

FREE

INDYPENDENT READER

toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old ...

Spring 2011 Issue 15

social movements



Indypendent Reader

*toward building a new society on the
vacant lots of the old ...*

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The **Indypendent Reader** is a quarterly newspaper that aims to serve marginalized communities in Baltimore through research, communication, and organizing. The project began as a collaboration between the Baltimore Independent Media Center and Campbaltimore Project and now includes many others. We encourage people to "become the media" by providing democratic access to available technologies and information. We seek to bring to light Baltimore's rich tradition of social and political activism. The primary goal of the project is not merely to produce a newspaper, but to start a collaborative project in which people dedicated to social justice in Baltimore can speak for themselves and continue to organize forums, workshops, and other events. These events disseminate ideas, build solidarity, and help promote and increase the reach of the paper itself.

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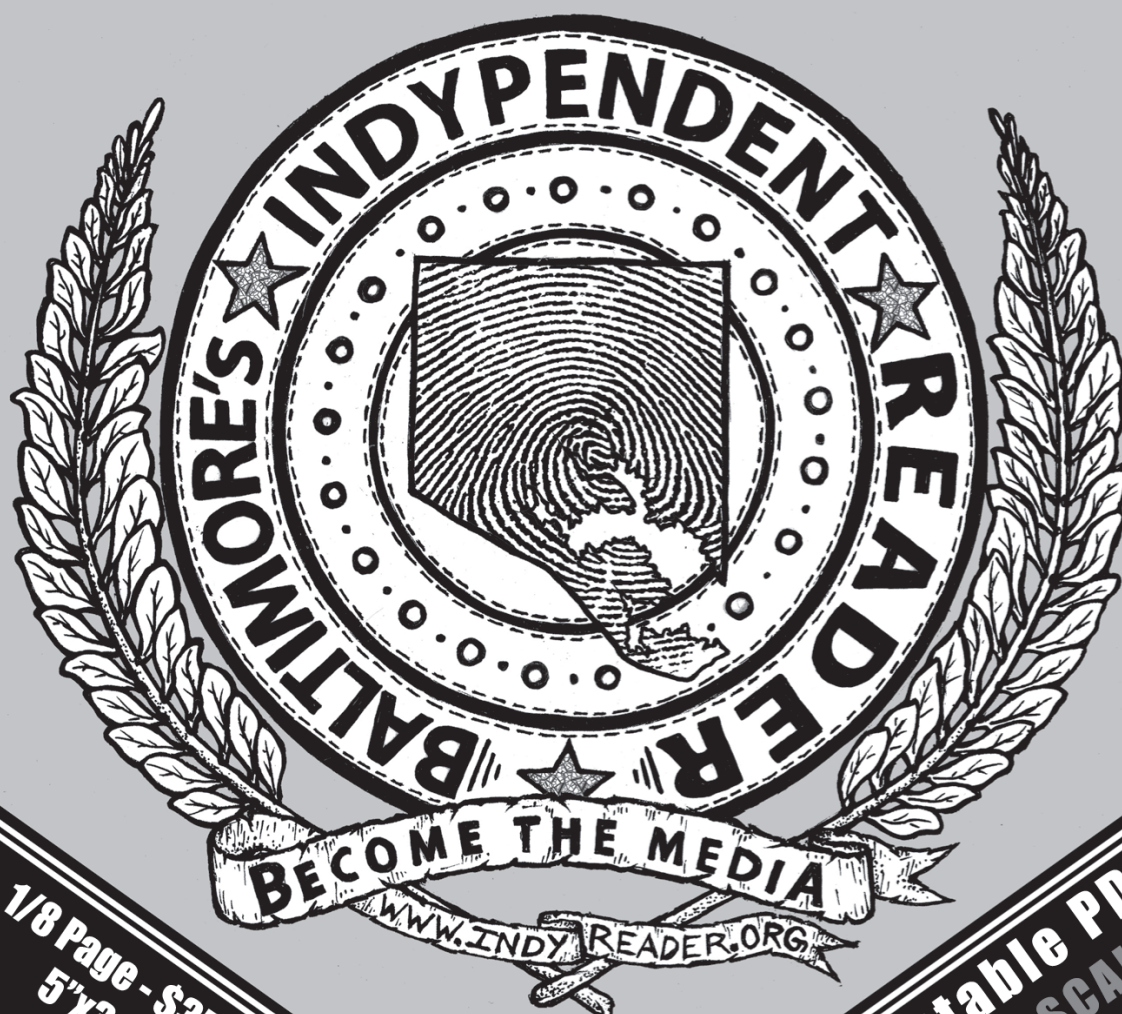
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MOVEMENT AND MOVEMENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE BY JOHN DUDA

In a sense, every issue of the *Indydependent Reader* is the “social movements” issue—from the very beginning of this project the goal was to provide a forum, a platform, and a resource for the multitude of social movements that are challenging the status quo, imagining and agitating for a better Baltimore. But for this, our fifteenth edition, we wanted to step back from the issues and focus on the movements themselves.

The phrase “social movements” is an essential piece of shorthand for describing those collective efforts to remake history, but it might, if used too cavalierly, convey the wrong impression. A “social movement” is not a piece on a chessboard, a self-contained, self-sufficient, and organizationally closed institution. It’s not a party, or an NGO, or a collective: indeed, it’s not a thing, but a process, a *movement*, a living, breathing wave of change and struggle that crashes into history, sometimes winning, sometimes receding, and always at every moment reinventing itself in a continuous process of evolution.

You can’t understand a “social movement” without understanding this movement: the context that animates it, the affects that circulate within it, the hopes and fears that drive it. And you can’t understand social movements in isolation: their power, more

often than not, comes from a whole ecosystem of movements, building off of each other’s victories, learning from each other’s mistakes, forming alliances and working in solidarity.

Looking at the voices and movements in the following pages, I find myself personally linked in a myriad ways to these struggles and to the people behind them—I’ve rallied with some, kept hot chocolate flowing for a chilly afternoon action for another. I’ve studied alongside some of the contributors, taught others, learned from all of them. I’ve helped raise money for a few, shared dinner with most of them. I’ve heard their stories and told them mine. And the process of media-making—of *movement media making*—continues this continuous process through which individual movements become a movement, as a thousand and one small (and not so small) acts of mutual aid and solidarity weave struggles together. Just in the course of writing the single article I contributed to this issue, I found myself not only getting involved with organizing a conference on workplace democracy, but taking a new job with one of the projects I was interviewing; consider this a disclaimer!

With all the complexity and fluidity characteristic of social movements, we felt that it


would be productive for this issue to focus on these movements themselves for once. What makes them tick? What can we learn from our failures? From our victories? Are social movements always recognizable as such, or do they germinate in unexpected places? What kind of foundation—economic, historical, spiritual, intellectual, interpersonal—do they rest upon?

It was with these questions in mind that we solicited articles for the current issue, and while what we’ve managed to pull together is far from comprehensive, we believe we’ve succeeded in assembling some vital perspectives on social movement and movements in Baltimore City and beyond. Betty Robinson offers a community organizer’s critical assessment on the failed attempt to stop the Remington Walmart, and what the movement could have done better. Reverend Heber Brown diagnoses the damage done by white supremacy in social movements. Radical sociologist Kevan Harris shares his experiences learning from social movements on the streets of Teheran. Anti-Zionist organizer Mark Gunnery examines the increasingly vocal movement of American Jews opposed to Israel’s policies of occupation and apartheid. Aliza Ess gives us a glimpse of the thriving DIY movement for localized sustainability, I investigate how workplace democracy can

link social movements and economic justice, Greg Rosenthal from the United Workers reviews a documentary film about grassroots responses to the economic crisis, and Corey Reidy and Clayton Conn have an in-depth exchange with members of Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle. And on top of all that, there’s also an excerpt from political prisoner Marshall “Eddie” Conway’s brand new autobiography, dealing with the extreme difficulties of organizing behind bars.

This issue also marks a new stage in the evolution of the *Indydependent Reader* itself—while we’re still committed to producing a free newspaper that takes an in-depth look at issues important to social justice struggles in Baltimore City, many of the people involved with the project are shifting their focus to our newly-redesigned website at indyreader.org, where we’re developing the capacity to cover struggles and stories as they unfold, and where we’re able to use the power of multimedia to help tell all these stories more effectively. As always, the *Indydependent Reader* remains an entirely volunteer project, and if you feel, as we do, that radical media making is an essential component of any movement of movements serious about changing the world, we hope you’ll consider getting involved. ★


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FREE FROM THE INSIDE OUT: A CURSORY EXAMINATION OF RACISM’S REACH WITHIN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak in-depth with a twenty-something year old college student and community activist. We were on our way to observe a legislative hearing in Annapolis when a discussion about the state of racial justice in Baltimore’s social movements emerged.

As she shared some of the internal struggles and questions that she has about organizing alongside those whom classify themselves as “White,” I couldn’t help but to feel like I was listening to a familiar song whose words I have long memorized.

In sharing a bit of her story, she was telling my story. She spoke about how, in the name of social justice organizing, well-financed and/or well-connected, White liberals have exerted disproportionate levels of power in rooms full of young, African¹ activists. She spoke about the levels of discomfort that she has when suggestions made by “professional” organizers (i.e. White folks) are granted instant credibility while community residents who speak from experiential wisdom tend to be at best tolerated or trotted out to be used in supremely scripted ways. She spoke of the economic pressure that she’s faced in having to take a job that, by extension of the paycheck, censored and suppressed the fullness of her revolutionary spirit. (This is what Dr. Judson Jeffries calls “Careerism” and what author, Michael Porter describes as “paycheck slavery” in his book *Kill Them Before They Grow: Misdiagnosis of African American boys in American classrooms*.) Finally, she spoke of the internal debate that she experiences—often wondering if her perceptions and feelings are merely figments of her imagination and if there is anyone else who identifies with her.

Thankfully, during that car ride, I was able to affirm her feelings and testify to their validity based on my own experiences. In fact, I believe, that while not well connected, there is a growing number of American Africans in Baltimore who are beginning to voice a common refrain involving White supremacy’s reach into social movements that involve the Black community. We rail, and rightly so, against a vicious social and political system of exploitation, dehumanization, and oppression of Black people in the so-called United States of America, but we don’t often analyze racism/White supremacy’s influence within and upon Black social movements.

Take Baltimore for instance.

In this city, we are not regularly given to unfiltered analysis or discussions related to how those who classify themselves as White liberals or progressives impact social movements in communities of color. It is assumed that progressive Whites will be involved in Black organizing. In many social justice circles, it is assumed that White people will take leadership roles (whether explicitly or by way of more discreet influence). It is assumed that the focus of door-to-door organizing will happen in the Black community, not in White neighborhoods. It is assumed that White, Western values and ideals should be the goal of the group’s action. When interracial social justice groups gather in Baltimore to engage an issue that disproportionately

impacts Black people, there is little objection when the terms are defined, the strategy is decided, and the “appropriate” partners are identified for the Blacks in the room...if they are in the room!

When one begins to raise questions about the injustices that are allowed to go on in the name of social justice organizing in the Black community, one is quickly muted and told that it’s really classism not racism or White supremacy that is the main culprit. (It’s hard not to get suspicious of social justice activists and organizers who never want to talk about racism/White supremacy and White privilege.)

This dynamic found within and upon Black social movements produces an arrangement that simply perpetuates the system that activists purport to fight against. Though it is wrapped in the veneer of “pseudo-social justice,” when it’s all said and done it is still an exploitative, dehumanizing, and oppressive social arrangement—just a more benevolent one.

SAY IT LOUD

Instead of African people being empowered to speak to their own issues, in their own ways, and decide their own partners, and craft their own solutions, the current social arrangement ensures the continued and collective subjugation of African people to the White Power Structure. This is how Black people in Baltimore can be the numeric majority in terms of citizenry and the outright minority in what Dr. Neely Fuller calls the nine major areas of people activity²...including the nonprofit and social change sectors. For far too long, African people have been turning to the “benevolent” White progressive community for answers, definitions, validity, strategy, and acceptance. And it is clear that that approach isn’t working and I dare say it will never work!

As South African Black Nationalist Steve Biko wrote: “We [Black people] must learn to accept that no group, however, benevolent, can ever hand power to the vanquished on a plate.”³ As ironic as this may sound coming from a Christian Pastor, no one is coming to save African people! As the Holy Quran says in 13: 11, “Verily, never will Allah (God) change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls).” This Surah helps to make clear that the liberation of African people is primarily the responsibility of African people.

This is why I embrace Black Nationalism (locally) and Pan-Africanism (globally). For me, they are intertwined philosophies that not only put full responsibility for liberation within the Black community, but they also provide a relative framework for self-determination in light of racism/White supremacy, as thoroughly explained in Dr. Amos Wilson’s *Blueprint for Black Power: A Moral, Political, and Economic Imperative for the 21st Century*. According to Brother Malcolm X, Kwame Ture⁴, and countless others, Black Nationalism says that Black people should control every aspect of the politics in their own community. (This is a foregone conclusion in other ethnic communities.) Pan-Afri-

//// BY REV. HEBER BROWN, III ///

canism, very simply put, speaks to the unity and dignity of the hundreds of millions of African people throughout the Diaspora and on the continent of Africa—calling us together to see each other’s problems as our own and to see in each other the solution.

Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism did not emerge out of a vacuum. They are sensible responses to racism/White supremacy that especially now present themselves as viable avenues for communal empowerment given that the more integrationist and gradualist approaches have not been able to provide uplift to the masses of Black people in Baltimore or in fact, this country.

A WORD TO WHITE PEOPLE

One might be tempted to read and hear the unfiltered Black Nationalist perspective and conclude that there is no role for White people in Black people’s struggle for social justice and human rights. This would be an incorrect conclusion. White people certainly have a role in racial social justice movements. However, that role is first as students—not as teachers. As Paulo Freire explains, “Who is better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation?”⁵

Authentic White allies of the African liberation struggle are those who come first to learn and one of the first lessons will be on how they benefit from the social arrangement constructed by the White Power Structure—irrespective of their political party, philosophical leaning, or economic standing. They will examine the privilege afforded them by the system (not inherent) and learn how to use that privilege responsibly. They will learn how they are dehumanized themselves by racism/White supremacy and understand what Freire means when he writes, “only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both [the oppressed and the oppressor].”⁶ They will not professionally position themselves on the periphery of Black oppression for the purpose of financial gain and credibility. (There are far too many so-called White allies who are making tons of money and being awarded numerous grants for their “messianic work” in the Black community—while the Black people they “serve” are left out in the cold when it’s time to collect the checks!)

Then after being re-educated, those in true solidarity will position themselves to be led by African people especially as issues that disproportionately impact the Black community are engaged. They will check their privilege and any semblances of false generosity at the door to stand in solidarity with, instead of assuming superiority over. The bulk of their activity within self-determining Black social movements, however, will not be in the Black community. White allies of African liberation struggles will know that their responsibility is primarily to the White

community. They’ll resist the temptation to constantly find themselves in Black social settings while keeping their own personal/professional circles unchallenged and comfortable with the status quo.

A WAY FORWARD

The world over has been blessed by a myriad of social movements, but as we’ve experienced them, we’ve realized that the ends do not justify the means. The path that we choose in order to bring about a more just society should be one that dignifies the humanity of all involved. Unfortunately, the prevailing character of too many social movements (and especially the nonprofit and foundation class⁷) in Baltimore is one that allows for racism/White supremacy to permeate the most “progressive” circles. It is incumbent upon us who dream and work for a new society to search out the inner rooms of our own organizing. We must begin asking the kinds of questions that make us uncomfortable and challenging the unspoken assumptions that govern our social justice activity. We must quickly discard the old arrangements that provided safe haven for a softer form of White supremacy within our movements and give space for new arrangements of power, leadership, and values to emerge. It is no question that the White Power Structure that dehumanizes, exploits, and oppresses us can be dismantled. The question is can we recognize its infection within us and within our movements and provide the proper antibiotic so that we can experience a holistic freedom from its poison. ★

Rev. Heber Brown, III is pastor of Pleasant Hope Baptist Church in North Baltimore and blogs at www.FaithinActionOnline.com.

NOTES

1 African, Black, and American African will be used interchangeably throughout this work.

2 Neely Fuller, Jr. states in his seminal work, *The United Independent Compensatory Code/ System/Concept: a textbook/workbook for thought, speech, and/or action for victims of racism (white supremacy)*, that the nine major areas of people activity are: Economics, Education, Entertainment, Labor, Law, Politics, Religion, Sex, and War.

3 Biko, Steve, *I Write What I Like*, 1978.

4 Ture, Kwame and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, 1967.

5 Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1921.

6 Ibid.

7 Thorough analysis of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex is provided in the wonderful text, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex* edited by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence.

A RADICAL'S VIEW ON IRAN

OR, HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BATON

BY KEVAN HARRIS

If you ever have had the pleasure of being whacked in the head by a riot squad goon in black Kevlar, then you and I have something in common. For me, it happened in central Tehran in July 2009 at an opposition demonstration against the Islamic Republic's sketchy presidential election and subsequent

state repression against protesters. I had already witnessed some serious mayhem over the summer of 2009, as well as some amazing solidarity between protesters of various classes and social backgrounds. This was the high

point of the opposition "Green Movement" in Iran, before it started to dwindle in numbers and unity as 2010 rolled around. But during that summer, I watched as Iranians shared strategies of countering the effects of tear gas, organized methods of pushing back the police, and debated the list of demands they wanted opposition leaders to embrace.

I thought I was a serious protest ninja, able to weave in and out of crowds without any repercussions. Until, of course, my ninja skills faltered and I got whacked on a hot July day in the middle of a student beat-down. The first thing I noticed, curiously, after I escaped, was that the baton in question was short and had a soft rubber tip. I could have been hit by something much worse: the notorious street militias in Iran, known as the basij, were swinging long metal poles and 2x4s with nails in them. The poor schmuck who hit me had at least taken a short course in crowd control, and I could tell he really didn't have his heart in it. His hate was not pure.

That baton gave me a sort of epiphany. The Islamic Republic seems pretty scary to most Americans—a few mullahs here, a few bearded militants there, throw in a nuke and mix—and there is often an assumption

that power in Iran operates along different principles than in Western states. That baton told me otherwise: why so soft?

Iran had a huge social revolution, only three decades ago, which overthrew the authoritarian Pahlavi monarchy. It brought millions onto the streets, heightened popular expectations, and forced the new government to claim legitimacy partly through the people's will. This revolutionary dynamic, no matter how much it became watered down by the often reactionary and violent methods of rule by the new Islamic Republic, never disappeared. It has continually been reformulated through different social movements in Iran which realized the promises and possibilities of social change.

Politics did not disappear in Iran in 1979 and reappear in 2009 just in time for CNN's cameras and the New York Times. Students and women have demanded greater popular participation in the political and social sphere, workers have demanded higher living standards, and peasants have demanded land and government support. The state responds, sometimes with its left hand (semi-free elections, universal education, birth control for married couples, welfare pro-

grams, land reform) and sometimes with its right hand (disqualification of election candidates, media crackdowns, no independent trade unions, arrests of activists). The political elite has always been split into various factions, and this has sometimes provided space for social demands to be heard.

States only respond to those groups with social power—there's nothing different in this about Iran compared to the US or anywhere else. But one dynamic of any revolution is the social empowerment of new groups and classes. This includes a new political elite, whose schisms and internal battles have determined much of the trajectory of the Islamic Republic's politics since 1979. But it also includes the newly educated youth, first generation female college graduates, migrants to large Iranian cities, and workers in Iran's large industrial sector. There is power in all these groups as well. Of course they do not all agree with each other's politics—the Green Movement's demands were mostly of a political nature and did not address the deep social concerns about inequality and equal access to resources that form the core of working class grievances in Iran. But that does not mean that this empowerment is false—the Iranian state is frankly scared, as any state should be of its population. And this is why that goon's baton was soft,

There is little likelihood of a repeat of 1979 in Iran—no total revolution is in the cards. Ask any Iranian inside the country (not the Iranian diaspora in the US, who are too often obsessed with nationalist delusions of nostalgia like any diaspora) and they will tell you they prefer a less cataclysmic event. But US activists should know that there is an internal struggle in Iran for social justice which has its own rhythms, victories, and disappointments. Any intervention by the US will undoubtedly aid the Iranian state, allowing them to monopolize the revolutionary discourse of nationalism for their own ends. Even sanctions, which are sold to us as "targeted" and "smart," are a form of economic warfare. They never achieve their intended consequences, precisely because US policy makers know next-to-nothing about how the complex Iranian economy actually works. US sanctions against a supposedly "terrorist" government bank in Iran means that small and medium sized Iranian businesses have to pay more for loans, lay off more workers, and stop hiring new college graduates. Not only are economic sanctions war by other means, but they are counter-productive for those who hope for social change in Iran.

It has become shockingly clear to US elites in 2011 that the Middle East is "just like us." They are now attempting to manage the "new realities" of a historical wave of revolt. But also, it has hopefully become clear to US radicals that the global South has more to teach us than we do them. Iranian struggles for social and political rights are something that only the Iranian people can make for themselves. We must be in critical solidarity with such forces in Iran, and the best place to start is by stopping US war, through whatever means, in Iran and beyond. ★

Kevan Harris, who frequently travels to Iran, is a doctoral candidate in sociology at Johns Hopkins University. He recently traveled throughout Iran for a year doing research. He writes a weblog called "The Thirsty Fish" at www.kevanharris.com.



2009 ELECTION PROTEST IN TEHRAN

Photo by Milad Avazbeigi (CC BY-SA 2.0)

JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE

BY MARK GUNNERY

From March 11th to the 13th, I was in Philadelphia for the annual national membership meeting of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). The weekend was powerful, full of challenging conversations, informative workshops, fascinating plenaries, updates on various campaigns and soul nourishing spiritual ceremonies. I walked away from it moved, inspired, and committed to organizing with other Jews around Palestine.

JVP is national organization of Jews and allies that works to achieve a lasting peace that recognizes the rights of both Israelis and Palestinians for security and self-determination through grassroots organizing, education, advocacy, and media. Among their projects are divestment campaigns against companies that profit from the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, attempts to defend and free Palestinian and Israeli human rights activists behind bars, challenges to the ways debate is stifled on Palestine/Israel and the misuses of the charges of antisemitism against Israel's critics, and supporting new and alternative Jewish rituals that include Palestinian narratives. They are open to non-Jews as well, and work in coalition with Arab, Muslim, Palestinian and Christian groups to fight bigotry and end the occupation.¹

JVP is part of a larger Jewish segment within the Palestine solidarity movement. International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN), American Jews for a Just Peace, Anarchists Against the Wall, Checkpoint Watch, Boycott From Within and the Shministim are a few of the movement's primarily Jewish groups. Jews For Human Rights and JVP/Tikkun are two in Baltimore. There are also many Jews in the movement who aren't part of specifically Jewish organizations.

The path that leads Jews to organize in solidarity with Palestinians is often long and difficult. For those of us who came up in Jewish communities marked by racist attitudes towards Palestinians, brutal Islamophobia, and a nationalist version of Judaism, joining a global, Palestinian-led movement that aims for fundamental changes to the Israeli system can be a painful existential process. We've been isolated from family and friends, labeled antisemites and self-hating Jews and, in cases like the pepper spraying of JVP members by Zionist activists from Stand

With Us in Berkeley, physically assaulted by other Jews.

THE DELEGITIMIZATION NETWORK

Beyond this, Jewish activists in the Palestine solidarity movement face many of the same obstacles that the rest of the movement has to deal with. These include harassment, infiltration, physical attacks, and a diplomatic assault by Israel and its supporters.

Following an influential 2010 report from the Reut Institute, Zionist establishment figures have referred to two enemies. One is the Resistance Network led by Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran, which has an Islamic agenda and seeks to destroy Israel by force. The other is the Delegitimization Network whose primary role, according to the Reut Institute, is to "negate Israel's right to exist [with] political and philosophical arguments." Their goal is to replace "the Zionist model with a state that is based on the 'one person, one vote' principle." Consisting "mostly of elements of the radical European left, Arab and Islamic groups, and so-called post or anti-Zionist Jews and Israelis [they] derive their inspiration from the collapse of the Soviet Union, East Germany, or apartheid South Africa."²

Not long after the Reut Institute's report was released, Israel's far-right Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman declared war on the movement at home and abroad, launching initiatives in an attempt to bring it down. In Israel, Lieberman's party, Yisrael Beiteinu, has introduced legislation that would criminalize BDS at home, penalizing both international and Israeli activists who call for it in any form. He instructed embassies in ten European countries to each recruit 1,000 members of the public to act as advocates for Israeli policies. Made up of Jewish and Christian activists, academics, journalists, and students, the advocates are briefed regularly by Israeli officials as to how to defend Israel's image in their respective countries. In March, the Foreign Ministry announced a new program. Along with members of Stand With Us, they plan to train El Al flight attendants to represent Israel and gather information abroad. In the days between flights, they'll deliver lectures and engage in talks and meetings with local residents.³

It's in this context that recent attempts to disrupt and delegitimize the global Palestinian solidarity movement, not to mention the movements in the Occupied Territories and within the 1967 borders, have occurred. Knowing this, it is not a stretch to imagine that the Israeli government has a role in fighting against the movement worldwide.

PRIVILEGE AND TRAUMA

While Jews have been affected by attacks on Palestine solidarity activists, they still carry a lot of privilege within the movement. For example, when five JVP protesters disrupted a speech on delegitimization by Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu under the banner of Young Jewish and Proud they were released with no charges. When eleven Muslim students disrupted a speech by Israel's ambassador to the US, Michael Oren, at the University of California at Irvine, they were arrested and charged with disrupting a public meeting as well as conspiring to do so. If convicted, they each face six months behind bars.

In order to be good allies, combat Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism at home, and embody anti-racist praxis, Jews in the movement should be real about the privileges we carry. Although there are many poor and working class Jews and Jews of color worldwide, a large number of Jews in the US and Canada have class and white skin privileges. Within North American Jewish communities, Jews can get away with a lot more criticism of Israel than non-Jews. Instead of hiding from these privileges and acting like they don't exist, we can simultaneously recognize, subvert, and utilize them, making space both within and beyond Jewish communities for critique of and action against Israeli policy towards Palestinians.

At the same time, we must also recognize that Jews are a historically oppressed group. Antisemitism has deeply traumatized us. Many of us are children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of people who were forced into ghettos and concentration camps in Europe, kicked out of countries in the Middle East and North Africa, faced pogroms in Tsarist Russia and religious repression in the former Soviet Union, and political repression and antisemitism in the United States. In addition, many of us know people killed or injured during political violence in Israel. In addition, we have a historical narrative that fixates on Jewish persecution, creating a Jewish self-image of eternal victimhood.

The Israeli establishment, and its international supporters, expertly exploit Jewish trauma to further political and military objectives, especially when they accuse BDS activists of trying to destroy Israel. To fully understand the implications of this, one needs to know the double meaning of the word Israel. Israel is a state formed in 1948. It is also another name of Jacob, one of the religious patriarchs in Jewish religious tradition, and father of the twelve original Jewish tribes. The word Israel long before 1948, referred to the Jewish people as a whole. For many Jews, when they hear that someone wants to destroy Israel, it doesn't just mean the end of a state's political system; it means that they want to destroy the Jews. Thus, when defenders of the Israeli status quo accuse their critics of wanting to destroy Israel they are dangerously triggering traumatic responses from Jews worldwide. At the same time, they are expressing a genuine fear based on a shared history of oppression, not just a cynical ploy to delegitimize activists and defend Israel.

For those of us who engage with Jewish communities, through organizing with Jews, participating in campaigns that target Jewish institutions like the Jewish National Fund, or doing cultural or spiritual work that critiques Israel, we can recognize and honor the truth of Jewish trauma and offer new frameworks through which to understand and work through it. We can transform our trauma through renegotiating it on our own terms. This is an essential role Jews can play in the struggle for full human rights and self-determination in Palestine.

ENDGAME

But why bother? If Jews are in the dominant position vis-à-vis the Palestinians, why work towards transforming ourselves? And since it is a conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, why engage at all with the Jewish community in North America?

The United States maintains a special relationship with Israel that involves providing them diplomatic cover and giving them military aid. In exchange, Israel uses that money to buy American weapons and helps US interests in the Middle East and Africa. There are many things contributing to this situation, including parallel foreign policy objectives, the increasing power of Evangelical Christian Zionists within the Washington establishment and a joint commitment to the global war on terror. Another is a Jewish community which, at least publicly, presents a unified front in support of Israel. Internally, though, there is much quiet debate and soul searching regarding Israel's policies.

We can use our privilege as Jews in North America to raise our voices in support of Palestinian human rights and self-determination. Through BDS campaigns, cultural projects, creative protests, flash mobs, alternative media, and educational projects, Jewish activists (along with everyone else in the movement here) can work towards justice in Palestine through shifting public opinion so much that it will become impossible for the US to continue supporting Israel the way it does now. Without US military aid and diplomatic support, Israel could not maintain the system it currently does within its disputed borders.

JVP is doing tremendously important and difficult work. Through protest actions, rituals and campaigns, JVP roots a commitment to Palestinian rights, freedom and dignity in Jewish values, practices and history. Their nuanced, creative, and grassroots style is politically effective, but it is also soul-nourishing, gives people space to renegotiate their trauma, and provides a model for new ways that Jews can relate to one another beyond ethnocentric nationalism. ★

Mark Gunnery is a student, herbalist and musician from Baltimore. He is a member of Jewish Voice For Peace, Baltimore Palestine Solidarity, and Jews For Human Rights, helped organize the US Assembly of Jews Confronting Racism and Israeli Apartheid in 2010 and participated in two US/Canadian fundraising tours for Anarchists Against the Wall.

NOTES

1 jewishvoiceforpeace.org/about

2 www.reut-institute.org/en/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=3769

3 www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4043373,00.html

AN EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT FROM

MARSHALL LAW: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A BALTIMORE BLACK PANTHER

Marshall “Eddie” Conway is a former Baltimore City Black Panther who has been incarcerated by the state of Maryland for over four decades. His autobiography has just been published by AK Press, and we are honored to be able to present this short excerpt, detailing some of the dynamics of organizing within the prison walls—a very different terrain than that enjoyed by most of the other social movements examined in this issue. —IR

July can be notoriously hot in Baltimore, but on this day, July 12, 1973, the weather was mild; in no way did it hint at the hell that was about to break loose. Six or seven comrades gathered in the cell that we had designated the unofficial headquarters of the Maryland Penitentiary Inter-Communal Survival Collective. The back half of the fifth tier also housed our library and office, all, of course, unofficial. Housed on this level were also several of our members. It was the highest tier in the prison and the farthest away from all surveillance. We operated our survival programs, physical education classes, and martial arts training from this area.

Down below on the flats, an event was beginning to play out that would have an effect on the entire prison system in Maryland. It wasn't any different from the hundreds or perhaps thousands of nearly identical events that had already occurred within that tomb. The beating of a black man was a regular thing in the history of that place; it was as if it was a required sacrifice to sustain the structure. However, this day would be different. There was a new revolutionary organization in the prison and self-defense was a part of the platform for the group. Our organization based its principles on those of the Black Panther Party, and the member's primary concern was for the welfare of the community within the prison.

I had been in the prison for over a year and a half at this point, and I had spent much of that time on lockup, so I had never seen the guards administer one of their notorious beat downs in front of dozens of witnesses as they were on this day. Most of the beatings that I was aware of had taken place in the “hole,” the isolated block of five or six cells where punishment was meted out on a regular basis to the rebellious men within the prison's ranks. The only other prisoners allowed into that area were those responsible for serving food and performing janitorial duties. The word would swirl among the population that this prisoner or that prisoner received a beating, but most felt powerless to do anything about the situation. It became acceptable and many saw it as just another part of the brutal prison culture. Guards beat prisoners with a guaranteed impunity and this practice never even raised an eyebrow.

The culture of violence that existed within

this structure had direct ties to slavery and oppression, as did the culture of resistance that would soon result in a direct response to this particular abuse.

The guards formed an entourage of sorts, their attendant business being to kick and beat the man that they were dragging past hundreds of prisoners. The prisoners who were on the flats or in their cells on the first and second tiers were outraged. The men began to throw objects at the guards and those who lacked physical objects threw slurs. Each side made threats back and forth

BY MARSHALL “EDDIE” CONWAY

the Maryland Penitentiary Inter-Communal Survival Collective. Rob was much like George Jackson: an intense brother who worked well with the population and he was well received by most. Rob had been the most vocal among those protesting the beating and now he refused to back down when the reinforcements attempted to neutralize the situation.

A group of us had arrived on the scene at almost the same time as the original group of guards who had come back to settle with Folks and the others who had opposed the beating. One group of guards blocked the grill while another group approached Folks, attempting to attack him from behind. Several comrades began to engage the guards who were blocking the grill, forcing it open while the other comrades gained entrance into the area where Folks was trapped. We collided with the guards who were behind Folks, and in the violence that ensued, the guard who had been in charge of the beating that had precipitated this incident received several stab wounds. This battle continued for a few minutes longer, until finally the guards retreated, allowing the comrades to leave the area. Later, they returned to retrieve their fallen member.

For a brief time, everything came to a standstill. The comrades had blended back into the population, and most of the prisoners were in that mental place where one goes after winning the battle. When this moment passed, it became clear that this minor victory would not appease the war gods. During that brief moment, the guards experienced the shock that occurs when the eye of the bully has been blackened, and he is sent running. They were not accustomed to organized resistance. This was not a riot with the chaos and calamity that those situations usually bring, neither was it a gang fight or a situation in which the guards could isolate one side or exploit the divisions. Above all, it was not what they had expected when they had made their way through the prison with a beaten man in tow.

Predictably, their response would be severe, and all these years later, I am still haunted by the depravity that they exhibited.

After the administration had sent for and received sufficient reinforcements, the prison was shut down and everyone was locked in their cells. Payback was in the air and on the tongues of the guards and we knew that the Collective would take a hit. Five comrades, including Folks and I, were singled out for the retributive punishment that gets served up in hefty portions in prison whenever the existing status quo is challenged and, in this case, flipped on its head, if only for a moment. They rounded us up and one by one took us to the hole where we were beaten.

The area was crowded with the bodies of men who no longer looked like men; they had taken on the characteristics of pigs by this point. Greedy with revenge, it was evident that they would maul anyone who fell into the pen. I was thrown in. The attacks started immediately and continued until I was no longer conscious, and probably beyond. When finally I awoke, I was in great pain. My jaw and shoulder had been broken, and my head was busted. I felt as if my brain would seep out of my head as I alternated between consciousness and sleep. The bruises and lacerations that covered my entire body simply served as background pain. I have no idea of what I must have looked like at that point, but judging from the pain, it must have been monstrous.

Days passed by and I lay in pain, completely isolated and unable to identify the place that they were holding me. I did know that I had never seen this part of the prison, and later I would learn that it was the old death row section of the penitentiary, which housed the gas chamber and the cells of the condemned. They held me there in that remote section of the prison without the benefit of medical treatment for a number of days clearly hoping I would die from the injuries. I could not communicate with the outside world, and the administration did not allow anyone into the prison to see me. Finally, my lawyer got a court order to see me, and once she saw the state I was in, she insisted that they rush me to the hospital for emergency treatment. I was there for a month, and upon release I joined my comrades on lockup. Though the other four had also suffered through the guards' brutality, I was the only one they had tried to kill. This was the first of several attempts that they would make on my life... ★

MARSHALL LAW THE LIFE & TIMES OF A BALTIMORE BLACK PANTHER MARSHALL “EDDIE” CONWAY AND DOMINIQUE STEVENSON

as the guards continued to brutalize their captive. When, finally, they threw him into lockup, satisfied that he no longer posed a threat, they went back and singled out one of the other prisoners who had protested too loudly.

Suddenly, there were other guards acting as reinforcements and responding to what they took to be a riot in the making. Those prisoners targeted for retribution from the goon squad, which had started the situation in the first place, were behind the grill. The guards allowed the other prisoners to leave the area.

It was at this point that a comrade found his way up to our “office” and informed us of the developments below. One of those locked behind the grill, Rob Folks, was a leader in

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//// THE WALMART STRUGGLE IN BALTIMORE

AN ORGANIZER REFLECTS ON ADDRESSING PUBLIC MONEY

Last summer and fall the Baltimore CAN Coalition publicly challenged the way economic development is done in Baltimore. Formed by Progressive Maryland, the Coalition had a membership of forty labor, community, and environmental groups. We focused on three things: we worked to raise the job quality standards for the 25th Street Station Development (to include a Walmart and Lowe's), we fought for a Baltimore City Living Wage for retail companies grossing more than 10 million annually, and we wrote some community standards to insert in the rewrite of the Baltimore City Zoning Code.

The sign-on statement was very general. It said, in part: *We call upon the Mayor, City Council, and other elected officials to stand up for Baltimore and expect more from developers, especially those receiving taxpayer subsidies. ... For too long, communities across Baltimore have stood alone against politically connected developers and big-box retailers that disregard the concerns of neighborhoods, workers, and nearby businesses as they apply suburban standards that threaten the urban fabric we value.*

In insisting on higher standards from the Walmart-Lowe's development, we joined with a mostly Hampden-based group, Bmore Local, which had collected petition signatures in support of 13 points for a community benefits agreement which included: a 60% local hire rate, businesses to pay a living wage with health care benefits, a minimum 60% of contractors, and sub-contractors, hired for the demolition, construction and infrastructure improvements and landscaping, be Baltimore City-based firms, 40% of which shall be minority-owned; that the development obtain a minimum of Silver LEED Certification from the US Green Building Council; the creation of public transit friendly facilities including deep curb cuts for bus stops; and that a minimum of 25% of all residential units at the site be designated specifically as affordable housing [NB: The City Department this develop-

Housing ruled that ment was exempt from the inclusion-ary zoning law because there was "no city money" in the deal.]

For many, Walmart's abysmal record is well known—low wages, meager health care benefits, viciously anti-union policies, wage theft, non-payment of taxes, use of tax dodges and tax havens, fines for violating environmental standards, squeezing suppliers, discrimination against women, and many of its employees are forced to use public benefits to supplement their wages. Others, blinded by their attraction to the promise of low prices, rarely question what Walmart executives do to their suppliers, workers in China who make

what Walmart sells, or workers who work in their stores.

What is not generally known, however, is how economic development decisions are made in Baltimore. It was quickly apparent once we began our organizing that the 25th Street Development was pretty much a "done deal." Negotiations on selling the site and greasing the pathway with City Council and the Planning Commission had been going on for over a year. It was clear that the Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC), the quasi-public body—public only when it wants taxpayer money and private when it comes to oversight and transparency—which promotes and makes economic development deals, was solidly behind the 25th Street Station Project. In addition, Rick Walker and his development team had been meeting with neighborhood groups since late 2009—just after the site was approved by Baltimore City Council as a Focus Area under the Maryland Enterprise Zone legislation administered by the BDC. This designation gave the project an 80% state property tax credit for 10 years for any new improvements to the current site. Under this legislation, the development pays only 20% of the property tax and the state reimburses the city for approximately half of what it loses. We estimated the loss in property taxes to the state and the city would be a minimum of 10 million dollars over a ten year period.

The neighborhood groups, although sincere in their efforts and hard working, largely concerned themselves with issues of design and traffic. From our perspective, they did not advocate for job quality standards and, though the development would be close to the Jones Falls, they seemingly did not keep a close eye on environmental issues. For example, these neighborhood groups did nothing to oppose 25th Street Station request to be grandfathered in to the old (2000) Maryland storm-water management law. In February 2011, when the 25th Street Station Development, a so-called "green" development, filed a waiver to

ance, and with Jon Laria as their lawyer, top campaign contributor to Martin O'Malley's campaign, and Maryland Sustainable Growth Chair, they appear to have an ace in their pocket."

Baltimore used to be a strong manufacturing city with many good union jobs. These jobs began moving out—down South first and then overseas—in the '60s and '70s. What has driven the economic development agenda in Baltimore since then is a combination of attracting tourists and conventions (the prime example being the development of the Inner Harbor and state-subsidized sports stadiums with restaurants and shops to complement the hotels), and a focus on luring mobile capital to a downtown "corporate center." These are mainly white-collar businesses, such as investment and banking, as well as high end services which cater to them. The other thrust of the development has been a push to increase the residential tax base through the construction of expensive housing mainly around the water and in formerly working class areas near the Harbor—Fells Point, South Baltimore, Tide Point, the East Harbor and Canton coupled with a push to grow retail services in these gentrifying areas.

In the 1970s, when William Donald Schaefer was Mayor, he built an infrastructure for economic development that was essentially shielded from input by taxpayers, voters and the City Council, in the form of "quasi-public corporations," a process which allows land and capital to be assembled without competitive bidding or public disclosure, of which BDC is one example. Mayor Schaefer established these bodies specifically to reduce citizen input. Although the business community has argued that to be successful, these economic deals have to be done in secrecy, the problem with this lack of transparency is that the public has neither the ability to weigh in on the use of tax-payer dollars nor the ability to truly set the standards by which public dollars are used.

A report released in 2002 by a research team at Good Jobs First, states, in part: "An analysis of Baltimore's economic development efforts reveals a recurring history of high costs, low benefits, and a lack of safeguards to ensure that taxpayer investments really pay off in family-wage jobs and an enhanced tax base. Unlike most states and many big cities, Baltimore has no job quality standards, requiring subsidized companies to pay a certain wage or to provide healthcare. The pattern is especially troubling today, as the city increasingly employs local tax expenditures—foregone future revenues—instead of federal or state dollars to

finance development deals." Things are no different now, almost 10 years later.

If we did an analysis today of where most of the special tax districts have been created or tax deals have been offered, we would conclude they are largely areas meant for gentrification and seldom support revitalization in our neighborhoods. The two largest TIF (Tax Increment Financing—a public financing method used to subsidize development) districts currently in the city are the Paterra-



kis (H&S Bakery) development at Harbor Point and the Turner Development on the Westport waterfront. Another area receiving public dollars—a total of \$212.6 million of federal, state and city taxpayer funds, is the East Baltimore Development Inc (EBDI) project north of Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions.

As Baltimore CAN often said when demanding a guarantee of a certain percentage of full time jobs with benefits and to raise the starting pay, we cannot grow our city on part-time minimum wage jobs. Too many of Baltimore's working people are currently holding 2 and 3 part-time jobs just to make ends meet. The experience of the United Workers Association is instructive here. They have been organizing workers at the Inner Harbor for three years and are making visible incredible worker abuse, including wage theft and sexual harassment.

At the July 22nd hearing on the Living Wage bill in front of the Council's Labor Subcommittee, chaired by Warren Branch from the 13th District, the list of opponents read like a who's who in business and commerce in our city, with the dominant argument being that the economy will not support raising worker's wages. Testimony against the bill included comments like "this bill is a holocaust to the retail industry," "a living wage law would re-

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be exempt from the 2007 Maryland Storm-Water Management Law and instead use the minimal requirements of the old 2000 law, an outstanding environmental blogger writing under the name of Baltidome commented: "The planners made a conscious decision to shoot for grandfathering, rather than compli-

or laws subsidized companies to pay a certain wage or to provide healthcare. The pattern is especially troubling today, as the city increasingly employs local tax expenditures—foregone future revenues—instead of federal or state dollars to

BALTIMORE //// GIVEAWAYS TO CORPORATE POWER

BY
**BETTY G.
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duce job opportunities for low skilled workers,” “if we raised wages county people would come in and take the jobs,” and “a living wage bill would imperil the future of the 25th Street Station project.” Over 80 supporters turned out for the hearing and dozens gave stirring testimony about the need to raise the standards for Baltimore’s workers. Bishop Doug Miles, a leader in BUILD which had championed the first living wage law in the country (applying to city sub-contractors) put the debate into historical context of the 1994 Living

Walton family members who are on the 10 richest Americans list and their net worth, and the presentation of a one penny award to Baltimore City for being the “easiest city to come into.” We had learned that both the developer and Walmart operatives told city officials and a small businessman that we were the easiest city they had ever tried to come into.

A huge challenge we faced was the lack of information people had about how economic development is done in the city, how public dollars are used to grease these development deals, and how the city’s desperation for jobs leads to an “any job is just fine” mantra. Another hurdle we encountered was something called Councilmanic courtesy. This is the system where the Councilperson in whose district the development is located calls the shots once the “details of the deal” are revealed to them by the BDC. So in the case of 25th Street Station, everything went through District 7 Councilwoman Belinda Conaway. At one point she did try to get a wage deliverable from Walmart but they would only talk if she dropped her support for the living wage bill which she did not do. When the final vote on the Planned Unit Development (PUD) comes, the lead council person can “release” another council rep from having to vote yes. As it was explained, this procedure is necessary because this unwritten agreement by Council members to pledge support to each-other’s “projects” keeps the Mayor from treading on their district decisions.

Among the things we did accomplish:

- We shifted the public conversation from “what a wonderful development the 25th Street Station project would be” to “we need development that is better than part-time minimum wage jobs; jobs where people can fully support their families”. We also raised awareness on how economic development plays-out in the city.
- We successfully countered the narrative—“there’s no city money in this development” —by publicizing the 10 year/10 million dollar property tax break and contending that the city will spend untold amounts on infrastructure improvements (certainly beyond what the developers have pledged to pay the city).
- We won several very small amendments to the PUD: that the Department of Public Works has to report to City Council on 25th Street Station’s storm-water management plan; similarly the Director of Housing must report on the green building requirements and the Department of Transportation must report to the City Council for five years on the cumulative costs of traffic mitigation (costs borne by the city and developer).
- We introduced testimony from Stacy Mitchell of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance which pointed out that the 25th Street Station economic impact study did not discuss potential jobs lost due to local

business being forced to close or downsize because of big-box competition.

- We raised awareness about initiatives in other cities—for example, in Southern California cities must engage impartial, outside, experts to report on the economic impact of large developments. In Chicago, a transparency law was passed in 2009 which requires the city to post economic development agreements on the city’s website. Many cities have “claw-back” provisions where public money must be paid back if the jobs promised are not created.

Interestingly, the only Council member to abstain on the final vote on the Planned Unit Development for the 25th Street Station project, Carl Stokes, announced he was creating a task force to study the process of economic development in the city. This Task Force has held four meetings and will soon publish a report with recommendations. Councilman Stokes held a hearing on March 30th to explore questions about the EBDI development raised by a series of articles in Daily Record. Our coalition believes that there should be additional public hearings held so that Baltimore residents and tax-payers can weigh in on what standards we expect from economic development deals in the future.

But the overall fight—to stop the use of tax-payer subsidies for big developers without any accountability or strong job, environmental and community standards—will take an extended campaign with a strong organization which can do the research, develop the strategy (with a power analysis), conduct a far-reaching public education campaign and organize a solid base in Baltimore’s many constituencies. We need an

organization in Baltimore that builds community power to put forward an economic development agenda with vision—an agenda which would include jobs with a family supporting wage, including union jobs, affordable housing, access to health care, quality public education, racial justice, immigrants’ rights and environmental stewardship for Baltimore’s people. The organization, most likely a coalition of faith, labor, civil rights and community groups, would need a capacity for collective action in order to fight for this agenda. ★

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Wage fight. Referring to the creation of retail jobs at the Harbor in the mid 1970s, he said: “But 20 years later, you had people showing up in soup kitchens who worked in the Inner Harbor. We were told nothing could be done to help such workers that would not hurt Baltimore’s economy. We did not believe it then and we do not believe it now.”

The bill died in the Labor Committee with vote of 1-1. [Branch voted no, Conaway yes with D’Adamo absent.] The champion of the bill, Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke of the 14th District, has subsequently worked to get it out of committee, but is one vote short of having it considered by the full Council.

In our organizing to raise the standards for the 25th Street Station Development, we used a variety of tactics: rallies at the Planning Commission hearing and at City Hall, e-mails and phone calls to City Council, neighborhood canvassing, media op-eds, and press conferences. We lobbied hard for amendments to the Planned Unit Development (PUD) to include job quality and environmental standards but we were repeatedly told by city officials and its legal department that this was only a zoning issue and our concerns could not be addressed in this legislation. Our final rally included a “Waltopus,” replete with pictures of the four

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Would stronger investment targeted to human capital and transportation have changed the economic development landscape so that in 2011 we would not be selling out for just any jobs?

What if Baltimore pursued a light industry strategy—using our supply of vacant factory buildings—instead of focusing on tourism and gentrification?

If there were a city-wide citizen debate on the goals of economic development, could we set some real standards for the city’s growth?

//// EXPERIMENTS IN ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY ////

What does a just and sustainable economy look like? And more importantly, how do we get there from here? We can't seriously entertain fantasies of a magical overnight transformation to some kind of socialist utopia: any process transforming our alienating, exploitative, environmentally-destructive and inequality-producing economic system with something better is going to be a long process. After all, the point here isn't just fighting back against a specific cutback in public spending or winning some specific concession from employers: it's to go beyond these individual struggles to visualize and construct real alternatives, with truly democratic processes of community control over the economic life of the community. We can't just demand this better world; we also have to build it, and the first step is figuring out how.

EXPERIMENTAL WORKPLACES

Part of this process involves prefigurative experiments: attempts to build, right now, real working models of the kinds of workplaces that would embody the kind of direct democracy and responsibility to the larger community characteristic of the future we're struggling for. When most people think of worker cooperatives or worker collectives, it's these kind of small scale projects that often come to mind. Despite their (relatively) small size, worker-controlled enterprises offer some unique opportunities to experiment with forms of long-term direct democracy with a material basis. Readers of this paper are probably familiar with examples like Red Emma's Bookstore Coffeehouse [disclaimer: I'm a proud member of the collective] or the Baltimore Bicycle Works, both collectives where every worker has an equal share in the decision-making process and an equal share in the ownership of the process. Not only do members of such projects get the benefits of working for themselves and not a boss or owner, but they can choose, collectively, to work towards values not defined by the narrow imperative of profit characteristic of the capitalist business world. Red Emma's for instance, has used its profits to finance new projects like the 2640 Space and the Baltimore Free School; the Baltimore Bicycle Works has worked to help promote sustainable transportation alternatives.

A new (to Baltimore) worker collective makes some of these possibilities really clear. "Just Walk" is a worker-owned and collectively organized pet-care company which started in Washington, D.C. and has now expanded to New York City and Baltimore. Blake Underwood, one of the workers, explains how worker ownership not only offers a better deal for the employee, but for the client as well:

"Most companies operate with one or a few boss/admin types who handle scheduling and client interaction and take some percentage of the walker's rate. These people are sometimes co-laborers, but that is the exception and not the rule. The walkers themselves are almost always contractors (usually sans contract) rather than company employees, limiting the owners' obligations and almost guaranteeing the maximization of worker exploitation. In our experience the boss's cut can range from 25% to 60%, but tending towards the 40%+ end. With this set-up there is typically almost no direct contact be-

tween the dog's human counterpart and the walker. And the individual walking a particular dog can change from day-to-day, calling into question the dog's welfare and the safety of the client's home."

The idea here is ultimately that the worker-controlled business opens up a space to question not just the way the business is run, but the impact of the business activity: Just Walk is painfully aware of the connection between an industry like dog-walking and the process of gentrification; besides trying to build internal awareness of the economic position their industry occupies, the company feels that "the best way for [the dog walking business] to combat gentrification specifically is to support the communities and organizations who are at the front lines of that fight." It's here that the limits of the isolated worker-owned project appear: how do you move beyond gestures of solidarity to large-scale economic transformation? And how do you bring the economic and social benefits of democratically controlled workplaces to the communities, ravaged by years of dispossession, that need these benefits most?

SCALING IT UP

These are precisely the kinds of questions being asked by the Democracy Collaborative, a grassroots think-tank based in Maryland and D.C. that's dedicated to the exploration of new models for economic democracy. I spoke with Steve Dubb, a researcher and organizer with the project, to find out not just how they envision a more economically just future, but how they've been putting this vision into practice in Cleveland, Ohio, where they've been instrumental in the formation of the Evergreen Cooperatives. Here the idea is not just to build a single worker-controlled enterprise, but to create a network of mutually-supporting projects capable of acting as the kernel for a wider economic transformation, generating what they call "community wealth."

Cleveland looks a lot like Baltimore: in the wake of deindustrialization, the largest employers are those connected to the city's academic and medical institutions. Using money from the Cleveland Foundation as start-up capital, the Collaborative worked to establish a network of businesses that would provide services to these large institutional clients. (In the long term, this is a really smart move—unlike a steel mill or automobile plant, a hospital or university is place-based, seriously unlikely to move elsewhere in the pursuit of higher margins.) These businesses—including a sustainable industrial laundry facility, a solar installation and weatherization firm, and a year-round intensive urban organic hydroponic farm—are organized as worker-cooperatives: new hires buy into the company in their first years on the job, meaning that ownership of the company stays within the community and that worker-owners not only receive a wage, but are also investing in and invested in their company's economic success. Hiring at these cooperatives focuses on underserved and economically marginalized African-American communities in Cleveland, providing not just "green jobs" but green careers: after three years of operation, the goal is to have the management of each firm provided entirely by workers drawn from the rank and file and trained with the skills to manage a medium-

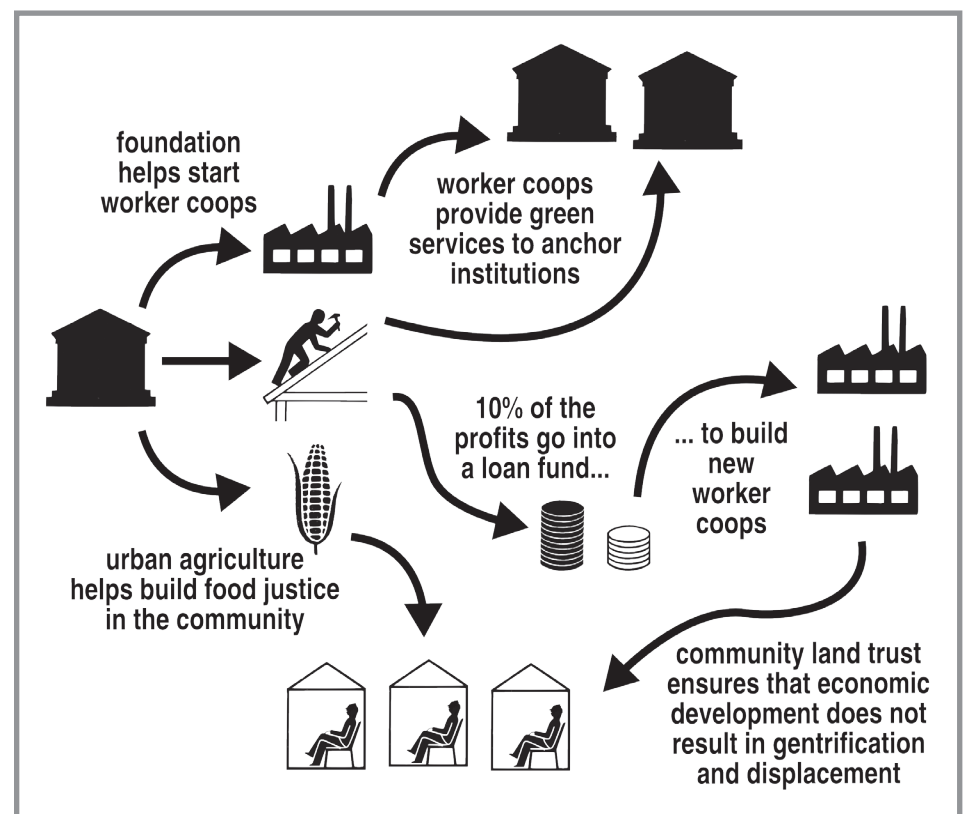
sized business under the direction of their fellow worker-owners: building what the Collaborative calls "everyday democracy."

The point of these projects is not just to provide a small number of jobs for their members, but also to help build new democratic workplaces. Taking a page from the Mondragon network of cooperatives in the Basque country, each of these coops then reserves 10% of their profits to establish a loan fund to help new cooperatives get off the ground. In this way, the size of each enterprise, projected to ultimately grow to around 50-75 worker-owners apiece, remains small enough to allow for face-to-face economic direct democracy, while at the same time supporting the expansion of the cooperative sector as a whole. The focus here is on "closing the loop": making sure that the benefits of economic development remain within the communities that need it most. This requires not just innovative individual cooperative workplaces, but long-term vision and strategy; for instance, the Collaborative, at the

BY JOHN DUDA

projects are not forthcoming. As the neighborhood hangs on, precariously, the city attempts in 1968 to jumpstart the engines of development in the neighborhood, closing the 500 block of Gay Street, the commercial center of the neighborhood, to traffic, creating the pedestrian mall that remains in place today. The strategy failed; without meaningful economic prospects for the inhabitants of the surrounding area to buttress the commercial activity in the district, Oldtown never became the shopping and tourist destination the city envisioned (that prize would go instead to the Inner Harbor, where development would commence a decade later). In the 1990s, the archipelago of public housing sites in the neighborhood would begin to be demolished because, as the argument went, concentrated low-income housing breeds poverty; deconcentration turned out to breed poverty even faster—as people moved out and more buildings came down, the already pre-

HOW IT WORKS: CLEVELAND'S EVERGREEN COOPERATIVES



start of this whole process, set up a community land trust to preserve affordable housing in the neighborhoods where the projects were being implemented: nothing would be more tragic than to see an explosion of sustainable economic development triggering an explosion of gentrification and displacement!

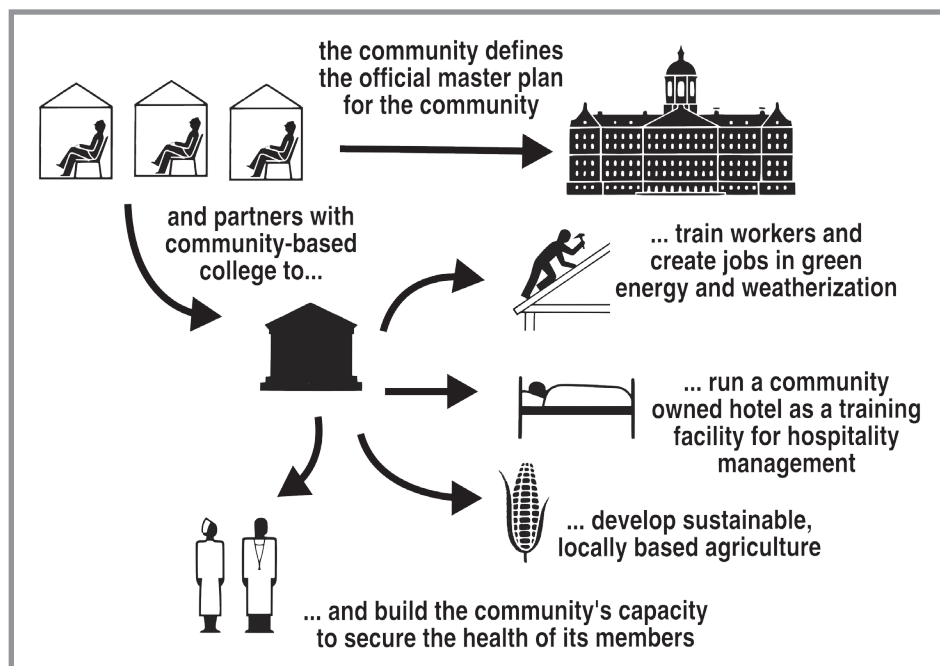
BUILDING A BETTER BALTIMORE

Oldtown isn't a place you would think to look for a model of viable and just bottom-up economic development. Just east of downtown across from I-83, it is not only one of the city's oldest neighborhoods, but one of its most economically disenfranchised. The shuttered, vacant, decaying storefronts of the Oldtown Mall mutely testify to the history here—a longtime thriving commercial district adjacent to Downtown becomes increasingly African-American, that is to say, given the racialization of urban poverty, increasingly poor. Public housing, much of it officially segregated, is built in the neighborhood. Income remains low, and as deindustrialization runs its course, jobs for the

carious economic base of the neighborhood collapsed. Redevelopment plans seeking to capitalize on the geographic proximity of the neighborhood have been in the air for nearly three decades; none have been put into place. Meanwhile, a few blocks east, the Johns Hopkins/EBDI development in what was once the Middle East neighborhood—before hundreds of residents lost their homes to what was supposed to be a biotech park, a new center of job creation in the knowledge industry—looks more and more like just a land grab (at least according to Melody Simon's reports in the Daily Record). The way to bring prosperity to an impoverished urban neighborhood is, it seems, to first make sure you remove the poor.

But on Oldtown's eastern edge, an institution is challenging the tragic consensus that development has to equal displacement, and proposing an alternative vision of Oldtown's future. This alternative vision was born at Sojourner-Douglass College, where I met with Jamal Mubdi-Bey, Director of Community Outreach, to discuss the Change4Real coalition—a unique effort to rethink and reori-

HOW IT WORKS: THE SDC PLAN TO REBUILD OLDTOWN



ent the priorities of economic development in the area from the bottom up. Founded in 1972, Sojourner-Douglass, Mubdi-Bey reminds us, came out of the Civil Rights movement, or, as he says to make his point clearer, “from the Black Power movement.” In other words, this is an institution which is controlled by the African-American community, and dedicated to helping that community achieve self-determination. The goal of the coalition and the College is to provide a framework for the redevelopment of Oldtown that is oriented first and foremost towards the current residents and their long-term economic well-being. This means building a framework oriented towards real jobs and real upward mobility, not the trickle-down of minimum wage jobs servicing the new urban gentry.

The current official master plan for Oldtown testifies to this effort to challenge the prevailing norms of development. By mobilizing the community, the Coalition played a substantial role in shaping the planning process, securing commitments to a development process that would mitigate displacement and prioritize economic redevelopment for the existing neighborhood’s inhabitants. Sojourner-Douglass, with its Community Outreach program and its soon to be launched

Center for Community Prosperity, has been at the center of these efforts to rethink Baltimore urban development along more sustainable and equitable lines. The specific geographic footprint at the neighborhood level offers a unique combination of an appropriately large-scale canvas for transformative economics, but a scale which is manageable and in which progress towards these goals can be measured and monitored. The College has also been at the heart of developing a set of unique economic institutions, which, like those in Cleveland’s Evergreen Cooperatives, will allow employees to become part-owners in enterprises aimed at securing the long term health and sustainability of the community. The School of Allied Health and an associated community-owned clinic will not only get residents educated to work in the medical industry, but will help address the persistent public health disparities that have plagued East Baltimore. One of just six energy efficiency training facilities in the state is located in Oldtown and associated with Sojourner-Douglass; here workers are acquiring skills to retrofit and weatherize existing buildings, and thinking about expanding into wind and solar power. A projected hotel in the neighborhood will not just provide entry-level service jobs, but will incorporate an educational component such that

workers gain access to a pathway to higher-level jobs in the management of the industry. Forty acres of farm land in Anne Arundel county, owned by Sojourner-Douglass, to be managed and farmed by neighborhood residents, is providing the basis for a cooperative neighborhood food infrastructure.

As Mubdi-Bey emphasizes, the biggest challenge here is one of education and organizing: it’s not just a matter of mobilizing the community to get a demand met or to stop a specific initiative, but a much longer process of helping the residents to understand what’s at stake in the development process, how processes of economic marginalization operate, and how these processes can be challenged and reversed. For the new vision of Oldtown to become a reality, the current inhabitants of the neighborhood have to become educated about and invested in this struggle—and that’s why Sojourner-Douglass, as an educational institution with a long connection to the community, is perhaps ideally suited to the challenge. If all goes well, in a decade or so, not only will community-based planning have eliminated poverty in Oldtown, but the knowledge of how to replicate and generalize this process will be taught to a new generation of grassroots development advocates at Sojourner-Douglass’ new School of Urban Planning.

IN THE SHELL OF THE OLD

What all of these experiments, small and large, have in common is a desire to stop dreaming of a better world and start taking the first steps towards it. As tentative efforts to build worker democracy are complemented by more comprehensive efforts to rethink the development process, the broad outlines of a possible geological shift in the dominant notions of “property” start to become apparent. It’s not so much a question of just making more people owners of property or co-owners of businesses, getting more people invested in the existing system, but of challenging that system on all levels in a systematic and long-term way. It’s not just that the community acquires ownership of property, but that the community fights for and wins the right to control the notion of “property” itself—the way it comes into being and is administered. One last example makes this

difference much clearer. Consider the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood, which Jamal Mubdi-Bey highlighted as an inspiration to the work in Oldtown. Here a multi-ethnic urban community, brought together by endemic poverty, and organizing for economic justice since the mid-1980s, has made the unprecedented advance of securing the right of eminent domain for the neighborhood community itself, resulting in the redevelopment of over 600 vacant and abandoned properties for the benefit of the community’s residents. This is a far cry from the sadly more typical pattern of urban disinvestment and neoliberal land grabs, but if we’re willing to rethink the economic assumptions that underlie these patterns, and work towards educating ourselves and our communities about the possible alternatives, a very different future might be on the horizon. ★

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OLDTOWN MALL

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THE INDYREADER TALKS TO: **LEADERS OF A BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE**

On December 30, 2010, the Baltimore Independent Reader's Clayton Conn and Corey Reidy sat down with Adam Jackson, Dayvon Love, Deverick Murray, and Lawrence Grandpre, from *Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle*; otherwise known as, "Baltimore's progressive policy think-tank." A fairly recent outgrowth from a Towson University campus organization, the members of LBS have thrown themselves full-throttle into grassroots policy-driven social justice activism. Our interview lasted for several hours and traversed topics ranging from their growth as an organization, to their personal politicizations and inspirations, their commitments as young black men to working for equality and revolution in Baltimore City, and to everything beyond and between.

Adam: Hi, my name's Adam Jackson. I'm the Executive Vice President of Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle. I'm from Baltimore City. I've lived in Baltimore my entire life. I graduated from Digital Harbor High School, in South Baltimore. I'm also a student at Towson University. I did a lot of stuff on campus. I'm an eight-year policy debater. That's basically where my experience comes from, my expertise comes from. And that's why I got involved in LBS. I learned a lot of stuff about the world that I live in. And that made me want to get involved with the group, because it deals specifically with policy.

Davyon: My name is Dayvon Love. I'm President of Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle. The idea behind the think-tank was that we wanted to use our policy debate experience to help the community develop the kind of thinking about public policy that would be beneficial. All of us are former policy debaters. I graduated from Forrest Park High School. I'm also a student at Towson University.

Deverick: My name is Deverick Murray. I'm a Towson student. I debated for about seven years. I grew up basically in Baltimore City, in the 'hood, really not thinking about how policy affected me or the people around me. But as I got older, and as I started to debate policy, at the highest levels of competition, with all the big name schools, I started to realize that the people that are policy makers and legislation makers are people who don't ever see certain other groups of people, don't ever watch them interact, don't ever experience what it is to live their lifestyle. So, when they make policy options available for people to endorse, they exclude a whole body of people. They're not thinking about their psychology. They're not thinking about their situation, or anything like that. That's the things that we want to change. We want to bring policy to young people, to youth—in order to get them to make good legislation for the most struggling citizens in Baltimore City.

Lawrence: Hi, my name is Lawrence Grandpre. I am Vice President of Research for Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle. I grew up here in Baltimore. I attended Baltimore College High School. Debated for eight years. I think probably a bit more so than some of my colleagues here in LBS, I was trained in the traditional style of debate; which is very much seeing politics as a game that you try to win, and not making it about connecting to you personally, or to social justice. But I was from Baltimore, so I was constantly exposed to what these guys were doing. I was stuck on this weird two-sided miniature war that was going on in this community. And

I think it mirrored a war that was going on in myself. The more you see the way that politics are talked about in debate, the more you read these articles from the Brookings Institution and the Cato Institute, and from all these Washington D.C. think-tanks, the more you think, "That's what politics is."

I began to realize that I was thinking about politics and policy through a lens, and a way of thinking, that was totally foreign to the reality that I had lived here in Baltimore. So, what I want to do is sort of take those skills, that I got from traditional policy debate: the research, the analytic thinking, the quantitative thinking, and apply those to policy now. So, it's not just the Brookings Institution and the Cato Institute producing literature that's relevant in policy. It's people who actually come from these experiences—who actually see the other side of the world—the "American Experience"—and to have that voice articulated in policy.

Indyreader: What is *Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle*? What is the project? What are some of the basic goals?

Dayvon: LBS is a youth-run, community-based, think tank that's dedicated to dealing with issues in Baltimore City. Everyone on the Executive Board is younger than twenty-five years old. All of us are Baltimore residents. All of us are graduates of Baltimore City public schools. We work on a series of different projects. We have an education proposal that is a series of principles and ideas that, if implemented, would have a dramatic effect on the conditions of people in this city. I'll give an example of one of the ideas in our education proposal. It pertains to the idea that students should be trained formally in how to organize a business, particularly in a cooperative economic paradigm. We think that it would help the entrepreneurial spirit that already exists amongst young people in this city. It would translate into some true economic participation with many people that typically aren't involved.

We've also participated in a project to challenge the construction of a youth detention facility. All the data about the effects that prison has on young people, is negative. [Prison] hasn't been shown to have any effects on improving the quality of life of the community or in transforming the person who is incarcerated. So we're in the process of trying to develop proposals to create new alternatives for young people that get caught up in the system, and provide alternative ways to address the conditions that lead a lot of people into the juvenile justice or criminal justice system.

Indyreader: You just mentioned the youth jail, as a specific target to organize around. Several weeks ago, there was the Youth Justice Sunday action. I was wondering if anyone could comment on what the follow-up has been? Any fall-out? Anything that has resulted from that concretely? Or has it galvanized more people?

Adam: Since Youth Justice Sunday a lot has happened. First off, it made a lot more people in the city aware that a youth jail was being built in the first place; which is one of the things that we thought was most important. People that lived in the area didn't even know that it was being built. So, more people are aware, and people are talking about the more substantive discussion on policy alternatives that people can embrace. When we talk about critiquing our current criminal justice system, we shouldn't just talk about continuing to lock people up. We should talk about, "What are the substantive ways we can engage the youth population to make them better human beings when they get out of the system? Or to keep them from going into the system in the first place?"

In terms of the actual material effects, a lot of legislators have committed to working with us to figure out how we can address the issue of the jail being built and what the alternatives are that the 104 million dollars can be spent on. There are people that are throwing around that maybe we should invest in the jail or a smaller jail, because the current one is bad or maybe we should refurbish it. And that's all fine, well, and good. But a lot

of people have said to us that they want to commit to figuring out alternatives. And that's probably the biggest thing that's come out of this so far. It did happen towards the end of the year, so people get slowed down, because the legislative session for the city has come to an end and the legislative session for the state doesn't come up until the beginning of next year. So, it's been slow recently. But we actually plan to get it revved up when the year starts and to really get people involved in the conversation who haven't been involved yet. A couple of legislators have come to our meetings. There are people in the community that have dedicated to help us out, too.

Deverick: Some of the most important things that came out of Youth Justice Sunday are the relationships and the organizational relationships that have been built—people are now getting together. We now have a stronger relationship with Red Emma's. We do a lot more work with them and a couple of other organizations. I think we have a good organized group of people, who are

all young people and who are now trying to work against youth jails. We have also just basically started to begin organizing with a whole group of people that for any issue we can call upon when it's time for everybody to show up to do their part. So I think one of the most important things is the relationships.

Lawrence: I think one of the most important things that has come out of Youth Justice Sunday is the start of a larger discourse on the issue of incarceration. I can recall a specific incident, where one of the kids I work with through debate, the son of a very prominent figure in local politics (who will remain nameless), a liberal figure, and he was like, "I don't get it. Shouldn't we just build a new jail, so the kids can have better conditions?" And, so, we had a discussion, and challenged this notion that the "liberal position," is to think, "Oh, new jails mean better conditions. So, actually a good liberal would support building a new jail." And then [this challenge leads] to recognizing the community opposition, and then we could have a larger discussion on the more systemic issues and larger structure of incarceration in this state and in this city. That's a tangible thing that I personally know has come out of Youth Justice Sunday. [The construction of the youth jail has since been delayed due to ostensibly unrelated issues with the statistics used to justify the planned capacity of the facility. —IR]

Indyreader: Deverick, you mentioned the importance of building relationships. How does LBS find solutions or propose ways of going about building alliances between such historically different communities? How do you build alliances between communities, in order to build a movement?

Deverick: Before we got anything started, we created an Eleven Point Manifesto. You can check out it anytime on our website. Our Eleven Point Manifesto is basically like, "These are the eleven things—the eleven goals—that as an organization believe are true. And things that we want done. And things that we want to stand in solidarity with getting done." You know what I'm sayin'?

One of the most important things is just being active and being everywhere. We as LBS try to spread ourselves out as much as possible, to be everywhere. If we hear that certain people have a certain idea that we agree with, we try to get with them. And be where they're at. One of the things that we believe, feel, and understand about this fight in Baltimore City, is that it got to be fought from every angle. The reason why the children are going to jail is because the school is bad. The reason why the school is bad is because its in a neighborhood where the family's in poverty. The reason why the family's in poverty is because of... And so we basically created eleven points that we feel deal with the wholeness of Baltimore City and it getting fixed.

Not every organization is going to believe in all of the eleven points. The important part is that, when we're active and we're out—and we try to come out to everybody's event, and we try to be at places where we'll meet other people—when we do those type of things, we say, "Okay, y'know what? We know that



LBS AT YOUTH JUSTICE SUNDAY

y'all aren't interested in education. That doesn't mean anything to y'all. But you are interested in the cooperative economics. So, let's get together. Let's do the work on cooperative economics. Let's do all the stuff that we can do on this point. Together. Because this is what we have in common. Because that's the only thing that's important."

Dayvon: I think the way to organize is around specific issues. What has helped us be effective in organizing across different communities, communities that typically don't work together, is that I think we appeal to a lot of different constituencies in the city that have different self-interests but have a similar goal. What LBS tries to do is focus on particular goals. So when we talk about education, we want to be very clear about what those goals are. Even though people may have different reasons for supporting a particular goal, the goal is what's important. And I think that's what makes the best organizing: when it's [based] around particular objectives and around particular goals. Because it then isn't as fettered by ideology, which a lot of times can [prevent] the type of coalitions that can achieve the outcomes that we all want.

Indyreader: *Changing gears a bit, though it does tie along with this conversation: your historical legacies—where do you draw a lot of inspiration from? What personally motivates you? What motivates you as an organization?*

Adam: A lot of things I've learned in the last four years of my adult life have cultivated my perspective of the world, what I think about power, and what I think it means to be a black man in American society. When I look for inspiration, I think about all the people that came before me that are exemplars of what I'm trying to do. For example, people like Malcolm X. People like Louis Farrakhan. Even the mainstream ones, people like Martin Luther King. All these black men that came before me, that died before their time, that had a large effect on massive amounts of people. I use them as a reference point. My biggest inspiration is probably Malcolm X. He's somebody that I'm trying to be like. He's probably the only black man that I can think of (besides my colleagues) who is the most like an example of what men should be like, of what black men should be like in a world of white supremacy and racism, one that seeks to destroy people like myself and kill people like myself.

Another of my biggest inspirations is my debate coach Daryl Burch. He actually used to be a debate coach at Louisville. He trained them in policy debate and he taught them how to use hip-hop in debates to talk about their social location, and to disrupt different forms of racism in American society through debate. I learned a lot through him. Debate helped me figure out how I can challenge racism through political and policy discussions. It gave me a firm foundation that I wish a lot of other black men had, having older black men to look up to when figuring out where to go to in life. I think that's why so many of us fall to the wayside; so many of us don't really have a template to figure out: what do I want to do with my life? How do I challenge domination and oppression, in a world that doesn't give me a reference point?

Indyreader: *You spoke about your template for how to live a life. What are the qualities of this template?*

Adam: If I've learned anything, people should commit themselves to destroying oppression and suffering in a world of white supremacy and racism.

Growing up as a light-skinned black man in Baltimore, there were a lot of assaults on my humanity. I don't think people really take that into account. Psychological things that happened over that time that trained me to think that I wasn't adequate enough. For folks thought, that I thought, that I was too good to be around certain folks, who were black, too. Over time I learned that I had to commit myself to something substantive to make my life mean something. For people who have middle class parents like me, the message is always: Grow up. Get a job. Get a nice middle class settled job. Have kids. You know? Grow old.

If washing dishes is what it would take for the revolution, y'know, then where's the dish detergent?

Have grandkids. Die. And that's just not a good life to live. I mean, that's empty. Especially in a world where people like me, who look like me, are suffering. Dying. Don't have access to things they need. And so, the reason why I mention Malcolm X, is because he's the only person I can think of historically, who completely changed his lifestyle and committed his entire life, up until death, to liberating black folks from a white supremacist world. And that's something that when I'm old, I want to be able to say or say to myself, that's what I've been committing myself to. And every black man in America should be committing themselves to that, whether they know it or not. They should commit themselves to destroying forces that conspire to kill black people everyday.

Davyon: Over the past few years, I've really taken it upon myself to become acquainted with the legacy of black people in this country—who've struggled against the forces that have attacked our humanity since we've arrived here, and even before black folks set foot in this country. And the reason why we emphasize black people's struggle against oppression is because for many people these notions of revolution and notions of fighting for social justice are mere abstractions. For us, putting the historical context behind it and seeing ourselves as legatees, in a tradition of freedom fighters via our own genealogical connection to that legacy, is important. We've spent a lot of time really looking at a broad canvass of people, who affect the nature of our thinking; from people like Harriet Jacobs to Mary Church Terrell to Fannie Lou Hamer to Elijah Muhammad to James Farmer. Their legacy provides us a way to develop a solid foundation.

And then, just to quickly answer the question about what those principles look like: I think Malcolm X represented a commitment to discipline. Something that I think many far left, radical movements lack in certain realms. They don't appreciate the importance of discipline. And I think how disciplined he was is something that is often excluded from discussion of Malcolm X's legacy. It was one of the first things that people remarked about when meeting him.

[He also had] an extreme commitment to family. That's something that I think often times can be missing in circles that dedicate themselves to revolution, the importance of families—however that gets constituted—but...families. The commitment to family is something that I think Malcolm X represented, the connection between the commitment to family and the commitment to struggle for social justice. Being able to make that connection is really important and a principle that Malcolm X teaches. The last principle I would say that Malcolm X exemplifies is the principle of being true to who you are, to what it is that you're about, because unfortunately there are a lot of leaders who have other motivations for what they're doing. There are a lot of people that just want to be somebody. And a lot of people that have financial incentives to do what they

do. There are a lot of folks that are trying to uphold a particular image. If you look at Malcolm X's career, he had very little regard for that and was just interested in staying true to what he was doing, and making sure that he was doing the right thing.

Deverick: Most of the time when you get into an idea of activism, or organizing, or doing anything good for people, there's a dichotomy between what you say and who you are. It's like, what you advocate for is to the left, and where you live your life is to the right. The most important part about what we say or how we carry ourselves is that we believe that it is most important to have a balance, a balanced medium. If I say that this is what we should do, this is what I practice in my home and in my house. To be disciplined, [this] is one of the most important things to us; that's what really sets what we do apart.

We have a theme: if washing dishes is what it would take for the revolution, y'know, then where's the dish detergent? If I gotta carry boxes all day into this apartment building, all the way to the top floor, then alright, let me get some gloves. Whatever's necessary. Whatever needs to be done. What's not important: money. What's not important: women. Y'know what I'm sayin'? Those things are not what's important. If it's not about the most struggling citizens in Baltimore City, then it's not about what LBS wants to be about.

I grew up and I spent a lot of time, just like most of my other colleagues [...] in the 'hood. And really, even if we weren't specifically affected by it, we saw who was affected by poverty. We saw who was affected by not having something to eat on the table. We either went through it or we saw what it did to people. We understand the ramifications of situations, like what's important growing up in the 'hood. I would see one of my homeboys: his mother on drugs, his father in jail. He's got to take care of his little sister. Where's his policy at? What policy is made specifically for him? If he sells drugs, the policy for him is the war on drugs: he's going to jail. He can't get food stamps; he's twelve. He can't get food stamps and with a seven-year-old little sister, how's he going to feed her? He can't get a work permit. How's he gonna get a job? Y'know what I'm saying? McDonald's don't give out free food. And so how else does he get right? The only way that he can get right and his little sister can get right, is if

we do what we're supposed to do right. And that's what's most important for us.

Where do we get our energy from? Who do we love? We love the most struggling citizens in Baltimore City. We get our energy from them. We want to make sure that we can do what's right for them and everyone else that's involved. That's one of the things that's most important to us. And that's why we try to build on the discipline of Malcolm X. We want to make sure that everybody can do what's necessary to have good value in their life.

Lawrence: I think my colleagues have covered most of the question on influences. I just want to touch real briefly on the question of, "What are the principles on which you live your life?"

One thing that I have seen as very important is recognizing the universal humanity of people around you. Though that may sound really simplistic, I think from my personal experience, attempting to live up to that has been really profound. I come from a school, a high school especially, where the goal was to train people to become part of the black bourgeoisie. Part of what a lot of people in my situation went through was what I now realize was learning a particular skill. That skill is to ignore what you see around you. We all road the bus to school. We all came from all over the state to come to the most prestigious high school in the city. We'd walk down the street and see people strung out on drugs. But when you go to Baltimore City College, those people are not your concern: your concern is your books. Your concern is getting into the right school. Your concern is trying to live that sort of life.

[Learning to] recognize that universal humanity has become a corrective to that, to [...] that deleting of a lot of stuff that doesn't fit into that narrative of going up the ladder of success, and becoming one of the elite blacks in this country. You know, the "Oprah Model" or what I'd say [is] the "Obama Model." Recognizing that part of living a life that's ethically intelligible—and that's a term that means a lot to me—is seeing the world around you. One part of living that lifestyle is not running away from that darkness, like so many around me have. I go to meet my high school friends now and all of them are black bourgeoisie. They come home and they watch *Friends*, they talk about some people that are struggling, and they're like, "Oh yeah, they just didn't have it in them." They copy and mimic the whole conservative-Reaganesque individual-responsibility thing, without recognizing the systems that put individuals in situations that they should view as impossible. Correcting that, through recognizing that universal humanity of everyone you see around you is something that I see as a really important component of living ethically.

Indyreader: *What's in a name: Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle? Where does it come from?*

Dayvon: What's interesting about this group is that there actually was a campus organization at Towson that my roommate and us started a few years back, in 2007, and that was dedicated towards social justice, community activism, and mentoring. Those were kind of the ideas it revolved around. The name actually came from this rapper named Talib Kweli, who had an album called *The Beautiful Struggle*. We think a lot of the things that are reflected in that album are a reflection of what we want to represent. We

think that the constituents, in a metaphoric sense, that we represent—those experiences and objectives are reflected in that music.

Adam: To give a bit more depth to what Dayvon said, I think what my colleagues have been doing for the past three to four years now, would not have been possible without a lot of our training and expertise in policy debate. Dayvon and his partner, for example, became the first all-black debate group to win a national debate championship—ever. Deverick and I were ranked in the top ten teams in the country last year, a team of black men. We weren't the first to do that, but we were one of the first. That's beautiful. But it took us a long time to get there. We've done things, in the past few years, that most people don't get to do in their lifetime. For example, at Towson, like Dayvon mentioned, there was a campus group called Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle. Well, there still is. But a lot of on-campus activism that we did at Towson also prepared us for some of the things we're doing now, in Baltimore. For example, I got the opportunity to coordinate a campus benefit concert that raised \$5,000 for Haiti, after the earthquake. And that's something that I don't think I could have done, without being trained like I was in debate. Deverick, as President of the Black Student Union, tripled the membership, from like 75 students to like 250. That's something that most people can't say that they did for a group, at all. On a campus that's mostly white, with only 2,000 black students, he did that. And the thing is, most of the time, reflecting on the stuff that I've done and all the things my friends have done, it feels wild that I've gotten this far. [...] All of it was only possible through going through struggle. But, I liked it the entire time I was doing it, because I realized how much it benefited the greater good, and how much it benefited me as a person. I guess that's how you explain our lives. It's a beautiful struggle. It's hard. It hurts. But when you get to the end of it, it feels beautiful.

Deverick: Funny thing is, it's actually not funny, the peculiar thing is that hip-hop and music is so important. Poetry. Rhyme. Arts of black people are just so important. It's something that just helps and it pushes us so much. The Talib Kweli title is just so impor-

tant. Because it's black music. It's hip hop. It's something that we all need, something that we all use at different times of need.

For our organization, we came up with a slogan: "LOVE THE PEOPLE. FREE THE PEOPLE." Right? That was a real important thing. And when I like to show my love... and dedication...and commitment...I can actually show y'all right here. I have a tattoo. [*Takes off jacket. Pulls up sleeve. Shows tattoo on his arm.*] I actually got a picture: it's a Black Jesus, with dreads, holding up a globe with Africa in the middle. And it says, "Free the people. 'Cause He loved the people."

That's how much dedication [we've got] and how much we mean it. This was my first tattoo, the only important tattoo that I got. I got it because this is the idea that I believe in, this was what was gonna fuel us for the rest of our lives.

Lawrence: Reflecting on that title, for me, I read this book called *Beauty in the Art of Being Just*. It makes an argument that something that we are all naturally attuned to in nature is symmetry, and that this can be seen a lot in the art world, i.e.: beauty or the notion of aesthetics. It makes the argument that we're naturally attuned to recognize this as something we should strive for, something that's beautiful. When you see a tree and the tree is symmetrical—the left half looks like the right half—then it's full of life, it's healthy, it's beautiful. That's one thing, I think, that is manifested through that word *beauty*. I think the word *beauty* has incredible political potential, if we just recognize that. The same ways that beauty in nature, symmetry in nature, is seen as beautiful...we should strive for symmetry, i.e.: equality. Organize our societies the same way that a symmetrical face is beautiful. The same way an equally balanced face is beautiful, an equally balanced society is beautiful. And striving towards that equal balance is something innate and natural. It's bred into us naturally, and we should just affirm that natural desire to seek beauty. That natural desire to seek beauty is the same thing as the natural desire to seek equality, and we should just embrace that innate nature towards striving towards equality.

Indyreader: *What is struggle? What is the social struggle? What is fighting for justice?*

Adam: To put it concisely, to struggle for justice means to identify the problems that cause oppression and suffering in the world—and to figure out ways to do violence to them.... to annihilate them. And, at the same time, to affirm the things that would create peace and justice and love in the world. Things like racism, sexism, homophobia, all these different social structures, can be very much entrenched in our society and the world at large. Unless you have committed folks, who are willing to inspire the masses to do something about it, there is no way that any of that stuff is gonna change. So for me, because [as] I always tell people, at twenty-two being a black man in America: it's already a miracle that I'm still alive anyway. So, at this point, for lack of better terminology...fuck it. I'm going to do something with my life. I might as well struggle for peace, justice, and freedom, instead of doing nothing. And if I know that people are still struggling or suffering everyday, [and I'm] watching all that happen, and I don't do anything about it, I feel like I'm just as bad as the people who are doing it. Committing myself to things that bring into existence justice and freedom, that is probably the most concise way I can put it.

Dayvon: When I think of struggle I think that it's always important to isolate what it is one's struggling for, because I think a lot of times people get caught up in [the fact] that they're struggling, without being clear what they're struggling for. For me what's important is that we're struggling for people who typically don't have the things that people need to survive, to have a healthy life, a fulfilling life. To figure out a way to make that exist for folks who don't have it: all of the struggling that I do is for that purpose, to make sure that there's a just world where there is peace.

Deverick: Literally, when I think of "struggle," I think about my heart, because I feel—this might seem crazy—but I just feel everything. So I work at Lakewood Elementary Middle School, and if I sit down with one of my students and they're telling me about something that's going on in their life, I can feel their pain. I can feel that, their

struggle, and what we're struggling for is to be able to eradicate that pain, for things that it shouldn't be for. I just don't think that people should be figuring out where they're going to eat at, or how they're going to live. I think that's some pain that they shouldn't be going through. I mean, stubbing your toe is stubbing your toe. But not having food to eat, that's a crime. I be struggling against that struggle, in order to get rid of that.

Lawrence: I guess it's ending with me taking a slightly different interpretation on that question. The first thing I thought of was the internal struggle: I think that for me, struggle is an internal struggle to hold onto and manifest an innate humanity. And I feel like in this country, people of color have had that innate humanity stripped from them. So I see the struggle as a struggle to affirm that innate humanity against a constellation of forces that seek to strip that away, be it the forces of capitalism, or self-hatred, or racism. I see that as the first step towards making that change. To continuously have that internal struggle. To manifest yourself as being something that can just exist freely. To just exist in a natural sense that can recognize the world that exists as itself, recognizing the innate compassion that all human beings have for one another, affirming that innate compassion and that innate humanity. That is revolutionary, the starting point for being able to externalize the desire to create equality, and symmetry, and beauty throughout the world. So it's that struggle to constantly hold onto the bits of humanity that you struggle for, and build upon that, in ways that show yourself as an example of how others can be, and fight back against the forces that can strip that away from you. ★

MORE INFO

More information about Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle can be found on their website: lbsbaltimore.org

The audio recording of this conversation can be found at: indyreader.org/content/exclusive-audio-interview-members-leaders-beautiful-struggle

DIY Baltimore: A Foodmakers Potluck at the Baltimore Free Farm BY ALIZA ESS

On the last Saturday in February, around forty people gathered together for a potluck meal in the Baltimore Free Farm warehouse. It was the monthly Foodmakers potluck, and the theme was "Seeds."

In keeping with the monthly theme there was a seedling workshop, and afterward everyone shared the food they had brought: sesame seed ice cream, pear muffins, even homemade cider and beer.

Someone passed around inaugural drafts of the "Bnote," a proposed local currency for Baltimore. People traded recipes and gardening tips, met new friends and learned about each other's jobs and hobbies. There were side conversations about other groups like the Mid-Atlantic Primitive Skills organization or the Baltimore Farm Network. New visitors to the Free Farm space learned a little about the creative re-use that defines the Free Farm's construction, such as the former cubicle walls that now provide insulation and improved audio quality to the walls of the event space.

"There was so much interest in this potluck," said Brian, one of the organizers for the Foodmaker potlucks. "About forty people RSVP'd, and there was twenty more on the waiting list. We're going to have to start meeting in bigger places!"

The Foodmakers google group and monthly potlucks are starting to spiral off into other events. There was talk about future plans for events like ChiliBrew, a smashing success of a fundraiser that showcases local home-brewers and chili-makers. The inaugural event last May raised money for Velocipede, a local co-operative organization that recycles bike

parts and teaches people how to fix their own bikes, and the Baltimore Free School, which holds workshops to promote community learning beyond the standard educational structure.



Andrew Mattingly, one of the members of the Baltimore Free Farm, described the many ways that the Free Farm is part of this larger Baltimore DIY ecosystem. They have hosted workshops with Baltimore Honey, gained free construction materials by volunteering with the Loading Dock, and have taught the community about gardening by hosting a number of garden work days.

"I don't feel that you can have sustainability without a community," said Andrew. "People all have their own specialty- working on sound for events, doing construction, gardening. DIY encompasses so many different aspects."

To list all of the Baltimore DIY music venues, art spaces, activist groups, alternative living spaces, gardens, educators, makers, design collectives and more would be an impossible task. There is even a group of people who make their own board games!

Spend enough time at any of these places and you just might become a frequent volunteer, event organizer, or amateur expert. There is an inspiring community of folks out there who love creating things for their own lives and community. The more people who are involved, the more skills and resources we all share together. ★

Aliza Ess blogs on urban sustainability and DIY projects at baltimorediy.org.

A CRISIS TO BE RECKONED WITH

GREG ROSENTHAL REVIEWS *CROSSING THE AMERICAN CRISES: FROM COLLAPSE TO ACTION*

CROSSING THE AMERICAN CRISES: FROM COLLAPSE TO ACTION

DIRECTORS: MICHAEL FOX AND SILVIA LEINDECKER

JANUARY 2011

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It took just five years for a social movement to develop in the face of the Great Depression. Described as the Great Revolt from Below, in 1934 massive strikes and social protest began the creation of modern industrial unionism and the public social system later packaged in the New Deal.

Almost four years have passed since the onset of Great Financial Crisis and public outrage and resistance has already begun. Most recently, we have seen the attack on the public sector in Ohio and Wisconsin (often confused with a narrow attack on union bargaining rights) where the entirety of the public social system gained during the 1930s is in danger, but not without a fight that speaks to all sectors of the population.

According to Naomi Klein, the ideological underpinnings for ramming through austerity measures, budget cuts, and attacks on the public sector and workers rights comes from a simple dictum by free-market ideologue and economist Milton Friedman, lead archi-

test of what Klein calls, “disaster capitalism.” Friedman once said, “Only a crisis produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around.” The ideas ‘lying around’ happen to be state-socialism (bailouts) for banks, financial firms and multi-national corporations, while everyone else is subject to the grind of free-market capitalism’s chaos in a race to the bottom.

As evidenced in the social movements of the 1930s and a new documentary following the economic crisis, *Crossing the American Crises: From Collapse to Action*, crisis may also serve as an opportunity for the acceleration of resistance, social movements and alternative forms of economic relationships based around human rights values. Of equal importance is the consideration that people have been both in crisis and organizing for social change well before the Great Financial Crisis, which filmmakers Silvia Leindecker and Michael Fox make sure to not overlook through the myriad of interviews they conduct with grassroots organizations across the U.S.

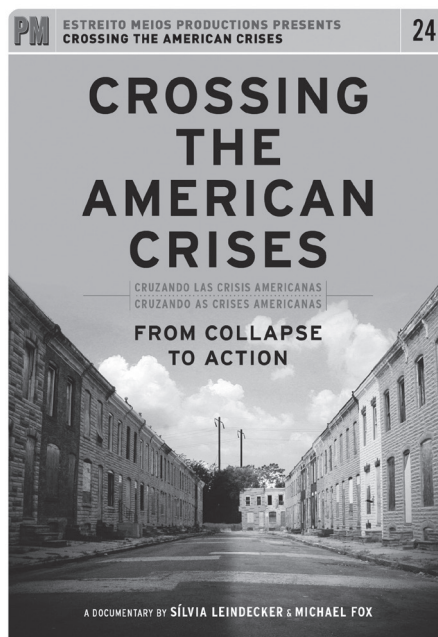
In contrast to other recent documentary films capturing the effects of the economic crisis, such as *Capitalism: A Love Story* or *American Casino*, Leindecker and Fox give us a front row seat not simply to the voices of hardship prompted by the economic crisis, but also the many movements that exist in the midst of such devastation. When weaved together into such a film, one finds hope in the shared narrative of a growing Social Movement.

Literally crossing the United States in their car, we meet and take inspiration from human rights organizations like the United Workers in Baltimore, the Poverty Initiative in NYC, the Vermont Workers Center, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in Oakland, and Detroit Summer. We also meet housing activists in D.C, green worker-run cooperatives in NYC, members of IVAW (Iraq Veterans Against the War), and education activists, youth advocates and Freedom Schoolers in New Orleans.

If you thought it would be tough to capture the scope of the greatest economic crisis since the 1930s AND resistance into one film...well, you would be right. But you cannot get much closer to connecting all the dots in just 90 minutes as with *Crossing the American Crises*.

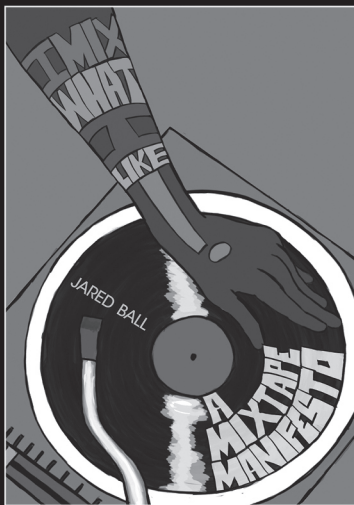
The filmmakers close with a clear call to action: To hear the pain of the millions suffering under an unjust economic system, and to be inspired to action through the examples of ourselves and our neighbors, organizing for social and economic justice into what could be a collective human rights social movement, capable of transforming the current power relations to extend human dignity for all. ★

Greg Rosenthal has worked within the human rights movement—often referred to as the Poor People’s Movement—in the United States for over five years as a community organizer and educator working with organizations such as the United Workers, the CIW (Coalition of Immokalee Workers) and SFA (Student/Farmworker Alliance), MMP (Media Mobilizing Project), the Poverty Initiative and KWRU (Kensington Welfare Rights Union). He is currently a Leadership Organizer with the United Workers in Maryland, a human rights campaign and education consultant for organizations such as IVAW and the Civilian-Soldier Alliance, and a graduate student in Intercultural Communication at UMBC. He can be reached at greg@unitedworkers.org.



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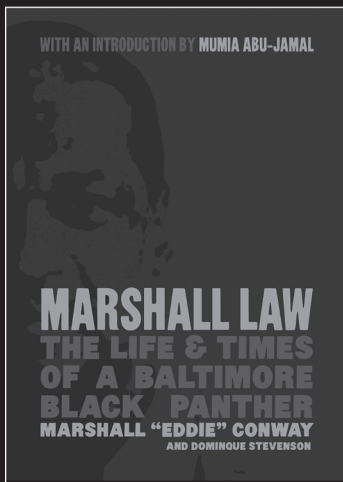
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