

# Boston Research Center for the 21st Century

NEWSLETTER : SPRING/SUMMER 2005 : NUMBER 24

## STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF HARRIET TUBMAN: I AM MY SISTER'S KEEPER

"STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF HARRIET TUBMAN: I AM MY SISTER'S KEEPER" was the fourth annual lecture in the Women of Courage Lecture Series co-sponsored by the Wellesley Centers for Women and the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century. The series celebrates American women in history and contemporary times who have stood up for fundamental human values such as economic justice, nonviolence, environmental ethics, and human rights.

In January, Dr./Reverend Gloria White-Hammond spoke to a diverse audience on the eve of her seventh trip to the Sudan. Her work there has helped to secure the freedom of 10,000 slaves and has focused on helping former slaves rebuild their communities. Previous lectures have honored Fannie Lou Hamer, Jeannette Rankin, and Rachel Carson. In 2006, the Women of Courage lecture will pay tribute to the life and work of

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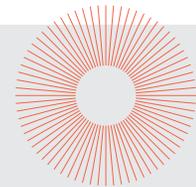
Susan McGee Bailey, Gloria White-Hammond, and Ginny Straus were all smiles before the Harriet Tubman Lecture on Human Rights.

## COMMUNITY AT THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL: REBUILDING A SENSE OF CONNECTEDNESS

THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL IN CAMDEN, MAINE, has since 1973 been offering an experience of connectedness and intimacy for those seeking to finish high school. Over the years, we have opened our doors to 511 former high school dropouts and awarded high school diplomas to 412. Forty percent have gone on to some form of post-secondary education, and 60 percent have remained in contact with us.

Respect and Relationship are the primary methods we have used to construct community hour-by-hour, day-by-day, year-by-year. The particular "shape" of our school stems from its roots in the U.S. social movements of the 1960s when egalitarianism, flat consensual decision-making structures, and counter-cultural communities proliferated. All voices counted in those days, and all voices count at our school, whether a student is part of the

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**Save the Date!**

**October 1, 2005**

**THE 2ND ANNUAL IKEDA FORUM  
FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE**

*See page 2 for details.*



*I am struck by the wisdom of the Sudanese described by Dr. Gloria White-Hammond in this issue's lead article on the Women of Courage lecture: Rejecting a person in the village is like rejecting part of oneself. This insight into the essential oneness of all life can be found in many of the great religious traditions of the world, including Buddhism. In Buddhism, every relationship, even a relationship with an "other," is a connection that holds energy within it, energy that can be transformed from negative to positive. Accordingly, heart-to-heart dialogue, when courageously pursued in the face of conflict, has the power to transform the impossible "other" into the possible "we."*

*To tap the community-building potential of dialogue, the BRC has undertaken an experiment. Like Emanuel Pariser's students at the Community School we too want to "learn about community in community." The BRC has convened a Learning Circle of community-builders in the Boston area to forge a community of philosophy and practice over a two-year period. Our hope is that from these dynamic connections wisdom will emerge that can be shared with a broader public. Our ultimate goal is to contribute to a shift in U.S. culture from isolation, violence, and war to interconnectedness, nonviolence, and peace.*

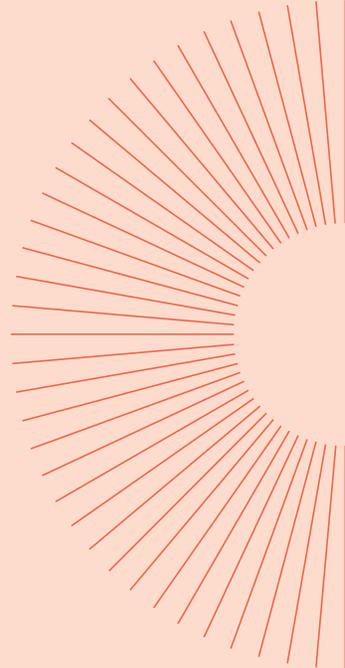
*As part of our dialogical mission to cultivate an inclusive sense of community locally and globally, we will be pursuing the local dimension through the BRC Learning Circle over the coming year. The global dimension of our mission continues to animate the Ikeda Forum for Intercultural Dialogue. The second public event in this annual series will be held on Saturday, October 1. This year's forum will focus on Walt Whitman and the international tapestry of poetic souls he envisioned.*

*Building global community is a huge challenge. Can we make it real? Can poetry help? Perhaps we go to war because we can't imagine another way. Heart-to-heart dialogue that breaks down the us/them divide requires imaginative empathy. As BRC's founder Daisaku Ikeda has said in Choose Hope, more than ever before, we need to "rehabilitate the poetic spirit in order to halt the hollowing-out of the spirit and the devastation caused by ever-expanding ego and greed."*

*Please join us this fall to explore the as yet unrealized dream of democracy-in-diversity that Whitman conjured up, hoping for responsive hearts among generations to come.*

*Virginia Straus*

**Virginia Straus, Executive Director**



**THE IKEDA FORUM FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE**

***"Talking Back" to Whitman: Poetry Matters***

**Saturday, October 1, 2005 9:00 a.m.– 5:00 p.m.**

THIS YEAR MARKS the 150th anniversary of Walt Whitman's masterpiece, *Leaves of Grass*. Scholar Ed Folsom has noted that "poets from Whitman's time to the present have continued to engage in dialogue with him, literally 'talking back' to him just as he talked forward to 'poets to come'." Join us as we highlight diverse voices who have responded to Whitman's vision of a poetry that weaves the world together.



## COMMENTARY: NONVIOLENCE AS A CIVIC VIRTUE

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WHEN WE THINK of the question, “Which came first—moral rules or virtues?” the obvious answer, I believe, is that virtues came first. English philosopher Leslie Stephen once described virtue ethics as follows: “Morality is internal. The moral law . . . has to be expressed in the form, ‘be this,’ not in the form ‘do this.’” He went on to say, “The true moral law says ‘hate not,’ instead of ‘kill not.’” In other words, moral law must be stated as a “rule of character” and virtuous people of good character require no reminder of what the rules are.

Critics of virtue ethics claim that virtues vary across cultures, making it impossible to define which are “correct.” Such critics prefer moral imperatives, which are abstractions based on thousands of years of observing loyal, honest, patient, just, and compassionate behavior. Because moral rules have normative force, even as abstractions, international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights serve as important checks on practices that most human beings find detestable. But beneath the power of ideas and beyond the rule of law, there must be a foundation of “good character” based on Stephen’s definition.

While discussing energy policy, Vice President Cheney once implied that conservation is a quaint personal virtue lacking any practical effect. His comment revealed one of the greatest moral problems of our time: the division between personal and civic virtue, and the corollary

assumption that as long as citizens are not breaking any laws, they have no moral obligations to others or even to themselves. But can we truly believe that moral neutrality leads to happiness, and be satisfied with merely providing a minimal legal framework?

While insisting on the pursuit of the great liberal universal values of tolerance, equality, justice, and free discussion, perhaps it’s time for political liberals to join with conservatives in supporting virtue formation in our families and character education in our schools. The very survival of our nation depends on such an alliance.

*“To overcome criticism that the virtues taught are too ethnocentric, school curricula need to show how these virtues express themselves in the world’s major cultures and religions.”*

Recent critics of character education in the schools argue that it has been taken over by those with a political agenda. Liberals can only fault themselves for allowing this to happen, and for not sufficiently acknowledging the severe crisis of values in our country. To overcome criticism that the virtues taught are too ethnocentric, school curricula need to show how these virtues express themselves in the world’s major cultures and religions.

One of the advantages of discussing virtues might be that we would come to an agreement about them much more easily than arguing about moral rules. For example, the debate about sexual abstinence could be constructively redirected by a focus on the virtue of fidelity. There should be no disagreement at all about the universal virtues of courage, loyalty, integrity, compassion, and justice; and there are very creative ways in which these values can be taught.

The greatest challenge to any program of moral education is the violence that is endemic in our culture. Here liberals have much to offer by stressing research that clearly demonstrates how violent behavior is learned and not natural to human beings. The virtue of nonviolence, along with patience and fortitude, should be taught as a central virtue in any character education program. As future citizens, children should be taught that violence is never morally necessary, and that conflicts should always, whenever possible, be resolved peacefully. In a world where moral character is understood to be internal—as exemplified by Christ, the Buddha, Gandhi, and King—nonviolence would not just be an optional personal virtue, but a required civic virtue.

—Nick Gier

Nick Gier is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Idaho. His most recent book is *The Virtue of Non-Violence: from Gautama to Gandhi* (State University of New York Press, 2004).

## Woman of Courage Lecture Series

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Jane Addams, founder of Hull House in Chicago, and recipient of the 1931 Nobel Peace Prize.

As she spoke of her work in Africa, The Reverend Gloria White-Hammond invoked the refrain popularized during the American Civil Rights Movement: “We shall overcome someday. Deep in my heart I do believe that we shall overcome someday.” With over 27 million people in bondage worldwide, she stated that “Slaves everywhere are literally dying to overcome.” She added that governments and people who do nothing about this are guilty of “functional complicity.”

She noted that over 2 million people have died in the Sudan due to “the longest running civil war on the African continent.” Furthermore, 4 million people have been displaced, many through slavery as Arab Muslims in the North raid the indigenous African villages of the South. In the chaos, men are often killed, boys kidnapped for soldiering, women raped, and many women and children taken North as slaves.



*“The privilege of  
waking up each morning  
on this side of freedom  
comes with responsibility.”  
.....*

Initially, White-Hammond was reluctant to go to such a place and ill-prepared to confront the crisis awaiting her. “I wasn’t prepared for the stories of unconscionable abuse,” she said. She recalled a young woman with two small children who was forced to carry loot on the trek North after her village was raided.



Gloria White-Hammond with a group of freed slaves in Sudan.

She expressed her worries about the safety of her little children, who might get away from her if she had to carry loot instead of them. “They [the raiders] solved the dilemma for her,” White-Hammond explained. “They quite simply shot her children to death.”

As her attention shifted from such horrors to the plight and hope of the Sudanese people, White-Hammond began to see herself as a person who could help. Part of the work involved “facilitating an underground railroad,” much like Harriet Tubman’s work in the nineteenth century. White-Hammond helped to raise funds and worked on the ground to buy back the freedom of thousands of people, mostly women and children. “You too could have purchased the freedom of a woman for a mere \$33,” she told the audience. “A cow, however, would cost \$100.”

After years of war, the challenges of community building are great. Illiteracy is 90 percent or higher and children, who have been enslaved and abused and have known only war, have lost their sense of efficacy. Even the recent peace treaty, while encouraging, leaves a great deal unresolved as people attempt to rebuild their lives in refugee camps.

The experience of the Sudan has changed White-Hammond. “My grief and outrage have become exponential,” she confided. “I had left the land of the free and arrived in the home of the brave.” But like Harriet Tubman, she feels “a sense of calling” to work with the women who are trying to rebuild their lives and communities in the wake of slavery.

The “epiphany” of this calling came to her through a process of inner struggle. It was on her second trip in 2002, when she was traveling as the only woman in the group and feeling somewhat isolated that she found her position “really, really hard.” She described the heat and discomfort, the bugs and dirt, the gunshots that interrupted her sleep. Echoing the title of a popular children’s book, she described her fifth day on that trip as a “Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Day” that brought her to a turning point. “What in the world am I doing in this place?” she wondered.

Faced with enormous human suffering all around her she felt “utterly overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacy.” Conscious of the possibility of violence in the midst of a war zone, her thoughts and values came into focus. “I realized that I was in exactly the place I needed to be,” she

said. “There comes a time when you hit a wall [in life] and you decide you’ve got to make a choice about whether you’re going to go forward and make a difference, or be still.”

She elaborated on the importance of sowing seeds and sustaining hope. “When you plant seeds you want to see those seeds bear fruit. But maybe this will happen later and you won’t see it. So, don’t give up.” She also spoke of her sense of responsibility, of her desire to share the gifts and advantages of her own life with others and help the world realize the vision of her own ancestors for the future they would never see. “The privilege of waking up each morning on this side of freedom comes with responsibility,” she said. “I am my sister’s keeper.”

Acting on this realization, in 2002 Gloria White-Hammond founded a human rights group organized to support women of southern Sudan called My Sister’s Keeper. She is also founder and consultant to the

church-based creative writing and mentoring ministry, Do the Write Thing, a program designed to empower high-risk adolescent females of African-American descent. “We need to let young women know that we can’t turn a deaf ear or a blind eye,” she said.

In the question and answer period that followed, White-Hammond was asked about the challenges of assimilation for slaves returning to their villages. “Rejection is foreign to the villages,” she replied. Unlike many cultures, even raped women are accepted into the community, not rejected as tainted. “Rejecting these women would be like rejecting a part of themselves,” she explained.

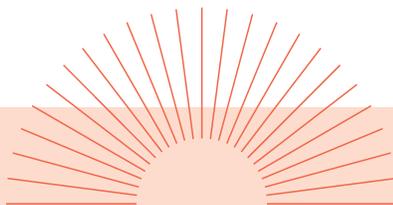
A young Brandeis University student from Sudan thanked the speaker and the audience for caring about her country and her people who are “in a very dark place,” noting that she thinks of her people back in the Sudan all the time. She emphasized

how moved she was by White-Hammond’s comments about the hope the Sudanese people feel. Similar sentiments were voiced by a Nigerian woman in the audience, who said that she was surprised to see any group of people in the United States give their attention to Africa and really care about the people there, and how good that sincere attention feels for her, as an African.

Concluding her remarks, Gloria White-Hammond invoked a freedom song, “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around. Gonna keep on walking, keep on talking, on freedom’s trail,” she said. Just as Tubman had become “the hope and dream of the slave,” she has decided to offer herself as this dream for those in Sudan who need her.

For an in-depth summary of this lecture, please go to [www.brc21.org/ht\\_summary.htm](http://www.brc21.org/ht_summary.htm).

—Helen Marie Casey



## THE PATH TO PEACE: 2005

IN HIS 2005 PEACE PROPOSAL entitled *Toward a New Era of Dialogue: Humanism Explored*, Daisaku Ikeda commemorates the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of Soka Gakkai International (SGI). Acknowledging a “gnawing sense of vulnerability” in the face of ongoing terrorist threats to humankind, Dr. Ikeda urges renewed efforts to promote education for human rights, disarmament, and sustainable development. Noting that the world’s problems are caused by human beings, he reasons that “they must have a human solution.” Indeed, humanism itself is the over-arching solution he proposes.

At the core of this inspiring document is a strong emphasis on dialogue as “the sure and certain path to peace.” Recalling his own intense efforts at dialogue in China and the Soviet Union in 1974, he suggests that just as no vision of peace was possible at that time without the communist bloc, so must peace today include a variety of people. As he explores the meaning of humanism, he quotes Rabindranath Tagore, Martin Buber, Eiichiro Ishida, and Albert Einstein, to name a few. He also shares the essential elements of Buddhist-inspired humanism.

In the end, he states that “The real essence and practice of humanism is found in heartfelt, one-to-one dialogue.” Because we are creatures of language, we must—Ikeda seems to say—keep talking, no matter what. “We have no choice but to immerse ourselves in humanity, to commit ourselves to an ocean of dialogue.”

Please see the back cover of this newsletter to order your copy of the 2005 Peace Proposal, or go to <http://www.sgi.org/english/President/peaceproposal/peace2005.htm>.

## Community at the Community School

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Residential Program (six-month intensive residence), the Outreach Program (for non-completers and alumni), or part of Passages, which addresses the needs of teen parents, usually young mothers, who are tutored in their homes by teacher/counselors.

The common thread is a sense of community, but how do we form community? We believe that staff members and students alike share the same basic needs. Each of us feels a need to belong, to be respected and attended to, to be in compassionate and mutual relationships, and to accomplish something meaningful that can lead to a hopeful future. We all need to be part of a community that encourages our voice and respects our opinion. And our lives need to be connected to the communities that surround us: our neighborhood, town, eco-region, country, world.

To meet these needs we have designed a process that merges the world of education and the “real world.” Although our approach to each student is highly individualized, all learning at the community school occurs in the contexts of relationship and community. Students begin their journey with us by completing a series of challenges individualized to their interests and capabilities before they are accepted; admission is based on their behavior, no one else’s. They apply by their own choice and, so, begin by taking responsibility for themselves as the authors of their educational futures.

In working with non-traditional high-risk students, our learning curve has been steep. Initially, we expected residential students to come to us fully able to participate in a democratic community. But because their time in residence with us is limited to six months—and students often come to



Motherhood is often an incentive to succeed at the Community School in Camden, Maine.

us with a backlog of distrust, disrespect, and neglect—they can’t jump in as fully engaged community members. Many have been actively discouraged from being a part of their previous school communities, either because of class, personal “difference,” gender, condition (pregnancy), behavior, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. Thus, our first challenge is to build a foundation of reciprocal trust and respect. When they believe that they truly have a voice worth listening to—and that we are worthy of their trust—young people become ready to co-create community. To accomplish this, teachers and students work together in dyads we call the “one-to-one.” These relationships form the dynamic molecules of community that students will enlarge upon in their lives.

Several years ago, I had a conversation with a graduate who told me that until she came to the Community School she fundamentally questioned the meaning of her own life. In her six months at the “C-school,” she felt that meaning was restored because of our desire to hear what she had to say, “as though I was someone that

mattered.” In the 13 years since that remark, she has used the relationships she established at the school to provide balance and perspective in her life.

For some students, relating genuinely to adults can be hard to take. I’ve known “Dan” since 1978 when he was an articulate, soft-spoken, humorous 17-year old. But despite obvious intelligence and close ties with classmates, “Dan” failed to complete his graduation requirements while at the Community School. Although he made it through the term, he took ten years to earn a diploma. Through our Outreach program we discovered an underlying reading problem, and he taught me what it meant to grow up in an abusive alcoholic household. Because of his past, he could never fully trust that staff members were not going to turn on him at any given moment, changing from our respectful, kind demeanors to the arbitrary rage and meanness he had experienced at home. Always waiting for the other shoe to drop, he even tried to provoke our fury. Fortunately, he failed at this as well.

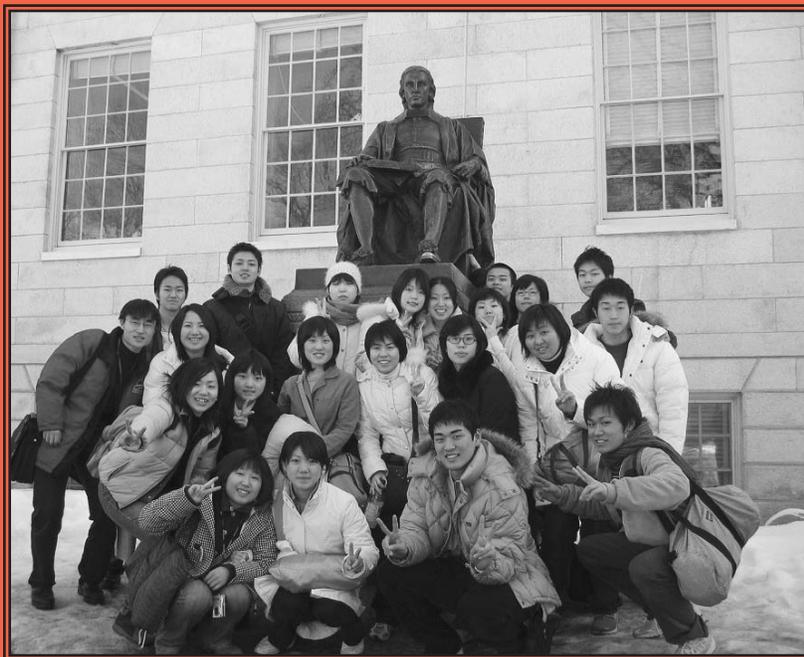
For “Dan,” becoming a part of our community was like playing hide-

and-see. It was not safe for him to reveal himself, because he “knew” that adults signified danger, and that he could only expect the worst from those closest to him. As a counterpoint, his C-school experience created a reserve of trust and respect that sustained him over the years as he grew and started a family of his own. Like most of the young people we meet at the Community School, Dan has learned to become part of a community by taking responsibility and caring for others.

Most students join us with less than ample faith in themselves. Failure and an absence of adult support has bought them the freedom of low expectations. Nevertheless, some internal process pushes these students to reconnect with their education. For our teen moms, their own children can be an extraordinary motivating factor; for our residents, motivations tend to cluster around gaining adult privilege and taking responsibility for their lives. Looking back, we have provided our students and staff with an authentic community in which to grow up together. We carry and are carried by the connections we have forged with others, ourselves, and the world around us. We have learned about community, in community. When names and dates are long forgotten, this will be the enduring lesson.

—*Emanuel Pariser*

Emanuel Pariser, co-director and co-founder of the Community School, has served for many years on state-level task forces and commissions relating to alternative education and substance abuse prevention. He is currently developing the theory of relational education as a doctoral candidate at the University of Maine, Orono. For further information go to [www.thecommunityschool.org](http://www.thecommunityschool.org), check out the book entitled *Changing Lives: Voices from a School that Works*, or contact Emanuel at [emanuel@thecommunityschool.org](mailto:emanuel@thecommunityschool.org).



**SOKA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS  
VISIT THE BRC**

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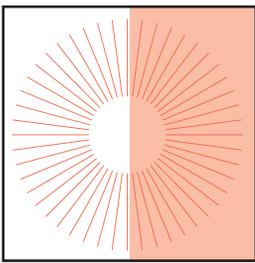
Twenty-two students from the Soka University Japan UN Club visited us in February on their way to the United Nations Headquarters where they had research briefings with Ambassador Chowdhury and other UN Officials in New York City. They are shown here posing with a statue of John Harvard, the founder of Harvard University, just a few blocks from the Center’s offices. The message of these young Ambassadors of Peace to all they encountered was “Be a fortress for the peace of humankind!”

*In Memoriam*

**David Wellington Chappell  
(February 2, 1940 – December 2, 2004)**

- Professor of Religion at University of Hawai’i for 28 years
- Founding faculty member and Professor of Comparative Studies at Soka University of America
- Principal founder of the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies
- Editor, *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace* (Wisdom Publications 1999)

The David W. Chappell Dialogue for Peace Foundation has been established to provide grants and scholarships to promote study in Interfaith Dialogue and Peace Studies, and to support attendance at Peace Study Conferences for American and international students. For further information, please contact [DialogueForPeace@ChappellFamily.com](mailto:DialogueForPeace@ChappellFamily.com).



## BUILDING COMMUNITY: A CONVERSATION WITH CEASAR MCDOWELL



**CEASAR MCDOWELL** has served as founding director of the Center for Reflective Community Practice (CRCP) at MIT for the past five years. With colleagues like Joy Amulya, and with the support of an Advisory Board and Partner Organizations, McDowell oversees the development of programs focused on knowledge building at the community level. He is also a member of the BRC's Learning Circle on Community Building (See Director's Message). McDowell was interviewed in the spring by BRC publications manager Patti Marxsen.

**PM:** In a sense, for most of us the family we grow up in is our first experience of community. What was your family like and what part of that experience remains with you?

**CM:** Like a lot of African Americans in this country my family was divided between the North and the South. Most of my family lived in rural Louisiana. But when my father was discharged from the service in 1944 in Colorado, he and my mother decided to stay there. I was the first person in our family to be born outside of the South. Growing up, I spent most of my summers in a small rural community in Louisiana, and all my school months in urban Denver.

**PM:** You lived in two worlds.

**CM:** Yes, my childhood was split between two worlds and they were very different worlds. I was born in 1950, but it was not until 1966 that my grandmother in Louisiana had running water in her house. She lived in a community that was poor economically, but rich socially.

**PM:** Was there a sense of community in Louisiana that helped you define what it meant to belong to a group of people?

**CM:** We had a very strong community in Colorado, but I do think our identity as a family was centered in Louisiana, where the community was almost exclusively black. In Denver, we lived in an integrated working-class neighborhood. Louisiana and Denver were definitely different worlds, but both places were child-centered, and everyone worked—men and women—and both were tight social groups. We also attended a church, the Baptist Church, and that was another kind of community.

**PM:** Did you feel worldly, because you had the experience of knowing different people and seeing them live in distinctively different ways in both the North and the South?

**CM:** I think it gave me a different way of seeing the world, and a different notion about my own ability to adapt to different environments.

**PM:** When was the first time you felt that being a part of a community outside the family mattered to you?

**CM:** Family and community were so tightly integrated for me, but in adolescence I started to create my own little communities like lots of kids do.

When I went off to college, to Pacific University in Oregon, I became a part of something different than my family was. It was a small liberal arts college in a small rural northern community with about 1,000 students; I liked it, but it was hard being one of a handful of black students surrounded by other communities that had no black people.

**PM:** We live in such a mobile and technological society that some thinkers, like Nel Noddings, have suggested that geographical communities and communities of kinship are not as available as they once were. In their place, she speaks of “communities of mind” that we might also think of as “communities of culture.” In this context, I wanted to ask if you believe there is a “black community” in America that people feel a part of, even if they are not related or geographically close, but black?

**CM:** Belonging to a community implies choice. When you talk about the concept of “the black community,” it is both a community of choice and a community that you are part of by virtue of being black and living in this country. You are treated in a certain way because of that, and it gives you a set of common experiences, a common framework to operate from, as well as a set of experiences that you can only share with other black people. So, yes, there is a “black community,” but it's not the same for everybody and in a lot of ways it's imposed by the larger society. It's a political thing that has a lot to do with how people are treated, and how institutions relate to them.

**PM:** Have you had mentors? If so, who are they and what lessons did you learn from them?



*One thing I believe is that many people in this country feel silenced around their own experience.*  
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**CM:** I looked up to my uncle. He was a biochemist, a senior research scientist with NASA involved in a lot of their early work with monkeys and space flight. He was an important person in my life who could model what was possible. And on top of all that, he lived in California. I'd visit him there and that was a real cool place to be in the 1960s.

**PM: Did he help you focus your talents?**

**CM:** He was one of the central people for me in my college years. But I was a restless soul, and I've tried a lot of different paths in my life: I've owned a horse farm and was a professional horse trainer for a while; I was a professional musician; I ran Youth Programs for the YMCA; I was the Associate Superintendent of a school system in Alaska; and I've been a filmmaker.

The important thing about all that is being comfortable and always searching for different avenues of self-expression. I think that's what I needed to find myself. I was blessed enough to be able to do it in a way that has given me a chance to try out these notions of community and to work with different people in different places.

**PM: On the website for the Center for Reflective Community Practice, it says that your projects "support the development and use of knowledge embedded in marginalized communities to build social capital, improve community service, and inform policy." Could you define a few terms here for our readers: "marginalized community" and "social capital," for example.**

**CM:** Marginalized refers to the position of neighborhood in relation to the larger system. Marginalized is an unfortunate term because it doesn't reflect the vibrancy and complexity in these communities that are the very basis of our work. The term refers to

communities and neighborhoods that are poor and populated predominantly by people of color. But it also contains for us the notion that a systematic, policy-driven set of circumstances has placed and kept these communities and neighborhood at the margins of society.

**PM: Do terms like "marginalized" accentuate the "otherness" of some people or groups?**

**CM:** Communities aren't the same everywhere, and a word like "community" doesn't mean the same thing in affluent suburbs as it means in a "marginalized" community. We have to be sensitive to issues of power and privilege.

**PM: And what do you mean by "social capital"?**

**CM:** The word "capital" implies an asset—a thing of value. At the CRCP, we firmly believe that relationships are a form of capital... that knowledge is a form of capital... that if people can recognize and use their knowledge capital, they will be able to improve the conditions they're living in because they'll have another way to engage with the world.

This goes back to the distinction often made between family and community. For me, growing up, the two were interconnected. When you look at that interconnection, it's a very strong social network that has a lot of value because it allows a lot of things to happen. If you dismiss it or don't pay attention to it or fail to nurture it, you can lose it. Part of our work is helping people recognize that they have these valuable social networks as a form of capital.

**PM: A key word in your organization is "reflective." How does reflection contribute to community building and social change?**

**CM:** I have a very firm belief that there is a wealth of knowledge inside the communities we work in. I also know that people often don't know what they know. I believe that one of the ways you can help people identify that knowledge is to engage them in some process of reflection on their work and experience. People need to have some distance, some space where they can look back over what they've done, over the meaning they're making, and test that against the assumptions they have about the world and the values they operate with. We can't do this on the fly. You have to be purposeful about making the space and time to do it.

**PM: Does reflection lead to knowledge?**

**CM:** We create and design processes in hopes of identifying knowledge, and we do it pretty rigorously. We do some individual work but most of our projects are collective. We may have groups of people come together and reflect on common experience because we want them to know how they collectively understand a piece of work.

**PM: How do you create the space and convince people that they have time to devote to this?**

**CM:** Sometimes the most important thing to do is simply create the opportunity. People will step up if you provide the support. One thing I believe is that many people in this country feel silenced around their own experience. For people in marginalized communities, their experience is often reflected back to them by "experts" or the media or other people's perceptions in ways that are unrecognizable to the people in these communities.

*continued on page 10*



## Guest Interview

*continued from page 9*

**PM:** This goes to the heart of otherness.

**CM:** “Othering” is ubiquitous. The important thing is the impact that it has. False images can rob people of a sense of control or agency in the world. So when you create opportunities for people to find their own voice and name their experience in the world, they’re eager for that. It’s not a new idea. Miles Horton did it with the Highlander Institute in the 1950s when he created learning circles for poor Appalachian people. He gave those people a voice and a place to find that voice. It’s a radical concept: giving people a voice around their own experience.

**PM:** Why is it radical?

**CM:** Because we do a lot in our society to keep people from having their own voice. We do it in schools, we do it in politics. When people can voice their own experience, then no one can take that away from them.

**PM:** How and where do you work?

**CM:** We work throughout the country. For example, we just finished a two-year project with five communities that included Mississippi and Texas, examining what they have learned about the role of race in building community. We also have a new knowledge-building initiative in Boston in which five neighborhoods are building a history of what they have learned about improving the lives of families and children. We also have individual fellows, who might be people who could grow and benefit from working with us, or they might be seasoned practitioners in community building.

**PM:** Could you share a story about someone whose work with you at MIT led to social change in his or her community?

*The essential question is:  
How well are we able  
to know what we  
need to know... to heal  
communities and the world?*

.....

**CM:** Jane Sapp, a musician and cultural worker, is currently a fellow we’re working with. Jane has been doing her work of community building through music all over the world, for decades. And now she’s stepping back and struggling with important questions about what she’s learned and what her work means for herself and for other people. The process she’s engaged in will lead to new knowledge for her and for us.

Another example is a group of community health workers in Springfield, Massachusetts, in a Puerto Rican neighborhood called the North End. This is the poorest neighborhood in the state; and these people work on many levels to deliver all kinds of services to those who live in that community. The health workers have become a team engaged in reflective practice. What’s interesting is that they initially saw their role as connecting people to services. But after going through a reflective process, they shifted their understanding of what they do and now realize that what they are really doing is community building focused on growing social networks. This has really enlivened them and people in the community and has increased the social and political activity of people in the North End.

**PM:** What are the challenges of getting people who don’t have time or have not been well served by social policy to work together? How do you go about trust-building?

**CM:** We have to think of ways to actually engage with the work that they’re doing. First of all, you have

to show up and not make demands. And I think you have to prove your commitment to them and their community. They have to know you’re going to be there for the long term. For example, we’ve been working with the North End in Springfield for four years, but we have a 10-year commitment to those people. And the work we do belongs to them.

**PM:** What do mean by “belongs to them”?

**CM:** Universities have a long history of co-opting underserved communities. We don’t want to do that, so we’ve had to work through copyright issues and things like that to make sure that the work we do, the knowledge we build, can only be used by the communities engaged with us for purposes that make sense to them. We can negotiate with them about it, but they own it.

**PM:** You’re sharing power.

**CM:** That’s what we do and that’s what we want to do: share the power in the knowledge building industry in this world. We want to shake it up and bring different voices and experiences into it. So much of the knowledge that is valued in the world is abstract. It’s data, not real, touchable experience. It doesn’t come from the people who live in a community and know what’s going on. The essential question is: How well are we able to know what we need to know... to heal communities and the world? You can’t know what you need to know if you distance yourself from reality.

**PM:** Would you go so far as to say that the knowledge on the ground should be combined with abstract knowledge?

**CM:** Yes, the combination creates possibilities. The world is fully connected and interconnected. We are a living system. But we’ve over-developed one aspect of our way of



## BOOK TALK

knowing and used that to dictate to the other parts of the system. It's unbalanced. We need to build our capacities in other areas.

**PM:** Does this relate to the term I came across on your website: "collective genius"?

**CM:** Work in communities is highly collective and there is a genius there. Individuals have part of that, but there is also something happening as a result of the collective mix of individuals. At the same time, we need to connect different ways of knowing into a kind of "connected genius." We need to connect the false dichotomy of theory and practice and the different kinds of knowledge that people in communities possess.

**PM:** What is the root cause of unhealthy communities?

**CM:** Inability to love, especially those people who are different from who we are. That's the root cause. Everything else stems from that.

**PM:** On a global scale, could you share some thoughts on what's going on in the world today and suggestions for practical steps ordinary people in the U.S. can take to build a culture of peace?

**CM:** I really believe that the best thing we can do to effect peace in the world is to be in peaceful and right relationship with the people who are right next to us. Our ability to change the world is the ability to change what's right in front of us and our way of interacting with what's right in front of us. Wendell Berry has an essay about this idea of "thinking globally." His idea is that people really can't affect the world globally, but that the best we can do is to fix ourselves and help those next to us. It all comes back to building good relationships.

**PM:** And love.

**CM:** Yes, and love. 🐾

### **Educating Citizens Well Received**

The Center's first education book, *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness* edited by Nel Noddings, was published by Teachers College Press in January. In the meantime, news of the book's publication was shared at *Educating Global Citizens: International Perspectives*, a symposium co-sponsored by the BRC at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting in April. It was also featured in a panel focused on *Global Citizenship Education in the U.S.: Historic Challenges and Emerging Models* at the Comparative International Education Society annual meeting in March.

Larry Hickman, director of the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University, had this to say about *Educating Citizens*: "Nel Noddings and her colleagues have given us a splendid book. It offers powerful strategies for incorporating themes of global citizenship into the curriculum, but also leaves plenty of room for managing the unique educational contexts that teachers face on a daily basis."

If you are a professor and would like to receive a complimentary examination copy of this book, please contact the center at [pubs@brc21.org](mailto:pubs@brc21.org).

### **Ideas in Action: Update**

The Center's forthcoming book, *Ideas in Action: Enduring Visions of the Philosophy and Practice of Education*, is well underway with an impressive slate of contributors. Editor David Hansen and the BRC are pleased to announce that the following chapters will be completed this summer:

*Hannah Arendt and the Human Condition*

Natasha Levinson, Kent State University

*Rabindranath Tagore and a Holistic Education*

Kathleen O'Connell, University of Toronto

*Jane Addams and Education for Personal and Civic Growth*

Jean Bethke Elshtain, University of Chicago Divinity School

*Tsunetsaburo Makiguchi and Value Creation*

Tatsuro Sakamoto, Soka University, and Kanoko Ide, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

*Paulo Freire's Politics and Pedagogy*

Stephen M. Fishman University of North Carolina (Charlotte), and Lucille McCarthy, University of Maryland Baltimore County

*Maria Montessori and Peace as a Premise for Educating*

Jennifer Whitcomb, University of Colorado, and Jacqueline Cossentino, University of Maryland

*W.E.B. Du Bois and an Education for True Human Progress*

Rodino Anderson, Teachers College Doctoral Student, Columbia University

*Rudolf Steiner and the Education of Human Perception*

Bruce Uhrmacher, University of Denver

*Tao Xingzhi and An Education for the People*

Zhang Kaiyuan, Central China Normal University

*John Dewey and the Quest for Meaning*

David Hansen, Teachers College, Columbia University

# WHAT IS COMMUNITY, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

We asked several people whose work involves community building this simple question, and got some not-so-simple answers.



**SARAH MICHELSON**  
Teen Intern with  
The Food Project,  
Current Program  
Involvement:  
Building Local  
Agricultural Systems  
Today (BLAST)  
[www.thefoodproject.org](http://www.thefoodproject.org)

give to my community, other communities are no less deserving. I need to be reminded that when I form a connection with someone based on common experience, it is not because that someone is from Sudbury. It is because we are both human beings, and I am part of a global community.



**FRANCES MOORE LAPPÉ**  
Author of *You Have the Power: Choosing Courage in a Culture of Fear and Democracy's Edge* (Forthcoming, Fall 2005)

COMMUNITY—meaning for me “nurturing human connection”—is our survival. We humans wither outside of community. It isn’t a luxury, a nice thing; community is essential to our well-being.

Inclusion in the social life of society is community’s foundation. By inclusion I mean universal access to entry, starting with legal protections against exclusion—racial discrimination, for example—but going far, far beyond. Inclusion means access to jobs with fair pay, decent shelter, effective schools, and reliable health care. If you deprive “a man of a job or an income,” said Martin Luther King, Jr., “you are in substance saying to that man that he has no right to exist... it is murder, psychologically.”

Yet today the ethic in ascendance is exclusion. We have allowed the government to let the minimum wage lose a quarter of its value in thirty years. One out of every five jobs in the U.S. will not lift a family of four out of poverty. And we’ve allowed healthcare to become unattainable by so many that America now ranks 42nd among the world’s nations in infant survival.

This profoundly disturbing assault on community calls us to accept an

MOST PEOPLE IN TODAY’S WORLD rely on a community for practical purposes. The necessities of life rarely come from one’s own hands, but rather from a complicated “web of mutuality,” as Martin Luther King, Jr., once phrased it. While people need to be part of a community for life’s necessities, most people want to be part of a community because there is something indescribably lovely about being a part of a group of people who share something that makes life seem less lonely. A community is a safe place.

But there is something potentially dangerous about communities. A community that is safe, comfortable, and trusting can be so enticing that individuals forget about the world outside of their community or regard other communities with subtle prejudices. I am a member of the Sudbury community, an affluent suburb of Boston. While I work to give back to my community, I also need to spend some time away from Sudbury, to know what life is like in Bolivia, in the American South, or in Roxbury, the inner city neighborhood where the Food Project does a lot of its work. I need to go to these places to remind myself that this way of life I am used to is not the only way or the best way. I need to be reminded that, while I



**RICHÉ C. ZAMOR**  
MS, MPH, PhD  
Executive Director,  
Professional  
Services Division,  
Latin American  
Health Institute,  
Boston,  
Massachusetts

A COMMUNITY is a group of individuals connected to each other by one or more attributes. The element that links them together is at the core, and is the essence of the group. Just as denoted by the root and the suffix of the word (community), a certain segment of the population is united by a familiar thread. In the field of Public Health, we see community as a group of folks who are at risk of being infected or affected by certain types of diseases based on their demographic, social, and economic status. A community is a familiar thread used to bring people together to advocate and support each other in the fight to overcome those threats. As human beings, we need a sense of belonging, and that sense of belonging is what connects us to the many relationships we develop. For me, the community is where one finds the balance between physical and mental fitness.

irony: We must risk exclusion—alienating or at least disturbing others—to become advocates for inclusion in community. Appreciating that community is essential to human well-being calls us to a particular kind of courage: walking with our fear of exclusion in order to stand up for inclusion.



**SHIRLEY SUET-LING TANG**, Assistant Professor, Asian-American Studies and American Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston (UMASS)

I WAS FIRST DRAWN to Asian-American Studies, and ethnic studies in general, because of its revolutionary commitment to community-building, justice-centered education, and hands-on, practical work. I have always felt that the best places to learn/teach are not behind the closed doors of an ivory tower but where people are experiencing marginalization and exclusion from decision-making power and resource-rich opportunities.

Several years ago, that was all theory. After I listened carefully to how young people and their families experienced problems first-hand and after I realized that they had always been at the forefront in fighting for a just and healthy community for all, I began to see things from their perspective and apply myself to keeping their—our—dreams alive. Since I started working at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, I have become a U.S. resident, and like many of the students and community members that I work with, I have also found my life becoming more and more tied to the political and social situation of immigrant communities and communities of color in U.S. society.

So, why is community important? Because community saves us from the

isolation and alienation we fear. Because in the real world people have no choice. Because community is about finding each other and a place we can call home. But we are also compelled to build community not only because we are survivors in an existing world order, but because we bring differences to a society that erases our differences. By dealing with differences we confront the question of the social and economic foundations of our society. By building community we bring some order to this fragmented world.



**ALAN O'HARE**  
Seanachie (Celtic Storyteller) and Director, Life Story Theatre  
[www.LifeStoryTheatre.org](http://www.LifeStoryTheatre.org)

IN THE SILENCE of an early morning walk recently, the crystal song of a scarlet red cardinal atop an oak tree awakened me more fully. As I stood listening to him and his mate, a couple walking their dog joined me. Without speaking a word, it was clear we were enchanted by the gift of their song, and we joined together briefly in a community of celebration for the gifts of Nature.

The new light, the morning hymn, and the momentary connection with other travelers evoked images from other communities. Each of these creates for us a safe experience of belonging, purpose, and shared values. In them, each of us encounters who we are and what our gifts are.

In the Sufi tradition, it is taught that the primary purpose of life is to awaken to the essence of who we are. Once we do so, we are invited to lovingly embrace this realization. The gift of community is that it offers each of us the fire of affirmation and support to achieve this. . . even on those days when we feel no fire.

But at that time we can recall the words of Thich Nhat Hanh: “I ask all of you to hold up your hands and tell me the truth. Do you believe, as I do, that someone in our hamlet is keeping the fire alive?”



**LISA R. FORTUNA**  
MD, MPH  
Staff Psychiatrist, Cambridge Health Alliance, Center for Multicultural Mental Health Research, Cambridge, Massachusetts

COMMUNITY IS ABOUT growing with others. I grew up surrounded by a culturally rich and loving community which has shaped my identity and pride as a black Latina woman. I have been blessed to be around young people and families ever engaged in improving the vitality of their community. Now, thirty five years into my life, I work as a child and adolescent psychiatrist. Every day, I get to meet with young people. Because of who these young people are and because of the love I have received, I strive to be the best physician I can be and to serve those who need me most.

In the process, my spirituality has been a central stabilizing and informing force in my life, one that has been very personal, very quiet and that has nevertheless guided every one of my life choices. This interface between community, medicine, and personal faith started with an early and longstanding fascination with the world around me. My mind was ignited by a love of science and medicine, and reliant on the power of community and deep respect and appreciation for healing. This attitude towards the world was inspired by my grandmother, my mother, and the elders around me who took the time to care. This is what community is about... taking care of each other. ☺



**PEACEMAKING CIRCLES:  
AN INVITATION TO A DIFFERENT  
KIND OF DIALOGUE**

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OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, the BRC has been actively engaged in learning about and using Peacemaking Circles in our internal staff development as well as in our public programs. As a values-driven method of resolving conflict, we found the Circle appealing because it relates to our mission, which is focused on dialogue and community building. In particular, we appreciate the dialogical nature of the Circle process as well as its focus on connection and healing.

We first learned about the Circle in our exploration of Restorative Justice during a Seminar Series we held with local practitioners in 2002. Through Carolyn Boyes-Watson, Director of the Center for Restorative Justice at Suffolk University, we were introduced to Roca, Inc., a Boston-area organization that has gained significant attention for its work with Peacemaking Circles. Roca, a multi-cultural human development and community-building organization, has been very successful in utilizing Circles. As Dr. Boyes-Watson explains, “Roca has used the Circle as a means to open up fresh possibilities

for connection, collaboration, and mutual understanding between youth and adult participants.” Roca has held numerous Circles with community leaders, judges, young people, and social service workers as a means of engaging a number of groups in complex issues that affect everyone in the community.

The particular Circle process utilized by Roca comes from the Tlingit First Nation people of the Yukon Territory of Canada. This process uses a talking piece to facilitate equal participation, and invites each group to develop its own guidelines on how participants will agree to come together. In the words of Kay Pranis, a Restorative Justice Planner and Circle Trainer, the process “places everyone in a Circle so they can hear one another, allows everyone to speak without interruption, and takes time to build relationships before trying to discuss core issues.” Circle advocates believe that the more time a group devotes to building trust, the quicker those participating in it can solve problems.

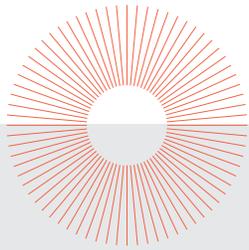
In the two years since BRC was first introduced to the Peacemaking Circle,

we have incorporated the process in much of the work we do. At our 10th Anniversary Conference, *Re-imagining Self, Other, and the Natural World*, we focused on three philosophies of interconnectedness derived from Eastern religious traditions, relational psychology, and indigenous cultures. We were fortunate to have Molly Baldwin and Saroem Phoung of Roca, Kay Pranis from Minnesota, and Tlingit Leader and Circle Trainer Harold Gatensby join our session to speak about the transformative nature of the Circle process. Those who gathered were moved when they learned about the work being done to restore communities through the use of the Circle.

Since our 10th Anniversary in 2003, we have also begun using Circles internally as a way of building deeper staff connections and developing our mission. Sayra Pinto, director of the Working Coalition for Latino Students in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, has been very supportive throughout this process. And recently, we’ve been working on a Learning Circle process with a selected group of local community-building leaders. Over the course of this two-year project, our goal is to become a lived community together and then produce a shareable product. Our vision is to share the wisdom gained through this process in the form of a book, a curriculum, or some other medium that can have a larger impact.

In appreciation for all that we’ve learned in our exploration of the Circle process, we have recently added a page on our website devoted to Peacemaking Circle resources. In the Resources section of [www.brc21.org](http://www.brc21.org), you will find a list of FAQ’s, further readings, and Web links related to the Circle process. We invite you to explore this material and learn how to bring the power of the Circle into your community, workplace, or family.

—Kevin Maher



## EDITOR'S NOTE

The Center's Mission Statement includes a determination "to cultivate an inclusive sense of community, locally and globally." In this issue of our newsletter, we explore the challenge and the promise of community building in the midst of our complex society.

Our Guest Interviewee, Ceasar McDowell, has worked for many years with the Center for Reflective Community Practice at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). For him, reflection is a key aspect of community building. At The Community School on the coast of Maine, co-directors Dora Lievow and Emanuel Pariser have learned that a sense of belonging fosters a sense of responsibility, to oneself and the surrounding community. Elsewhere, diverse voices from a variety of perspectives share responses to a deceptively simple question: What is community, and why is it important?

Looking beyond the communities close to home, Dr. Gloria White-Hammond's Woman of Courage Lecture in January reminded us that having safe communities throughout the world is a fundamental human right. We applaud her inspiring example.

Community means many things to many people. We hope this issue inspires some new thinking that can be transformed into action, near and far.

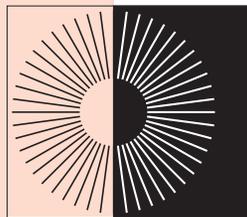
— *Patti M. Marxsen*  
*Publications Manager*

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## Mission Statement

The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC) is an international peace institute that envisions a worldwide network of global citizens developing cultures of peace through dialogue and understanding. The Center's mission is to cultivate an inclusive sense of community, locally and globally. Its current programs focus on women's leadership for peace, global citizenship education, and the philosophy and practice of community building. We sponsor public forums, educational seminars, and dialogue circles that are collaborative, diverse, and inter-generational. BRC also produces multi-author books that have been used in over 250 college and university courses.

The Center was founded in 1993 by Daisaku Ikeda, a peace activist and President of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a Buddhist association with members in 190 countries and territories.



## How to Reach Us

We welcome your advice, ideas, and comments, as well as requests for complimentary examination copies of our books. Individual staff members can be reached by calling 617-491-1090 or via fax at 617-491-1169. Email addresses are listed below:

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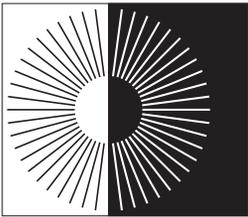
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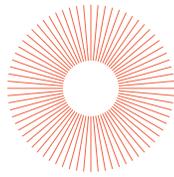
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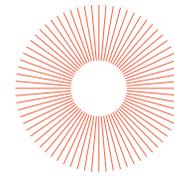
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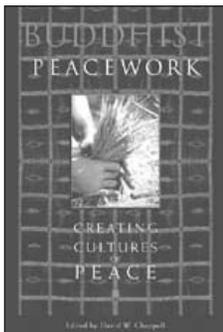


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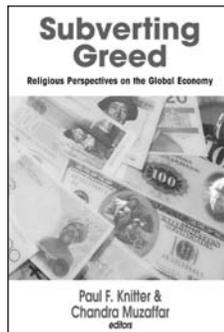
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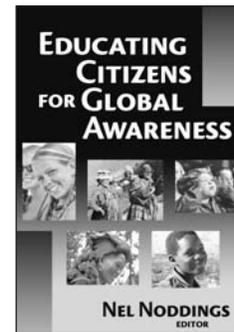
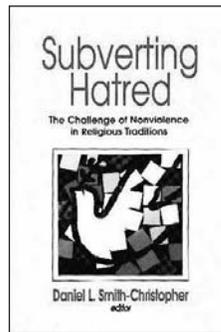
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