Stand Up for Social Justice

By Nathalie Gagnon-Joseph

Stand Up, a student group focused on social justice group based in Northeastern Vermont, has grown over the past year. Now in partnership with The Art House in Craftsbury, Stand Up has 501(c)3 status, holds regular meetings with students at Hazen Union High School in Hardwick, and has scheduled educational workshops for its volunteers and participants through the Peace & Justice Center.

In total, 17 high school and middle school students come to the weekly meetings. Six club advisors support the group’s programming.

One student expressed that Stand Up is a safe place where they can talk about themselves and topics that they are passionate about without being judged.

“Workshops are going to be really, really important for our students and for us so that we have tools that we can use,” said founder Rachel Wilson about the PJC’s Building Empathy and Addressing Racial Oppression workshop that she has organized for Stand Up volunteers and participants.

Stand Up has come a long way from its humble beginnings last year. It started as a simple notion of Wilson’s: “The idea started when I lived across the street from Hazen Union High School in Hardwick, and I would go across the street and go to soccer games and stuff,” Wilson said. “That’s when it hit me how few people of color live around here.”

With so few brown and black faces around, Wilson thought perhaps they might be going through what she also went through as a people of color in high school in Massachusetts: questioning their identity and wondering where they fit in a predominantly white landscape.

“I feel like I finally have some understanding and I want to give that to students as well,” she said.

She started with a closed group that offered a safe place for multicultural students to express themselves and find support.

Parents talked about the difficulties their children face. “She talked about seeing small things,” Wilson said about one mother who saw her adopted eight-year-old son edged out of groups at school, and her mother, who has braided hair all her life, to show a few techniques.

“It ended up being more therapy than actual hair doing,” Wilson said. “But it was great. It ended up being more about support.”

Parents talked about the difficulties their children face. “She talked about seeing small things,” Wilson said about one mother who saw her adopted eight-year-old son edged out of groups at school, and
In last fall’s PJC newsletter, we included our Educational Program Catalog. Since then, we have received many inquiries about bringing our work to various locations and institutions. We have said yes to classroom teachers, student groups, community centers, places of worship, college classes, and the UVM Medical School. We have had the honor of sharing information and learning with participants about trade agreements, how to talk about racism, non-violent theory and practice, and much more. In the past couple of months, we have been to Franklin, Chittenden, Caledonia, and Washington Counties and have plans now for programming in Bennington County in September.

Vermonters are looking for information and for ways to build and join movements. It is a great time to be at the Peace & Justice Center helping people connect the dots. We are inspired by the work people throughout the state are doing and thrilled to be a part of that work. We are grateful to our members and volunteers who make this work happen through donations and through deeds.

As we continue to support our mission by sharing educational programming with interested groups, we are training new facilitators. At a Prospective Facilitator Gathering in February, almost 30 people turned out to learn how to help lead these programs. Many of these attendees are now working through the process of becoming a PJC Facilitator. It is very exciting to have so many people interested in serving in this role and we can use more people to join in this effort – especially people outside Chittenden County.

To bring a workshop to your community or to discuss becoming a facilitator, please contact Kyle, Program Manager, at kyle@pjcvt.org or (802) 863-2345 x6. Our Program Catalog can be found on our website (pjcvt.org) under “What We Do.” Facilitators are paid for their time.

As we educate ourselves and other Vermonters about issues of oppression and injustice, we are building a movement of informed people who are motivated to join in whenever there are calls to action. We help people determine the best ways for them personally to contribute to lasting and meaningful change. Having conversations that address race and racism, becoming a more effective ally for people experiencing oppression, uniting with co-workers to change power dynamics in the workplace, changing personal and business purchasing habits, taking to the streets, working for beneficial legislative change, and so many other actions are of great value. Especially when they are all added together.

When overwhelmed by the amount of pain and injustice in the world, I hold on to a Helen Keller quote that my then eight-year old son shared with me: Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it. I invite you to find the actions that feel right to you as we work together to overcome the suffering inside ourselves, in our communities, and in the world.
ECHO’s Current XOXO Exhibit Seeks to Build on RACE Exhibit from 2012

By Nina Ridhibhinyo, Director of Programs & Exhibits, ECHO, Leamy Center for Lake Champlain

ECHO is perhaps best known in the community for our live animals and hands-on science exhibits. However, ECHO’s mission also includes the exploration of historical and cultural topics within the Lake Champlain Basin. This cross-disciplinary approach can be found in our permanent exhibits as well as our touring exhibits. Currently and through May 15, we are hosting the wonderful exhibit XOXO: An Exhibit About Love & Forgiveness from the Pittsburgh Children’s Museum.

Through facial expressions, words, movement, and art making, this exhibit provides visitors the opportunity to think about and explore feelings. Visitors can answer questions about love and forgiveness and tie them to a wall for others to read; build and explore a variety of facial expressions using empathy blocks; and speak into tone phones and watch how their voices affect shapes projected on a screen. ECHO chose to host XOXO, in part, because we recognized the opportunity to extend the work we began with the powerful RACE: Are We So Different? exhibit in 2012.

During RACE, ECHO hosted community conversations on diversity and inclusion; race and ethnicity; and identity during a series of special Saturdays. We also began an internal journey guided by CQ Strategies, an amazing group of local consultants, toward being a more culturally responsive organization. Through XOXO, we hoped to continue these internal and community conversations by exploring ideas of conflict, justice, and non-romantic love, but we also recognized we would need strong community partnerships to do so. Luckily, the perfect partner happens to be our Burlington Waterfront neighbor.

When our internal team began talking about our goals for a series of special XOXO Sundays, which would pair with our annual MLK Jr. Day celebration, we knew we wanted the Peace & Justice Center to be involved. What we didn’t know was what amazing partners they would be. When we first met with Rachel Siegel and Kyle Silliman-Smith we were blown away by their depth of knowledge, passion, and responsiveness. These are difficult, complex topics, and the PJC was willing to work with us to not just present information but to truly engage our family audience.

The result has been a partnership at three special XOXO program days at the museum, including MLK Jr. Day (which took place in January and hosted over 1200 community members), XOXO Special Sunday: Peace & Reconciliation (March 13th), and XOXO Special Sunday: Love the Earth (April 10th). During these days, PJC educators explore a history of children in movements for peace and teach families how to engage in conflict as a tool to better understand and connect to each other. PJC made these events truly meaningful community conversations, and we hope this is just the beginning of many collaborations to come.

You can learn more about XOXO: An Exhibit About Love & Forgiveness at www.echovt.org.

In Memorandum: Doug Dunbebin 1962-2016

I was shocked and saddened to learn about the sudden death of a great friend of the PJC, Doug Dunbebin. For years, well before the PJC could afford to buy a program to lay out the newsletter, he let me come across Church St to his office and spend the several days it took to lay out the newsletter each month.

About 16 years ago, Doug created the Peace & Justice Center’s logos, logos we still use today. Back then, these logos looked modern, sleek, neat, bold, and simple. They still look that way. Doug built them to last. He designed the layout for the newsletter, which we still use, and the logo for the PJC’s Vermont Livable Wage Campaign, along with bumper stickers, rack cards, brochures, and posters for us too. Because it made so much sense and harmony to him, the font he chose for the PJC logo was Humnins (sic).

It is said that image is important to the sustainability of an organization. Doug was one of the creators of our image. It is part of his legacy. This photo doesn’t show Doug’s twinkly eyes. Nor does it show his big heart. But Doug committed his life to peace and justice, a world and community where people were treated fairly and decently and with love and kindness. He shared those values with us and helped us share them with the community and world. Doug, we will miss you greatly. When you see our logo, think of Doug. I do.

--Wendy Coe, Office Manager and co-founder, PJC
“Bert Thompson – You are My Hero”

because you stood for peace,
you are my hero.

seeing war and the insanity
of the killing
you spent your life -- speaking
your truth for peace.

despite the travails and hardships
of life,
you were unwavering
for peace.

you were unbowed
and unafraid to roar
your valiant voice
for peace.

because you stood
for peace
you are my hero &
friend.

may your voice &
courage for peace
be heard for generations

and all will know
Bert Thompson
stood for peace.

****
much affection
Namaya
March 21, 2016

PJC Internships

Mae

I am thrilled to be working as the Peace & Justice Center’s Fair Trade Intern this semester. I’m currently finishing my senior year at UVM where I am majoring in Natural Resource Planning and minoring in Philosophy.

So far at the Peace & Justice Center, I’ve mostly been working on the store’s application to become a member of the Fair Trade Federation (FTF). This means compiling information about all of our vendors so that we can prove to the Federation that all of the goods we carry at the Peace & Justice Store meet the criteria of the nine FTF Principles. I’m enjoying learning about the artisans around the world who craft the eclectic things we sell in the shop and how fair trade practices have improved their lives and communities.

Daphne

Interning at the Peace & Justice Center has been insanely rewarding. When I first applied for the internship I went for the fair trade position because I thought that I wanted to go into sustainable business. I didn’t get that position and while that is still a great internship, I am so grateful for how it played out. I am the Programming intern supporting the Racial Justice, Peace Education, and Cost of War programs. I am learning about things I had no idea about before and it has completely opened my mind. Now, I have no idea what field I want to go into, but instead I am focusing on how I can expand my views and knowledge. If you intern at the Peace & Justice Center it will be worthwhile and may even change your life or your career path.

In Memorandum:
Bert Thompson
1954-2016

By Larry Hamilton

Bert was one of the four founders the Vermont chapter of Veterans for Peace. He rarely missed a meeting or any other activity, attended many of the national meetings, and was the creative force behind setting up our “Veterans for Peace” television show on VCAM. The show will continue and Dave Ross, his closest comrade in the group, will try to fill his boots. Bert had a special talent for making the show run smoothly, finding really great guests with the level of expertise that make the show a draw. The Peace & Justice Center work has been featured several times. The show is now seen in most of Vermont on Public Access and has worked itself up to being the station’s most downloaded program. We are all truly amazed at the diversity of people who watch us on a regular basis. He did a hell of a job in spite of many recent health problems. We will try to keep his legacy going.

PJC Summer Internships

Racial Justice: This intern works with the Program Manager and the Racial Justice Advisory Group to educate communities about institutional racism and white privilege. The Racial Justice intern will work with a variety of activists and campaigns.

Peace Education: This intern helps plan, promote, and organize our nonviolence education and anti-war programs. The Peace Education intern is primarily responsible for the PJC’s “Recruiting for Peace” program in local high schools around the state.

Fair Trade: This intern works in the Peace & Justice Store to provide Fair Trade information to customers. The Fair Trade intern also supports our Fair Trade education program, scheduling, planning, and giving presentations in the community.

Volunteer Program Development Internship: This is a practical, hands-on internship designed to develop volunteer recruitment, management, and retention tools. This internship is designed for someone who is considering a career in the non-profit sector.

The deadline for summer internships is April 14. The 12 week internship runs May 23 through mid-August. volunteer@pjcvt.org.
Cracking the Fair Trade Label

By Kristen Connors

I am thrilled to see more and more Fair Trade certified products on the grocery store shelves, and in other retail settings. Not only are more of these products available to consumers, but also the number of certifiers has grown. Currently in the United States there are four major groups: Fair Trade USA, Fair for Life, Fair Trade America, and the Small Producer Symbol. These certifiers have different standards they use to determine whether an organization complies with their Fair Trade principles.

Fair Trade USA (FTUSA): This is the oldest certifier in the USA. Originally the national branch of FLO, FTUSA split in 2011 to pursue its own certifications using different (mainly lowered) standards to certify producers. Fair trade certification was designed, first and foremost to give small producers and cooperatives access to global markets. However, FTUSA certifies large scale plantations even though these companies often crowd out smaller scale farms. FTUSA does not provide reoccurring audits to ensure fair standards are upheld by firms, or investigate fair labor practices along the supply chain. FTUSA requires a minimum of only 20% of ingredients used in multi-ingredient products be Fair Trade certified. FTUSA does set a minimum floor price for producers, and FT premiums on plantations are allocated through a committee comprised of labor and management representatives.

Fair Trade America (FTI): This is the new national branch of Fair Trade International. FTI requires the same percentage of Fair Trade certified ingredients in multi-ingredient foods as FTUSA. FTI reserves 50% of assembly seats in its governing body to organized small producers. FTI does permit some plantations to be certified, but excludes those producing coffee, cocoa, sugar, rice, cotton, and honey. FTI still only certifies small producers of these crops because it is these producers the fair trade movement was originally designed to help.

Fair For Life: Fair for Life audits the entire supply chain of a product to ensure each step of production meets fair and equal labor standards as detailed by the International Labor Organization. Fair for Life requires that multi-ingredient products contain 80% Fair Trade certified ingredients. Fair for Life will certify plantations in any industry, but the workers on large farms may establish committees to allocate premiums with no management presence. This maintains worker control of money intended to be put aside for community development projects.

Small Producers Symbol (SPP): In accordance with the original intent of the fair trade movement, SPP only certifies small farmers and small producers. They have established minimum floor prices and they run audits to screen out producers with labor or environmental violations. They require that multi-ingredient products contain at least 50% Fair Trade certified products.

In conclusion, each of these certifying agencies has different standards and practices to determine if goods are being produced using accepted fair trade standards. Each agency has clearly defined priorities within the core fair trade principles. So now, when you find yourself comparing different fair trade products, I hope you’ll feel confident enough to make a decision that aligns best with your own principles and priorities.

Sources:

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\(^1\)This is less relevant with small producers.

\(^2\)Very few products from these producers are multi-ingredient.

\(^3\)By definition Small Producers does not certify plantations.
2016 Legislative Review

By Dylan Kelley

Paid Sick Leave

Vermont is now the fifth state in the country to mandate employees eighteen and older receive paid sick leave from employers. We have joined California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Oregon who have similar legislation: Vermont House Bill 187 will affect roughly 60,000 workers across the Green Mountain State will benefit. Following a contested journey through the legislature (including a heated debate around exemptions for the small businesses that make up the vast majority of Vermont’s localized economies), the new law will take effect on New Year’s Day, 2017.

Primarily impacting low-wage workers in the service industry, the final signing of this bill in the House Chamber on March 9th was the product of a decade long fight by progressive voices across the state spearheaded by the Vermont Paid Sick Days Coalition, a group of grassroots organizations comprised of Voices for Vermont’s Children, Main Street Alliance, Rights and Democracy, Early Childhood Alliance, Vermont Commission on Women, VT-NEA, United Professions/AFT, the Vermont Workers’ Center, and the Peace & Justice Center among many others.

Throughout their ultimately successful campaign, the Coalition frequently spoke and wrote of the severe consequences for working class children and families when faced with the difficult decision of missing work to tend to a sick child, leaving them at home alone, or sending them to school or childcare centers while ill. “The overall consequences for these families are felt in their overall health and well-being and can result in serious financial hardship. Guaranteeing the right to earn paid sick days benefits everybody. Paid time off for health care is good for workers and their families, good for employers, and critical to public health and safety,” the coalition wrote.

The passage of H. 187 has also garnered praise from local and national political elites: “This is consistent with Vermonter’s values, and it poses a significant public health improvement,” said Governor Peter Shumlin upon signing the bill into law. In Washington, President Obama took a moment to acknowledge the important role of the Green Mountain State. “I’m once again calling on Congress to help us catch up with other advanced nations and provide this basic security to all Americans. Until Congress acts, I urge other states to follow Vermont’s lead,” the President said.

Marijuana Legalization

By far the most talked about and most controversial legislation of the year has been S. 241, the legalization and state regulation of recreational marijuana. Already passed in Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, as well as the District of Columbia, the legalization of pot in Vermont appears to be more of a question of “when” rather than “if.” Vermont’s version of legalization narrowly passed the State Senate on February 24, but isn’t expected to be heard by the House until April due to the raft of budget and tax bills on the docket.

The big question now is, will that delay work toward the adoption or rejection of the legalization bill offered by the Senate? As of this writing, S. 241 is expected to have a difficult road ahead despite support from Speaker Shap Smith and Governor Shumlin. Vermont presidential candidate Bernie Sanders also supports legalization and has long been in favor of dropping the federal classification of cannabis as a Schedule 1 narcotic, a classification that controversially places marijuana in the same category as heroin, LSD, and methamphetamine.

Following a total of eight public forums and countless testimonies for and against the bill it currently allows for Vermonter residents aged 21 and up to possess up to one ounce of cannabis (with non-residents being limited to one quarter ounce) and imposes a 25% sales tax. Taking into account data showing that about 80,000 Vermonter use marijuana on a monthly basis, this sales tax looks to generate between $20 and $225 million annually. The sales tax estimate varies wildly due to speculation of the currently unregulated market. The revenue will be allocated to drug abuse prevention and treatment programs across the state.

Opponents of the bill point to Vermont’s growing addiction to opiates and say that the legalization of one drug while fighting the increasing usage of another doesn’t make sense. During a recent conversation on VPR’s Vermont Edition, Speaker Smith, despite mostly supporting the bill, said there are enough unanswered questions around home cultivation and regulation of retail outlets to make him wonder if the bill was “ready for prime time.”

Perhaps embodying both support and the opposition to legalization is Bennington Senator Dick Sears. Sears, who was long seen as one of the primary opponents of S. 241, spoke in support of the bill at the end of an hour long debate in the Senate chamber. After questioning the legitimacy and effectiveness of prohibition of marijuana, Sears concluded, “I believe S.241 is a rational approach to the failed policy of today.”

Electronic Communications Privacy Act

While Paid Sick Leave and Marijuana Legalization dominate the headlines, there is one other bill that is slowly making its way through committees in the House having been passed unanimously by the Senate earlier this session. S.155, also known as the Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA), seeks to put concrete restrictions on the use, gathering, and dissemination of electronic records in four key areas. The most relevant to the PJC of these are the new restrictions regarding the use and retention of information gathered by means of unmanned aerial vehicles or what we commonly refer to as “drones.”

Coming in the midst of a growing national debate on the use of drones abroad (not to mention the recent Pentagon report justifying the use of military spy drones over American soil), the bill would require law enforcement agencies to obtain a warrant before using a drone to conduct surveillance for investigative purposes and dictates that any information gathered during surveillance without a warrant
would be inadmissible as evidence in court. The ECPA would also require mandatory reporting procedures regarding any deployment of drones by law enforcement, any data gathered by these deployments, and mandatory disclosures of funding that enabled the use of a drone by the deploying agency.

Despite these new requirements and restrictions on the use of drones, Allen Gilbert of the VT-ACLU remains concerned about a new philosophy of “guilty until proven innocent” that may result from the increasing use of the remote aircraft by law enforcement. “Basically the electronic privacy bill codifies what current practice is,” said Gilbert in a statement to Vermont Digger founder Anne Galloway. “The one thing that has come out of all this is that everyone should be concerned about much greater surveillance in the future,” he said.

We would also like to point out that the use of automated systems by law enforcement to monitor the civilian population does not end with police use of flying robots. Another key provision of Vermont’s ECPA is new restrictions on the retention and use of data gathered from Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs), the tiny scanners now commonly seen on police vehicles across Vermont. Capable of scanning thousands of plates an hour, these seemingly innocuous black boxes conducted 8 million scans of vehicles across the state last year and (in the process) recorded time-date-location information on countless Vermonters.

Commenting on the difficulty of keeping up with the pace of emerging surveillance capabilities, ACLU senior policy analyst Jay Stanley told USA Today, “Sometimes, new technology changes so rapidly that existing law no longer fits what people think is appropriate” ☝️

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State of Vermont
House of Representatives

Concurrent House Resolution
H.C.R. 242

Whereas, the murder of Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012 in Florida sparked outrage in the Black community, and
Whereas, a strong perception following this homicide that the nation placed a low value on the lives of Black Americans led Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors to form the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), and,
Whereas, BLM was formed to affirm Black Americans’ humanity and resilience in the face of deadly oppression, and
Whereas, the killing of Michael Brown, 18 years of age, in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014, ignited major growth in BLM, and
Whereas, the deaths of at least 102 unarmed Black Americans in 2015 reaffirmed the continuing crisis in the relationship between Black Americans and law enforcement officials, and
Whereas, BLM focuses its work on diversity, restorative justice, and being unapologetically Black, and
Whereas, the repeated incidents of violence against Black Americans have demonstrated the core reason the BLM was established, and
Whereas, BLM supporters in Vermont, who include members of all races, have stood in solidarity with this nationwide movement, and
Whereas, only 1.2 percent of Vermonters are Black and still face discrimination in many aspects of their daily lives, and
Whereas, the General Assembly has acknowledged the problems Black Vermonters encounter with public safety officials, and in 2012 and 2014, the General Assembly enacted legislation leading to the establishment of bias-free policing, and a greater law enforcement awareness and readiness to adopt those policies, and
Whereas, the Vermont Black Lives Matter movement has spurred a continuing dialogue to ensure that all Vermonters are guaranteed fundamental civil rights and equity, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:
That the General Assembly recognizes the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and Vermont Black communities, and be it further

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to Shela Linton, Ebony Nyoni, and Mark Hughes. ☝️

Last year, Governor Shumlin declared February 12 to be Black Lives Matter Day. This year, in honor of the second anniversary thereof, community organizers Ebony Nyoni, Mark Hughes and Shela Linton worked with legislators to pass the above Resolution.
Book Suggestions for Young People

Reviewed by Rachel Siegel

Return to Sender
by Julia Alvarez
5-9th grade

The story focuses on the relationship between a 12-year old daughter of a Mexican farm worker in Vermont and the 12-year old son of the white farm owner. Assumptions, stereotypes, power dynamics, xenophobia, capitalism, immigration, and more are explored in ways that are accessible to kids. The writing is exquisite, as one would expect who has read Alvarez’s adult books. Warning: The girl’s mother is captured crossing the border and spends many months enslaved by traffickers. The descriptions of her experience and the resulting trauma are not graphic, but they are explicit. I was glad I read the book out loud with my 11-year old and I admit to omitting a couple specific details. We are so fortunate to have such a gifted and accomplished author as Ms. Alvarez here in Vermont and writing about this very topical issue. Even if you don’t have a young person to read it with, I highly recommend it.

A Long Walk to Water: Based on a True Story
by Linda Sue Park
4th-8th grade

Two narratives alternate in this heartbreaking, yet hopeful story. It is a look at reality in South Sudan. One story takes place in 1985 and tells of an 11-year old boy fleeing violence and the other is of an 11-year old girl in 2008 whose life is structured around a four hour walk each direction every day to fetch water. The details of war and survival in the dessert are spelled out in straightforward ways that I found very upsetting, but that my son absorbed and transformed into his own desire to do social justice and peace work. The stories come together in the end in an uplifting, but not Pollyannic, conclusion. I was glad we read the book together because we often refer back to it when he is struggling. We remember that we just have to get to the next marker on our journey and not get overwhelmed by the magnitude of any given issue, struggle, or journey.

Number the Stars
by Lois Lowry
3-7th grade

The story of a 10-year old Jewish girl living in Denmark during WWII and the inspiring work of the Danish Resistance who smuggled her and thousands of others out of the country. The book is completely accessible to children, but does not shy from the truth. Subplots about friendships and family dynamics held my eight year old’s attention as he was drawn in, slowly at first, and then thoroughly, to the political story. He especially loved this book because he deeply identifies as a Jew, but I am confident that this book would reach anyone’s heart. Special thanks to Amy LaChance, his teacher who introduced the book to him. He was so enthralled with the book that he brought it home and wanted to read it again with me so we could share the experience.

Reviewed by Guthrie Smith

X: A Novel
by Ilyasah Shabazz & Kekla Magoon
8th grade and up

I am Malcolm. I am my father’s son. But to be my father’s son means that they will always come for me. They will always come for me, and I will always succumb.

This novel, co-written by Malcolm X’s third daughter, Ilyasah, follows Malcolm through his childhood, ending with his imprisonment for theft at age 20. It is written with young Malcolm Little’s voice, feeling betrayed by the world, deeply rejecting his father’s activism on behalf of blacks, and looking to find freedom in illegal ventures, “making the most” of his situation as a black man. His intelligence and deep love for family, and the words of his father, remain with him throughout his escapades, but don’t find their way to guiding his life until his incarceration. Here, with the reaffirmation of his Muslim faith, his vow to spend the rest of his life fighting against society’s grave injustice for blacks, Malcolm X emerges.

I can’t think of a more appropriate time for a book about the early years of Malcolm X. Racism hasn’t receded. It has evolved into an often hidden belief and as such, it tends to explode when ignited. I hope this story inspires a new generation of activists to step into what remains a vital and deep-rooted issue.

All of these books are available at the peace & justice store
Women and the War on Drugs

By Robin Lloyd

I first smoked marijuana when I was 30 years old. I found it to be more fun than alcohol. And more spiritual. It reminded me why I became a Quaker. It helped me see the inner light in people.

The next realization was that it was insane to make this simple plant illegal. In reading books on the subject I learned a surprising fact: the legal prohibition of cannabis, coca, and poppy plants is determined at the highest level, not by God, since after all Jesus used a cannabis extract in healing, but by the UN’s Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961. In 1970, Richard Nixon signed the legislation implementing national prohibition in compliance with the convention: the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act.

So just to make that clear, US drug policy is determined by a United Nations Convention.

A potentially momentous reconsideration of that convention will be taking place this April in NYC at the second United National General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS).

I attended the first UNGASS in 1998 as part of the effort by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to change policy and especially to assert our position that ending the war on drugs is a women’s issue. Why? There are many things wrong with this War – its racism, its reliance on military solutions – but one that is not frequently mentioned is its impact on women.

The War on Drugs condones a form of macho violence. In earlier decades, that violence was played out between cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, then now it’s the DEA and narco traffickers. The war allows men to find an excuse to be violent and to militarize our society. Women lose in times of war, no matter what George Bush says.

And what are the results of criminalizing a natural human desire to change consciousness? A massive international slush fund of illegal money funding broth-...
April 10, Sunday
1:30-2:30pm, Children in Nonviolence Movements for Peace at the ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain, Burlington. Nonviolence education, whether for kids or adults, is an essential building block for peace building. Students may know a bit about Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Cesar Chavez, but what about the strategy of the movements they were a part of? What is nonviolence in action? Rachel Siegel will lead this program on how young people can be, and have been, leaders in social justice movements. This program is being offered as part of the ECHO Center’s full day of activities relating to a Love the Earth theme. All ages are welcome!

April 10, Sunday
4:30pm to 5:30pm, “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness” Book Discussion Group at South Burlington High School. This book, written by Michelle Alexander, examines institutional racism in the United States and how it relates to and has evolved from previous oppressive laws, such as slavery and Jim Crow policies. In order to get the full benefit of this program, participants are asked to read the book in its entirety and attend both sessions. This program is presented in partnership with the Student Diversity Union at South Burlington High School. To RSVP call 863-2345 x6 or e-mail program@pjcvt.org. FREE.

April 11, Saturday
7pm Ideas on Tap: Between the World and Me at ArtsRiot, Pine St, Burlington. Dr. Emily Bernard leads a discussion of the landmark book by Ta-Nehisi Coates, winner of the 2015 National Book Award. It is written as a letter to Coates’s son and has garnered a huge amount of attention for its unflinching take on the legacy of racism in America. Co-sponsored by the Peace & Justice Center. For more info visit VT Humanities Council’s website vermonthumanities.org/events.

April 11, Wednesday
4:30-close, Bluebird BBQ Community Night to support PJC, 317 Riverside Ave, Burlington. Bluebird Barbecue will be donating 10% of the entire evening’s sales to the Peace & Justice Center. Have a nice night out and help support our work.

April 15, Friday
11am Penny Poll on Church Street in Burlington. This Tax Day, participate in our Penny Poll as part of this Day of Action Against Military Spending. We will have jars with different government programs (human services, agriculture, etc.) and people will have the opportunity to distribute ten pennies into the jars to show us how they would like the discretionary budget to be distributed. After completing the poll, participants will find out how the funds are currently distributed and be entered in a raffle to win a fabulous prize. This event is presented in partnership with the Will Miller Chapter of Green Mountain Veterans for Peace. For more information please contact Kyle at program@pjcvt.org or (802) 863-2345 x6.

April 24, Sunday
1pm Poetry Reading and Book Signing: author Alexis Lathem will be reading selections from her book “Alphabet of Bones” at the Peace & Justice Center. See her website for further information. (http://windridgebooks.org/shop-our-books/alpha-bet-of-bones).

April 28, Monday
4:30pm, Nonviolent Activism 101 at Kellogg-Hubbard Library, 6 Lincoln St, Essex Junction. Facilitators Francine Serwili-Ngunga and Kyle Stillman-Smith will lead workshop participants through this labyrinth of challenges including how to identify and acknowledge racial bias and create tools and guidelines that help undo racism within their community. It is essential to the work that folks attend all three parts of this workshop. The first session will focus on the concept of white fragility, the struggle for dominant communities to tolerate discussions on race without feeling shame, guilt, or victimization. The second session dives into myths and stereotypes in order to identify subconscious bias and how these biases affect our daily lives. The final session offers tools and guidelines for action in order to reaffirm our commitment to creating and supporting an anti-oppressive society. Space is limited so we highly recommend registering. Register online at pjcvt.org or for more information or to register over the phone call 863-2345 x6. FREE.

May 10 & 17, Tuesdays
3:30pm to 5:30pm, Building Empathy and Addressing Racial Oppression at Brownell Library, 6 Lincoln St, Essex Junction. Participants Francine Serwili-Ngunga and Kyle Stillman-Smith will lead workshop participants through this labyrinth of challenges including how to identify and acknowledge racial bias and create tools and guidelines that help undo racism within their community. It is essential to the work that folks attend all three parts of this workshop. The first session will focus on the concept of white fragility, the struggle for dominant communities to tolerate discussions on race without feeling shame, guilt, or victimization. The second session dives into myths and stereotypes in order to identify subconscious bias and how these biases affect our daily lives. The final session offers tools and guidelines for action in order to reaffirm our commitment to creating and supporting an anti-oppressive society. Space is limited so we highly recommend registering. Register online at pjcvt.org or for more information or to register over the phone call 863-2345 x6. FREE.

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May 25, June 1 & 8, Wednesdays
6:30pm to 8:30pm, Vermont Youth Conference at Burlington College, 351 North Ave, Burlington. Spectrum’s Multicultural Youth Program and Diversity Rocks! invite anyone between ages 14-24 from Chittenden County to join in a day-long conference. This program is planned by youth for youth. Participants will have the opportunity to connect with their peers, address issues facing youth, and learn how to use their passions to be more involved in their communities and schools. The conference will be topped off by a Dance Party with a local DJ! The Peace & Justice Center is delighted to be leading a workshop on engaging in conflict for peace as part of the programming for this day. Check out the Facebook Event.
CALENDAR

exploring violence and systems of oppression in order to have a meaningful understanding of how a nonviolent strategy is effective in taking on violence. In the second half of the day, participants will work together to practice developing a coordinated nonviolent response to a particular oppressive policy, institution, structure, and/or practice within the community. We are looking forward to learning with all participants and building skills and strategy to lift up movements and local efforts that contribute to a just and peaceful world. RSVP at 863-2345 x6. FREE.

June 12, Sunday

Vermont Loving Day. The Loving v. Virginia (1967) decision legalized interracial marriage and other relationships in the United States. It is truly a milestone in the history of civil rights. From the decision: “Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual and cannot be infringed by the State.” Details, including date, will be finalized closer to the event, visit pjcvt.org or Vermont Loving Day on Facebook for updated information.

Sessions and Speakers

The Fair Trade Federation (FTF) Conference brings together speakers and presenters from a variety of backgrounds. The focus is on providing businesses with practical knowledge and skills while also inspiring community and deepening understanding of fair trade as an important global movement. The Conference will be held at the Burlington Hilton Hotel. More info at http://www.fairtradefederation.org.

Plenary speakers include Ben Cohen, Ben & Jerry’s, Radical Entrepreneurism: Doing Business Differently; Doug Lapp, Ten Thousand Villages, Creating Change in Artisan Communities; and Rick Peyser, Lutheran World Relief, Fighting Food Insecurity: Stories from the Field.

Alphabet of Bones

In 1994 I wandered into the Peace & Justice Center for the first time to attend an open meeting hosted by the Native Forest Network. It was there that I learned about an Innu community on the north shore of Quebec who were soliciting support for their campaign to stop a massive hydro project on their land, Hydro Quebec’s SM3 project. Over the next several years I continued to work with the support of the PJC and other groups in solidarity with First Nations movements in Quebec and Labrador, in response to what amounted to a massive industrial assault on the rivers and forests of the north.

While I have continued to report on hydroelectric development in Quebec and Labrador (my feature article on HQ’s current Romaine River project appeared in Canada’s Alternatives Journal in 2014), I have also explored through poetry what it means to be a human being living through an age of mass extinction – not only of species, but also of cultures that had endured for thousands of years – and to bear witness to the unprecedented assault upon the natural world that is all around us.

Alexis Lathem will read poetry from Alphabet of Bones with musical accompaniment by the Herttua/Carroll jazz duo, show slides and read selections from her nonfiction writings on hydroelectric development in the northlands. Sunday, April 24, 4 pm. Peace & Justice Store.

And far behind the eyes
an ancient river valley
fills up with water
drowning an ancient
alphabet of bones.

– from the title poem in Alphabet of Bones
(Wind Ridge 2015)
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World Fair Trade Day
May 7th, 2016, 10am-2pm

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