill Howdyshell lives and teaches 5th grade in Togiak, a small Yu'pik fishing village in southwestern Alaska. In Togiak, harvesting berries is a practice that goes back countless generations. The berries are the key ingredient in *akutaq*, called eskimo ice cream. In her classes, Howdyshell's students write identity poems with lines proclaiming "I am from *akutaq*," and describing cherished excursions with parents and grandparents. In 2014, residents discovered that there would be no berries that year: the tundra had not frozen for a sufficient length of time for the berries to regenerate. With a dramatic rise in temperatures, Yu'pik people can no longer rely on digging deep into the permafrost to store food in makeshift freezers. And most distressing: as a result of rising seas, during the next few years, Yu'pik people will be forced to relocate large parts of their community.

Climate change is tearing through Togiak, and Jill Howdyshell's students are living the effects: "Miss Jill, you know the water on the sea level used to be down here, and now it's all the way up here!" Given the stakes and immediacy of the crisis, you might expect that this environmental calamity would be part of the Alaskan school's curriculum. But you'd be wrong. As is true in schools throughout the United States, Togiak's curricular conversation is dominated not by the unprecedented challenges posed by climate change, and the underlying economic forces powering this crisis, but by the Common Core standards and the tests designed to evaluate students' success at reaching them, the "Alaska Measure of Progress."

Jill Howdyshell writes about the gap between her students' lived experience and curricular reality in an article she produced as part of a recent retreat to create critical classroom experiences that bring the social and economic impacts of the climate crisis to life. The retreat was hosted by the Zinn Education Project and *Rethinking Schools*, in partnership with the Naomi Klein book and Avi Lewis documentary project *This Changes Everything*.¹ Over three days in December 2014 in Portland, Oregon, twenty-two educators from across the United States came together to share stories, workshop ideas, and support each other in developing curriculum for their own and others' classes.

Klein's book argues that the failure to deal with climate change is because truly responding requires deep challenges to neoliberal economic orthodoxy through interventions like regulation, taxation, and collective action, but that the changes required to confront the crisis are also an opportunity to transform our economic system for the better, close the inequality gap, and deepen democratic engagement: "Climate change—if treated as a true planetary emergency—could become a galvanizing force for humanity, leaving us all not just safer from extreme weather, but with societies that are safer and fairer in all kinds of other ways as well. The resources required to move rapidly away from fossil fuels and prepare for the coming heavy weather could pull huge swaths of humanity out of poverty, providing services now sorely lacking, from clean water to electricity. This is a vision of the future that goes beyond just surviving or enduring climate change, beyond 'mitigating' and

'adapting' to it in the grim language of the United Nations. It is a vision in which we collectively use the crisis to leap somewhere that seems, frankly, better than where we are right now" (7).

Like Klein's previous works, *This Changes Everything* is research-driven and interdisciplinary, backed by over 800 endnotes drawn from climate science, history, psychology, and sociology, and paired with investigative reporting. Alongside the book, the broader *This Changes Everything* project seeks to break down silos between economic and climate thinking, teaching, and action through partnerships with movements and organizations like *Rethinking Schools*. Through consultation with educators the *This Changes Everything* project decided to develop classroom materials to assist teachers and students in connecting climate change to other issues.

Despite imaginative teaching on the climate throughout the United States and Canada, the official (and often corporate-sponsored) curriculum is mostly silent on the topic and often misleading in important ways. "The gap between our climate emergency and the attention paid to climate change in the school curriculum is immense," says Linda Christensen, director of the Oregon Writing Project, who co-led the writing retreat with *Rethinking Schools* curriculum editor Bill Bigelow. "With *This Changes Everything*, we saw an opportunity to help close that gap." In Portland, where the retreat took place, high school students take only one required course about the world: Modern World History. The adopted text is, not coincidentally, *Modern World History*, published by Holt McDougal, a subsidiary of the publishing behemoth, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Klein's book argues that the failure to deal with climate change is because truly responding requires deep challenges to neoliberal economic orthodoxy through interventions like regulation, taxation, and collective action, but that the changes required to confront the crisis are also an opportunity to transform our economic system for the better, close the inequality gap, and deepen democratic engagement.

The authors of *Modern World History* bury discussion of climate change in just three paragraphs on page 679. In the edition of the book used by students, the second paragraph begins, "Not all scientists agree with the theory of the greenhouse effect."² The book acknowledges that the Earth's climate is "slowly warming," but adds: "To combat this problem, the industrialized nations have called for limits on the release of greenhouse gases. In the past, developed nations were the worst polluters." Evidently, to make sure that students get the point that the eco-criminals are the world's poor countries, the book adds: "So far, developing countries have resisted strict limits."

Other textbooks, even science textbooks, are still soaked in doubt about human-caused climate changes, and offer students a fundamentally incoherent grounding to begin to make sense of the changing world around them. Not content with their role in driving the climate crisis through enormous fossil fuel investments, the industrialist billionaires Charles and David Koch have funneled millions of their private fortunes to ensure that the very existence of climate change is hidden from students.

The Koch brothers fund the Arlington, Virginia-based Bill of Rights Institute, a “free market” curriculum outfit that produces text material and lesson plans that eschew any mention of climate change. The Institute offers free professional development workshops, sponsors student essay contests, and appears at major conferences like the National Council for the Social Studies. On the political front, the Koch-funded American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) has pushed what it calls the “Environmental Literacy Improvement Act,” a bill that aims to treat climate change (and evolution) as controversies, and would also make it a crime for teachers to attempt “to change student behavior, attitudes or values,” or to “encourage political action activities.” Texas, Louisiana, South Dakota, and Tennessee have passed versions of this legislation.



THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING PEDAGOGY RETREAT PARTICIPANTS, 2014
PHOTO: ALEX KELLY

Against this challenging backdrop, *Rethinking Schools* and the *This Changes Everything* team conceived the idea for a retreat to develop innovative materials inspired by the book and film to connect climate and economics in the classroom. A call was circulated in May 2014 and more than 170 educators applied to participate in the retreat, which sadly could only accommodate 18 in addition to retreat facilitators. The strong response from educators, even before *This Changes Everything* had been released, was heartening to us—it demonstrated the breadth of work going on across the United States to create critical material for students.

The retreat was held at the Menucha Conference Center, about 40 minutes up the Columbia River Gorge from Portland. It was an appropriate locale to explore a work that celebrates indigenous rights and the power of social movements. The Gorge is spectacularly beautiful—a designated National Scenic Area that for thousands of years has been the site of Native American fisheries and, since the 1800s, struggles over fishing rights. These continue. From our main meeting and writing room at Menucha, participants could look across to the Washington

side of the river and see mile-and-a-half long trains carrying coal from the Powder River Basin in Montana and Wyoming to a coal-fired power plant near Centralia, Washington. In the hope of exporting coal to Asia, coal and rail companies want to expand these coal trains, and also barge coal down the Columbia, with a potentially devastating impact on Indigenous Peoples from the Gorge up the coast of Washington, where the Lummi people have been fighting a proposed coal export facility at Cherry Point, near Bellingham. And on the Oregon side below, so-called “bomb trains,” filled with highly flammable crude oil from the Bakken oil fields of North Dakota, head west along the Columbia River. So as we wrote about teaching capitalism and the climate, fronts in that war were playing out in the valley below.

Retreat participants came from all over: North Carolina, New York City, Alaska, Mississippi, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, southern California, New Mexico, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Portland. Some were teachers in their first years in the classroom, while others had taught for decades; most taught high school, but the group included elementary and middle school teachers and teacher educators.

“Most of the retreat participants had never met one another, so we started the retreat with a playful mixer. We also wanted participants to think about what they might want to write about, and how their own teaching intersected with Naomi Klein’s analysis,” said retreat co-facilitator Linda Christensen, herself a 40-year teaching veteran. We hoped that this initial activity would seed work that teacher-writers would launch over the weekend.

We gave each participant a couple of provocative quotes from *This Changes Everything*, including:

For a long time, environmentalists spoke of climate change as a great equalizer, the one issue that affected everyone, rich or poor. It was supposed to bring us together. Yet all signs are that it is doing precisely the opposite, stratifying us further into a society of haves and have-nots, divided between those whose wealth offers them a not insignificant measure of protection from ferocious weather, at least for now, and those left to the mercy of increasingly dysfunctional states.

And

... the climate moment offers an overarching narrative in which everything from the fight for good jobs to justice for migrants to reparations for historical wrongs like slavery and colonialism can all become part of the grand project of building a nontoxic, shockproof economy before it's too late.

To get people talking—about their own work, about potential writing or curriculum ideas, and about how these might align with Klein’s radical analysis—we gave participants eight “mixer” questions, and asked them to circulate through the room. These included:

Talk with another person about one of the quotes that they have from *This Changes Everything*. What's their reaction to the quote? Can either of you think of a way of teaching this idea to students, or helping them to explore it?

Find someone who has a story about students taking climate-related action. Talk about the kind of teaching that contributed to students taking this action. Who is the person and what did the person learn from this?

Find someone who had a teaching idea or "aha" while reading *This Changes Everything* or watching the *This Changes Everything* film. Who's the person; what's the idea?

As we anticipated, this was a lively session of idea- and story-sharing—although the mingling part was tough as people wanted to talk through ideas and flesh out lessons.

We followed by looking at several clips of Avi Lewis's forthcoming film, *This Changes Everything*. We wanted to get people thinking in curricular terms—about how they might use parts of the film with their own students—and so gave people model poems and interior monologues that might spark writing ideas. The following poem from Martín Espada was one model we shared with participants:

Jorge the Church Janitor Finally Quits
by Martín Espada³

*No one asks
where I am from,
I must be
from the country of janitors,
I have always mopped this floor.
Honduras, you are a squatter's camp
outside the city
of their understanding.

No one can speak
my name,
I host the fiesta
of the bathroom,
stirring the toilet
like a punchbowl.*

*The Spanish music of my name
is lost
when the guests complain
about toilet paper.*

*What they say
must be true:
I am smart,
but I have a bad attitude.*

*No one knows
that I quit tonight,
maybe the mop
will push on without me,
sniffing along the floor
like a crazy squid
with stringy gray tentacles.

They will call it Jorge.*

Many participants wrote from an especially poignant segment of the film in which Crystal Lameman, a leader of the Beaver Lake Cree First Nations people of Alberta, Canada, attempts to get access to ancestral land where she has heard there had been an oil spill. In the film, we watch as Lameman is patronized by a company official—"I'm sorry. Did I confuse you?"—as he denies her entry to Beaver Lake Cree land.

Retreat participant Alma McDonald, who teaches in Mississippi, wrote her persona poem from Crystal Lameman's point of view:

*I stated my name and made my demand.
I have the right to be here because this is tribal land.

I needed to see the land and put my mind at ease.
So excuse me sir, could you step aside please?

He looked down at me, like I was dirt on his shoes
and had the nerve to ask me, if I was confused.

I was shocked and appalled and highly offended.
How dare he treat me like I'm some dumb Indian?

No, sir I'm not confused. In fact, I see clearly.
We trusted the treaty and it has cost us dearly.*

We said you could use the land to the depth of a plow. But you decided to claim ownership, and screw us somehow.

Am I confused? No, not in the least. We didn't give you the deed. You only signed a lease.

17,000 ways you've violated our trust. And now we're Idle no more and demand you hear us.

Participants then shared their poems and monologues in small groups and some volunteered—or were volunteered—to read theirs to the full group. “It was a simple, yet powerful exercise,” said Mark Hansen, co-director of the Oregon Writing Project, and one of the leaders of the small group sessions. “We continued the process of getting to know one another, but also helped teachers imagine how they might use part of the film with students—it moved the group into ‘thinking in the language of curriculum.’”

In previous *Rethinking Schools* writing retreats, the transition from brainstorming to writing was somewhat more straightforward. Most teachers came with definite article ideas and the facilitators’ task was to draw those out in story. But early in this writing retreat, we discovered that Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything* had led most people to rethink their own curricula, and people came less wanting to write about teaching they had already done than to construct new curriculum based on the book and the film, which participants had previewed prior to the retreat. Of course, we had urged people to come to the retreat with ideas about articles or curriculum that they might want to write about, but we knew that *This Changes Everything*, well, changed everything. People were evaluating their curriculum in terms of Klein’s analysis and imagining curricular approaches that could “translate” this analysis for their students. All at the same time.

We asked people to write about what they intended to work on during the retreat. As facilitators, we shared some of our own curriculum ideas, hoping to offer examples for ways to link aspects of the book and film with imaginative and participatory teaching strategies. At this early stage of writing, we were looking for an exploration into new curriculum. Participants could describe something in the book or film that they wanted to bring to life for students. They could tell a story about how they had approached the climate crisis with their students, or how they had taught about capitalism, “extractivism,” or the new “blockadia” movements, as Klein dubs them, which are resisting the commodification of nature.

Teacher-writers shared these write-ups in small groups after dinner—we wrote or met each day until at least 9 pm—and group members offered one another careful political and curricular feedback, all of which seeded writing for the rest of the three days. The remainder of our time together was spent writing and honing both articles and curriculum. We had no expectation that everyone would complete a polished draft over the weekend, but we intended for people to get a running start on curriculum that they could teach and that could be turned into articles with support from *Rethinking Schools* editors in the months following the retreat.

We have been inspired by the diversity and depth of articles and curriculum that participants are working on. Some of these include:

—In creating her role play on “Island Blockadia,” Portland teacher and *Rethinking Schools* editorial associate Moé Yonamine, has assembled a remarkable collection of stories from Pacific Island activists describing the impact of climate change and imperialism—including Okinawa, where Yonamine was born and still has family—but also people’s resistance. One role from the point of view of Samoan activist, Koreti Tiumalu describes her work challenging, in particular, Australia’s promotion of coal:

Thirty activists took part in the Pacific Climate Warriors tour to build and transport traditional canoes to Australia. This was symbolic because we were trying to show that our Pacific Island communities have been living sustainably off the land for generations and yet we are now the ones being affected by climate change. We want to share our traditional knowledge of our warrior history to help guide all of us in stopping the destruction of our islands today—to use traditional skills and knowledge as a way to tell that story. We picked Australia because Australia is considered a “big brother” to the Pacific. It makes no sense that our big brother is not contributing to the preservation of our Pacific Island nations, but rather is the biggest exporter of coal in the Pacific. I think most Australians must not know how much impact the coal industry has on our Pacific Islands. Because if they did, I believe they would demand climate justice for the whole region.

Yonamine’s role play centers around a “Pacific Island Forum” to discuss the effects of climate change, militarism, and imperialism on Island peoples and to fashion demands of the so-called “big brother” nations of Australia and New Zealand, as well as the broader international community.

—Rosa Rivera Furumoto is writing about her work with about 25 Latina *promotoras*, all mothers, mostly immigrants, in the San Fernando Valley in southern California, to nurture consciousness and activism around climate change and capitalism. As Furumoto describes, the women “serve as a liaison between community members and other organizations and service providers, similar to the health *promotora* model often used in Latin America.” Furumoto writes about how she is striving to incorporate families’ cultural values and traditions into the work. She writes: “Our idea is that when you reach the mother you reach the entire family, as she is the heart or center in most Latina/o families.”

—New York City teacher Rosie Frascella is teaching and writing about her blending of Klein’s description of “sacrifice zones” with the Black Lives Matter movement: “*This Changes Everything* highlights the extreme risks connected to extreme energy. She writes, ‘Running an economy on energy sources that release poisons as an unavoidable part of their extraction and refining has always required sacrifice zones—whole subsets of humanity

categorized as less than fully human, which made their poisoning in the name of progress somehow acceptable.’ This idea of a sacrifice zone not only applies to the extraction of resources in the energy sector, but in the entire capitalist and private sector. We see examples of sacrifice zones when it comes to over-policing, emergency responses to natural disasters, and other forms of public ‘safety.’” Frascella’s curriculum introduces a series of “sacrifice zones” and asks students to reflect on critical questions: Who lives there? Who doesn’t? What is being sacrificed? Who benefits from the sacrifice? She focuses on the corporate media’s portrayal of sacrifice zones and counter-narratives missing from the corporate media but articulated by grassroots organizations.

Once these lessons have been tested in classrooms they will be available to other teachers to use and adapt; some will be published in *Rethinking Schools* magazine and posted on the *This Changes Everything* and Zinn Education Project websites.

In March three retreat participants from New York



CHILDREN AT THE PEOPLE’S CLIMATE CHANGE MARCH, SEPTEMBER 21, 2014, NYC. PHOTO: LEONARD VOGT

presented a “Teaching *This Changes Everything*” workshop at the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCORE) conference. The workshop was full and enthusiastically received by a mix of student teachers, newer teaching graduates, and veteran radicals, again demonstrating the demand for curriculum with a strong economic and political analysis and for tools to explore and teach these concepts in the classroom. This gathering was followed up by a day-long workshop for activists and teachers in Brooklyn, focused around activities included in *A People’s Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis*, and which included excerpts from the forthcoming film, *This Changes Everything*.

Later this year similar workshops will be held at the annual *National Council for the Social Sciences* (NCSS) conference and other education gatherings. We hope that this partnership and the teaching resources that this network of teachers creates become part of the curriculum conversation, both to put tools into hands of students who will be living through the intense impacts of the climate crisis and to challenge the narrow curriculum about

environment and economic issues currently available in classrooms across the United States and Canada.

We are committed to working with teachers to create materials that encourage solutions-oriented thinking in their classrooms. One fundamental problem with the curricular enterprise of the Koch brothers and corporate textbook giants like Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and Pearson is that the corporate project requires ideological obfuscation. Textbooks like *Modern World History* fail to help students think systemically, and to name the role of the capitalist system in pushing the climate crisis forward. The texts may talk in terms of the role of “industrialized nations” and “developing countries,” but they fail to mention, let alone interrogate, the nature of the global economic system. By contrast, the curriculum that the partnership between *Rethinking Schools*, Zinn Education Project, and *This Changes Everything* is developing aims explicitly to equip students to recognize the underlying ideas and impacts of the choices that confront humanity as we seek solutions to the climate crisis.



As Rosie Frascella demonstrates through her lessons with her students, our curriculum needs to ask whose land and lives fall into the sacrifice zones of global capitalism and why? How does the regime of neoliberalism affect the rise of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and what alternative ideology is needed to rein in greenhouse gas emissions? By providing students with the tools to understand and critique how and why decisions are made, how power works and is wielded, and how change can happen, we hope to contribute to building a more engaged populace, better armed to confront the impacts of climate change.

Climate change and capitalism are complex and contested systems with vast spin surrounding their definitions and impacts, not to mention the sometimes wonky nature of the economic and scientific language used to explore them. This complexity can make them daunting for both educators and students to approach. This is further reflected in the lack of adequate responses, in inertia, and in denial of climate change more broadly in society. Starting from an exploration of the values and

decisions that are driving the global response to climate change we hope that students can start to explore how power in our economic and political systems works—and doesn't work. By working with teachers to create lessons inspired by *This Changes Everything* that can unpack the philosophy, values, and stories behind the science and these systems it is our hope that we can make them more accessible as it is so critical that these ideas are in our classrooms.

At our Menucha writing retreat in December, we held a Skype conversation with Naomi Klein, who joked that one response she gets in her presentations is, "Climate change was already a heavy lift. Did you have to go and make it about capitalism, too?!" It's a question teachers might ask ourselves: Teaching climate change is not sufficiently daunting, we also have to investigate capitalism? But if the role of education—especially *radical* education—is to get to root causes of problems, and to use that inquiry to reflect on genuine and fundamental solutions, then we are led inexorably to the nature of our economic system. And, as Klein argues, it is not as if the current economic system is currently working for the vast majority of people. Connecting these two crises might just be the way to truly face up to and transform them.

And we can do this in ways that are playful, participatory, and not the least bit preachy. For example, an activity included in *A People's Curriculum for the Earth* focuses on La Vía Campesina, the world's largest social movement, which unites 164 peasant and farm organizations from 73 countries, with a combined membership of more than 200 million. (Good luck finding a single mention of La Vía Campesina in any mainstream textbook.) A role play that features six constituent La Vía Campesina organizations helps students articulate a critique of the market-driven approach of the WTO, Monsanto and other agribusiness corporations, the United States and G7 governments, the World Bank/IMF, et al., and to imagine alternatives grounded in global solidarity, agroecology, and local and democratic cooperation. In the role play, students enact the La Vía Campesina maxim of "no negotiation without mobilization" and create manifestos, slogans, and posters challenging the entire neoliberal approach to food and farming. One poster from the Mozambican Peasant Union (UNAC) during a recent role play summed up the La Vía Campesina approach: "Food for the Many, Not for the Money." The activity's writing debrief explicitly asks students how their La Vía Campesina "program" addresses a range of issues—from public health to global inequality to forced migration to climate change. These connections are easy for students to make because they have *experienced* them in class, through connecting with other La Vía Campesina organizations, and directly confronting the export-driven, privatized, techno-approaches of agribusiness and G7 governments.

In activities like this, students can explore the dynamics of capitalism—and challenges to capitalism—not through dry economics texts, or abstract discussions about capitalism vs. socialism, but through classroom activities that bring these dynamics to life.

Of course, as always, teachers need to read the political context of their particular school and school district to decide which activities make sense to use with their students. The suffocating test-and-punish regime in schools—especially the new Common Core-aligned SBAC and PARCC tests, whose results are increasingly tied to teacher evaluations—may discourage some teachers from attempting this kind of teaching. But the spring of 2015 was a Spring of Resistance, with widespread student walkouts and opt-outs from standardized tests, and a revival of teachers insisting that we have the right to teach about what matters in the world and in our students' lives. And the vitality of grassroots curriculum exchanges—e.g., the San Francisco Teachers 4 Social Justice, Milwaukee's Educators Network for Social Justice, the New York Collective of Radical Educators, the Northwest Teaching for Social Justice conference, Free Minds/Free People, and many more—make this a good time to critique the biases of the official curriculum and promote alternatives.

At our Menucha writing retreat in December, we held a Skype conversation with Naomi Klein, who joked that one response she gets in her presentations is, "Climate change was already a heavy lift. Did you have to go and make it about capitalism, too?!" It's a question teachers might ask ourselves: Teaching climate change is not sufficiently daunting, we also have to investigate capitalism? But if the role of education—especially radical education—is to get to root causes of problems, and to use that inquiry to reflect on genuine and fundamental solutions, then we are led inexorably to the nature of our economic system.

When we say "this changes everything," we mean that in terms of the kind of curriculum that will help students probe the causes and consequences of the climate crisis. But we also mean it with respect to the relationships we must build between educators and activists. The collaboration between *This Changes Everything, Rethinking Schools*, and the Zinn Education Project is one gesture in that direction. As educators, we need to draw on the insights and experiences of on-the-ground "blockadia" activists, whose resistance is giving us a fighting chance to reorient the world away from fossil fuels and toward equality. As activists, we need to reach out to the educators who will equip young people with the scientific, analytic, and activist tools that will allow them to join the movement for climate justice even before they leave school.

Naomi Klein observes that "the movement we need is already in the streets; in the courts; in the classrooms; even in the halls of power—we just need to find each

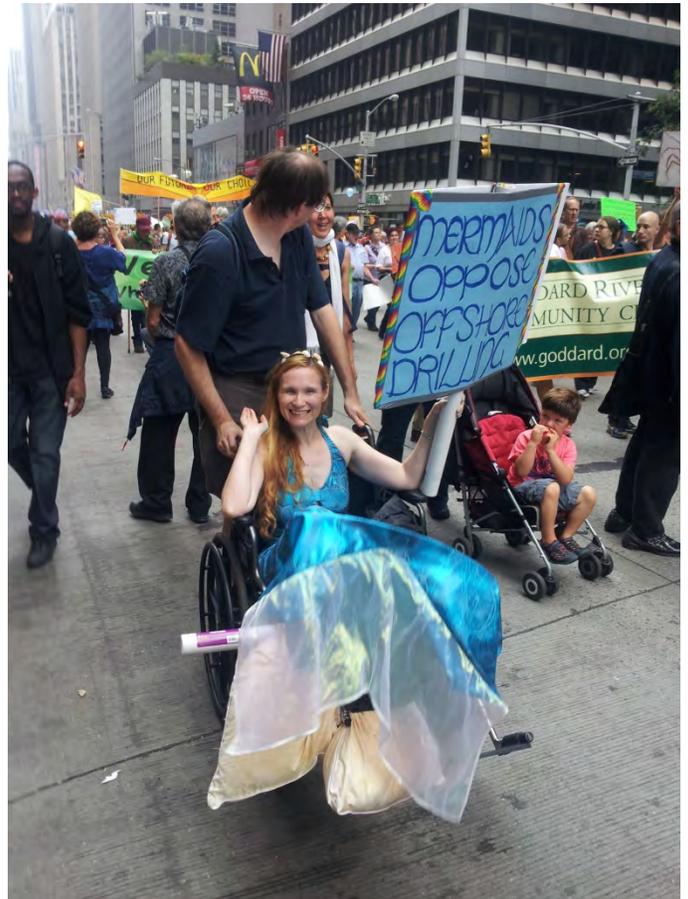
other. One way or another, everything is going to change. And for a brief time, the nature of that change is still up to us.” We hope our collaboration contributes to this critical movement.

NOTES

¹Founded in 1986, *Rethinking Schools* is a quarterly magazine and publisher with a mandate to inspire and inform critical teaching for social justice. Some of the organization’s influential books include *Rethinking Columbus*; *Rethinking Our Classrooms*; *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*; *Rethinking Mathematics*; and the latest on environmental justice themes, *A People’s Curriculum for the Earth*. In 2007, at the initiation of historian-activist Howard Zinn and a former student of Zinn’s, *Rethinking Schools* partnered with the nonprofit Teaching for Change to launch the Zinn Education Project, an online resource that today provides almost 50,000 teachers with more than a hundred free “outside the textbook” history lessons. Inspired by the success of the Zinn Education Project, the team behind *This Changes Everything* reached out to *Rethinking Schools* and Teaching for Change to develop a similar partnership. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014) is the most recent book by renowned Canadian journalist and activist Naomi Klein (*No Logo, The Shock Doctrine*), with a companion documentary film by Avi Lewis (*The Take*) to be released in late 2015.

²Likely because of critical articles in *Rethinking Schools*, this line was omitted in the 2012 edition—too late for the tens of thousands of students throughout the country who use earlier editions—but the rest of the awful three paragraphs remains.

³From *Rebellion Is The Circle of a Lover’s Hands* (Poems), by Martín Espada (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Books, 1990). Reprinted with permission of the author.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



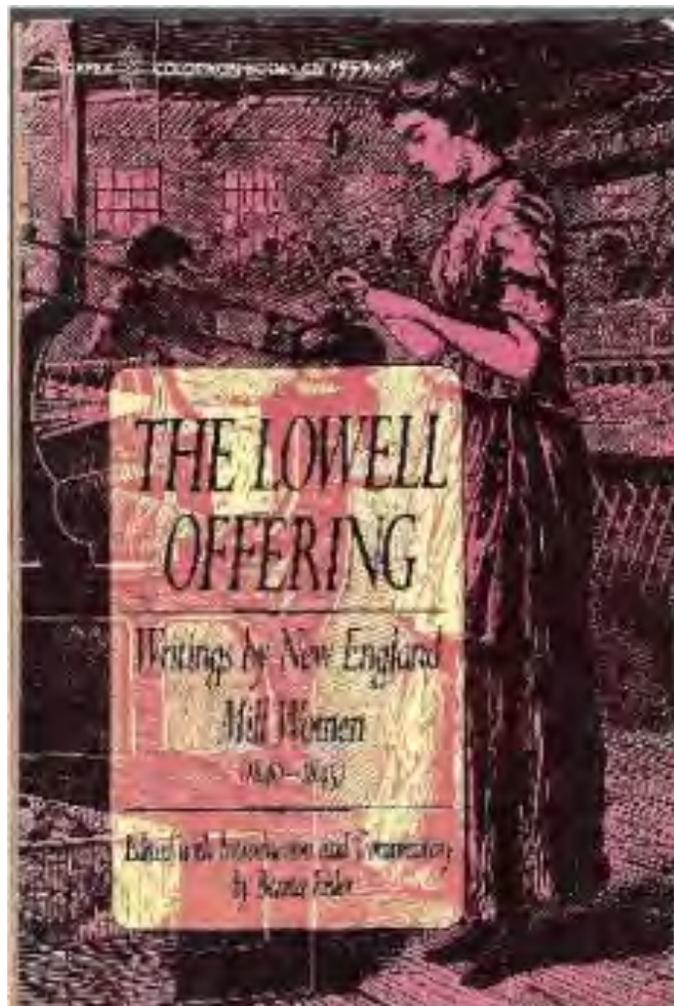
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Post-Feminist Puritanism: Teaching (and Learning from) *The Lowell Offering* in the 21st Century

by Sara Appel



In my first semester as a postdoc in the English department at the University of Pittsburgh, I taught an elective course called Women's Work: Gender and Labor in U.S. Literature and Culture to a group of 21 women undergraduates. Apparently the inclusion of both "women" and "gender" in the title was enough to scare off any potential male takers of a class that, inspired by texts like Josephine L. Baker's "A Second Peep at Factory Life" and Herman Melville's "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," I'd designed as a literary-conceptual "walking tour" of places where women work. A unit called "In the Office" featured episodes of *Mad Men* as well as Tess Slesinger's "The Mouse-Trap," a 1935 short story about a secretary torn between an office affair

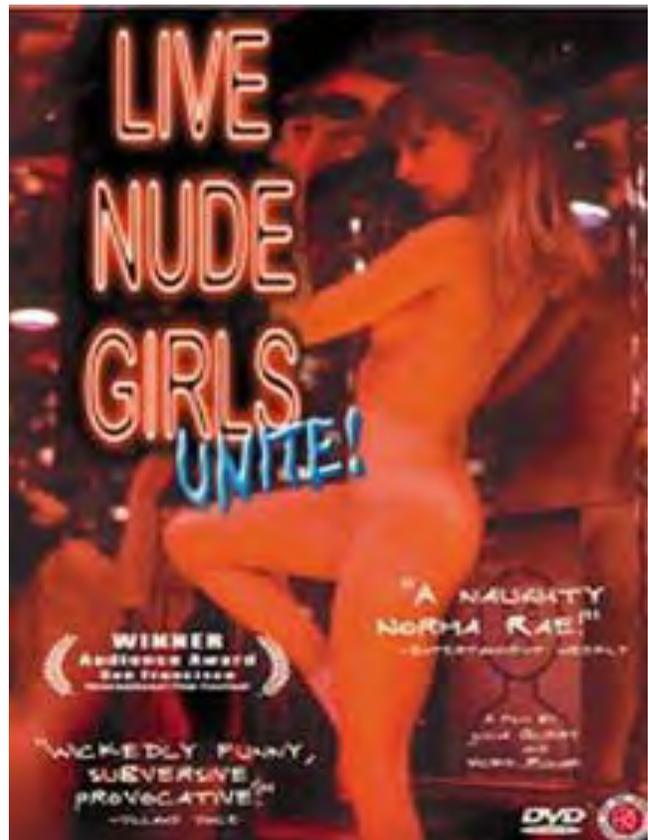


and a strike; in my unit on sex work, "In the Club, Between the Sheets," we read *Rent Girl*, Michele Tea's memoir about working as a prostitute in the early 1990's, and watched *Live Nude Girls Unite!*, which documents the unionization of San Francisco's Lusty Lady peep show club.

Given such provocative tourist destinations, I was a bit surprised by my students' especially enthusiastic reception of *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women*, the primary text I'd assigned for "In the Factory." This volume compiles a number of the most significant contributions to *The Lowell Offering*, a grassroots monthly magazine featuring short stories, opinion pieces, and other literary "offerings" by women who worked in the Lowell, Massachusetts textile mills in the 1840's. Though factory work was not an occupation that my (mostly) middle class-

raised college students had in mind for themselves—a science-oriented bunch, at least half were planning on careers in medicine, dentistry, engineering, and environmental studies—they were nonetheless able to relate, in an intimate way, to what volume editor and historian Benita Eisler calls the "transformation of farm girl into factory operative" that grants the *Offering* its narrative momentum and literary-historical importance (43).

Considering the kind of transformations that *Offering* writers focused on in their accounts of mill work and everyday life in the city, perhaps it isn't so surprising that my students felt a sense of transhistorical kinship with a cohort of New England farm girls drawn to the mills by as much as \$3.00 a week—wages that, when the Lowell "experiment" in feminized factory labor began its brief run,



were the highest paid to women workers anywhere in the United States (15). The excitement of encountering a sea of potential new friends, who "thickened and swarmed around me, until I was almost dizzy," in the dining hall or dorms; hitting the streets for shopping, meetings, or simply to size up the latest fashion trends; resenting the work itself, when socializing seems like a far more compelling way to spend one's time: my 18-22 year-old female college students easily saw their own lives reflected in such experiences, and admired the factory operatives all the more for the proto-feminist "breaking away" from farm fathers that granted their mass pilgrimage to the mills a subversive edge.

Indeed, the Lowell workers *were* impressive, perhaps especially so to young women who tend to emphasize

socioeconomic independence and “self-improvement” goals in their contemporary sense of what it means to be a feminist. With traveling Lyceum lectures featuring speakers as distinguished as Ralph Waldo Emerson, regular evening and Sunday School classes, and access to as many novels as they could stomach—not to mention the international literary acclaim showered on *The Lowell Offering* and its respected editors, including the especially shrewd, business-minded Harriett Farley (herself a former factory girl)—the mill women arguably exhibited a “Lean In” style feminist ethos more characteristic of ambitious 21st century college students than most other laboring classes of the time.¹ As one of my students admired in class, “Being a woman, I view these women as courageous, to break the norms of society in order to do something more ‘successful’.”

Consciously capitalist or not, several other students made statements equating progress in women’s rights with the individual right to “make something of oneself,” or feel “productive.” Indeed, so strong was my students’ assumption that social productivity and self-worth go hand-in-hand that, when I asked them to reflect on the relationship between work and dignity in light of Herman Melville’s thoughts on the issue—“They talk of the dignity of work. Bosh... the true dignity is in leisure,” he once quipped²—they appeared to channel Ben Franklin’s ghost. Several expressed a strong belief that there is a right and wrong way to spend one’s leisure time, and that the relative dignity of leisure depends on how work-time is spent. “Free time is not dignified if you’re not working hard enough at work,” one commented—an assumption that many immaterial and information-oriented professions, including academia, rely on to guarantee workers’ self-policing of their on and off-the-clock time. Another student was especially vehement on this issue: “There is nothing dignified about a (woman) spending her leisure time drinking or daydreaming, for she has to put her skills into something productive,” she insisted. Yet another felt that leisure time was best spent “volunteering, or enjoying friends and family,” committing one’s time to more-or-less selfless pursuits.

But it wasn’t so much this kind of predictable worship at the altar of neoliberal productivity that caused me to feel a few pangs of disappointment in my students; it was more that most of them took an individualistic rather than social approach to our discussion of dignity. Even while studying a text concerned with legions of women who were compelled to work 12-hour days with only Sundays off—many of whom voiced their desire to be treated more equitably as *group* of laborers—my students appeared to exhibit little sense of either these women or *themselves* as a collective entity. In that respect, their reactions readily exemplified what sociologist Kathi Weeks has discussed as the relationship between the privatization of work (where a job becomes a task to be performed for a wage or salary according to private corporate imperatives) and the internalization of work as an individual, depoliticized experience (3-4). Due further, I would argue, to the emphasis throughout college on readying oneself for entry into the “work force” through personally chosen majors, classes, and professionalizing opportunities, my students’

imagination of work rarely extends beyond a consideration of their own futures. They see themselves as individuals doing or not doing things “successfully” according to the capitalist status quo, not a group inclined to question the desirability and viability of a system that they tend to view in as ahistorical of terms as their admiration for hard-working, industrious 19th century women.

Be that as it may, however, it was less difficult than one might expect for my students to take a critically reflective step back from such myopia. Several readily brought a class-conscious eye to their analyses—notably a few women of color, and two white women who openly claimed working-class backgrounds—and they could generally provoke the rest of the class to consider our texts and topics from more systemic perspectives. In her discussion board response to our conversation about dignity, one student zeroed in on the perhaps disproportionate gratitude with which an *Offering* short-story character announces that the three hours between the end of the work day and the girls’ boarding house curfew are “all our own.” “(The girl) puts those three hours on a pedestal,” she commented, “as though they are a gift, not a right.” Another student defined dignity, in light of the mill women’s reality, as “the feeling of worth one gets after receiving a paycheck.” She easily saw the materialist connection between the dignity of work and compensation for the labor expended; moreover, she elaborated, “The only dignity (the women) truly possess lies in the opportunity for a wage provided by these grueling factories, away from the unpaid and mandatory gender labor they already perform on a daily basis.”

Indeed, the Lowell workers were impressive, perhaps especially so to young women who tend to emphasize socioeconomic independence and “self-improvement” goals in their contemporary sense of what it means to be a feminist.

This last, especially astute point further complicates what I perceived to be my students’ general sense of *The Lowell Offering* as a proto-feminist text with a “post-feminist” vibe that they found familiar. Considering the “unpaid and mandatory gender labor” that was indeed the quiet backdrop of a mill girl’s working life, I found it especially curious that my 21st century students—young women who, in their near-universal disdain for “slut-shaming” and other contemporary anti-woman sentiments, would hardly seem to harbor values one might call puritan—so often reserved their deepest respect for the women represented as especially “virtuous” by *Offering* writers. Heavily influenced by a corporate rhetorical machine intent on convincing farmers that their daughters would be safe and remain “unsullied” when exposed to city life, the image of the mid-19th century mill girl was the ultimate amalgamation of puritanical norms that dictated what it meant to be both the ideal woman *and* wage laborer. Preferring to hire women culled from what Eisler

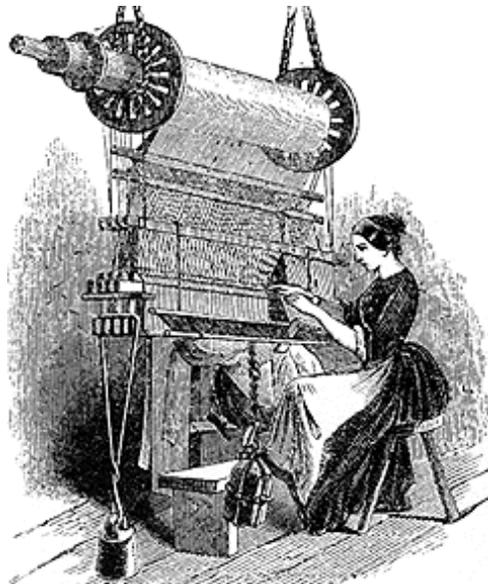
describes as “the dismally paid ranks of rural schoolteachers,” factory owners were quick to portray themselves as benevolent paternalists dedicated to “making a contribution to public morality” by assembling, as one mill owner put it, “a fund of labor, well-educated and virtuous” (16). A worthy operative would not only exhibit qualities associated with explicitly feminine virtue—chastity, meekness, a devotion to family, etc.—but qualities that I would argue rendered the Lowell women, as women, an especially vulnerable version of the “good,” properly exploitable wage laborer to which Max Weber has ascribed a range of characteristics known as the Protestant work ethic: a commitment to relentless, duty-bound work; an ascetic rejection of worldly pleasures and desires; a disdain for idleness; and, as the quality most often celebrated by both *Offering* writers and my students, a spirit of uncomplaining self-sacrifice.

Ever aware that any significant disruption of this image could result in a loss of corporate and public support for their magazine, *Offering* editors and writers took pains to protect it in their literary fashioning of factory operative “characters” (whether fictional or journalistic); yet they also pushed the envelope where they could, with writers like Sarah Bagley and Josephine L. Baker producing exposé-style descriptions of factory life containing both subtly sardonic and (less often) direct critiques of, as Baker put it, “the present system of labor” (Eisler 81).³ But despite the important political work being done by these and other women labor agitators (including Bagley’s involvement in the Ten Hour Movement, the national campaign for a maximum ten-hour work day), the majority of my students remained less interested than I’d hoped they would be in exploring such aspects of the workers’ experiences in their engagement with the *Offering* defaulting in the final analysis to praising the “positive attitudes” they saw reflected in melodramatic representations of weary yet ever-cheerful girls slaving away at the mills to pay the mortgage on an imperiled family home or keep a younger brother in school.⁴

For sure, factory owners’ initial interest in acquiring a female labor force involved nothing more benevolent than the bottom line. Fearing that the waves of proletarian revolt consuming European factories might tsunami across the Atlantic (and inflict damage on profit margins), Lowell entrepreneurs saw the acquisition of women workers as a way to circumvent having to raise wages and improve working conditions for men. They could pay women half as much, and package their innovative approach to labor as an exciting new opportunity for both independence-minded women and their struggling farm families—a move that additionally provided fresh faces and eager, ready-to-work attitudes when the increasingly questionable “character” of

U.S. industrial capitalism required some damage control. Lowell therefore emerges as a moment where an especially ironic light can be cast on the bitter coupling of feminism with capitalism. A desire for agency, self-sufficiency, and escape from the yoke of farm and fathers led industrious young women straight into the arms of factory fathers who would insist every bit as much, if not more, on a one-to-one correlation between feminine virtue and sacrifice for the “greater good” of corporate enterprise.

Considering this, the celebration of self-sacrifice as virtue by my women students raises questions about the nature of women’s work, voiced from a distant yet palpably present past, in a so-called post-feminist present that many of them take to be a given. How do my students, themselves on the verge of entering the “work force,” view their own relationship to the self-sacrificial spirit demanded of those who would perform “unpaid and mandatory gendered labor” as a 19th-century prerequisite to being a 21st century woman worker—whatever her wages, salary, or lack thereof? Drawing from the perhaps perverse coupling of two texts that I also assigned in my Women’s Work class—Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg’s bestseller *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* and bell hooks’ classic essay “Rethinking the Nature of Work”—I will spend the remainder of this essay exploring how my students’ ambivalent reactions to *The Lowell Offering* can help us better understand the concept of post-feminism in a world where capitalist productivity imperatives remain intrinsically tied to conservative gender norms. How might the “vibe” of familiarity that my students picked up on between their own experiences and those of the Lowell women speak to the difficulty of defining post-feminism and assessing its value as an idea that assumes we are now “beyond” the need for a social justice framework to address gender inequality? Despite a lived and felt understanding of the ways that women have been exploited within our own patriarchal-capitalist reality and realities of the past, the young women of Women’s Work exhibited a lingering ideological investment in the same traditionally feminine “virtues” that render women workers especially in danger of unjust use as laborers.



DRAWING OF A MILL GIRL AT WORK COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

To What Must We “Get Accustomed”?

One of our most provocative classroom discussions of *The Lowell Offering* involved thinking about what it might mean for women to “get accustomed” to exploitative working conditions. In the second of four fictionalized “Letters from Susan,” recently hired factory operative Susan describes the immediate, damaging effects of mill work on her own body. “When I went out into the night,

the sound of the mill was in my ears, as of crickets," she writes to a friend back home, also mentioning more long-term damage inflicted on other girls: "The right hand, which is the one used in starting and stopping the loom, becomes larger than the left" (Eisler 52). That said, after complaining about her swollen, aching feet and how most workers have to "procure shoes a size or two larger than when they came" after a year or two in the mill, Susan quickly adds, "but I suppose I shall get accustomed to that, too." My students cringed at seeing the deforming nature of this work described in such plain prose. However, in a move that exemplifies what Eisler has called "the peculiarly American desire to ignore the unpleasant" (215), they were more inclined to praise the girls for their resilience and positive attitude in the face of the need to grow "accustomed" to such conditions than interrogate *why* the sacrifice of workers' bodily integrity was integral to the factory system.

***Consciously capitalist or not,
several other students made
statements equating progress in
women's rights with the individual
right to "make something of
oneself," or feel "productive."***

One student characterized Susan's tendency to point out the disadvantages of factory work as a form of "self-pity," emphasizing instead the sunnier side of her letters: "She is proud and happy when she remembers her hard work will pay off in the end." In her discussion board response to "The Affectations of Factory Life," a short story that leaves its mill worker protagonist on her death bed presumably due to the emotional stress involved in covering for her brother's secret class-passing behavior (he's in love with a rich girl) and subjecting herself to suspicion of being a "wicked girl" during his covert visits to her boarding house (Eisler 92), another student praised the sister's behavior as "self-sacrificial and commendable"; she added, "(This story) could be used to demonstrate the strength of women." Considering such sentiments, I had to wonder: were my students locating the mill women's "strength" in their ability to adapt to less-than-ideal working conditions *in spite of* the exploitative conditions to which they were continually subject—to endure work that was nonetheless often essential for their survival and that of their families? Or did they find more inspiration in the women's willingness to smile through *rather than* confront various forms of everyday violence—to not only take on the "unpaid and mandatory gender labor" involved in protecting a lying brother's reputation, but to do so happily, at the behest of the virtue that was a less-than-wealthy 19th century woman's only real form of currency?

Though her self-proclaimed "feminist manifesto" encouraging careerist women to "Lean In" to the male-dominated corporate business world may seem to share little generic affinity with a deathbed eulogy to the "sweet silent influence" of a consumptive sister (Eisler 92), Sheryl Sandberg ultimately sacrifices her own critique of the sexist culture she experiences, advising women that

getting "accustomed" or accommodating themselves to dehumanization is still a necessary prerequisite to the success they seek. Sandberg, like my students, is outraged over the "double-bind" many women find themselves in regarding the issue of career success and likability. Successful (read: self-interested) women are not well liked, it seems, while women who "care too much about being liked" are not seen as strong leaders (Sandberg 40-44). And yet, Sandberg's advice to women attempting to "negotiate" higher salaries and more senior positions sounds like something out of a charm school textbook. In addition to advising women to downplay their agency in seeking promotions—going so far as to tell them to "suggest that someone more senior encouraged the negotiation" so as not to give the impression that she came up with the idea *all on her own*—Sandberg, allegedly at the behest of University of Michigan president Mary Sue Coleman, recommends a "relentlessly pleasant" negotiating formula: "This method requires smiling frequently, expressing appreciation and concern, invoking common interests, emphasizing larger goals . . . (Women) need to stay focused . . . and smile" (47-48).

Sandberg advocates a performance of the kind of "mandatory" gendered labor that both my keen student and sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild understand to be an essentialized component of women's on-the-job success. Whether attached to a wage or not, smiling is a form of affective labor that women have been historically conditioned to perform as purveyors of pleasantries.⁵ Sandberg's advice additionally underscores how self-sacrificial behavior is assimilated to capitalist imperatives that have little to do with whether or not a woman worker benefits. "Common interests" and "larger goals" comprise a success that, Sandberg continues, "feels better when shared with others" (48). Just as patriarchal norms turned the Lowell sister's sacrifice of her virtue into (ironically) a virtuous act on behalf of the "greater good" of a family in which her brother's humanity assumes a privileged status, capitalism realizes that it can extract more surplus labor when a woman's other-orientation is co-opted on behalf of its own interests, under the guise of high praise for caring more about "the team" than oneself. Aware of the anti-feminist core of what she advises, Sandberg nevertheless forces herself to assume a literary "smile," projecting a front of empty positivity in her writing: "My hope, of course, is that we won't have to play by these archaic rules forever and that eventually we can all just be ourselves," she offers blandly, with no genuine attempt to flesh out changes that may be necessary for such a hope to be realized (49). Sandberg's complacent acceptance of the "women's work" required of her to be successful in corporate business raises further concerns as I think about what awaits my ambitious, millennial women students in their quest for career "success"—a vague concept that they, like Sandberg, throw around with aplomb, assuming its definition to be self-evident. Whether expressed in plastered-on smiles or deformed hands, to what forms of everyday discrimination and damage will they, like Sandberg and the Lowell women, find themselves "getting accustomed" in order to weather the systemic abuses of contemporary capitalism? And will such adaptability be worth it?

Never one for false positivity, bell hooks has also taken Sandberg to task for peddling a brand of “neoliberal feminism” or “faux feminism” that both refrains from challenging the patriarchal capitalist status quo in any meaningful way and elides issues of race, class, and education in its presentation of a careerist “corporate fantasy world” as accessible to all women who want it badly enough. hooks’ October 2008 blog discussion of Sandberg’s influence on contemporary feminism is especially relevant to a consideration of how women’s “unpaid and mandatory gender labor” continues to serve as an insidious means to ensure that paternalistic corporate brotherhood remains as in tact as ever (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/10/17973/>). Confirming hooks’ insistence that the author of *Lean In* “comes across . . . as a lovable younger sister who just wants to play on the big brother’s team” rather than a “manifesto” instigator capable of motivating “white males in a corporate environment to change their belief system,” part of Sandberg’s project (like that of the consumptive Lowell sister) also involves insulating her many male “mentors”—including Mark Zuckerberg and Larry Summers—from complicity in their maintenance of the same heterosexist business culture that she claims women can change by just “leaning in” more deeply. Summers is never portrayed as anything other than a fatherly, generous advisor; and Zuckerberg, despite being years her junior, is treated with further cringe-inducing deference by Sandberg, who perhaps does practice what she preaches (*act like someone else suggested it!*) by ascribing a number of her most significant “Aha!” moments to his wizened advice rather than her own reflections.⁶ Indeed, if Sandberg’s project reveals anything, it’s that her brand of “neoliberal feminism” and what millennials have come to think of as post-feminism are one and the same beast. As hooks points out, Sandberg assumes no responsibility to understand or even acknowledge the entire history of visionary feminist thinking and collective struggle preceding her adoption of the term (*feminist*), a move allowing her to re-brand feminism as merely a project whereby individual women with the will to “rise” adopt strategies to insinuate themselves into the ever-in-tact boy’s club of worldly power and influence. Feminist liberation, for Sandberg, is nothing more than a woman’s ability to actualize “personal fulfillment”—an issue that recalls my students’ tendency to reserve more admiration for the Lowell women who expressed accounts of such fulfillment rather than those inclined to lodge complaints against the factory system (the sullen “self-pitiers”).

But despite her more sophisticated understanding of feminism as a project that ends only with the dismantling of the “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” essentialized assumptions about feminine virtue have crept their way into hooks’ discussion of work as well. In “Rethinking the Nature of Work,” hooks asserts that the uncoupling of work from wages is a necessary part of rendering work a more liberatory activity. Her discussion of why a “wages for housework” campaign will never increase the social value of service jobs remains convincing: if care and service work performed for a wage *outside* the home is already treated as all but valueless in capitalist societies, she provokes us to ask, why would we assume that such

work performed for pay *inside* the home would be any more valued? (102) However, her insistence (via the anonymous authors of *Women and the New World*) that we should not “put a price on activities which should fulfill human needs” requires examination in light of my students’ admiration for literary characters who are depicted as the *best* kind of women workers when they put “human needs” before any selfish (or *masculine*) concerns with “price.”

Significantly, perhaps the best place to turn to flesh out such observations—especially in light of Sandberg’s suggested negotiating strategies for women attempting to “get ahead” in male-dominated careers—is to the fourth of fictional Lowell operative Susan’s letters to Mary, her friend back home. The voice of this letter is remarkably different from Susan’s second, where she acquiesces to “getting accustomed” to the aforementioned bodily deformities and other damages of factory life with as much positivity as she can muster. With a few months of factory work under her belt, Susan now addresses Mary with a tone of detached, discerning wisdom in her evaluation of whether several of their friends—including Mary herself—should consider leaving their farm lives for the factory. The gist of Susan’s advice involves the adoption of a negotiating formula that, though spoken from a time when feminist impulses were assumed to be in their infancy, puts Sandberg’s self-effacing faux feminism to shame. Susan instructs each of her friends (Mary, Hester, Lydia, Miriam and Nancy) to measure, with as much accuracy as possible, whether the situation she has going at home will grant her a higher quality of life than what she could get at the factory—with the determinate of this quality of life being whether the conditions inherent to either place afford her more or less agency, respect, and, ultimately, *dignity* as a person in command of her own destiny (Eisler 60-63).

In an especially intriguing departure from hooks’ sense that capitalist wage labor cannot provide a compelling platform for women’s empowerment, one “negotiating strategy” that Susan suggests for her friend Lydia involves using the very existence of Lowell as an *option* for girls like them as leverage with her father: “(Tell Lydia) to consider all things, and before she decides to leave home, to request her father pay her a standard sum as wages. If he will give her a dollar a week I should advise her to stay with him and her mother” (Eisler 62). For better or worse, Susan’s advice to Lydia—an especially subversive request for “wages for housework” in that it involves a daughter standing up to a father with a viable back-up plan already in place if he denies her what she’s asking—would never have come to pass had Susan not experienced the wage she earned in the factory as significant to her self-becoming. As inadequate a symbol of feminist progress as it may have been in terms of “the powerful’s estimation of the value of (women’s) labor” (hooks 104), this wage nonetheless provoked Susan to contemplate what she and her friends might be worth—that they’re worth, at minimum, *more than nothing*, and more on their *own* terms than what their fathers might claim were the factory option not part of negotiations. Though its opportunities remained firmly entrenched within the limitations of the capitalist system, Lowell presented these young women

with a set of terms that they could call their own; and though the tentacles of factory fathers would exercise their broad, suffocating reach as well, one cannot fail to appreciate the effect that the existence of a wage had on these women's awareness that they were, in fact, worth something. To again borrow my smart student's language, earning a wage clued Susan in to the possibility that the "unpaid and mandatory gendered labor" to which she as well as women like Sandberg had "grown accustomed" need remain neither uncompensated nor mandatory.

Far from representing such a radically progressive turn from the world in which Susan underwent her transformation from naïve farm girl to self-assured negotiator, contemporary discourse around gender, work, and the meaning of feminism continues to be dogged by a puritanical celebration of smiling, selfless women and the sacrifices they make on behalf of paternalistic socioeconomic systems. *Teaching*, today and yesterday, is a perfect example of a profession where selflessness-as-virtue has been incorporated into the exploitation of teachers; those who ask for fair compensation are depicted as degrading a form of work that ideally shouldn't have a "price" attached. Though I'm light on solutions to such problems, I think the best direction for innovative thought on these subjects is in work being done by those like Kathi Weeks, who prods us to question why even the most radically anti-capitalist among us, like hooks, still tend to hold work *itself* up as the most righteous form of human activity. Whether coming at the issue from a political position aligned with dismantling or further entrenching the power of the capitalist patriarchy, both hooks and Sandberg romanticize work as the ultimate force through which their respective vision of feminist empowerment will be accomplished. Yet there may be more of a threat to the capitalist status quo contained in Susan's unsentimental recognition that the various forms of manual, care, and service work she and her friends perform on the farm, as well as the more standardized factory work available in Lowell, are *just work*—an activity with a worth that can be measured and compensated for, not the end-all-be-all of personal satisfaction and creative expression. We may never find liberation in "women's work" unless we are willing to question whether *any* work is truly liberating—or at least uncouple our celebration of work from a moralism *about* work that still pervades.

Works Cited

- Eisler, Benita, ed. *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women (1840-1845)*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998. Print.
- hooks, bell. "Rethinking the Nature of Work." In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984. 96-107. Print.
- Sandberg, Sheryl. *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. Print.
- Weeks, Kathi. *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.

Notes

- ¹ Though many of the Lowell women came to the mills from chronically poor farm families, the backgrounds of a significant number of the farm-girl turned factory-operative workers might better be characterized as petty bourgeoisie than proletariat. To emphasize both real and perceived class differences between the mill women and other working-class laborers—differences that also appear to have something to do with the conflation of U.S. regionalism with gendered and racialized assumptions about certain kinds of "gentile" women—Eisler focuses on the public praise heaped on the women for their New England "refinement," noting how the "first generation of Lowell mill girls was also the last WASP labor force in America" (referring to the girls' eventual replacement by immigrant labor). On marriages that sometimes occurred between woman workers and their male overseers, an operative character from one *Offering* short story concurs with Eisler: "Indeed, in almost all matches here the woman is superior in education and manner, if not in intellect, to her partner" (Eisler 29, 58).
- ² This quote allegedly came from a letter Melville wrote to his cousin Catherine G. Lansing on Sept. 5, 1877. From *Correspondence: The Writings of Herman Melville*. Chicago: Northwestern University Library, 1993. 602-671. Print.
- ³ A few such works by individual *Offering* writers include: Baker's "A Second Peep at Factory Life" (Vol. V, 1845); Bagley's "Pleasures of Factory Life" (Series I, 1840—which snarkily begins, "Pleasures, did you say? What! Pleasures in *factory* life?"); Betsey Chamberlain's "A New Society," an especially powerful manifesto-style, almost utopian call for conditions like an 8-hour work day and "that every father . . . who neglects to give his daughters the same advantages for an education as his sons should be expelled from this society, and be considered a heathen" (Vol. I, 1841); and even some of editor Farley's later writings, where she becomes increasingly frustrated with corporate mistreatment of women operatives, including editorials on "The Ten Hour Movement" and "Two Suicides" (the latter being a scathing indictment of the factory system's culpability in the suicide deaths of two operatives—"Are we guilty?", she asks. Vol. V, 1845; Vol. IV, 1844).
- ⁴ A few stories of this disposition being: Bagley's "Tales of Factory Life, No. 2" (Vol. I, 1841); Farley's "The Affections Illustrated in Factory Life" (Vol. IV, 1843); and an unknown author's "Susan Miller" (Vol. I, 1841).
- ⁵ For more of Hochschild's thoughts on smiling as affective or emotional labor, see "Exploring the Managed Heart," the first chapter of *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1983. 3-23. Print.
- ⁶ In perhaps the most unforgivable of these moments of deference, Sandberg allows Zuckerberg the last words in her chapter on "Success and Likeability," with her own final contribution being little more than a head-nod accompanied by, I'm sure, a pleasant smile: "He said that when you want to change things, you can't please everyone. If you do please everyone, you aren't making progress. Mark was right."



LOWELL, MASS. MILLS
COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



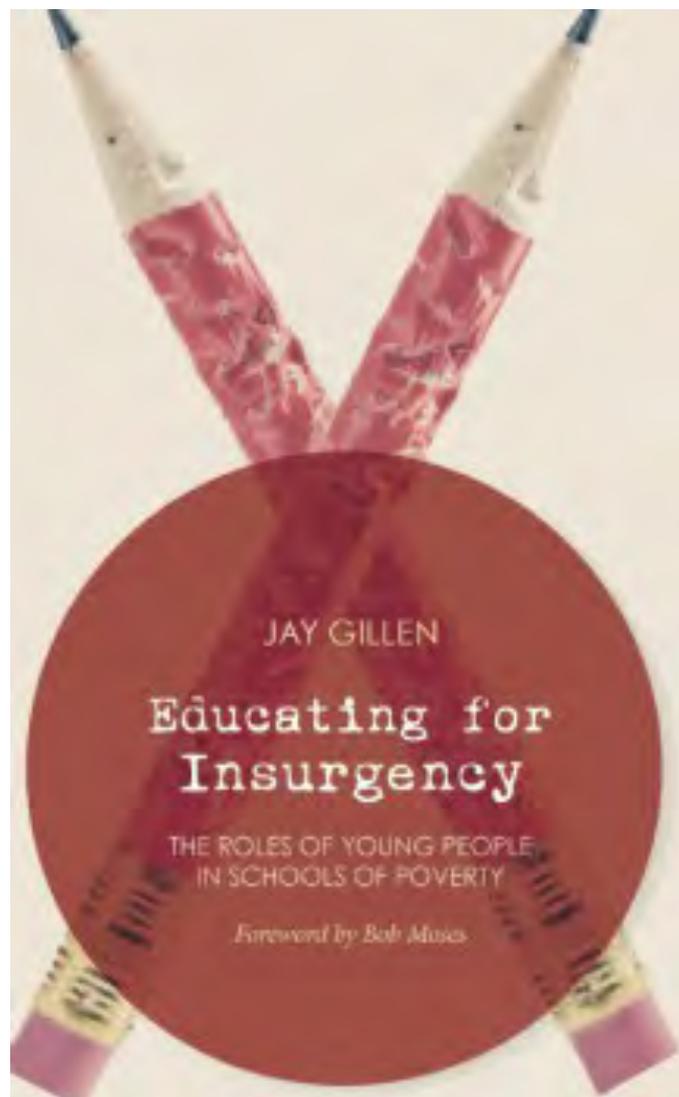
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.press.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review: Educating for Insurgency: The Roles of Young People in Schools of Poverty by Jay Gillen

Reviewed by Paul Lauter



Educating for Insurgency: The Roles of Young People in Schools of Poverty by Jay Gillen (AK Press, 2014)

"I did not enjoy high school much because my work in the Algebra Project taught me that I was not receiving the quality education I deserved. So each day I waited for the bell so I could leave and work in the program, where I learned so much more. I began organizing in high school and was nearly expelled for organizing a student strike. . . . most of my focus in high school was on organizing students to speak out, to demonstrate and demand quality education." —Chris Goodman. ("No Justice No Life: Brian Jones Kicks it with Chris Goodman of the Baltimore Algebra Project," Posted in *Article Link*, August 3, 2009.)

(This review was written three weeks ago, before the events that have made "Baltimore" a symbol of racial tyranny and political malfeasance. It is not, therefore, focused on police violence nor responses to the killing of Freddie Gray and so many other black men. It presents, rather, a project designed to help empower students in schools of poverty—not on the specious theory that educational institutions can by themselves overcome discrimination, marginalization, and poverty, but because schools can, and must, be part of the solution rather than continuing to be part of the problem.)

Much of the debate going on in educational circles today concerns differing ideas about how to accomplish certain agreed-upon goals. Mainly these consist of the 3 R's—reading, riting and rithmatic—with a touch perhaps of American history, whether seen through the lens of Selma or of Mountain View. Some wish to provide teachers with greater scope, better resources, and fewer students in the classroom. Others, the multimillion dollar "reformers," promote a regime of ceaseless testing, managerial authority, privatization, and "teacher-proof" curricula. But suppose you conclude, based on observing the thousands of segregated Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland throughout the United States, that the huge number of students in schools of poverty are ill-served by these very goals, that poor, often black and Latino, students, even if they pass every test and climb in to community colleges, will never—a few tokens aside—get an even break in 21st-century America. What then? Can the goals of schooling themselves be transformed? Can schools become sites not of failure and exclusion, but of insurgency and transformation? Can the young people now marginalized, enraged, and trapped in disastrous institutions become agents of creativity and growth—and real learning?

Such questions lie at the core of Jay Gillen's essential book, *Educating for Insurgency: The Roles of Young People in Schools of Poverty*. I use the full title of Gillen's book because, unlike most of what is being written today, it shifts focus from the adults fighting about schooling to the students themselves as the key actors in their own education. The question Gillen addresses is how might we

think about the ways students can, indeed must, organize themselves, those close to them, and the many others with whom they must contend for a future. His approach is not to address the question always on a teacher's mind—what do I do Monday?—but to propose a theory about how change and education could and already do take place even in, or perhaps especially in, schools of poverty. This book is not a manual for classroom management but a treatise on education, democracy, and hope.

At the center of Gillen's treatise is his and his students' experience with one of the three r's, rithmatic, in the form of the Algebra Project. The Algebra Project was first devised by Bob Moses, a key figure in the efforts of the young organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to challenge and eliminate racial segregation in its most intransigent bastion, Mississippi, in the 1950s and 1960s. The Baltimore version of the Project has been highly successful, even in this society's financial terms: students working in it have earned \$2 million dollars over the last ten years "sharing math knowledge" (p. 140). It has also provided what Gillen calls a "crawl space" wherein students begin to learn how to mobilize the organizational resources necessary to confront the school boards, politicians, and courts that stand in the way of their educational development. Educational and political authorities who see math as vital to 21st-century schooling are willing to provide money, some, to those who succeed in teaching it, and they interfere less with the process. As Gillen puts it, "Math hides the student insurgency as it learns how to walk." In this way it differs from the admirable Mexican-American Studies program in Tucson, which was banned by Arizona lawmakers despite—or perhaps because of—its success in motivating and educating students to confront injustice.

At the center of Gillen's treatise is his and his students' experience with one of the three r's, rithmatic, in the form of the Algebra Project. The Algebra Project was first devised by Bob Moses, a key figure in the efforts of the young organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to challenge and eliminate racial segregation in its most intransigent bastion, Mississippi, in the 1950s and 1960s.

A project seriously devoted to teaching math is insulated against the charge sometimes registered against radical education projects that they are indifferent to students of poverty learning the basics. Mathematical knowledge is, of course, a goal of the Algebra Project, just as the vote was the goal of SNCC organizing in Mississippi. The brilliant analogy between voter registration and learning algebra in school, which Gillen has derived from Bob Moses' work, is apt, first, because young people are key to implementation. But for two other reasons as well:

one, both are directed to changing oppressive institutions, the segregated political system in the 1960s, and the segregated school system today. And, two, both the vote and mathematical literacy are necessary to full citizenship in the technologically-driven 21st century. To vote in Mississippi of 1964 and to be able to deploy math knowledge today are important goals in themselves, to be sure. But their importance derives as much from the sense of empowerment their achievement provides, especially to those who must press through the institutional barriers to such accomplishments. Empowerment—not test-taking—is what Gillen’s book, the Algebra Project, and real education are about. To put it a bit differently, “As with voting rights, the point is to encourage students to begin to demand—of themselves and of the system—what society claims they don’t want” [Jessica T. Wahman, “Fleshing Out Consensus’: Radical Pragmatism, Civil Rights, and the Algebra Project,” *Education and Culture* 25 (1) (2009), 11.]

***Classroom events, he theorizes,
are usefully understood in dramatic
rather than legalistic terms.***

Reading the dialogues among Gillen’s students we get a sense of their mathematical literacy, as well as a challenge to older folks who likely do not have it. Mathematical literacy has to do not with the capacity to fill in bubbles on high stakes tests, but with the ability to solve ever-new problems on one’s own and, most important, to teach your knowledge to younger students, as Algebra Project instructors do. But underlying the Project is a more fundamental goal:

What we seek to encourage, however, is the methodical rehearsal of roles that emphasize the collective purposes of the troupe, acts that self-consciously grow through demands on self and peers toward demands on a larger society. The educational system does not serve the students’ purposes now. They must learn to use the crawl spaces we make available to them to prepare for organized acts that will render that system unworkable, and compel change. (p. 132)

This passage highlights two important elements of Gillen’s book. First, it is couched in the language of theater: “rehearsal,” “roles,” “troupe,” “acts,” and the like. Indeed, Gillen develops an extended analogy between the classroom and the theater. He contrasts the kind of education he is encouraging, which he describes as a “dramatistic approach to education,” to the “technocratic approach” (p. 121) which characterizes most of today’s schooling, with its emphasis on grading, indeed monetizing, students, teachers, and even schools. This is not simply a clever metaphor. Gillen points, first, to the importance to the development of young people of trying out roles for themselves and in relation to peers and adults. “For adolescents, nothing is more important than trying on personas and rehearsing roles. They do this whether they are permitted to do it or not” (p. 132). When it isn’t permitted, their actions are generally construed as

“acting out,” which is seen by authorities as a, perhaps the, major problem of students in schools of poverty—indeed in the streets of America’s towns and cities. It is met in both venues by repression, arrest, and, all too often, violence. In such dramas, hierarchies and the roles they demand are already defined, too often by the uniform, on the one hand, and skin color, on the other. Gillen’s work is to read students’ acts differently, not merely as insurrectionary, or childish, disruptions needing to be controlled, but as expressions of discontent with an authoritarian and unresponsive system, efforts to enter into more vital interactions with peers, teachers, and authorities. That involves, in practice, a more welcoming and interactive pedagogical style, which Gillen illustrates, and underlying it, a theory of classroom communications, which he develops at some length.

Classroom events, he theorizes, are usefully understood in dramatic rather than legalistic terms. As in a play, classrooms are domains in which people interact, change in relationship one to another. Legalistic terms trap and define people into particular, inflexible roles: e.g., there is the perpetrator, the policeman, the teacher, the witness, the principal, the judge, and so forth. People are able to act only within the definitions these roles impose. In dramatic terms, as in life, roles can shift, dissolve, open into new definitions: the perp becomes a baffled and enraged child reaching out for hope or at least solace; the cop becomes a slightly older, no less angry youngster acting out if not for solace or hope at least for strength. Legalistically, each has a set of predetermined lines that lead to a much-too-well-rehearsed denouement, often gunfire. Dramatically, the subtexts can be heard and responded to and the action creatively recast. The student learns to be the teacher; the teacher emerges as an accomplice; the judge is judged, or becomes a witness to actions for transformation.

In working out this theory of classroom action, Gillen draws creatively on the work of Kenneth Burke, especially his books *A Grammar of Motives* (1945) and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950). I was myself startled to see the work of Burke, until the last few years long out of fashion—and also of William Empson on pastoral and W.K. Wimsatt on the “counterlogical”—evoked in a book at some level about teaching mathematics. In fact, some of the most persuasive sections of Gillen’s book are his readings of scenes and characters from *King Lear* and *As You Like It*. Through those readings, using concepts derived from pastoral and courtship, he recasts the drama of the classroom.

Built into the long quotation I cited above is also another kind of theory, one having to do with the process of organizing for change: “acts that self-consciously grow through demands on self and peers toward demands on a larger society.” Those familiar with instances of radical change will recognize the sequence, if not precisely the language. What is being proposed is analogous to Gandhian Satyagraha, or the non-violent direct action associated with M.L. King and, differently, A.J. Muste. Gillen formulates the process with some care: “Demand on yourself. Demand on your peers. Demand on the larger society. This is an ordered series: the first is prerequisite

to the second, the second is prerequisite to the third . . . attempts to change the unjust arrangements of a society will be crushed unless the insurgents have developed a discipline that can withstand the oppressor's attempts to fracture their unity and weaken their organization" (p. 125). One begins with self-discipline, with the willingness to undertake tasks, like registering to vote in McComb, Mississippi, or participating seriously in inner-city Baltimore schools, that are necessary and potentially dangerous. But one cannot move to the next stage without undertaking the first oneself: one cannot propose to others that they register to vote or come to school regularly and put time and effort into learning, without attempting it oneself.

But students are not merely the victims of a perverse system that places them in a school to prison pipeline. They are, in fact, crucial players in the dramas of the classroom and any discussion that omits them—and most do—will miss the point.

Such change requires forcefully addressing the larger society, but as Gillen is quick to point out, "it is not the demand on the larger society, but the demand on peers that is the beginning of political action. The language 'demand on peers' is unfamiliar. But it is another way of saying 'self-government' or 'democracy'" (p. 127). Gillen is not arguing, of course, that schools or, indeed, American politics are in this or most other senses "democratic." As he quotes Vincent Harding, "we are practitioners in an educational system that does not yet exist." The problem is developing an understanding of how the "educational system does not serve the students' purpose now" and a practice (to return to our original quotation)—"that will render the system unworkable, and compel change" (p. 132).

What you want to "render . . . unworkable" is, among other matters, the systematic starvation of public education, particularly in schools that serve poor and working class students. Courts order the State to provide adequate funding to the Baltimore schools, for example, but when that funding is not forthcoming, Baltimore Algebra Project activists demonstrate, march on Annapolis, engage in a hunger strike, carry out "die-ins" at meetings of school authorities. They stage direct actions to extend student bus tickets to 8 p.m. so that all can participate in the math tutoring central to the Project's work. They organize against police violence—no small matter as we know in Baltimore and elsewhere—and put forward alternative narratives to those offered by the powers that be. They teach algebra successfully to younger students but also develop sessions on public speaking, civil disobedience, organizing tactics and the other skills necessary for pursuing their goals in the public arena. Their goals are not only teaching mathematics but demanding quality education as a "Constitutional Right," no less important than the ballot.

I have quoted extensively from Gillen's text partly to provide a sense to readers of the clarity of his prose. But partly, too, because—as the last sentence in the paragraph I have cited indicates—Gillen's goals need to be seen for what they are: not the tinkering around the edges that might elevate a few students' math test scores by some fraction, but as a radical (to the root) transformation of the system now in place to "educate" students of poverty. Gillen does not argue that public schools are somehow failing. To the contrary, he insists that "Schools for young people in poverty are marvelously successful at teaching about the scarcity of resources, arbitrariness of authority, and shunting of joy to the peripheries that characterize the society they are actually growing up into" (p. 134). The purposes of such schools is not especially learning, or rather the learning has to do with accepting particular forms of authority and power, accepting (even with rage) particular and limited stations in life, most of all accepting that it is your own limitations and not a system of hierarchy and privilege that defines your life chances (p. 89). We might wish to evoke here some of the conversation between Augustine and Alfred St. Clare in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: says Alfred: "'the lower class must not be educated.' 'That is past praying for,' said Augustine; 'educated they will be, and we have only to say how. Our system is educating them in barbarism and brutality.'" What Augustine does not see, of course, is the contravening education provided within the society of slaves, and he expresses the fear of white liberal society at what slavery was teaching its victims. But his point is nevertheless useful: however they may be failing in terms of orthodox educational yields, schools of poverty certainly do teach, and the students do learn those social meanings. That is surely one of the implications of Ferguson.

The importance of Gillen's book can perhaps be seen most usefully by placing it in the context of the opt out movement.

But students are not merely the victims of a perverse system that places them in a school to prison pipeline. They are, in fact, crucial players in the dramas of the classroom and any discussion that omits them—and most do—will miss the point. But can or even should students—and particularly students in schools of poverty—be thought about as change agents? Gillen's answer begins, as does his book, with the reflection that, historically, it was often young people of color who carried through abolitionist activities against slavery, as well as the heroic efforts to disrupt segregation in the American South during the 1950s and 1960s. The young people who sat in at lunch counters in Greensboro, who marched in and to Montgomery, who went from house to house in rural Mississippi may provide answers to the question.

But are such historical models relevant? One might point as well to the disappeared students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College of Ayotzinapa. Or the American draft and GI resisters of the Vietnam era. Or the women and girls of Redstockings or the earlier Bread

and Roses strike. The question is sometimes posed as “how old should a child be to participate in activities for change?” That’s a reasonable question, particularly in an era in which children’s futures are being reshaped, some would say distorted, by a variety of political efforts to control schools and privatize their budgets. But perhaps the real question might better be formulated thus: what can young people, even very young people, learn by undertaking the kind of program Gillen proposes? As my epigraph suggests, his three-part sequence—place demands on yourself, on your peers, and on the larger society—entails a considerable learning process. One learns not only algebra but about the society and its politics, and not just from books and classroom curricula but from engaging in actions to change things. One learns, too, about one’s own power within a society, about the uses of language, about the critical tensions in American culture between individual advancement and shared progress. One learns, perhaps most of all, about the schools themselves, their crucial role in the implementation of the ideas of democracy, and the differences between organizing schools to train a docile workforce and organizing them to develop an informed citizenship, organizing them to enrich the few and organizing them to unshackle the many.

Gillen’s strategy, like that of the opt out movement, is to “render the system unworkable.” But what he offers in the place of disruption and test scores is learning rooted in the empowerment of students. The idea is not to train students to fill in bubbles but to teach them algebra and geometry, as well as how power operates, how poetry means, and how schools and communities can be changed. But most of all, it is to teach them democracy.

The importance of Gillen’s book can perhaps be seen most usefully by placing it in the context of the opt out movement. The movement to opt students out of high stakes tests is not, from one point of view, a “radical” crusade: most of those who have been active in it would probably not see it as a challenge to American capitalism, though it has the potential, I think, to undermine the authority of the “reformers.” It is, first and foremost, a brilliantly conceived act of civil disobedience. A comment on Diane Ravitch’s blog suggests its possibilities: “The students have the power and the means to squash the

test.” Were that to happen in any significant measure, the impact on the effort to impose a capitalist model on schools in America, which have heretofore been governed in quite another way, would be profound. That is true because the “reformers” have hung their hopes on testing as the pivotal instrument of change. To be sure, they have tried to privatize public schools into money-making charters; they have tried to break teachers’ unions; they have promoted the authority of managers over that of the people who do the actual work of teaching; above all, they have depended on the unspoken ability of capitalism to overturn all settled relations of labor and control. That effort has been almost entirely negative: it argues that schooling in America is broken and must be replaced, one way or another. Only then will . . . well, test scores go up. That then becomes the be-all and end-all. In the final analysis only significantly improved test scores can make a case premised on . . . improved test scores. “To squash the test” is thus to cut the legs from under the effort to change the schools from above. Those who live by the test will die by the test.

Gillen’s strategy, like that of the opt out movement, is to “render the system unworkable.” But what he offers in the place of disruption and test scores is learning rooted in the empowerment of students. The idea is not to train students to fill in bubbles but to teach them algebra and geometry, as well as how power operates, how poetry means, and how schools and communities can be changed. But most of all, it is to teach them democracy. It is not that schools in America or elsewhere have ever been democratic; they are, after all, organized around the hierarchy of one or more adults and younger children. But as students learn by placing demands on self, then on others, and ultimately on the society, they are learning, too, the practice of democracy, which is finally a system in which the critical decisions about a community’s institutions are made by all the members of the community and not by absentee governors, self-appointed philanthropists, or affluent testing agencies.

To say this another way, the conflict over the schools is really a conflict about the future of America. Are our schools and communities to be ruled by the 1% and the politicians and bureaucrats they buy? Or by the 99%, who may not know algebra but who know what the “reforms” imposed on them and their children really add up to.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

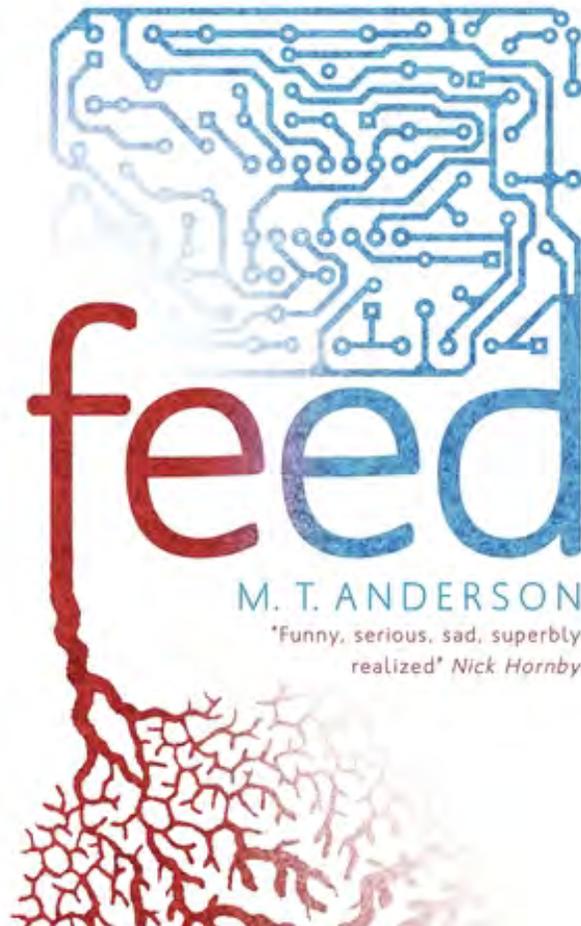
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note: Young Adult Literature in the College Classroom: Teaching the Novel *Feed*

by Jason Myers

The Spring 2015 semester marked my fourth time teaching ENG 1500: Experiences in Literature at William Paterson University. One of the major objectives stated in the university's description of this course is to help students to develop an appreciation of literature and, since this is a general education course taken by students pursuing various majors and not a class full of English majors, I always take this objective seriously whenever I teach this class. However, given that I have experienced an average of only two to three self-proclaimed avid book readers per section, this has always been an uphill battle. The students are primarily from working-class backgrounds and many claim to have not even read an entire novel cover to cover in their lives. So, how does one teach a group of students not accustomed to reading books to



appreciate literature? My answer to this question this semester was to turn to some Young Adult fare. I approach this course not as an introduction to literature, but as the last literature course my students might ever take. I wanted them to enjoy their reading experiences, not simply struggle through difficult reading material, as well as to see the value of seeing the world through the lens of a literary text, even if this text might not be considered "high art." My goal was to present books that I thought the students would find relatable and accessible and then to complicate their readings of these works by teasing out their political content.

One of the books that I chose for the course is a novel entitled *Feed* by M.T. Anderson (Candlewick Press, 2002), which was a finalist for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature. The novel is a satire

that presents a world approximately one hundred years in the future where people are now continuously connected to

the internet via a chip in their brains called the Feed that most have implanted at birth. As these people grow up, their brains literally form, from cerebral cortex to frontal lobe, around this Feed. Once this process is complete, the brain cannot function without the Feed. The socialization processes the novel's characters undergo are entirely mediated by the Feed, a piece of hardware and an operating system with the main purpose of creating the perfect consumer. The software creates consumer profiles for users based on the advertisements they succumb to, sites they browse, and/or products they purchase, much like how internet advertisers use cookies to mine user data and create tailored advertisements today. The characters are constantly bombarded with advertisements for every occasion, and readers are treated to examples of feedcasts throughout the novel in a quasi-modernist fashion.

On the surface, the Feed itself appears to be a Frankenstein, a future to be feared, but the basic functionality of the Feed and how the characters use it was immediately familiar to my students. While the characters in the novel M-chat each other (through a person-to-person instant messaging system that works like an internet based telepathy) more than they communicate verbally, my students claimed that they text, instant message, snap chat, tweet, etc. more than they sometimes converse with friends face-to-face. In the spirit of this novel, I had my students create their own blogs to reflect on their reading, and the majority of them saw themselves in the young characters, especially relating to the part of the story where they lost access to the Feed after being hacked by a member of a terrorist organization known as the Coalition of Pity at a night club on the moon—out there, I know. Students shared their experiences in writing of the horrors of being somewhere with friends or family and running out of battery life on one or more of their smart devices. It was pretty clear to them early on that the Feed itself was not that much different from the internet today. It merely provided users even more instantaneous access. Many students actually likened it to Google Glass.

On top of this, in a note on the novel at the back of the book, Anderson explains that he is not a Luddite. Once I explained to the class what this meant, they began to question what the novel was really criticizing, and the majority of the class agreed that the target of the satire was not the technology itself but how it has been appropriated and used by its owners: the corporations Feedtech, American Feedware, OnFeed, and Feedlink. To put this in Marxist terms, the issue was not the development of the means of production, even if the product was primarily information, but the relations of production. Most of my students quickly saw that this new technology could be put to better use if it was publicly controlled and used for the betterment of human civilization and not merely to increase profit for monopoly corporations.

The novel's downfall is that it is more focused on exposing and poking fun at consumer culture than investigating the system that engendered it. The relationship between the two main characters Titus and Violet even becomes an extended metaphor for how many Americans consume goods with no care of how or where

they were produced and our willingness to quickly discard them when we have lost interest with no real concern as to where these rejected commodities end up. Violet's father, the only academic in the novel, actually accuses Titus of behaving this way after his daughter falls deathly ill as a result of her Feed hardware malfunctioning, and Titus quickly moves on to date another young woman.

The novel's downfall is that it is more focused on exposing and poking fun at consumer culture than investigating the system that engendered it.

Anderson also positions the only way to resist the Feed as through consumer choice: an action to be undertaken individually and not collectively. The character Violet chooses to fight back by creating a bizarre consumer profile for herself by window shopping for items she knows she will never purchase at the mall. This is equivalent to the argument that consumers have the power to force significant change to a free market system via what they decide to purchase. In other words, Anderson places class struggle at the point of commodity exchange and consumption and not at the point of production itself. Violet's fight is not to raise the working masses to take control of the means of production but to throw a monkey wrench into the system based on the data she feeds it through her consumer choices. However, a few of my students argued that Anderson himself must be aware that Violet's venture is futile because it ultimately ends up leading to her death when Feedtech refuses to fix her malfunctioning Feed device because they view her as an unreliable investment based on her bizarre consumer profile.

That said, a great strength of this novel is its ability to raise students' political consciousness on a variety of different issues. This past semester, I received papers from students who examined how cultural hegemony functions to pacify the characters of the novel even in the face of immediate threat. Due to the devastation of the environment, people in the novel begin to develop lesions on their bodies. These lesions are transformed into fashion statements as soon as the characters of a hit reality television show entitled "Oh? Wow! Thing!" develop them. The President of the United States even puts out a feedcast explaining that the lesions can in no way be the fault of the corporations. The schools in the novel are owned and operated by the corporations and the noun "school" is trademarked throughout the text. Every bit of knowledge is controlled by those in power, and many of my students were able to draw clear connections to popular culture today, their experiences in public schools, and the charter school movement. I even had a couple of students write papers that argued that Violet's upbringing, being that she was from a much less affluent socioeconomic background than that of the other characters and raised by an academic, was the reason that she was able to resist the Feed. The others were blinded by their life circumstances. However, students still struggled a bit with developing

clear critiques of the state's relationship to the corporations, though this struggle provided us some great opportunities to discuss money in politics and the role of the state with regard to protecting the interests of capital.

. . . a great strength of this novel is its ability to raise students' political consciousness on a variety of different issues.

I also received some papers that drew connections between the environmental devastation of this speculative landscape and many current environmental issues. In the novel, global warming has rendered the planet unlivable, so people are forced to live under domes both above and underground. They travel in flying cars through a series of tubes. The ocean is dead. They end up laminating whales somehow just so they can place them back into the sea to hunt them. They manufacture their clouds, which are trademarked throughout the text; they produce air via air factories, which they fell trees to build because they are perceived as more efficient; and they grow their meat on meat farms—do not ask me how—because there is no more land for cattle to graze. And all of this has been normalized for the people living in this brave new world. This led several of my students to even take on papers arguing for the need for more environmental activism to prevent a world like this from ever coming into being, a few even linking the state of the environment today to capitalist production and its overconsumption of resources.

The novel alludes to inter-imperialist rivalry when the United States stakes out a claim for the moon against the desires of the Global Alliance, and readers get glimpses throughout the text of an existing third world where people are clearly much more politically active and violently oppressed than they are in the United States. And the form and style of the novel appear to be aimed at raising political consciousness, as well. Feedcasts are interspersed with the first person narrative; the page numbers drop out when the characters are hacked and they lose access to the Feed (as if time stands still); the chapters are short and choppy, like the attention span of the characters; and the novel, though somewhat chaotic throughout, ends on a page with just one sentence written in very small font in the center: "Everything must go." Thus, it forces readers to stop and pay attention to three short words in a way that none of the characters, and most of my students, are used to doing in this fast paced digital world. The words themselves create a double meaning, functioning both as the end of a Feed advertisement for a blowout sale and a political statement. One of my students claimed that she boycotted all social media platforms as a result of reading this novel. While her individual action still falls within the scope of how the character Violet might have read and acted on the novel's final statement above—which is not to say with a greater move towards the understanding that a

complete overhaul of the current political and economic system is truly needed to resist the Feed and the unequal profit driven economy it helps to sustain—this student did move from complacency to political action, regardless of how small. And I will take it!



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



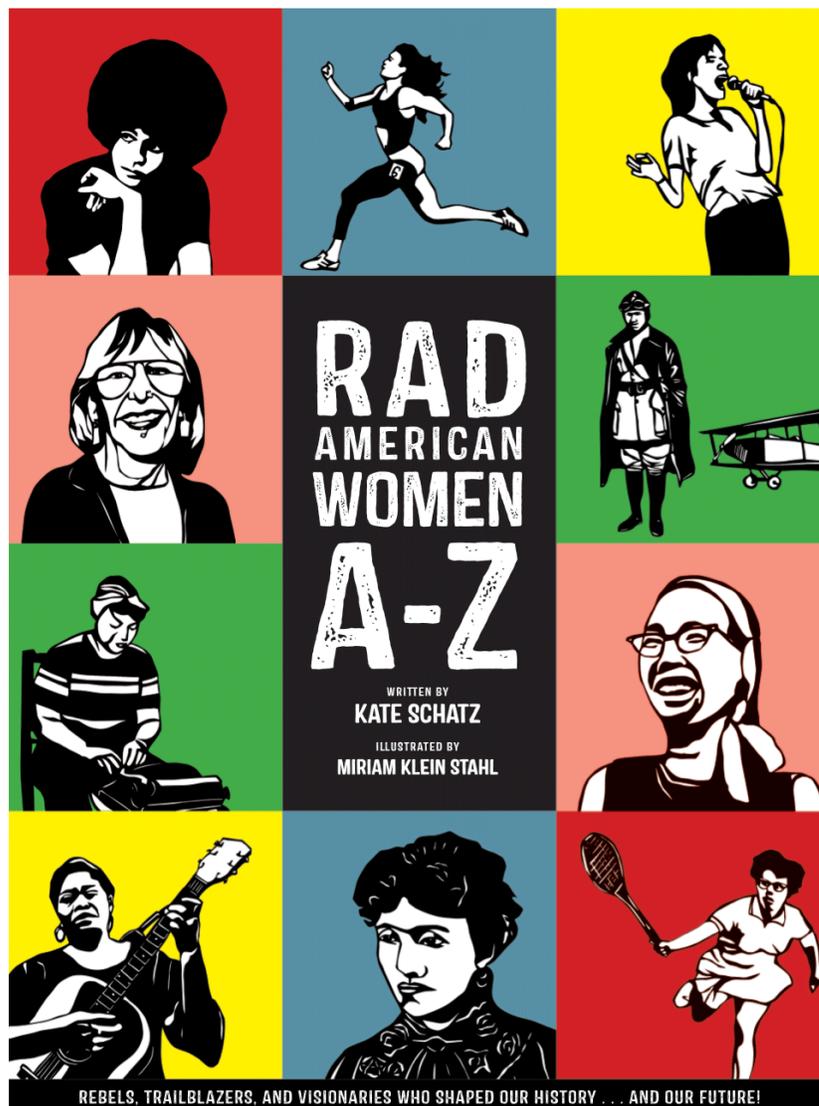
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

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, January 14, 2015 and 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, 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, 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 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.

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.

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.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Contributors' Notes



PHOTO: LEONARD VOGT

Sara Appel is Dietrich School Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of English, University of Pittsburgh.

Bill Bigelow is the curriculum editor of Rethinking Schools and co-directs the Zinn Education Project. He is co-editor of A People's Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis.

James Davis teaches English and American Studies at Brooklyn College, City University of New York.

Nicole Fabricant is an assistant professor of anthropology at Towson University in Maryland. She teaches courses on Indigeneity, Environmental (In)justice, Climate Change and Resource Politics. Her research and recent publications have centered on the Landless Peasant Movement (MST-Bolivia), a 50,000-member social movement comprised of displaced peasants, informal workers, and intellectuals fighting for land redistribution and the revitalization of small-scale farming. Her book *Mobilizing Bolivia's Displaced: Indigenous Politics and the Struggle over Land* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012) explores the creative ways in which displaced peoples use and mobilize cultural forms to push for political and economic reforms.

Breanne Fahs is an associate professor of women and gender studies at Arizona State University, where she specializes in studying women's sexuality, critical embodiment studies, radical feminism, and political activism. She has published widely in feminist, social science, and humanities journals and has authored four books: *Performing Sex* (SUNY Press, 2011), *The Moral Panics of Sexuality* (Palgrave, 2013), *Valerie Solanas* (Feminist Press, 2014), and *Out for Blood* (SUNY Press, forthcoming). She is the director of the Feminist Research on Gender and Sexuality Group at Arizona State University, and she also works as a private practice clinical psychologist specializing in sexuality, couples work, and trauma recovery.

Alex Kelly is a filmmaker and activist from Central Australia and is Impact Producer and Distribution Strategist on *This Changes Everything*.

Paul Lauter is Smith Professor Emeritus at Trinity College. During the 1960s he was director of the nation's first community school project and wrote regularly for publications like *The New York Review of Books* on educational issues and on the anti-war movement. He was one of the founders of *Radical Teacher* and intends to remain on the editorial board as it helps drown capitalism in its sauna.

Katie McKenna is the Engagement Lead for *This Changes Everything*.

Jason Myers has an MA from Rutgers University and an MAT from Fairleigh Dickinson University. He is currently a lecturer at William Paterson University.

Bob Rosen teaches English at William Patterson University in New Jersey.

Doreen Stabinsky is currently the Zennström visiting professor in climate change leadership at Uppsala University in Sweden. She teaches global environment politics half-time at College of the Atlantic. She also works as an independent consultant on climate and agriculture policy and politics, advising a number of developing country governments and international non-governmental organizations in the climate negotiations.

Eleanor Stein has been a life-long activist for human rights, civil rights, and peace. A founder of the upstate New York group Women Against War, for the last ten years her focus has been climate change. She teaches the Law of Climate Change: Domestic & Transnational at Albany Law School and the State University of New York at Albany, and she is currently enrolled in the LLM program on Climate Change Law and Policy at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland. She is a member of the Board of Directors of Eco-Viva, an organization in solidarity with environmental and climate change organizations in rural El Salvador. Her recent publications include *Regional Initiatives to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, in Michael Gerrard, Ed., *Global Climate Change and U.S. Law*, and *No War for Oil, No Oil for War!* with her husband, Jeff Jones, in *Monthly Review Magazine's MRZine* (2007).



SUBWAY AD IN NYC FOR PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH OF SEPTEMBER 21, 2014.
PHOTO: LEONARD VOGT



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).