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CROSS-CLASS ALLIANCES:

SUBVERTING CAPITALIST CLASS STRUCTURE BY RE-IMAGINING DEMOCRACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISM, AND CLASS INSTITUTIONS

by

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CHAPTER ONE

CROSS-CLASS ALLIANCES: ALTERING CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND ADVANCING DEMOCRACY

We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.
-Albert Einstein

Introduction: Why cross-class alliances?

"Why are all these rich kids pretending to be homeless?" a friend asked me. Tents sprawled across the Mount Holyoke green, filled with students ("rich kids") sleeping in symbolic solidarity with homeless people living in true Tent Cities. The event was intended to raise awareness of the plight of the homeless in Springfield, MA, while also raising money for Arise for Social Justice (Arise), a grassroots non-profit with which I volunteer. Despite my explanation, my friend would not be convinced that the ordeal was anything but meaningless and absurd. This difficult conversation, along with my other experiences working with Arise as a middle-class white woman, sparked my interest in the effects of collaboration between people of different socio-economic classes. Often, cross-class alliances are seen through reluctant eyes; how could a privileged member of society ever understand what it's like to live a working-class life? How could low-income people organize alongside privileged people without fearing the surrender of their

interests and values? Why *are* the rich kids pretending to be homeless, and what meaning could this offer to the United States' stratified society?

I argue that alliances between people of different social classes have the subtle capacity to defy capitalist class structure, a social system which compels people to fortify their differences. Social classes, as manifested today, both result from and perpetuate capitalism. My argument incorporates the underlying assumption that capitalism is an intrinsically unequal system which promotes injustice. Contemporary U.S. society reveals that the hierarchical capitalist system produces socio-economic classes with widely disparate opportunities and social agency.

This assumption is shared by J. K. Gibson-Graham, who writes feminist critiques of the political economy. She asks, "When was it that capitalism assumed discursive dominance, becoming the only present form of economy and all that could be imagined as existing in the proximate future? And why do we have little to say these days about an expansive and generative politics of noncapitalist construction?"[1] In response, she states that the recent naturalization of 'the economy' denies the economy the "discursive mandate given to other social spheres."[2] Thus, in order to affect change, it is necessary to imagine the economy differently. Class plays a major role in this imaginative exercise, as social classes are a key signifier of capitalism. Forming alliances across capitalist divisions rejects the competitive and isolating rhetoric of current class structure in the U.S., allowing a new inter-class discourse to emerge. Gibson-Graham advocates reading the economy "for difference rather than dominance;"[3] this

theory may be applied to class as well. By engaging with the inequities in the patterns of political and cultural interactions between social classes, society may exchange its relationships of dominance for relationships of difference.

As the dream of a post-capitalist society underlies my research, I see cross-class alliances as practical exercises in subverting capitalist class structure. Cross-class alliances are not a distinct theory of revolutionizing capitalist society; more accurately, they promote a process that would assist all anti-capitalist movements. When enacted through forums that provide shared agency and voice, social transformation is less likely to perpetuate the existing unjust class system. Simultaneously, the forces that perpetuate and naturalize class divides are exposed. Cross-class alliances illuminate economic realities and the cultural habits with which people justify class distinctions. By demanding recognition and redemption of unequal class agency, alliances foster an attitude necessary to critically confront the brutal injustices of capitalism. Ultimately, the objective of cross-class alliances is a society in which concrete economic realities (such as the means of production) and conceptual social realities (such as race and gender) do not determine unequal social agency; this is a classless society.

I must confess, this topic now presents an unavoidable linguistic contradiction; how does one conceive of *cross-class* alliances as a tool to enable a class-*less* society? Currently, this tension is theoretical. If the alliances I advocate become successful, this tension will become a practical problem as well. In the distant future, if class cleavages do indeed begin to abate, the process demands an

alteration of terms. The language of alliances *across* class divides must be substituted by the language of alliances *irrespective* of class divides. Focusing solely on class, however, neglects other unequivocally relevant vehicles of discrimination. Even if the hierarchical class system does begin to tumble, other differences still generate injustice; race comes first to mind. Of course, in a genuine consideration of class conflict in the U.S., race is a dominant theme. Class, race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and other sources of divide are so continuously imbricated that one cannot discuss any of these concepts without referring to the others. Although I have chosen to focus on class, I could have written a very similar paper on race or gender. The theoretical approach I advocate can be a model for alliances across many types of difference. If cross-class alliances only confront a narrow definition of class conflict, they may pursue a mere distribution of wealth. These alliances, however, have the capacity to reveal complex matrices of identity politics and may therefore promote the redistribution of power. Still, the notion that cross-class action may dismantle class structure remains ironic. An analogy may be made to non-profit organizations, which are often in the business of putting themselves out of business.[4]

To put themselves out of business, cross-class alliances promote a distant objective; the transformation of minds and socio-economic disparities to create a future reality in which people may perform classless relationships. For now, I shall embrace the term 'cross-class alliances' despite the linguistic and theoretical

strife it causes.[5] The irony of terms is partially a result of my attempt to maintain a sense of realism while attacking the seemingly invincible forces of capitalist structures. I cannot locate a language which effectively combines my utopian vision with a realistic edge, and I refuse to abandon either of these perspectives. Furthermore, there is something refreshing about an undertaking that constantly demands critique and reformation of language. Such tensions serve the essential purpose of keeping theory on its toes and discouraging one-dimensional interpretations.

The dual need for expediency and a utopian vision informs two equally important objectives of cross-class alliances. Within the distant goal of promoting a classless society void of capitalist injustices, structural alliances between class institutions may play a large role. I imagine such alliances as formal, enduring relationships likely to have explicit intentions of undermining capitalist class barriers. Cross-class alliances also serve a second more immediate goal: relief from pressing injustices. Many forms of social activism pursue this goal. Temporary activist alliances rally around socio-political causes, not class relationships. Class and identity politics do, however, often compel groups to endorse particular agendas. Cross-class activist alliances have the capacity to promote social change in a way which does not perpetuate systems of injustice; allied groups are best prepared to initiate social agendas which do not discriminate or marginalize.

Within this spectrum between institutional alliances and activist alliances, a third variety of cross-class action emerges: the realm of democracy, public procedures, and public policy. Although some people do not subscribe to institutional or activist agendas, all U.S. citizens are, in principle, eligible to be part of the U.S. democratic system which (falsely) purports itself as the ultimate alliance of all people, regardless of class, race, religion, gender, etc. Even those who are structurally prohibited from participating in democratic procedures are affected by the decisions made within this sphere. Although I contest the fairness of modern capitalist democracy (a defining aspect of reality in the U.S.), it is a constructive space in which to observe cross-class interactions. Whether through class institutions, activist organizations, or democratic action, cross-class alliances are essentially a tool to enable social justice, therefore granting all people the right to be both respected and self-respecting in a society of equal opportunity.

This chapter will examine theories of class and class consciousness in order to develop a framework within which cross-class alliances may emerge. The results of this investigation then lead to a discussion about the psychology of class interactions, a concept that the subsequent chapters will apply to alliances within activism and between class institutions. This chapter shall apply theories of cross-class interaction to the realm of democracy and public democratic procedures. Through sociological and psychological means, cross-class alliances advance democracy, defy capitalist class structure, and encourage productive discussion of class conflict.

Theories of class and class consciousness

To fully understand the term 'cross-class alliance' and its implications, one must first confront the "essentially contested concept" of class.[6] What is a socio-economic class? How are classes formed and maintained? These questions must be answered satisfactorily before responding to the question: how can we transcend or break down class barriers? The class theories of Karl Marx, Erik Olin Wright, Barbara and John Ehrenreich, and E. P. Thompson are particularly applicable to these queries. Each of these theorists analyzes class from a different historical perspective; each introduces a thoughtful new element into discussions of class theory. These authors are by no means the only theorists who have deliberated the topic of class or endorsed these perspectives. They are, however, representative of important trends within class theory and reflective of the current U.S. population's attitude towards class.

Theories of *class consciousness* are also vital to this discussion, as the interactions of class consciousnesses play a distinct role in the formation or failure of cross-class alliances. Just as theorists differ in their perceptions of class, notions of class consciousness are also applied in diverse ways. Although Thompson's definitions of class and class consciousness appear most useful for the purposes of promoting cross-class alliances and conceiving of transformed class structures for the future, Marx, Wright, the Ehrenreichs, and Thompson all

offer important perspectives which are necessary to understand class in the U.S. today.

Karl Marx is generally accepted as one of the most influential thinkers of the mid-nineteenth century; any theorization of class would seem incomplete without the inclusion of Marx. For Marx, class is the fundamental division in society. Marx's two classes, defined through economic positions, are the capitalist bourgeoisie (the small class of people who own the means of production) and the proletariat (the masses who sell their capacity to work to the bourgeoisie, effectively estranging themselves from the products of their labor). In his *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx outlines how the bourgeoisie have maintained dominance from the times of ancient Rome to the feudal era to the period of industrialization in which he wrote.[7] History, for Marx, incorporates an evolutionary process in which the proletariat will eventually revolt against capitalism, seize the means of production from the bourgeoisie, and rule through a brief 'dictatorship of the proletariat' until a communist society is implemented.

Class consciousness, for Marx, is a state of mind reached by a class when it becomes aware of its historical and evolutionary role in society. Class consciousness is the proletariat's transformation from a class *in itself* to a class *for itself*.[8] Consciousness, for Marx, exists because of the historic social and economic factors which define the existence of the proletariat. Consciousness could never develop apart from social realities. Marx's revolution for a

communist society relied upon this proletariat consciousness to unite the workers of the world.

When the proletariat revolutions failed to result in communism due to a complex combination of factors (including poor timing and poor choice of location), Marx's evolutionary predictions were proved wrong, demanding a reevaluation of Marxist theory. From Marx's misjudgment, one may learn that the proletariat consciousness is difficult to mobilize, proletariat revolutions are prone to becoming totalitarian regimes, a middle class is not contradictory to capitalism, and, perhaps most significantly, that the capitalist economic system is much more resilient than Marx could ever have imagined. Despite—and perhaps, in part, *because* of—his failed predictions, Marx has created a vast legacy for class theory. Marx initiated a critical opposition to capitalism and he popularized the concept that people should be conscious of their class and their relation to the means of production. Economic labor was revealed as the intersection of power and production. Marx's historical analysis of class and his focus on economic relations continue to influence prominent class theorists of the following centuries.

One such theorist, Erik Olin Wright, published some well-known class theory in the late twentieth century and continues to modify his research today. Wright draws on Marxist ideas, claiming that "Marxist theory has become an exciting and productive terrain on which to ask questions and pursue research."[9] Undoubtedly, this is true. Devotion to the terrain of Marxist thought has caused Wright to

maintain Marxist language while describing class; the middle classes which emerged in capitalist systems in the post-industrial period are named '*contradictory* class locations' between the polar bourgeoisie and proletariat. Within an array of various middle classes, Wright finds that Marx's distinct roles of exploiter and exploited are contradicted because middle classes entail both bourgeoisie and proletariat tendencies.

Still, Wright maintains allegiance to Marx as he defines classes in terms of economic position. Wright's analyses apply Marxist thought to the modern manifestations of capitalist economic classes. Wright employs a multitude of charts and maps to qualify individual people into specific class roles (small employer, expert nonmanager, semicredentialed manager, etc.) according to their skill assets, organization assets, income, and attitudes. Wright's work is important because his techniques statistically illuminate the exploitation inherent in capitalist class formation. He allows useful, specific empirical data (such as the income gap) to emerge within discussions of class. Disturbingly, despite all these categorical maps, Wright does not include other categories of difference within his overview of class society. For a study which does include other specific details about who constitutes each class, a discussion of race and racism seems compulsory; this is especially true as Wright's research is based in a country founded upon racially-justified slavery where race still contributes to the designation of individuals to certain social classes.

Wright's work also reflects a popular conception of class. Through promotions, salary raises, and hierarchical job communities, people are trained to see class as the product of neat, organized equations. Furthermore, this logic suggests that advancement from one income bracket to another may lead to a transformation of class. This approach to class encourages the belief that class is something static within which people place or find themselves. A static interpretation of class relations confines us to the present (or at least deters change for the future) by hindering us from imagining alternative realities. Society conditions us to imagine the possibility of shifting between social classes but not the possibility of transcending class altogether. Although Wright may be critical of the status quo, his technique of mapping classes makes it difficult to imagine a way to undermine these boxes and borders. Merely *describing* class structures and assigning people to roles within these structures promotes a feeling of natural inevitability. Wright keeps class, class experiences, and class cultures confined to his own definitions.

Another contemporary class theory, set forth by Barbara and John Ehrenreich, expands upon what Wright refers to as 'contradictory class locations': the space between Marx's bourgeoisie and proletariat. The Ehrenreichs categorize this middle space as the 'professional-managerial class' (or PMC). Their theory, although limited to the relevance of the PMC, is important because it provides a critical analysis of the relations between the PMC and the lower-class which Wright's theory lacks.

The PMC is characterized by its role as both a manager and an employee of a capitalist institution. As a modification of Marxist thought, the emergence of the PMC has created a "three-way polarization."[10] With this new polarization emerges a new antagonism between the PMC and the working class. This antagonism, according to the Ehrenreichs, is inherent in the objective relations between the two groups; daily inter-group contact expresses

> the relation of control which is at the heart of the PMC-working class relation: teacher and student, manager and workers, social worker and client, etc. The subjective dimension of these contacts is a complex mixture of hostility and deference on the part of the working-class people, contempt and paternalism on the part of the PMC.[11]

Here, the Ehrenreichs present two crucial observations. Firstly, the middle-class is constantly and intimately interacting with the working-class. For working-class people, daily exposure to middle-class life reinforces the notion that promotion to the middle-class realm is within reach. The illusion of the achievable and catchall middle-class obscures economic realities which confine people to the working-class.

Secondly, the Ehrenreichs introduce a psychology of class interactions which grapples with the crucial question: how can we imagine cross-class alliances between the PMC and the working-class when each class consciousness is partially formed through an intrinsic antagonism towards the other? This theory demands that the PMC "address itself to the subjective and cultural aspects of class oppression as well as to material inequalities; it must commit itself to uprooting its own ingrained and often subtle attitudes of condescension and

elitism."[12] If the PMC experiences "guilty self-effacement" or "simplistic glorification of the working class," this will "perpetuate the class roles forged in capitalist society" and offer class antagonisms no hope of transformation.[13] The Ehrenreichs' concept of the antagonistic inter-class relationship will be an important perspective to keep in mind, as will their concept of working-class and PMC class consciousnesses as knowledge, skill, and culture in opposition.[14] The most useful element of this theory is the acknowledgement of a psychological and cultural tension between classes. By promoting self-reflection among the PMC, the Ehrenreichs set forth the beginnings of a cross-class agenda which allows a focus on economic and sociological realities without neglecting the cultural and emotional aspects of class interaction.

An earlier theorist of the twentieth century, E. P. Thompson, has become well-known for a theory of class provided in the preface to his book, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson, an English historian and socialist, wrote during the 1950s and 1960s when labor movements and unionization promoted an optimistic aura of reform. Although Thompson's brief theoretical preface neglects all specific factors (such as the crucial role of economic forces and race in defining classes), the optimism which imbues his class theory makes it the preferable theoretical foundation for imagining social transformation.

Thompson sensibly places class distinctions as historical phenomena formed over time through human relationships. Class, he says, happens when some group of people "feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves

and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."[15] These class relationships are by no means natural, for they evolve without a fundamental past or a predestined future. One historical instant cannot reveal a class structure; only patterns in groups' relationships, ideas, and institutions over time may form classes.[16]

Thompson's perception of class (as opposed to the 'mapping' techniques of Wright), makes class a flexible and evolving concept. Thus, class consciousnesses are also flexible because the shifts in society which alter class formations also affect people's awareness of their identity in relation to others within a social system. This potential fluidity is useful because it allows for the possibility of dissolving class barriers if class relationships, ideas, institutions, or consciousnesses are undermined. In this light, cross-class alliances are more easily imaginable because it is within the capability of social movements to blend, blur, and fundamentally alter class structures. Thompson's theory offers a collective human agency to alter the future of class relations by altering the patterns of relationships that have persevered through recent history. Thompson places class as a relationship between people and people, not a relationship between people and economic structures. Thus, one is reminded that economic structures do not change themselves; people have the collective agency to alter the structures in which we live. Even miniscule changes can create a deep impact if they manage to shift the overall constellation of class relationships. By defining class as an element of inter-personal relationships, Thompson also provides a

space within class structure to incorporate sociological oppressions resultant from differences in race, gender, language, religion, etc.

As for class consciousness, Thompson discusses two prominent conceptions. The first is a common interpretation of Marxist thought which maintains that class consciousness is a positive realization which a class as a whole 'ought' to have. The second suspects that class consciousness is a "bad thing invented by displaced intellectuals" but serves to solidify the social struggle by providing a way to channel lower-class grievances.[17] Thompson rejects both of these conceptions; remembering that class is a relationship and not a natural entity, "'It' does not exist … to have an ideal interest or consciousness."[18] Class consciousness is not something to be spontaneously obtained or collectively utilized; everyone has individual, natural understandings of the ways in which their class becomes conscious to them. However, as classes develop by articulating groups' shared interests, a collective class consciousness may emerge in the form of identity collectives. Identity politics, however, are influenced by many factors besides class. Linking identity politics too strongly to a collective class consciousness would be a risky limitation. Thus, class consciousness is both a cultural self-awareness and an awareness of one's class in relation to others. Class consciousness (as well as gender consciousness, race consciousness, etc.) often feels pre-determined and static, yet it is in fact flexible.[19]

Today, the United States is witnessing a new fluidity of class which is altering the way in which people conceive of their position within society. Although the

owning-class is controlling more and more wealth, other social classes are feeling more precarious. The middle class no longer feels secure or comfortable as health services are stripped away and middle-class jobs are outsourced to other countries. Additionally, many stories have surfaced telling of individuals who depart the cycle of poverty and alter their class status through education. Such stories certainly do not affect everyone, but communities tend to cling to the fear and achievement ideologies which these experiences and myths express. Although the statistics are meaningful, communities' senses of anxiety or yearning also amplify individual experiences, advancing the notion of an increasingly unstable class structure. More and more people are having or witnessing cross-class experiences and are thus unsure how to categorize themselves in the typical Wrightian fashion.

Logically, along with this smudging of class lines, cross-class alliances are occurring in more places today than could have been imagined in the recent past. I am tempted by the prospect that instability therefore paves the way for social transformation. Yet, this instability applies to individuals and communities, not the class structure as a whole. The mobile class experiences of individuals may in fact serve to strengthen the capitalist class system by appeasing those who believe people should not be destined to one social class. However, the hope of this project is to use the present era of seeming class fluidity to encourage alliances which do not mollify discontent but render it into a transformative power. The increasing uncertainty of class and rising occurrence of cross-class alliances adds

a new importance to the definition of class consciousness as a flexible, individual, and *cultural* manifestation. When people's circumstances defy strict affiliation with one social category, they tend to apply cultural identities (which may be grounded in racial, class, or religious experiences) to become conscious of their position in society. Self-perception is informed by an intricate fusion of cultural associations and, of course, economic income. Thus, Thompson helpfully defines class consciousness as class experiences "handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms."[20]

The theories of Marx, Wright, the Ehrenreichs, and Thompson all convey legitimacy. Each theorist is reflective of his or her historical moment and has observations that apply to contemporary class relations. Even the task of observing how class theory has altered over time makes an effective point; if one confines oneself to the theory of one historical moment, one may forget that class structures, class consciousness, and even class theory are all fluid entities capable of change. Thompson, however, is a useful and refreshing theorist to employ while attempting to imagine a transformed future.

Sociological and psychological effects of cross-class alliances

In an alliance, groups of people from different classes come together and reinterpret their values, ideas, and institutional forms in a way which allows for mutual goal-making. Once a commitment to a cross-class alliance is made, groups will often discover that they must reconsider cultural presumptions in

order to have an effective dialogue. To find common ground, allied groups must learn to expand their perceptions of the issues at hand (whether they are labor, peace, or environmental issues). Fred Rose, a contemporary social activist and supporter of cross-class alliances, suggests that allied groups find a common language to bridge their cultural differences.

One cultural difference highlighted by Rose is that middle-class activist groups (for example, advocates for a clean environment) tend to use a language of *values* to describe social movements while working-class groups (for example, labor organizations) tend to speak in terms of shared *interests*. Although this distinction between values and interests is not entirely unproblematic—this will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter—, it does capture the problem posed by divergent class consciousnesses and cultures. Rose's common language would entail expanding the reach of values and interpreting values as an extension of interests. An example of this is the middle-class environmentalists expanding their definition of a 'healthy environment' (a value) to include decent-wage jobs for all (an interest) and the working-class labor activists reinterpreting the environmental campaign as the universal application of interests.[21] This process of finding a common language is comparable to the process of foreigners learning another culture. If the 'other side' actually spoke another tongue:

> the task would be more obvious. But they don't—they use the same words and refer to the same events, but with meanings that are obscure. Coalition builders need to unpack the prejudices and stereotypes, find those common cultural reference points, become familiar with each other's goals, interests, and limitations, and take action together.[22]

In this sense, cross-class alliances are an exercise in human communication. Cross-class alliances are "ultimately the challenge of making outsiders and strangers into insiders and political allies. Issues matter fundamentally—but the process is a *social process* of integrating groups that don't ordinarily sit at the same tables."[23] Maria Lugones, author of *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, describes how this process works:

> [we must try to] accommodate different levels of comprehension and incomprehension, as well as levels of opening ourselves up to each other, levels of intimacy, and large and sometimes dispersed solidarity. Sometimes it has been many people together—hundreds of us talking and acting out our sense of the possible—and sometimes it has been very tentative connections inside the walls of very strictly guarded, normed, repressive domains.[24]

By remaining open to cooperation on all these different levels, even the most tentative connections can give way to agreement on the fundamental issues at hand. Common ground will be found at different places for different groups. Eventually, however, through their commitment to finding common ground, cross-class alliances encourage themselves to expand perceptions of social problems to include a critique of the structural enforcements of class. Once a culture of cooperation and dialogue is established, then cross-class alliances encourage the possibility that inter-group dialogue may lead to the popular realization that the capitalist socio-economic structure requires dismantling if any further common ground is to be found. This need not necessarily be an explicitly articulated process. Rather, it is a level of clarity that is reached while engaging cooperatively.

For a cross-class alliance to function, classes themselves need not be transformed; however, the transformation of class barriers is often an effect of cross-class alliances. Likewise, an altered class consciousness is often the effect of a transformed class distinction. Although manifestations of class structures and class consciousness are cyclical, this cycle is easy to break, or modify, at the stage of class consciousness if class consciousness is defined as the cultural expression of class experiences. To tear down all the boxes and maps of class categories which are rigidly controlled by the capitalist economy, people may begin by initiating a transformation of their own class consciousnesses. Cross-class alliances—both consciously and not—pursue this end. Conversely, cross-class alliances also have the potential to affect social change which helps to diminish Wrightian class distinctions, thereby encouraging a transformation of consciousness.

Lugones applies the terms 'world-traveling' and 'playfulness' to capture this process of transforming consciousness. World-traveling describes the process of coming to understand another's perception of class, race, and other differences. By traveling to the worlds of others, "we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have traveled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other."[25] I would add that this process also allows us to be fully aware of ourselves.

Playfulness describes the attitude that is necessary to have successful world-traveling across differences. While engaging in the world-traveling experience of

cross-class alliances, it is important to interact "in uncertainty, open to risking one's own ground, including one's own self-understanding… It is that openness to uncertainty that enables one to find in others one's own possibilities and theirs."[26] This playful attitude can be disconcerting, especially when one is questioning one's own self-understanding. This is a scary process, but it is an excellent way to thrive and develop as a person. Lugones states that playfulness is "a good companion to fear; it keeps one focused on the crossing, on the process of metamorphosis."[27] The process of metamorphosis that most concerns cross-class alliances is, of course, class consciousness.

Throughout my discussion of class consciousness, a tension arises between the intertwined sociological and psychological effects of cross-class alliances. Do alliances primarily seek to playfully alter consciousnesses or forcefully change socio-economic structures? In general, I imagine that alliances between class institutions (envision, for example, an alliance between a liberal arts college and a low-income social justice organization) must be long-lasting and must incorporate a formal recognition that class psychologies will—and should—be altered. Alliances within activism certainly have a more sociological focus, though the processes used to affect sociological change provide a fertile ground in which to nurture the peripheral effect of playful class consciousness adaptation. Alliances help contradict class antagonisms because their sociological effects are less likely to engage in the social reproduction of class.

Rose describes social reproduction as what

> happens when individuals [and, I would add, institutions], acting in their own interests, unconsciously reinforce and recreate the structures and conditions that make up society… If movements do not become aware of the unconscious ways in which they reinforce existing divisions in society, they are likely to encourage them.[28]

In a way, cross-class alliances are one type of movement that does not necessarily have to become aware of unconscious reinforcements in order to halt social reproduction; by including representatives from different social classes, these alliances by their very nature encourage action that empowers those whom society has left behind. Still, the atmosphere of cross-class alliances should further the goal of making people aware of their role in social reproduction. As Rose suggests, long-term alliances that become movements must explicitly acknowledge their role in creating class norms.

U.S. Democratic society as one realm that would benefit from cross-class alliances

Social reproduction is pervasive in the realm of democracy. As I mentioned in my introduction, U.S. democracy professes to be the ultimate cross-class alliance; it is a place where class theoretically does not exist. Evidently, this is not the case; access to and participation in democratic practices varies greatly according to class, race, and geographic location. The consequences of democracy play a role in manufacturing class differences and inhibiting effective alliances by reinforcing distinct class consciousnesses. Public policy (think: drug laws, healthcare divisions, welfare, school funding) promotes false binaries between groups based upon definitions created through the law. These same policies perpetuate injustices against lower-class people, effectively silencing those for whom democracy purports to provide a forum.

The failure of public policy to reflect the values and interests of all classes compels one to ask: why doesn't democracy function as a cross-class alliance? One part of the answer is that low-income people do not engage with politics as readily as more privileged classes. Low-income people experience more time-consuming day-by-day struggles which make it difficult to follow current political issues. Obstacles such as insufficient childcare, inflexible jobs, and the sparseness of voting stations in poor neighborhoods make getting to the polls on election days nearly impossible for many people. Additionally, low-income people may understandably dismiss democratic action as hopeless and futile.

These factors also thwart low-income politicians from winning elections. When voting, protesting, running for office, and following political news are all difficult paths to take, the political agency of low-income people is effectively dismantled. David Croteau, an analyst of class political participation, observes that while low-income people remain political non-participants, "American democracy will remain a mirage whose legitimacy is, at best, in question. Societies with stark differential class participation will never produce justice."[29] However, focusing on political participation does not reach the root of the problem.

The origins of inequality in the United States begin within the juxtaposition of the capitalist economy and the illusion of democracy. The belief that democracy could perform as an alliance of all people regardless of class, race, and other social barriers was, in the words of democracy theorist Anthony Arblaster, "premised on the assumption that governmental power was *the* power in society, that politics dominated over social and economic life, and that no factional power or interest group could successfully resist the legitimate might of the popular will."[30] But, as Croteau writes, "power in contemporary society has in many cases escaped state control. That is, government is no longer *the* power in society."[31] The production economy led by capitalist corporations is a far more dominant force upon society than is democracy. Corporations' ability to control the media and influence public policies are two important aspects of their power. The most basic reflection of corporate power is, however, corporations' direct role in maintaining a hierarchical and consumerist class system that includes a large

low-income class willing to work for low wages. Political programs of social assistance falter when faced with stark economic realities. The failure of democracy is represented by the fact that the illusion of agency in the political realm does not produce agency in the workplace or in the daily lives of low-income people.

Therefore, placing hope in democracy alone is not an effective strategy for promoting social justice. Some U.S. residents have already lost faith in democracy and have slipped into a deep cynicism which restrains action. Many others place blind trust in the current political system. With this unfounded faith, society allows the rhetoric of democracy to undermine the application of democracy. Trusting the rhetoric, people neglect to realize that democracy does not currently represent all classes equally. To achieve this clarity of observation is to admit that honored practices of civic engagement are a farce, as they are premised by the denial of economic influences. Facing the truth about democracy would also open a Pandora's Box of other masked social injustices. Unfortunately, those who recognize the deceptive aspects of democracy are often those whom the system marginalizes.

Can democracy alone redeem capitalist injustices? No. However, democratic procedures may be advanced through the practice of cross-class alliances. Fred Rose affirms: "[the] democratic promise of intermovement coalitions is that they build political majorities with integrated agendas that are worthy of broad support. In this way coalitions present an opportunity for the deliberation and collective

learning that democracy requires."[32] In other words, although cross-class alliances in democracy do not address the roots of societal inequality, democracy is one of many social realms which benefit from cross-class coalition-building.

Cross-class interactions in democracy: ward representation in Springfield, MA

To exemplify some of the claims I have made thus far, and to further explore the subject of democracy, I will turn to my experience working within the public democratic sphere. This experience does not embody a definite cross-class alliance; rather, it occurred in a way that generated many cross-class interactions. During the 2007 city election of Springfield, MA, I volunteered with Arise for Social Justice to campaign (successfully) for the establishment of ward representation in Springfield. Ward representation is an electoral system which will allow each of the eight wards (neighborhoods) in Springfield to have a representative in the City Council. Five additional members will be elected from the city as a whole. In the previous at-large system, the majority of City Council members were wealthy white men who resided predominantly in the two richest wards. As Springfield is about fifty percent non-white and low-income (U.S. Census Bureau figures show that nearly half of Springfield's children live below the poverty line),[33] the at-large electoral system clearly did not adequately represent Springfield's population. The City Council resulting from ward representation will function more as a cross-class alliance; hypothetically, people of (or representative of) different classes will, to apply Rose's metaphor, literally sit at the same table.

Although Arise, which represents low-income people, has been advocating ward representation for years, it was not until council member Jose Tosado

pushed for the proposal that it emerged as a binding referendum question on the ballot. Thus, the process of initializing ward representation involved action and support across social classes. Voters, who passed the initiative by 74%, came from all eight wards and therefore most likely reflected cross-class support.[34] The most fascinating arena of cross-class interaction, however, occurred at the polls on election day.

To campaign for ward representation, Arise recruited students from the Five Colleges to picket polls and distribute information to voters. Thus, I, a middle-class student, acted as a representative of Arise, an organization of low-income people. Arise assigned me to work at a poll in one of the wealthier wards. Hence, I was interacting with voters who were predominantly of my own social class. I wonder if this was not a calculated decision, as I noticeably have an entryway into the sphere of the middle-class voters.

Although I shared a social class with these voters, the several conversations I had revealed that I had a very different class consciousness. In many ways, our class cultures seemed similar; we wore well-fitted store-bought clothes and spoke in an intellectual manner. However, the underlying assumptions we were making about the effectiveness of 'politics as usual' required some earnestly defensive conversation. I was trying to be conscious of the privilege which my social status grants me at the expense of others. Those with whom I conversed seemed resistant to interpreting their own social class as related to others'; they preferred to see the world through Wrightian class structures. Voters demanded of me,

"Why are you standing out here in the rain? Who are you holding this sign for? You don't even vote in Springfield? What is ward representation all about anyway, and why is it good for me?" I responded to this last query by saying, "The new electoral system will adapt your City Council to better reflect your community. This is good for democracy and therefore good for you." By patiently explaining facts about Springfield's democratic system and by maintaining a cheery and factual disposition in the face of petulant voters, I attempted to portray a sense of reason and clarity. I felt hopeful about those individuals who seemed to concede their oppositional stance as they entered the polls.

In this moment, I had internalized the values and interests of the low-income people working with Arise without negating or replacing my middle-class experience. I do not claim to embody the values of all low-income people, especially as many poorer people tend not to participate in the voting process. In fact, much of Arise's campaign before election day focused on getting low-income voters to go to the polls. If one considers voting (and putting faith in democracy) to be a primarily middle-class tradition, this part of Arise's campaign could be interpreted as a low-income organization pressing a middle-class value upon low-income people because it is in their interest.

To encourage voters to interpret ward representation as something that people of all social classes would benefit from, Arise used the slogan "Good for Everybody." I see this as an application of Rose's technique of fostering language

that bridges interests and values. Although ward representation may not actually reflect the political values and economic interests of many wealthier Springfield residents, it is essentially good for the practice of democracy. Thus, through both the slogan and our individual conversations with voters, Arise members attempted to expand voters' perceptions of their interests and values to include a desire for a truer democracy in which Springfield's population could be more accurately represented. Expanding class consciousness within this example of democracy also illuminates the need to encourage recognition of the power relationships which give people more or less agency in political structures according to their class, race, or geographic location.

Although no explicit cross-class alliance was formed in this example of establishing ward representation in Springfield, cross-class interactions surrounded its creation and clearly aided its success. Ward representation itself, though certainly not a complete victory over the inequities of the current democratic system, has the potential to encourage cross-class debate within the City Council. I value this campaign as an example because it combines individual instances of cross-class action to promote an electoral system that will encourage cross-class discussion at a governmental level.

The process of campaigning for ward representation illuminates some of the psychological tensions experienced in cross-class interactions and some of the techniques used by coalition builders to broaden support. Simultaneously, this example raises questions about the hazy realm of public space and democratic

procedures: whose territory is democracy? To what extent can democracy be actualized as cross-class action despite social cleavages which stratify participation?

Although reforming the democratic realm does not have the capacity to redeem all social injustices, the same could be said of every other site of social activity. Each of these sites—democracy, social activism, educational institutions, corporations, unions, religious institutions, among others—is a productive place to act across class barriers to resist capitalist class structure. When enacted in each of these social spheres, cross-class alliances can further the causes of subverting capitalism, advancing democratic practices, and promoting social justice. Cross-class alliances pursue these goals through structural, political, and psychological means. Structurally, the union of people across class barriers is a symbolic denial of the current capitalist organization of society. Politically, cross-class alliances defy the reproduction of social injustices by advocating policies which are unlikely to discriminate. Psychologically, committing to regular cross-class interactions encourages class consciousnesses to transform, making people more willing to alter their own interests and values to allow for mutual goal-making.

Borrowing a metaphor from Beverly Tatum, a theorist of racism, I ask you to imagine a moving walkway.[35] Everybody strides along this horizontal escalator. If you don't like the direction in which you are headed, your instinct is to stop walking. On the walkway, however, in order to effectively change your path you

must actually turn around and walk in the opposite direction. Like changing destination on the walkway, social change is a two-step process. First, people must recognize that the walkway leads to a disgraceful location. That is, the walkway of society (which humans have constructed) reproduces social injustices. To simply ignore injustices is to stop walking; even when lacking overtly biased actions, people will still be carried along an unjust path. The second step of social change is to actively walk against the motion of the walkway by working conscientiously to end unjust social reproduction.

The linear nature of the image aside, this is an effective metaphor for imagining the potential of cross-class alliances. The sociological and psychological effects of cross-class alliances will encourage people to 'stop walking' and recognize that society is structured in an intrinsically biased manner. Cross-class alliances are then useful for actively altering the structure of society; while walking against the flow on the walkway, our strides will be made easier if we can convince the people surrounding us to turn and walk alongside us in the other direction. To change our collective destination, we must engage in dialogue with those who surround us and walk together to create a new path. If our collective voices become loud enough, perhaps we can even convince the technician to deactivate the walkway.

CHAPTER TWO

CROSS-CLASS ALLIANCES IN ACTIVISM

Why had I always believed us contemptible by nature?. . . Among the women I knew there was no one who would have understood what I was thinking, no other working-class woman in the women's collective where I was living. I began to suspect that we shared no common language to speak those bitter truths.
-Dorothy Allison, Skin

Introduction: Why care about cross-class alliances in activism?

Democracy in the U.S. is not living up to its potential as an alliance of different socio-economic classes. Instead of transcending differences, democratic practices succumb to the realities of contemporary capitalism by enforcing divisions within political, ethnic, and class identities. Labor activist Fred Rose asks, “Isn’t there more to democracy than competing factions?”[36] Early proponents of democracy imagined that this political system would discourage factions and foster community among citizens through the shared experience of political participation. “But,” Rose continues, “politics in practice hardly lives up to these visionary ideals.”[37] Democracy has yet to overcome political, economic, and social cleavages. The failure of democracy to act as a cross-class alliance reveals a need to support alliances in other social realms. Interactions “within groups segregated by class, race, interest, or location do little to broaden perspectives about the common good… If individuals are to develop through

public participation, they need to interact in meaningful ways with people who are different than themselves."[38] Activism is one social sphere where meaningful, playful cross-class action can be accomplished.

Why focus on activism? Activist groups are a sensible place to start promoting cross-class alliances because the activist identity assumes a passion for change. Activists may not be actively seeking a cross-class alliance, but they are certainly not socially apathetic. I do not mean to suggest that activists are more open-minded than others, for they are not immune from the human tendency to obstinately prioritize particular agendas. Indeed, some activist agendas even contradict visions of justice and equality. However, many social justice activists consciously identify with causes that would benefit from the broad, diverse advocacy that cross-class alliances offer. Additionally, activism is one social arena where cross-class alliances have already been acknowledged as significant and pursued with notable successes.

Bear in mind that complete success is a rare occurrence in the realm of social justice activism. Especially in organizations comprised of low-income people who have to struggle with their own hectic lives as well as maintain a money-starved operation, progress demands patience. Despite the passion and resilience of activist groups, movements frequently fail. Social justice and labor issues are ignored (often to reappear months or years later) and values placed on distant causes are forgotten, replaced, or discouraged as time goes by. Thus, when analyzing social activism through what is produced, one may make the

observation that group action serves the sociological and psychological point that there is a basic human need to pursue meaning through group action, successful or not. Where, then, is the political value of activism? How can we encourage action to be productive? Cross-class alliances can serve as a crucial ingredient in activist success stories. Through broader support and a commitment to incorporating diverse class experiences, cross-class alliances are capable of transcending typical social discriminations. Through the process of forming coalitions, alliances in activism will also encourage reassessments of class consciousnesses.

In activism, an alliance may be a coalition between two or more distinct activist groups or it may be individuals participating in an activist cause of differently-classed people. Both of these instances would result in a situation where the activist group(s) may be encouraged to reevaluate their ideology in light of the inclusion of new class experiences. Through the incorporation of diverse viewpoints, allied activists are more likely to produce results which thwart social reproduction by denying the usual top-down application of power and voice.

Bourdieu, class consciousness, and identity politics: Why do people act?

Activist alliances are often temporary, rallying around socio-political causes, not class relationships. However, class relationships play a crucial role in how and where activist groups initially form. The social theory of Pierre Bourdieu, a

dominant twentieth century sociologist, is useful when grappling with the questions of how and why people acquire activist identities. Bourdieu's social theory rejects the traditional sociological opposition between objectivism and subjectivism. This binary opposition between two antonymous perspectives is a detrimental concept because it disregards how "social structures and mental structures are interlinked by a twofold relationship of mutual constitution and correspondence."[39] Furthermore, the notion of objectivism assumes that social forces act upon people "'irrespective of their consciousness and will' (to invoke Marx's well-known formula)."[40] Such an assumption denies the agency of activist groups and the role of individual consciousnesses in forming activist identities.

To represent the power of both social and mental structures, Bourdieu developed his social theory around the concepts of habitus, capital, and field. Maria Lugones would consider the unique combination of these three factors to be a person's 'world.' Successful 'world-traveling' would promote a new comprehension of habitus, capital, and field. Habitus "designates the system of durable and transposable *dispositions* through which we perceive, judge, and act in the world."[41] As humans live in certain social conditions and through certain social experiences, an unconscious set of malleable dispositions is created. The habitus is responsible when people of similar class, race, gender, or religion feel spontaneously comfortable with one another.

Within the habitus, people's unconscious dispositions are affected by their access to capital. Cultural capital consists of symbolic goods, skills, values,

knowledge, and titles. Social capital may be acquired through membership in a group. Cultural and social capital often produce economic capital, or material assets. Congruous with E. P. Thompson, Bourdieu believes that the "variation over time of this volume and composition [of capital] records their trajectory through social space and provides invariable clues as to their habitus."[42]

The third component of Bourdieu's sociology, the field, applies to the "distinct microcosms" of today's society— spheres of art, music, education, science, religion, politics, corporations, activism, and so on— which have "their own rules, regularities, and forms of authority."[43] These spheres are often "battlefield[s] wherein the bases of identity and hierarchy are endlessly disputed over."[44] Fields intricately interact with the habitus to influence human action. Bourdieu's theory of habitus, capital, and field is useful to keep in mind while exploring class consciousness, identity politics, and the urge to become an 'activist.' In Bourdieu's terms, a cross-class alliance would involve two distinct fields of activism each negotiating a dissonant habitus in order to share capital. In the process, the habitus of each group will adapt and the rules and regularities of the fields will transform. As this occurs, the participants are in a position to adapt their class consciousness through world-traveling.

Because of the habitus, associations are more easily formed between people of similar identity experiences. As Erik Olin Wright's class theory represents, identities in contemporary U.S. society tend to be categorized and rendered inflexible. Identity theorist Joshua Gameson states that these "fixed identity

categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power."[45] When collectivities are discriminated against, the experience of discrimination itself can become a strong mobilizing force. How, then, can identity categories be employed to uplift minorities and not oppress? Is it possible to maintain the empowering aspects of identity while allowing identities to relax out of restricting and discriminatory categories? Perhaps cross-class and cross-cultural alliances could respond to this problem; an alliance between two or more groups would preserve distinct identities while offering a shared position of empowerment.

People with multiracial or multi-class identities often feel conflicted as a result of fixed identity categories. Gameson describes such feelings as "destabilized identities."[46] His use of the word 'destabilized' is disconcerting, for it suggests that multi-cultured people do not hold complete agency over their separate portions of identity. Indeed, people with multiple class identities do often feel destabilized and disjointed from all the worlds with which they are familiar. Barbara Jensen, in her article "Across the Great Divide: Crossing Classes and Clashing Cultures," writes about the experience of Shelly, a working-class woman who is the first in her family to go to college.[47] Although Shelly loves her new world of academia, she no longer shares the class experiences, emotions, and values of her family and husband. During a tearful breakdown in her Psychology of Women course, Shelly reveals that she does not feel comfortable in either class realm; an introduction to academia was a "crossover" experience that transformed her into a contradictory new person. Jensen writes, "With no language or

concepts to bridge or even explain this experience, she is falling prey to the contradictions within it."[48]

Shelly is one of millions who feel this strife. Jensen believes "Shelly's struggle constitutes a particular inner and outer (psychological and sociological) constellation that many working class people who enter the middle class experience."[49] Using the terms of Maria Lugones, the middle-class nature of academia does not allow for world-traveling and does not encourage a playful attitude because it denies the painfully transformative experience of low-income students. As Bourdieu would say, "persons undergoing great social mobility often possess segmented or conflictive dispositional sets [within their habitus]."[50] Feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa "analyzed her experiences growing up as a lesbian within multiple 'cultures' as 'mestiza consciousness.'"[51] 'Mestiza,' meaning 'mixed,' is most commonly used to describe identities that are Hispanic and white. Including a lesbian identity in this term illuminates the need for categorizing terms to be flexible enough to suit individual experiences. As class experiences begin to intertwine and combine, as witnessed by the experiences of Shelly and Gloria, class identities must adapt to suit today's world. Fixed identities demand falsely concrete class consciousnesses, which deny true identity experiences and limit the effectiveness of cross-class interactions.

To review a fundamental point of Chapter One, question how an all-inclusive and stable class consciousness could exist when distinctions between social classes are somewhat malleable (as in the case of Shelly) and inter-class cultures

so diverse. Consider a community of timber workers in Oregon and a group of retail workers in Massachusetts; these people may all identify as working-class, but their experiences in the labor force and in the political realm are very different. Of course, commonalities exist which lead to solidarity. Diverse working-class communities may share a sentiment of alienation from their workplace, as expressed by Marx, or may have common experiences with unionism, rights to low-income housing, or state-assisted healthcare. If a moment of solidarity is created between diverse working-class communities, class consciousnesses are shared through the practice of commiserating and exchanging opinions. However, to consider a working-class consciousness something that the working-class possesses and enacts for change leaves out those who aren't in the working-class but still desire transformation of the current economic and political systems. This interpretation also leads to ignorance of the roles of race, gender, and religion in identity formation. Thus, an inflexible perception of class consciousness is not productive. However, many identity collectives in the U.S. do tend to assert a group consciousness. Understanding these groups is important because identity politics play a large role in compelling people to activism.

Melissa Checker and Maggie Fishman, two scholars of identity and activism, observe that people in the U.S. possess a "characteristic American desire to join collectivities in order to define themselves and to redefine society at the same time."[52] In a country where "the most pressing social issues … often present themselves to individuals in the form of identity questions," it is not surprising

that self-identification with a collectivity compels people to certain forms of activism.[53] In fact, the need to identify with a collectivity corresponds to the notion that fixed identity categories lead to both oppression and political power. The oppression of identity categories induces solidarity, while the potential power of identity categories suggests that perhaps identity politics should be "reframe[d]… as cultural activism."[54]

In practice, identity politics often do incorporate a commitment to activism. Through self-identification and the institutions which mark people (the neighborhoods they live in, the schools they go to, the companies they work for, their family, etc.), people may be expected to be passionate about certain causes. A basic example of this is a minority group telling its members that they must stand up for their equal rights and cultural heritage, or when white people feel that they must act for reparations of slavery and imperialism. In every cultural micro-sphere (in Bourdieu's terms, every field), people will feel obligated to care about one thing or another. Cultural values and experiences will influence this compulsion. This complex relationship between field and habitus deeply affects the activist sentiment. Economic freedom also significantly affects the call to action. People with limited economic agency and little wealth will find it more cumbersome to commit to a cause. These same people, of course, may be more likely to rebel against the capitalist norms that victimize them in the workplace if worsening work conditions act as a catalyst. Regardless of the circumstances, low-income people generally must make greater daily sacrifices than middle-class

people when adhering to a social cause. Over time, middle-class activists may also make sacrifices as they let go of certain class conveniences.

If aligning with an identity collective makes an activist statement, does joining an activist group make a class-specific cultural statement? As most activist groups reflect the interests and values of a single social class, the answer is often yes. Even activist organizations that purport to serve all people regardless of class and culture (including, for example, the environmental movement) tend to be comprised of only certain social classes and therefore unintentionally reinforce particular cultural values and reproduce capitalist class norms. Here emerges a difficult notion: if identity correlates with a certain activist agenda and identities are defined in opposition (as explained by E. P. Thompson), then how will activist agendas ever become compatible? Although activist groups often organize around identity or class-specific values, they must also seek a widening discourse and coalition-building in order to foster lasting social justice and the relaxation of inflexible class consciousnesses.

Although identity collectives tend to compel certain activist agendas, they may also reject activism by denying social problems. The privileged status given to the white middle-class identity creates this sense of resistance towards cultural activism. In her book, *Daughters of Suburbia*, Lorraine Delia Kenny states that the middle class “thrives on not being recognized as a cultural phenomenon. Its culture is a culture of entitlement in which the Self does not question its position within the dominant, normative group and instead accepts all the privileges of

race and class that seem to naturally come her way."[55] In such a culture, acting in the interests of another social class or ethnic community contradicts the class value of avoiding conflict. People who are not white or middle class may still 'fit in' the suburban realm as long as their identity does not openly create conflict. As Kenny writes, "studying whiteness in the context of suburban teen girls makes clear that whiteness is not only about race. Nor is race simply about skin color."[56] After all, the concept of whiteness has always been adapting to include people, such as Irish immigrants, who thoroughly assimilate into the dominant white culture. Kenny explains that whiteness is also

> the ability to have access to and make optimum use of things like higher education and the learned social graces, vocabularies, and demeanors that allow one to prosper among the elite or at least compete within the dominant culture... What one values or expects from the world, how one communicates, dresses, and is educated, for example, say more about what being white and middle class is all about, than does one's skin color or bank account.[57]

In other words, white middle-class suburbia offers comfortable and quintessentially American cultural capital; being part of this identity group offers economic wealth, feelings of cultural superiority, and powerful social connections which lead to the accumulation of even more capital. Poor, non-white groups are (often unconsciously) discriminated against and the experiences of wealthy non-white people and low-income white people are marginalized. Thus, in middle-class white suburbia a culture of conflict-avoidance and moral minimalism exists in order to whiten and neutralize situations which contradict the desired norm. Kenny observed an instance in a suburban high school where the topic of abortion

was introduced to teenage girls. Their responses deflected the issue away from their own class by framing abortion as something they "[gladly] don't have to think about"; as observed by one girl's mother, a social worker, teen pregnancy was a problem of the lower class.[58] To end this uncomfortable discussion, the girls quickly changed the topic to discuss how their friend Amy Goldberg, a Korean adoptee, had a very pretty Korean name but a "sooo American" common name; "[in] one fell swoop, the girls' conversation deftly abandoned and literally whitewashed two contentious matters: abortion and their racial and ethnic differences."[59]

As these examples indicate, conflict in middle-class white communities is often avoided through trite moral statements or deflecting problems onto the lower classes, and non-typical people are applauded for conforming. Conflict between groups is ignored or morally simplified, although individual conflicts may be settled through extreme yet legal measures such as suing. Drawing attention to social injustices or issues of racial and class conflict is shunned. As a fifteen-year-old in my own predominantly white suburban high school, I had a boyfriend who was black. Just by being together, we were perceived to be making the activist statement that interracial dating was acceptable. This boy was not openly subjected to many racist remarks from our peers; I, however, received a couple hateful comments when I began dating him. To some white middle-class boys it was acceptable for 'Q' to be black, but it was not acceptable for me, a white girl, to cross the line of inter-racial relationships. Apparently, this

adolescent coupling signified a larger social mixing that was making the suburbs uncomfortable. In their eyes, I should have avoided the 'problem' of black people in middle-class spaces by not involving myself with the black student.

Although I could have avoided this conflict, it could never have been ignored by 'Q'. The culture of avoiding conflict is a privilege that does not extend to all people in the suburban community. Along with many other social theorists, Kenny observed that people who are forced to witness conflict because they are low-income or non-white have a better understanding of the way class and racial conflict manifest themselves. My vision is that cross-class alliances in activism could encourage cross-class interactions that do not whiten or conform, but validate the perspectives of the marginalized.

As it is, the middle-class culture of avoidance discourages social justice activism. In the immediate wake of the 2003 war in Iraq, I co-founded a Peace Club with several of my high school peers. One of our actions was a sit-in against the war; about twenty of us sat in the lobby of the school with signs explaining our objections. We did not expect that our actions would miraculously end the war. Rather, we wished to share with our peers and community at large the message that the war was unacceptable. Many other students did not share our concerns or understand our intent. We were asked, "Do you really expect to stop a war by sitting in the hallway?" and "Why do you care? It's not like *you're* gonna have to go to Iraq." The war was not their problem. It occurred in a distant country and was supported by soldiers from the lower classes of U.S. society.

When a crew from *Newsweek* magazine came to take photos of the Peace Club for an article on student activism, the most curious thing happened: a popular new student organization was founded within an hour. As the article states, "Some kids wanted to call it the War Club. Which made sense, since it was meant to be an alternative to the Peace Club. But the principal didn't approve," so the group was called the South Hadley Alliance of Republican Conservative Students (SHARCS).[60] The SHARCS stood behind the Peace Club for the Newsweek camerawoman proudly bearing white tee-shirts with sayings such as "SHARCS take a bite out of liberals," "In Bush we trust," and "Down with activism." (See Appendix A for photographs.) Down with activism? But you, SHARCS, are activists yourselves, parading around the school yelling chants and sporting matching tee-shirts! Within the middle-class culture of conflict avoidance, I was not surprised to see that the most popularly accepted subject of activism in my high school was *anti-activism*.

As part of this culture of conflict avoidance, middle-class people also have the leisure to remain unconcerned with the world at large. People who are well-off are often personally unscathed by social ills and are therefore more content to remain ignorant of social injustices. Paradoxically, large-scale social action among the middle-class tends to develop around the pursuits of peace and environmental sustainability. Middle-class *local* actions often arise for the protection of animal rights, preserving historic landmarks, saving the local library, or other important yet non-vital tasks. The middle-class tendency to limit

activism to uncomplicated, appealing, and non-controversial agendas results from the culture of conflict avoidance. Although middle-class movements often appear completely altruistic, the denial of self-interest often obscures the fact that participants in activism do indeed benefit. The way in which these middle-class movements gain attention and members reflects the reproduction of cultural capital. Particularly in the middle and upper class, popularity often becomes a large factor in motivating people to act. The epitome of this may be Lance Armstrong's 2004 LIVESTRONG campaign, in which millions of yellow plastic wristbands were sold at a dollar a piece to benefit cancer research. The bracelets became a trend in both Hollywood and the White House, spurring sales and encouraging some people to make a personal profit from the campaign by selling bracelets on Ebay.com. Clearly, joining an activist campaign—even one that is non-controversial—for the pursuit of popularity and cultural capital is not conducive to achieving meaningful action or fostering cross-class alliances.

The diverse and complex factors which compel action in each social class must be analyzed and kept in mind while striving for cross-class alliances. Cross-class alliances in activism must also be attentive to the economic barriers which limit lower-class activism. Betsy Leondar-Wright, author of *Class Matters: Cross-Class Alliance Building for Middle-Class Activists*, applies a metaphor to describe how class and income affect activists' success: "there are discouraged unconventional people constrained to paint on a small canvas at one end of the class spectrum, and entitled unconventional people painting on a big canvas at the

other end."[61] Grassroots activists may create beautiful work that goes unnoticed and fades away, ineffective, whereas privileged activists may devote incredible amounts of time and money successfully promoting work that is not even socially useful. Activists need to learn how to share the paintbrush.

Tensions between middle-class and working-class activist groups

According to the distinct identity motivations of middle and working-class people, middle and working-class activist organizations tend to pursue different agendas. As mentioned in Chapter One, Fred Rose has observed conflict between a language of interest and a language of values. He states that "working-class people tend to approach social change through organizing around perceived immediate interests, while middle-class movements tend to see change as a process of education and value change."[62] Of course, he does not deny that both interests and values are at play in every social movement. However, he claims that the language and logic of each type of movement revolves around either interests or values. Rose offers plenty of evidence to support his observation: struggles between working-class labor movements on the one hand, and middle-class peace or environmental movements on the other often find their goals oppositional. Conflict arises most often when the preservation of jobs is harmful to the environment. Additionally, working-class movements often exist to promote the social class as a whole; to gain respect for workers and better living conditions for working-class families. Middle-class movements typically do not

exist to promote middle-class families, but to establish some 'universal' good or value.

Labor activism—which struggles with the owning-class for rights such as living wages and safe working conditions—often still supports an industrial economic system which sends pollutants into the air or manufactures machinery of war, thus angering environmental and peace activist groups. To promote alliances between labor activists and environmental or peace activists, Rose suggests focusing on ultimate common goals and creating a language that does not focus on interests or values individually, but defines interests and values as mutually compatible. This new common language must take into account the *cultural* differences which Rose views as the root of the interests/values tension. To apply Bourdieu's theory, the different rhetoric used by working-class and middle-class activists serves to translate only select interests or values into cultural capital. A new language would offer a shared cultural capital to all activists. Rose recommends expanding the reach of values and interpreting values as an extension of interests. As stated in Chapter One, an example of this is the environmentalists expanding their definition of a 'healthy environment' to include decent-wage jobs for all and the labor activists reinterpreting the environmental campaign as the universal application of interests.[63]

Assigning 'interests' and 'values' to the cultural spheres of working-class and middle-class people seems contradictory when looking at other ways in which people engage themselves politically. Class analyst David Croteau questions why

working-class voting habits do not reflect the interests and values at play in working-class activism habits. The past several decades have witnessed a dwindling amount of unionization and a movement of the political left from its historic location in the working-class to the professional-managerial class.[64] When lower and working-class people vote today, they often vote more conservatively and end up supporting tax cuts for the rich, education campaigns which punish low-income school systems, the reduction of health care spending, and increased military recruiting in low-income areas. These conservative agendas which protect the status quo or dismantle social safety nets are certainly not in the personal 'interest' of lower and working-class people. However, the allure of conservative 'family values' is often a compelling factor in a low-income person's vote.

Croteau states that working-class people do not follow politics in the news nearly as much as middle-class people.[65] Perhaps this explains the desire for low-income people to turn to the rhetoric of 'values' in politics; when people are structurally prevented from following what is happening in the Middle East or are confused by the limited information available about the newest health care initiative, talk of straightforward 'family values' is something most people can endorse without hesitation. Political stories presented by big media tend to be simplistic, unreliable, and supportive of capitalist norms. The time, energy, and resources needed to find alternative news sources makes this habit a middle-class phenomenon. The lack of news-following in the working-class is a cultural

difference with structural reinforcement; when one has no power in the workplace, one is conditioned to believe that power in the larger political or social world is also unachievable. Besides, why follow the news when one has precious little leisure time and worldly knowledge is not necessary for success in one's job?

Bourdieu would agree that unlike low-income people, middle-class people have much cultural capital to gain from following politics. Rather, cultural capital gained by the middle-class is more likely to become transformed into economic capital; knowledgeable, worldly individuals are more likely to receive professional-managerial promotions. Thus, activism (or at least open compassion) regarding worldly issues offers cultural capital to the middle-class. Croteau argues that while middle-class activists vie for worldly goals, "working-class participation [in social activism] tends to be limited to defensive actions aimed at concretely preventing the existing conditions of daily life."[66] All people will act when their personal livelihood is threatened; indeed, economic realities make this situation much more prominent among low-income people. (It is important to keep in mind that there are also political activists—such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina—who originally acted purely from personal and emotional motivations, with no intent to become political.) Croteau further argues that working-class movements seek immediate social change (an interest) while middle-class movements "look to other criteria"—such as

obtaining and sharing a sense of values—"to judge the value of their involvement."[67]

Although Rose focuses on class cultures and Croteau focuses on class politics, both authors support the notion that working-class and middle-class *activism* revolve around perceptions of interests and values. Rose's argument is useful for understanding the intricacies of why and how people act, although I am uncomfortable with assigning 'values' and 'interests' as an *intrinsic* aspect of class cultures when the political sphere seems to represent a different story. Still, Rose does make clear the fact that cross-class alliances do indeed pose problems of cross-*cultural* competence. Both Rose and Croteau agree that the "arrogance" of activist groups causes them to become "blindfolded by the primacy of *their* issue,"[68] suggesting that a technique for creating cross-class alliances is to remove cultural and political lenses in order to see common perspectives. Curiously, in this discussion of cross-cultural and cross-class conflict, neither Rose nor Croteau dwell on the role of race and ethnicity; the inclusion of different ethnic cultures and race politics throws these cultural boundaries into an even more complex web.

By framing issues of activist cross-class alliances through the language of interests and values, is this tension somehow perpetuated? Isn't it value-laden to purport an interest in social justice? Isn't it in the interest of low-income people to change current social values? While volunteering with Arise for Social Justice, I observed that this low-income advocacy group *prioritized* value change by

encouraging Springfield residents to see low-income people as victims of the cycle of poverty and by raising awareness about the causes and cures of homelessness. During weekly vigils, Arise members stand at a busy intersection in Springfield talking to passers-by and distributing information about unjust city policies and the social reproduction of poverty. Values and education change are as much a part of Arise's mission as they may be for a middle-class activist group. Often, for Arise, sharing these values does take the form of local actions (such as campaigning for ward representation), which are in the interest of the lower class (as well as democratic society). As there are so many achievable opportunities for change at a local, urban level, it makes sense that a group like Arise should act in what appears to be 'in the interests of' low-income people. However, talking about low-income activism in this way perpetuates the notion that low-income activism is void of values or a larger social agenda. In this sense, Rose's analysis seems to represent the problem he poses.

Although the interests/values theory does have some merit, it is important to have more than one way to conceive of the tension between activist groups. Perhaps it would be more useful to speak of activism which is either locally or distantly inspired, or temporally distant or immediate. According to Rose's observations, middle-class activists pursue geographically widespread and temporally distant goals while working-class activists fight for local, immediate rights. However, these trends may also be interpreted conversely; environmental and peace activists often ground their movements through promoting concrete

change and awareness in select areas, while labor activists fight for immediate, local concerns in order to secure a legacy of rights for the working-class as a whole.

Altering perceptions of 'community' can help activists combine the 'local' and the 'distant.' The miracle cure of stronger 'community' has often been proposed as the solution to this country's woes. Families, churches, local government, and community organizations are intended to "serve as intermediaries between isolated individuals and the large, anonymous institutions of mass society" in order to "teach people to care about the needs of others and to work effectively with people of different interests."[69] Yet, as Rose warns, it is naïve to put such faith in 'community' when "narrowly defined advocacy organizations tend to attract or recruit people from similar backgrounds," fostering segregation and stereotyping instead of meaningful cross-class interaction.[70] Many people would feel a stronger 'community' bond with geographically distant people of a similar class than with geographically near but differently-classed people. How can the language and concept of 'community' become a productive aspect of social justice? Principally, notions of 'local' must be reconfigured to include cross-class groups. Reinterpreting 'community' with the explicit goal of combining neighborhoods of all classes may be an effective tactic, but this would require that community organizations and institutions commit to meaningful cross-class community action.

Rose observes that "when single-issue movements do interact, it is most often through anonymous forums such as the press, or in public hearings, or across protest barricades that further cement convictions and conflict. Other opportunities for participation in more diverse associations are clearly needed. Could intermovement coalitions provide this opportunity?"[71] Indeed, the diverse range of perspective introduced by cross-class alliances in activism would discourage activist groups from becoming too focused on a single issue, a single moment, or a single socio-geographic segment.

Coalition-building in environmental activism

I would like to return to the example of the environment, as discussed by Fred Rose, because Rose's technique of expanding language and concepts has been particularly successful when applied to cross-class alliances in environmental activism. Rose calls for an expanding discourse, one which would allow for the term 'environment' to incorporate social justice and labor issues. In order to do this, environmentalism must relinquish its exclusively middle-class nature and embrace multiple class concerns.

Historically, environmental justice and social justice have aggressively clashed. In 1970, Douglas Moore of the Washington Black United Front called environmentalist Ralph Nader "the biggest damn racist in the U.S." and "[more] responsible than any man for perverting the war on poverty to the war on pollution."[72] Because of their distinct natures as working/lower-class and middle-

class movements, respectively, civil rights and environmentalism "emerged in U.S. history as two distinct and even adversarial social movements."[73] This seems ironic, for the first to suffer from ecological devastation are the lower classes. The rising sea level due to global warming is eliminating islands in Alaska, displacing poor natives.[74] Hurricane Katrina revealed how unpredictable weather patterns will leave poor neighborhoods in devastation while wealthy areas are repaired. Inner city air is the most polluted, while the inner city poor are unlikely to have a distant vacation home where they can breathe healthily. Low-income areas are more likely to include toxic waste sites while offering fewer health and legal care options. Robert Bullard, a professor at Georgia's Clark Atlanta University and director of the university's Environmental Justice Resource Center, states that areas with the most toxic waste facilities are comprised of the "most vulnerable people who have the fewest resources to escape neighborhoods because of residential segregation, housing discrimination, and limited incomes."[75] The term 'environmental racism,' coined by Benjamin Chavis, is used to describe the systematic placement of hazardous sites in low-income areas.[76] According to this picture and the reality of environmental racism, it seems necessary to see environmental justice and social justice as blended concerns.

However, middle-class pro-environmental groups—especially the big ones like Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Foundation, and the Nature Conservatory—have actually been severely detrimental to environmental justice. Not only have

they, as Douglas Moore stated, (unintentionally) used an incomplete perception of environmental concerns to draw attention away from issues of civil rights and poverty, but these groups have also "exacerbated discriminatory siting practices" of toxic waste facilities.[77] In the 1970s, public concerns about toxic waste increased and tougher regulations were established. White, middle-class suburban neighborhoods were able to use their political significance to thwart toxic facilities; "often these sites are then placed in minority neighborhoods… Minority communities have thus become the prime targets to solve 'facility siting gridlock.'"[78] Of course, when toxic facilities move into these poor neighborhoods, the Sierra Club's advocacy is nowhere to be found.

More recently, alliances have been made between low-income activist groups in toxic areas and larger, middle-class groups like Sierra Club. The low-income groups offer 'credibility' to the middle-class groups, who in turn offer financial support. As a result, many low-income areas have been cleaned up and some environmental groups are redefining their perspective on environmental justice issues.[79] Still, the racialized legacy of class conflict in environmental activism often deters progress. Additionally, it does seem improper that low-income environmental justice groups still have to barter for funding when they are openly acknowledged as being the groups with 'credibility.'

At the question and answer session of a 1999 Sierra Club meeting, Arthur Smith, the sole African American in attendance and a representative of a local low-income environmental group

> asked the mayor what he intended to do about violence in the inner cities. For Smith it was perfectly appropriate to address inner-city violence at a Sierra Club meeting because violence *was* an environmental concern for his neighborhood. In contrast, the Sierra Club members' questions were directed at recycling, cleaning trash off roadways, and creating bicycle lanes…When [activists from Smith's organization] say that they are working to clean up their environment, they mean that they are not just working to remediate the damage left by toxic contamination, but the damage left by a larger legacy of institutional racism.[80]

Smith's activist group clearly reflects the expanding discourse which Fred Rose recommends. This expanded definition of 'environment' has yet to completely take hold within the Sierra Club and other middle-class pro-environmental institutions. Credibility and money are not all that must be shared when middle and lower-class environmental groups interact. One hopes that with continued cross-class alliances, expanded perceptions of social and environmental justice will also continue to form. Developing these new perspectives of the way humans interact and perceive of their environment is one aspect of the adaptation of class consciousness. As one develops a new definition of environmental concerns, one's perception of class is also affected.

Environmental activism is also intriguing to cross-class advocates because the movement has been known to incorporate groups who are not traditionally expected to vie for environmental justice. Medical doctors are one example. Although physicians do not tend to organize as activists, some groups of doctors have defied this norm by developing an "environmental health movement that draws on older public health concepts of sanitation and population health and

newer notions of eco-system health."[81] In recent years, "physicians in medical social movement organizations have participated in efforts to address environmental health, national security, access to health care, and human rights."[82] By acting for these diverse causes, doctor groups (including Physicians for Social Responsibility, Physicians for Human Rights, and Physicians for a National Health Program), send the message that social and environmental justice is a vital aspect of human *health*. Such physicians are beginning to label themselves 'activist professionals.' These actions are comparable to Arthur Smith's role in the Sierra Club, for they expand public notions of what is considered a healthy environment as well as *who* is expected to assume the identity of an environmental justice activist.

A second group that has altered perceptions of the environment (and labor's connection to environmental justice) is the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation in Australia. During the period of high industrialization in the 1970s, the construction union refused to do work on sites that would damage the environment. The union effectively combined traditional labor demands such as higher wages, safety standards, better work conditions, and amenities with the new demand for protecting natural spaces from corporate enlargement. The laborers' "guiding principle, which aroused such strong emotions and which underpinned its environmental activism, was the concept of the social responsibility of labour: that workers had a right to insist that their labour not be used in harmful ways."[83] The union's goals stretched beyond their own personal

needs and enveloped larger human struggles: "the central moral question the union posed for the wider public was whether the pursuit of profit, invariably presented as 'progress,' should override all other claims."[84]

The labor union chose to employ the term 'green bans' to describe their actions because "green bans, unlike black bans, contained both an environmental element and a social element"; the term quickly became "emblematic of its wide cross-class support."[85]

While fighting for environmental protection, the union also adopted civil rights issues and developed diverse cross-class alliances. The unionists rallied for "prisoners, homosexuals, Aborigines, students, the women's movement, and poorer home buyers, even imposing a range of non-environmental bans in defense of these oppressed, marginalized, or vulnerable people."[86] The union activists joined forces with "New Left activists," "middle-class matrons," "inner-city pensioners, Marxist academics, hippies, housewives, and acclaimed writers and intellectuals" to create an unforeseeably successful alliance of labor, environmental, and civil rights activism.[87] The union and its supporters even staged protests against the U.S. war in Vietnam by building blockades for Australian students who defied the draft. In fact, union leader Jack Mundey was arrested not for his labor or ecological demands but for "intent to incite people to fail to register for National Service."[88] By supporting such a broad array of social movements under the flag of pro-ecological 'green bans,' this New South Wales labor union altered the way in which their community conceived of a healthy,

strong environment. The actions of the Builders Labourers' Federation are reflective of a wider trend, for many contemporary unions have begun to perceive of themselves as social movements.

Patrick White, an Australian author, has stated, "It is a rare thing to find a union with so advanced a social conscience."[89] This ambiguous comment, flaunted on the back cover of a book about the Builders Labourers' Federation's green bans, may suggest that labor unions do not normally have a social conscience. Yet, the rights labor unions traditionally strive for—living wages, safe working conditions, affordable health insurance—are clearly socially-minded; unions fight to establish these basic human rights as a precedent for all working people. Judging by the cover and other descriptions of the book, the 'advanced social conscience' of the construction union is attributed to its passion for ecological justice. If this is the message Patrick White intended to send, then he has revealed himself to be trapped within an exclusively middle-class activist mentality.

However, Patrick White was quite possibly referring to the cross-class nature of the union's activism. Inclusive cross-class action, like that of the Australian union, playfully draws from and encourages 'advanced social consciousnesses' by encouraging people and groups to recognize their relational positions in society and to develop a sense of shared fate. A realization of shared fate is crucial, especially when considering the environment; which social class does the

environment belong to? Middle class people claim environmental activism, but environmental devastation affects the poor first.

Moreover, the U.S. is obviously not the only country concerned with environmental justice. One of many global examples is the struggle in Brazil over rainforest preservation. In their article 'The Forest for the Trees,' Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger firmly connect police brutality against street children with Brazil's inability to conserve its rainforest.[90] The article emphasizes that environmentalists must expand their narrow concern of protecting nature. The rainforest would actually be better protected if environmentalists addressed police corruption, poverty, and "Brazil's desire to be an agricultural superpower, a UN Security Council member, or an industrial leader in biotechnology."[91] In many ways, the process of creating cross-class alliances within one nation-state is similar to the process of developing world-wide environmental action.

Conclusion: What can we do? Techniques for building cross-class alliances

To discover a way to reduce the impact of the cultural barrier between activist groups of different classes, it would be helpful to look at another event which many considered to be a success due to its cross-class and cross-culture nature. In 1986, a weeklong Tent City was created in Boston to encourage the city to create transitional housing for formerly homeless people. About fifty people moved into the Tent City and a couple hundred participated in daytime events. Betsy Leondar-Wright describes the event in her book, *Class Matters*: "We were about as cross-class as a group could be, and the gifts of the [low-income class, working-class, professional middle-class, and owning-class] were all ingredients in our success."[92] The homeless people who moved onto the site knew of the bakeries and stores that would give away food and one homeless woman gave a visionary speech that made many cry. The working-class participants assisted with logistics (like electricity and security) and called upon their vital connections in the city police and City Hall. Managerial types such as Betsy Leondar-Wright and other college-educated people took care of fundraising, media relations, and legal negotiations. Owning-class people volunteered full time to organize daytime programs and whimsical art activities which drew more attention to the site. With each class culture bringing distinct cultural assets to the event, "[the coalition] pulled off a miracle."[93] According to the demands of the Tent City, an unused building was transformed into transitional housing.

The 1986 Tent City in Boston reveals how distinct class cultures can combine to allow an activist event to reach more people and gain more goals. On a smaller scale, I have witnessed how my participation in the vigils of Arise for Social Justice may have encouraged some middle-class people (who otherwise would have ignored Arise's presence) to hear what Arise was advocating. My middle-class style seemed to convince these individuals to stop and talk; as was the case when I campaigned for ward representation in a wealthy neighborhood, some privileged people feel more comfortable talking with someone who is clearly of a similar class. As Leondar-Wright states, "there's no hiding our privilege"; we might as well be honest about our class backgrounds and use them to attract potential sympathizers.[94]

The Tent City and other cross-class events have brought success to social justice activism by promoting agendas that are agreeable to and supported by a clear cross-section of society. These events also encourage a level of cross-class interaction that promotes the adaptation of class consciousness; by finding rapport with those of different classes, people begin to alter their conceptions of how class works in the U.S. Knowing how effective cross-class activism can be, how can existing activist groups encourage alliances?

Although each class culture offers useful skills and assets to a coalition, different cultural habits also tend to deter potential alliances. A crucial step in negotiating a successful alliance is to recognize those aspects of one's culture which are off-putting or classist. Leondar-Wright wrote an article in which she

discussed facets of middle-class culture which low-income and working-class activists find “baffling, infuriating, intimidating or just plain weird.”[95] Although her advice is targeted towards middle-class activists seeking alliances with low-income activists, the logic of her argument may be applied to all social classes. She begins by stating that middle-class “alternative values can confuse us about who's the enemy…[For example, if] our alternative values lead us to be nonviolent, then we may see all hunters and all football players as the enemy, whatever their class.”[96] Assuming that one’s own middle-class lifestyle is superior will be correctly read as classism by low-income people.

Thus, coalition-builders must keep a critical eye on how they present their class to others. Leondar-Wright recommends differentiating between essential and inessential wierdnesses. While it may be essential for individuals to remain pro-gay rights, anti-racist, ambiguously gendered, or vegetarian even when these traits are considered ‘weird’ by others, it is not essential to press personal decisions upon others. This is “the line we cross too often, unnecessarily imposing a cultural weirdness on others. PMC activists, especially young radicals, make the mistake of imposing our own essential weirdnesses on mixed-culture groups.”[97] Examples of such impositions are serving all-vegan meals at a cross-class event or beginning a coalition meeting with a meditative breathing and chanting ritual. Cross-class alliances simply won’t be successful “without attention to the cultural nuances that alienate people from each other. If we care about our movement's size and strength, it's essential that we be no weirder than

we need to be."[98] The practice of observing our own alienating qualities also serves to further our realizations of how class functions in this society. Despite efforts to subdue class-specific oddities, cross-class coalitions should make activists uncomfortable at times. Discomfort then becomes one of the strongest teaching tools; this corresponds with Lugones' notion of a playful attitude. As Bernice Johnson Reagon, civil rights activist and founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock, has said about coalitions, "If you're comfortable, you ain't doing no coalescing."[99] It is time for activist groups to pursue cross-class alliances by seeking out partnerships that offer an educational level of discomfort. Such partnerships may be between groups that are geographically close, and thus have local political power to offer, but do not currently view each other as part of the same community. In these instances, it comes to mind that formal alliances between different class institutions would be beneficial.

Activists must approach alliances with an open mind, for cultural discomfort often paves the way towards an adaptation of class consciousness and expanded conceptions of the 'environment,' etc., as advocated by Fred Rose. Utilizing Rose's technique, it is prudent to consider the political sphere and the economic sphere as interlinked. From Marx to Bourdieu, social theorists have revealed that these spheres are quite elaborately entwined; activists must treat them as such. This is happening as labor unions become (or at least recognize) social movements. Additionally, cross-class activist groups may benefit from modeling themselves as multi-issue organizations (like Arise), and thus avoiding singular

approaches. Reinforcing cross-class interactions through formal, long-lasting affiliations between class institutions seems a logical plan of action.

Cross-class interactions would also benefit from applying Rose's technique of expanding language to the realms of activism and democracy. If U.S. society expanded its definition of effective democracy to include cross-class involvement in public activism, social justice would be realized at a faster rate. In this diverse (and globalized) society, conflict cannot be avoided. However, society can learn to deal with conflict in a productive way that provides equal agency to all people. If cross-class activism is encouraged on a large scale, people may finally begin to resolve conflict productively by integrating diverse activist passions into the patterns of democratic U.S. society.

CHAPTER THREE

ALLIANCES BETWEEN CLASS INSTITUTIONS

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day,
I can hear her breathing.
-Arundhati Roy

Introduction: Class institutions

The process of benefiting from cross-class alliances, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, would clearly be reinforced if formal alliances existed between certain class institutions. The products of cross-class alliances which I have discussed—achieving measures which do not reproduce capitalist class norms, transforming class consciousnesses, expanding activist languages, and altering notions of community— would affect far more people in far more meaningful ways if applied between class institutions. In this context, I define a 'class institution' as any group, organization, place, structure, or field which strongly connotes a specific socio-economic class and reproduces capitalist class structure by reaffirming the social roles of that particular class. Some examples of class institutions I will engage with are philanthropy (upper-class), academia (middle-class), and grassroots social justice organizations (low-income class).

Cross-class alliances between two or more class institutions have the strongest ability to foster productive class consciousness adaptation, which leads to just change and critical perceptions of capitalist class norms. Institutional alliances

are a significant commitment. Through this commitment, social fields of different classes compel themselves to engage in meaningful action with equal agency. These relationships are formal, long-lasting, and likely to have explicit intentions of undermining capitalist class barriers. The recognition that class consciousnesses *should* be altered provides the momentum behind this challenging commitment.

In my discussion of institutional cross-class alliances, I seek responses to an important question: through cross-class alliances, might class institutions succeed in undermining their roles as perpetuators of capitalist class structure? I envision that class institutions may embrace cross-class alliances as a way to redefine their classed nature. If class institutions can alter the ways in which they interact, perhaps their tendency to reproduce social norms will be thwarted. If class institutions can indeed subvert capitalism despite their inherently capitalist nature, then cross-class alliances will be a crucial tool in this process. For those who believe it is best (or at least worthwhile) to oppose capitalism 'from within,' cross-class alliances are a valuable practice.

In this chapter, I explore the possibility of institutional alteration by examining and imagining solid alliances between class institutions. I also consider 'exercises' in cross-class action, through which institutions attempt to diverge from their classed nature through cross-class action that may not be an explicit alliance. The middle-class institution of U.S. national parks, the upper/middle class institution of philanthropy, and the middle-class institution of academia will

be examined. Once again, can these institutions embrace alliances with low-income organizations to undermine their roles within the capitalist class system?

Potential for cross-class exercises in U.S. national parks

National parks in the U.S. are widely acknowledged as a middle-class institution because the parks are maintained by middle-class advocacy and visited primarily by middle-class families. However, the whiteness and middle-classness of the parks is also deeply rooted in the history of their development. The 'national treasures' and beautiful landscapes protected by park boundaries were once, of course, lands inhabited by Native Americans. As white settlers forced the Native Americans from their homes, they simultaneously embraced a rhetoric of 'Nature' which presented beautiful American landscapes as natural miracles; they were portrayed as empty space untouched and uninhabited by humans. Thus, the parks' history of violent displacement was forgotten and the land was made into a metaphor for America itself; the parks were "perceived as a representation of national ideals and national self-image… [The experience of the parks] ideally functioned as a ritual of incorporation, melding the body of the 'American' with the body of 'America.'"[100] In this illusion, both national parks and Americans are beautiful, naturally grand, and possibly God's greatest creation. Through the middle-class ritual of visiting parks, differences of race and class are "erased" and "maintained."[101] Just as identity conflicts are wiped away by the middle-class

attitude, race, class, and other conflicting differences play no role in the fantasy of the national park.

National parks are marketed as sacred, but who are they sacred for? From the very onset of national park tourism, the middle and upper classes were targeted to be the beneficiaries of the country's most striking vistas. Frederick Law Olmsted, father of American landscape architecture and designer of New York's Central Park, claims a theory of a "hierarchy of influence" to "have Nature provide a particular service to the middle class, but also to differentiate himself from the savage: 'The power of scenery to affect men is, in a large way, proportionate to the degree of their civilization.'"[102] In the wake of Olmsted's theory, parks are marketed to be of cultural significance only for the middle class; this marketing is not only revealed by the middle-class park admission prices and other structural gatekeepers, but also by the class institutions that bring tour groups to the parks, the magazines that advertise parks, and the decidedly middle-class nature of cultural artifacts like Monopoly: National Parks Edition. Over time, the violent history and homogenizing essence of national parks have morphed into a cultural phenomenon of the (equally homogenizing) middle class.

Shelton Johnson, a tour guide at Yosemite, agrees, observing that it is "an open secret that few members of ethnic minorities are interested in the national parks… If you go to Zion, Grand Canyon, Yellowstone or Yosemite … you find African American visitors are rarer than wildlife."[103] Johnson, an African American himself, has initiated a new type of tourism at Yosemite to encourage minorities to

feel welcome. While browsing through old primary documents, Johnson discovered a forgotten piece of history: in addition to the well-known white heroes of the Sierra Nevada, black men—the famous Buffalo Soldiers—patrolled Yosemite for several years in the late nineteenth century. To reinvigorate this history, Johnson offers a tour of the park in which he assumes the persona of a nineteenth century black park ranger, Sergeant Elizy Boman. ("In real life, Boman was really only a private, but I decided that after a hundred years, at least he could get a promotion," Johnson said.[104]) In addition to these special tours that highlight the forgotten role of African Americans, Johnson offers presentations in schools. After speaking about national parks at a school on a temporary assignment in Washington, D.C., he said, "it was like I was talking about Mars or Jupiter… The parks were not part of the young people's experience."[105] Clearly, speeches at inner-city schools are not the most effective way to share the experience of a national park. The students who hear this speech still face the same structural barriers to visiting the parks that they always have faced. In order to truly embrace Johnson's mission, national parks must take actions such as funding visits from low-income schools. Low-income students will best experience the park by witnessing Sergeant Elizy Boman on-site.

Johnson hopes that by highlighting the lost experiences of the Buffalo Soldiers, he can loosen the middle-class hold on the parks by "show[ing] ethnic minorities that the national parks are part of their heritage."[106] By celebrating the role of minorities, the park's function as a homogenizing metaphor for the U.S. is

weakened. So far, Johnson's popularity has revealed considerable success at increasing the social diversity of Yosemite tourists. Yosemite's chief ranger supports Johnson's mission, saying, "If we don't reach out to all the people in the United States, we are missing the boat in a democracy."[107]

After Yosemite's "transformation from indigenous space to capitalist space," allowing history to forget the role of black soldiers added further insult to justice.[108] I view Johnson's endeavor as an 'exercise' in cross-class action because he is attempting to redefine the classist and racist nature of a middle-class institution. By altering the clientele and the experience of visiting Yosemite, may the park alter its position within the capitalist system? By illuminating suppressed histories, can national parks actually counterbalance their cruel legacy? Possibly not. Johnson's attempt is not remotely enough to amend the past alone, but it is certainly an effort that is worth expanding. I include the example of national parks because it is one of countless U.S. cultural habits that seem harmless but in fact reinforce a history of discrimination. Unlike philanthropy or educational institutions, my next two examples, national parks are a seldom-considered phenomenon and are perceived to be apolitical. Acknowledging the role national parks play in unjust social reproduction allows one to more easily realize the similar role played by other cultural tendencies. Johnson's exercise in transforming a class institution is also an example for all groups that seek stronger cross-class action.

Social service and philanthropy

Social service and philanthropic agencies are further examples of class institutions that perpetuate capitalist class norms. Social service organizations provide deeply needed assistance, but neglect to question the larger systems of injustice that require their existence in the first place. David Wagner, author of *What's Love Got to Do with It? A Critical Look at American Charity*, asks:

> What if [Cesar] Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., Thomas Paine, Eugene V. Debs, Margaret Sanger or Mother Jones had been content to serve at soup kitchens or join a religious mission somewhere? What if they had become therapists or professional administrators? … [S]ocial-service approaches often individualize problems or divide classes and communities, removing collective struggle from the table.[109]

Arise for Social Justice is one organization that is quite familiar with this danger of perpetuating social norms through social service. Arise has often described itself as "not a service organization." However, although Arise seeks to alter systems of injustice the organization did not turn away people who knocked at the door in need of food, clothing, and shelter. In fact, I spent several long days at the old Arise office sorting through donated clothes to deliver to the Salvation Army, boxing donated canned goods, and helping a woman move out of an apartment which, until the move, had been paid for by Arise. These activities—which are very clearly social services—consumed time and energy, distracting Arise from its original intention to advocate for low-income people's rights. Arise eventually shut down its office to regain focus on this primary goal. The organization has recently moved into a new office with a renewed vision.

Social philanthropy is, in a way, the most extreme form of social service. Unlike Arise, social philanthropic organizations often have an explicit desire to fund social programs that offer services to low-income people. Although many philanthropic organizations work against reproduction of the status quo, philanthropy is a distinctly upper-to-middle-class institution that perpetuates injustices by accommodating the present capitalist class structure. As top-down mechanism for 'change,' philanthropy ensures that agency remains in the hands of the socially elite. Too often, philanthropy attempts a redistribution of wealth instead of a redistribution of power. By avoiding the roots of social problems, philanthropic social services engage in social reproduction.

An anthropology professor once told me a story that captures a defining aspect of social service organizations.[110] Imagine you are a doctor walking along a river. You hear a shout; turning, you see a wounded person struggling in the rapid waters. You dive in and pull the person to shore. Immediately, another floating body emerges from around the bend. You save this person as well but yet another is calling for help. For each person you rescue, many more come floating downriver. Some you can save, but many you cannot. Why, throughout this entire struggle, do you not walk around the bend to stop whoever is throwing these people into the river? Social service philanthropy is like this doctor, resistant to 'upriver' solutions.

Upriver solutions would be: to establish a living wage in addition to handing out turkeys at Thanksgiving; to build more schools instead of prisons; and to offer

affordable preventative health care instead of constructing more emergency rooms. Upriver solutions are successful because they incorporate a panoramic view of social problems. Could philanthropic organizations ever adopt this larger picture and encourage upriver change? Through cross-class alliances, could they relinquish their controlling grip over how their money is spent? If so, can philanthropy conceivably undermine its role as an elite, classist institution?

Some contemporary philanthropic organizations seem to be moving towards this goal. An article in *The New York Times* entitled, "Women's 'Cross-Class Alliance' Starts Foundation" describes a new theory of philanthropy: "[one] wealthy director gave $250,000 and another director scraped together a $10 gift. They helped create the New York Women's Foundation, a new philanthropy that says proudly it represents a "cross-class alliance of women from all over the city."[111] Other philanthropies such as the Haymarket People's Fund, the Women's Funding Network, and the Changemakers Fund profess similar ideologies. The Changemakers Fund states on its website that it focuses on "transforming philanthropy" by working "intentionally to (1) counter the status quo of inequality, injustice and oppression, and (2) unleash the capacity of communities to participate in philanthropic processes and decision-making."[112]

By including low-income board members and seeking community agency, these neo-philanthropies defy their traditional roles. Time will tell if these organizations can succeed in giving philanthropy a new reputation as a true "counter [to the] status quo" instead of its facilitator.

Reclassifying academia

The final class institution I would like to re-imagine through cross-class alliances is higher education in colleges and universities. Although college is purportedly an option for people of all social classes, it remains a conspicuously middle-to-upper-class ritual. The recent rises in tuition exacerbate this problem. College is incorporated into the capitalist class system in a very direct way, for higher education produces the professional-managerial class. College functions as a stage in the lives of middle-class people where they hone their ability to assume a position of leadership in society. An underlying value of middle-class society is the realization of individual potential; thus, the culture of individual achievement and individual celebration in college is particularly comfortable to a middle-class student. Academia is distinct from many other class institutions because it has an openly acknowledged capacity to affirm and alter class status. As mentioned in Chapter Two, higher education can possess a painfully transformative power:

> [The] working class occupies a structurally different relationship to the education system [than] other oppressed groups; being educated… is to change one's social class identity, in part if not in whole. The same does not hold true to the same degree for women, different ethnic groups or disabled people. No other group changes its identity by succeeding in education, to quite the same degree; no other group finds that school is about learning to be the opposite to what one is.[113]

Higher education performs the unspoken task of perpetuating and *rationalizing* class norms by denying non-middle-class cultures the freedom to be

simultaneously “what one is” *and* described as ‘educated.’

Problematic class dynamics are exaggerated by the complex matrix of workers on college campuses. In addition to professors and students, who either reinforce or produce a middle-class identity, a campus is a workplace for a multitude of non-middle-class workers. Those who clean the dormitories, repair the computers, cook the students’ food, maintain the grounds, fix the electrical problems, construct new buildings, and work as secretaries are routinely unacknowledged for their role in maintaining a successful institution. This under-appreciation appears in the anonymity of staff workers to the average student as well as in the salaries and benefits of staff members, which are far less lucrative than those of professors. The students who are most likely to have an understanding of this class matrix are those who themselves work on campus because they are lower-income and receive work-study jobs.

Thus, the college setting manufactures capitalist class norms and acts as a miniscule reflection of the class inequality in society at large. The cultural and structural barriers which allow academia to maintain an unequal class system should appear jarring in this society where education is proclaimed as a human right. Again, what would it take for the institution of academia to undermine its role as a perpetuator of the capitalist class system?

One meaningful place to engage with this question is the practice of community-based learning (CBL; sometimes called service learning) in colleges. Although such programs originated as service opportunities for students, most

current CBL programs embrace the notion that students will work cooperatively with community organizations to gain mutual assistance and knowledge. However, these interactions cannot be considered true cross-class alliances because the relationship is usually not reciprocal. Especially as CBL programs are now considered a "full-fledged movement," curriculums must ensure that reciprocity, rather than 'feel-good service,' is the goal; CBL programs may then become "an informed effort to help youth develop skills fundamental to the democratic pursuit of social change."[114]

Faith Kares, a 2003 graduate of Mount Holyoke College, wrote an honors thesis on the relationship between Mt. Holyoke and the Holyoke-based organizations involved in the CBL program. She employs the term 'unintended consequences' (coined by Keith Morton in "The Irony of Service: Charity, Project and Social Change in Learning") to describe the adverse effects of Mt. Holyoke students' CBL projects. Unintentionally, the students became strains upon the community organizations and reinforced some cultural and class barriers.[115] Curtis Ogden describes this process in his article "Going Beyond Service": "Service can take on an air of loftiness that perpetuates rather than rights imbalance… [We must have] a certain level of consciousness that takes us beyond the desire to help… This lack of awareness can have dire consequences, turning service upon itself, fracturing community rather than building it."[116] CBL projects can perpetuate imbalances by reinforcing the middle-class desire to feel good by helping the less fortunate; Kares' interviews with Mt. Holyoke CBL students

reveal that the (middle-class) students felt their CBL work was deeply appreciated. The Holyoke community organizations, on the other hand, felt that the students' need for direction was distracting; they often felt "used" as a subject of study and were reminded simultaneously that they were restricted to a lower realm of society and that the middle-class has little ability to perceive the realities of low-income life. [117]

Mt. Holyoke states that it shall teach its students through "purposeful engagement with the world." Yet, what could be *less* purposeful than simply perpetuating existing class dynamics? Kares questions if Mt. Holyoke's "theory," as outlined in the college's Mission Statement, is congruent with its "practice." Based on interviews with students and community members, she concludes that "there was a disjuncture in terms of the intentions behind many of the community service initiatives and the ways in which they were 'received' and perceived in Holyoke."[118]

My own CBL experiences at Mt. Holyoke support Kares' observations. While volunteering at Arise for Social Justice, I was indeed applauded by other students for "all the great work [I was] doing over there; they must really appreciate it!" Yet, the other two students who also worked with Arise and I knew quite well that we were benefiting disproportionately from the CBL relationship. I wrote in my CBL journal, "[when] a campaign has been active for years, it is impossible for three strangers to step in for one semester and make a significant contribution." Most of the work we did was inessential to Arise's campaigns, for we did not have

the necessary expertise and Arise did not have enough staff to spend time coaching us. As the three of us did what we could without disrupting the chaotic flow of action, we learned invaluable lessons about how a non-profit grassroots social justice organization must operate.

Although the tendency of CBL to reproduce class norms and slight community organizations is tremendously problematic, I am still an advocate of CBL programs. Within the practice of CBL lies a remarkable potential for equal-agency cross-class alliances. What would real alliances look like? What would they produce? If colleges embrace CBL programs that are more structurally beneficial to community organizations, perhaps they may subvert their capitalist class essence. In order for this to occur, CBL programs must serve organizations as the organizations wish to be served, not as the students deem appropriate. For the organization to have the flexibility to devote time and energy to directing students (and possibly co-designing curriculums), a salary should be offered. Organizations who participate in CBL programs are acting as professors to students; they should be paid as such. Leaders of these community organizations should also be invited to spend time on-campus, which would help to break down a campus' reputation as an exclusive, foreign territory.

Additionally, as Ogden stated, a "certain level of consciousness" must be fostered among students prior to CBL participation in order to ensure that they realize the true nature of their CBL interactions. For Ogden, the most profound CBL knowledge "came not from serving but from *not* serving. It was not the

process of development that called to me but dialogue with people and the constant questioning of my own assumptions."[119] The notion of constantly questioning one's own assumptions rings true with Lugones' concept of the playful attitude. If students are trained to approach CBL experiences with playful attitudes, effective world-traveling and the adaptation of class consciousnesses are more likely to occur.

Playful attitudes are impossible to foster if students treat CBL as a service opportunity. Even after the term 'service learning' expires, CBL programs must strive to dissuade philanthropic ideals, for there is no end to the form these ideals may take. One student presents his CBL experience: "I have learned that we need the homeless because we can learn a lot from them."[120] Although this student reflects the notion of reciprocity, he has failed to grasp the fact that CBL programs may become a force for social *change*. Instead of viewing the relationship between homeless community members and himself as a partnership for transformation, he used 'the homeless' to simply further his own academic path. He says this as if he hopes that 'the homeless' will be available to teach future students as well. When CBL is used in this way, it will indeed serve to maintain homelessness and other social norms. If this student had fostered a more playful attitude—if he had been more open to questioning his own motivations and risking his own self-identity—he would have interpreted his experience in a way which makes CBL learning an actual force for change.

In contrast, I will offer a CBL success story. At Mt. Holyoke, one CBL course option is called Inside-Out at Hampden County: Crisis and Transcendence. This course is co-facilitated by Professor Simone Davis and Lysette Navarro of Voices from Inside. Half of the students are from the Five Colleges (these are the students normally eligible to take Mt. Holyoke courses) and half are incarcerated women from Hampden County. To ensure that the course fosters an open-minded and peer-based atmosphere, students must have an interview with Professor Davis before being selected to enroll in the course. Creative writing and literary analysis are the academic focuses, although the course also educates participants about the injustices of U.S. prison institutions. The result is a truly collaborative classroom community. Although many different interpretations and levels of 'crisis' and 'transcendence' exist, I have observed that the transformative nature of the course itself represents one process of crisis and transcendence. As students interact, they tend to remain open to risking their own self-perception and embracing a playful attitude: "that openness to uncertainty that enables one to find in others one's own possibilities and theirs."[121] The personal crisis of being uncertain, of fearfully grasping for possibilities while self-questioning, becomes transcendence into a new self-understanding.

Although the experience is not completely unproblematic (some structural barriers still exist which seem to prevent many non-white incarcerated women from participating in the course), this course is a model CBL experience because: the interview process and the general atmosphere of the class lead to playful

attitudes and the equal consideration of Five College students and incarcerated students; the course redefines the notions of *who* should facilitate college courses and *who* is capable of taking them; and the course prepares students to address a crucial matter of social injustice. I consider successful CBL experiences such as this to be exercises in cross-class action which help to subvert the class-perpetuating role of higher education.

Colleges and universities are often hailed as a premium site for modern social transformation. CBL plays a large role in this transformative potential, but as Ogden states, “this will only be realized if we view it as such.”[122] CBL must explicitly subvert class norms if it is actually to become a successful force for change. Higher education may not be capable of denying capitalist reproduction outright, but it can certainly help promote a healthier, more just class matrix on individual campuses and in society at large. Now is the time to view educational institutions as “agents of change and social justice rather than instruments of social control and the status quo.”[123]

Conclusion: Changing the moral of the story

Class institutions can be considered stories within which all people are constantly acting. Through cross-class exercises and alliances which alter the setting, characters, and mood, the moral of the story can change even if the plot remains the same. Although class institutions are often defined by and defining of capitalist class norms, cross-class alliances can change who is included and what is learned within activist and institutional participation. The sociological and psychological effects of cross-class action, as described in the first two chapters, must be enforced throughout society at an institutional level. Especially as a country founded upon racial and class discrimination, the U.S. must learn the craft of transforming historic institutions with cruel, unjust legacies.

The practice of cross-class alliance-building is a plausible way to subvert capitalist class structure because it is a technique which works to destabilize the system from within. For those who believe radical change from without is less meaningful than (or less successful without) radical change from within, cross-class alliances offer an intriguing potential. The capacity of cross-class alliances is still unknown, for society has not pushed the practice to its limits. Still, it seems essential that alliances be attempted, especially in those realms of society which are particularly perpetuating of capitalist class norms.

While cultivating alliances, society must also engage in the process of redefining democracy, activism, and class institutions to make these concepts less resistant to just social change. All social realms are dominated by capital, but

these three realms are particularly effective places to put pressure on the system. To redefine these concepts, it is necessary to blend them together and view them within each other: democracy needs to embrace the culture of cross-class activism; activism must incorporate firm alliances between class institutions; and the adaptation of class consciousness should become a desirable effect of participation in cross-class democracy, activism, and institutional affiliation. U.S. society should disregard the antiquated notion that only certain types of people are activists and acknowledge that democracy would benefit if all people embraced cross-class activism as a common political routine. Cross-class activism would, in turn, achieve greater political, economic, and psychological change if supported through long-term institutional partnerships.

Our new culture of cross-class action will create liminal spaces where conflict is recognized and engaged with in a productive manner. These liminal spaces are cultivated in language, between social structures, and within people's minds. In the beginning of Chapter One, I mentioned that theorist J.K. Gibson-Graham advocates an imaginative exercise in creating inter-group discourse. In the same vein, Fred Rose's technique of finding a common language is another way to create a new liminal linguistic space. Of course, Rose reflects the problem that language will always be a step behind the change it creates. Although one may want to discount the interests/values tension as artificial, one must be slow to let go of this language for it is an accurate reflection of how the world is perceived. As a new common language is crafted, people will find their inner capacity to

translate across differences. By doing so class consciousnesses and class institutions will destabilize, allowing new self-understandings and social structures to rise from the uncertain ground. Lugones describes this process as "pilgrimages," which are

> movements of people that loosen the hold of the institutional, structural descriptions in the creation of liminal spaces…The possibilities of antistructural understandings of selves, relations, and realities became important to me…as a way to think of resisters to structural, institutionalized oppressions. I think of antistructural selves, relations, and practices as constituting space and time away from linear, univocal, and cohesive constructions of the social.[124]

Liminal languages and structures allow conflict to be illuminated and resolved with creativity and equal agency. The playful atmosphere of liminal spaces dissuades people from becoming "wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful, we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular 'world.' We *are there creatively.* We are not passive."[125] Creativity is at the core of successful cross-class alliances. If U.S. society would like to address its unjust legacies and its self-perpetuating unequal class system, it must embrace cross-class alliances to create educational, transformative spaces. As the realms of democracy and activism are complicated and re-imagined, a playful attitude must be maintained. This playfulness implies that coalition-building is somewhat like a game: struggle is unavoidable, but conflict is dealt with in a respectful manner and discomfort can be enjoyably energizing.

It is time to embark into a new social era of actively fostering a culture of cross-class action. Cross-class exercises and alliances are practices which grant a

hopeful pursuit of change and a powerful inter-class agency, "if one understands [them] as fitting":

> a variegated,
> dominated,
> in resistance to a variety of intermeshed and interlocking oppressions, aggregate that
> pulls in different ways,
> sometimes in unison,
> but more often in many directions,
> dispersed
> but "intent," in a loose sense of intentionality, on overcoming
> social fragmentation,
> the purity of language
> disembodiment,
> a unilinear history,
> mythical attachments to place or communities of the
> same.[126]

ENDNOTES

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[2] Ibid., 53.
[3] Ibid., 59.
[4] Thanks to Lauren Breunig for this analogy. The paraphrased statement about non-profit organizations is thanks to Kelly Garrett, Associate Director of the Rainwater Foundation.
[5] Here, it may be prudent to note that there have been two other notable usages of the term 'cross-class alliance' and I allude to neither. One is W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of a white cross-class alliance against a black political movement. The other is some Trotskyites use of the term to criticize popular fronts.
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[11] Ibid., 17.
[12] Ibid., 45.
[13] Ibid., 45.
[14] Ibid., 45.
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Hackman, Madeline L. Peters, and Ximena Zùñiga. New York: Routledge, 2000. 79-82. Beverly Tatum applies this metaphor to racism.

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[37] Ibid., 6.
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[40] Ibid., 220.
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[50] Wacquant, 221.
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[63] Ibid., 187.
[64] Ehrenreich, 5.
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[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid. Leondar-Wright adds that the hippie counter-culture movement of the 1960s and 1970s was "the pinnacle of inessential weirdnesses in US history" (ibid.). This movement made tremendous activist impact, but the all-inclusive 'people's movement' that was present in the hippie rhetoric was rarely backed up by real alliances.
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[119] Claus, 189.
[120] Ibid., 191.
[121] Lugones, 26.
[122] Claus, 69.
[123] Ibid., 90.
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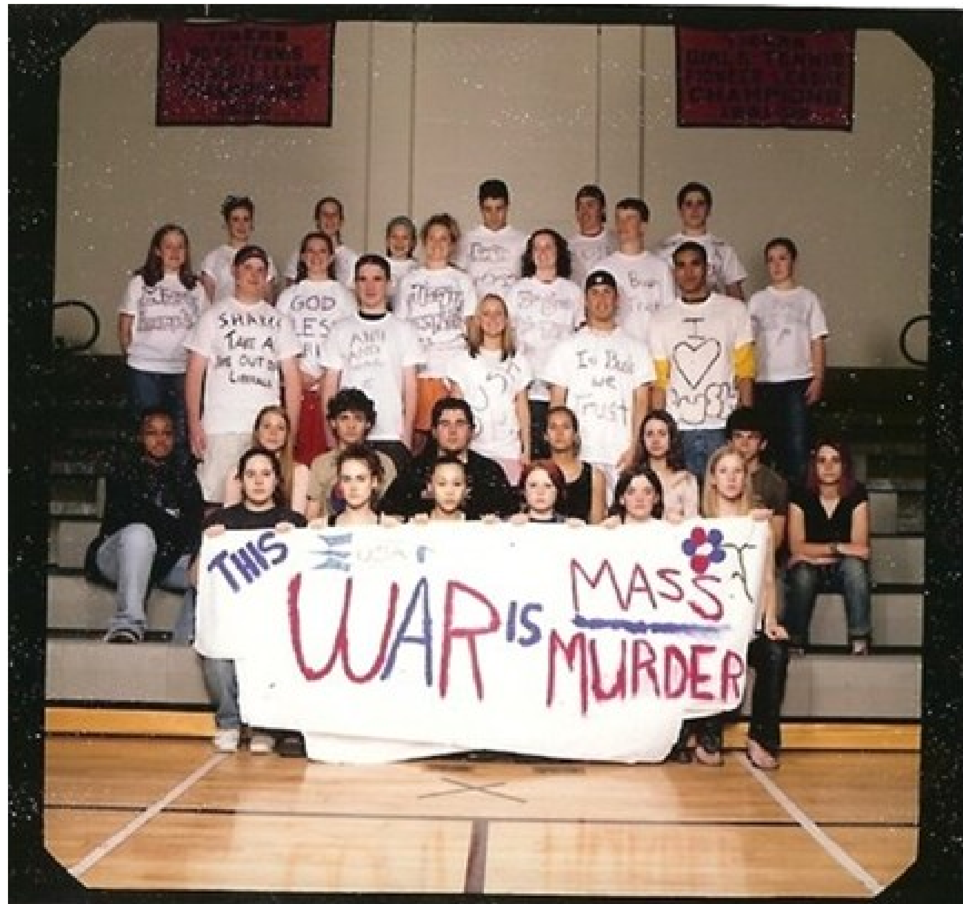
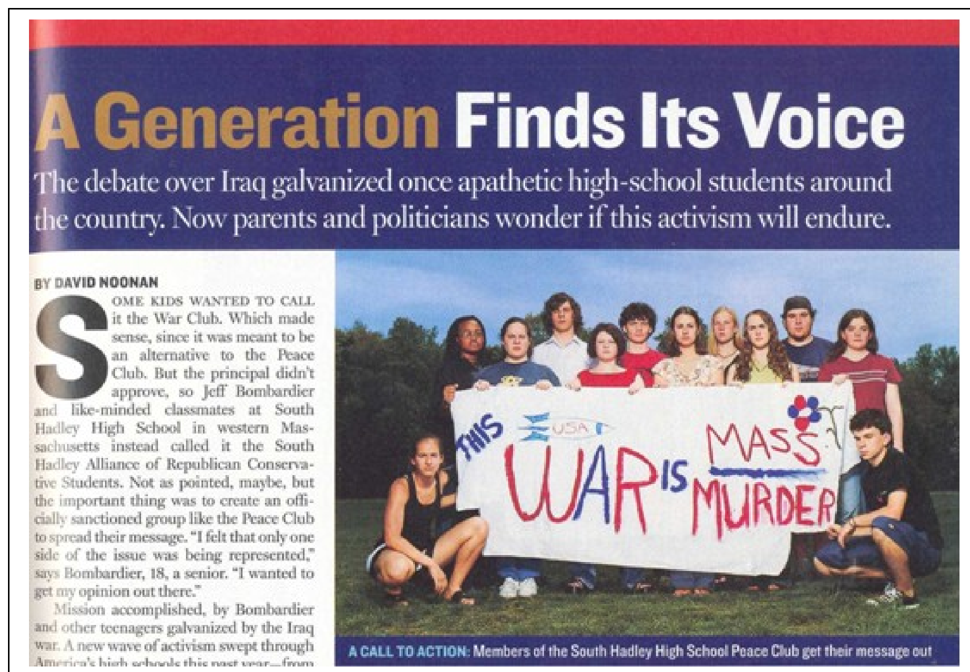
APPENDIX A:

PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SOUTH HADLEY PEACE CLUB AND THE SOUTH HADLEY ALLIANCE OF REPUBLICAN CONSERVATIVE STUDENTS

1) *Newsweek*'s unpublished test photograph featuring the Peace Club and the SHARCS



2) The article in *Newsweek* featuring the Peace Club



A Generation Finds Its Voice

The debate over Iraq galvanized once apathetic high-school students around the country. Now parents and politicians wonder if this activism will endure.

BY DAVID NOONAN

SOME KIDS WANTED TO CALL it the War Club. Which made sense, since it was meant to be an alternative to the Peace Club. But the principal didn't approve, so Jeff Bombardier and like-minded classmates at South Hadley High School in western Massachusetts instead called it the South Hadley Alliance of Republican Conservative Students. Not as pointed, maybe, but the important thing was to create an officially sanctioned group like the Peace Club to spread their message. "I felt that only one side of the issue was being represented," says Bombardier, 18, a senior. "I wanted to get my opinion out there."

Mission accomplished, by Bombardier and other teenagers galvanized by the Iraq war. A new wave of activism swept through America's high schools this past year—from

A CALL TO ACTION: Members of the South Hadley High School Peace Club get their message out