

Undocumented Immigration: What Women in Mexico Have to Say

As presented in part at the SWAA 2008 Houston conference

Since 2006, I have lived and worked on both sides of the United States-Mexico border, researching the impact of undocumented immigration to the U.S. on women left behind in rural areas. Across 18 communities and two states in Central Mexico, I have talked to community leaders, organizers, farmers, activists, mothers and daughters, and I have conducted an additional 65 formal interviews with women whose family members have left them to make what money they can in the United States.

The interviews uncover a disconnect between what women in rural Mexico want and need in terms of transnational migration and the direction of U.S. debate and policy. No woman that participated in the formal interviews or that I talked to informally felt that what they needed to do to improve their economic condition was to make better individual choices, work harder, or stay in school longer, as would be common in the U.S. (McCarty, in press). They talked about policy, with at times a sophisticated knowledge of Mexico's complicated political system. They wanted living wage jobs, more accessible educational opportunities and real representation by their "elected" leaders. They wanted a means by which to be organized as women to better address their needs and the needs of their children. And, while discussing the issues faced by undocumented workers in the U.S., not one woman talked about wanting a "path to U.S. citizenship" for themselves or their family. They did, however, talk consistently and with great force about wanting time-limited legal opportunities for work for their husbands and loved ones, contracts and rules established to protect the worker and to keep them safe in the U.S., and the ability to return home.

Unfortunately, just the opposite is happening. NAFTA and other "free trade" agreements have shifted rural agricultural production in Mexico from family and community farming to giant agribusiness, displacing more and more people from their traditional ways and means of survival. It is difficult to leave your family, friends and country for a new land that could hardly be more different. Few people could or would do it unless their desperation overcomes their fears. But the people of

rural Mexico are desperate. The ideology of having free markets for capital and closed borders for workers runs afoul of an iron law of human nature: law or no law, treaty or no treaty, displaced workers go where they can find work.

The U.S. response to the resulting tide of displaced rural Mexicans crossing the border has made it harder and more dangerous to cross the border. While migration to the U.S. is now the only real opportunity left available for many women and men in rural central Mexico, this tightening of the border has created a boon for traffickers, coyotes, and the system that supports their activities. Those I interviewed had to pay coyotes an average of \$2,700 to get as far as San Antonio. The migrants that survive, avoid *la migra*, and make it to the U.S. are in great debt to a person who has every intention of collecting. The difficulties and expense of crossing an increasingly militarized border naturally make immigrants without documents reluctant to risk a return to Mexico for visits, so the decision to emigrate is seen more and more as irrevocable.

But it is easy to focus on the problems and miss the signs of solutions bubbling up from below. The most encouraging theme from the interviews was the self-organized response of women to the increasing number of their teenage and young adult children being pushed to the U.S. The women were preoccupied with the welfare of their children, but they were doing more than worrying. Despite significant cultural barriers to the empowerment of women in Mexico, many were engaged in remarkable collective initiatives.

I interviewed and spent time with multiple cooperatives of women in various stages of development and operation, women working not only to support their families in Mexico but driven to imagine and construct alternative means of survival. They were building new structures of meaningful work that are not dependent upon the whims of international capitalism, cooperative endeavors that will keep their children

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Editor's Comments

As I write this, the eyes of the nation are focused on the economic crisis and the presidential election. By the time most of you read this, the election will be over, and the potential for mass celebration or mass protest seem equally possible, depending upon the outcome.

Unfortunately, the scheduling of this newsletter's publication does not yet allow us to be very responsive to the immediate issues facing the public welfare state and the struggles to make it more humane and effective. Indeed, most of this issue's content was solicited following the SWAA Conference last April.

Regardless of the outcome of the national and regional elections, there will be much to consider about what is next for progressive human service workers, academics and activists. It is my hope that the next issue, due in January, can speak to the future of our struggle given the political realities we will face. I strongly encourage new voices to submit content about what they see as the challenges and opportunities in both the near and distant future.

Also, I am seeking new quotations, graphics, icons, and so on to help fill out the pages of BCR Reports. You can send me your ideas and contributions to bikerbillboyd@hotmail.com.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to Susan Allen, Heather Greene, Peter Kindle, Don Schweitzer, John Sinclair and Laura Walther for their assistance in editing this edition. Sometimes I find the newsletter a lonely responsibility, so it is nice to have company.

I also want to extend my thanks to SWAA Conference 2008 presenters Dawn McCarty, Elena Delavega and Gary E May for submitting content to this edition. The Houston Conference was well organized and executed, and many thanks to the conference committee and presenters for their hard work.

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What About The 2009 Conference?

Many hands are busy planning and preparing for a SWAA Conference in the Spring or Early Summer of 2009. Please continue to visit our website at www.socialwelfarealliance.org for the latest details, call for presentations and registration materials.



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(Formerly The Bertha Capen Reynolds Society)
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**The representatives the current year's Conference Committee and year immediately preceding the current year (not currently listed) share one vote on the NSC.

SWAA National Steering Committee Meeting

October 25-26, 2008

Rochester, New York

Open to all SWAA Members

For more information, contact info@socialwelfareactionalliance.org

Chapter Reports

Denver

This past spring, we founded a Denver chapter of Social Welfare Action Alliance (SWAA). Our chapter is currently being led by MSW students at the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver, but members include faculty, staff, doctoral students, alumni, and community social workers and human service workers. We will eventually be having a strategic planning session wherein we will solidify our mission, vision, goals and objectives. Right now, we are a network of local activist social workers who are interested in working on a range of issues centering on social and economic justice. In the next year, we are hoping to strengthen our relationships with progressive organizations in the area and get more community members involved. We are planning a social justice theater project, a radical zine, several workshops on reframing, an organized opposition to the upcoming destructive state ballot initiatives (such as the Civil Rights Initiative that would end affirmative action and equal opportunity programs in the state of Colorado; the Personhood Amendment that would define person as a fertilized egg, banning all abortions and most forms of birth control; and the Right to Work for Less Initiative that would make it much harder for unions to organize in Colorado). We recently participated in the Colorado AIDS walk, where we raised almost \$500 for Colorado AIDS Project.

For more information or to join SWAA-Denver, please contact Stephanie Bell at Stephanie.bell@du.edu.

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Mississippi

The Mississippi chapter continues to struggle with creating a mission and agenda. The wide dispersal of members from all points in the state (northern, central, and southern) creates difficulties in generating unity of action. At the meeting in 2007, the proposed agenda centered on concerns related to the Iraq war and especially the trauma faced by returning veterans and their families. This remains a concern for the members of the chapter, but the significant distance between members has made coordination and response difficult. Secondarily, without an infusion of new members and the desire on the part of them for a leadership role, it is questionable if the chapter will be able to sustain itself, at least at this point in time.

In a recent meeting at the Mississippi Social Welfare Conference, I engaged in an intriguing discussion with a member who suggested we investigate web-conferencing as a means of meeting. Our great distances simply preclude our regular face-to-face and email has not been effective in generating action. He is checking into the potential and we may make such a proposal to the members if it seems to be a viable option.

Mississippi remains at the forefront of social justice breakdowns, including cradle – to – prison pipeline, lack of affordable housing, poverty, high infant mortality rates, high rates of obesity and diabetes, lack of health care, lack of employment at a living wage and continued racial, gender, political, and sexual orientation discrimination and oppres-

sion. We certainly have our work cut out for us, and there continues to be a visible need for the Social Welfare Action Alliance's presence in the state.

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Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Chapter at Widener University is well on its way. We had our first meeting, and will have a follow up meeting shortly. We are going to have two locations for our chapter, one in Harrisburg and one in Chester. Several of us will work with members in both locations and we will also join each other's meetings via speaker phones.

We have decided to model facilitation tools as part of our meeting. We used Talking Paper to collect ideas for our chapter and members' commitment. The goal of this is to broaden our members' repertoire of tools for conflict resolution, group empowerment, and team building.

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***Are you organizing a
SWAA chapter or some
other activist group?
Please share your efforts
with us!
Send your reports to
info@socialwelfareactionalliance.org***

How To Organize a SWAA Chapter

Any group of 10 current SWAA members can create a Chapter. "How to Organize a SWAA Chapter" organizing packets are available from the SWAA website at www.socialwelfareactionalliance.org or by contacting Melissa Sydor at melsk@me.com or 585-262-4366. The contents of the packets include such things as posters, brochures, book order forms, recent newsletters, copy of by-laws, names of SWAA organizers from the Steering Committee who will help you, and much more! Please allow four weeks for delivery.

Peace and Justice Committee Report

Moya Atkinson, co-chair of the SWAA Peace and Justice Committee spearheaded a valiant effort at getting the NASW Peace and Justice Committee reinstated. She successfully generated the support (by obtaining in excess of the required number of NASW member/chapter signatures) to add the item to the agenda for the 2008 delegate assembly. Although the delegate assembly vote was not to reinstate the committee, Moya's tenacity in carrying the goal to its conclusion reflected her commitment to peace issues.

The Committee is currently planning for the 2008-2009 agenda. Tentative areas (pending an upcoming conference call prior to the National Steering Committee meeting in October) include on-going efforts to end the Iraq war, and in regard to social justice, continued focus on rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, and access to housing and employment at a living wage, and universal health care.

The Committee met at the annual conference in Houston and approved the following agenda:

1. Create a list of educational resources on peace and social justice that could be used in class rooms and other venues,
2. Distribute information on the NASW Peace Policy Toolkit, for which Moya and Anne wrote the introduction (available for free at <http://www.socialworkers.org>),
3. Distribute information on the peace-teaching toolkit for use in the classroom (<http://www.wagingpeace.org/menu/programs/youth-outreach/peace-ed-book/teaching-peace.pdf>),
4. Creation of a blog for peace and justice issues so that members could share information about what they are doing in regard to specific issues,
5. Increase the committees activity with PPEHRC activities.

If you have an interest in working with the peace and justice committee, contact Moya at moyaatk@att.net or Susan at scallen@bellsouth.net.

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Effort to Reinstate NASW's Peace and Social Justice at NASW's 2008 Delegate Assembly Failed – Now What?

It was a disappointing end to a long effort on the part of many dedicated social workers to reinstate NASW's Peace and Social Justice Committee as a mandated committee; in the end, the NASW delegates voted by a 2/3 majority not to reinstate the Committee. There were many reasons for our failure, which we will discuss at our National Steering Committee meeting. Your insights and experiences are welcome. Please ask your chapter's delegates and president what their impressions were of the 2008 "virtual" Delegate Assembly, and share them with us.

Out of the ashes rises the Phoenix... and an opportunity for SWAA to continue to use the resources garnered from the PSJ experience as well as to develop our own effective committee. We have the names

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Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign at the RNC

Here's a brief personal report from Minnesota. Much more is available at www.economichumanrights.org; check the blog for links to news.

Yes, it was scary. What you saw on television were, for the most part, clashes between self-styled anarchists and/or "planted" agitators and very brutal and heavily armed police. Also, remarkably, police shut down a good deal of broadcasting, shut out legitimate media from some reporting sites, and arrested well-known commentator Amy Goodman and her producers (check www.democracynow.org for background).

PPEHRC's Truth Commissions and March for Our Lives were remarkably successful. We joined the 10,000 strong Peace March on Monday (Labor Day) and still drew between two and three thousand to the March for Our Lives on Tuesday (when most protesters had gone home and school was in session). Although we had many very aggressive anarchists and planted agitators in the crowd, our discipline and commitment to nonviolence held throughout. The one incident reported as being related to our event was, in fact, a skirmish at the edge of our rally between mounted police and a person totally unrelated to us.

Four of us were, at the end of the march, prepared to do planned civil disobedience: Cheri Honkala, Bruce Wright (a Southern Baptist minister from Florida), Rosa Clement (Green Party candidate for Vice President), and myself (not a particularly important person, but a seasoned cell companion for Cheri). With several thousand very disciplined and silent people behind us, we approached the steel cage surrounding the convention and asked the police for permission to enter to serve a citizen's arrest warrant for violations of economic human rights/crimes against humanity. Of course the police said nothing, but one raised his machine gun, and the others readied pepper spray and smoke bombs. Cheri continued to appeal for non-violent communication with "an officer in charge." The heavily-armed police, dressed in full black riot gear, took further offensive positions. Concerned about the refusal of the police to communicate and their heavy displayed armaments, Cheri decided to call off the civil disobedience. She passed a US flag and the citizen's arrest warrant under the steel mesh fence and asked that it be delivered to party officials and the candidates.

We counted this an absolute victory for several reasons:

1. At the rally, Cheri publicly and effectively addressed "the anarchist question,"
2. We managed a non-violent, disciplined march despite provocations, including some apparently incited by agents,
3. We were able to stay at the steel cage wall long enough for the press to get excellent images of non-violent marchers committed only to ending poverty facing that wall and very heavily armed, threatening police.

Seeing these images, one must ask, "What is so dangerous about asking for economic justice in the world's richest country?" Why, in the face of that appeal, are we met with the kind of police-state tactics like those we associate with the world's most repressive regimes?

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A Real Story about Alaska: What You Won't Read in the Political News

These past few weeks, Alaska has been in the news. In all of the media hype, one thing people have not read is the story of people living on St. Paul Island. That's not unexpected - one does not often read the stories of the marginalized and disenfranchised. What has remained with me since the five weeks in July and August that I spent on the island providing social work services to a small, rural, remote, Aleut village are the haunting images of the results of colonization. The intent of this article is to share some of my personal experiences during the time I lived and worked on the island, and the application I think it has to the US, and indeed to all "Americans."

St. Paul Island is a tiny island in the Bering Sea – one of the four Pribilof Islands. It is roughly 40 square miles, with a population of about 400 people, 90% of whom are Aleuts. To understand a bit about the systemic nature of what I experienced, one must understand at least a tiny bit of the history of the island and how its people came to be there. There is one small village on the southwest tip of the island – the "hilly" part of the island, which is a mostly flat volcanic rock in the middle of the sea. It generally rains, is foggy or overcast most days, and the wind blows. It was an uninhabited island until an Aleut fisherman/hunter discovered it in the fog due to the sounds of the northern fur seals, which guided him to land (by legend at least.) When the Russian fur traders discovered the island (home to the northern fur seal) they enslaved Aleuts from the southern Aleutian chain and brought them to the island to slaughter the seals for fur trade. After Alaska was sold to the US, the federal government took over the role of the Russian fur traders in terms of controlling the Aleuts and the island. Only 25 years ago were the people of St. Paul freed from federal control.

Like other native populations in the Americas and Alaska, colonization of a people creates significant problems for the colonized. Russians introduced heavy drinking and its frequent resultant violence to the native Alaskan population. Similar to the Native American population, loss of a traditional way of life that was very group and community oriented left people grappling with an identity affected by huge changes in their experience, culture, and capacity to adapt to those negative influences.

I knew very little about St. Paul prior to landing on the island - the entire land mass was visible as we circled to land and I got a view of what would be my home for the next few weeks. I was both excited and apprehensive, having no idea of what it would be like and knowing no one on the island. It was an opportunity to practice what I teach – that with use of the generalist model of social work, one can practice anywhere with anyone. I knew the first rule would be engagement, and doing a lot of listening in order to learn about the community and its needs.

What I did know prior to arrival was that the major problem of the community was alcohol abuse, and accompanying domestic violence and sexual abuse. I had no idea of the extent of these problems until I began meeting with health center workers, the police chief, and attended a community pot luck to hear the concerns and needs of the community: What did they want and need from me for the next five weeks, and beyond?

The first day I worked until after midnight and was back at the center the following morning by eight. I began seeing clients the second day and it was a steady stream for the remainder of my time on the island. What I began to conclude was how difficult it was for individuals to achieve wellness in the environment of the village. I believe that all individuals have strengths and that all environments have resources, but it began to seem like a hopelessly daunting task in this rural, isolated village that was an \$800 plane ticket and three hours to the mainland. Every person I saw (many on referral from the court system, but many by their choice) had similar stories and it became part of the overall picture: parental alcohol abuse, domestic violence, abandonment due to parental incarceration on the mainland, limited employment other than the fishing industry which sustains the economy and the cycle repeating itself over and over. Under all the anger and violence was always fear and loss. Children's parents did not know how to parent as they were addicted to alcohol, victims and perpetrators of abuse, as had been their grandparents, and so on. Even when people sobered up, there was little to no wellness present – partially due to the lack of available services and a general discomfort with behavioral health intervention, but also because the community is so young in terms of its identity. As one Aleut woman explained it, "We are like a 25 year old, trying to figure out who we are in terms of what and who we want to be."

In addition to those social problems, poverty and the resultant health-related ills tax the resilience of the people. Obviously, it is expensive to ship items to an island 750 air miles from Anchorage, or two weeks by barge. Items in the one grocery store were outrageously expensive, particularly fruits and vegetables – which were extremely limited and often in poor condition by the time they reached the shelf. Parents cannot afford a half-gallon of orange juice or milk for \$10, so their children drink cheap high-sugar sodas. It was common to see children with significant decay and other dental problems, and many adults had missing teeth, disfigured teeth, or other visible dental needs. St. Paul Island also has one of the highest rates of diabetes and the associated health ills.

Home heating fuel prices in the harsh winters (and often needed during the summer which is only around 45 degrees) created hardships for many people – choices between heating and eating were not rhetorical but reality.

Even though I saw instances of individual strength and resources, the concerns are overwhelming. Younger and younger children are falling into the pattern. It raised questions: Are there some risk factors that are so overwhelming, so systemically-embedded that they defy resilience? Are there some problems from which we cannot emerge, or at least not without great difficulty? And finally, when we have these human-created social problems, why do we have so few people in power who care about the need to un-make them?

The application I think this experience holds for us in the Americas (all of the Americas, north, central and south, and for citizens of the US including those living in rural and remote Alaskan villages, marginalized from the rest of the US) is that without undoing the effects of colonization, we cannot begin to make progress as a nation, a region, or a global world. To refer to citizens of the US as Americans, without reference to the fact that Americans includes all of the Americas, not

The Inspiration Quotient's Role in Disability Discrimination

Background

Approximately 54 million Americans have a disability according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 1996 data. This represents approximately 20% of the U.S. population. As people age, they face a risk for adventitious disability that is roughly proportional to their ageing. For example, by age 85, 84% of Americans have at least one disability.

In a 1998 survey of U.S. households commissioned by the National Organization on Disability (NOD) conducted by Harris and Associates, the pattern and magnitude of poor quality of life indicators was again substantiated. This survey has been conducted periodically over the past several years. In the 1998 survey, the unemployment rate among persons with disabilities was 61%. Secondary students with disabilities were twice as likely to drop out of high school as students without disabilities. Furthermore, the NOD/Harris survey found that persons with disabilities were one third less likely to socialize with friends, less than one half as likely to go to a restaurant at least one time weekly, and significantly less likely to be registered to vote when compared with persons with no disabilities. Households with a disabled member had a 33% higher exposure to poverty than non-disabled households. One third of respondents said that transportation was a major problem in their lives. Finally, persons with disabilities were significantly less likely to report being satisfied with their lives when compared with their non-disabled peers.

This abysmal state of affairs persists, despite substantial expenditures of money and effort directed toward "helping" persons with disabilities. When asked, most respondents report a very favorable attitude toward people with disabilities. Public discourse that appears to reflect this overall favorable attitude seems to betray powerful, insidious limiting and pejorative attitudes toward this population however. There seem to be powerful forces that are largely unchallenged and that perpetuate second class status for persons with disabilities.

Assumptions That Support the Status Quo

In their 2000 article, "Disability Beyond Stigma: Social Interaction and Activism", Fine and Asch assert that five pervasive assumptions conspire to perpetuate ongoing marginalization of people with disabilities. The first of these is the assumption that disability (and disability-related impairment) is located solely in biology and is therefore immutable. A second assumption is that when a disabled person faces problems it is the impairment (disability) which is the cause. Third, it is often assumed that the disabled person is a "victim". Fourth, disability is commonly thought to be central to the disabled person's self-concept, self-definition, social comparison, and reference groups. Finally, it is frequently assumed that disability is synonymous with needing help and social support.

These assumptions provide a durable framework and suggest a familiar perspective for understanding persons with disabilities - all without the holder of such assumptions having to identify acknowledge any animus toward persons with disabilities. The assumptions, if unchallenged, may lead one to explain or understand the experience of disability in a biased fashion. In effect, the assumptions seem provide all the neces-

sary answers. They may also direct behavior toward people with disabilities.

If the assumption that disability and impairment are immutably linked is accepted, then why look any further than individual mitigation to reduce impairment? If all problems are viewed as consequences of the disability, why focus interventions beyond the owner of the disability? Because of the rather sympathetic orientation toward victims, and an expectation for their engagement as passive recipients of the helpful beneficence of others, people tend to have low expectations of those with disabilities. Furthermore, if a disabled person has the audacity to express dissatisfaction with the well intentioned but misguided "helpful" assistance of others, he or she is likely to be deemed overly demanding, unappreciative and subjected to the ultimate defense proffered by Samaritans: "I was only trying to help". Good intentions are expected to trump ineffectiveness, a condition I have previously referred to as "beneficent incompetence".

The power and pervasiveness of these assumptions and the predictability of behavior they drive is found broadly in popular culture. Most notably, the assumptions shape and predict the discourse about disability in America.

The Inspiration Quotient

An example from the June 22, 2004 edition of the "Evansville Courier and Press" serves to illustrate the circular, pejorative, limiting, stereotypical views about persons with disabilities. The article - a full front page story with predictable color photographs - concerned a 22 year old man who uses a wheelchair. The photos and text depicted this young man engaging in activities that most of us would consider being rather routine, and certainly unremarkable. Activities such as greeting worshipers at church, bowling, visiting with benefactors (folks who had putatively befriended this young man through their involvement in the community integration program in which he is enrolled), and similar "normal", "routine" activities were highlighted. The text was replete with references to the young man's persistence, sense of humor, aspirations, and pleasantness. Again, none of these characteristics would be deemed noteworthy - and certainly not newsworthy - if exhibited by any other person. The editorial bias is clear: these things are remarkable, and even newsworthy, because this man has a disability and uses a wheelchair. The low expectations for persons with disabilities betrayed by the newspaper's judgment about the interest and value of this man's story both reify and nurture the assumptions discussed in the Fine and Asch article. Such stories, highlighting such so-called accomplishments and implicitly unexpected normal behaviors among those with disabilities, are all too common.

Such articles have prompted me to consider how best to explain their appeal. I am developing the concept of The Inspiration Quotient (In.Q.). The In.Q. may be understood as the relationship between expectations for and achievements of persons with disabilities. Given the chronic, widespread condition of low expectations, even nominal achievements, such as those depicted in the "Courier and Press" article, are extraordinary. Their appeal includes an affirmation that people with disabilities - for whom we have no animus - actually can do "normal" things. They are deemed "inspirational". It makes the non-disabled viewer feel better.

Hispanics

What's Hispanic? Hispanic is not a race, nor a nationality, it's an ethnicity very broadly defined. I am Mexican, but in the United States I am labeled Hispanic. This is a gentle label, not meant to offend. So is Latino or Latina, but these are catch - all labels to describe people who generally come, or whose even distant ancestors have come, from Latin America or Spain. Nonetheless, Hispanic and Latino or Latina are the appropriate labels for this group of people, merely because they are not offensive, were never meant to be offensive, and are simply descriptive. Yet these labels, as all labels, can never be completely accurate, and they imply a number of stereotypes about people, about their personalities (passionate), their preferred foods (corn and beans), their family styles (very close), their language (Spanish), their propensity for being late, their ability to handle spicy foods, and even their physical appearance (brown). These stereotypes are too narrow to apply to such a broad and diverse group of people.

When I was in Mexico, I would have never called myself Hispanic, Latina, or Latin American. It is only here [in the US] that it matters. On the one hand, I have been lumped together with a number of other peoples whose cultures are vastly different from mine. On the other, I myself feel a bond to all peoples like myself, who speak Spanish (or Portuguese), and who have historic ties to the Iberian Peninsula. Hispanics come in every color, in every race. We have many different cultures and many different styles. A Cuban-American is probably more different from a Mexican-American than either of those is from an Anglo-American, but all of us are not Anglo, not African-American, not Asian. Not something else. We are not something else together. And a very interesting thing happens also when people come to the United States – being Mexican, Salvadoran, or Argentinean starts mattering less than being Hispanic. It is as if, once labeled, we become one people as we have never been before.

However, I wonder, why the need to label us at all? My daughter says that she is not Mexican-American, that she is American. She is right. She is an American citizen by birth, and she does not want to be labeled anything else, even the gentle labels of Hispanic or Latina.

And gentle labels they are. There are much harsher, meaner labels. Even though Mexicans have been in the United States since before it existed, and people of Hispanic origin have been American Citizens since the Guadalupe-Hidalgo treaty gave them American Citizenship following the Mexican-American war of 1848, brown people who look Hispanic are still called “wet backs,” implying that Hispanics have no right to be here. Other harsh labels for Hispanics are “spics,” making fun of the accent that results when people whose mother tongue is Spanish speak English; “FOB” or “Fresh of the Border,” again, implying that Hispanic looking people are not really American; “beaners,” making fun of the fact that Mexicans and other Latin Americans eat beans; “greaser,” making fun of hairstyles favored by Mexican-American men; “low rider,” making fun of the cars Hispanic young men favor. It is all about making fun, all about reminding us that we are subordinate, inferior, unworthy.

Sometimes a group of people will take ownership of a previously discriminatory label and use it. This is what happened to the word Chicano, which used to be very offensive until Cesar Chavez took it to name a labor movement. It became a label of pride. Other times, even words

that appear to be innocuous can be used in a mean-spirited way with the intent to denigrate. I can still feel the pain in the pit of my stomach when I remember the time I have felt the most degraded. It was the time my neighbor dented my car while backing up out of her driveway. When I asked her to call her insurance company, she went back into her house and told her husband what had happened. He came out of the house in a fury, screaming “Hey you, Mexican!” Mexican is not a negative label, but he made it into an obscene word. This man took a beautiful word and made it into something ugly. I felt so shamed that I went back into my house and lost my ability to deal with the problem at hand. There were hatred and contempt in the words, and I felt them.

Words, after all, are nothing but a collection of sounds. It is the meaning we assign to them that can make them into tools of discrimination and oppression. The meaning can also make them tools of freedom and empowerment. Which ones are we to choose?

If we know anything about self-fulfilling prophesies, we know that people become what they are labeled. We know that people who are labeled with denigrating names believe they should be denigrated and that they really are inferior. Mean labels purposefully inflict harm, and their manifest function is to maintain people in a subordinate position and to stress their inferiority. But even gentle labels that are ostensibly not meant to offend may achieve the same goals. The Hispanic or Latino/Latina labels both lump people together and set them apart from the greater society. They perpetuate stereotypes that Hispanics or Latinos are hot-blooded, family oriented, lazy, colorful, and do not follow bureaucratic rationality well. The fact is that each individual person may be all of these things, some of these things, or none of these things.

That is why labels hurt so much, and that is why my daughter in her intuitive innocence prefers not to be labeled, but to be called simply American.

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from being pushed to the United States and allow the ones already north of the border to return home. From mushrooms and tomatoes to handcrafted quilts and sewing, women are organizing themselves collectively to survive, taking the economic survival of their family into their own hands. As a consequence, rural and uneducated women, long the most overlooked and powerless people in Mexico, are becoming leaders in what can only be described as a revolution.

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**Here I Go Down for Freedom:
A Tribute to Dr. Barbara Hunter Joseph
January 7, 1936 - December 2, 2007**

Rarely do we meet a person so dedicated to teaching the truth, fighting for social justice and caring for those around her. Barbara taught by example, encouraging her many students, friends, co-workers to be our best selves by opposing oppressions, understanding race and class privilege and struggling for justice and human rights.

She did it with humor, critical thinking, clarity, and love. I offer these reflections about her tribute with much gratitude.

On May 16, 2008, a rainy Spring evening, we gathered at Hunter College in Manhattan to honor the life and work of Barbara Hunter Joseph. The Memorial was beautifully organized and hosted by her daughter Alli Joseph.

As the lobby filled with social work colleagues, family, Shinnocock relatives, friends and students of Barbara's, the musicians played. A large screen offered a slide show of beautiful photographs chronicling many significant events and people in Barbara's life.

We moved into the auditorium and listened to reflections by Alli Joseph, Steve Joseph (her former husband), colleagues and friends Terry Mizrahi, Bonnie Johnson and Harriet Putterman.

Anthony Hunter, her cousin and co-worker at the American Indian Community House, spoke of her mentoring. "Being sensitive to everyone around you, acting from love, heart, brain, being; she placed these principals in each of us - we carry that with us. She touched us all. We will pass it on. She belonged to all of us."

The musical performances by Dick Joseph and Jeff Tillman, Bev Grant and Laura Stern Wolfe and the Shinnecock tribal drum reflected the diverse musical traditions that Barbara enjoyed. The powerful gospel music performed by Lavender Light enlivened our spirits. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." Barbara's light and political insight will shine on as we pledge ourselves to one another.

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"The real choice before us as social workers is whether we are to be passive or active... We must first of all know that we have allies.... In using the organizations we have we shall find others in the community also fighting in organized ways for the same issues in human welfare."

*Bertha Capen Reynods
Social Work and Social Living,
p. 175-6*

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We are starting by focusing our efforts on the upcoming election; this is something we are all passionate about. We also have several issues that are important to us individually and collectively, universal health care, child welfare, intellectual and developmental disability rights; particularly in the area of supported communication and freedom from abuse in the name of treatment, to name a few. Most of us work in these fields and are finding that as insiders our voices have little weight. We are turning to each other for outsider pressure and support.

Each of us will take responsibility to educate the rest of us in our areas of concern and ways we can help. Together we will then decide on prioritized activities and fields of focus.

While we currently only have 13 members, we are confident that our numbers will grow significantly in the near future - many folks have already expressed interest.

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Portland

The Portland Chapter is continuing to put a great deal of effort into bringing content to social work students at Portland State University that we feel is missing from the formal coursework. Since our last report, we became involved in a local union organizing effort at a residential treatment program for adolescent girls. The campaign was a success, and the center's management agreed to bargain in good faith with the union, represented by SEIU.

We also had brought to campus speakers from Oregon Action, a grassroots organization that has been active in many issues impacting communities of color and low income neighborhoods. They have been involved in leading the effort at confronting racial discrimination within the Portland Police Bureau.

Summer was spent planning for this fall's presentations (what we call Red Lunch Boxes). Our goal is to use these presentations in order to craft a 'progressive social work' curriculum, loosely modeled on the free school structure. This is especially important to students since PSU has dropped its formal Progressive Social Work elective.

We also strive to get out of the classroom and into the community. Students are organizing a diaper drive to help local organizations keep up with the growing demand. Students are very wary of simply engaging in charity efforts and are using the drive as a way to gain understanding of the struggles poor families have in obtaining essentials like diapers and cleaning supplies.

Finally, we are co-hosting with Sisters of the Road a visit by Willie Baptist of the Union Theological Seminary's Poverty Initiative in late October.

For more information, please contact us at swaapdx@hotmail.com.

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Rochester

The Rochester Chapter is very busy planning an October 2008 Conference titled ***Violence and Poverty: Assault on Human Rights***. We are collaborating with SUNY Brockport College, St. John Fisher College, Rochester Institute of Technology, Greater Rochester Collaborative MSW Program, the Rochester Chapter of NOW, local churches and poor people's organizations in an effort to respond to the recent increase in violence in our community. The conference speakers and workshops will focus on economic injustice and show its connections to the violence in our community. We have Elijah Anderson, Diane Dujan, Ann Withorn, Fred Newdom and many others scheduled to speak and offer workshops.

We continue to plan and offer Reality Tours and have received small grants to enable us to fund a part time organizer. The new organizer is a BSW student and new SWAA member. We hope to find funding to make this an ongoing position.

Our membership has increased to include many people with diverse backgrounds who are willing to combine their passion for social justice and their unique talents. Our membership now includes a self taught web designer who has made our web page interesting, informative and most of all easy to use. Another new member is a media arts and sciences professor who is generously bringing her considerable talents to add exciting elements to our fall conference. We are also pleased to have an AmericCorp Vista volunteer who is highly skilled and dedicated to community organizing. Also joining us is a sociology professor whose connections have brought us our keynote speaker for the conference. A formerly homeless community organizer has also recently joined us and adds valuable input and perspective.

Lastly, the Rochester Chapter is hosting the SWAA National Steering Committee Meeting, also in October. All are welcome! Come Join Us!

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Journal of Progressive Human Services

The Journal of Progressive Human Services (JPHS) is available to members of SWAA at a substantial discount. It can be ordered through SWAA using the application in this issue of the *BCR Reports*. **Neither the JPHS collective nor SWAA are involved in subscription fulfillment; that is the responsibility of our publisher, Haworth Press. If you are a subscriber and have not received an issue, contact Haworth at 1-800-429-6784 or at getinfo@haworthpress.com.** To submit an article to JPHS, send four copies of your manuscript, including a short abstract to: David Prichard, JPHS, University of New England, School of Social Work, 716 Stevens Avenue, Portland, ME 04103. It is important that your name and any other identifying information not appear on three of these four copies. We also encourage submissions of poetry and short (500-1000 word) opinion pieces for our Soapbox column and letters to the editors.

I am now the sole Editor of the Journal of Progressive Human Services and will be liaison to SWAA. The previous collective members including Marcia Cohen, Barbara Meldrum, Flower Noble, John Baugher, Otrude Moyo, Carrie Eagles, and Kate Delois are to be thanked for their tremendous dedication and support of SWAA, BCR and JPHS

*For JPHS,
David Prichard*

“Social Work can defend its standards only if it realizes the organized nature of the opposition to it, why these interests are opposed, and where its own allies are to be found.”

*Bertha Capen Reynolds
Social Work and Social Living,
NASW, 1975, p. 166.*

Collective Decision Making vs. Personal Responsibility Philosophy as they Relate to Substantive Rights

The general philosophy in the United States is that of personal responsibility. This is anchored in the beliefs of personal freedom. For absolute freedom to exist, so must its corollary - personal responsibility. The United States was built on the belief that men (White, propertied men) should be free. This belief stems in part from the Protestant belief that self control, frugality, work and delayed gratification were the mark of the pious. The pious, in addition to rewards on this earth, would also be rewarded in heaven.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the belief in collective decision making. This is anchored in the belief that we are all responsible for all, that our actions and behaviors must conform to others around us and that society around us informs our behaviors and our behaviors shape society. No one is alone and people's actions affect those around them. This is more consistent with the social work view of person-in-environment. Collective decision making means that we all have an ethical responsibility for other human beings, for the collectivity.

Substantive rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were initially granted to White, propertied males, who saw absolutely nothing wrong with the theory of personal responsibility. Why would they? They had all the means, power and privilege to be responsible for themselves. They did not feel they needed help. Of course they needed others - and used them - but they saw this power over racial minorities, women, and landless Whites as their birthright. Because the leaders of society benefited from the structures of society, they felt that every person should be responsible for himself (whereas women were dependents). They did not feel they had to provide anything for anybody. This would have cut into their profits and privilege. Collective decision making means that those with most privilege and power have to give some of it up in order to consider the needs and wishes of all.

The idea that all men were created equal was radical in its time. It hinted at a spirit of collectivity, because if all men are created equal, then all men should participate equally in shaping the society. The Constitution did not provide substantive rights to women or minorities initially, but was radical enough and flexible enough that through the ages enough procedural rights have come to exist through amendments and Supreme Court decisions that underprivileged groups have obtained more substantive rights.

Privilege is a hard thing to give up, and so the United States still subscribes to the philosophy of personal responsibility. True collective decision making would take away the power and privilege of those who have them, and so every procedural right won by oppressed groups has been a slow and difficult battle. And there is still no ERA.

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and email addresses of hundreds of the nearly 900 social workers who signed the original petition to put the reinstatement of NASW's P&SJ Committee on the 2008 Delegate Assembly agenda. We also have the names of some of the delegates who voted in favor of the Committee's reinstatement.

At this juncture, there are at least three alternatives:

1. Progressive Democrats of America, a small PAC, has succeeded in bringing a progressive agenda to the Democratic Party with its "inside/outside" method. Please review its structure and issues at www.pdamerica.org and consider how it could be adapted to SWAA's advocacy development
2. Consider joining our forces with other organizations, such as Psychologists for Social Responsibility. Visit its web site: <http://www.psysts.org>. Social worker Anne Anderson was the Co-Coordinator of Psychologists for Social Responsibility for over twenty years, and contributed greatly to its current status as an alternative voice to the American Psychological Association in critical times
3. Work with NASW leaders to promote our causes. We don't need a committee to ask our Executive Director and her staff and our Board representatives to advocate for a progressive agenda which reflects the policies in *Social Work Speaks*. We have a responsibility to question the many social problems we face as professionals, including offering solutions to:
 - the high rate of incarceration;
 - immigration;
 - the widening gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots";
 - the excruciating cost of our wars of aggression, leaving over \$9 trillion in debt for our children and grandchildren to pay;
 - our devastation of countries and populations;
 - global warming, human trafficking, torture etc.

The role of advocacy has been minimized in the social work profession over the past 40 years. Many barriers have been identified by recent social work publications, including:

- Preoccupation with the service role which is viewed as distinctly separate from advocacy and social action;
- A lack of professional norms and standards of practice for advocacy;
- Mistaken perception of advocacy as confrontation;
- Concern with professionalism which has in effect "conservatized" social work;
- Fear of losing one's own status when identifying with social issues that our clients face;
- Lack of training and education in technical expertise required in social action.

It is imperative to return to the foundation of social work and be political in our actions.

NASW has had many successes in strengthening the profession, but it also has serious problems and decisions to make. Experience over the last five years has shown that NASW is a corporation and a top-down organization, with closed Board meetings and other restrictions that chill dissent and discussion. There are many questions that face our

profession and its respective professional organizations. Paramount in this debate are four areas of focus:

- What will be the future of NASW, its Delegate Assembly (with its reduced role resulting from the recent bylaws amendment) and the other social work organizations, including SWAA, in a world of competing professions?
- How will social and political action become once again legitimized as a function of all social workers?
- What should SWAA's role be and where should we put our energies?
- How can we develop a strategy to overcome the barriers to social and political action?

As we struggle to find and use our voices as social workers to advocate for a higher quality of life for our clients and ourselves and for a safe and healthy planet, we need to consider our choices and make compromises, with or without NASW, but we cannot give up! Please feel free to discuss this matter on the SWAA web site, and/or email moyaatk@att.net or teri.cardwell@sbcglobal.net.

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just the US, is part of cognitive colonization: making us believe something about ourselves without regard to its truthfulness. I know this is not a new and original idea, and that we have been grappling with it throughout my life time (and long before that); however, the experience of being in St. Paul was like having it thrust into my face and my reality in a very close and personal way. I don't kid myself that I was able to do much more in the short time I was there than to give people an opportunity to be heard, respected, valued, and engaged in the effort to create capacity for circumstances to shift. It was the beginning of what Walter Mignolo and others call "cognitive de-colonization." I am gratified that I have been invited back to work with the community again and my vision is to partner with them in both gaining understanding and taking action. To paraphrase, my own de-colonization is bound up in theirs.

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The average In.Q. is 100 (a perfect match between expectations and achievement), where the subject does as expected. In.Q.s in excess of 100 occur either because expectations are incredibly low (the usual condition) and achievements are average (such as in the case above), or because achievements exceed the typical low (as opposed to “incredibly low”) expectations. Below average In.Q. values occur when achievements are substantially lower than expectations. Such a condition seems most common in educational settings where expectations have to do with compliant school behavior rather than academic performance.

In the absence of noteworthy achievements, effort may count significantly in the In.Q. computation. This is reflected in accounts of the so-called achievements of Special Olympics participants, where medals are awarded for skills that are of little or no functional value. (For example, the softball toss is scored on distance rather than accuracy or reciprocity. Most folks who throw a softball throw it to another *person*, not just randomly on the field.) Every participant is considered a “winner” simply for trying. (Effort counts!) Media accounts of these events are replete with effusive, evocative accounts by the dispensers of copious hugs who attest to the affirming effect of dispensing hugs to such “deserving” recipients. (Beneficence rewarded!) No one openly questions the paradigm that victimizes Special Olympians in this manner, thereby creating opportunities for “normals” to express their generosity and love.

Obviously, the In.Q. is very susceptible to the biases and interpretation of the observer. For some, that we disabled folks are able to get out of bed and go to the supermarket is inspirational, warranting a high In.Q. for us - we should feel good, right? Who knows, the newspaper may even want to do a story about our shopping, deeming it newsworthy!

Using us and our lives as inspirational icons to reinforce the same limiting judgments and behaviors that serve to perpetuate our marginalization is duplicitous at best and cruelly exploitative at worst. This conspiracy of low expectations (ascribing inspirational value along with failure to understand the experience of disability as a dynamic, socially constructed phenomenon), where the quality of our lives is predicted more by what happens around us than by what our disabilities are, continues to relegate us to second class citizenship.

Assumptions That Challenge the Status Quo

In our textbook, *Ending Disability Discrimination: Strategies for Social Workers*, my co-editor, Martha Raske, and I argue that disability is only reasonably understood within a dynamic framework where the quality of interaction is a more important predictor of achievement and satisfaction than the disability itself. Disability-related impairment is viewed as a consequence of discrimination, not as a consequence of the disability itself. Our book is based on an assumption that disability and impairment are not immutably linked. As a wheelchair user, I am not usually impaired but, in an environment that presents architectural barriers such as steps, I am impaired even though my disability is exactly the same in both circumstances. So, impairment is not predicted by my disability but by the receptiveness of the environments in which I operate.

Our second assumption is that disability-related impairment is socially

constructed. It's all about the capacity in communities for all citizens to access opportunities to participate, to achieve, to fail and to be held accountable. This suggests a much broader target system for intervention on behalf of people with disabilities. Continuing to focus interventions on mitigation, restoration, and rehabilitation, while ignoring broader systems, prejudices and marginalizing forces, is short sighted and of very limited positive consequence for people with disabilities.

Raske and I contend that “disability” is a nominal state that is accompanied by limiting assumptions, prejudices, and stereotypes only if it suits the observer. In this sense, “disability” is a name only. It does not in itself suggest inferiority, superiority or anything else. To the degree that such judgments accompany conceptualizations and discourse about disability, they reflect the biases of the holder of such judgments. Clearly, people have made impressive improvements - even though we have much work yet to do - in understanding race and gender relations. Similarly, we must work to further the understanding of disability.

Disability and pride can coexist. This assumption casts a different light on perceptions of and about persons with disabilities than is consistent with rash conclusions about our value as icons of inspiration. Pride is an important confounding variable in the In.Q. calculation. How does one assess the influence of pride as a motivator in our living rich, productive lives - not in spite of or because of our disabilities - but *with* our disabilities? Many people think disability is anathema to pride. The concept of “Disability Pride” is an oxymoron to them.

Finally, Raske and I assert that helpers/advocates/activists must assume a “working with” rather than a “working on” orientation when interacting with persons with disabilities. This collaborative, consultative role is contrary to the usual stereotypes and expectations concerning persons with disabilities. The evidence that little is at risk if we change our orientation is abundant. It was again validated in the NOD/Harris survey.

The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law on July 26, 1990. The U.S. Supreme Court's Olmstead decision was June 22, 1999. These seminal changes in the glacial movement of legislation and litigation involving people with disabilities have not resulted in radical or even significant granular changes in American culture. People with disabilities may well be the last discovered minority group in the U.S. It's up to all of us who are willing to challenge and question the assumptions that support the status quo to insist that changes be made. We need to challenge In.Q. assumptions. We need to challenge popular portrayals of people with disabilities. We need to challenge low expectations. We need to challenge patronizing treatment of and second class citizenship of persons with disabilities. It is imperative that we each make the changes that we can. The stakes are high. The need is great.

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Join the only organization of
social workers and human service workers
dedicated to activism for social and economic justice.



Who We Are

The Social Welfare Action Alliance (SWAA) is a national organization of progressive social workers and other human service workers. Founded in 1985, the Alliance is based on principles that reflect a concern for social and economic justice, peace and coalition building with progressive social movements. These principles articulate a need by social service workers for a practice and theory that responds to progressive concerns.

SWAA chapters determine their own agendas, provide forums for discussions and debates around local, national and international issues. Local chapters are represented on the national steering committee to help shape the organization's direction. In addition, the Alliance holds annual national gatherings that focus on critical issues, tools and ideas for action to promote social change.

"The real choice before us as social workers is whether we are to be passive or active."

- Bertha Capen Reynolds

Join the local chapter of the Social Welfare Action Alliance

Any group of 10 current SWAA members can create a Chapter. "How to Organize a SWAA Chapter" organizing packets are available from the SWAA website at www.socialwelfareactionalliance.org or by contacting Melissa Sydor at melmas1@yahoo.com or 585-262-4366. The contents of the packets include such things as posters, brochures, book order forms, recent newsletters, copy of by-laws, names of SWAA organizers from the Steering Committee who will help you, and much more! Please allow four weeks for delivery.

www.socialwelfareactionalliance.org



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Progressive Workers in Social Welfare

Formerly Bertha Capen Reynolds Society

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