

RACE
CULTURE
ACTION

ColorLines

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This issue of *ColorLines* features a special section on race and education.

Forty-five years after the historic Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawed separate and unequal schools in this country, we are burdened with public schools that are more segregated and more unequal than ever. On top of the historic problems of race and class inequality, issues of language and culture are more prominent than ever due to the dramatic rise in the number of Latino and Asian students. Today, there are more Latinos than there are African Americans in the public schools nationwide, and they are faring even worse than black students.

Consequently, issues of race, nationality, and class in education have become more complicated and more important than ever. To tackle these problems, we must avoid the tendency to reduce one to the other, and become more precise and specific in our analyses and our prescriptions. Libero Della Piana of the Applied Research Center and, by interview, Deborah Escobedo, the lead attorney in the suit against California's Proposition 227 (which outlaws bilingual education), address some of these issues herein.

Concurrently, conservatives have launched a sophisticated, well-financed, and coordinated campaign to privatize education. This attack has taken many forms— from corporations like Edison taking over management of public schools, to Burger King Academies, to corporate-sponsored education materials like McDonald's "nutritional curriculum," to elevated corporate advertising in schools.

Meanwhile, the religious right promotes school prayer and attacks books, teachers, and curricula that they find inconsistent with the Bible. Ominously, they have taken over many local school boards.

Perhaps the single most dangerous attack on public education comes in the form of school voucher programs. Voucher proponents have adopted the insidious strategy of first tailoring limited voucher programs to benefit poor people, especially students of color, and then using this base to implement universal vouchers which end up increasing racial and class inequalities.

The national focal point of the voucher battle is Milwaukee. But that city is also home to one of the main centers of progressive public educators, the quarterly publication *Rethinking Schools*. In this issue, Bob Peterson and Barbara Miner of *Rethinking Schools* unravel the race agenda behind school vouchers.

The race and education section is completed by two articles about innovative organizing to improve public schools being done around the country.

This issue also contains two important articles addressing sexual oppression and violence. Rinku Sen, co-director of the Center for Third World Organizing, explores how racism complicates domestic violence organizing. And Alexandra Suh of the Rainbow Center and the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence tells the story of race, militarism, and Korean sexworkers in New York.

—Bob Wing



Japanese textile c. 1450



Editorial Offices
ColorLines Magazine
4096 Piedmont Avenue #319
Oakland, CA 94611-5221
Phone: 510-653-3415 Fax: 510-653-3427
E-mail: colorlines@arc.org

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Media Inquiries:
We Interrupt This Message
415-537-9437

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High school students protest anti-affirmative action measures in California. Photo by David Bacon.

Contributors

Alfredo de Avila, "Ask Alfredo." Alfredo is former director of the Texas Farmworkers Union and an organizing trainer. He brings over 25 years of experience to his consultations with today's grassroots organizations.

Libero Della Piana, "Reading, Writing, Race & Resegregation." Libero is senior research associate at the Applied Research Center, an Oakland-based institute which emphasizes issues of race and social change. Libero received a Bannerman Fellowship for Young Organizers of Color in 1997

Rebecca Gordon, "Language Hysteria." Rebecca is senior research associate at the Applied Research Center and also works at Californians for Justice in Oakland, CA. She is author of *Letters from Nicaragua* and was editor of *Lesbian Contradiction: A Journal of Irreverent Feminism* for twelve years.

Todd Inoue, "Injustice Doesn't Go Out of Style: Raising Hell with the Asian Dub Foundation." Todd is a freelance scribe, whose work appears in the *San Jose Mercury News*, *Pulse*, and Amazon.com.

Geoffrey Jacques, "Painting Dreams, Painting 'Race'." Jean-Michel Basquiat, Bob Thompson, and Kerry Marshall." Geoffrey is a poet and essayist who lives in New York. His latest book of poems, *Suspended Knowledge*, is available from Adastra press.

Terry Keleher, "ERASE—Toward a New Model of School Reform." Terry is director of action education programs at the Applied Research Center. He was a co-founder of the National

Organizers Alliance and former organizer for Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

Alma Lopez, cover artist. Alma has created, designed, and painted murals and digital murals in California, Nevada, Texas, and Wisconsin. An award winning artist, she also did the cover for our last issue. She is co-founder of Homegirl Productions, a Black & Brown public art collective.

Patrisia Macías Rojas, "Just Facts: Racial Inequality in Public Education." Patrisia is a graduate student in sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, and a member of the *ColorLines* editorial staff. She is a sculptor who works in clay and mixed media.

Barbara Miner, "The Color Of 'Choice.'" Barbara is managing editor of *Rethinking Schools*, a progressive quarterly magazine focusing on public schooling. She is former managing editor of the *Guardian* newspaper.

Akilah Monifa, "Education Is A Right!" Akilah is a freelance writer, adjunct professor of law at New College in San Francisco, and a member of the *ColorLines* editorial staff. She contributed to *Lesbians in Academia: Degrees of Freedom*.

Noni Olabisi, cover artist. Noni is a Los Angeles based self-taught artist rooted in the history and traditions of the African and African-American experience. During the aftermath of the 1992 uprising, Ms. Olabisi painted her first mural titled Freedom Won't Wait. Her work also appears on the Watts Prophets' album *When The 90s Came* She also co-founder of Homegirl Productions.

Josh Parr, "Education Is A Right!" Josh is founder of Revolutionaryjudo.com, an e-magazine for and about the New American plurality, and associate editor at Pacific News Service, where he works with the *Beat Within*, a weekly newsletter for incarcerated youth in the SF Bay Area.

Bob Peterson, "The Color Of 'Choice.'" Bob is a fifth grade teacher in the Milwaukee public schools and former Wisconsin Teacher of the Year. He is an editor of *Rethinking Schools* and a founder of the National Coalition of Education Activists.

Rinku Sen, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Searching for Domestic Violence Solutions in Communities of Color." Rinku is co-director of the Center for Third World Organizing, a nationwide racial justice organization of people of color. Her writings have appeared in *Social Policy* and *Women Transforming Politics*.

Alexandra Seung Hye Suh, "From a 'Short Time' to a Way Out: Race, Militarism & Korean Sex Workers in New York." Alexandra works at Rainbow Center, and with the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence and the Korea Exposure and Education Program. She is a doctoral candidate at Columbia University and an instructor in the Asian/Pacific/ American Studies Program at New York University.

Dana Y. Takagi, "Forget Post-Colonialism: Sovereignty and Self-Determination in Hawai'i." Dana is associate professor of sociology at University of California, Santa Cruz. Her first book, *The Retreat from Race*, is in its second edition. She is at work on a new book about Hawaiian sovereignty.

Oliver Wang, "Untied Tongue: Saul Williams Spills Words on the Hip-Hop Generation." Oliver is a member of the editorial staff of *ColorLines* and a graduate student in Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He is also a freelance music critic and writer.

Patricia Williams, "What Happened to the National Race Dialogue?" Patricia is professor of law at Columbia University School of Law. Her book, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, won numerous awards. She writes the column "Diary of a Mad Professor" for the *Nation* and is author of *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race*.

About the Cover

Located at the Angeles Mesa Public Library at 2700 W. 52nd Street in South Los Angeles, Education is a Basic Human Right is a mural by Homegirl Productions on education, race, and school desegregation. The complete mural and more about the muralists can be found at:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~almalopez>

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am amazed at the incredible leap in logic Makani Themba tries to pull off in her piece, "Real Women Have Men: The New Cultural Offensive Against Black Career Women" (*ColorLines*, Summer 1998). Ms. Themba accuses my book, *The Sistahs' Rules*, of being a tool of conspiracy to hold back African American women in the workplace an argument that is not only illogical, but a complete misreading of the book.

In my book, I said again and again how it is of the utmost importance for black women to not depend on their men to get anything for them, that they should delight in getting successful careers and building a strong foundation for themselves. The book implores women to be self-sufficient, to improve their self-esteem, to admire a man for what's between his ears (rather than what's in-between his legs), to avoid being clingy, to protect themselves from sexual diseases, and to choose a man who is honest, trustworthy and loving, rather than rich and self-serving.

Never once have I tried to seduce black women into thinking that they should quit their jobs, fry the chicken, birth the babies, and step aside so daddy can take his "rightful place as king of the castle and wage earner."

When, exactly, did intact families become a bad thing?

I suspect that it's convenient for conspiracy theorists like Ms. Themba to encourage the more weak-minded among us to think that the problems we women face everyday lie in others not in the person in the mirror.

I implore women to find men who can stand beside them so that, TOGETHER, they can scale previously unreachable heights and bring the black community to a new, progressive place.

Denene Millner
New York, NY

Makani Themba responds:

I stand by my commentary on the *Sistahs' Rules* and all of the examples in the article. To set the record straight, I never wrote that the book or any book like it constitutes what's oppressing those who look beyond the mirror to "others" as "weak-minded."

The truth is that no matter how we fix our hair, our greens, or ourselves, we will never "fix" what's really ailing our families until we turn outward and collectively address the ever-growing consequences of our oppression. Of course, this discussion won't sell many books or make for good talk show material, but it is still vitally important.

I wrote the piece in hopes of elevating the discussion above finger pointing to an examination of the larger socio-economic factors that shape these issues. And to offer a critical examination of books and films that appear to thwart this broader discussion.

Much of the anger, tension, and discord that provides the fodder for these "discussions" on "black (usually heterosexual) relationships" are rooted in slavery, oppression, and capitalism

not the failings of black women. Yet, we rarely talk about them. Which brings me to my original point.

Movies like *Soul Food* and how-to books limit the focus and discussion to the individual actions of "us women." There is an inherent criticism in providing advice. It narrows our analysis of the challenges facing our people to what we can see in "the mirror" or from our front porch. This is neither accurate nor helpful. In fact, as I stated in the article, books like *The Sistahs' Rules* exacerbate and profit from our internalized oppression. In fact, Ms. Millner refers to those who look beyond the mirror to "others" as "weak-minded."

The truth is that no matter how we fix our hair, our greens, or ourselves, we will never "fix" what's really ailing our families until we turn outward and collectively address the ever-growing consequences of our oppression. Of course, this discussion won't sell many books or make for good talk show material, but it is still vitally important.

Dear Editor,

I've read with great interest all three issues of *ColorLines* and want to congratulate all those associated with producing what I believe can become the most valuable and most important voice for justice and human progress in the country. Your excellent

selection of Letters to the Editor that appeared in the Winter, 1999 issue was for me most revealing. Of all the letters I am sure you have received since you appeared, you chose those that had either explicit suggestions that will improve *ColorLines* (Josh Parr, San Francisco, and John Raymond, Washington, DC) or offered constructive editorial corrections (Anita L. DeFrantz, IOC Vice President).

Nothing destroys a publication faster than inaccurate information and careless editing. There should be no excuse for either in *ColorLines*. The truth of our condition and our mission, the destruction of the Color Line at home and globally, needs no embellishment.

In struggle,
David G. Du Bois
President, W.E.B. Du
Bois Foundation
Amherst, MA

Write Us

Submission Guidelines

We welcome letters to the editor. Letters must include the writer's name and contact information. We reserve the right to edit letters that we publish.

ColorLines

Letters to the Editor
4096 Piedmont Avenue
Suite #319
Oakland, CA 94611
colorlines@arc.org

RaceFile

by Melia Franklin,
ColorLines staff

Referendum on Puerto Rico's Status

In a December 13, 1998 referendum sponsored by the Puerto Rican government, Puerto Ricans rebuffed Governor Pedro Rosselló's latest attempt to press Puerto Rico into becoming a U.S. state. Statehood leaders unilaterally crafted the ballot to divide the opposition into four options—independence, commonwealth (the existing status), "free association," and "none of the above." Statehooders further claimed that Puerto Rican's would endanger their U.S. citizenship if they did not vote for statehood.

In protest of this ballot manipulation, pro-commonwealthers called on voters to choose "none of the above." Many independentistas called for an outright boycott. With 71.1 percent of registered voters participating, 50.2 percent voted "none of the above," 46.5 percent voted for statehood, and 2.5 percent for independence. Commonwealth and free association each received less than 1 percent. The balloting was non-binding on the U.S., which did not officially endorse the referendum.

Journalists of Color Debate I-200

One outcome of anti-affirmative action Initiative 200 in the State of Washington was a

fractious debate among journalists of color. In an important act of solidarity, last year the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), the Asian American Journalists Association, and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists decided to meet jointly in Seattle in 1999.

However, the group immediately embroiled itself in a six-month debate about whether to cancel the convention because of Initiative 200. Leaders of the NABJ advocated cancellation, but leaders of NAJA and others argued that the organizations could get hammered by hotel cancellation fees of \$500,000 or more. When all was said and done, the group decided to stay put.

Truck Driver Protests English-Only Rule

Cuba-born Rogelio Campos had been a commercial truck-driver for five years when he was stopped by a Yonkers, NY, police officer last July. When he responded to the officer's questions in Spanish, he got slapped with a ticket. But it wasn't an ordinary ticket; it was for the "crime" of not speaking English while hauling more than 10,000 pounds, an obscure federal regulation. With the support of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund and others, Campos is fighting the ticket. "I know a lot of Hispanics who drive trucks

and don't know how to speak English," he said.

Afrocentrism Under Attack

Last year, Molefi Kete Asante, the nation's most prominent Afrocentric academician, was forced to resign as chair of the Temple University African-American Studies Department. Asante's resignation was apparently due to "incessant infighting" within the department which, under Asante's leadership, had developed the most influential Afrocentric curriculum in the country.

Asante's resignation is a blow to Afrocentrism, but its influence continues, from Afrocentric hip-hop and fashions, to Afrocentric curricula in elementary, secondary, and university education.

"The U.S. is Driving Me Crazy!"

Whether it's human rights abuses or English-only rules, one thing seems clear: living in the U.S. is bad for your health—at least if you are an immigrant from Mexico. A study released in September reported that many Mexican immigrants suffer increased mental health problems the longer they stay in the U.S.

William Vega of U.C. Berkeley studied 3,000 Fresno county residents. He found that recent immigrants and Mexican nationals experienced only half the rate of depression, panic disorders, and drug

and alcohol abuse as U.S.-born Mexican Americans. Vega believes the difference is due to the strong Mexican family structure, which tends to break down in the U.S.

New Battleground for Affirmative Action: Public Schools

The battle for affirmative action, once fought exclusively in universities and professional schools, has found new terrain: magnet public schools.

- In Boston, MA, after highly-touted Boston Latin School rejected a white student and accepted several minorities with lower scores, her parents sued the district, resulting in a ruling striking down the high school's diversity strategy.
- In Charlotte, NC, the parent of a white girl rejected from a magnet elementary school when unfilled spaces were set aside for African American students filed suit to challenge the school's admissions policy.
- In San Francisco, CA, a Chinese American parent sued the district over prestigious Lowell High School's admission policy. Because of the unusual number of Chinese Americans who score high on the admission test to Lowell, they must score higher than other students in order to be admitted. The case is scheduled to go to trial this year. **RACE**

Forget Post-Colonialism!

Sovereignty and Self-Determination in Hawai'i

It's getting hotter in the Pacific. Dana Takagi gets inside the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.

Nationalism has become a dirty "n" word in many progressive circles. It evokes imagery of political extremes—Afrocentrism, Serbian-sponsored ethnic cleansing, World War II-era militarism, and blood-based loyalties. In short, it conjures up an exclusionary politics that runs counter to political tastes that favor racial and ethnic coalitions, tolerance, and humanism.

But nationalism comes in many colors. In Hawai'i, nationalism is a progressive and multiracial politics of self-determination. Hawai'i is the home of one of today's most exciting, secessionist-style social movements. There, Native Hawaiians, the indigenous peoples of the archipelago, are clamoring for the right of self-determination.

In a 1996 Hawaiians-only, plebiscite-style election, Native Hawaiians voted



On the centennial of annexation, Native elders raised portraits of Kamehameha II, Kamehameha III, and Kamehameha IV. Photo by Cindy Ellen Russell.

approximately 3 to 1 in favor of electing a Native Hawaiian Convention—a possible, if controversial, first step toward some form of sovereignty. The Convention, slated to convene this year, is charged with proposing a form of government subject

to approval by Native Hawaiians.

From Cultural Appeal to Self-Determination

Native Hawaiians' political claims for self-determination are deeply embedded in a cultural and cosmological set of values that emphasize the interrelatedness of people, the environment, and sovereignty or nationhood.

This cosmology, what some call religious beliefs—love of the land (*aloha 'aina*), righteous behavior (*pono*), references to Hawaiian gods (*Pele*—the goddess of fire)—is an integral part of Local culture (and tourism) of the islands.

The holism of the movement is appealing. Some new social movements like to claim an affinity with Native

Hawaiians. Environmentalists are quick to latch on to the “all things connected” aspect of Hawaiian cosmology and seize upon sovereignty as an ecology movement. Some gays and lesbians believe Native Hawaiian tolerance toward homosexuality is the reason that the nation’s most important legal test case of same-sex marriage, *Baehr v.*



For many Locals, sovereignty is less a question of “if” than of “when” and “how.” Video still courtesy of Nā Maka O Ka Āina.

Hawai’i, occurred in the Rainbow State.

Native Hawaiian leaders, however, direct themselves toward reclaiming the sovereign political status of the Hawaiian nation—a status denied by over a century of U.S. imperialism and colonialism. Until 1893, Hawai’i was an independent sovereign nation with an established government monarchy. But U.S. business and military interests, led by magnates Sanford Dole and Lorrin Thurston, forcibly dethroned then-reigning Hawaiian Queen Liliuokalani.

Dole proclaimed himself President of the Republic of Hawai’i, and, in a hastily arranged constitutional convention, claimed dominion over all land, water, and former citizens of the nation of Hawai’i. Believing that the “lawful government of Hawai’i was overthrown,” President Grover Cleveland stymied Dole and the Republic’s plans for annexation. However, Cleveland’s successor, President William McKinley, signed an annexation treaty with the Republic of Hawai’i in August 1898.

Hawai’i was a territory of the United States from 1898 to 1959, when it was granted statehood. From the point of view of Native Hawaiians, statehood was the climax of a chain of events that was marked from the start by an illegal takeover. Or, as many sovereignty activists say, “Forget post-colonialism—Hawai’i is still colonized.”

Wrongs Worth Righting

Hawaiian struggles for self-determination have centered on control of and access to land and water rights, and claims to some form of self-government. Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, recently remarked, “Native Hawaiians have a more severe need for housing than any other group in the United States, including American Indians and Alaskan natives.” In their homeland, Hawaiians are twice as likely to be

homeless as non-Hawaiians.

Over the last thirty years, numerous controversies have pitted tourism, development, and U.S. military interests against the preservation of Hawaiian land, water, and cultural rights. Historically, the courts and state government agencies have been stingy about allowing Native Hawaiian access to various resources, including 1.4 million acres of land held in public trust since the overthrow of the monarchy.

But there have been occasional victories. Sovereignty activists recently won the return of Kaho’olawe (an island used for bombing practice by the U.S. military) to the state, as well as two major legal decisions affirming the right of Native cultural practices, like gathering and fishing on public lands. And, while the U.S. rarely apologizes for wrong-doing to a people (the last major apology was issued in 1988 to Japanese Americans for their incarceration in internment camps during WWII), on the centennial of the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani in 1993, President Clinton signed a bill that apologized to Native Hawaiians for the overthrow.

Native Hawaiians are one of five indigenous groups under the jurisdiction of the United States. Two of these groups, Native Alaskans and American Indians, have a process, however flawed, of federal recognition through the Department of Interior’s

Bureau of Indian Affairs. Two others, American Samoans and Chamorros (the indigenous peoples of Guam), are defined by international law as citizens of self-governing territories, and thus have the right to seek full or partial independence from the U.S. That leaves Native Hawaiians—who only recently received their own census category for the 2000 census—as the only indigenous group with no claim to self-determination that is based in either U.S. or international law.

What’s (and Who’s) in a Nation?

Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination is different from civil rights. Civil rights are guarantees that can be exercised within a nation, but self-determination guarantees the right of self-government. Thus, Native Hawaiian calls for self-determination focus on sovereignty. And while there are conflicting beliefs about how best to achieve it, there is widespread consensus among Native leaders that the dispossession of Hawaiians from their own land and culture this past century is a wrong that must be righted.

Most people in Hawai’i, regardless of race or ancestral origin, agree. This is remarkable for a state in which Native Hawaiians represent only 10 percent of the total population. The “majority” racial group (approximately 60 percent) is Asian American (mainly Japanese Ameri-

cans and Filipino Americans) while other “minority” racial groups (approximately 30 percent) include whites and others. (It is important to note that some 45 percent of all marriages are interracial and more than half of all children born there are of mixed race heritage.) Still, the zeitgeist among Locals—from ordinary people to the highest levels of state government—is that sovereignty is not a question of “if,” but rather of “when” and “how.”

Among Native Hawaiians, opinions about the political vision of sovereignty are divided between two models of sovereignty—the “nation within a nation” view versus the “independence” model. In the “nation within a nation” model, Native Hawaiians would establish a form of self-government that would have some autonomy over economic development, control certain resources such as a land base, and govern matters of culture, language, and religion. Such a nation would operate as a nation within the U.S., subject to the U.S. federal government—including the Supreme Court, the Constitution, and other federal laws. A useful comparison would be the federally recognized Native American nations in the U.S.

In the “independence” model, a sovereign nation of Hawai’i would not be subject to U.S. federal government oversight. It would be a wholly autonomous, self-governing nation. Advocates of this

model envision the nation of Hawai’i as a multiracial society—including but not limited to Native Hawaiians. After all, according to independence advocates, the nation of Hawai’i at the time of the overthrow was a multiracial society and all of the nation’s citizens—which included sizable numbers of Asians, for example—were disenfranchised through the overthrow and annexation. These different views of the future constantly figure in on-going debates about what to do now.

The last two governors of the state of Hawai’i have supported sovereignty in principle, if not in practice. In 1993, then-Governor John Waihe’e, the first part-Hawaiian governor of the state, appointed a special commission—a veritable who’s who of community and sovereignty activists—to report on the status of Native Hawaiians. The commission then struggled through intense political discussions.

In September of 1996, the sovereignty commission sponsored a Hawaiians-only, plebiscite-style election, known as the Native Hawaiian Vote. Some 31,000 of 80,000 Native Hawaiians voted 22,294 to 8,129 in favor of electing a Native Hawaiian Convention that would propose a sovereign form of government for Native Hawaiian approval. But the Vote provoked angry disagreements over the proper path to self-determination which still smolder among sovereignty

Native Hawaiians—who only recently received their own census category—are the only indigenous group with no claim to self-determination that is based in either U.S. or international law.

Critics of the Native Hawaiian Vote organized a coalition to boycott the election, claiming victory when over 60 percent of Native Hawaiians did not vote. They believed that self-determination for Native Hawaiians would ultimately be thwarted in any political process that was 'state-sponsored.' Organizations like Ka Lahui Hawai'i (led by attorney Mililani Trask) and Ka Pakaukau (led by well-known Local physician, Kekuni Blaisdell) shunned the 1996 vote, in part driven by the belief that the Native Hawaiian Vote, and any subsequent Convention, would not be recognized under international law.

In fact, recognition of self-determination for Native Hawaiians in the international arena has shown some positive signs of late. Most sovereignty activists would like Hawai'i returned to the United Nations' list of non-self-governing territories. This change of status would allow Hawai'i to participate in UN-sponsored decolonization activities—a political process which could maintain state status or lead to a form of independence. Hawai'i had been listed as a colony of the United States between 1946 and 1959—but was removed from the list after Hawai'i became a state. In July 1998, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations submitted a report to a UN subcommis-

Minimally, the new nation envisioned by sovereignty activists is one in which Native Hawaiians' land would be returned to them, and Hawaiians would enjoy the right to choose their own form of government. Whether it arrives at separation or a nation-within-a-nation, the political process called for by Native Hawaiians will require cooperation and negotiation between and among Native Hawaiians, and eventually also with the rest of the residents of the state of Hawai'i.

Indigenous peoples' struggles over land rights are one of the main causes of conflict and struggle around the world. What is at stake in such global conflicts? Nothing less than the balancing of liberal democracy and federalism with the rights of nations within nations and other groups deserving of self-government. The United States, with its recognition of Indian nations, is already a weak version of a multinational state. Self-determination for Native Hawaiians, whether acquired in the domestic or international arena, offers the U.S. an opportunity to strengthen a commitment to rectify past wrongs, and to enlarge our vision of how different groups can coexist in a multinational state. **RACE**

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factor in public schooling, shaping the quality of the education students receive and, as a result, their future life opportunities.

As shown in the accompanying sidebar, *Just Facts: Public School Resegregation and Racial Inequality*, an examination of any dimension of public education reveals stark racial differences. Whether in funding, curriculum, school discipline, or

Current racial segregation surpasses that which existed before the landmark Brown Supreme Court decision (1954) that supposedly outlawed “separate but equal” schooling.

graduation and college enrollment rates, the experiences of students who are African American, Native American, Latino, or recent immigrants from Asia or Latin America are quite different from those of their white counterparts.

Moreover, students of color who graduate from high school are less likely than white graduates to go on to college, in large part because they are steered away from college prep courses—if their high school even offers them in the first place. And, graduates of color who don’t go on to college are far less likely to find a job after high school than white high school dropouts.

Race in Three Dimensions

I visited several Bay Area schools to get a first-hand view of the racial dynamics. While Bancroft has a dwindling white student population, Oakland High School, a 15-minute drive into the Oakland Unified School District, has almost no white students. The majority of Oakland High’s students are Asians who defy the image of a “model minority.” Most are poor, recent immigrants who suffered cruelly during U.S.-induced wars in Southeast Asia and their subsequent immigration to this country. They face daunting educational barriers.

Oakland High is integrated except for the striking absence of white students, who made up only two percent of Oakland High in 1995. Although whites constitute about 30 percent of the city’s population, they are only 6 percent of Oakland’s public school population. Racial anxiety and financial ability have led to an exodus of white students out of schools like Oakland High. Throughout the country, white parents have figured out how to remove their children from urban schools and place them into private schools or nearby suburban schools that are well-funded, “safe”—and virtually lily-white. Some white families picked up and moved altogether, knowing that the Supreme Court ruling in *Milliken v. Bradley* meant desegregation could never cross district lines.

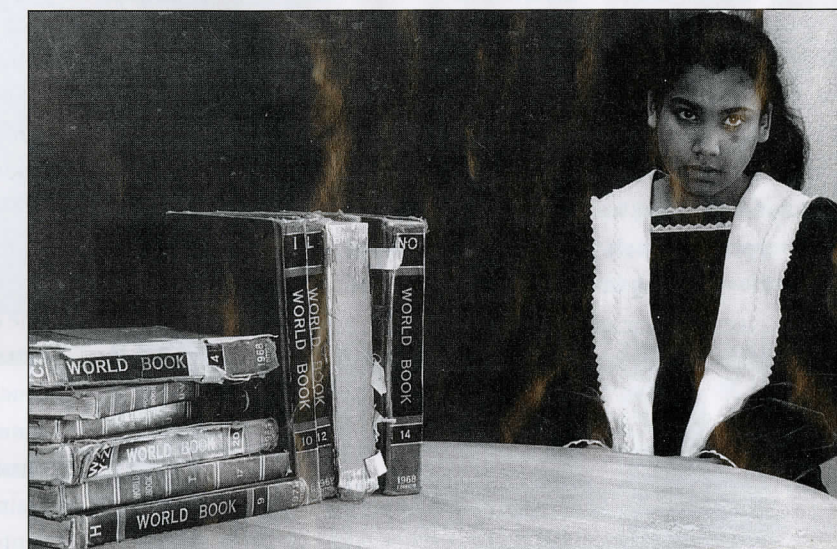
Next I checked out the schools in Piedmont, CA. Nestled in the hills, it is a wealthy white enclave completely surrounded by urban Oakland. Piedmont has its own police force, tax base, and public school district. As a result, Piedmont students do not share resources or attend school with the low-income, Asian, African American, Native, or Latino kids just down the hill. I peer over the fence of



English class at Phillips Academy (above). Puerto Rican student at H.B. Lawrence Elementary School (right)
Photos © 1999 Michael Jacobson-Hardy.

Piedmont Middle School and glimpse the privileges these kids have: pool, tennis court, tree-lined yard—and a big fence to keep me out.

White enclaves and suburbs like Piedmont exist throughout the country, as do schools that are attended mostly by working class whites like the San Leandro schools of twenty years ago. The majority of white kids go to predominantly white schools located in suburbs and small towns, while most children of color attend segregated urban or semi-urban schools.



color in rural areas and small towns are much more likely to attend integrated schools than those who live in large cities.

- Big metropolitan areas maintain school segregation by having smaller school districts. The 1974 *Milliken* Supreme Court decision forbids desegregation plans that cross school district lines, so if the suburbs and the city have separate districts, their students won’t be able to attend the same schools.

Is “separate but equal” really such a bad thing?

- It’s impossible to answer that question, because separate but equal schools do not exist. Schools in this country are both separate and profoundly unequal.
- White suburban schools have vastly more money than inner-city schools, whose students are often 90 to 100 percent children of color. That’s because almost half of school funding comes from local property taxes.
- In New York state, the richest school district spent \$38,572 per student in 1992. That’s seven times what the poorest district spent—\$5,423. In Illinois, the ratio was 8 to 1. In Texas, per-stu-

dent spending ranged from \$3,098 to more than 10 times as much—\$42,000.

- 92% of whites, 86% of African Americans, and only 61% of Latinos finish high school.
- In metropolitan Philadelphia, inner-city drop-out rates are four times as high as those of suburban schools.
- White high school graduates are much more likely to go to college, and to finish college, than African Americans or Latinos. Here’s how it breaks down:

	Some College	B.A. Degree
Whites	67%	34%
African Americans	56%	17%
Latinos	51%	16%

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics; Rethinking Schools, *Funding for Justice*; Milwaukee, WI, 1997; Orfield and Eaton, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*; New Press, 1997.

JUST FACTS RACIAL RESEGREGATION AND INEQUALITY IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Patrisia Macías Rojas and Rebecca Gordon

Who goes to public school in this country?

There are approximately 46 million students in about 16,000 separate public school districts. Of these,

- 16% are African American;
- 9% are Latino;
- 3% are Asian American;
- 1% are Native American; and
- 71% are white.

Who goes to private schools?

Hardly anyone. Even 7 out of 8 of wealthy white families send their kids to public high schools.

Who teaches in public schools?

88% of public school teachers are white.

Do students of different races attend the same schools? Very seldom. The schools are more segregated today than they were twenty years ago.

- By 1986, the proportion of African American students in intensely segregated (90 to 100 percent students of color) schools started to climb again, as did those attending schools with student of color majorities. By 1991, that proportion returned to the same level as in 1971, when the Supreme Court issued its first school desegregation busing decision.
- Latino students never experienced any decrease in segregation at all. In fact, segregation of Latino students has only increased over time.
- 63% of all white students go to schools that are 90% to 100% white.
- Although recently increasing, black students in the South are only half as likely to attend intensely segregated schools as those who live in the Northeast.
- The most intense school segregation happens in large Northern metropolitan areas surrounded by white suburbs. Students of

What Can Be Done?

by Libero Della Piana

The challenges in public education are complex and there are no easy "quick fix" solutions. That said, listed below are some measures which, if implemented, go a long way towards creating greater racial equality in our schools:

■ Improve the quality of teaching.

Redesign teacher credential programs to ensure that teachers are thoroughly trained to meet the needs of diverse student populations. Provide funding incentives to those school districts that train their teachers in the use of multicultural curricula and classroom methods.

Bring more people of color into teaching. Allocate adequate resources, including federally funded scholarships, to encourage and enable college students of color to become teachers.

■ End high stakes testing and tracking and provide support to schools to prepare *all* students to have the option of taking advanced classes.

Academic tracking and standardized tests, based on biased and dubious criteria, serve as a cover for intra-school segregation and unfairly determine who advances, who graduates, and who gets left behind.

■ Roll back resegregation by reconfiguring school districts.

Over the last 25 years, the Supreme Court has moved to prohibit desegregation across school district boundaries, erecting a legal fire wall between students of color in underfunded inner city school districts and wealthier, whiter neighboring districts. Consolidating core urban school districts with those of surrounding suburbs is one strategy that could address the vast spending gulf between rich and poor school districts and give inner-city students of color access to the same resources as suburban students.

■ Create district-based "Racial Equity" Councils.

Establish in every school district a recognized, legitimate forum where parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members can regularly air issues of race and education.

mark *Brown* Supreme Court decision (1954) that supposedly outlawed "separate but equal" schooling.

Where's the Money?

Unequal funding lies at the root of many of the problems in public schooling. Lack of materials and training, lack of staff, overcrowding, and crumbling buildings are all results of funding shortages. As long as school funding is linked to local property taxes, and is supplemented by parent donations, schools will continue to be separate and unequal.

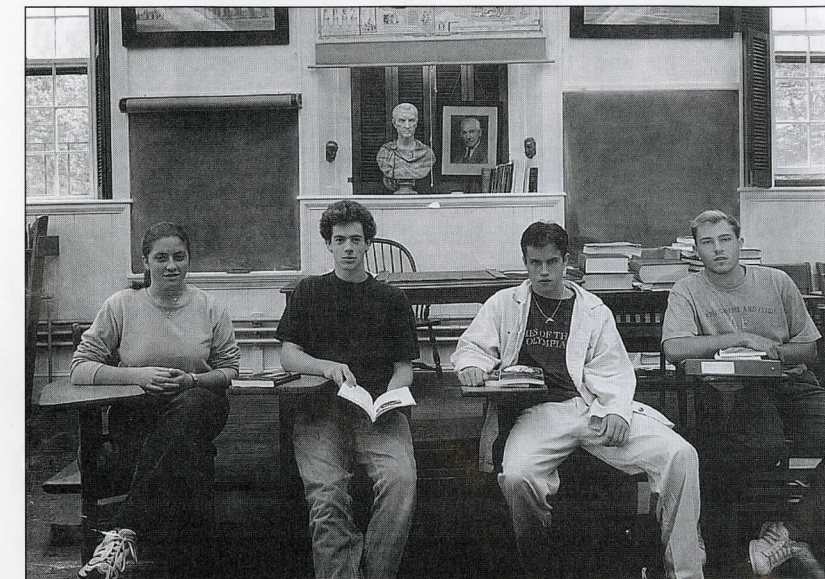
As a suburban school with relative wealth, San Leandro's Bancroft Middle School has, until recently, been able to keep class sizes small. This is now changing. Their building, intended for 750 students, now holds almost 900, with more to come next year. Unless more resources are committed, the orderly flow of busy students will soon become a crush, teacher-to-student ratios will skyrocket, and more students will slip through the cracks.

The halls at Oakland High are already a claustrophobic mess. Oakland High went from an already overcrowded 1,700 students in 1995 to 2,256 in 1997. The classrooms reflect it. One afternoon Spanish class I attended had 54 students. Students were sitting on couches bought by the teacher because there weren't enough chairs. Students stand at the back of many classrooms. Needless to say, it is almost impossible to maintain classroom order or attention with fifty students. Noise levels are high and attention spans are short. Just in front of me, a young woman puts her head down on the desk, checked out for the day.

Delaine Eastin, Superintendent of California Public Schools, agrees there is a problem. At a recent luncheon with reporters from the ethnic press, Eastin likened some California schools to schools in Apartheid South Africa. She went on to catalogue the funding woes of California schools, complaining, "There are billions of dollars in deferred maintenance." Not surprisingly, the oldest schools with the greatest need for repairs, and the districts in most need of new schools, are urban and made up of students of color. Public schooling has been divided along race lines into haves and have-nots.

Of course, the lens of class is also crucial in looking at public education. But without the powerful factor of race, that lens is misleading. For example, while many working class whites attend adequate schools in white suburbs and small towns, the schools attended

by working class students of color are almost universally substandard. Schools where students of color are 90 percent or more of the student body are 14 times more likely to have a majority of poor students than schools that are overwhelmingly white. Further, almost all rich schools are white schools. Race is a pivotal factor determining the resources available to public schools.



Students in front of Roman art reproductions waiting for Latin Class at Phillips Academy to begin (above). Student in front of paid billboard at Holyoke High School waiting for class to begin (right). Photos © 1999 Michael Jacobson-Hardy.

Police in the Schools?

As I walk the halls of Oakland High, the only white faces I see belong to teachers. In fact, if you are a student of color anywhere in the U.S., it is unlikely that you will have a teacher that reflects your racial or cultural heritage. Although 35 percent of all public school students are children of color, 88 percent of all public school teachers are white.

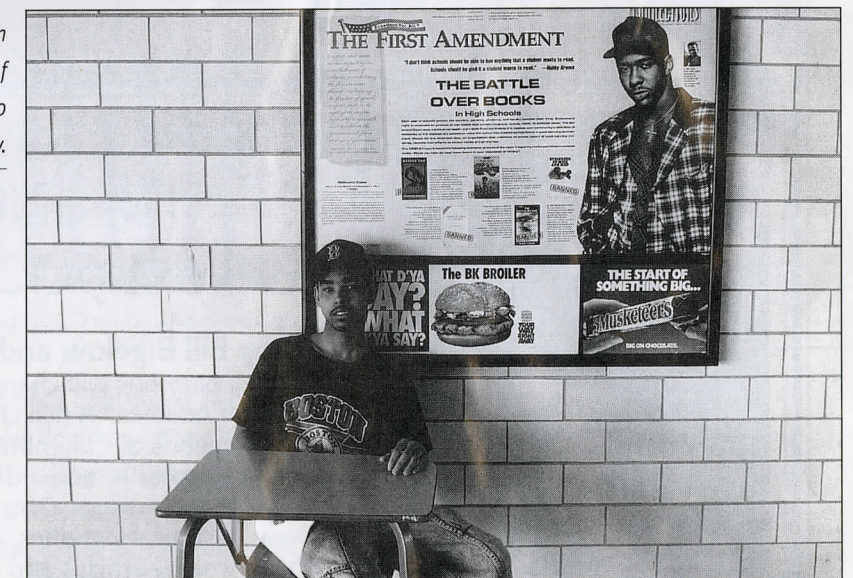
The fears of teachers, administrators, and the greater voting populace have fueled a new drive to criminalize students of color. Safety is a priority in schools, but calling in police, installing metal detectors and video surveillance borders on the hysterical.

Jails have become more of a federal priority than school funding. In California, the state spends \$60,000 a year to incarcerate a young person, but only \$5,000 per year to educate one. As Carol Bishop of the Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment says, "Our kids are leaving elementary school

with police records instead of diplomas." To make matters worse, for many students of color, schools themselves are becoming very much like jails.

Oakland High has security guards at every entrance. I was stopped at a gate by a plain-clothes security officer with a walkie-talkie. Even though I am a total stranger, he readily waves me through. While Piedmont schools are set up to keep people like me out, Oakland High's security is apparently designed to keep students on campus. Students need a pass to leave school and are always in the presence of security, in the halls, on the field, or in the cafeteria.

Last summer, People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO) and the Applied Research Center (ARC) worked with a group of high school students on exposing institutional racism in their schools as part of ARC's ERASE program (see sidebar). They listed conflicts with security as a major problem. Students of color throughout Oakland are more prone to harassment and questioning, and girls of color are often sexually harassed by those purportedly hired to protect them. With a little digging,



the teens discovered that not a penny out of an annual district security budget of over \$5 million was spent on training security guards.

Last school year, nearly 9,000 students were suspended in the Oakland Unified School District. Eighty percent of all suspended students were African American, though they constituted little more than half of all students. Now Oakland City Manager Robert Bobb wants to put the Oakland Police in charge of school security and enforcing anti-truancy laws.

Having police patrol the school hallways is a dangerous nationwide trend. In New York, the central school board just gave the green light to station police inside its 1,100 public schools. Many community members, students, and parents are worried about a possible increase in student arrests and loss of confidentiality. The combination of putting police in charge of school discipline and racially-biased suspension policies may mean a fast track to prison for large numbers of students, especially students of color.

Fighting for the Future

Back in San Leandro, CA, Bancroft Middle School doesn't feel like the prison that many urban schools do. But that may change. Twenty years ago, Bancroft had almost no students of color, but now they constitute 62 percent of the student body. Yet the city as a whole is still 75 percent white. With increased overcrowding and diminishing white students, how long will it be before the mostly white San Leandro populace abandons the schools or leaves the city all together? Only by addressing the underlying racial and class issues can a school like Bancroft avoid the problems of a school like Oakland High.

The Oakland Highs of the world are not lost causes either. Well-meaning teachers and administrators, along with parents, students, and community members, can make a big difference.

But in order to make real institutional change to a system that systematically disadvantages students of color, we have to address racism head on. We must rededicate ourselves to public education and organize to eliminate tracking, equalize funding, and develop safety and suspension policies that are not inherently biased against young people of color.

I step into a class at Oakland High and hear a young Latina student despair, "What am I going to do without an education?" The bell rings and the students pour out the door past me, and I think, "If this is what they call an education, what will you do *with* one?" **RACE**

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BEHIND THE MILWAUKEE SCHOOL VOUCHER MOVEMENT

The Color of "Choice"

Bob Peterson and Barbara Miner investigate the way the Right has played the race card in pushing its vaunted voucher program.

Conservatives use the rhetoric of "choice" to portray vouchers as a vehicle for levelling the educational playing field for communities of color.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Just ask Wisconsin State Representative Polly Williams (D-Milwaukee).

Williams, who is African American, became a national spokesperson for vouchers in 1990 when she spearheaded a much-publicized, but very limited, voucher initiative for low-income students in Milwaukee. But recently Williams told the *Boston Globe* that "I knew that once they [white Republicans and rightwing foundations] figured they didn't need me as a black cover, they would try to take control of vouchers and use them for their own selfish interest."

Bob Peterson, a fifth grade teacher in Milwaukee, was Wisconsin State Teacher of the Year and is an editor of the quarterly magazine, Rethinking Schools. Barbara Miner is managing editor of Rethinking Schools. Selling Out Our Schools: Vouchers, Markets and the Future of Public Education, is available for \$8.50 from Rethinking Schools at 800-669-4192 or www.rethinkingschools.org.



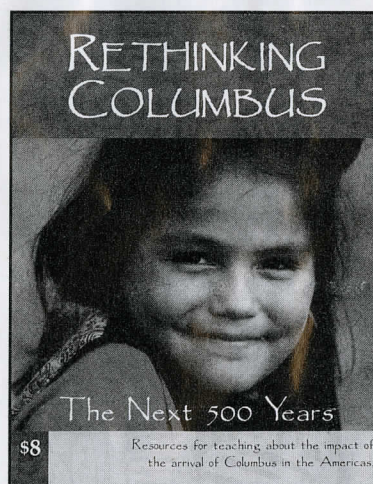
Girl at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School, MA. Photo © 1999 Michael Jacobson-Hardy.

In the last eight years, Williams has seen how Republicans and other conservative power-brokers use the rhetoric of equal opportunity to mask their real goal of privatizing Milwaukee's public schools and removing schools from public oversight, predominantly to the benefit of white families with money and privilege.

Why the Right Loves Vouchers

Just about every group on the right loves vouchers, a system in which the government gives students a "voucher" that can be used to pay for their

education at any private or public school that will accept them. The religious right sees vouchers as a way to batter down the separation between church and state and to make the public pay for fundamentalist religious schools. Free-marketeers see vouchers as a way to privatize public education—opening up a \$600 billion market and removing education from the messy realm of democratic control. For the libertarians, vouchers are a way to dismantle the biggest and most important public institution in this country.



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"The protections afforded by the Bill of Rights do not apply to private actors such as University School. Restrictions on constitutional rights that would be protected at a public high school need not be honored at a private high school."

—U S. Federal Court, Milwaukee

All love the fact that vouchers transfer money away from public schools into private schools. Private schools are not subject to hard-won anti-discrimination or accessibility laws, educational quality standards, separation of church and state mandates, or public safety and environmental safeguards. They are accountable only to their owners.

Take the case of Tenasha Taylor. Tenasha, an African American student at University School, a private high school in Milwaukee, criticized the school as racist in a speech assigned by her English teacher. The school sus-

pended her and asked her not to return the following fall. Tenasha sued on the grounds of free speech. The court ruled against her, saying: "It is an elementary principle of constitutional law that the protections afforded by the Bill of Rights do not apply to private actors such as University School. Generally, restrictions on constitutional rights that would be protected at a public high school...need not be honored at a private high school."

Contrary to the claims of its supporters, privatization of schools through vouchers would greatly aggravate the

existing problems of racial inequality and poor standards in the schools.

Milton Friedman and Vouchers

Conservative economist Milton Friedman, infamous for his free-market economic blueprints for the Chilean dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, initiated the concept of vouchers in the 1950s. At the time, only white segregationists rallied to his support. They established the first publicly funded school vouchers in the United States in Virginia in 1956 for the explicit purpose of circumventing

the historic *Brown* desegregation decision of that same year by helping white people attend private academies.

Eventually, the Virginia program and similar plans passed by segregationist Southern legislatures in the 1950s were ruled unconstitutional. But following the rightward drift of national politics in recent decades, vouchers were resurrected. This time, voucher supporters have tried to appeal not only to their traditional white conservative base, but to people of color who are, not surprisingly, also dissatisfied with public education. As voucher advocate Daniel McGroarty put it in a strategy paper for the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, limited voucher programs targeting poor families should be used as a "beachhead"—a way "to win and hold new ground in the long march to universal school choice."

The Milwaukee Proving Ground

The Milwaukee-based, rightwing Bradley Foundation and other well-heeled voucher advocates chose the Milwaukee public schools as the proving ground for this strategy.

In 1990, the Wisconsin state legislature passed a limited voucher program for Milwaukee that was tailored to gain support from minorities. The program allowed a few hundred low-income children in Milwaukee to use publicly funded vouchers to attend a specified handful of non-religious private schools. The principal argument for this program was that it would allow low-income African American students to attend good private schools. And, indeed, the program has been quite popular in black Milwaukee.

Having established this "beachhead," voucher proponents are now moving to implement their full agenda. Recently, the program was opened to religious schools and was expanded to include up to 15,000 students. In June 1998, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that the expansion does not violate the separation of church and state and the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal, thereby leaving it intact. The ink was barely dry on the Wisconsin Supreme Court decision when Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist called for an end to the income cap for those receiving vouchers, currently set at about \$23,000 a year for a family of four.

Rep. Williams was characteristically blunt in responding to the mayor's proposal. "He just said what they were already doing in the back rooms," Williams told *The Tampa Tribune*. "He wants to attract white people back to the city [by saying] 'You don't have to go to



Vouchers let white families abandon the notion that the government has a responsibility to provide all children with equal education. Park Avenue Elementary School, Cudahy, CA. Photo by David Bacon.

Milwaukee public schools [with black children] because we have opened a way for you." Williams contends that the conservative movers and shakers behind the voucher movement have been using African Americans all along.

Indeed, in the first five years of the Milwaukee program, the majority of voucher students were African American. But now that religious schools are included, the figures are expected to change dramatically. According to the Milwaukee NAACP, a voucher opponent, in 1996 only 10 percent of the students in Catholic elementary schools in Milwaukee were African American, compared to 61 percent in the public schools.

The proposed elimination of income requirements will aggravate the racial and class inequities still further, allowing predominantly white middle and upper

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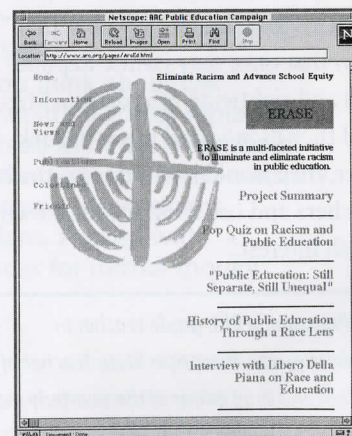
If you would like to be part of a multiracial national membership organization that is committed to quality and equity in public education, contact NCEA, PO Box 679, Rhinebeck, NY 12572; call (914) 876-4580; or email: rfbs@aol.com.

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class families to use public money to pay for private schooling.

Further, the money for the Milwaukee voucher program is being taken out of the budget of the Milwaukee public schools, which are expected to lose \$22 million in funding in 1998-99 because of the voucher program. Thus, this state-mandated voucher program takes significant money out of a district whose population is about 80 percent students of color and already spends thousands of dollars less per student than surrounding white suburban districts. In the Milwaukee public schools, 61 percent of students are African American, 12 percent are Latino, 5 percent Asian, 1 percent Native American, and 20 percent are white.

As NAACP president Kweisi Mfume has said, many of the "best [public school] students will be skimmed off—those whom private schools find desirable for their own reasons. Since families will have to make up additional costs [of the private schools], those in the upper- and middle-income brackets will be helped the most." And, conversely, students who are the most challenging to educate due to race, class, or disability will be left in defunded public schools. In short, the voucher system profoundly aggravates existing class and racial biases in education.

The Bradley Foundation's Hidden Agenda

It is impossible to understand the voucher movement without understanding some of the power-brokers that are calling the shots. Several conservative foundations are involved, but the most notable is the Milwaukee-based Bradley Foundation. With assets of \$461 million, Bradley is the country's most powerful conservative foundation. In the last decade, the foundation has poured millions of dollars into voucher initiatives.

The Bradley Foundation also gave almost \$1 million to Charles Murray to research and co-author *The Bell Curve*, which argues that the majority of African Americans are biologically inferior and that educational resources should be allocated to the intellectual elite. Not surprisingly, *The Bell Curve*'s main proposal for educational reform is vouchers.

Robert Lowe, co-editor of *Selling Out Our Schools: Vouchers, Markets, and the Future of Public Education*, argues, "The link between *The Bell Curve* and the Bradley Foundation strongly suggests that the interest of the foundation...is the diversion of resources spent on urban schools, whose students are largely deemed uneducable, to the allegedly worthy children of more affluent families."

Defend Public Education

Forty years ago white-dominated Southern state legislatures gave vouchers to white people so they could opt out of a desegregated school system. Today, the white-dominated state legislatures of Wisconsin and

Ohio are essentially doing the same thing: using vouchers to let white families take their children out of integrated schools and abandon the notion that the government has a responsibility to provide all children with equal, quality education. A voucher program similar to Milwaukee's exists in Cleveland, and voucher plans have been proposed in at least 28 other states. In addition, corporate magnates such as Wal-Mart's John Walton have funded private voucher programs in a number of urban areas—programs unabashedly designed to build political pressure for publicly supported vouchers.

Voucher supporters have enacted laws which promote a lessening of our communities' responsibility to our children, aggravate racial and class inequalities, remove education from democratic control, and instead promote an individual "solution" to a social problem—the education of our children.

But vouchers are not a solution. Instead, advocates of equity and social justice must work to reform public schools and demand that they fulfill their responsibility to provide equal education to all children. There is no doubt that public schools must do a better job of giving students the skills they need to understand, maneuver in, and improve society. However, progressives must not be tricked into thinking that the only alternative is a system of private schools and for-profit endeavors. At issue is our very system of providing a free, public education to all children. **RACE**

The Bradley Foundation gave almost \$1 million to Charles Murray for The Bell Curve, which argues that the majority of African Americans are biologically inferior

The frustrating thing about working for the rights of language minority children, says attorney Deborah Escobedo, is that "so many people do not see them as real students. In fact, under California's Proposition 227, which virtually banned bilingual education, they're referred to as 'English learners'—as if they go to school just to learn English."

Escobedo has a long history of defending the rights of students—and their communities—who speak a first language

An Interview with Deborah Escobedo

by Rebecca Gordon

Language

Hysteria
The Aftermath of
California's Bilingual Ban

other than English. She is a staff attorney with Multicultural Education, Training & Advocacy (META), Inc., a national legal advocacy organization, specializing in education issues affecting the rights of low-income, minority, and immigrant students. With META, Escobedo serves as co-lead counsel in *Valeria G. v. Wilson*, the legal challenge to California's Proposition 227

"Kids are not Guinea Pigs"

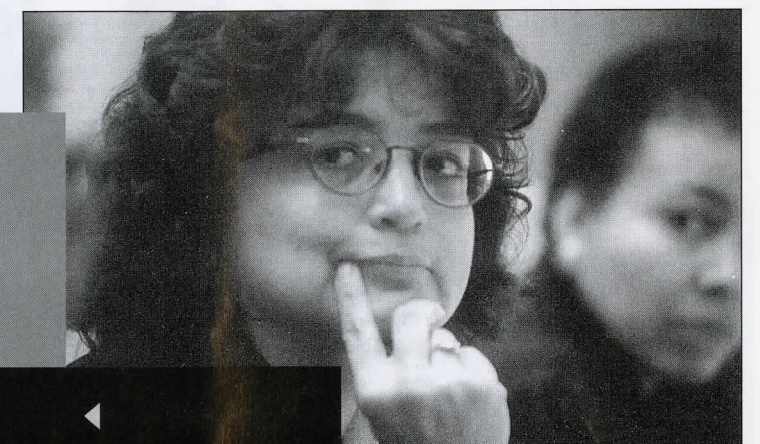
Passed in June 1998 by ballot initiative, Proposition 227 effectively outlaws bilingual education for California's 1.4 million language minority children. Until 227, bilingual education allowed them to keep up with their peers in subjects like math and history, while they learned enough English to participate in mainstream classes. Now 227 bars California

Rebecca Gordon is senior research associate at the Applied Research Center in Oakland, CA.

public schools from teaching kids in their own languages. Instead, these students will have a single year in which to learn English, after which they're tossed in to sink or swim with native English speakers.

In an education system where the track leading to algebra and four-year college diverges as early as elementary school from the route to business math and Burger King, Proposition 227 condemns many immigrant students of color to a second-class education.

Escobedo continues, "Prop. 227 says, 'we don't care how you've assessed these kids or what their needs are, these kids are going to be thrown out of their bilingual programs, placed in English-only classrooms—segregated classrooms, I might



Deborah Escobedo. Photo by Don West.

add—and will remain there until they have a 'good, working knowledge of English.' Not the academic English required under the law, but 'good, working knowledge'—whatever that means." The result

will be "absolutely devastating for these kids."

META's opponents in *Valeria G. v. Wilson* don't seem to care. "I was shocked by the argument in their case," Escobedo says. "They admit that 'good working knowledge' is not academic knowledge of English," and "that it's up to the school districts to bring them up to speed with 'catch-up' programs." Escobedo is indignant. "They come to school burdened by poverty already, and school is difficult enough for them, but to allow them to get behind academically—consciously—and to say they can 'just catch up'—it's ludicrous. These are kids we're dealing with—not guinea pigs!"

"A Wake-Up Call"

Why does someone like computer magnate Ron Unz, the sponsor of 227, think he has the right to make educational

policy for California's immigrant children? Escobedo says, "I call it the hacienda mentality. 'They can work in our fields, and they can clean our toilets and take care of our children, but they're not smart enough to determine what's good for their own children.'" Communities of color must confront this mentality, says Escobedo, "and they are doing it. I think the one good thing that's come out of all this is that communities are becoming more proactive. 227 definitely was a wake-up call, especially to immigrant communities."

For Escobedo, organized parent groups are crucial to the fight for a decent education for language minority students. "Many school districts give a lot of lip service to parent involvement. 'But,' she says, 'when parents actually start getting meaningfully involved, I've seen many, many school districts do everything possible to undo the monster that they've created.'"

"It's this sort of mentality: 'we only want them involved when they're going to follow our rules.' But when they really start asking questions, start demanding things, and start saying 'we want to be part of the decision-making process,' over and over I see school districts back off from their commitment to parental involvement." School district strategies to stymie parent involvement "can be very simple things like having meetings at times when they know parents are going to be working or holding parent meetings only in English."

"Immigrant parents need to continue to educate themselves," Escobedo says. "They need to start holding school boards more accountable, they need to learn the language of 'school reform,' and I think they need to work better with other groups." She also thinks they need to start "walking into those legislative offices" in the state capital, Sacramento.

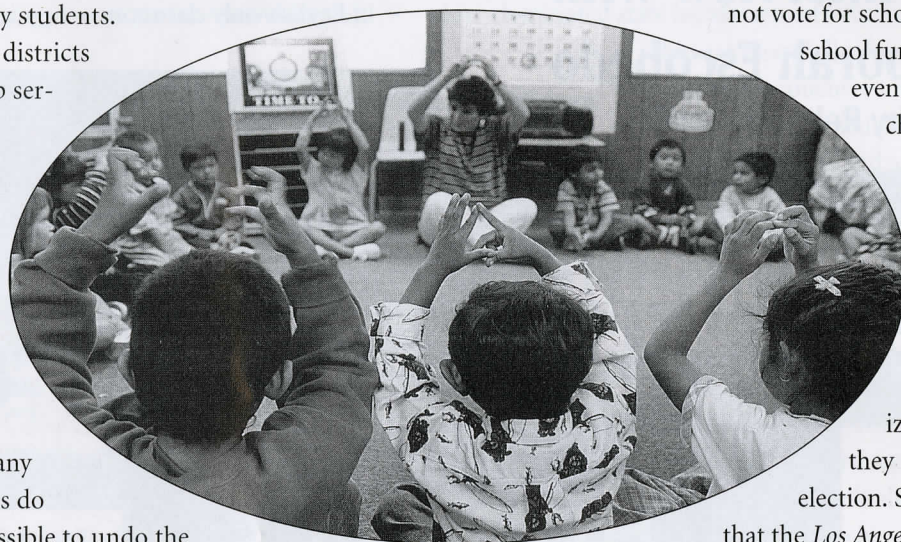
Advocates for immigrant students' rights also need

to know who has the power to affect what goes on in our schools. A frequently overlooked arena of struggle, according to Escobedo, is the State Board of Education. In California, the governor appoints board members who, among other things, choose the textbooks for the state's public schools. California's State Board is hardly representative of its students. "Forty percent of the kids in our schools are Latino; not one Latino sits on the State Board of Education," says Escobedo.

One of the most egregious limits to democracy in this country is that non-citizen parents cannot vote for school boards or on school funding policies, even though their children make up a huge percentage of many school districts. Still, Escobedo says, if non-citizens organize, they can sway an election. She points out that the *Los Angeles Times* credited Latino immigrant parents with providing the push to pass a school bond initiative that had failed the first time out. "It's Latino immigrant kids in L.A. Unified who are going to school in dilapidated buildings. These are our kids, and we need to do something about it. Maybe we can't vote, but we can get out the vote, we can have house parties, and we can talk to other parents who do vote."

But working respectfully with immigrant parents is tricky. Escobedo is critical of advocacy groups that take on what should be the parents' role. "You really have to do it in a way that puts parents in the leadership, and it's a difficult process to go through. When I work with parents," Escobedo says, "I tell them, you know, 'I'm just a lawyer. These are your kids, they're not my kids. No one knows your kids better than you do, no one loves them better than you do.' They have to develop their own leadership ability. And they can. I've seen over and over that they can. Seeing that happen is one of the most rewarding parts of my work."

RACE



Mi Escuelita public pre-school classroom in San Juan Bautista, CA.

Photo by David Bacon

Education IS A RIGHT!

The State of Organizing

by Akilah Monifa and Josh Parr, ColorLines staff

CARE—Coalition of Alabamians Reforming Education

"They arrested me for handing out a leaflet at my child's school. Some of our parents went to jail. One of our members was even murdered," says Rose Sanders.

Sanders, an African American attorney and co-founder of CARE, is describing a school desegregation campaign in her home town of Selma, Alabama. But she's not talking about the fight to open all-white schools to black students in the 1960s. She's talking about fighting segregation in the 1990s—the kind that happens inside those once-closed schools.

Since 1990, CARE and its predecessor organization, the Best Education Support Team, have worked to eliminate tracking in Alabama's public schools. In Selma, says Sanders, "We discovered a vicious form of racial tracking. They weren't even using children's grades or test scores to assign

Akilah Monifa is a freelance writer and adjunct professor of law at New College in San Francisco. Josh Parr is the founder of Revolutionaryjudo.com, an e-magazine for and about the New American plurality.

Groups around the country are engaged in innovative progressive organizing to improve education. Here are profiles of a few groups that are "talking the talk, and walking the walk."



Battles against anti-immigrant initiatives in California have often been led by children and youth. The children of janitors rally in Oakland. Photo by David Bacon.

children to tracks." Consequently, although 80 percent of Selma's students were African American, 80 percent of the students in the upper track were white. Teachers and counselors routinely prohibited African American students from taking algebra under any circumstances. After months of organizing by CARE, the local superintendent of schools, an African American, agreed to introduce the use of grades

and test scores in tracking decisions—and to let black kids take algebra. With support from the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Alabama Black Legislative Caucus, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, CARE held its first statewide summit in 1995, attended by more than 500 people. Today they broadcast a weekly radio show, "School Talk," which reports on the doings of

ERASE—Towards a New Model of School Reform

by Terry Keleher

“Central High School suspends students of color all the time,” says Takina Greene, an 18-year-old member of Direct Action for Rights & Equality (DARE) in Providence, RI. “Our futures aren’t important to them.”

DARE is a participant in the national ERASE (Eliminate Racism and Advance School Equity) Initiative of the Applied Research Center in Oakland. ERASE is an innovative new model of school reform that helps grassroots organizations to combine research, direct action, media, and policy work into tools for dismantling racism in public schools. Members of participating organizations go through an extensive series of educational workshops, including skits on the history of racism in the schools, a “pop quiz” on racial statistics, and skills trainings. Groups also use research kits that help guide them when they are digging for dirt.

Using ERASE’s research kits, Native American parents working with Indian People’s Action (IPA) in Montana found that, although Native American students make up 6 percent of the student body, more than 98 percent of the Missoula school district’s teachers are white. Native American students living in urban areas are being disciplined at much higher rates than their white counterparts. Some are disciplined because white teachers insist on eye contact—which Native kids refuse to honor since it is a sign of disrespect in some Native cultures. Some are punished for being absent during healing and funeral rituals, which can take several days. “What they don’t understand, they just punish,” says IPA’s Janet Robideau.

IPA is fighting back, however. They have successfully demanded—and won—new diversity/cultural sensitivity trainings for teachers and IPA representation on the school system’s curriculum committee.

IPA and DARE are just two of six diverse organizations who are part of the ERASE Initiative’s pilot project: the others are Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment (CAFE), Providence, Rhode Island; Parent Advocacy Center (PAC), New York City; Sisters in Portland Impacting Real Issues Together (SPIRIT), Portland, Oregon; and People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO), Oakland, California.

All six organizations found that students of color in public schools were subject to racially-biased discipline policies, racial tracking, unequal funding, curriculum bias, racial segregation, and language bias. But, armed with their new understanding of racism, research, and policy development, these groups are ready to challenge racial bias in their schools. **RACE**

the State Board of Education. They’ve also given birth to SMART, the “Student Movement Against Racial Tracking.” Two poorly-performing Alabama school systems have agreed to let CARE help them de-track altogether this year. And, through their contacts with organizers, attorneys, and academics around the country, says Sanders, “We have put tracking on the national agenda.”

ACORN—(Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now)

New York ACORN established its Schools Office in 1988 in response to its members’ interest in improving local schools. It organizes campaigns around education issues and develops small, autonomous, public charter schools in neighborhoods where they are active.

The mission of New York ACORN’s charter schools is to promote “innovative pedagogical practice oriented around themes of social change, a genuinely democratic school governance system, and strong community and parental involvement.” After they get a school up and running, ACORN members stay involved as members of the school’s governing council, participating in decisions about curriculum, the hiring of teachers, and discipline. So far ACORN has successfully developed one elementary school and two high schools, with more in the making.

New York ACORN has also produced three reports documenting racism in the public schools, all entitled “Secret Apartheid.” The first report details evidence that parents of color were systematically blocked from obtaining information about gifted kindergarten programs. This leads to de facto tracking of students of color into mediocre programs.

The second report portrays racial discrimination in access to special

courses which prepare students to score well on entrance examinations for specialized math and science schools. The most recent report reveals that federal magnet money originally earmarked to reduce school segregation was in fact being diverted to set up gifted programs which primarily serve white students.

These reports are being used as organizing tools by local ACORN campaigns. They also resulted in a resolution by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights requiring the New York Board of Education to cease the discrimination detailed in ACORN’s reports.

OLIN

In October, 1998, thousands of high school students poured out of subway stations and marched to the Alameda County Sheriffs’ office to demand that the county shift funding priorities from jails to schools.

Disrupting life as usual has always been a calling card of OLIN, a San Francisco Bay Area organization comprised primarily of high school students. OLIN means “movement” in the indigenous Nahuatl language. Previously known as STEP and VOS, OLIN was created in 1992 by secondary school students with the help of U.C. Berkeley’s MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) chapter.

OLIN recruited students from existing Chicano Clubs at local high schools and taught them a Raza history curriculum which it developed. These students were taught not only to organize, but to teach this history in their

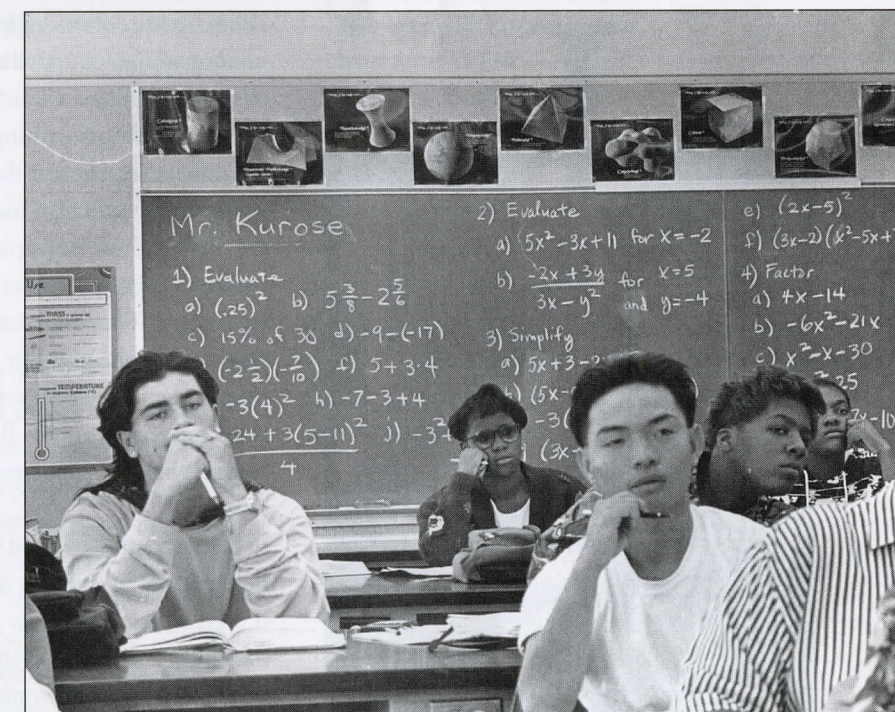
schools. These recruits also facilitated barrio outreach. OLIN soon gained national attention by leading massive high school “blow-outs” the day before the California-wide vote on anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in 1995.

OLIN has now expanded the scope of its organizing to include Asians and African Americans, and demands that schools take a multi-cultural approach to “Teach us our roots so we can grow!” They also focus on the increasing gap between what California spends on jails versus schools. Demanding “Schools Not Jails,” OLIN sends the message that they are sick of the state’s racist policy that expects crime not college from students of color.

“We want young people to feel their own power, to get the sensation of real freedom,” says a local organizer. “We teach them to be the warriors of their generation.” **RACE**

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America’s classroom—advanced math class in Oakland, CA. Photo by Kathy Sloane.



What Happened to the

An interview with Angela Oh



Race and legal expert Angela Oh.

Transcribed by Rhea Weng

fare and, for a short time, hopes were high indeed.

Almost immediately, however, the Initiative ran into significant challenges. From the right came attacks that the Advisory Board was "too liberal," supported discrimination against presumptively "more qualified" and deserving white candidates, and worst of all, believed in "preferences" for a wide range of undeserving minorities—"undeserving" either because shockingly underqualified or appalling overqualified.

From the left, the critique began by asserting that the very metaphor of a "bridge" over the divide of race implied only two sides. What of Native Americans? What of Asians, Latinos, and the multiple identities and cultural positions subsumed by any of the flat, "essentializing" taxonomies of race?

Undoubtedly it would have been a more interesting debate if these attacks, aggressive as they were, were all that the Board had been confronted with. The greatest obstacle turned out to be obscurity. There was no national conver-

sation. The media, so fatally attracted only to sensation, minimized, marginalized, and outright ignored the work of the Board. And the White House, so distracted by Ken Starr's blitzkrieg of pulp politics, found the considerable resources of the executive branch increasingly reconsecrated to defensive maneuvering and damage control.

Given such a complicated backdrop of dashed hopes and distortions, it was a privilege to sit down and talk to one of the Board's most distinguished members, Angela Oh. Herewith is her attempt to set the record straight.

Patricia Williams: Angela, how did you see your role on the Advisory Board to the President's Initiative on Race?

Angela Oh: Well, I thought my role was to travel throughout the country, engaging communities in a constructive dialog about racism—and about the possibilities of racial reconciliation.

PW: What impact did the Initiative have?

National Race Dialogue?

Patricia Williams dialogues with Angela Oh, one of the most outspoken members of the Advisory Board to the President's Initiative on Race.

AO: We stirred a lot of pots. Thousands of stories were run about the Initiative. We counted about 3,000. And hundreds of public meetings on race were held, attended by tens of thousands of people. The interest in the Initiative was enormous. But, mostly, I see the Initiative as just the beginning of a process that I hope will have a long term impact on the difficult problems of racism.

PW: Was it difficult to serve under the media's scrutiny?

AO: I had never served in a capacity that was so visible and national in scope, and I didn't appreciate how truly powerful the media is. The media presented the Initiative as much more sweeping than it was meant to be and that created public expectations for immediate results.

Then, when we filed our report to the President, the media dubbed it the Initiative's "Final Report to the American people," and passed the judgment that "it doesn't really say much." In reality, the report is just a memo to the President from the Advisory Board. It outlines our observations on race and racism and makes suggestions we thought the

President should seriously consider pursuing.

PW: Was the media right about the report? Or does it actually say something substantial?

AO: I actually think it says a lot of very significant things. We told the President to establish an institutional base in the executive branch for the Race Initiative. Once established, the Initiative could produce a comprehensive "White House Monograph on the State of Race Relations at the End of the 20th Century." The monograph could consist of a series of volumes, including contributions from a wide range of disciplines and points of view. It could be a huge legacy to future generations—and something concrete to deliver to the American people.

PW: I noticed that the media never greeted John Hope Franklin, the chair of the Advisory Board, as the legend he truly is. I never saw anywhere in print the fact that he revolutionized the writing of U.S. history with his book, *From Slavery to Freedom*, or that he has authored over sixty important books.

AO: John Hope Franklin is a man who has led with such dignity and grace throughout the years. It was awful that he was treated so poorly by the media, and in some instances by members of the public who had no idea who this man is, and what he represents to this country. And yet, it was his demonstration of grace, elegance, self-dignity, and respect in the face of criticism that was my greatest lesson in this whole process. Through him, I learned what a truly great person is like when placed in a position of tremendous responsibility.

I believe there were people close to the President that saw the Race Initiative as a political liability.



Law professor and author Patricia Williams.

PW: The media portrayed friction between the two of you. Was there?

AO: From the very first day of the Board, the media manufactured a conflict between John Hope and me. What really happened is that I voiced an opinion that any relevant framework around race relations in this country would have to include the experiences of people who are neither black or white, let alone mixed race people. I did not try to diminish the chasm between blacks and whites, but only to highlight my thoughts about other issues I thought we should discuss.

John Hope did not disagree with me at all. He simply asserted, as the great historian he is, that we should not forget the unique history of white/black relationships as we move forward. I really respected that. But that little exchange between John Hope and I was blown up by the media as if it were a big conflict on the Board.

You know, when the media blew this thing up, John Hope could easily have asserted himself. He would have had all of the evidence in place on his side. But in his wisdom, he knew that making a fight out of this might alienate many of the people we were reaching out to. So, instead he showed his greatness by listening. I was very moved by his leadership style.

John Hope and I were extremely dismayed by this whole controversy. So, we have decided to write a piece together that will get broad circulation to counteract this perception.

PW: What else were you surprised by on the Advisory Board?

AO: How powerful the internal political machinations of the White House

are. I still believe that the President had a genuine interest in race and wanted to do something significant and bold. But I also believe there were people close to him that did not want anything to happen with this because they saw the Race Initiative as a political liability. Although I can't give you names, we all felt huge resistance from the White House staff.

One example was that, when we finished, we had a big press conference to hand over our report to the President. But the White House Staff did not even have copies of our report available for distribution. I still don't know how people can get copies.

PW: Did anything else interfere with the Initiative's success?

AO: Definitely. By January, our staff was finally hitting a rhythm. We could have moved stuff, I think. But then the Lewinsky scandal surfaced. After that, nobody was interested in us. Nuclear testing in India and Pakistan and the fiscal crisis in Asia also emerged. With all this going on, the Initiative was overshadowed.

PW: Conservatives seemed to try to discredit the Initiative by claiming they were excluded. What do you think of this criticism?

AO: To me, it didn't make sense to bring conservatives like Abigail Thernstrom or Ward Connerly onto the President's Advisory Board. Why would you invite people who you know are going to try to undermine your agenda? However, I believe the White House was right to invite conservatives to participate in the public discussions, to submit papers, etc. But there was no reason to include them on the Advisory Board itself.

PW: Did you receive any really negative response to your work on the Board?

AO: I got my share of hate mail and hate voice mail, threatening things like "I know what you look like. You don't know what I look like. I'm watching you." I called the Federal Marshal and said, "now you told us to report anything, so I'm reporting it." I just wanted there to be a record of this. What's scary is that you know these people are not stable. But you just have to move past it.

PW: What did you learn about the future of race relations in the U.S. by participating in the Initiative?

AO: As I talked to people all around the country, I was impressed over and over again by the number of really decent people out there. There are so many people trying to find a way to make things work. They aren't filled with hate. It's easy, if you don't have opportunities to really know people of different races and nationalities, to be tricked by what you see or others say.

As far as people of color go, as our numbers grow, we will get more influence over the political process. The recent California election shows that we will have new opportunities and challenges. To me the question is: Will we behave like many of the white people who have power now—will we act out of vengeance? Or will we be able to demonstrate that not only are we competent but that we have the compassion and the stability to exercise power wisely. I look forward to these challenges and am optimistic about the future.

ACTION

Between a Rock & a Hard Place

Domestic Violence in Communities of Color

Meekah Scott, here at a rally against domestic violence, survived domestic violence by killing her batterer—and was incarcerated. Photo by Marilyn Hughes, Impact Visuals.

Rinku Sen is co-director of the Center for Third World Organizing in Oakland, CA.

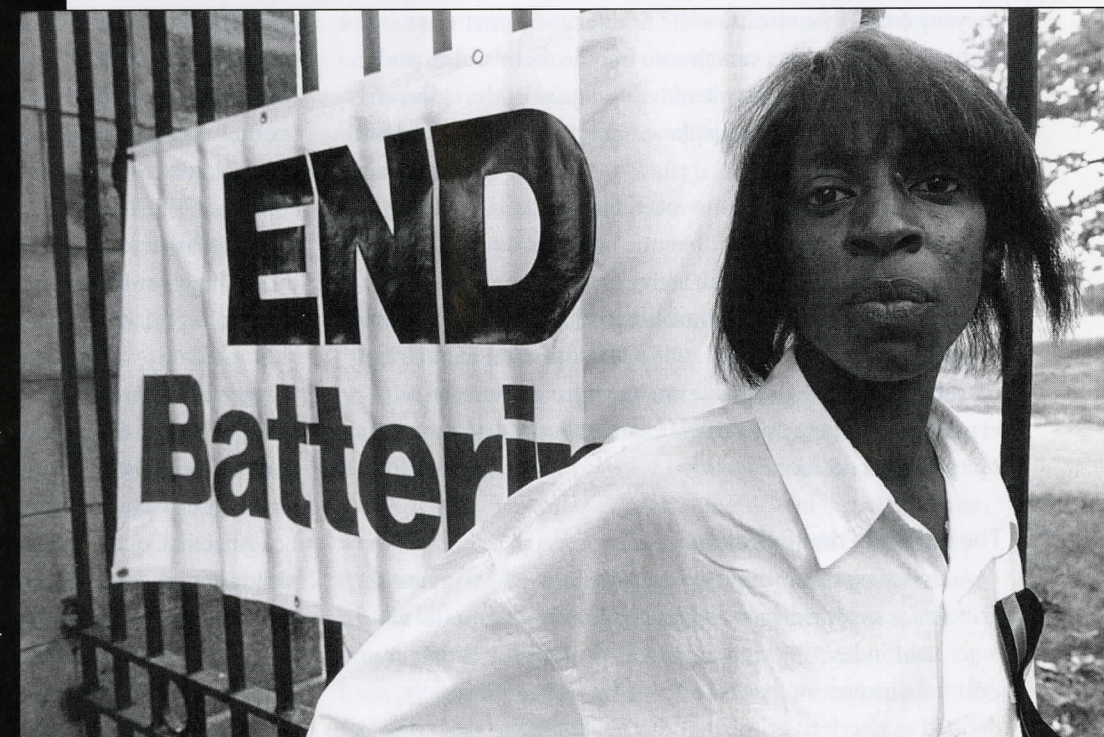
Race versus gender? Rinku Sen explores the complexities of domestic violence in communities of color.

One out of four American women becomes a victim of domestic violence during her lifetime; one in three African American men comes under the supervision of the police and courts before the age of 25. Sometimes these two realities create conflicting loyalties, especially for women of color, who desperately need solutions to both problems.

Women of color have been involved in the battered women's movement since its beginnings. Yet sometimes communities of color display deep, race-based ambivalence about the causes of, and solutions to, domestic violence. In the O.J. Simpson case, the African American community's recog-

nition of racism in the courts overrode concern about abuse (or murder?) of a privileged white woman.

In the early 1970s, the original leaders of the battered women's movement made a conscious, strategic decision to insist that battering was universal, took place in all communities, and in all classes. Chuck Turner, a black counselor and manager at Emerge, which provides rehabilitation services to court-supervised batterers of all races, identifies one of those commonalities: "that the batterer feels entitled to services and authority from women, and believes that if she is not behaving in the way that fits that role, he has the right to punish her." Focusing on the universality of domestic violence



Eighty percent of the men no other contact with the

helped get woman battering on the national agenda.

In so doing, advocates of all colors avoided the view that men of color might be more likely to be violent toward their partners, or that women of color were more tolerant of violence against themselves or their peers. They feared that such views would play into preexisting racist stereotypes.

But What is the Truth?

Statistics from the National Family Violence Survey show that poverty puts women at added risk for sustaining physical and psychological injury. Since women and children of color constitute disproportionate numbers of the poor, it may be that domestic violence is more prevalent in communities of color because of poverty.

However, many anti-domestic violence activists question the accuracy of such statistics. Alana Bowman, who is white, is a deputy city attorney in Los Angeles and former supervisor of that county's domestic violence prosecution unit. She suggests that domestic violence might simply be more visible in poor, immigrant, and racial minority communities because "people call the police when they need any kind of social service because the police are there 24 hours a day and they are free." By contrast, some middle and upper class women, mostly white, can choose to hide their bruises and wounds by going to a private doctor instead of the emergency room, and can buy an airplane ticket to escape instead of going to a shelter.

Yet, many activists are convinced that domestic violence takes distinctive forms in different communities of color. Long-time African American activist and researcher Beth Richie says that the search for solutions has to "recognize that women who are addicted to an illegal drug, or trying to live on subsistence wages, or have unclear immigration status, experience violence differently because of our further marginalized position."

The Color of Criminalization

Activists express mixed feelings about the effectiveness of criminal justice strategies to prevent and stop domestic violence, and in keeping women safe. Bowman and Turner support criminalization because domestic violence is legally defined as a serious crime that carries escalating sanctions.

Bowman considers herself to be "in the business of making criminals out of men who do not see themselves as criminals," further noting that eighty percent of the men who batter women have no other contact with the criminal justice system. Though distressed by the racist criminalization of African American men, Richie acknowledges that many women's lives have been saved by police intervention.

None of those interviewed for this article believe criminal prosecution alone is adequate to deal with the root causes of violence against women. Richie argues that criminalization does little to raise consciousness or protect individual women in black communities. Oliver Williams, director of the National Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, says that the criminal justice system can only "capture the easy targets—low-income white men and men of color. We can't expect the legal system to catch all the people doing the battering, so there have to be community sanctions for batterers and community protection for women."

Unfortunately, criminalizing domestic violence ensures that some women, mostly of color, get no help. Many women of color simply will not call the police for fear of what will happen to themselves or their abusive partner in the hands of law enforcement officers. Many immigrant women will not call for fear of having their immigration status questioned. Mandatory arrest laws are often used by police to arrest both partners in a dispute, with the claim that both partners were being violent. Sue Ostoff, a white woman who directs the National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women, says that "if we keep increasing criminal sanctions, we will increasingly see that who is getting pulled into that net are women, especially women of color."

Some groups are pursuing alternatives to criminalization that focus on raising awareness and censuring batterers. Sakhi, a group of South Asian women in New York, regularly conducts marches and rallies, sometimes at the homes of batterers. Leah Aldridge, an African American who works at the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women, runs a program to reeducate teens about rape and battering. Working through schools and community organizations, this program aims to break the cycle in which children experience family violence and go on to either tolerate it or perpetrate it as adults.

who batter women have criminal justice system.

Sovereignty and Domestic Violence

In Indian country, anti-domestic violence activists confront the benefits and costs of criminal justice and shelter systems from a position of sovereignty. Charen Artichoker, an Oglala Lakota and Hochunk woman who directs Cangleska, Inc. in Rapid City, South Dakota, says that communities that operate a sovereign tribal force "recognize the police as front-line people who come and help whether you have a domestic dispute or need your refrigerator moved." She says tribal control of the police force makes a tremendous difference "because it is our own system and the cops are Indian."

On the other hand, Artichoker points out the racist history of Bureau of Indian Affairs' policing in Indian country. Additionally, many Indians choose not to call the authorities in cases of rape, severe violence, or murder because such crimes would be handled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Activist Maggie Escovita Steele (Chiricahua Apache) says "they take forever to come, and nothing's going to happen." Artichoker, who supports criminalization in general, says that calling the Feds "is not the stance of a sovereign nation."

Such cases force many Indian communities to develop their own sanctions against abusers, sanctions which can be politically delicate in small communities where everybody knows one another. Escovita Steele recounts an example in which a young woman was killed, splitting the community over family and friendship loyalties. The young people of the community got together, called out the perpetrators, asked the tribe not to pay their legal fees, and to pay all the burial costs for the victim. Such interventions require high levels of consciousness by advocates who, Artichoker says, push communities to "get past the stigma about ratting each other out."

Artichoker's organization has developed a shelter system that supports abused women. "We've built our shelter to be different from the usual. We don't keep the food, phones, or people locked up, and have no curfew." Although the shelter helps, Artichoker wants an Indian-run criminal justice system which would pull the batterer, not the woman, out of the home and community. "I wish we had a place where the men would have to stay, but where they'd get some information about how to change their behavior. Right now all he gets is the guys saying 'forget the bitch, have another beer.'"

Where to go from here?

While many anti-domestic violence activists have pushed for public awareness to help prevent violence, others question whether batterer re-education programs get to the root causes of violence any more effectively than criminalization has. Bowman feels that much of the new money entering the field is going to questionable programs which promote individual rather than social solutions. Such campaigns threaten perpetrators with jail, but fail to counter men's sense of entitlement to control women's lives through the use of intimidation and violence. Turner admits that "programs like ours have some benefits, but their effectiveness depends on the attitudes of the community surrounding the couple. Attitudes that blame the woman or deny the abuse create a framework that gives men a lot of room to deny their own responsibility."

Women of color also wonder whether they can expect support from white battered women's activists to specifically address domestic violence in communities of color. Richie says women of color increasingly feel able to act without support from white women, but that white activists are also increasingly open to questioning criminalization as the main solution to domestic violence. She thinks some of this openness stems from white women's negative experiences with criminalization—being hassled by the cops, getting arrested themselves, going to prison for killing their abusers, losing time from work and school while trying to prosecute abusers, or suffering from declining economic status that makes leaving less of an option.

Still, Richie questions whether the anti-domestic violence movement's internal critics, including herself, will be able to "undo our rigid stance about [the universality of battering and the need to sanction batterers] without demeaning the integrity of our own work over the last 30 years."

In short, women of color are between a rock and a hard place: perhaps at greater risk for domestic violence than white women because of poverty (of self and of partner); unable to trust the police for themselves or their partners; less able to rely on internal community resources because of low awareness of domestic violence; and confronted with reluctance from progressive people of all colors to further criminalize men of color. **ACTION**

From a "Short Time" to "A Way Out"

Race, Militarism & Korean Sex Workers in New York

Alexandra Seung Hye Suh looks at the U.S. military roots of the Asian sex trade and the workers' attempts to fight back.



Korean sex workers face state repression. Still from the movie The Women Outside. Courtesy Hye Jung Park, J.T. Takagi, and Third World Newsreel.

Oblivious to the cold night air, "Misook"* tells a joke in her staccato Korean as she helps to hoist a heavy bureau donated to the Rainbow Center by a furniture store into the van. The Rainbow Center is a New York City organization providing shelter, service, and advocacy for Korean women facing homelessness, domestic violence, rape, and mental illness.

Misook has spent the afternoon with others photocopying and stapling news articles about the Justice for Mrs. O Coalition, which is organizing on behalf of a Korean woman raped by a

* Misook, Jinna, and Miyoung Taylor are pseudonyms. Their statements have been translated from Korean by the writer.

Alexandra Seung Hye Suh works at Rainbow Center and the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAHV), and teaches in the Asian/Pacific/American Studies Program at New York University.

powerful member of the Korean community, who was also her employer and immigration sponsor. As one of the few Rainbow Center sisters who drives, Misook plays an important role, taking women to English classes, dropping bulk mail newsletters off at the post office, stopping at the bank.

Other days, she conducts Bible study and outreach at massage parlors. She knows these women because, for seven years, Misook was also a massage parlor worker. After years of marriage to an abusive, alcoholic husband who gambled and had affairs, she finally left him. But, lacking a high school degree and speaking little English, her options were limited and she turned to massage parlor work.

Then the massage parlor owner started supplying her with freebase cocaine. "Nobody will tell you that," she says. "They might tell you about selling bodies, but they won't tell you that they sell drugs too." It's one way of keeping women in debt and working.

"I didn't work continuously," she explains. "I would make some money, then hang around taking drugs. When the money ran out I would work again, then do the same thing."

U.S. Militarism in Korea

Korean massage parlors, which proliferated in cities throughout the U.S. in the 1970s, are an unacknowledged part of the legacy of U.S. military involvement in Asia. Since the end of WWII, the U.S. has held a dominant military, political, economic, and cultural influence over the southern half of Korea. Today there are approximately 37,000 U.S. troops and 100 American military bases and installations in South Korea.

Prostitution around U.S. bases is not unique to Asia. But militarized prostitution in the Philippines, Thailand, Korea, and Okinawa, and the sex tourism industries that grew out of it, have a history and scope unmatched anywhere else in the world. And it has

fed a despicably racist perception that associates all Asian women with submissiveness and sex.

Since the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of Korean women, mostly from devastated rural communities, have worked in one of the dozens of camp-town bars and clubs that surround every sizable U.S. base in Korea. After the Korean War (1950–53), in which millions of civilians were killed, South Koreans' average annual income was under \$100. Today, women still earn only 53 percent of what men make.

In Korea's booming 1980s economy, a "short time" with a Korean prostitute could cost as little as \$5; the entire night as little as \$10. U.S. servicemen, many from America's urban or rural poor, don't earn much, but \$5 is still spare change. In 1965, a U.S. Army study found that 84 percent of its troops in Korea had "been out with a prostitute at least once." Most think that figure is even higher today.

Another impact of U.S. troop presence in Korea is that over 100,000 marriages between American men and Korean women, many but by no means all of whom were former prostitutes, have taken place since 1950. Through bar work near the bases, Korean women earn foreign exchange dollars for South Korea and often support family members. But the overwhelming stigma associated with prostitution, especially with foreigners, led many families to reject their daughters and sisters. To many, marriage with a serviceman looked like a way out.

Back into the Fire

But for many women, this way out led back to prostitution, this time in the U.S. Most Korean women who have worked in massage parlors in the U.S. are or were married to U.S. servicemen.

"It's got to be something like 90 percent," says Misook. "Jinna,"* another Rainbow Center sister with massage parlor work experience, nods her head in agreement. Jinna was married to a serviceman, ended up working in a massage parlor, and acquired a serious substance abuse problem. A car accident triggered her decision to quit cold turkey and live at the Center.

Three-quarters of marriages between Korean women and U.S. servicemen end in divorce, and 70 percent of such marriages are abusive. The husbands often hold near-total control within such marriages, a control reenforced by racist and sexist perceptions and institutions. As U.S. citizens, husbands are their wives' immigration sponsors and wield the power to revoke their applications. Because they are familiar with U.S. society, they have greater access to jobs and possess basic survival skills such as knowing how to write a check, how to drive, and how to talk to the police. They have friends and family, often nearby, while their wives are frequently isolated from families left behind in Korea.

The wives are also stigmatized in Korean communities. They are reviled as prostitutes whether or not they have such a background, and are called demeaning names like "Western princess." When their marriages fall apart, they often feel isolated from both U.S. society and the Korean community, leading some to view massage parlor work as their best, if not their only option.

State Repression

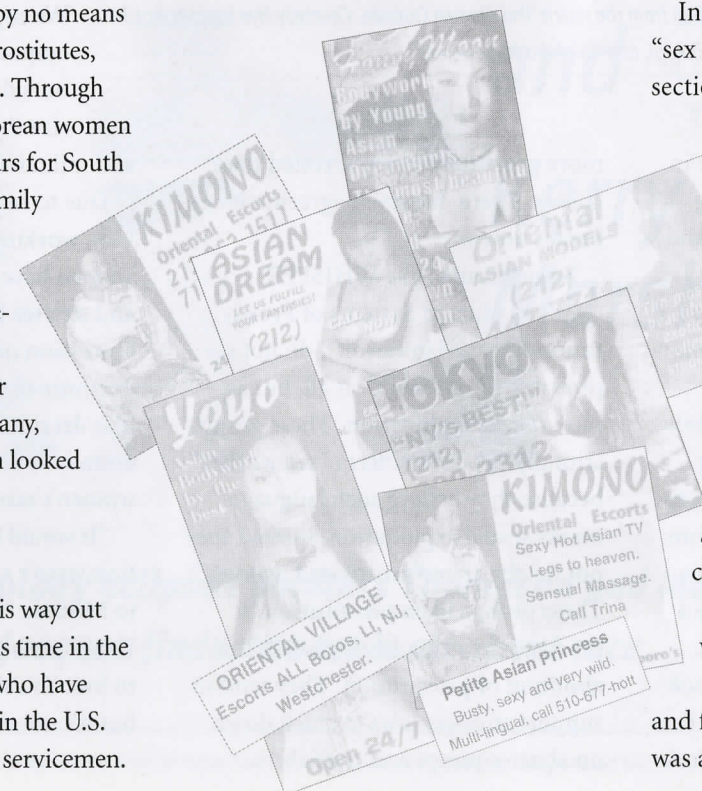
"Law enforcement is really clamping down on this industry as part of [New York City Mayor Rudolph] Giuliani's Quality of Life campaign," says Ai-jen Poo, coordinator of the Women Workers Project of the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAHV), which has worked with Korean women sexworkers. "There are task forces in immigrant neighborhoods targeting immigrant brothels and massage parlors. Owners can no longer afford to open houses and workers can no longer afford to keep getting arrested and being forced to move around."

In *Screw*, an infamous New York "sex review," there used to be a special section for "Asian spas," which were predominantly Korean parlors.

But by the mid-1990s, this section had no listings.

Instead, it ran this announcement: "Thanks to city politics, Manhattan's always dependable Oriental spas are suffering harassment and constant closings by city officials that make it impossible [for *Screw*] to keep up with the changes."

Ironically, massage parlor workers say that police officers are among their most numerous and frequent clients. "The first time I was arrested and taken to the police



station I was amazed to recognize so many of the [massage parlor] customers there at the station," Misook exclaims. "Even if a [police officer] is someone's regular, he could come the next day and bust her," Jinna declares wryly.

Tightening immigration legislation has also made life more difficult for Korean prostitutes. If arrested, they now face a far higher risk of deportation and much more stringent barriers to citizenship.

Escort Services

For many, the alternative to constant arrest is escort service, in which women meet clients at the clients' location. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, some even take major credit cards. But escort service work, while providing more protection from law enforcement, is "much more dangerous," says Poo. "The majority of incidents of rape and assault that we've heard about have been in escort services. You have to go to a stranger's place, you're isolated, and you don't know what's on the other side of the door." CAAAV worked on one case in which a Korean woman, "Miyoungh Taylor," had been robbed, beaten, and left for dead in a Manhattan office building by a white former military school student and self-described martial arts expert.

In a society where economic stability is out of reach for most working class Asian immigrant women, prostitution can look like a path to economic independence. But Misook warns, "Yeah, if you're good you can make a thousand dollars a day. That's a lot. But where is all that money? You look at the women, and they don't have it. You spend it all. If you could just do it

for a short time and get out, it would be all right. But you don't," she repeats. Jinna tells a story: "I knew one woman who was really good with money. She worked in a house, then opened her own place in Atlantic City. She never took drugs. She saved her money. She was raking it in. Then her husband killed her. For the money."

Organizing Sex Workers

Today, nearly all groups doing organizing work with prostitutes support decriminalization of prostitution and oppose the unequal enforcement of anti-prostitution laws that result in



Still from the movie *The Women Outside*. Courtesy Hye Jung Park, J.T. Takagi, and Third World Newsreel.

more prostitutes being arrested than clients. There, however, agreement breaks down.

Some groups, like WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt), do not see prostitution as "work" at all, but as pure sexual exploitation. These groups strongly oppose the term "sex worker" because they believe such language masks sexual exploitation. Instead they opt for the term "prostituted women." These groups liken prostitution to rape and slavery, and emphasize the abolition of prostitution. They tend to support stronger laws to crack down on abusive pimps and traffickers.

However, these organizations have been criticized for denying women's agency and attempting to further circumscribe the limited economic options of women.

Other organizations, such as the North American Task Force on Prostitution, emphasize the enforcement of labor and occupational safety laws in prostitution. They tend to see the state as an oppressive rather than a protective force. Yet, such organizations have been criticized from the perspective that women cannot make a "free" choice to enter prostitution in a sexist and male-dominated society.

The organizations I work with, Rainbow Center and CAAAV, see Korean massage parlors as sites of labor exploitation as well as sexual and racial exploitation. We make a distinction between massage parlor prostitution or escort services as opposed to sexual slavery, in which women are physically confined and forced to sexually serve clients. We support women's collective empowerment both within and outside the parlors and emphasize the role of U.S. imperialism and militarism in prostitution.

Due to racism and sexism in the U.S., working class Asian immigrant women have few occupational choices and stricter laws often result in greater repression of women. We support decriminalization, but also recognize that decriminalization alone will not essentially change Asian immigrant women's economic position.

"It would be a lot better if prostitution wasn't against the law," according to Misook. "You can look at it as a job." But, Jinna adds, "It's not the right way to live. You shouldn't get arrested for it, but it's not the right way to live." **ACTION**

PAINTING DREAMS, PAINTING "RACE"

Jean-Michel
Basquiat,
Bob Thompson,
and
Kerry James
Marshall

"Basquiat dreams." Collage by Bukoo Buss.

Basquiat's mythology eclipses painters Thompson and Marshall. But, as Geoffrey Jacques finds, the art is all about race.

Geoffrey Jacques is a poet and essayist who lives in New York. His latest book of poems, *Suspended Knowledge*, is available from Adastra press.

In death, as in life, the painter Jean-Michel Basquiat is a figure who polarizes.

Basquiat, of Haitian and Puerto Rican parentage, first hit the New York art scene as a graffiti artist linked with early hip-hop. During his nine-year career, which ended in August 1988 with his death at age 27 of a heroin-cocaine overdose, Basquiat was promoted by the art establishment as the only important painter of African descent. Five years after the artist's death, the Whitney Museum of American Art sponsored a large traveling exhibition of his work, the intent of which seemed to be to codify a notion of Basquiat's singular importance.

This codification sets some people's teeth chattering. "They won't give big shows to

artists like Martin Puryear or Jacob Lawrence," says an African American arts educator. They only give such shows, she says, "to people who are marginal, and whose work is questionable."

Marginal? Questionable? You wouldn't know it from the recent bestselling biography by Phoebe Hoban, the hit arthouse film directed by Julian Schnabel, or the books and catalogues which have proliferated since Basquiat's death. Ask any reasonably well-educated young art student about important African American visual artists of the 1980s, and it's likely that Basquiat's name will be the first, perhaps only, one he or she will mention.

But ask some African American artists, critics, or curators in New York, and you are just as likely to get bombarded with emotional invective as with enthusiastic praise. That Basquiat, with virtually no formal training, could alone among artists of color become the chosen one—be swept up into the hothouse art world of the booming 1980s, and, most notably through his friendship with Andy Warhol, arrive at the center of that world—still rankles many art-world African Americans.

Some charge the art establishment with approving only those black artists who are dysfunctional, who fit some colonialist-inspired notion of the noble savage. But Basquiat also gives us a window through which to look at certain approaches to image-making that emerge from being black in this race-conscious and racist society. And by looking at two African American artists—Kerry James Marshall ("Mementos" at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, September 11-November 29, 1998) and Robert Thompson (retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, September 25, 1998-January 3, 1999)—we can see more clearly the sensibility Basquiat brought to his own enigmatic works.

Kerry James Marshall's Home Dreamscapes

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1955 and currently living in Chicago, Kerry James Marshall is an intensely humorous painter. His street and domestic scenes emphasize both his working class roots and his penchant for the absurd and the hallucinatory. He is a painter of

dreams. His paintings carry an aura of pious nostalgia and seek to imbue the "ordinary" with a sense of transcendence. Heaven, Marshall's paintings say, is in your living room.

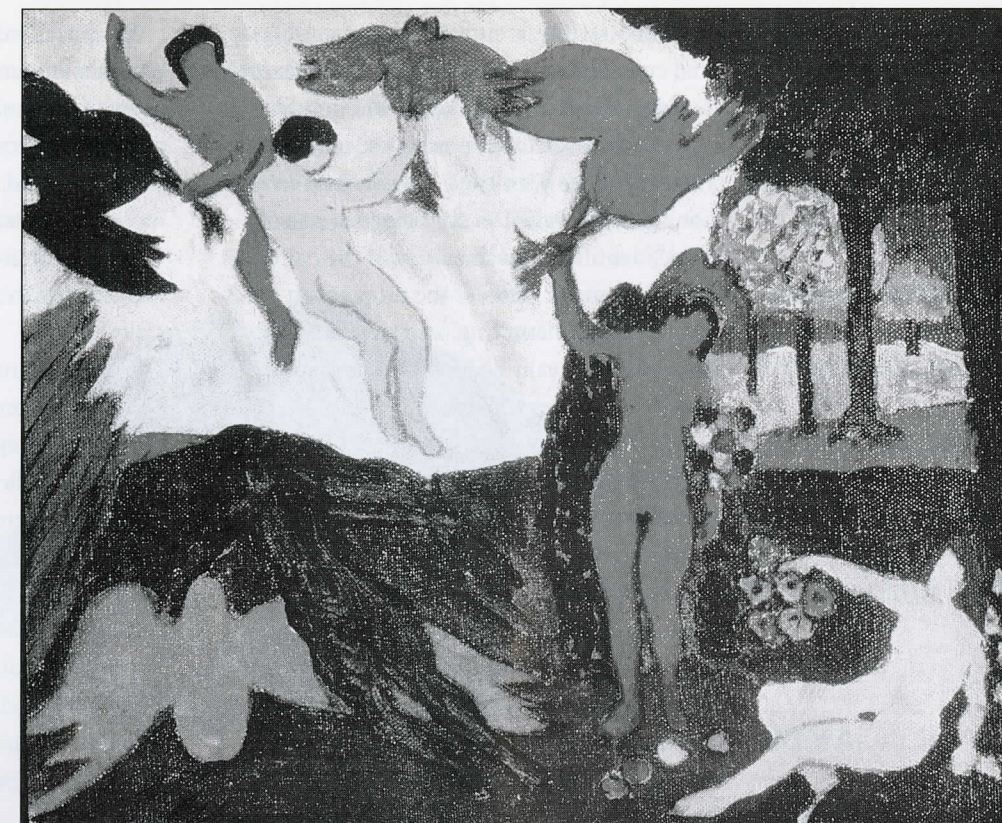
In "Mementos," the paintings center on the endgame of the 1960s, with its uprisings and political assassinations, as seen through the remembered eyes of a child. In "Souvenir IV," a black woman stands in one of those newly middle class, look-but-don't-touch living rooms. She's wearing wings on her back. Above is a cartoon-like cloud with the names of famous black writers and artists who died in the 1950s and 1960s: Zora Neale Hurston, Meta Warrick Fuller, Lorraine Hansberry, W.E.B.

Du Bois, others. Another cloud wafts through an open window, bearing the name of Father Divine.

Many of Marshall's people are painted a deep, black skin color. His love for the richness of his subjects' color is reminiscent of fellow Chicago painter Archibald Motley, whose cabaret scene and other paintings remain underacknowledged. Marshall's paintings are striking and playful, and reveal a vision deeply rooted in the concept—also, it seems, a late '60s leftover—that black people are beautiful.

Thompson's Militant Integrationism

Although he wasn't lionized the way Basquiat was, Bob Thompson was probably the best-known black painter of his generation—one which includes black artists like Emilio Cruz, Mel Edwards, Emma Amos, Sam Gilliam, and Barbara Chase-Riboud. Like Basquiat, Thompson died young—in 1966 at age 29—a death also complicated by heroin use. He, too, was an artist who painted dreams. But his dreams did not draw inspiration from a remembered world; nor were they, like many of Basquiat's paintings, filled with tragic, mock-



"Abundance and the Four Elements" by Bob Thompson. Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of Modern Art.

heroic romanticism. Thompson's paintings, best seen in *La Caprice* and *Abundance* and the *Four Elements*, are profoundly utopian and express a sensibility which a politically-inclined mind might call militant integrationism.

Thompson often painted his figures green, orange, or blue—any color but a normal human skin tone—and set these figures in landscapes with a burning, churning sky. His tableaux are drawn from dreams, old master paintings, biblical stories, and comic book and myth-derived influences. He included outsized creatures like birds and dragons in his work. Thompson was a jazz lover, and counted many musicians, notably Ornette Coleman, among his friends. Musicians like Archie Shepp dedicated compositions to him, and Thompson's paintings appeared on record album covers (*La Caprice* appears on Steve Lacy's *The Forest and the Zoo*).

The term "militant integrationism" is meant not so much to describe Thompson's work; it is an attempt to get a handle on the sensibility that produced it. This show gave us a glimpse into a sensibility which is now nearly lost: an—dare I use the word?—Afrocentric integra-

Thompson's
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"Souvenir IV" by Kerry James Marshall. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Art Museum.

That Basquiat, with virtually no formal training, could alone arrive at the center of the art world—still rankles many art-world African Americans.

tionism on which a multiracial and multilayered culture could be built. That ideal was later denounced as a sham by some who found other sorts of rhetoric more intoxicating. And Thompson has been cited usually in conversation, rarely in print) as not being sufficiently black-identified. But then look at the paintings, and ask yourself whether the utopianism imagined there isn't tempting, and whether that utopianism is really alien to the African American jazz sensibility.

Lost Dreams and Post-Apocalyptic Nightmares

This sensibility is a relic of its time—a utopianism engendered by the counterculture aesthetic that emerged around the time of Thompson's death, and whose great black prophet and exemplar is Jimi Hendrix. Thompson's utopias and Marshall's dreams seem to bookend a certain historical period. The bohemian hopes and post-militant, post-apocalyptic nightmares that framed the 1960s are imagined here. As for Basquiat, his was a major artistic imagination of the generation which came along and tried to make sense of it all.

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Basquiat's work is almost wholly locked within an argument about the defining contours of bohemia. Basquiat was born of Haitian and Puerto Rican immigrants. But at the dawn of the digitized, globalized age, before increased mobility began to rearrange some of the older cultural and racial paradigms, he identified with African American culture, especially jazz.

Unlike Thompson's Coleman or Shepp, the younger painter's jazz musician heroes are not his friends; they are icons, saints from another (lost) time. Allen Ginsberg's "best minds," remember, were last seen "dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn." But in Basquiat's world, the hipster's streets no longer belonged to blacks; they belonged to Andy Warhol. Basquiat ultimately lost that struggle for cultural reclamation, but the struggle lives on in his imagery, and explains, as much as anything, the peculiar character of his "black" aesthetic.

Basquiat's Hip-Hop Be-Bop

Despite all the legitimate griping from some black people in the art world, there's no getting around the fact that Basquiat was, and remains, a significant presence. His work is part of a movement which looked to reinvigorate painting while simultaneously recasting the debate between "high" and popular art that has dogged us at least since the pre-dawn of Pop art. It is a reinvigoration which aimed away from a facile incorporation of advertising iconography and toward imagery which connected with the dance music culture of the late-1970s/early-1980s.

While other artists of his generation seemed more interested in incorporating and rearranging images found in the real world, Basquiat remained, above all, an image maker, a painter. And his images were deeply rooted in an African-oriented sensibility, without being at all essentialist or nationalist. He took his African-ness for granted in a way that was disturbing to some—with its playfulness at the border of caricature—while liberating to others. His was an African diasporic sensibility fitted for a post-segregation, post-apartheid world.

Basquiat was also a youth culture artist, the most important visual artist to emerge from the hip-hop generation. Probably the best way to look at his work is with the music of Public Enemy playing in your ears. But his was youth culture with a difference. Basquiat was a jazz enthusiast with a hip-hop sensibility. Though he first emerged on the New York art scene as a graffiti artist linked with the world of early hip-hop, he identified most deeply with both the art and the legend of Charlie Parker.

Feeling Basquiat

So how do we reconcile the two Basquiat: the chosen one of the 1980's art world on the one hand, and the painter who glimpsed the multilayered diasporic nature of our millennial culture on the other? The truth is that we don't. Taking sides in that debate is to take sides against the art. And to do that is to voluntarily walk around blindfolded.

Basquiat brought all these conflicts into his work, along with a set of visual tropes and images drawn from such disparate sources as comic books and the work of Cy Twombly. His images could sometimes be frightening: a skull with wild orange eyes and teeth (Untitled (Black Skull)) peers out at you, surrounded by a spear, a scale, and what looks like a set of male genitalia, all against a black ground, itself spotted, smeared, and scratched with bits of orange and white paint.

Or they can be surprisingly evocative. In *Max Roach* (1984), an all-but-obscured red and black face, its empty eyes staring, is surrounded by the outline of a big gray hat, and sits behind a partially formed drum set, in a pink, white, and red field. The painting reminds us of that quality we appreciate most in good drummers—that they be felt more than heard.

Basquiat was a bold, almost extravagant, col-

orist. His paintings sometimes veer to the edge of incoherence, to be saved by a sense of rhythm and taste which is, at times, uncanny. Basquiat liked to write on his canvases, and some of them are filled with words—words as memories, concepts, ideas, images, often all at

the same time. There are those who want to inscribe a politics to the

words, and in some cases the impulse is a fair one.

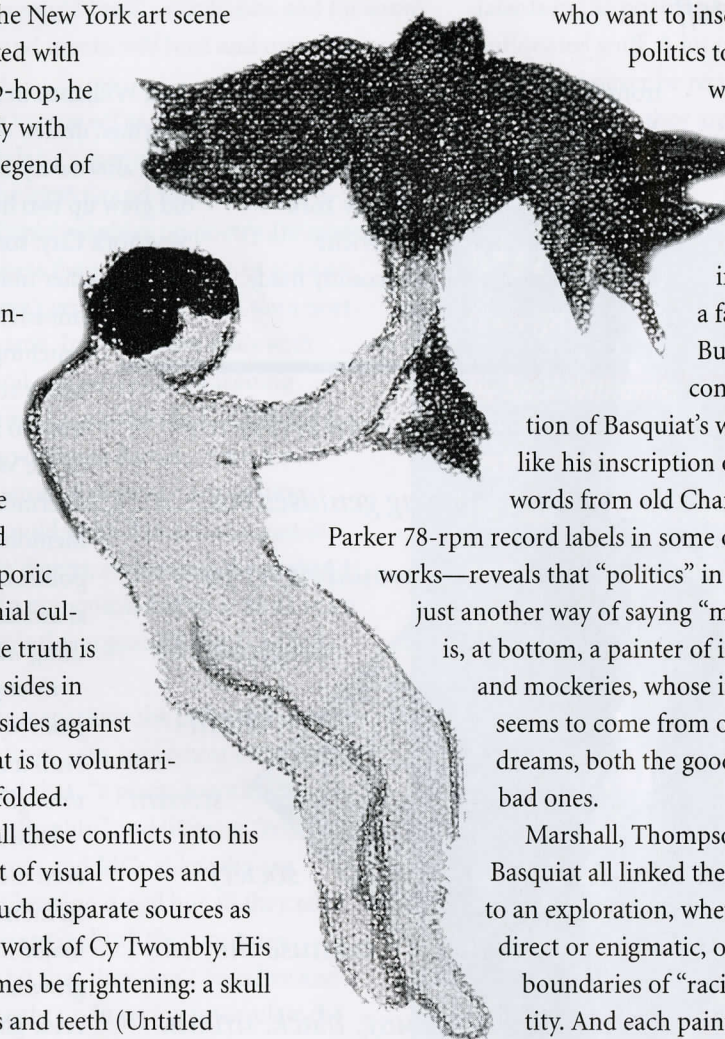
But a careful considera-

tion of Basquiat's work—like his inscription of the words from old Charlie

Parker 78-rpm record labels in some of his works—reveals that "politics" in this art is just another way of saying "myth." He is, at bottom, a painter of ironies and mockeries, whose imagery seems to come from our dreams, both the good and the bad ones.

Marshall, Thompson, and Basquiat all linked their visions to an exploration, whether direct or enigmatic, of the boundaries of "racial" identity. And each painter's work finds itself, finally, dismiss-

ing all fetishist concepts of "race" in favor of a more idealistic, dreamlike, utopian one. But these concepts are utopian only in so far as we refuse to learn—as we could have learned years ago from Parker, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, even early 20th century artists like painter Henry Ossawa Tanner and Louis Armstrong—that to fetishize skin color is something more suited for the nostalgic descendants of slaveholders than it is for the rest of us. For us, the ability to use identity in a purely expressive way is, finally, the surest mark of freedom. **CULTURE**



His was an African diasporic sensibility fitted for a post-segregation, post-apartheid world.

Detail from "Abundance and the Four Elements" by Bob Thompson. Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of Modern Art.

SAUL WILLIAMS SPILLS WORDS ON THE HIP-HOP GENERATION

UNTIED TONGUE

by Oliver Wang, ColorLines staff

In the handbook for June Jordan's Poetry for the People, Jordan writes that "poetry is not ... a casual disquisition on the colors of the sky, a soporific daydream, or

bumpersticker sloganeering." Yet, these are often the kinds of poems we get exposed to on the daily through countless greeting cards and light-rock radio, glossing over the black and white starkness of reality with pastel paint strokes.

Against the dull canvas of these conventions comes Saul Williams, brightly spraying his words like Krylon colors in a train yard. Both an accomplished poet and actor, Williams is part of a new wave of wordsmiths reclaiming poetry from ivory tower academics and advertising executives alike. With the convergence between spoken word and today's rap music, Williams is perfectly positioned as the hip-hop poet to take both forms into the next millennium.

riding on a freight train/in the freezing rain/listening to Coltrane/my reality went insane.

Twice the First Time

Juggling projects like syllables, Williams has taken his words from the page to the stage, and now the screen. He already has his first book of poetry, *The Seventh Octave*, out on Moore Black Press. His spoken word songs have found their ways onto everything

from the UK hip-hop compilation *Black Whole Styles*, to jazz artist Weldon Irvine's *Spoken Melodies*, to a massive double album of New York underground rap music, *Lyricist Lounge*. Biggest of all, he recently made

tion, Williams, in real life, is no reformed dealer, doling out words and weed alternately. Instead, the 26-year-old grew up two hours upstate from New York City, son of an elementary school teacher mother and Baptist

minister father. Growing up watching and listening to his father sermonize, Williams learned long ago the power of the Word, noting, "what is a sermon but a collection of memoirs, stand-up comedy, political rallying and spiritual awakening? It's the same thing with poetry."

through meditation/I program my heart to beat breakbeats and hum basslines/through exhalation. —Ohm

However, for Williams, even more than his father's sermons, hip-hop has been a major influence on his poetic growth. Like many youth of color globally, Williams was exposed to the expressive force of spoken word through rap rhymes, and he wasted little time in becoming a knee-high MC. "When I first started writing poetry, I was in elementary school,"

says Williams, recalling, "I was writing it in rap form and battling kids at lunch tables."

Having honed his verbal pugilism in grade school, the transition to slam poetry probably seemed natural. The idea of "slam" conveys urgency, action,

"A lot of hip-hop artists are
fucking geniuses but
would never be
recognized by
main-
stream
society
because they are
young, black, urban,
and are a bit too tense for

them," says Williams.

Pensive Saul Williams stars in *Slam*.

his film debut in Marc Levin's *Slam*, where he plays Ray Joshua, a Washington D.C. drug dealer saved from a life of crime by the force of rhyme.

While *Slam* emerges as yet another ghetto *bildungsroman* tale where prison becomes the site for the sinner's salva-

and excitement, and the slam poetry contest scene is marked by the same kind of heated rivalry felt in MC battles. An outgrowth of Chicago's poetry performance scene, the slam circuit has grown into a full-on competitive culture where individuals and teams recite poems to score points with the judges. With no props or special effects allowed, these poets have to rely solely on the spoken word to build and destroy alike. Sticks and stones might break your bones, and for some of these poets, words and names will hurt and maim just as well as heal and mend.

Yet, Williams doesn't come off as a poet-version of hip-hop's mad rapper. While he's spent his time in the slam scene—having won the 1996 Grand Slam Championship—Williams' musings on poetry are more focused on self-awareness than on competitive acumen. Even in the movie, there's very little focus on slam poetry, despite the film's name. Instead, *Slam* deals with Williams' mental, moral, and spiritual awakening through poetry. For him, it's not the thrill of the hunt, but the fear of finding what you dare not look for. "Maya Angelou once wrote that someone's writing should be what they would write if they had a gun in their mouth," recalls Williams, continuing the analogy by asking, "If you had a gun pointed at your head, what would you write? That is the urgency through which you should write."

Implicit behind this scenario is the belief that poetry has to honestly come from your innermost core. Poet June Jordan once stated that, "a poem is antithetical to lies/evasions and superficiality" and likewise, Williams gets frustrated with poets and MCs alike who are always, "talking about keeping it real but all they talk about is everything except reality." He continues, "They are glorifying shit that they don't even live and they got other kids caught up in trying to emulate the type of stuff that they don't even do themselves. You see the reverberations of it on the streets and in the mentalities of young people."

the ground on which you walk/is the tongue with which I talk.

—Elohim (1972)

At 26, Williams isn't too far removed from the next generation of youth that he mentions. He regularly travels the country, giving readings at schools and trying to introduce students to a culture of poetry beyond that of dead white men. "I've always had trouble with societies that hold certain artists in such awe that we don't tend to recognize any of our own," shares Williams, critiquing how, "English-speaking,

Western society has such great awe for people like Shakespeare that they cannot see that which is relevant in contemporary artists."

As a result, young people, especially from communities of color, usually feel distanced from poetry. This also contributes, argues Williams, to a false hierarchy/divide erected between poetry and hip-hop. "There are so few recognized talents in the poetry world because of people's awe for dead, antiquated stuff. A lot of hip-hop artists are fucking geniuses but would never be recognized as geniuses by mainstream society because they are young, black, urban, and are a bit too tense for them," says Williams.

1987

(excerpt)

by Saul Williams

I'm the weather man

the cloud say storm is coming

A white buffalo was born already runnin

and if you listen very close you'll hear a hummin'

beneath the surface of our purpose there's a rumor of ancient rain

dressed in clownface minstrels the sky

the moon's my mammy

the storm holds me eye

dressed in westerleys

robed by Robeson

old man river know my name

and the reason you were born is the reason why I came

and she looks me in the eyes

and my eyes get weak/pulse rate descends

hearts rate increase

m.c.'s look me in the eye

pulse rate descends

hearts rate increase...Beautiful.

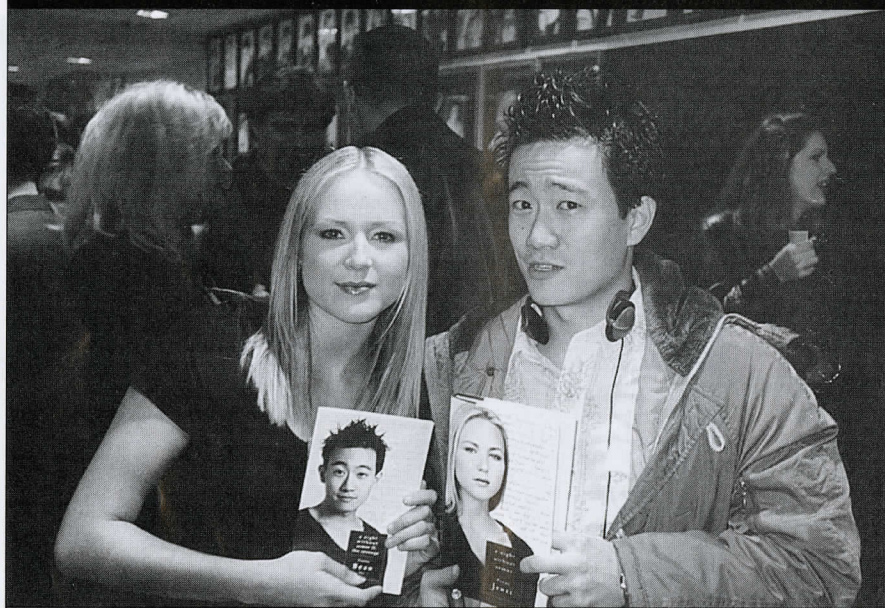
From Weldon Irvine's CD, *Spoken Melodies*

When speaking to new audiences, young or old, Williams describes his process as trying to, "connect to your subconscious and start opening up some kind of vortex." However, spoken word for him is not just an attempt to manifest the metaphysical. Poetry also holds power by allowing its

practitioner to take control of his/her own language—an inherently political act in an age where virtual realities threaten to seduce us away from self-knowledge and determination. This constant reinvention of quotidian speech and thought is why Williams likens poetry to "incantations," offer-

ing that "poetry has the power of getting us onto new grounds with the same stuff so it's a new approach to everyday language. With that new approach can come new understandings and new perspectives, and those are the most powerful things you can have on this planet." **CULTURE**

BEAUKNOWS



Beau Sia's *A Night Without Armor II: The Revenge* was an answer rap to Jewel's execrable book of poetry.

by Oliver Wang, *ColorLines* staff

Also starring in *Slam* as the foul-mouthed Johnny Huang is Beau Sia. A former Chinese American Okie now relocated to New York, Sia is a 22-year-old on a tear. Armed with a New York University degree in screenwriting, Sia's first book, *A Night Without Armor II: The Revenge* is a line-for-line "answer rap" to singer Jewel's execrable book *A Night Without Armor*, parodied right down to the cover art. He also recently released a hip-hop/poetry album, *Attack, Attack, Go!* (Mouth Almighty Records) whose title captures his hyper-kinetic delivery.

In person, Sia is subdued, a possible consequence of years vegetating in front of a television while growing up in Oklahoma. Sia says that his childhood years watching TV have had the most impact on his poetic imagination. "What I like to do is read and watch a lot of television," he says. "I spent so many years in Oklahoma, I watched MTV all the time. I feel that in a lot of my work, that's what leaks out of it—the MTV stuff I've absorbed over the years."

What he didn't absorb from the Midwest experience was much of an ethnic identity. Sia credits his move to New York and its immense diversi-

ty for pulling him out of his shell of racial denial. He confides, "When I was living in Oklahoma, I was so ashamed of who I was, I would tell people that I was white on the inside. It's very bizarre—this desire by Asian Americans to assimilate so much that they push away their culture."

However, even as he's grown more comfortable in his own skin, Sia recognizes that his ethnicity makes his poetry career all the more challenging. Relating his experience with people in the publishing industry, Sia asks rhetorically, "How could I be marketable? How can you market an Asian American male in this country? Nobody's figured it out yet."

In the meantime, Sia intends to release another book of poetry and perhaps another album. However, he downplays the importance of book sales or literary awards, choosing instead to focus on how his poetry is received. "What I'm concerned with is exposing poetry to people who'd normally not be exposed to poetry," shares Sia. "I hope to influence lives to a more positive end—where people don't have to feel like they have to be quiet about their lives—that you can express yourself and you can be vulnerable...it's OK." **CULTURE**

injustice doesn't go out of style

RAISING HELL WITH THE ASIAN DUB FOUNDATION

By Todd Inoue

In 1993, Dr. Das and Chandrasonic were teachers in London's East End at a music education program called Community Music, setting up music technology workshops for disadvantaged South Asian youth. Out of the workshops the Asian Dub Foundation, (ADF)—equal parts jungle propulsion, dub reggae skank, punk edge, hip-hop rage, and Qawwali uplift—was born. Their 1995 debut, *Facts and Fictions*, proudly displayed the rage, ambition, and power of Britain's emerging second generation of Asians. (Asian Britain is overwhelmingly Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi.)

ADF defies feel-good liberal multiculturalism. On "Jericho," Master D rapped, "You're multicultural but we're anti-racist. We ain't ethnic, exotic, or eclectic." Next they cut the ear-shattering single "Free Satpal Ram"—pushing Britain's counterpart to Mumia Abu-Jamal into the spotlight. In 1986, Satpal Ram was imprisoned for life after stabbing racist attackers in self-defense. He has since suffered racially motivated beatings at the hands of

Todd Inoue is a freelance scribe, whose work appears in the *San Jose Mercury News*, *Pulse!*, and *Amazon.com*.

England's "foremost political pop group," the Asian Dub Foundation began humbly in the streets.



The Asian Dub Foundation: (l to r) Master D, Pandit G., Chandrasonic, Sun-J and Dr. Das.

prison constabularies. But one night in prison, Ram heard the ADF song on his Walkman radio, and the radio announcer championing his cause. He soon found letters of support pouring in as well. Then Britpop hero Bobby Gillespie of the band Primal Scream took up ADF's banner, calling them "the best rock-n-roll band in years."

"you're multicultural but we're anti-racist. we ain't ethnic, exotic, or eclectic."

Today the buzz on ADF is ferocious. Their new album, *Rafi's Revenge*, justifies the hype. One of the most critically acclaimed albums of 1998, ADF is the sound of the Asian underground's bright future: "Abandon all your first impressions/Come and take part in this

conscious session/Look to the past to get inspiration/ Move yourselves forward with dub acceleration." *ColorLines* spoke with Dr. Das by phone from his home in London.

ColorLines: You helped organize and teach music technology workshops for Asian kids. What kind of aspira-

tions do Asian kids have in Britain? Do they recognize the racism inherent in society?

Dr. Das: They have the same aspirations as anybody else, really. We just want to get along, play our cause, live a decent life without getting hassled too

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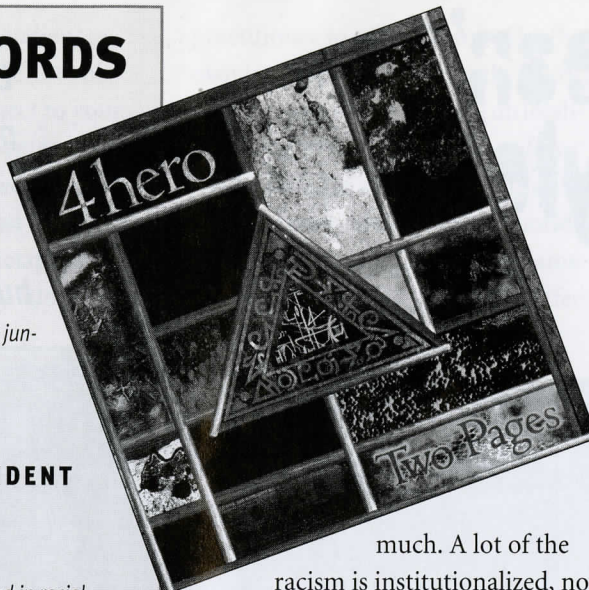
(Pimpstrut) Organic beats meet cerebral rhymes as this Chinese American trio from Philly broaden rap's black/white spectrum.

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MILES DAVIS-THE COMPLETE BITCHES BREW SESSIONS

(Columbia) Miles proved the opposite of "cool" is "burning hot"—the rebirth of black power jazz. **CULTURE**



much. A lot of the racism is institutionalized, not blatant everyday. I don't think day-to-day people analyze it in such a way.

CL: ADF seems like the first group of its kind. What role models did you have when forming the group?

DD: Not many. That's why we formed that band. We started in 1993 as HipSpace. We were experimenting with technology and Asian sounds. The band Fun^da^mental was doing it simultaneously. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was a big hero for us. What he was doing with Qawwali and experimenting with other sounds, that's how a bunch of us got into it.

CL: With so many Asian musicians in Britain doing things—from Talvin Singh to Cornershop to you guys does the stereotype show signs of changing?

DD: A stereotype, by definition, is the perception of someone outside your group. Young Asian people are doing all kinds of things. You mentioned Cornershop and they helped alter one of the biggest stereotypes. [Editors note: In Britain, Asians are commonly represented as cornershop keepers.] Now when we hear "cornershop," it doesn't conjure up the stereotype of an old couple working all hours at the corner store. It conjures up different ideals and forward thinking.

CL: What is the state of Pan-Asian unity in Britain? Does it exist?

DD: I can't say for the whole country, but within ADF, we have Punjabi, Bengali, Hindu. We're looking for people who are looking for changes and making links with people in all different areas.

CL: Was ADF born out of the (DJ dance) sound system?

DD: The sound system is at the heart of it. We used to run shows in Paris, like 10 hour shows, and play the gig and do lots of DJing in between. That's how our music develops—just jamming, messing around.

CL: Was it hard to get gigs? Did you run into racial obstacles?

DD: Oh yeah. There's verbal or physical abuse, that's one thing. But mainly it was the racism of not being given the opportunity to play. Literally, because of our names, it was definitely hard to get gigs. We found it hard to get our records in the shops. Our first album was totally ignored.

CL: Do people sense that ADF is too serious?

DD: That comes with people's perception of political music. But anyone who comes to see us can see we're having a laugh. We call it a conscious party.

CL: Is there a place for consciousness within pop music?

DD: Course there is! Pop music—three and a half-minute songs—has only been going for fifty years. Popular music as a place for commentary and criticism of kings and governments—that's been going on for 500 years. Our music is occupied with living day-to-day and the issues that we've learned from our parents—that's all we're doing. And hopefully making very funky music.

CL: What's the status of Satpal Ram?

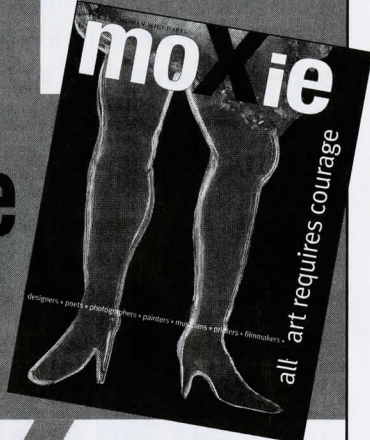
DD: Behind bars. Because of the nature of his protest, he's been classified as a disruptive prisoner. Category B—high security. We're trying to get him sent to a more open prison. At the (British music) Mercury Awards, the drummer and bass player of Pulp said they'd written to Satpal. (Socialist Brit pop group) Chumbawamba has created a webpage.

CL: Can music make a change?

DD: Yes, because injustice doesn't go out of style. It's absurd that talking about

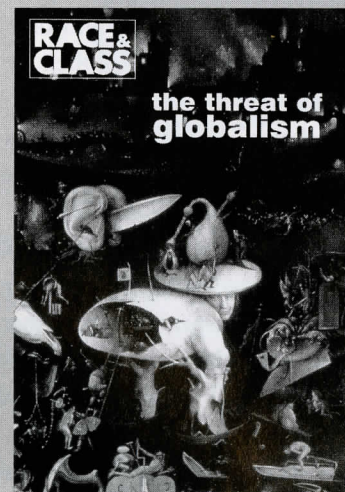
issues can go in and out of style. People should always be talking about these things. It's a precursor to action. Music makes people aware of certain things. The day-to-day work is unglamorous. It's really hard. You have to go at it every day. Pandit G worked for such an organization. G. ran a helpline which operated from 6 p.m.–6 a.m. He had to stay in all night to man this line that helped the wrongfully arrested. It's not about going out on the streets and chucking stones or beating a few fascists and going 'round the pub bragging about it. **CULTURE**

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the threat of globalism RACE & CLASS

Globalisation is fast becoming the buzzword to justify the new world economic order. But what fresh dangers does globalism present for the Third World, and how can the Left reinvent itself in the information age? This special double issue of *Race & Class* asks what is new about globalisation, have information- and bio-technologies changed economic and social relations, how

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Ask Alfredo

Dear Alfredo,

I organize in my Native American community in Montana. Our organization's members have identified public schools as an area of major concern. The most obvious problem is that there are only two Native American teachers (and only three other teachers of color) working in our local school district, which employs 1008 teachers. More than 13 percent of the student body is Native American, and another seven percent are other students of color.

Recently, our leaders met with the school superintendent to demand that he hire more Native American teachers. The superintendent informed us that the district had just hired two more Native American teachers "but very few apply."

After the meeting, I discovered that our local teachers college reports that 20 percent of its graduates are Native Americans. This information made me furious. I was ready to blast the superintendent publicly and accuse the district of being racist. Our leaders agreed the district was being racist, but to my surprise, they opposed my proposal because, as one said, "my mother did not bring me up to use those types of derogatory words." We were unable to agree on a plan on how to move forward.

So my question to you is, how and when should someone raise the issue of racism? How can I convince my own leadership that it's appropriate to call someone or some institution racist?

Sincerely,
Angry and Confused

Alfredo de Avila is an organizing consultant and past training director for the Center for Third World Organizing.

Dear Angry and Confused,

Well, I agree with you. The fact that there are only two Native American teachers employed by the district is absolutely ridiculous, and certainly no accident. But you face an interesting dilemma about how to get your leaders to agree to call the school district racist.

If there is smoke there is fire. Not hiring enough Native American teachers is probably just one part of what I bet is a pattern of racist practices at the district that, with a little digging, you can get your leaders to uncover. It's time to do some research to bring your leaders along, step by step.

Talk to your members, leaders, and other members of your community. Ask them and their children if they have ever seen or been victims of discrimination, of racially motivated accusations or insults, of unjust or unfair treatment by any staff members or other students in the schools because they are Native American. Have your leaders check whether Native American students get disciplined or suspended more than white kids. Take notes and collect data. Get the goods.

Also, find out if any Native Americans have applied for teaching jobs in the district over the past five years. Were they given an interview? Were any of them ever actually offered a job? How did they feel they were treated? You might even go out and find some certified Native American teachers and get them to apply and watch what happens very carefully.

Organize your leaders to take a close look at how the history and literature books used in the district depict Native American history and culture. Check into whether Native Americans are being unfairly tracked into non-college track courses.

As they come in, present the facts you gather to your leaders and mem-

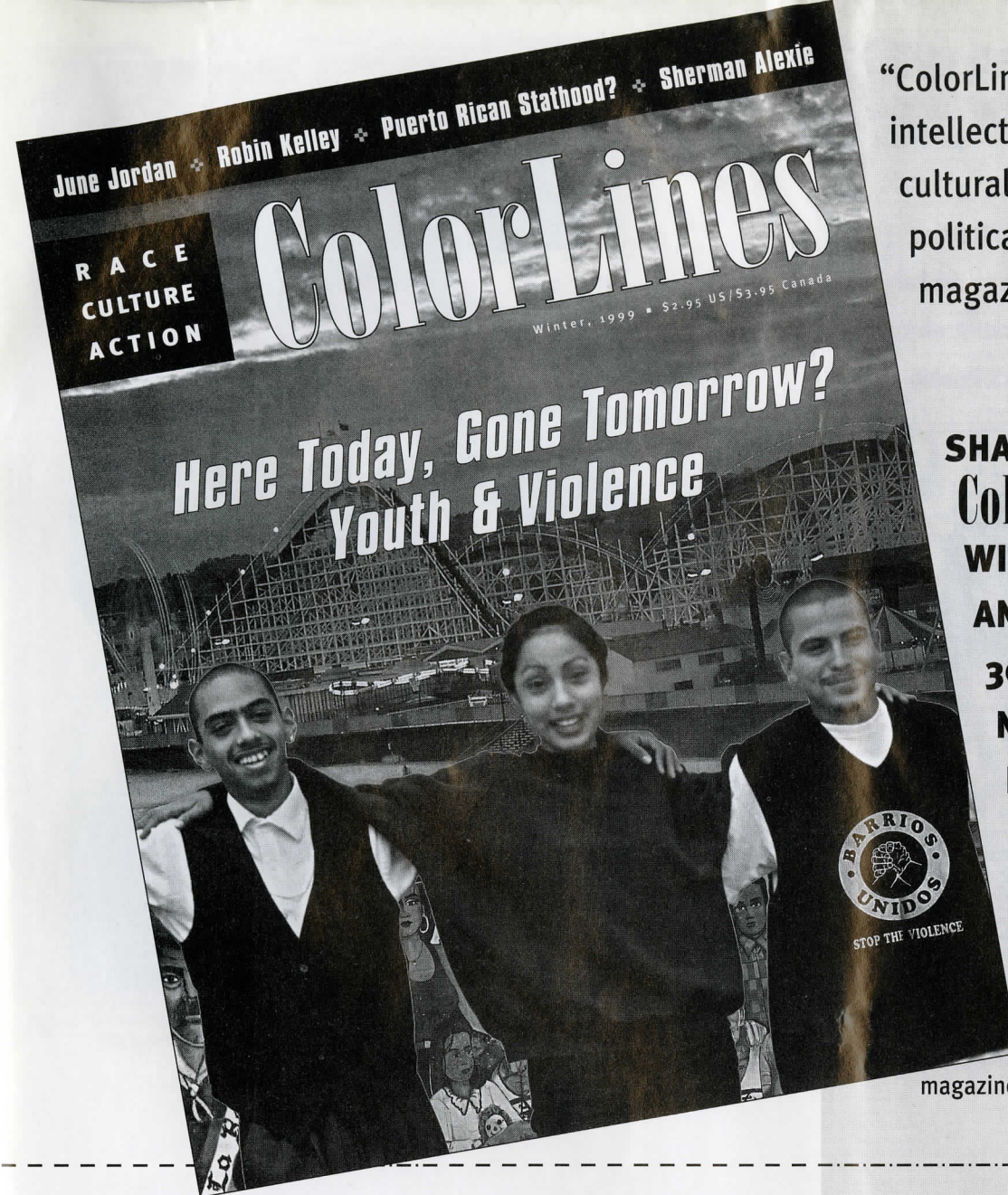
bers. And then you can have a discussion about how to make the case for racism. Each piece of damaging information which you find can be used as a tactic. As in poker, it's your deal, so don't show all your cards at once. Play them one at a time, escalating the actions and charges as you go along.

Together with your leaders and active members you should map out a specific campaign plan over a specific time period. Each action should be different from the last, using different information you have collected and demands that you have formulated to expose or embarrass the school district for its discriminatory action against Native Americans. As the research and the campaign moves forward, your leaders and members will see the pattern of racist policies and practices of the district and will then have the experience to call a spade a spade.

By the way, make sure your demands on the district are very specific and measurable. Don't just call them racists, and ask them to fix the problem. They may come up with worse solutions if you don't guide their thinking. Exactly how many new Native American and other teachers of colors should be hired next year? How many and what classes on Native American history and culture should be implemented and by when? Have them adopt a suspension policy that you come up with.

So, take your leadership through this battle one step at a time and assure them they have nothing to lose, because when you're on the bottom there is only one way to go, and that's up. **ACTION**

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The nation's new classroom. Oakland, CA. Photo by Kathy Sloane.

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