

Boston Research Center for the 21st Century

NEWSLETTER : FALL 2005/WINTER 2006 : NUMBER 25

BRINGING POETS INTO THE DIALOGUE OF PEACE: IKEDA FORUM “TALKS BACK”



Ed Folsom responds to a question under the gaze of Walt Whitman.

*I am with you, men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence;
I project myself — also I return — I am with you, and know how it is.*

WALT WHITMAN from “Crossing the Brooklyn Ferry”

THE SECOND ANNUAL IKEDA FORUM for Intercultural Dialogue was held at the Center on October 1, 2005. In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Whitman’s masterpiece, *Leaves of Grass*, the theme of this year’s Forum was “*Talking Back*” to Whitman: *Poetry Matters*. Scholars and poets from Asia and the Americas gathered to listen, learn, and respond to Whitman’s poetic vision of America.

In his welcoming remarks, BRC President Masao Yokota mentioned that the BRC’s founder Daisaku Ikeda, a peace activist and poet, believes that a common spiritual ground and pathway to peace can be discovered through poetry. Recalling his first exposure to Whitman’s “Passage to

India” as a student in Japan, Yokota spoke of the poet’s optimistic approach to East/West understanding. “Harmony should characterize East/West dialogue,” he said. “This, I believe, is the essence of a Whitmanian atmosphere.”

BRC Executive Director Virginia Benson explained that last year’s Forum led to a desire to bring the wisdom of poetry into conversations for peace. Considering the many conflicts in the world today, she suggested that a discussion about Whitman’s vision of democracy would be a fitting celebration of *Leaves of Grass*.

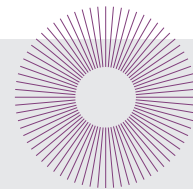
Joel Myerson, professor of American Literature Emeritus at the University of
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THE SHIFTING LENS OF LITERATURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY



IN THE CENTER’S MOST RECENT BOOK, *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness*, Nel Noddings endorses the “use of art and literature in teaching cultural sensitivity, moral reflection, and global understanding.” The novels Noddings recommends make a good case for these important lessons as they promise perspective on everything from racial discrimination and the status of women to peace, war, and the importance of place.

Among her numerous suggestions are late twentieth-century classics like Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), and Wallace Stegner’s panoramic masterpiece of the American West, *Angle of Repose* (1971). Each of these offers
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SAVE THE DATE!

February 1, 2006
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT LECTURE
ON GLOBAL VISION

Further information on page 7.



In a column entitled “Disasters We Can Prevent” (Boston Globe, October 24, 2005), James Carroll reflects on what we can learn from the many natural disasters afflicting the world, near and far. “Deeper sources of carelessness and corruption are often exposed during disasters,” he says, “and they must be confronted.” Politics, he observes, involves the work of reflecting on, learning from, and improving our response to such disasters. He goes on, “All local politics is global now... We humans are all downriver from the same coming flood. We need a new politics, one which reflects this unprecedented fact of our existence. No one is safe unless everyone is.”

How do we get to that new local-global politics? This year’s Ikeda Forum, covered in these pages, hints at one source: a new spirituality guided by a poetic vision, starting with a more expansive sense of human identity. At last year’s Ikeda Forum commemorating the 150th anniversary of Thoreau’s Walden, Zoughbi Zoughbi, the head of a Palestinian peace center, called for a “new spirituality,” a common religious sensibility that unites us with a shared sense of what it means to be human. An Australian poet at last year’s gathering queried Zoughbi: “Where are the poets? Can the poets help create this new spirituality?”

This year’s Ikeda Forum responded to these questions by commemorating the 150th anniversary of Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass. Our examination of this classic took us into the “inner dawn” extolled by Thoreau in his work, and sang of the landscape thus illuminated—the “actual me” in Whitman’s words. This concept encompasses a self more expansive than the all-too-familiar ego from which so much mischief originates. This greater self, interconnected with other humans and with all of life, is at once global and local, universal and particular. Whitman’s “universal democracy”—the new politics he points to but cannot yet see, the ideal “America” he expects to be created by “the poets to come”—begins with a larger awareness of who we are, grounded in this “actual me.”

We hope you enjoy issue 25 of the BRC newsletter, which has much food for thought on local-global connections, imagined and real. To gain a fuller account of the latest Ikeda Forum, do order the report offered on page 5, and then send us your thoughts about what you’d like to see in future Forums. Our book program continues apace, as we find ready readers for Educating Citizens and forge ahead on a book about international educational philosophers of the 20th century.

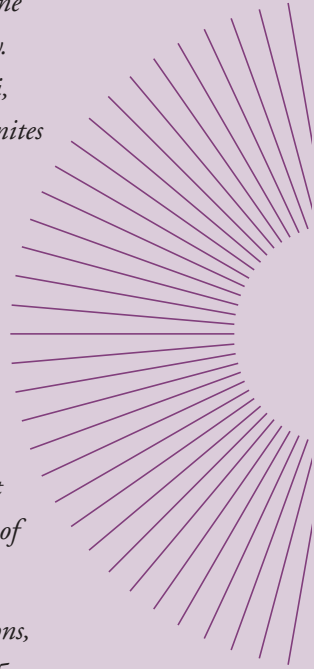
Please join us for our next public event on February 1, 2006, which culminates the Women of Courage lecture series (see page 7). Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt and her legacy reflected in the human rights education work of Shulamith Koenig, this occasion, too, promises to resonate with global and local connections. Like the Ikeda Forum, which begins the transformation with the self, Eleanor Roosevelt sees clearly how everything hinges on the behavior—and kinship consciousness—of each person:

Where after all do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person: The neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, REMARKS AT THE UNITED NATIONS, MARCH 27, 1953

Virginia (Straus) Benson

Virginia (Straus) Benson, Executive Director





COMMENTARY

AN EPILOGUE FOR KATRINA: 25 YEARS LATER

AS WE MARK THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF HURRICANE KATRINA, we honor the memory of those who died and those who suffered in what will be long remembered as far more than a natural disaster. Like other tumultuous geological events—the obliteration of Pompeii by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius (79 CE), the explosion of Krakatoa in Southeast Asia (1883), and the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, to name a few—the tragedy of Katrina was a turning point. Massive reconstruction and reclaiming of wetlands along the Gulf Coast has now been accomplished; the “new” New Orleans is a model of city-planning; the school children who were educated as refugees in the autumn of 2005 have grown up and become leaders in our communities; and the poverty and racism that so shocked middle- and upper-class America at the time has now been eradicated.

That storm that we followed from open ocean to the Gulf Coast is a landmark on the map of our moral geography, a place where the contradictions embedded in American society inevitably collided. In Katrina, we saw the impact of short-sighted political decisions on our fragile environment, the outrage of racism entwined in our class system, and the tolerance for poverty in the face of unprecedented wealth. Katrina, in all her fury, gave us a clear understanding of how our values were operating in those years, and just how connected we were—locally and globally.

In the years leading up to Hurricane Katrina, our leaders had taught us to project our fears and anxieties onto

external threats. We were enemy-conscious people with a vast military apparatus designed to defend our shores. Katrina taught us that no amount of weapons could protect us from Nature or an exploited natural environment. We were a society of individuals in those days, committed to private gain instead of the public good. Thanks to Katrina, and the work of world-renowned Professor Neva Goodwin (see page 8 for a nostalgic interview), we realized that wealth is merely an intermediate goal and human well-being the ultimate goal of a free economy.

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Katrina taught us the value of a compassionate and confrontational press. Aging icons like Anderson Cooper of CNN and Robyn Roberts of ABC insisted on answers from elected officials at the time. Their courage brought a new balance to journalism, restoring some of the integrity that was lost to the pressure of “patriotism” in the wake of 9/11, and recast the role of politicians as public servants.

In 2005, other nations of the world had a chance to reach out and help

the United States in a rare moment of need. The empathy we felt helped us to shed our global persona of the dominant power and, at the same time, brought much-needed food, fuel, and resources to the 250,000 people affected by the hurricane.

Because of Katrina, we finally got serious about developing alternative energy resources. Today, millions of Americans drive cars that get 100 miles per gallon, unheard of in those days. Millions of homes are heated by solar power and wind power. We are through depleting the good Earth of its precious fossil fuels, and in the process we have reduced carbon emissions and reversed the dangerous climate changes that were just beginning to occur in the first years of our century.

At the Boston Research Center, Hurricane Katrina is remembered as a tragic but useful model of what a culture of peace is and is not. Stalwart octogenarian executive director, Virginia Benson, said recently, “The way Katrina connected people through suffering and through finding solutions allowed us to speak more forcefully to the importance of community from that point on.”

Like other horrific events, Katrina stopped time and made us think. The world became smaller and people became closer. In the face of sudden loss, change became possible. Today, in 2030, we remember that storm swirling in space, headed across Florida and into the Gulf. We now know that in its velocity we witnessed the unstoppable winds of change.

—Patti M. Marxsen



Joel Myerson and Sarah Wider

Ikeda Forum "Talks Back"

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South Carolina, then situated Whitman's life and work in an historical and literary context. When *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1855, critics assailed it as immodest and "quite out of place amid the decorum of modern society." In fact, the only positive reviews were written by Whitman himself, anonymously.

Modern literary scholars view Whitman's poetry as "a watershed in American literary history," Myerson explained, noting that by rejecting the formal structures of traditional poetry in favor of free verse, Whitman opened the way for later poets to experiment stylistically. In terms of substance, his poetry was sensuous, erotic, and embraced the language of the common people. Myerson observed: "Whitman praised America's democracy and the interconnectedness of its citizens as a means of making all of us equal."

Sarah Wider, professor of English at Colgate University, presented a paper entitled "The Power of the Poetic Voice," which underscored the vital role that poetry, poets, and the readers of poetry play in the creation of a just world. To emphasize her point, Wider quoted from *Fighting for Peace*, a book of poetry by Daisaku Ikeda:



Ed Folsom's keynote lecture drew a crowd on Saturday morning.

*You who wield power!
It is up to you
to offer the world
the highest example and model.
By rights you should be poets.*

Wider concluded that because world leaders are not seeking peace, it is up to the poets to bear witness, affirm relations, and speak for the silenced. "We must speak with the voices we long to hear," she concluded to prolonged applause.

In his keynote lecture, Ed Folsom, professor of English at the University of Iowa, described how poets of diverse backgrounds have been responding to Whitman for a century and a half, noting that one of the longest bouts of *talking-back* is the ongoing African-American response. Focusing on the work of Langston Hughes, Folsom demonstrated how Hughes responded to *Leaves of Grass* and incorporated Whitmanian themes into his poetry. In particular, he demonstrated how Whitman's idiom borrowed from street slang, "So long!", was echoed by Hughes in the opening pages of his *Selected Poems* to evoke the long struggle of African-American people. As Hughes embellished Whitman's sense of "we'll meet again" with yearning in the face of a dream deferred, it was clear that a

dialogue had evolved between both poets and their shared vision for America.

The afternoon session consisted of an international panel of distinguished scholars and poets chaired by Kenneth Price, professor of American Literature at the University of Nebraska. Cristanne Miller, Professor of English from Pomona College, provided a feminist perspective on Whitman, arguing that Whitman's poetry resonated with the feminist poets of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s because of his struggle for identity, his writing of and from the body, and his sexual openness and egalitarianism. As she explored the poetry of Adrienne Rich, Miller suggested that both Whitman and Rich regard the work of the poet ethically, though each fulfilled this role in different ways.

Guiyou Huang, dean of Undergraduate Studies at St. Thomas University, explained Whitman's influence on both Chinese literature and democracy. Whitman's work first appeared in China in the second decade of the twentieth century following the May 4, 1919, student revolution. He explained that prominent writers and political figures studied Whitman's work at that time and found it useful in the effort to reinforce a Chinese



Natasha Trethewey spoke of the "erasures of history."



Cristanne Miller, Guiyou Huang, and Yuji Kami

spirit that would prevent the country from sinking back into feudalism. The democratic vision embodied in Whitman's poetry also encouraged the Chinese people to fight for their national sovereignty during the Sino-Japanese War. As Huang noted, these influences were made possible by translations.

The complex impact and reception of Whitman's poetry in Latin America was discussed by Enrico Mario Santí, professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Kentucky. Whitman was introduced to Latin America in 1882 by the poet Jose Martí's portrait of the author and defense of *Leaves of Grass*, which had been banned in Boston. From that point, Latin American poets used Whitmanian verse to respond to U.S. political and military aggression. However, Santí emphasized that the reality of U.S.-Latin American relations often worked against Whitman's predominant themes. "Whitman's Democracy, in the sense of respect for representative government and equal opportunity, has not translated well into Latin America," he said. Santí read from Guatemalan poet Pedro Mir's "Countersong to Walt Whitman," in which he replaces Whitman's multi-dimensional "I" with the more communal "we."

Yuji Kami, professor of American Literature at Soka University in Japan, continued the intercultural presentations with a Japanese Buddhist response to Whitman. *Leaves of Grass*, introduced in 1892, appealed to Japanese writers in form and content due to its departure from their own rigid literary conventions and its message of self-discovery and inner exploration. Kami focused on stylistic and thematic similarities between Whitman and Daisaku Ikeda, who recognized a kindred spirit when he read *Leaves of Grass* in 1951. Like Whitman, Ikeda's poetic voice is expansive as it seeks to bridge the inner life, the life of society, and that of the cosmos to discover "the sublime and eternal in all being." Kami further explained that in Mayahana Buddhism, the source of Ikeda's inspiration, the Greater Self corresponds to Whitman's "actual me." Ikeda's poetry responds directly to Whitman by celebrating our true nature, our authentic self, and our infinite potential to create a Whitmanian utopian democracy.

Finally, the poet Natasha Trethewey read several of her poems about the forgotten black regiments of the Civil War. Trethewey expressed Whitman's, and her own, complex ambivalence toward the South. She observed that

although Whitman's poetry has come to represent the poetics of democracy and anti-racism, omissions of black Civil War soldiers in Whitman's work are consistent with the relegation of blacks to the "margins of public memory."

Spirited discussion followed each presentation, touching upon poetry's role in modern culture, the importance of mindful readers, Whitman's shortcomings and silences, the strengths of his work, and his vision for a "universal democracy." Perhaps the nature of the East/West dialogue exemplified by this Forum is best expressed by the poet himself in these lines from "Song of Myself":
*You are asking me questions,
 and I hear you;
 I answer that I cannot answer —
 you must find out for yourself.*

—Kathleen Olesky



For an in-depth summary of the event and/or to learn how you can order a report on "Talking Back" to Whitman: Poetry Matters, please go to the Events Page of the BRC website: www.brc21.org/events05.html

Literature in the 21st Century

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a chance to develop global awareness by relating to lives we will never inhabit.

But beyond the value of understanding others, literature also offers a means of understanding ourselves *in relation* to the larger world. How do the choices we make affect people half a world away? What common ground do we share with people in the developing world? A first-glance review of literature in the early years of our new century suggests that writers have a lot to say in response to these questions as literary fiction tilts toward a new complexity of perspective, a new commitment to translated works, and a new awareness of Western “classics” as messengers of hope and freedom.

Some of the best novels written in the past five years operate from a local-global perspective aimed at the reconciliation of conflicting “truths.” Improbable relationships are commonplace as boundaries evaporate and universal values override nationalistic concerns. Indeed, the focus is no longer on one person or place as much as it is on the relationship between two or more coexisting realities. Underlying this literature is a worldview with a keen sense of double-vision.

The Dew Breaker (2004) by Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat is a romanesque collection of nine stories woven around the nameless figure of a former “Tonton Macoute,” a member of the secret police during Haiti’s two Duvalier regimes (1957-1986). The dew breaker’s daughter Ka was raised to believe that her father’s role in the politics of Haiti had been good, even noble. But in the pivotal opening story, “The Book of the Dead,” Ka learns of her father’s true identity as they travel from New York to Florida. These two are among the *vwayjè* (voyagers or wanderers)

who figure prominently in Danticat’s work, characters condemned to wander. The dew breaker wanders but so do his victims, and there are a lot of them. Fifty thousand people were killed during the Duvalier Era and 35,000 risked their lives in overcrowded boats in its long aftermath.

In the final story, “The Dew Breaker,” we come to understand how the torturer came to be an “ordinary” barber in Brooklyn. When his daughter learns of her father’s role as a torturer, she asks her mother, “Maman, how do you love him?” The only place to go from here, Danticat seems to suggest, is in the direction of awareness and reconciliation.

A Sunday by the Pool in Kigali (2000) by Gil Courtemanche seems, at first, to be a kind of cynical dispatch from Rwanda on the eve of the 1994 genocide. But thanks to an artful English translation by Patricia Claxton, this courageous book has made the bestseller lists in Canada and the United States because it goes much deeper than that. Here we have a riveting snapshot of the elite expatriate community feeding off the desperation of Hutus and Tutsis alike. Cocktails, doublespeak, and erotic adventures are served up poolside at the Hotel Milles-Collines where the protagonist, a middle-aged Canadian journalist named Bernard Valcourt, falls hopelessly in love with Gentille, a young barmaid. She is Hutu but has the fair skin and long body of a Tutsi. He marries Gentille as the world descends into a hellish genocide that is ignored by Western governments and UN troops. The whites leave. Massacred, mutilated bodies line the streets. Gentille is detained and Valcourt forced to go to Kenya before he can return to search for her. Their relationship is a story within a story, but the larger story addresses themes of violence, power, and the moral choices that emerge when human beings freed from national boundaries seek the “truth.” In the end, Valcourt chooses Rwanda, where 800,000

“Tutsi cockroaches” were murdered in the spring of 1994, as his home. “I no longer wish to be happy now,” he says, “just to be aware.”

The Vintage paperback of Claxton’s translation of Courtemanche’s novel is a rare object. In 1999, America’s National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) conducted a study on translated literature with cross-cultural understanding in mind. The findings were telling: out of 12,828 books of fiction and poetry published that year, a mere 297 (2.3 percent) were translated works. A similar study by UNESCO found that while 50 percent of all translations published worldwide are translated *from* English, only 6 percent are translated *into* English. Such data make it easy to understand why the late Cliff Becker of the NEA declared the state of literary translation in America “a national crisis” in 2002.

Happily, there are efforts underway to address the “crisis.” The NEA increased its number of translation grants in the first five years of the twenty-first century, in spite of overall budget cuts. Other organizations, such as the PEN American Center, have also increased their funding of translated literature. But still, the scarcity of translated literature signals an absence of global perspective.

If Americans are limited to works written in English, what are people reading in other parts of the world? Poor, illiterate people do not have access to books in any language. And we know that books with Western titles are often banned, declared subversive, or priced beyond reach. Though most American readers of literature are a growing minority, we still—as a society—think of reading as an inalienable right. And as we learned from Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), reading literature can be risky.

In this eye-opening text, we meet seven young Muslim women as they gather in a former professor’s apartment in

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LOOKING BACK ON OUR WOMEN OF COURAGE

In the winter of 2006, the Center will cosponsor, with the Wellesley Centers for Women, our fifth and final Woman of Courage Lecture: the Eleanor Roosevelt Lecture on Global Vision. Since 2002, remarkable speakers, representing their equally remarkable counterparts in history, have informed and entertained audiences totaling over 700 people in Cambridge and Wellesley. We hope their example, and their well-chosen words, have inspired others to walk the path of courage. In-depth summaries of all lectures can be found on the BRC Events page of our website, www.brc21.org.

LINDA STOUT

THE FANNIE LOU HAMER LECTURE
ON ECONOMIC JUSTICE

*Social Justice in the 21st Century:
What's It Going to Take?*

FEBRUARY 2002



A grassroots activist who works on behalf of poor communities and director of Spirit in Action, Ms. Stout's lecture focused on the often unacknowledged influence of women in the ongoing process of social change. She stressed the importance of spiritual values and community building in the quest for justice. "What made Fannie Lou Hamer extraordinary was her vision of the future. She worked from the heart," Stout said.

CONGRESSWOMAN BARBARA LEE

THE JEANNETTE RANKIN LECTURE
ON WORLD PEACE

Forging Alternatives to War

JANUARY 2003



Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA) told her audience that every time she walks past the statue of Jeannette Rankin in Washington, "I feel her spirit." In keeping with Rankin's opposition to WWI and WWII, Lee was the only member of the U.S. Congress to vote against the appropriation of funds for the bombing of Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11. Believing that the best way to stand for her country is to stand for peace, she said, "Without peace and justice, we will never know security."

JANINE BENYUS

THE RACHEL CARSON LECTURE
ON ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

*Echoing Nature: Lessons for a
Sustainable Future*

FEBRUARY 2004



"Learn from the experts!" Janine Benyus exclaimed, pointing to a larger-than-life image of a Namibian beetle. Then, in a hushed voice, "We are surrounded by genius." As a science writer with a social conscience, Benyus travels the world learning from the adaptability of Nature. In her view, "biomimicry," a field she pioneers in *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature* (1997), shifts the focus from "learning about" to "learning from."

DR. GLORIA WHITE-HAMMOND

THE HARRIET TUBMAN LECTURE
ON HUMAN RIGHTS

*Standing on the Shoulders of Harriet
Tubman: I Am My Sister's Keeper*

FEBRUARY 2005



As a physician and pastor, the work of Dr. White-Hammond has focused on healing, youth empowerment, and the freeing of slaves in the Sudan. "My grief and outrage have become exponential," she said, as she described her life-altering experience in Africa. "I had left the land of the free and arrived in the home of the brave." Like her mentor Harriet Tubman, White-Hammond feels "a sense of calling."

Please Join Us for the ELEANOR ROOSEVELT LECTURE ON GLOBAL VISION

Wednesday, February 1, 2006

Boston Research Center, Cambridge



Speaker: MS. SHULAMITH KOENIG

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) won international respect and admiration for her role as First Lady, but she regarded the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as her greatest achievement. Shula Koenig has also made human rights her life's work. As former Executive Director and Founder of the People's Movement for Human Rights Learning (PDHRE), she set out to create a global human rights culture. Her vision includes the creation of a worldwide corps of human rights educators who will serve as role models and catalysts in their communities. To this end, Ms. Koenig worked tirelessly to support the United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education (1994-2004), organizing consultations and workshops with educators, human rights advocates and community leaders in more than 60 countries. In 2003, she was the recipient of the UN Human Rights Award. Please go to www.brc21.org/events.html to RSVP after December 15, 2005.



NEVA GOODWIN

ON THE FUTURE OF THE ECONOMY AND A WORLD OF WELL-BEING

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Neva Goodwin is the co-director, with William Moomaw, of the Global Development and Environment Institute (GDAE) administered jointly by the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences at Tufts University. She has served as editor of two series (6 volumes in each): the “Evolving Values for a Capitalist World” series published by the University of Michigan Press and “Frontier Thinking in Economic Issues” published by Island Press, Washington, DC. Dr. Goodwin has authored, co-authored, and edited numerous publications. Most recently, she was the lead author of *Microeconomics in Context*, a college-level

textbook (with a “transition economy” edition published in Vietnam and Russia, as well as the U.S. version published by Houghton Mifflin), and an editor of *New Thinking in Macroeconomics: Social, Institutional, and Environmental Perspectives*. She was interviewed by BRC publications manager Patti Marxsen.

PM: For over two hundred years, the western world has functioned on the premise of “enlightened self-interest” as articulated by Adam Smith in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. This philosophy has given us the modern world, where wealth is created through competition and the efficient use of resources. Why is that premise no longer valid?

NG: The original premise of Adam Smith is valid, but it’s become narrowed beyond his original intention. When he published in *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, he’d already written a book called *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759 and assumed some awareness of his earlier book. As a result, the classical economic view includes a lot of assumptions about social behavior. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith talks about sympathy as a very important driving motive in human beings that assumes that we care what happens to other people, and we care what other

people think of us. What has changed is not that Smith’s view of “enlightened self-interest” is no longer relevant, but what he would have meant by “enlightened.” Modern economics, by contrast, is very focused on *getting*, on profits and consumption.

PM: How is the moral fabric of our society changed, so that we’ve come to think of “enlightened self-interest” as pure greed?

NG: Economics has taken us to a point that we believe the only purpose of the economy is to enable people to get as much as possible. In emphasizing a narrow, selfish kind of self-interest, it has legitimized selfishness and greed. There’s a feedback loop here between this economic view of what is rational and the kind of behavior our society endorses; the implication in text books and a lot of economics writings is that rationality is identical with selfish behavior, and if you do anything that appears to be unselfish, you’re irrational.

PM: Would Adam Smith be horrified to see what his philosophy has brought about?

NG: I think he would be very horrified. You know, his chair was the chair of moral philosophy; he was not known as an economist, but as a moral philosopher. I believe he’d be shocked to see a culture that praises greed and tolerates the tremendous distance between rich and poor that has developed in the world.

PM: So much of your work goes beyond the technical aspects of economics and encompasses the larger context we’re discussing here. What is “contextual economics” and what are its goals?

NG: Contextual economics begins by asking, “What is the goal of the economy?” In standard economics, you find a built-in assumption that the goal of the economy is to maximize consumption. Period. Given that goal, you then have intermediate goals of wealth and efficiency, both of which are good because they allow you to maximize consumption. In fact, standard economics doesn’t distinguish between the intermediate goals of wealth and efficiency and the final goal of maximizing consumption. It implies that they’re all equally desirable.

In contextual economics, we start by asking what human beings really care about. We lay out a list of what a lot of people would consider as reasonable ultimate goals, recognizing that people will differ. Happiness is an obvious one, along with security, freedom, ability to be responsible for one’s own life, opportunity to participate in society, self-respect, and so forth.



*Contextual economics
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.....

PM: How do studies determine what matters most?

NG: In “happiness studies” people are asked not what makes them happy, but how satisfied they are with their lives. Then they’re asked which things produce or fail to produce that satisfaction. These studies have been going on since the 1950s. More recently, there’s a new field of “hedonic psychology,” best explained in a wonderful book published by the Russell Sage Foundation called *Well-Being*. “Well-being” is also the term we use in contextual economics as the overarching term for the goals of the economy, recognizing that it is composed of many elements.

PM: So “well being” is your ultimate goal and “wealth” is an intermediate goal, rather than an endpoint.

NG: Exactly, though there are some elements of well-being that are supported by wealth. For example, the obvious one is security in the sense of knowing that you are going to have a meal tomorrow and knowing that your children are going to live to grow up. A certain level of wealth is needed to achieve that kind of security. But studies have, indeed, indicated that as a society gets richer it does not get happier. That is a really clear finding in America based on 50 years of studies, with huge numbers of people being polled every year.

PM: Does wealth make us *unhappier*?

NG: It does look as if there’s been a slight decline in happiness in the last 50 years in this country. But when you go within the society and look at different people at any given moment in time, those who are wealthier are happier than those who are not. So as the society as a whole becomes wealthier, as a whole it doesn’t become happier but the happiness is divided up at any moment in time with more happiness by and large going to those who have more.

PM: Does happiness depend on how much you have in relation to your friends and neighbors?

NG: In our society, comparison with others, and status, and self-respect based on status are definitely important. Robert Frank’s book, *Luxury Fever*, emphasizes the distinction between the kind of thing you can buy to increase your status and the kind of thing you can buy to give you other kinds of pleasures. Interestingly, status goods don’t raise the overall happiness of the society because, while some people are happier, others are miserable and envious.

PM: What’s wrong with this picture?

NG: What I want to emphasize is how the economic system is pushing us in the wrong direction, towards the status goods. Those are the things you can never get enough of and those are the things that the producers can always sell more of. This brings us to the toughest macroeconomic question of all which is, “What do you do with an economic system addicted to always selling more?” It’s addicted to what we consider economic growth, or growth of Gross National Product (GNP), which means more things and more dollar value of “stuff” being sold every year.

PM: You make it sound like a treadmill.

NG: It *is* a treadmill. And environmentally we can’t afford to stay on it. Many people would say that we can’t afford it spiritually either, that it’s a path that’s leading us in the wrong direction. And the hedonic psychologists would say it’s not leading us to happiness, now or for the future.

PM: Does economics concern itself with the future?

NG: Instant gratification is encouraged by producers and advertisers in our economy. If you encourage a focus on the present, you can get people to buy more “stuff” and then you can lead them into debt, which benefits part of the economy. In contextual economics, we emphasize well-being now and into the future as well.

PM: It’s quite a complicated system, isn’t it, with deeply embedded dysfunction?

NG: Absolutely, and it’s going to be very, very difficult to unravel because powerful parts of the system have a built-in anti-social selfishness. But now we’re talking about institutions, not people. We’re talking about corporations where right now the culture seems to push the whole system towards choosing immoral people to be their leaders.

PM: How do such leaders affect our economy and our culture?

NG: It’s easier for a leader to destroy a good corporate culture than to implement a bad one. A leader can make a difference but the corporate culture can drift downwards, as so many corporations have done over the last 50 years in this country. Jim Wolfonson at the World Bank had all sorts of very positive ideas that the culture just ignored. Another good example is Walmart. When Walmart came along and behaved like the perfect competitor, it forced others to do the same.

PM: In what way did it behave like the perfect competitor?

NG: To begin with, it cut every cost to the bone. Now, it’s really uncomfortable to work at any level in a firm which is cutting every cost to the bone. It requires an intensity of pace and a lack of amenity which nobody likes. But standard economic theory

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ENGAGING AMERICAN YOUTH AS GLOBAL CITIZENS



THE NEED TO CULTIVATE a new generation of leaders is vital in the world today, and particularly important in the United States where commitment to international development and citizens' knowledge of global issues ranks low. What qualities should such leaders possess? And how can we help to shape the future by shaping leadership qualities in young people today? First and foremost, the leaders of tomorrow must see the connections between the local and the global.

Preparing the next generation of Americans to be global citizens is essential to global stability and human prosperity in the 21st century.

They must understand that overcoming worldwide challenges like hunger, AIDS, and environmental degradation will require cooperative, global solutions. In short, they must be global citizens with their capacity to bring a simple set of community-minded values to the global scale: appreciation of diversity, empathy for others, commitment to social justice

and equity, and belief that all people are entitled to live with dignity. They must also be dedicated to the eradication of poverty and protection of fundamental human rights.

At NetAid, our goal is to educate, inspire, and empower the next generation of global citizens by instilling these values in young Americans and establishing a firm foundation of global understanding. To build this foundation, in 2004 NetAid developed the Global Citizen Corps (GCC), a program that builds on the passion and energy of young leaders who already feel connected to a world beyond their immediate surroundings. Circumventing barriers within the formal school curriculum, NetAid provides globally-minded high school students with the tools and resources needed to inform their peers and inspire them to take action around issues of global poverty. By preparing a national corps of peer educators, the GCC aims to significantly increase the number of American teenagers with the knowledge and values fundamental to global citizenship.

During the 2004-2005 school year, NetAid selected 34 teenagers from across the U.S. as the pilot class of GCC Leaders. By training these leaders to engage their peers in learning and action, they were able to reach over 30,000 students and teachers around issues of global poverty and development. To further amplify their message, these leaders made creative use of the media to reach audiences, appearing on MTV's Total Request Live, CNN, and the CBS Early Show. Early indicators from the pilot attest to the power of transforming young

leaders into active agents of social change around global issues.

In July 2005, NetAid convened a new class of young leaders—55 of the country's globally-minded social entrepreneurs from high schools across the U.S.—for the first annual GCC training summit in New York City. Through an intensive week-long program combining expert speakers, skill-building workshops, and experiential learning through role-play, case studies, and simulations, these young leaders developed action plans for engaging their schools and communities over the course of the school year. This fall, leveraging cutting-edge technology, NetAid will recruit and train an additional 150 student leaders from across the U.S. through an online action center that combines eLearning with community dialogue. We anticipate that through their actions, these 200 leaders will foster the expansion of a growing network of global citizens.

Preparing the next generation of Americans to be global citizens is essential to global stability and human prosperity in the 21st century. Creating a world in which all people have access to opportunity and can live with dignity will depend on the responsible engagement of today's youth. Young people's ability to understand that global solutions begin at home—in their local communities across the U.S.—is fundamental to building a constituency committed to these values today and for years to come.

—*Abigail Falik and Justin van Fleet*

Abigail Falik serves as the program manager for the NetAid Global Citizen Corps and Justin van Fleet focuses on curriculum development and program evaluation at NetAid. For further information, go to www.netaid.org.

THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IMAGINING A FUTURE FOR OUR PLANET

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WE HUMANS CURRENTLY FACE the greatest challenge of our short history on this planet. For our children's children to have a place to live—a chance to live—we must rescue our environment from destruction. Already resources are stretched and inequality is rife. Earth is home to approximately 6.4 billion people; 850 million of our neighbors live in extreme poverty. What will happen when we run out of clean water, when we run out of oil, when we have utterly ruined our ecosystem? Daisaku Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International, offers a crucial starting point to break free from our present inertia: “We must learn to imagine the world after we are gone and to act today with responsibility toward the generations who will follow us.”

Without people of imagination we cannot begin to confront what lies ahead. The Earth Charter (2000) set out a vision for a more secure future, calling on humanity to “join together to bring forth a sustainable global society.” For decades, the United Nations (UN) too has been grappling with the problem of our fading world. With the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the designated lead agency, the UN has created an ambitious and viable plan. This ten-year plan, the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), spanning 2005-2014, is based on consultation, research, and preparation, and marks an important step to meeting the challenge of the future.

Sustainable development is defined in a 1987 UN publication as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” A 1991 definition from the UN and the World Wide Fund for Nature expands this to include “improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems.” The 1991 language makes a critical distinction. Yes, the future of people and the environment must be safeguarded; but there must be recognition of the needs of today's hungry and poor. Hence, each of the three key areas of focus, Society, Environment, and Economy, outlined in the UNESCO-published Implementation Scheme document, is rooted firmly in an understanding of the situation today.

For Society, the document underscores the necessity of “an understanding of social institutions and their role in change and development, as well as the democratic and participatory systems which give opportunity for the expression of opinion.” For the future of the Environment, the emphasis is on understanding our ecological heritage and its fragility alongside “commitment to factoring environmental concerns into social and economic development.” Evaluating how to approach the Economy, the strategy calls for individuals and societies to evaluate their use of resources in the interest of care for our ecosystem and economic justice and understanding all the long-term implications of economic growth.

One thing is certain, no matter who we are or where we live, we all must invest in this undertaking. United in purpose we may flourish: divided we will perish. The strength of DESD is its recognition that there is no easy, one-size-fits-all solution. As the original Concept Document states, “There is no universal model for education for sustainable development. While there will be overall agreement on the concept there will be nuanced differences according to local contexts, priorities and approaches. Each country has to define its own priorities and actions.”

Clearly, education is the only way to come to grips with our crisis. But, as President Ikeda points out, “education for sustainable development is not about gaining mastery of a body of knowledge or a set of skills. It is about fostering an appreciation of interconnection that is both dynamic and intimate. It is, in this sense, not something that can be taught; it can only be learned... Ultimately it is a matter of learning and growing into a new way of being.” That new way of being means getting beyond our fears of the present and the future, and committing to our neighbors, our community, and our world.

—James McCrea

For further information:
<http://www.unesco.org/education/desd>



Guest Interview

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predicted that firms would be forced to follow the competitors. Since Wal-Mart has come along, others have been forced to follow. As everybody in competition with Wal-Mart began to cut costs, Sam Walton found he had to go overseas to get cheaper goods made by workers with lower wages, something he didn't want to do at all. If you want really low wage workers you have to go outside of the United States.

PM: Your work identifies resource maintenance as a very important part of economics. In fact you describe it or define it as one of the four essential economic activities in addition to production, distribution, and consumption. But isn't resource maintenance implied by production, distribution, and consumption?

NG: Like other aspects of the economy, the answer depends on your time horizon. If you have a very short time horizon, you can produce, distribute, and consume without maintaining any resources. But it won't go on forever. And that's exactly what we're doing. We're acting as if we had a very short time horizon.

PM: You mean we're not thinking about the future?

NG: Right. We're failing to maintain a lot of important resources, which includes something that some people call social capital.

PM: Contextual economics distinguishes among five kinds of capital: natural, manufactured, human, social, and financial. Tell us about these forms of capital.

NG: Natural capital includes things like biodiversity and clean air and clean water; manufactured capital refers to productive machinery and equipment and factories and roads and transportation and the communication system; and financial capital

I think the single most important thing we could do now is to start striving towards a better balance between public and private.

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of course is the one that people are most apt to think of if you use the word capital. Interestingly, it's the one we could survive without.

PM: Those three kinds of capital refer to things. But what about human and social capital?

NG: Human capital is the productive ability inherent in each person. If people learn to read and write, they increase their human capital. It makes them potentially more productive. If someone is starving or malnourished, that reduces human capital. So health, nutrition, education, and skills contribute to human capital.

The social capital of trust, honesty, responsibility, and behavior that would earn you self-respect as well as respect from others, is something that Adam Smith took for granted. An economy works much better when it has social capital, but our economy has been destroying social capital consistently. For example, although cooperation contributes at least as much to productivity as competition does, our economic system does not reward cooperation.

PM: As we all know, there are many unpaid workers in our economy. How should we compensate the labor of caretaking that includes motherhood, elder care, and other forms of often uncompensated labor?

NG: The ideal world would be one in which material compensation reflects the importance of the work in terms of human well-being. In such a world, nurses and educators and farm workers, and people who take care of children, and keep homes, and make

communities pleasant places to live, are the people who would be most rewarded. What got me into economics was asking the question, "Why, instead of being the best rewarded, are those people the least rewarded?"

PM: Is it because such workers are most often women?

NG: That's a big piece of it. Women don't ask as much as men do for compensation; they simply don't play the game as aggressively. But look at fieldwork in agriculture. In different societies it may be done by men, by women, or by both and it's always very low paid. And yet it's the thing that people depend on the most.

PM: Are there any insights from the world of contextual economics that would help us provide more security for elders?

NG: If we ask, "What is a good life and how are you going to achieve it?" you begin to recognize that a lot of what makes for a good life are what economists call "public goods," as opposed to "private goods." Private goods are what individuals purchase and use for themselves. Public goods cannot usually be sold; everybody gets to enjoy them. A great deal of the quality of life depends on public goods. Systems for retirement are a good example of this. You cannot let the market be solely responsible for public goods because it won't provide them. Economists recognize this, but in the current anti-government, pro-market environment it is not a very popular thought.

PM: Does this principle also relate to public education and healthcare?

NG: We need to recognize the limits of the market and realize that it only provides private goods. I think the single most important thing we could do now is to start striving towards a better balance between public and private.



PM: Is there a model of good balance?

NG: Economist Amartya Sen has emphasized the uniqueness of the state of Kerala within the country of India. Kerala is quasi-communist in its approach. It's not rich, but it emphasizes public goods. It also emphasizes primary education over higher education, and primary healthcare over heart transplants. With the same amount of money, they unquestionably achieve a higher quality of life for the majority of the population.

PM: Given the goal that you have set for yourself—to reform the way economic theory is used to shape the world—why have you adopted the strategy of writing textbooks and developing free on-line teaching modules?

NG: As an economist, one has to choose a point of entry. There are wonderful people working to formulate policy, and there are great activists. The point of entry that seemed the least well-served, and the one where I could help make a difference, was in education, because the available textbooks are mostly identical. Also, a lot of writing deals only with one piece of the problem. So I felt this was a great moment in history for a writer of textbooks to draw on the work of the last 20 or 30 years in feminist, ecological, radical, and other kinds of economics.

PM: For 12 years now you've co-directed the Global Development and Environment Institute at Tufts. How do the principles of the new economics that we've been discussing apply to global development?

NG: The theory now being taught in economics courses is both descriptive and prescriptive: it gives students an idea of the parameters of the possible, and also steers them toward preferring a particular kind of world. The economic models are very powerful in describing and prescribing how to create financial wealth and produce

lots of stuff, but they pay little attention to preserving and maintaining resources, and are quite destructive of well-being in the long run. As we develop the ideas of contextual economics, in our teaching materials and textbooks, we present models for economic strategies that are simultaneously supportive of individual goals and of social goals. We present as both possible and desirable economic behaviors that are good for the future and for the present. This requires taking account of the health of the whole globe, with its entire ecosystem and all its people, recognizing that this is an integrated system where we ultimately all benefit from behaving decently towards other people and the environment. That's a point of view that makes sense if you take a relatively long view; not if short-sighted selfishness is considered the only kind of rationality. But the choice of what point of view to take is not about facts; this is a purely individual decision that each person makes, usually unconsciously, about what matters in life.

PM: With global development in mind, what can people do as individuals regardless of who they are or where they live, to contribute to human well-being in other parts of the world?

NG: A good starting place is to think about what does contribute to well-being, and to consider how each of us has been led away from striving towards well-being as our economy focuses excessively on material affluence. The creation of a new economy will have to begin with each of us developing a more thoughtful personal sense of what really matters. ☺

For further information, or to access educational materials, please go to <http://www.gdae.org>.

BRC Recognized for Building Cultures of Peace

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) has selected the Boston Research Center as the 2005 recipient of its Distinguished Contribution to Building Cultures of Peace Award. PsySR president Paul Kimmel presented a plaque to Ginny (Straus) Benson and Masao Yokota at a special ceremony during the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in Washington, DC, in August. Previous recipients of the award, which has been given since 1998, include Ashoka, the Search for Common Ground, and True Majority. To learn more about how PsySR uses psychological knowledge and skills to promote peace with social justice at the community, national, and international levels, go to www.psysr.org.

A Symposium at the Center for the Study of World Religions

The Center cosponsored a symposium on October 7 at the Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) of the Harvard Divinity School. A panel discussion entitled *Perspectives on Religion and Globalization* featured CWSR director Don Swearer, Harvard-Yenching Institute director Tu Weiming, Yoichi Kawada of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, and Hiroshi Kanno, director of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University in Tokyo. The panel explored the role and impact of Eastern traditions in our global society during a special visit from a delegation of Japanese scholars hosted by the BRC in October.

Highly Recommended



The Lost Art of Healing by Dr. Bernard Lown has been a classic since its publication in 1996. In it,

Dr. Lown reminds doctors and other medical professionals that listening is part of the healing process. In the summer of 2005, the Center's president, Masao Yokota, sat down to listen to the doctor... who continues to work for peace, justice, and global public health. "Nuclear War, Hope for the Future, and the Power of Connectivity: An Interview with Dr. Bernard Lown" is available on our website at www.brc21.org/resources/res_lown.html.



Daisaku Ikeda's book of poems, *Fighting for Peace*, translated by Andrew Gebert, was recently selected as a finalist for the Publishers'

Marketing Association's 2005 Benjamin Franklin Award. In this collection, Ikeda uses starkly simple language to bring readers face-to-face with the horrors of war and expose the human psychology underlying mass violence. Gebert, an editor of SGI publications and frequent interpreter/translator for individuals and organizations, noted that "The Japanese original has a deep, oceanic rhythm or swell; bringing that to English has been a wonderful challenge." He also explained that while contemporary poetry tends toward the cryptic and extremely private, Ikeda's poetry taps into a deep vein of what might be called public poetry. To order, please contact: <http://www.dunhillpublishing.com>



Elise Boulding: A Life in the Cause of Peace by Mary Lee Morrison was published in April of 2005 by McFarland and Company. Widely regarded

as an influential social reformer and early advocate for the integration of peace studies and women's studies, Boulding is also a longstanding friend of the Boston Research Center. In addition to her numerous awards, including nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990, Boulding is the co-author with Randall Forsberg of our popular book entitled *Abolishing War*. As Michael True says in the Epilogue to this book, "Her gift is her ability to integrate everyday life and scholarship..."

Educating Citizens for Global Awareness Update

The Center's first education book, *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness* edited by Nel Noddings, was reprinted in August in time to meet the demand of the 2005-2006 academic year. As this newsletter went to press, this book had been adopted for course use in over 25 colleges and universities since its publication in January 2005.

To quote a recent review: "The book's editor, Nel Noddings, has done an excellent job, through her selections and her own contributions, in tacking back and forth between big-picture philosophical theorizing about *what* education for global citizenship is and why we need to do it, and concrete approaches to curricular transformation... As Noddings discusses in her writing throughout this volume, approaching citizenship education from this angle is a necessity given the complexities of the challenges we face in the twenty-first century." Ethan Lowenstein, *Teachers College Record*, June 2005

Ethical Visions Update

Educational Ideas Have Consequences: Ethical Visions of the Philosophy and Practice of Education edited by David T. Hansen of Teachers College, Columbia University, is well underway. Ten chapters will soon be completed and discussions with publishers have begun. "Working on this book has been a wonderful learning opportunity," said Dr. Hansen. "By looking carefully at a selection of twentieth-century educational philosophers and the living legacy of their work, we are beginning to see how their wisdom can assist teachers the world over to respond effectively to contemporary conditions and pressures."

Literature in the 21st Century

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Iran to discuss the work of Nabokov, Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Jane Austen. Here again, we feel reality split into a double-perspective as these young women form a deeper understanding of the limits of their lives. Freedom is elsewhere, but the lens of freedom is literature. Just as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* influenced the Bulgarian Revolution of 1989, this book suggests the possibility of people taking to the streets in Iran under the banner of Jane Austen. And if we can imagine that, we can imagine anything.

The Center's second annual Ikeda Forum for Intercultural Dialogue focused on ways in which the language of poetry speaks across time and space. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* proves that the best literature, however rooted in its historical context, always speaks to a vision of the future. Through the shifting lens of literature, today's writers are beginning to bring the future into focus.

—Patti Marxsen



I've been thinking a lot about *place* lately; not a particular place, but the *concept of place* in the evolution of human consciousness. Essentially, *place* has to do with our paradoxical need for boundaries and connection. The ancient Greeks created the walled city, the *polis*. Later, during the Roman Empire, the Latin term *insula* came to mean something like "jurisdiction." It was a defined place, a political structure, an insulated world where those belonging to and supporting it could count on a sense of protection. The same can be said of villages throughout the world, towns emerging in the Middle Ages, and nation-states whose boundaries have been drawn and redrawn by war. If nothing else, *place* is a dynamic concept.

In the 21st century, we find ourselves called to new thinking about our "human geography," a subject explored in depth by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) long before he taught school or developed his philosophy of education or founded Soka Gakkai. "The lofty insights, understandings, and principles of the universe are revealed in every tiny village or hamlet," he said.

We have much to learn as we rethink our place in the world, transcend familiar boundaries, and reach out for survival and more. Somehow, it's comforting to know that this has been going on for centuries.

— Patti M. Marxsen
Publications Manger

Mission Statement

The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC) is an international peace institute. The Center was founded in 1993 by Daisaku Ikeda, a peace activist and president of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), one of the most dynamic and diverse Buddhist organizations in the world. Inspired by the SGI's philosophy of value creation (Soka), the BRC works to build cultures of peace through dialogue and education. Our dialogue programs include public forums, scholarly seminars, and peace-making circles that are diverse and intergenerational. Through these programs, scholars and activists are able to forge unexpected connections, refresh their sense of purpose, and learn from each other in a spirit of camaraderie. The overarching goal of these gatherings is to contribute to a shift in US culture from isolation, violence, and war to interconnectedness, nonviolence, and peace. The BRC also works to encourage the peaceful aspirations of young people through multi-author books that are published by academic presses. Our titles, such as *Buddhist Peacework*, *Subverting Hatred*, *Subverting Greed*, and *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness*, introduce humanistic values and concerns that rarely make it into the typical curriculum. So far, they've been used as supplemental texts in over 300 college and university courses in the United States.

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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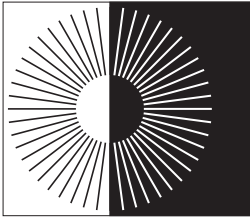
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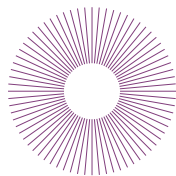
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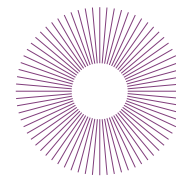
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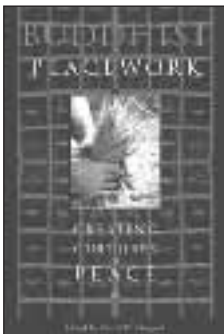


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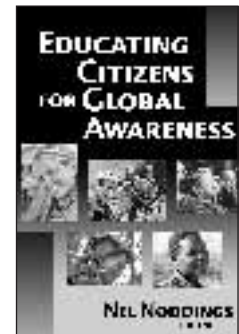
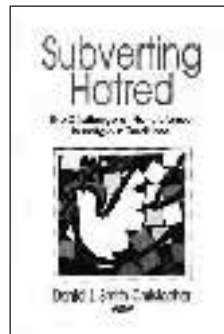
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