

Social Justice Movements in a Liminal Age

by Deepak Bhargava

Liminal – 1. relating to a transitional or initial stage of a process; 2. occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold

Introduction

The brief, ecstatic Obama-centered period of 2008-2010 seems to resist all of the stories that have since been spun about it, from triumphant narratives of transformation, to angry jeremiads of betrayal of the progressive cause, to the apocalyptic stories of national ruin that animate the Right. In sober hindsight, it looks more like an opening chapter than a climax: a period in which a few major, hard-fought breakthroughs that will tangibly improve people’s lives were won; many opportunities were squandered, and many crises were left unaddressed; no grand ideological re-alignment occurred; and the social justice movement overall did honorable work, but

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struggled to make the most of an extraordinary moment.

I remember vividly now a moment in the heady days after the 2008 election, when some heralded the triumphant return of a Rainbow Coalition that might produce a lasting progressive governing majority. A close aide and friend to the President said to me that in his view nothing fundamental about American politics and society had changed, other than that there would be a new occupant at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and that it would be a mistake to over-read the election results, as many were doing. The balance of power among contending social forces in America was not essentially altered. Most Americans who voted for and against Obama, contrary to what ideologues of both left and right like to believe, subscribe to no coherent doctrine of any kind and are capable of holding utterly contradictory opinions without discomfort. There had been no tectonic shift in ideological underpinnings. And whatever one chooses to believe about the underlying commitments of the President, it is indisputable that he was elected by himself, not with legions of Members of Congress sworn to his or any agenda. In other words, we have gotten pretty much what might be expected, given the prevailing social conditions, political institutions and ideological contours of the country.

The achievements of this period—the largest expansion of anti-poverty programs and the largest expansion of

the New Deal state in 40 years—were far from trivial in policy terms. They were achieved largely through disciplined, hard-fought ground campaigns which have not received the appreciation or recognition they deserve, perhaps understandably so, given the period of backlash that followed. It is notable that what was achieved in policy terms was in no way accompanied by a story that has stuck—and if there is a great failure of both the Obama Administration and the Left in this period, it has been (until Occupy!) a failure of story-telling.

That this period was brought to an abrupt end by the Tea Party, virulent right-wing populism and its electoral expression in 2010 also raises the questions about whether the country is now in for a lasting period of backlash and whether the hopes raised in 2008 were altogether unjustified.

It may be that the arc of the story is hard to decipher because we are still in the opening chapters. We are, I

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would argue, in a liminal period—a confusing, contradictory and highly unstable period of transition in which many futures are now possible—and aspects of those very different futures are manifest in our present. The confluence of the economic crisis, demographic change, and the radicalization of the Right have created a highly volatile situation, and we are probably not done lurching back and forth between the futures presaged by the elections of 2008 and 2010. Neither the hope for an inclusive, just world nor the prospect of a brutally unequal and racialized one are fantastical—they are both here, right now.

Perhaps what is most striking about the present moment is the extent to which, after such wild swings in the public debate, nothing definitive about our country's trajectory is yet decided. Not even the highly consequential election of 2012 alone is likely to decide the question. What we do now and in the coming years matters a great deal.

If it is true that we are in a historically significant period of transition, it may be helpful to take a step back from the maelstrom of events and ask some grounding questions. What are the forces and factors at play in this current period that will shape the trajectory of our future? What are the key strategic tasks that those concerned with social justice must tackle in or-

der to win the day, particularly those areas in which we need more than incremental progress, where we need major breakthroughs?

This brief paper is not a roadmap to the future, but more an inventory of some of the key questions that face us in hopes that it may facilitate the focusing of our discussions. Though the questions are closely inter-related, for purposes of this paper I will lift up four areas of particular strategic concern where we have urgent needs:

- A cogent progressive approach to the economy, particularly with respect to the questions of mass unemployment and the future of work, that is grounded in a coherent theory not only of re-distribution but also of wealth creation.

Aspects of very different futures are manifest in our present.

- A practical approach to addressing structural racism that can work at the levels of hearts and minds, policy and constituency-building all at once. The highly racialized discourse of the national political environment has raised the stakes on getting this right.
- A deep reckoning with the cultural and moral force of radical individualism, which stands at this stage as an enormous obstacle to advancing a social justice agenda in the U.S.
- A clear-eyed understanding of the nature of our conservative opposition, in order that we might more strategically and effectively resist, and more effectively speak to the center.

I'll conclude with a brief inventory of some of the assets and liabilities that our movement carries into this critical period.

The Economy

The depth of the crisis we face is evident to all in the catastrophe of unemployment, increasing poverty and foreclosures that has gripped the

United States. What has perhaps been less well understood is how deep the roots of that crisis are. While the crisis was precipitated by the financial collapse, the source of our problems is deeper than the invention of toxic financial instruments. We will therefore need a transformational program for the "real" economy as the foundation for a social justice agenda in this decade.

Joseph Stiglitz and others have argued that much as the Great Depression had its roots in the transition from agriculture to manufacturing and the difficulty of absorbing a massive new labor force, so too today's crisis has its roots in the transition from an industrial economy to a service economy and the resulting displacement of vast numbers of workers. This has been compounded in a vicious circle, as Robert Reich and others have pointed out, by levels of inequality that actually retard growth and by an aggressive and concerted attack by corporations and the Right on the social consensus that had kept inequality within bounds in the post-war period. The debate about the role of globalization in the current economic crisis is unsettled, but what does seem clear is that multi-national companies can make record profits while radically shrinking employment levels in the U.S. That development makes working people extremely vulnerable.

I never thought I would quote Larry Summers approvingly, but his take in the Jan. 8, 2012 *Financial Times* captures the dilemma well:

"The spread of stagnation and abnormal unemployment from Japan to the rest of the industrialized world does raise doubts about capitalism's efficacy as a promoter of employment and rising living standards for a broad middle class. The problem is genuine. Serious questions about the fairness of capitalism are being raised. These are driven by sharp increases in unemployment beyond the business cycle—one in six American men is likely to be out of work even after the economy recovers—combined with dramatic rises in the share of income going to

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Middle-Income Peers As Educational Resources and the Constitutional Right to Equal Access

by Derek W. Black

Integrating our nation's public schools continues to be one of the most important and daunting challenges to delivering equal education opportunities. Decades of research confirms that the socioeconomic composition of a school is one of the, if not the most, important factors in individual students' achievement. Yet policies and realistic legal strategies supporting the expansion of voluntary desegregation are few and far between. Mandatory racial desegregation has all but run its course. Voluntary desegregation, while still possible, is subject to significant constitutional limitations that can make it difficult for school districts to devise workable plans. See, e.g., *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701 (2007). School finance litigation has attempted to force states to more fairly distribute resources so as to compensate for the effects of student disadvantage and poverty concentration, but has rarely lodged direct challenges at the problem of segregation. As of late, school finance litigation has even been tepid about challenging resource inequality, conceding to the reality that the recession has emptied state coffers and undermined public services in general.

The inability to defend integration over the past two decades has allowed schools to re-segregate to levels simi-

lar to those that existed when desegregation first began in earnest in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The inability to fundamentally alter the way schools are funded results in predominantly poor and minority schools routinely receiving thousands of dollars less per pupil than their suburban counterparts. In short, today's schools are both segregated and unequal. Given the severity of today's segregation and inequality, a racial achievement gap between whites and minorities equivalent to two

Constitutional guarantees are about far more than money.

years of learning by the eighth grade is not entirely surprising. What is surprising is the dearth of policy and legal solutions to the problem.

One solution may lie in re-envisioning school finance litigation. For over a decade, scholars have called for a "fourth wave" of school finance litigation that would combine racial desegregation and school finance into a single movement. The idea has been that racial and/or socioeconomic iso-

lation deprive students of their state constitutional right to an equal or adequate education. With the exception of an opinion by the Connecticut Supreme Court in *Sheff v O'Neill*, 678 A.2d 1267 (1996), this theory has yet to take firm root. Only a few advocates have even attempted to pursue integration through school finance claims. The benefit of litigating segregation through school finance is that it avoids various doctrinal limitations that exist in the federal courts. Yet current theories of desegregation through school finance would require significant expansion of current state precedent and also pose many of the same practical problems that the federal desegregation posed: inter-district desegregation, judicial capacity and judicial authority.

Integrative approaches to school finance, however, need not confront these practical limitations or require significant expansions of precedent. A careful examination of current school finance precedent indicates that a constitutional right to equal access to middle-income peers at the school district level should already exist. The

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John Payton and Richard Bellman

We dedicate this issue of *Poverty & Race* to two civil rights heroes: **John Payton** passed away in March at age 65. He was since 2008 President & Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, former Corporation Counsel for the District of Columbia, and noted for his work on the University of Michigan's affirmative action litigation and on behalf of the Free South Africa Movement in the 1980s. As Pres. Obama correctly characterized him, he was a "true champion of equality."

In April, the civil rights community also lost **Richard Bellman**, one of the leaders of the fair housing movement, who fought exclusionary zoning for decades in the New York metro area and across the country, helping to define the legal doctrines that support our work today.

theory is not that students can compel a state or school district to create racially or socioeconomically integrated environments where they would not otherwise exist, but that past school finance decisions provide a basis on which to constrain the distribution of middle-income students within individual school districts. A constitutional right to equal access to middle-income peers within individual school districts flows from four basic principles, three of which already find solid support.

The Right to Equitable and Quality Educational Opportunities, Not Just Money

Although routinely dubbed school finance litigation because additional funding has been the primary remedy litigants have requested, the core holdings in school finance litigation establish constitutional guarantees of equal and quality educational opportunity that are about far more than money. In fact, the constitutional violation in most cases is not funding inequity itself, but the substantive and outcome-based inequities that can result from funding inequity. Funding is relevant only because it can purchase critical inputs, such as teachers and curricula, that are necessary to offer students an equal educational opportunity or some qualitative level of education. The ultimate issue is whether students are receiving the appropriate constitutional education, which can be jeopardized through any number of state and local school policies, only one of which is financing.

Educational Responsibility at the Local Level

Constitutional duties to deliver a quality or an equal education extend to districts in addition to states. Most states bear the ultimate responsibility for educational failures, but local

school districts are also responsible for supporting and delivering a constitutional education. To reason otherwise would afford districts wider constitutional latitude than states, when the primary constitutional power and duty itself is vested with the state. States are responsible for setting up an educational structure and monitoring local activities. They then delegate extensive responsibilities to school districts, including financial, staffing and implementation issues, leaving the daily and practical aspects of delivering a constitutional education to the discretion of school districts. When

Constitutional duties extend to districts in addition to states.

school districts exercise this discretion poorly, they can just as easily create inadequate and unequal educational opportunities as the state when it fails to provide sufficient funding or establish appropriate policies. In short, districts, like states, have a constitutional duty to deliver appropriate educational opportunities.

The Resource Distribution Principle

Educational constitutional duties include an obligation of strategic and equitable resource distribution. Courts have recognized that an abundance of resources will not guarantee equitable or quality education opportunities without a careful and fair distribution of those resources. For instance, states and school districts with abundant funds and resources can still fail to provide equal or adequate opportunities if those funds are spent on the wrong services or distributed to the wrong places. See *Abbott v. Burke*, 575 A.2d 359, 377 (N.J. 1990), discussing the role of variances in how efficiently districts use their funds as a problem in determining whether money matters. Likewise, a district might have just enough resources to deliver a constitutional education but

still fail to do so because it does not make the best strategic choices in deploying the resources. In effect, the state may have done its part to make a constitutional education possible, but the district takes action that inhibits the delivery of appropriate education. Even though the state might have the ultimate responsibility to correct such a district, the constitutional failure occurs at the district level and the solution is not more funding for the district, but better allocation of existing resources. Of course, it is also possible that failures occur at both the state and district level. The state might provide inadequate funds and a district might make matters worse by poorly allocating those resources. Either way, constitutional rights to education require that educational systems adhere to effective distributional mechanisms and principles.

This concept is embedded in the very language of several state constitutions. Nineteen state constitutions mandate an “efficient” education. At the most basic level, dictionary definitions of efficient offer straightforward meanings that include “performing or functioning in the best possible manner with the least waste of time and effort”; and “satisfactory and economical to use.” Courts have interpreted their constitutional language consistent with such definitions. For instance, the West Virginia Supreme Court found that the constitutional phrase “efficient” commanded that “the education system be absolutely complete, attentive to every detail, . . . [and] produce results without waste.” *Pauley v. Kelly*, 255 S.E.2d 859, 874 (1979). Likewise, the state must deliver a quality education “economically.” *Id.* at 877. This duty also encompasses local school district actions. The court noted that many other courts “have required specific actions by local boards to bring them to compliance with the constitutional mandate” and state action that failed to ensure local compliance has likewise “been declared unconstitutional.” *Id.* at 874. Thus, in addition to quality instruction and facilities, “state and local monitoring for waste and incom-

petency [are] implicit in the definition of ‘a thorough and efficient system.’” *Id.* at 877.

This constitutional mandate of strategic distribution even extends to states whose constitution does not explicitly mandate “efficiency.” For instance, the North Carolina Supreme Court was more prescriptive on this principle than states with “efficiency” clauses. The court indicated “that neither the State nor . . . [the Hoke County School System] are strategically allocating the available resources to see that at-risk children have the equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education,” *Hoke Cnty. Bd. of Educ. v. State*, 599 S.E.2d 365, 388 (N.C. 2004). It then directed both the state and school districts to “conduct self-examinations of the present allocation of resources and . . . produce a rational [], comprehensive plan which strategically focuses available resources and funds towards meeting the needs of all children, including at-risk children [,] to obtain a sound basic education.” *Id.* at 389. In short, the manner in which state and local school districts allocate their resources is as important as the amount of resources they have. Thus, courts have found that their constitutions require that states and districts strategically distribute their resources in ways that minimize waste and maximize equal opportunity.

Middle-Income Peers as Educational Resources

The final conceptual step in a constitutional right to middle-income peers is not as simple as the first three. It requires a reorientation in thinking about educational resources. Legally relevant educational resources tend to be conceptualized as those things that schools can buy, develop or create that have positive impacts on educational outcomes. This conceptualization, however, is overly narrow and ignores reality. Schools enjoy any number of important resources that they do not and cannot buy, such as the communities, public services, partnerships and private industries surrounding

them that support the educational environment. The more important, obvious and direct non-economic resource is a school district’s middle-income students. Common sense, as well as decades of social science, indicates that students learn not only from their teachers, but also their peers. Middle-income peers (and their parents) bring a host of experiences, outside learning and high expectations to schools that positively impact other students in their schools. In fact, the percentage of middle-income students in a school can be more important to the educational achievement of all students in that school than any other resource.

Nineteen states mandate an “efficient” education.

Students, regardless of their individual socioeconomic status or race, achieve at higher levels in predominantly middle-class schools and achieve at lower levels in predominantly poor schools. In short, while not a traditional resource that schools can buy, middle-income students are an invaluable resource that exerts significant effects on the achievement of all students.

Empirical Findings on Racially Unequal Access to Middle-Income Peers

Reconceptualizing educational resources to include middle-income students by itself is not enough. Courts must also reorient their perception of poverty and racial segregation. Poverty and racial segregation today are perceived as inevitable, beyond the control of states and districts, and natural. Of course, it is true that school districts have almost no control over the total number of middle-income and poor students in their districts, but they have complete control over the assignment of those middle-income and poor students who are, in fact, enrolled in their districts. Conventional wisdom over the past two decades, however,

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has been to ignore this basic fact and the problem of segregation within districts because the most extreme and extensive segregation exists between districts. While conventional wisdom may be correct in its assessment of inter-district segregation, inter-district segregation has proven largely impenetrable thus far. In any event, it does not follow that segregation within districts is not occurring or serious.

To the contrary, my recently published empirical study of access to middle-income peers reveals that many school districts have the capacity to expose all students to middle-income environments, but instead deny minorities of the experience. See *53 Boston College Law Review* 373 (2012) available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2008731>. A serious problem with racially unequal access to middle-income peers within districts stretched across all eleven states included in the study. Some districts were providing access that was so unequal it was shocking. In four of the states, some districts provided whites twice as much access to middle-income peers as minorities. This is the difference between whites attending a solidly middle-income school, with 70% middle-income peers, and minorities attending

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a solidly poor school with only 35% middle-income peers. A few districts even provided whites access that was three to five times that of minorities. The data also revealed that in several states a quarter of the districts were providing access that, although not shockingly unequal, was disparate enough to create qualitatively different experiences for white and minority students. And on the basic question of rough equality, in some states, only about half the districts provided equal access. In short, far too many school districts have student assignment policies that place minority students at educational risk in comparison to whites and thus raise serious constitutional concerns.

Interestingly, the study also uncovered a pattern of many other school districts doing the opposite by providing minority students equal access to middle-income environments. The fact that this inequality of access is occurring within the confines of individual school districts, but not others, demonstrates that the current racially and socioeconomically isolated nature of many districts is not inevitable. Rather, districts are making choices about how they distribute valuable resources—too often to the disadvantage of minorities.

Unequal Access and Achievement Gaps

Consistent with the literature, this unequal access appeared to have consequences for minority students' academic achievement. After identifying the varying levels of equitable and inequitable access, the study analyzed whether racial inequality in access to middle-income peers corresponded with any change in the racial achievement gap. It found that, in general, those districts with the most inequitable access for minorities also had the highest achievement gaps, whereas districts that provided minorities the most equitable access had the lowest

achievement gaps. Moreover, the difference in achievement gaps between these unequal and equal access districts was drastic. In seven of eleven states, the achievement gap drop between inequitable-access districts and equitable-access districts was more than 50%, cutting the achievement gap in half. And in all the remaining states but one,

Students learn not only from teachers, but also their peers.

the drop in the achievement gap was still large. These empirical findings not only force a reorientation of how one perceives racial inequality in student assignments, but suggest that a widespread pattern of segregative student assignments and wide achievement gaps persists that would otherwise be inconsistent with a constitutional right to equal access to middle-income peers.

Conclusion

The failure of an integration movement to emerge in state courts may be more a result of perception and strat-

egy than doctrine and reality. While not as broad as prior theories, this article's theory offers a strategy for school integration that has strong conceptual grounds in school finance precedent. Once one understands that middle-income students are one of the many resources districts distribute, the equitable and strategic distribution of resources that school finance precedent has forced on schools and districts is directly implicated. Of course, no court has yet explicitly conceptualized middle-income students as resources, but a review of social science literature, as well as the differing academic achievement that students produce based on their exposure to middle-income peers, renders the concept undeniable. Courts already intuit this notion and heavily scrutinize and condemn the prevailing poor performance of districts with concentrated poverty. And parents already act on it, often flocking to schools based more on the socioeconomic status of the students who attend them than the characteristics of the school facility or the particular staff who teach in them. Once legal analysis catches up to reality and intuition, state constitutional education precedent will squarely apply. □

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Lessons from Mount Laurel: The Benefits of Affordable Housing for All Concerned

by Douglas S. Massey

In 1983, the New Jersey Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision in the case of *South Burlington County NAACP v. Mount Laurel Township*. Commonly known as Mount Laurel II, the ruling held that all municipalities in New Jersey had an affirmative obligation, under the state constitution, to house their fair share of affordable housing in the region. The decision effectively forbade the use of zoning to prevent the construction of affordable housing units in affluent suburban communities.

Although the township and litigants entered into a consent decree in 1985, the affordable development, which came to be known as Ethel Lawrence Homes (ELH), did not open its doors until late 2000, when 100 affordable units were allocated to low- and moderate-income families on a first-come, first-served basis. Another 40 units were completed and filled in the same way in 2004.

In 2009-2010, I joined with a team of colleagues to undertake a systematic evaluation of the effect that ELH had on the township and surrounding neighborhoods, as well as on the lives of the people who were able to take advantage of access to affordable housing in an affluent suburb of Philadelphia. Both evaluations followed a quasi-experimental design.

To assess the effect of ELH on the township itself, we undertook a multiple time series study that compared trends in home values, tax burdens and crime rates in Mount Laurel before and after 2001, with trends in a matched set of nearby townships before and after the same date. Performing a statistical

analysis of “differences in differences” before and after the opening of ELH, we found no detectable effects of the project’s opening on any outcome. Trends in home values, crime rates and taxes were the same in Mount Laurel as in similar townships nearby.

Even in neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the project, we found no effect of ELH on crime, property values or taxes. Indeed, in a survey

We found no effect on crime, property values or taxes.

we conducted among neighbors, one-third didn’t know affordable housing even existed in the neighborhood, and among those who did know, only 40% could successfully name the project. Despite dire predictions and outsized fears expressed before the fact, when ELH finally opened, it was not with a bang, but a whimper.

The manner by which units in ELH were allocated to tenants also afforded a quasi-experimental research design. After a period of regional advertising, aspiring tenants were instructed to come into the developer’s office to complete and hand in an application form. All applications received during the application period were placed on a list and assigned a sequence number indicating the order in which they were submitted. The applications were then evaluated in order received, and if they met income and other eligibility criteria determined from the form, they were offered a unit in the development.

Applicants still on the waiting list at the time of our study constitute a good comparison group with which to assess the effects of ELH residence. Since applicants admitted and still

waiting were both self-selected into the population of people wishing to take advantage of affordable housing, selection bias is effectively controlled. We therefore interviewed all project residents along with a sample selected from the waiting list. In order to further ensure comparability between the two groups, we coded up all of the information on the application form and from it estimated equations predicting the likelihood of being offered a unit. These were then used to generate propensity scores, and each ELH resident was matched with a non-resident from the waiting list with a similar propensity score.

Our comparison of matched ELH residents and non-residents revealed a dramatic reduction in exposure to neighborhood disorder and violence as a result of moving into the development, which in turn yielded a significantly lower frequency of negative life events and improved mental health. Owing in part to these improvements, along with other advantages associated with suburban residence, ELH residents displayed higher rates of employment, larger share of income from work, greater total incomes, and lower rates of welfare dependency.

As for the children living in ELH, school quality also improved dramatically relative to the comparison group, while exposure to school disorder and violence declined steeply. ELH children also reported greater access to a quiet place to study, more time spent studying and more educationally engaged parents. Although we found no significant direct effect of ELH residence on the grades earned by students, we did find significant indirect effects through hours studied, school quality and school disorder, which on net improved grades.

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These findings have both policy and scholarly importance. In terms of policy, they suggest that ELH and the underlying Mount Laurel Doctrine are both unequivocal successes. The construction of affordable units in an affluent suburb using tax credits and low-interest loans produced a self-supporting housing development that dramatically improved the lives of low- and moderate-income residents and greatly advanced the mobility prospects of their children while imposing no negative externalities on neighbors or township residents. In terms of scholarship, our findings confirms the importance of neighborhoods in determining individual and family outcomes, and demonstrates the validity and power of neighborhood effects in conditioning human well-being. □

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the top 1 percent (and even the top .01 percent) of the population and declining social mobility. The problem is real and profound and seems very unlikely to correct itself untended."

If this line of thinking is correct, the problem is not just how to get back at the banks, but how to transform an economy that at the level of production will no longer generate reliable or steady employment for millions of people. Barring massive intervention by the government to increase demand in labor markets, we will be living with a massive rate of unemployment for a decade at least. This will not only create misery for millions of unemployed people but also depress wages and working conditions for people with jobs throughout the West, make austerity the ruling paradigm, create fertile ground for nativism and viable far-right political parties (as we are seeing in Europe), and stifle efforts at worker organization. This is why chronic joblessness is the central political problem for the Left in the West today.

Unfortunately, the Left has, with

many notable exceptions, been better at answering questions of redistribution than in posing coherent alternatives with respect to wealth creation and job creation. A coherent and vicious program of austerity will not be defeated without a credible alternative. In the short run, it is critical that we be prepared with a cogent program for the post-election period in which the Bush tax cuts are slated to expire and

Changing demography is the single greatest potential asset for progressives.

"sequestration" of domestic and defense spending will begin. This is an enormous opportunity to demand a set of affirmative, creative interventions to address persistent joblessness through government action, coupled with a traditional redistributionist approach anchored in tax policy, and to begin to lay the foundations for a progressive story about the economy. One can imagine, for example, a strategy to tie the expiration of the Bush tax cuts to a massive, sectorally focused

jobs program (targeted to communities most in need) in areas such as care work, infrastructure, education and the green economy. There is no reason in principle that we could not create 10 or 15 million new jobs, using the revenue of the expiring Bush tax cuts to do so—and such a demand should and can be made by a broad alliance.

Over the long term, we urgently need more robust discussions among and between the various camps and thinkers on the Left about what the shape of a new economy should or could be. Is our highest aspiration a version of Scandinavian social democracy with strong safety nets? A German- or Chinese-inspired statist approach with strong intervention in labor markets and sectors of the economy? What role for local economies, cooperatives and sustainability concerns, which many argue should be central to a new economic vision? Until we have a clearer picture of the economic system we seek to build, it will be extremely difficult to organize the kind of movement needed to shake us loose from the grip of market fundamentalism.

Structural Racism

One of the great accomplishments of the past decades has been the articulation by many thinkers and the embrace by significant parts (though not yet a majority) of the progressive movement of an analytic framework called “structural racism.” One of the great failures of this same period has been the inability to put the analysis into action in a large-scale way at the level of consciousness, campaigns or policy.

The stakes on this are getting higher. Heightened and overt racist appeals in the national political discourse, evident in the Republican Presidential primary but not only there, are obviously fed by animus to an African-American President and by deep unease about the demographic change that is gripping the country. Manuel Pastor and Vanessa Carter are right that the conflict between an aging, fearful, shrinking white population and a growing, more hopeful younger brown and black population is the axis on which our politics now turns. (See their “Reshaping the Social Contract” in the Jan./Feb. 2012 *Poverty & Race*.) It lies at the heart of nasty anti-immigrant attacks, but also attacks on voting rights, financing for public education and the role of government itself. We can easily imagine a future in which full citizenship is effectively denied to large numbers of people of color (because of mass incarceration, immigration policies that foster a large undocumented population, and the restriction of the franchise by means of 21st Century poll taxes)—and an angry, older white minority holds on to power for a generation at the expense of the common good. The failure to offer a bold, affirmative and specific program on race around which constituencies can be mobilized and public debate conducted leaves the field clear for a dangerous, racist paradigm to take root.

Changing demography is, of course, the single greatest potential asset for progressives in the 21st Century, if we can build a real coalition among African Americans, Latinos and Asian

Thanks for your contributions to PRRAC!

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Howard Winant

Americans. Doing so will require the articulation of a clear proactive racial justice agenda and aggressive coalition-building strategies. There are promising seeds of this all over the country—and I’m particularly moved by the way in which the debate over

The question is whether we can go from opposing to proposing.

the country’s worst anti-immigrant law in Alabama has sparked a multi-racial coalition with great promise.

I do not know the answers to the questions I am posing, but here offer some thoughts to get the discussion started. In the realm of policy, I think the related crises of mass incarceration and mass unemployment, both of which are devastating in their impact, may offer the two strongest entry points to building a stronger racial justice movement in the country. In terms of consciousness, we need to develop a popular language around racial justice with great moral force that can be applied across a range of issues and problems. One of the main negative effects of the culture of individualism discussed below is that racism is seen nearly exclusively by the public in terms of questions of intent and individual behavior—structures and inter-

locking systems are invisible to most, and we therefore need a moral language that can break through this pervasive way of understanding race. And in terms of movement-building, strengthening movement infrastructure in African-American communities, and deliberate building of relationships—particularly between African Americans and Latinos—are the critical and obvious, but not necessarily easy, tasks in front of us.

A Culture of Individualism

A thoughtful recent analysis by Ron Brownstein of polling since the economic crisis began by the *National Journal* found the following:

“One theme consistently winding through the polls is the emergence of what could be called a “reluctant self-reliance,” as Americans look increasingly to reconstruct economic security from their own efforts, in part because they don’t trust outside institutions to provide it for them. The surveys suggest that the battered economy has crystallized a gestating crisis of confidence in virtually all of the nation’s public and private leadership class—from elected officials to the captains of business and labor. Taken together,

(Please turn to page 10)

the results render a stark judgment: At a time when they believe they are navigating much more turbulent economic waters than earlier generations, most Americans feel they are paddling alone. Shawn Kurt, an unemployed lumber-mill worker in Molalla, Ore., who responded to one survey, spoke for many when he plaintively declared, 'I myself don't see no one trying to help me.' The Heartland Monitor surveys document pervasive dissatisfaction with the nation's direction; deep apprehension about the opportunity for future generations (particularly among whites); a collapse of faith in the public and private leadership class; intense political polarization that largely tracks racial lines; and the absence of a reliable majority for either side's vision of government's role in society, all leavened only by individual Americans' reluctant self-reliance and their tenacious faith in their own ability to manage the mounting financial risks they see confronting them. Those attitudes cumulatively resemble the sentiments a poll might find in a Third World country before a coup."

Notably, when people are asked whether their financial well-being depends mostly on their own actions or on factors out of their control, even in the face of striking evidence to the contrary, nearly 60% cite their own actions, compared to less than 40% who cite factors beyond their control. Interestingly, people of color are more likely to say that their financial well-being rests on their own efforts than are whites.

This radical individualism shows up everywhere in the culture—from the cult of Ron Paul to the near hegemonic penetration of a therapeutic language of self-realization and self-expression in our everyday conversation. And it is coupled with a deep distrust of all institutions—banks and corporations to be sure, but government and labor unions just as much so.

The consequences of this phenomenon for progressive politics are enormous. Efforts to target corporations and banks are important and mine a

deep vein of public sympathy, but unless the fundamental conviction of the efficacy of collective enterprise is restored, it will reinforce solipsism and skepticism rather than leverage major structural change. There has been no progressive project in human history that has not relied on the centrality of community—a shared sense of what we owe to each other. The vernaculars of the moral language that nourished that core conviction are in deep decline.

I am very unclear how to tackle this problem, because its roots are so deep and profound. We at the Center for Community Change have tried to lift up "community values" in a variety of campaigns, and I'm encouraged that transformational campaigns like Caring Across Generations are leading explicitly with interdependence as a core value. (CAG is led by Domestic Workers United and Jobs With Jus-

Can we build a movement grounded in transformative ideas about economics, race and community?

tice—www.caringacrossgenerations.org) Still more is needed to nourish the taproots of solidarity and community in the culture. Ilyse Hogue has intriguing ideas about renewing the connection between service, mutual aid and progressive politics (see her article, "Why the Right Attacked Unions, ACORN and Planned Parenthood" in the March 21, 2100 edition of *The Nation*)—and it may be that some robust experiments in a variety of fields are needed to develop a path forward. There is not likely to be a shortcut to developing structures, institutions, habits and practices that embody values of interdependence and community in an experiential way. Caring circles for mutual aid, cooperatives, the revival and reconstruction of community fabric in particular neighborhoods or places, and even spiritual practices and rituals may be part of the path forward.

Understanding the Right, Speaking to the Center

It has become commonplace now on the left to trace a lineage for modern-day conservatism—back to Goldwater, Buckley, Oakeshott, Hayek and all the way back to Burke. But it is the discontinuities between today's Right and the conservatism of previous eras that are striking. Mark Lilla put this well in an insightful article "Republicans for Revolution," in the Jan. 12, 2112 *NY Review of Books*:

"What we have not seen much of, except on the fringes of American politics, are redemptive reactionaries who think the only way forward is to destroy what history has given us and wait for a new order to emerge out of the chaos. At least until now. The real news on the American right is the mainstreaming of political apocalypticism. This has been brewing among intellectuals since the Nineties, but in the past four years, thanks to the right-wing media establishment and economic collapse, it has reached a wider public and transformed the Republican Party. . . All this is new—and it has little to do with the principles of conservatism. . . No, there is something darker and dystopic at work here. People who know what kind of new world they want to create through revolution are trouble enough; those who only know what they want to destroy are a curse."

There is an increasingly dominant part of the conservative movement in America that is playing for keeps—to roll back the 20th Century and blow up the current social order and most of what we take for granted in it—from the existence of safety nets to voting rights. The combination of this apocalyptic temperament with vast sums of corporate money hell-bent on using power to acquire more power (and destroy the power centers of the Left, particularly labor, but also Planned Parenthood and others) is a very dangerous stew.

Its implications for us are three-fold. First, that for a weak and besieged Left a "united front" approach

that attempts to engage with centrist groups and constituencies to marginalize the Right is imperative. This is not a period where the vanity of small differences or sectarianism will serve us well. Second, that we must not delude ourselves, as I fear some have done in the wake of the disappointments (real or perceived) of the Obama Administration, that electoral politics do not matter. In liminal moments where multiple futures are possible, who controls the state matters a great deal—as Scott Walker has convincingly demonstrated in Wisconsin. Third, we must resist the siren song of magical thinking, particularly the trope that the vast majority of Americans already agree with us and that we are one militant action away from our own Arab Spring. Recruitment and engagement of the millions of people who do not already agree with us about everything is at least as important a task as mobilizing the already converted for action.

Learning to speak effectively to the center of American politics from our core values about this central troika of issues—the economy, race, and community—may be the fundamental challenge for the Left in the 21st Century. This is not mainly a matter of “messaging” or polling and focus groups – it will require reconstructing and refreshing our core ideas, at the roots, which will put us in a much better position to speak to the vast majority of Americans.

Conclusion: Can Our Movements Meet the Moment?

We bring many assets to the fights ahead of us. New and inspiring leadership in many key institutions. A real resistance movement in many states against the excesses of the right that have in many cases turned the tide. Bold attempts to do fresh thinking on the issues laid out above, some of which are finding their way into innovative practice. New approaches to organizing that move the locus of recruitment, strategy and action away

PRRAC Update

- PRRAC Research Director **Chester Hartman** has just been appointed to the District of Columbia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission—a body on which PRRAC Social Science Advisory Board member **Gregory Squires** already serves.

PRRAC staff changes:

- We recently said goodbye to our Deputy Director, **Saba Bireda**, who left to take a position at Education Counsel, an education law and policy group based in Washington, DC. Saba made an important contribution to PRRAC's educational equity work and helped to lead our project exploring the potential for building long-term sta-

bility and inclusion in gentrifying communities.

- We are pleased to welcome **Megan Haberle**, our new Policy Counsel, who will be specializing in PRRAC's housing and community development work. Megan came to us from The Opportunity Agenda, where she worked as a legal fellow on their economic opportunity initiative. She is a 2008 graduate of Columbia Law School and also worked in private practice in New York City. We also recently welcomed **Samantha Hodges**, our Emerson Hunger Fellow for 2012. Samantha is a 2011 graduate of Wesleyan University and is supporting our educational equity and school diversity work.

from paid organizers to unpaid activists moved by big ideas. An Occupy Movement that, whatever it does next, has opened up political space. Some parts our movement are growing, especially the LGBT and immigrant rights movements, and they are having a real impact on public consciousness and culture even through the ups and downs of particular policy battles. And while demography is not destiny, the growth of constituencies of color is an enormous advantage for us in the 21st Century.

And we also face some daunting challenges: the extraordinary dominance of money in politics and corporate power; chronic under-investment in African-American organizing capacity; a lack of organizing to scale in nearly any constituency, with limited exceptions; continued and exacerbated instability in the sources of financing for social justice work; the continued existential threat to the labor movement in the U.S., without which a progressive movement is difficult to conceive; a culture of individualism that is deeply hostile to the notions of community upon which our politics

fundamentally depend; and major ideological lacunae, particularly in the field of economics.

Yet I see encouraging signs that our movements can meet the moment. In 2011, we were called to defend some of the great gains of the 20th Century, from voting rights to collective bargaining, the New Deal and Great Society social insurance programs that are our heritage. Progressives showed up to fight—from Wisconsin to Wall Street, and in many other less well noticed and some unlikely battlegrounds—in Ohio, Maine, North Carolina, Arizona, Montana and Alabama. The question that now faces us is whether, having weathered the onslaught, we can go from opposing to proposing—whether we can build an independent mass movement that is durable, resilient and grounded in big, transformative ideas about economics, race and community and is willing to engage with the vast majority of Americans who are not yet progressives.

The future is very much within our grasp. □

Resources

Most Resources are available directly from the issuing organization, either on their website (if given) or via other contact information listed. Materials published by PRRAC are available through our website: www.prrac.org.

Prices include the shipping/handling (s/h) charge when this information is provided to PRRAC. "No price listed" items often are free.

When ordering items from PRRAC: SASE = self-addressed stamped envelope (45¢ unless otherwise indicated). Orders may not be placed by telephone or fax. Please indicate from which issue of P&R you are ordering.

Race/Racism

- **Race and Social Problems** has just started its 4th year of publication -- multidisciplinary, national & international, produced by the Center on Race and Social Problems, School of Social Work, Univ. of Pittsburgh and published by Springer Press. Inf. on ms. submission, past issues, the Center from Gary Koeske, gkoeske@pitt.edu [13400]

- **The Asian American Film Festival** was held March 8-18, 2012 at various Bay Area venues. Inf. from The Center for Asian American Media, 145 Ninth St., #350, SF, CA 94103-2641, membership@caamedia.org [13404]

- **Vincent Who?: the Documentary of Asian American Empowerment** is a 40-min., 2009 documentary about the 1982 killing of Vincent Chin in Detroit by two white out-of-work autoworkers, blaming him for the rise of the Asian auto industry. The killers served not a day in jail. The incident galvanized Asian Americans for the first time to form a real cross-class community movement. Producer/writer Curtis Chin can tour to show the film, and DVD version is available at <http://vincentwhomovie.com> [13405]

- **The Todd A. Bell National Resource Center on the African-American Male** is located at Ohio State Univ. Student Academic Services Bldg., 281 W. Lane Ave., Columbus, OH 43210, 614/247-4765, odi-brc@osu.edu [13410]

- **"Not Your Father's Suburb: Race and Rectitude in a Changing Minnesota Community,"** by Susan E. Eaton (16 pp., Feb. 2012), is available (no price listed) from One Nation Indivisible, www.onenationindivisible.org, seaton@law.harvard.edu [13412]

- **"The State of Communities of Color in the U.S. Economy: Still Feeling the Pain Three Years Into the Recovery,"** by Christian E. Weller, Julie Ajinkya & Jane Farrell (26 pp.,

April 2012), is available (no price listed) from the Center for American Progress, 1333 H St. NW, 10th fl., Wash., DC 20005, 202/682-1611, www.americanprogress.org [13414]

- **American Blackout** is a 89-min., 2006 documentary on the historic suppression of black voters in the US, with interviews by Cynthia McKinney, John Lewis, Bernie Sanders and others. Available on DVD. [13419]

Community Organizing

- **Community and Anti-Racism Organizing:** The organization Resist supplies relatively small grants, all over the country, for social, economic, racial and environmental justice. Their Jan./Feb. 2012 Newsletter lists recent grants, nearly three dozen of which appear under the category "Community and Anti-Racism Organizing." Contact them at 259 Elm St., #201, Somerville, MA 02144, 617/623-5110, info@resistinc.org, www.resistinc.org [13424]

- **"Training of Trainers Institute,"** sponsored by United for a Fair Economy, will be held **June 21-24, 2012** near Baltimore. Inf. from UFE, 29 Winter St., 2nd fl., Boston, MA 02108, info@faireconomy.org

Criminal Justice

- **"To Build a Better Criminal Justice System,"** eds. Marc Mauer & Kate Epstein (64 pp., March 2012), is available (no price listed) from The Sentencing Project, 1705 DeSales St. NW, 8th fl., Wash., DC 20036, 202/628-0871. Among the contributors to the 26 short pieces are Alan Jenkins, Jeremy Travis, Angela Y. Davis, Bart Lubow, Charles J. Hynes & Paul Butler. www.sentencingproject.org [13399]

- **"Federal Sentencing Options After Booker"** was the 12-page, Feb. 16, 2012 testimony of Marc Mauer, ED of The Sentencing Project, before the U.S. Sentencing Commn. Available (possibly free) from the Project, 1705 DeSales St. NW, 8th fl., Wash., DC 20036, 202/628-0871 [13406]

- **"Public Housing Transformation and Crime: Making the Case for Responsible Relocation,"** by Susan J. Popkin, Michael J. Rich, Leah Hende, Chris Hayes & Joe Parilla (April 2012), is available (no price listed) from The Urban Inst., 2100 M St. NW, Wash., DC 20037, 202/833-7200, paffairs@urban.org, www.urban.org [13423]

Education

- **"Straight Talk on Teacher Quality: Six**

Game-Changing Ideas and What to Do About Them" (24 pp., Dec. 2011)

was produced by The Annenberg Inst. for School Reform for The Schott Foundation. Available (no price listed) from Annenberg, Brown Univ., PO Box 1985, Providence, RI 02912, www.annenberginstitute.org [13402]

- **"Multiplication is for White People"** by Lisa Delpit (256 pp., 2011, \$26.95), has been published by New Press. Shows that achievement gap is caused by poor teaching, negative stereotypes, and a curriculum that does not adequately connect to poor children's lives. [13420]

- **"A Rotting Apple: Education Redlining in New York City"** (202 pp., 2012) is available (no price listed) from The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 675 Mass. Ave., 8th fl., Cambridge, MA 02139, 617/876-7700. Foreword by PRRAC Soc. Sci. Adv. Bd. member Pedro Noguera.

- **"Since 1851: 160 Years of Scholarship and Achievement in the Nation's Capital,"** by Marjorie Lightman & William Zeisel (192 pp., Jan. 2012, \$125), a history of the Univ of the District of Columbia, is available from Alan Etter, Aetter@udc.edu

- **"History Under Attack: What Kids Aren't Learning and Why It Matters,"** sponsored by Teaching for Change, was held March 17, 2012 at Busboys & Poets in Wash., DC. Renee

Poussaint hosted the event, and among the presenters was Enid Lee. Inf. from dmenkart@teachingforchange.org [13403]

- **"The Impact of Poverty on Education: Diverse Scholarly Perspectives,"** sponsored by Broader, Bolder Approach to Education & The Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, was held April 19, 2012 at the Dirksen Senate Office Bldg. Speakers included Peter Edelman, Sean Reardon, Linda Darling-Hammond. Inf. from Global Policy Solutions, 1830 11th St. NW, #1, Wash., DC 20003, maya@globalpolicysolutions.com [13426]

- **"Creating a Culture of Excellence: The Role of School Leaders"** was an April 26, 2012 Briefing held at the Dirksen Senate Office Bldg., co-sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education & the Natl. Assn. for Secondary School Principals. Inf. from all4ed@all4ed.org, 202/828-0828. [13417]

- **"Boosting Success for 21st Century Learners: Equitable Practices for High Achievement,"** the Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Conf., will be held **May 4, 2012** at the Natl. 4-H Conf. Ctr. in Chevy Chase, MD. Reg. at <http://www.maec.org/conference>

Families/ Women/ Children

- **"The Foreclosure**

Crisis and Children: A Three-City [Balt., NYC, DC] Study," by Kathryn L.S. Pettit & Jennifer L. S. Comey (2012), is available (no price listed) from The Urban Inst., 2100 M St. NW, Wash., DC 20037, 202/833-7200, paffairs@urban.org, www.urban.org

Food/ Nutrition/ Hunger

- **"Beyond Hunger,"** sponsored by The Center for Hunger-Free Communities, took place May 2-4, 2012 in Philadelphia. Inf. from the Center, Drexel Univ. School of Health, 1505 Race St., 11th fl., Mail Stop 1035, Phila., PA 19102, 215/762-7345, info@centerforhungerfreecommunities.org [13427]

Homelessness

- **"Searching Out Solutions: Constructive Alternatives to the Criminalization of Homelessness"** (53 pp., 2012) is available (likely free) from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 409 3rd St. SW, #310, Wash., DC 20024, usich@usich.gov, www.usich.gov [13422]

Housing

- **"A Spatial Analysis of Housing Vacancy in the United States, 2000-2011,"** by Justin Holmlander, Colin Polsky, Dan Zinder & Dan Runfola, is a 2011 Lincoln Inst. working paper, available at www.lincolninst.edu/pubs. [13421]

- **"The Last Tower: The Decline and Fall of Public Housing,"** by Ben Austen, a 9-page article on Chicago's Cabrini-Green project and public housing in general, appeared in the May 2012 issue of *Harper's Magazine*.

- **"Latino Homeownership after the Collapse: Mitigating Foreclosures and Wealth Losses in our Hardest Hit Communities"** was an April 16, 2012 Young Latino Leaders Summit Series, held at the Rayburn House Office Bldg., sponsored by The Congressional Hispanic Caucus Inst. Inf. from them at 911 2nd St. NE, Wash., DC 20002, 800/EXCEL-DC. [13416]

- **"Examining the Power of Place—Housing, Desegregation and Opportunity"** was an April 30, 2012 session at Northwestern University's Inst. for Policy Research. Inf. from the Inst., 2040 Sheridan Rd., Evanston, IL 60208, 847/491-3395.

Miscellaneous

- **"Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age"** (118 pp., 2009) is The Report of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy. Available (possibly free) from The Aspen Inst., One Dupont Circle NW, #700, Wash., DC 20036, 202/736-5818, www.aspeninstitute.org/c&s [13413]

- **Rebuild the Dream,** by Van Jones (320 pp.,

April 2012), has been published by Nation Books. [13415]

• "Los Angeles Since 1992: Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Uprisings" is a new special issue (Vol. 38:1) of *Amerasia Journal*, available (\$15 + s/h) from the UCLA Asian American Studies Center,

3230 Campbell Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1546, 310/825-2968, aascpress@aasc.ucla.edu [13418]

• "American Gridlock: Why the Left and Right are Both Wrong" is (was -- depending on when you get this issue) a May 7, 2012 event, sponsored by The New America

Foundation, featuring H. Woody Brock, author of a new book by the same title as the event (but with these words added to the title after a colon: "Commonsense 101 Solutions to the Economic Crises" 288 pp., 2011, John Wiley & Sons. [13428])

Job Opportunities

• **California Rural Legal Assistance** (headed by PRRAC Bd. member José Padilla) is seeking a **Rural Fair Housing Center Manager** for its Maryville office. Ltr./ resume to Jose Villarreal, CRLA, 631 Howard St., #300, SF, CA 94105.

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