YOU DON’T LIKE CAPITALISM. WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO?

SOLIDARITY

WHAT IF WE EXCHANGE TIME INSTEAD OF MONEY?

BLACK MAMAS BAIL-OUT

WHEN A COMMUNITY DECIDES NO ONE STAYS IN JAIL JUST BECAUSE THEY’RE POOR
Hohlbein sees homelessness as primarily the result of people being excluded from society and community. “The beauty of community is that we can change that now, if we turn around and love people instead of judging them, accepting them and knowing that they’re doing the best they can.”

Valerie Schloredt, p 43

Rex Hohlbein and his daugher, Jen LaFreniere, both Seattle architects, are building tiny homes for the homeless in people’s backyards. Thirty homeowners have signed up so far.
As American capitalism continues to shovel wealth at the very rich by taking resources away from the struggling rest, it’s easy to feel defeated, especially with Donald Trump at the helm. This issue began with the idea that something else is happening underneath that official story of the economy. In our work every day, we see communities full of generous people working to lift each other up. So, what opportunities do people have in going about their lives to build solidarity? Every time we purchase something, share something, eat something—every decision we make to create homes and livelihoods that meet our needs can be tailored to bring maximum social justice to others.

To be sure, when we talk about fixing wealth disparity, it is often with justice in mind. But on top of achieving a healthier and fairer world, we believe there’s one more important thing. Joy.

What we want to strive for is a persistent and collective joy that can come from these solidarity economies, where our own happiness isn’t contingent on momentary success or someone else’s exploitation. This economic joy emerges from the knowledge that generosity is a shared responsibility. That our food, our work, our community are causing no one harm, and, in fact, are helping to lift up others. If our very existence is helping others to thrive, then that’s a joyful economy.

It might start with forming relationships outside the cash economy. A group of women in St. Louis formed the Cowry Collective to enable themselves to barter and trade services like lawn mowing, painting, farming, and cooking. Time-banking initiatives such as this are taking off across the country to share community burdens and tie people more strongly together.

It might involve bringing care and love into the cash economy. In Hawai’i, the state government, drawing on the traditions of its Native Hawaiian and Asian population, instituted a program to pay people who must work and also care for children and elders.

And as we consider how to build more diverse and joyful solidarity economies, we ultimately will come to this: What are we willing to give up for others? And what do we gain in return?

As economist Darrick Hamilton points out, the elite aren’t just the superrich. That means addressing systemic inequality requires a rebalancing, asking more of those who have benefitted—even indirectly—from our nation’s history of racial exploitation and subjugation. In Seattle, homeowners are giving up space to solve homelessness. Families are constructing tiny backyard houses for homeless people—literally saying, “Yes, in my backyard.”

And what are you willing to do? If you could create solidarity economies and bring joy to others and yourself, would you?
THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMIES ISSUE

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Dorothy Hinton-Adams and Southerners on New Ground activist Angelica Wheelis. Hinton-Adams was freed during Black Mamas Bail-Out, a coordinated, month-long effort in May to highlight the injustice of cash bail. Photo by Lyndon Eugene.
Penn Loh
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Loh is senior lecturer and director of the Master of Public Policy Program and Community Practice at Tufts University’s Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning. He partners with various community-based organizations in the Solidarity Economy Initiative, Right to the City Alliance and Center for Economic Democracy. He has published broadly on environmental justice, sustainable community development, and solidarity economies.

Darrick Hamilton
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Diversity, inclusion, and social justice work is core to Hamilton’s personal and professional values. He is a stratification economist with joint appointments in The New School’s Milano School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy and the Department of Economics at The New School for Social Research, using social science and policy analysis to study causes and consequences of racial and ethnic disparities and the associated remedies to address these inequalities.

Ai-jen Poo
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Poo, the executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, co-director of Caring Across Generations, and a 2014 MacArthur Fellow, is an award-winning activist and author who has spent her career organizing immigrant women workers to advocate for sustainable, quality caregiving jobs and working to ensure affordable care for older adults. Her book, The Age of Dignity: Preparing for the Elder Boom in a Changing America, outlines a path to becoming a more caring nation.
Fall 2017
Alaska’s just transition

In our fall issue, we went in depth to show communities making a just transition away from using fossil fuels. We sent editor Stephen Miller to the Arctic to explore how oil-rich Alaska is choosing to ramp up efforts toward renewable energy. Organizer Jessica Girard from the Northern Alaska Environmental Center said the magazine issue has helped reach and inspire more Alaskans about the work already underway in their state. Overall, it “has helped in normalizing the term and how a just transition can look in our state, how it is Native-led, and how it is already happening,” she told us.

Food justice in Ecuador

In Ecuador, YES! reader Alan Adams was inspired by the article “How to Feed Ourselves in a Time of Climate Change,” in which author and food justice activist Raj Patel along with executive editor Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz set out 13 ideas for a just and sustainable food system. Adams decided to use these standards to see how the local Kañari people where he lives were doing in their own food system. “When I read the first section of the article about indigenous land ownership, I was struck by how true that factor is in making economic and social progress,” he told us, referring to a section on the importance of indigenous sovereignty. “Without land ownership, [the Kañari] could not own their response to climate change.” Adams then identified the rest of the ideas—like carbon sequestration and open source seeds—in Kañari practices. “This exercise then set me on the path of analyzing the entire effort by the Kañari indigenous community to better understand it and describe it to potential providers of financial and technical support,” he said.

Sanctuary in Seattle

In August, more than 130 Seattle area residents attended the YES! conversation event “Sanctuary Stories,” in which immigrant community members discussed the city’s fight to protect immigrants from new xenophobic policies of the Trump administration. Senior Editor Shannan Stoll moderated a conversation with a panel of local experts on sanctuary policy, DACA, detention centers, immigration law, and the role of churches. We asked them what it really means to be a sanctuary city, how Seattle’s most vulnerable can be protected, and how to grow a protector movement grounded in democracy. Participants broke off into smaller discussions to find out how they could plug in to local activism. More than 50 people walked away with specific pledges for action—and next steps toward making them a reality.
People We Love: Compassionate morticians

The Trump effect: Thousands of women run for office

The Page That Counts

YOU CAN
HAVE A
DE-STRESSED,
DE-COMMERICALIZED,
GO-YOUR-OWN-WAY
HOLIDAY.
NO, REALLY,
YOU CAN.
I MADE NEW HOLIDAY TRADITIONS TO MATCH MY VALUES

Throughout my childhood, my paternal grandmother always made sure the family had a “good” Christmas. For her, that meant everyone received a gift—especially the children. We would meet at a relative’s house each year on Christmas Eve and at midnight exchange gifts. Money was often tight, and sometimes the holidays brought more of a burden when having to choose between buying decorations and gifts and paying bills.

For my own daughter’s and son’s first Christmases, I wanted them to have a good Christmas, too. I went overboard in trying to make this happen by buying unnecessary things. After that, I stopped buying gifts, and although I would still visit family for that holiday, I didn’t exchange gifts.

But these days, I’m starting my own traditions, which include observing the African American cultural holiday Kwanzaa. That doesn’t mean I can’t celebrate Christmas; it’s just given me a new approach to doing so.

In 1966, Maulana Karenga created Kwanzaa (derived from a Swahili phrase meaning “first fruits”), a weeklong celebration to introduce and reinforce seven values, called Nguzo Saba, of African culture. Karenga is a professor and chair of Africana Studies at California State University, Long Beach. He said he created Kwanzaa specifically for African Americans, who did not have a day that celebrated their unique history and experience in the United States. While the early years of the holiday was in resistance to racism and White supremacy and rejected Christianity—therefore Christmas outright—the holiday has evolved to embrace all people of African descent no matter their religion.

Not everyone stresses about what the holidays demand of us, but the good news is, no one has to. Here are five ways the Nguzo Saba can inspire you to participate in the holidays without feeling financially and emotionally overwhelmed. Reclaim the holidays as your own. I did.

DON’T BUY YOUR GIFTS—MAKE THEM.

You don’t have to give in to the holiday shopping tradition of overspending. Make meaningful gifts. Be creative, be intentional.

The principle of Kuumba (creativity) “teaches us to do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial for future generations than we inherited it.”

FROM
The Official Kwanzaa Website
IF YOU MUST BUY GIFTS, SHOP LOCALLY.

Jobs and opportunities are created when dollars circulate locally. This creates healthier environments and builds community.

The principle of Ujamaa (cooperative economics) “teaches us to build and maintain our own stores and other businesses and to profit from them together.”

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT YOUR GIFTS AND CHARITY.

Look for decision-making opportunities that influence outcome. In building racial equity, these opportunities are called Choice Points. They’re a tool that is used to help us turn away from our same old choices/actions and make an equity-driven choice/action. If you’re used to giving to a charity or organization that is made up of mostly White people, instead consider organizations that benefit people of color and are run by people of color.

The principle of Ujima (collective work and responsibility) “teaches us to build and maintain our community together and make our brothers’ and sisters’ problems our problems and to solve them together.”

ATTEND OR PARTICIPATE IN A HOLIDAY CELEBRATION OUTSIDE OF YOUR OWN COMMUNITY.

If you’re Catholic, change it up and visit a Protestant church, particularly one with people of color. If you’re atheist or agnostic, go with your churchgoing family members. If church is not your family’s thing, go together to visit a community center or an organization that helps displaced people.

The principle of Umoja (unity) “teaches us to strive for and to maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.”

DO SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR YOURSELF.

It’s been a hell of a year. Take this time for self-care and reflection. Read a book of fiction. Spend time with friends with whom you don’t have to talk about politics. Take a trip, doesn’t have to be long or far. Drink wine … or tea. Journal: What are your personal goals to contribute to a just and sustainable world? Or write a letter to yourself reminding you of the good of humanity in the face of the year’s catastrophic events. Dream again.

The principle of Imani (faith) “tells us to believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.”
Not everyone likes talking about the death of a loved one. A few people in the funeral industry have taken it upon themselves to make those uncomfortable conversations easier and to offer more options for making those difficult decisions at the end of life.
What if the high cost of dying could be taken down with an alternative business model?

The Co-op Funeral Home of People’s Memorial in Seattle is one of the only nonprofit, member-owned cooperative funeral homes in the U.S., and anyone can join. Members of the People’s Memorial Association own the co-op, paying a $50 joining fee to access discounted, transparent pricing for traditional and green burials, carbon-offset cremations, and other services.

“We don’t tell people what they need,” says Nora Menkin, the co-op’s managing funeral director. “We provide them with their options so that they can come at making these decisions from an educated place.”

As a founding member of the watchdog Funeral Consumers Alliance, the association has been working to ban predatory practices and update outdated and culturally discriminatory laws. It also offers popular end-of-life planning workshops to help members write wills and designate powers of attorney.

For Menkin, the daughter of a hospice physician whose house calls were sometimes her play dates, death was never an uncomfortable subject. At the co-op, she sees how much it means to families to be able to afford and choose their own approach to funerals. “That’s what keeps me going,” she says.

In 2009, when Brian Flowers founded The Meadow Natural Burial Ground in Ferndale, Washington, it was one of only a dozen green burial grounds in the country. Undaunted by the lack of how-to resources, he approached Moles Farewell Tributes, a family-owned funeral home, about dedicating part of its cemetery grounds for green burials.

Moles later hired him as their green burial coordinator. As former president of the Green Burial Council, Flowers educated other funeral professionals and land trust organizations on how to offer certified green burials, which increase native plant diversity in the burial ground.

“Green burial has an appeal to something pretty essential in our humanity,” Flowers says.

A green (or “natural”) burial eschews caskets, vaults, and toxic embalming fluids for biodegradable materials: a muslin shroud, a cardboard casket, a quilt. Weeks later, all but shroud and skeleton will have decomposed.

Flowers wants his body naturally buried when he dies. And he’s including a ritual for his living self: “I want to make my own casket, and keep it in my environment as a meditation of my own mortality,” he says.

Americans have been cut off from powerful rituals because they don’t interact with death. Caitlin Doughty seeks to change that. “Sitting with the body and digging the grave by hand, and standing there pushing the button for the cremation to start,” she says. These, and other alternatives, are options at her nonprofit funeral home, Undertaking LA, in Los Angeles.

Doughty’s own path to death acceptance took her from macabre child to medieval history student to hauling bodies as a crematory operator. She answers awkward death questions in her funny and honest “Ask a Mortician” web series, and she founded The Order of the Good Death collective and the Death Salon conferences to spread the word on alternatives to the mainstream funeral industry.

It’s all about creating a “death positive” culture, she says.

“What it means is that it’s okay to have this real interest in your mortality, and it’s not morbid or weird to feel that way,” she says.

It also means becoming educated about death care options, deciding for yourself what “dignified” means, and having knowledgeable people in our communities to take care of bodies.
Ryen Rasmussen, Washington, D.C.

Rasmussen, 12, was exposed to politics when her mom founded the Girls in Politics Initiative, which encourages girls’ leadership. She’s passionate about women’s rights, and Trump’s win pushed her to run for student council—she said her 7th-grade class has a “dangerous habit of only electing males.” Rasmussen’s Twitter profile reads, #futurepresident.

Nadya Okamoto, Cambridge, Massachusetts

When the Harvard freshman saw fellow classmates displaced by gentrification in Cambridge, she launched a campaign to become the youngest city councilmember.

Gina Scialabba, Piedmont, California

Scialabba, who serves on the public safety commission in Piedmont, California, dreams of becoming the state’s first lesbian senator and wants to fight for fair access to health care. Her mother died of breast cancer after struggling to get quality care.

Carol Surveyor, Salt Lake City, Utah

Surveyor’s mother was murdered on the Navajo reservation in 2015. Now she’s running for Congress in Utah’s 2nd District to fight violence against women and stand up for environmental sites sacred to Natives.

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THE TRUMP EFFECT: THOUSANDS OF WOMEN RUN FOR OFFICE

One year ago, following Trump’s victory over Clinton, women saw how much the country needs them.

Christa Hillstrom

On election night last November, Nadya Okamoto gathered with friends in the dining hall of her dorm at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Okamoto, then 18, wore a Hillary Clinton T-shirt—earlier that day, she’d voted for Clinton—and felt “pumped that the first woman in history would be elected.” Two years before, she had co-founded a nonprofit, PERIOD, that provided tampons to homeless women and girls. She’d helped launch a movement to destigmatize menstruation and, like many women, was troubled by the way Donald Trump talked about women during his campaign.

As the results came in that night, her exhilaration drained. “I was so sad, angry, I was crying,” she said. But as she looked around at her devastated classmates, her body kicked into fight mode. She wondered what she could do.

It was the same story across the United States.

In Piedmont, California, Gina Scialabba, an attorney who volunteered with Clinton’s campaign, started out the evening celebrating. By the end of the night she was heartbroken and confused. As the weeks went by, she worried about the future of health care and marriage equality under a Trump administration—and whether her own plans to marry her partner would be threatened. She began to express her opinions more openly.

“You should run,” Scialabba’s friends told her.

In the year since Trump won the presidency, groups working toward women’s political empowerment have reported an unprecedented surge of interest in politics, especially at the local level. Thousands of women who had not considered or embarked on bids for office began stepping up, nominating themselves for everything from school boards to U.S. Congress. Deborah Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, said the day of the election she worried that women would “just pull the covers over their heads.”

Instead, she saw the opposite: The following day, she started receiving applications for CAWP’s Ready to Run campaign training camp. By the end of the year, the number of registrations had surged upward by a factor of 10.

Kimberly Peeler-Allen, co-founder of Higher Heights, a group focused on Black women’s political participation, was contacted by dozens of women interested in running immediately following the election, and more than 1,000 women came to one of her leadership seminars. The defeat of “the most qualified candidate either party has ever put up in history,” Peeler-Allen said, “has had women—particularly Black women—saying, ‘If I don’t step up, who will?’”

In Cambridge, Okamoto was worried about gentrification and had been sending ideas to her local leaders. “People said, ‘If you have so many ideas, why don’t you run yourself?’” she said. “So I was like, OK, fine. I’ll run for office.”

Neither Okamoto nor Scialabba knew exactly where to start. They joined an incubator run by the organization She Should Run, which recruits, trains, and shepherds women through the process of running for office. When the group launched its first programs in 2011, it typically drew 50 to 100 interested women. In the past year, they have welcomed around 16,000 women into their campaign training programs.

“It’s truly been a moment where we’ve seen women begin to own their potential for elected office,” said Clare Bresnahan, the organization’s executive director. She Should Run helped Okamoto launch a campaign to be the youngest member of Cambridge’s city council and is guiding Scialabba through a yearlong exploration of her political future before she makes a bid for office. “A lot of what She Should Run does is about giving a community to women, who are really encouraging one another to go big,” Bresnahan said.

When women and men are not equally represented in government, the resulting policies do not fully promote women’s interests. One of She Should Run’s goals is to, by 2030, help achieve parity in politics—women holding at least half of the 500,000 elected seats nationwide.

Going into the off-year election season of 2017, women occupied just 105 of the 535 seats—19.6 percent—in the U.S. Congress, 24 percent of statewide elective executive offices, like governor and attorney general, and 25 percent of state legislative offices. Only 20 of the country’s 100 largest cities had female mayors.

It’s not that women can’t win elections. In fact, research shows that when women run, they have an equal chance of winning. The problem is that not enough step forward.

There are plenty of reasons why that is the case. Many women already juggle full-time jobs and raising children, which puts campaign work out of reach. A 2009 CAWP study examining paths to state legislative offices found that women are on average 50 years old when they first run for office, while their male peers tend to launch political campaigns at much younger ages. “We used to hear that what women needed was a wife,” said CAWP’s Deborah Walsh.

Groups like She Should Run hope the networks of support they’re building among thousands of future candidates can change this landscape. This year, legislative elections in New Jersey and Virginia provided a first glimpse into what we may see more broadly in 2018: Both states had more women running than before, and Virginia saw a 60 percent increase from the previous election cycle.

But Bresnahan cautions against putting too much stock in 2018. What’s important, she said, is seedingsafe the pipeline for the long term—planning for the “decade of the woman” rather than the “year of the woman”—and preparing millennials for a lifetime of active engagement. She wants them to say, “Wow, my friend thinks I can do this. My neighbor is doing it. I could do it, too.”

Scialabba hopes to run for office in the near future; meanwhile, she’s getting involved with her community however she can. Earlier this year, she applied for a seat on the Piedmont public safety commission. One of her first tasks was helping launch a dog-walker safety program.

“Every time someone asks if there’s someone who can do something for the community, I raise my hand and do it,” Scialabba said. “The best way I can be a part of it is to literally just show up and do it.”

The 2016 presidential election provided a wake-up call for women across the country. But rather than showing that women can’t win, it has proved to women like Scialabba and Okamoto that now, more than ever, they are called to do more than root from the sidelines.

Christa Hillstrom is an editor at YES! Magazine.
Year in which the FDA instituted guidelines that barred women of childbearing potential from participating in pharmaceutical safety and efficacy trials (later reversed): **1977**

Ratio of neuroscience studies that use only male animals compared with ones that use only females: **5.5-to-1**

Americans 65 and older who have Alzheimer’s disease: **5.3 million**

Americans 65 and older with Alzheimer’s disease who are women: **62%**

Change in American deaths from heart disease between 2000 and 2014: **-14%**

Increase in number of American deaths from Alzheimer’s disease: **89%**

Confederate monuments in the U.S: **718**

Confederate monuments that have been removed: **51**

Number of U.S. states with laws that limit or prohibit the removal or alteration of monuments: **7**

In Ukraine, the number of statues erected to honor Russian Communist Party founder Vladimir Lenin: **1,320**

Those monuments that have been removed: **100%**

Date on which Lenin Street in Zakarpattia was renamed Lennon Street in a tribute to John Lennon: **3/2/2016**

Average rate of high school completion in Canada: **84%**

Average rate of high school completion among First Nations people living on reserves: **41%**

Probability that a First Nations student who lives on a reserve and does not speak an indigenous language will do well in school: **62%**

Probability that a First Nations student who lives on a reserve and does speak an indigenous language will do well in school: **70%**

Indigenous languages in Canada that are endangered: **74%**

During the 1992–1994 recovery, rate of new jobs created in counties with more than 1 million residents: **16%**

During the 2010–2014 recovery: **41%**

During the 1992–1994 recovery, new jobs created in counties with fewer than 100,000 residents: **27%**

During the 2010–2014 recovery: **9%**

White working-class Americans who say they trust the federal government more than half the time: **20%**

Those who think the government should take a more active role in solving the country’s economic and social problems: **50%**

Sources:

1. U.S. Food and Drug Administration
2. Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews, 2011
3. Alzheimer’s Association
4. Southern Poverty Law Center
5. The New York Times
6. The Atlantic Monthly
7. The Independent
8. Statistics Canada
9. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
10. Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International
11. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
12. Economic Innovation Group
13. Peter Hart Research Associates
Old Window Workshop production manager Nannette Bowie, left, and director Pam Howland pose in front of Leishla Lugo and Shaniqua Dobbins at a worksite in Springfield, Massachusetts. Dobbins and Lugo are in their first year of training with the women-owned cooperative.
So, are we trapped in capitalism? While many of us may want a new economy where people and planet are prioritized over profit, we remain skeptical that another world is really possible. We make some progress locally but then feel powerless to affect national and global forces. Too often “the economy” is equated with markets where corporations compete to make profits for the wealthiest 1 percent and the rest work for a wage or salary (or don’t make money at all). Work itself is seen as legitimate only if it legally generates income. Value is measured only in money terms, based on what people are willing to pay in the market. The capitalist mindset also separates economy from society and nature, as if it exists apart from people, communities, government, and our planet. Economy is its own machine, fueled by profit and competition.

When everything that we label “economic” is assumed to be capitalist—transactional and market-driven—then it is no wonder that we run short on imagination.

WE HAVE OPPORTUNITIES EVERY DAY TO BUILD SOLIDARITY ECONOMIES THAT LIFT EACH OTHER UP AND SPREAD JOY.

THE ONLY CHOICE

Penn Loh

Since the breakup of the Soviet bloc and China’s turn toward free markets, many economists have pronounced an “end of history,” where capitalism reigns supreme as the ultimate form of economy. Perhaps “there is no alternative” to a globalized neoliberal economy, as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher often said. Indeed, free markets in which individuals compete to get what they can while they can are glorified in popular culture through reality shows such as Shark Tank.

But many of us in the 99 percent are not feeling so happy or secure about this economy’s results. Many are working harder and longer just to maintain housing and keep food on the table. Even the college-educated are mired in student debt, keeping the American Dream beyond their grasp. And then there are those who have never been served well by this economy. African Americans were liberated from enslavement only to be largely shut out of “free” market opportunities. Immigrants continue to work in the shadows. Women still earn only about three-quarters of what men make for the same work.
Redefining economy beyond capitalism

To escape this “capitalocentrism,” we need to broaden the definition of economy beyond capitalism. What if instead, economy is all the ways that we meet our material needs and care for each other? And what if it’s not a singular thing? Then we would see that beneath the official capitalist economy are all sorts of thriving non-capitalist economies, where there may not be a profit motive or market exchange. They include tasks that we do every day. We cook and clean for ourselves and each other; we grow food; we provide emotional support to friends. These are all ways of meeting our material needs and caring for each other.

For many, these economies, which foster solidarity and are rooted in values of democracy and justice rather than maximizing profit, are invisible or not recognized as “economic”; they are merely how we go about our lives. Capitalist thinking blinds us to these economic activities, some of which make survival possible and life meaningful. These non-capitalist ways also add up to a significant portion of all economic activity. Economist Nancy Folbre from University of Massachusetts Amherst estimates that unpaid domestic work (historically considered “women’s work”) was equal to 26 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product in 2010.

Broadening the definition of economy also puts people back into the system and empowers us. Economy is not just something that happens to us, a sea in which we swim or sink. Rather we are all part of multiple economies, some in which we are the main actors—such as our household economies—and others in which we are the extras—such as venture capital markets.

Recognizing these diverse economies, lifting the veil of capitalocentrism, allows us to see that there are choices to be made, ethics and values to be considered. For example, I might pay more for lettuce from a local farmer who grows sustainably rather than from a distant supplier that exploits farm workers and uses pesticides. These choices are not only made as consumers, but also as workers, producers, and neighbors, and through policies that set the rules necessary for any economy to function. Do I work for a for-profit owned by shareholders or for a worker-owned cooperative, nonprofit, or B corporation? Should public land be used for luxury condos or for affordable housing? These questions open space for all of us to participate in shaping our world and the economic futures of the 99 percent.

Solidarity is rising

Across the U.S., from Jackson, Mississippi, to Oakland, California; in rural Kentucky and on Navajo-Hopi lands; and throughout Massachusetts’ biggest cities, it is often poor communities and communities of color that are building solidarity economies around these questions. This is not new. In fact, this is where solidarity economics—collective strategies for survival—have been innovated out of necessity. Think mutual aid, community organizing, self-help, and cooperatives of all kinds. These practices have been embedded in Black liberation movements, the early labor movement, and many other progressive movements in the U.S.

The desire for deep, transformational change—for the multitude of solidarity economies to add up to something—comes not just from those who are dissatisfied, but even more so from communities that are simply struggling to survive. Dreams of a decent life and a fair shake come from those making Black Lives Matter, from immigrant workers making poverty wages, from ex-prisoners locked out of the mainstream economy, from tenants barely able to make rent, and from communities being displaced to make way for the 1 percent.

Springfield is Massachusetts’ third-largest city, and here the Wellspring initiative is building a network of worker-owned cooperatives to create local jobs and build wealth for low-income and unemployed residents. Inspired by the Cleveland Evergreen Cooperatives, which has built a network of worker-owned businesses to provide goods and services to the region’s anchor institutions, Wellspring was founded in 2011 to try to capture some of the $1.5 billion spent by its own anchor institutions, such as Baystate Health and University of Massachusetts Amherst. One study showed anchors procure less than 10 percent from local businesses.

Its first cooperative, Wellspring Upholstery, was launched in 2013 and now has seven workers. Wellspring Upholstery was the first business to be developed, in part because there was a successful 25-year-old upholstery training program run by the county prison that could provide trained workers. Wellspring’s second cooperative is Old Windows Workshop, a women-owned window restoration business. A main goal of this business, according to production manager Nannette Bowie, is to allow “the flexibility of a working mom to take care of your family responsibilities and keep a full-time job.”

Wellspring raised almost $1 million to start its third business, a commercial greenhouse, which will produce lettuce, greens, and herbs for the local schools.
Wellspring Upholstery Cooperative worker-owners “Joel” Carlos Orria-Fontanez, Evan Cohen, Tina Pepper, Gary Roby, and Jose Serrano in their workshop.
and anchor institutions. Construction began during the summer. With several businesses underway, Wellspring is demonstrating viable models they hope will inspire others and grow the job base and wealth-building opportunities for low-income and unemployed residents.

Wellspring is just one example of solidarity economies that are emerging in Massachusetts. In Worcester, the state’s second-largest city, the Solidarity and Green Economy Alliance is cultivating their own ecology of more than a dozen cooperatives. Some are matching resident skills to meet community needs, such as landscaping, soil remediation, honey production, and urban agriculture. Others are providing services to movement organizations, such as translation, video production, and bookkeeping. In Boston’s Roxbury and Dorchester neighborhoods, a food solidarity economy is emerging, which includes a community land trust, urban farms and a greenhouse, a kitchen incubator, a consumer food co-op, and a worker-owned organics recycling company. And Latinx residents of East Boston have formed the Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity. Concerned about rapid gentrification, the group began exploring how economic alternatives could help them stay in East Boston. They are supporting startup cooperatives in child care, sewing, and cleaning. The Boston Ujima Project was just officially launched in September to build a community capital fund where a participatory budgeting process is used to make investments in local businesses.

Consciousness, power, and economy

Yet solidarity economics is more than just cooperatives. It is a social justice movement. It is shifting our consciousness not only to uncover root causes, but also to expand our vision of what is possible, and to inspire dreams of the world as it could be. It is building power, not just to resist and reform the injustices and unsustainable practices produced by current systems, but ultimately to control and govern political and economic resources to sustain people and the planet. And it is creating economic alternatives and prototypes for producing, exchanging, consuming, and investing in ways that are more just, sustainable, and democratic.

If we want to transform and go beyond capitalism, then we must confront it in all three of these dimensions: consciousness, power, and economy.

We do not have the luxury of creating solidarity economies in a vacuum. That means that we have to put them into practice now at home and in our own communities, no matter how small the scale. At the same time, we can work with others to build larger solidarity alternatives and do the hard work of reforming the political, economic, and ideological systems that are making life so difficult for so many.

Everyone can put solidarity values into practice—to live in solidarity—starting in whatever ways we can. And that is the transformative power of solidarity economics, that it doesn’t have to scale up only by building larger and larger organizations and systems. It can scale up by many people in many places pursuing economics of social justice. It will require taking back government to dismantle the systems that privilege capitalism and to redirect public resources toward solidarity economies. We can all begin by spreading the word, sharing our radical imagination of the world that we want to live in.

Penn Loh is a senior lecturer and director of community practice at Tufts University’s Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning. With Sarah Jimenez, he wrote the 2017 report “Solidarity Rising in Massachusetts: How a Solidarity Economy Movement is Emerging in Lower-Income Communities of Color.”
THE HAPPINESS MULTIPLIER EFFECT

For a joyful economy, spread the wealth.

1. There’s a limit to how much happiness money buys.

The increase in everyday emotional well-being vs. annual income:

- LESS
- MORE

$0  $75,000  $150,000  $225,000

After $75,000, more money has little effect

2. Giving to others increases our own happiness.

In a university study, people given $5 or $20 to spend were “much happier” after spending it on others. Those who spent it on themselves reported no change in happiness. The amount didn’t matter.

3. Happiness spreads through interaction and proximity.

One person’s happiness triggers a three-degree chain reaction that benefits not only their friends, but their neighbors’ friends and their friends’ neighbors’ friends.

- Neighbor: 34%
- Spouse living within a mile: 8%
- Sibling living within a mile: 14%
- Friend living within a mile: 25%

4. Fair distribution of wealth increases happiness more than economic growth.

“Life satisfaction” rises with a country’s economic growth. But it falls in proportion to the severity of income inequality.

Sources:
1. Princeton University, Kahneman and Deaton, 2010
4. Di Tella and MacLean, University of Virginia and London Business School, 2010

Illustration by Yee Ting Kuit/GETTY IMAGES
What Happens When the Rich Invest in Racial Equity

In 2013, Kate Poole was at a conference for young people who wanted to put their vast wealth to good use. There were opportunities to invest in green technology and local food, but she felt that even well-intentioned investing often extracted interest from communities.

“As a wealthy White person, I don’t need to keep looking to grow my return,” Poole said. “That’s not going to redistribute wealth.”

Instead, Poole joined seven peers to form Regenerative Finance, an organization made up of young people with access to wealth. They wanted to use their unique financial leverage to show what “non-extractive” investing could look like—putting wealth back into places that long experienced exploitation.

Member Leah Fury said that growing up wealthy, she felt a dissonance...
I’m working toward giving away about 10% of my wealth annually.

Gifts (a.k.a. investments with a 0% chance of financial return)

Circle of Aunts + Uncles

Local Lending Circle

Weckler’s Ice Cream $2,000

Incarciate Coffee $2,500

Funds waiting to be deployed are invested in community finance.
between valuing equity and justice and what she identifies as her “settler privilege.” By putting her money into non-extractive projects, she hopes to reconcile that disconnect. “There are some things that I’m absolutely giving up, and other ways I’m getting access to connections that I wouldn’t have otherwise,” Fury said.

Soon after forming, the group was approached by the Renaissance Community Co-op, a fledgling grocery store in Greensboro, North Carolina, that needed funding. At the time, the city’s Northeast neighborhood, which has a large African American population, was considered unprofitable by large grocery stores and had been without one for 18 years. The neighbors who founded RCC needed loans to build one there.

“A lot of us are from the Northeast [region], mostly White inheritors,” Poole said of the group. “There was this clear connection between this money that our families had amassed and extraction from the Black South.” So they rallied 28 investors to raise $253,000 for a loan to RCC. But rather than pay the interest to wealthy investors, RCC will put that money into the Southern Reparations Loan Fund, a community-operated fund that reinvests in other Southern co-ops, particularly those that benefit African Americans and people in poverty. It can then be reinvested in other ventures.

“There are lots and lots of different ways White supremacy is active in building White wealth,” Poole said. Growing up, she came to understand that her family’s money came from owning and selling stolen land, and from stock in companies with histories of racial and environmental exploitation.

At times in the past, she’d felt she had to hide her privilege. But not anymore: “The more I’ve been able to share resources and the more I’ve been able to be honest about who I am and who my family is, [the more it] has allowed me to show up more as myself.”

Araz Hachadourian is a freelance writer and communications coordinator for the New Economy Coalition.

COMMENTARY :: Darrick Hamilton and Christopher Famighetti

THE ELITE IS NOT WHO YOU THINK IT IS—IT MIGHT BE YOU

To most, the occupy movement is best characterized by the slogan “We are the 99 percent.” Indeed, a year before Occupy sprang to life, the top 1 percent held roughly 35 percent of the nation’s wealth, while the bottom 50 percent held about 1 percent. But the data tell a more complex story, and the bifurcated way that we define “elite” may need adjustment.

As senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, Richard Reeves describes in his new book, Dream Hoarders, that while the top 1 percent overwhelmingly receives a disproportionate share of economic gains, the upper middle class is also “hoarding”
resources. Families in the 80th to the 99th percentiles—or those earning at least $112,000—have made out pretty well over the past 35 years. Since 1980, incomes for the top 1 percent skyrocketed, and wages for those in the next 10 percent increased considerably. Comparably, the bottom 80 percent saw wages stagnate. Reeves details how the wage gains for the top 20 percent translate into access to better schools, better colleges, and, eventually, better jobs with higher wages.

Simply put, the privileged upper middle class is “hoarding” the benefits of economic growth for themselves and their kids.

Reeves is spot on—“class barriers” to enter either the rich or the upper middle class are on the rise. But there’s yet another complexity to consider in identifying the elite. What is glaringly missing from Dream Hoarders is an adequate discussion of race and the racially stratified American economy. When we are talking about the upper middle class, or the top 20 percent, we are de facto talking about a group that is overwhelmingly White.

Census data from 2015 demonstrate that just 5 percent of Black households have an annual income of $150,000 or more, compared to 12 percent of White households. In contrast, 22 percent of Black households earn less than $15,000 a year, which is double the 11 percent rate for White households. In terms of income trends, Blacks are the only racial group that actually saw a decline in their real income since 2000.

Disparities are worse when looking at wealth. The 2016 Survey of Consumer Finances indicates that Black households have median wealth of about $17,600 (inclusive of home equity), in contrast to $171,000 in median wealth for White households. And these disparities persist and even worsen factoring in education. Black families where the head of household has a college degree have less wealth than White families where the head of household dropped out of high school.

The racial wealth gap is an inheritance that predates the 35 years referenced by Reeves. It begins with chattel slavery, when Blacks literally served as capital assets for a White landowning plantation class. And America’s current regressive tax system hoards resources and underwrites dreams, as Reeves details, primarily for the top 20 percent.

A 2014 report by Prosperity Now corroborates that the federal government, through deduction and subsidy, spent $540 billion in asset-building tax programs, like the mortgage interest deduction, the IRA and other retirement accounts, 529 college savings plans, and capital gains rate reductions—policies that reward savings and investments.

And who has savings and investments? The best estimates suggest that 70 percent of the billions in tax savings go to upper middle class and wealthy households. The bottom 60 percent received just 12 percent of these benefits. In the case of mortgage interest deduction, high-income households can receive upward of tens of thousands of dollars of benefit, while the bottom 20 percent of households receive on average just $3 in deduction.

Ultimately, to reverse the wrongs of the past and to create a more equitable society, we need ambitious race-conscious solutions.

Baby bonds, originally proposed by economists William Darity Jr. and Darrick Hamilton (co-author of this article), is a bold solution in that vein. It would provide every American newborn with an account at birth. These accounts would serve as seed capital for when the child matures to adulthood to purchase the economic security of an appreciating asset like a house, a new business, or a debt-free education. The program is race-conscious and universal given the fact that the bottom 50 percent of American households own 1 percent of the nation’s wealth and because all American babies would qualify. The average account at birth would be $20,000 and progressively rise to about $50,000 to $60,000 for children born into the most wealth-poor families. Such a program would cost upward of about $90 billion—that’s less than 20 percent of the $540 billion that the federal government already spends on tax expenditures that mostly benefit the wealthy.

We applaud Reeves for refuting a naive narrative that vilifies the superrich as the only source of economic injustice. We need to pinpoint accurately the elite, then explicitly recognize the racial dimensions of American economic stratification—that the wealthy and upper middle class are overwhelmingly White and underwhelmingly Black. Ultimately, we need ambitious solutions: “race-conscious universal programs,” a term even coined by Reeves and colleague Elizabeth Sawhill.

It is one thing to recognize income inequality and wealth disparity—and the racially stratified economy. It is another for what is arguably its most powerful cohort—the top 20 percent—to reverse its “opportunity hoarding” ways and assume its fair share of responsibility for fixing it. The easy out is to point at the top 1 percent and stop there; but if you are part of the professional class, you too are likely among the culprits and beneficiaries of an unjust economy.
In Atlanta, Black Mamas Bail-Out freed Dorothy Hinton-Adams from jail using community bail funds. Members and partners of Southerners on New Ground, a grassroots regional queer liberation organization, helped coordinate the campaign.

Left to right, seated: Dorothy Hinton-Adams, Amina Abdul-Jalil

Left to right, standing: Akiva Freidlin, Taylor Money-Worthy, Angelica Wheelis, Alyssa Green
When she was arrested for allegedly shoplifting a can of peanuts in May, Dorothy Hinton-Adams didn’t have the money to pay for her bail, which a judge set at $500.

No bail bond company would help her, so Hinton-Adams, 71, was forced to stay in Fulton County Jail in Atlanta until her court date. “After the 15th day, I got kind of panicky,” Hinton-Adams said. “So I asked around how I could find out if I had a court date? There was a lady in there who wrote down my name and booking number.”

That night, a stranger appeared and paid the $500 to bail Hinton-Adams out.

Hinton-Adams is among some 60 women across the South freed during Black Mamas Bail-Out, a coordinated, month-long effort in May by the grassroots group Southerners on New Ground to highlight the injustice of cash bail and its disproportionate impact on women of color and LGBTQ women.

At any one time in this country, about 450,000 people are behind bars awaiting trial, and the vast majority of these people—5 out of 6—are there simply because they cannot afford the bail a judge has set for them.

While lawyers and policy advocates launch pilot projects aimed at nudging jurisdictions to reduce the number of
Dorothy Hinton-Adams stands outside the Fulton County Jail in Atlanta, where she was stuck in jail because she couldn’t afford her $500 bail. Her bail was eventually paid by a campaign to highlight the injustice of cash bail and its disproportionate impact on women of color and LGBTQ women. Later, the charges against her were dropped.

people they lock up pre-trial, community bail funds—either ongoing endeavors or one-off programs like Black Mamas Bail-Out—take a different approach: Get them out now.

“You don’t have to wait for a law, you don’t need a litigation strategy. You just get them out, and you change their lives,” said David Feige, co-founder of the Bronx Freedom Fund, the pioneer of the current wave of community bail funds. Grassroots activists frequently contact the Bronx Freedom Fund to get advice on how to set up bail funds in their own communities, Feige said.

“It’s a turnkey operation. They’re very easy to set up. It’s scalable,” he said.

Bail was originally intended as a deposit to ensure that an accused person would return to court. But in recent years, judges have been setting bail higher and higher. Between 1992 and 2009 there was a 43 percent increase, after adjusting for inflation, in the amount of bail imposed in felony cases in the 75 largest counties in the U.S.

The overall effect is that people who have not been convicted of any crime are increasingly filling America’s jails. Ninety-five percent of the growth in the overall jail inmate population in the U.S. since 2000 was just people in jails awaiting trial. Poor people, people of color, and people with certain disabilities are more likely to be held in jail before trial and to be assigned high bail amounts, and thus face a greater likelihood that they’ll end up with a criminal conviction.

Ninety-seven percent of the more than 1,000 people the Bronx Freedom Fund has bailed out have shown up for court, Feige said. When those who have received bail from community bail funds show up for court, it demonstrates the injustice of holding people behind bars before trial simply because they are poor.

“About 50 percent of cases we bail out get dismissed,” Feige said. “They were crap cases. Of the remaining 50 percent, half of those result in noncriminal dispositions, and in the history of the fund, almost no one ever has gone back to jail. We have a radical effect on case outcomes just by posting bail.”

Community bail funds give people accused of crimes a better chance for a fair trial. Studies show people who are jailed before trial are more likely to receive a jail or prison sentence, and for a longer time, than those who are free.

This is partly because being incarcerated is so horrible and so packed with collateral consequences for individuals and their communities—loss of income, job, and housing, and stress on families, to name a few—that most are willing to do anything to avoid it, even if it means disregarding their own innocence to accept a criminal conviction and the discrimination and stigma that come with it.

“Faced with ‘plead guilty, get out; maintain innocence, stay in,’” pretty much everyone makes the decision to plead guilty,” Feige said.

Plea agreements have become so prevalent in America’s courts that only about 5 percent of criminal cases at either the state or federal level ever go to trial. In misdemeanor proceedings where public defense is involved, plea bargaining is also the default setting, a tendency derided by critics as “meet ‘em and plead ‘em.” But when bail funds remove the threat of jail and the pressure to enter a guilty plea, the results are revealing.

In setting bail at all, the judge has made a determination that the accused individual is not too dangerous to be released to the community, said Matt Suchan, co-founder of the Chicago Community Bond Fund, which provides bail money for people who don’t have it and are being held in the county jail on felony charges.

“Our position is [that] even a $2 million bond is a release decision by that judge,” Suchan said. “Setting a very high bond is still a release decision.”

It’s a decision that’s made quickly. In Cook County, Illinois, bond hearings that determine whether someone gets locked up or walks free take an average of 37 seconds, and while one person might walk free on their own recognizance, another person charged with the same offense might face $10,000 in bail.

“Judges will barely look up sometimes,” Suchan said. “They’ll hear the charge, the criminal history, and sometimes just shout out a number.”

Bailing out people is only one tactic to address the harm of mass incarceration, and, he adds, its impact is limited. A single bail fund will never be able to free the 4,000 people who on any given day are in Cook County Jail because they can’t afford their bail. Instead, Suchan said, Chicago Community Bond Fund wants to prevent people from ever going in.

For people like Hinton-Adams, who has felt the sharp end of America’s dependence on cash bail, the result can’t come soon enough. Five days after being bailed out of Fulton County Jail, she still didn’t have a court date, so she went down to the county courthouse to inquire. They sent her next door, to the state courthouse.

There, Hinton-Adams learned the charges against her had been dismissed; her record expunged. It was proof, she said, of what she’d known all along: “I should’ve just been let out.”

Award-winning journalist Amy Roe has written for The Guardian, Utne Reader, Truthout, and others. She is the former editor of Real Change, a newspaper sold by low-income and homeless vendors on the streets of Seattle. Amy is currently senior writer at the ACLU of Washington, where she writes about efforts to reform America’s criminal justice system.
HOW TO BRING CARING FOR CHILDREN AND ELDERS (AND OTHER ACTS OF LOVE) INTO THE ECONOMY

Ask anyone about caregiving, and you’ll likely hear a story about personal sacrifice. Heather Boldon, a single mother from Minnesota, gave up her full-time job to care for her mother. She took a more than 50 percent pay cut, spent down her 401k, and lost her health insurance. When she was injured, she couldn’t visit a doctor to see whether she needed surgery. In New York, Delores McCrae, a home care worker, was evicted from her home and lived in a women’s homeless shelter where she was separated from her 11-year-old son. She made just $10 an hour.

Many say that our care system—the paid and unpaid labor of caring for our families and communities—is broken: Our economy doesn’t take care of caregivers. But care comes from love, community, and mutual respect; while we may be far from holistic, sustainable infrastructure that meets our families’ needs, some innovations hint at a better way.

On the whole, U.S. policies have little regard for what caregiving takes. In a country where almost everything can be bought and sold, care work, one of the most concrete representations of love that we have, is extremely undervalued and comes at an economic and emotional cost. A 2017 Brookings Institution study revealed that over one-third of unemployed women in the United States left the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities. These women lose an estimated $324,044 in wages and benefits over their lifetimes, weakening their ability to support their families and themselves in the future and into retirement. Meanwhile, with a median hourly wage of around $10, often without benefits, many professional caregivers in the United States don’t make enough money for their own families.

This system isn’t working for any of us. Thankfully, there are other models.

Japan’s Fureai Kippu welfare system allows people to earn credits caring for the elderly, which they can save for themselves as they age, transfer to family members, or exchange for services. In the Netherlands, students can live in nursing homes, volunteering 30 hours a month in exchange for rent.

In the United States, people are stepping up, creating community-centered care economies and breakthroughs in policy.

Hawai’i was ripe for a policy change. East Asian and Native Hawaiian cultural influences have meant that, in general, Hawaiian families prioritize care for elders. As in many communities of color, the work of caregiving here is seen as a collective, intergenerational effort. But because family-centered caregiving was not supported by public policy until recently, people experienced widespread burnout. Led by local leaders, community organizations, and our organization, Caring Across Generations, caregivers began telling their representatives that the system was not working for them and they needed support. In July, the state adopted the Kupuna Caregiver Assistance Act, the first legislation of its kind in the nation. It provides a voucher for up to $70 a day to eligible working family members to care for their aging loved ones at home. The program is intended to allow more caregivers—often wives and daughters—to stay in the workforce and receive some relief while they manage family responsibilities. When we use our creativity to pass policies like these, we invest in people on the front lines showing up for those who need it most.

Maria is an undocumented single mother of five and caregiver for her late husband’s friend Jose, who is in a wheelchair. In Texas, after Hurricane Harvey hit, she fled her flooded trailer but was unsure of where to go. She feared going to a shelter could lead to deportation, so she waited with Jose and her younger children in an inflatable pool for over an hour until three men picked them up and took them to a local furniture store, which had been turned into a shelter. Instead of meeting agents asking for papers, Maria was greeted with hot dogs, coffee, a place to sleep, and a wheelchair for Jose.

Disasters like these can bring out the worst in our systems, but also the best in our ability to show up for one another. Every day, people in our communities are figuring out how to care for one another against the odds—and to value that vital work. That is what should inspire and inform the larger changes we need. Creating an economy that allows our families to live, care, and age with dignity is the challenge of a generation.

Ai-jen Poo is the executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance and co-director of Caring Across Generations.

Sarita Gupta is the executive director of Jobs With Justice, co-director of Caring Across Generations, and a 2016 Next Avenue Influencer on Aging.
Together, Making Music Dreams Come True

When the Minneapolis hip-hop collective Doomtree started in 2001, it joined a genre with a long tradition of collaboration, from Run-DMC to the Wu-Tang Clan. At the time, the group comprised 15 musicians, most of them fresh out of high school.

“I got invited into the crew before I ever made a beat,” said DJ and Doomtree member Lazerbeak. “I don’t think any of us fully knew how to make rap. We just really wanted to do it and kind of taught each other.”

Today’s roster has seven members—Cecil Otter, Dessa, Mike Mictlan, P.O.S, Paper Tiger, Sims, and Lazerbeak—who have practiced and learned from each other for years. They have been able to turn their music into livelihoods because they all put their heads, hearts, and resources together. They were able to book showcases as a crew that they wouldn’t have been able to do as solo artists, and to feature each other’s work on albums and tours. That commitment to collaboration helped build a new local hip-hop scene, establishing a market for their music that may not have otherwise grown.

“It’s the punk rock [do-it-yourself] ethos,” rapper Sims said. “There’s no major labels here [in Minneapolis], so we kind of had to do it ourselves.” To get their music out, Sims said, “we had to find a network of people—each other.” Through the collective, the members launched their own label.

One reason Doomtree has worked is that it’s a cooperatively owned business. Everyone has a say in how it’s run and a role in how it works, whether it’s logo design, budgeting, or ordering T-shirts. Shared ownership and decision-making have allowed members to explore careers they never would have been able to have under a traditional label. “This is about artists being able to control and have more power and do more for themselves than they have in previous iterations of this music business,” Sims said.

Now they’re helping to create that space for new generations of artists. “We’re the old guys, and we’re seeing the new generation of artists come up,” Lazerbeak said. “It feels good to be a link in that chain.”

—Araz Hachadourian
The 150-Mile Wardrobe: Clothes That Reflect the Abundance (and Limits) of Home

Between pesticides, chemical dyes, and plastic, producing a typical sweater eats an enormous amount of natural and industrial resources. Apparel is one of the world’s most polluting industries, and the U.S. sends up to 75 percent of its cotton abroad—only to ship it back as cheap T-shirts.

The Northern California Fibershed was designed to circumvent all that.

About 104 farmers, ranchers, weavers, spinners, and designers across 19 counties make up a garment-producing system where every producer uses materials sourced within...
a 150-mile radius: A shop in Oakland buys marigolds from a farm in Chico to dye yarn shorn from sheep in Sonoma and weaves it into sweaters sold in San Francisco.

The concept started in 2010 when textile artist and sustainability advocate Rebecca Burgess challenged herself for one year to wear only clothes produced near her community.

“Six weeks in, I still only had two items of clothing,” says Burgess, who drew inspiration from Southeast Asian cultures with highly localized fiber production. “Your region can hold all you need to survive—that transformed my understanding of what was possible.”

Piece by piece, she built a regional wardrobe and learned what resources were available nearby—and what was needed to “create a functional system out of an abundant system.”

Since then, Burgess has been working in Northern California and across the country to help farmers and artisans connect and create their own regional fiber systems, first by analyzing the supply chain, then by connecting producers to each other. A complete circuit starts with the production of dye and fiber, which is processed, spun, and turned into fabric, then handed to designers and makers before reaching the wearer.

At heart, the system is about connecting and respecting the gifts and limits of the land. Burgess says the system sequesters as much carbon from the atmosphere as it emits, and the organically dyed garments are compostable. The farmers plan to strengthen their network as an agricultural cooperative by the end of 2018.

“You realize you have such a community of people here who are helping you survive,” Burgess said. “You become grateful to each other in ways that modern culture strips us of.”

—Araz Hachadourian
Oakland community members share a blessing before picking up produce from FrutaGift volunteers at Hidden Creek Cohousing in Fruitvale, California. When translators are present, the blessing is given in Spanish, English, Mandarin, Arabic, Mam, Japanese, and Catalan.
I grow a half-dozen fruit trees along my 40-foot stretch of sidewalk. The generous fig tree just finished, two young apple trees and a pomegranate are full of bounty, and the kumquat and persimmon are ripening. As much as I love the simple act of orcharding, I’m also sharing a radical vision for food and economy in my suburban Los Angeles community of Altadena. What if all my neighbors grew food in their yards, too? What if we shared the bounty with each other? What if you could eat a delicious, varied, and healthy meal from the abundance provided by your neighborhood trees?

Forty percent of the food produced in the part of the planet we call the U.S. is wasted. Much of this waste ends up in landfills, where it produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas. The food-climate nexus is a window into a deeply broken system; studying it—and experimenting with alternative economics within our communities—can reveal solutions that benefit everyone.

Consider the gift economy, brilliantly on display every Sunday in the Fruitvale neighborhood of Oakland, California. Pancho Ramos-Stierle is a driving force behind this free community farm stand, FrutaGift, which is painted in the colors of the season.

For over six years, Ramos-Stierle and his friends have gone to a local farmers market after closing time to help farmers clean and pack up. Farmers began offering their unsold organic fruits and vegetables for Ramos-Stierle to bring to

“If 100% of the people were farming, it would be ideal.”
—Masanobu Fukuoka

COMMENTS // Peter Kalmus
THE GIFT ECONOMY AND A RADICAL VISION FOR FOOD
the people in his neighborhood. Using this produce, he and his friends cook a sumptuous vegan meal that they bring the following week to share with the tired workers. A circle is created; everyone benefits. There is bounty and gratitude.

And yet, FrutaGift is just one part of a larger gift economy. Ramos-Stierle’s inspiration was the Free Farm Stand in the Mission District in San Francisco, started decades ago by a man named Tree. Says Ramos-Stierle, “I still remember the sense of awe and gratitude he evoked in me when I first met him. Like the giant redwoods and sequoias, Tree’s giant heart is filled with selfless service and love for all.”

Ramos-Stierle tries to carry this same gratitude for food and community to FrutaGift in Oakland. “Before we start distributing the food, we make a gratitude circle. We hold hands, and someone gives a blessing in their own tradition to honor all that made it possible to gather and be nourished in such a way.” Visitors to FrutaGift and the Free Farm Stand have gone on to do the same in their own communities.

Capitalism and its cash economy seem to lead inexorably to exploitation and wealth disparity, a few haves and mostly have-nots. But perhaps food can be the leading edge toward a sustainable, resilient economy of abundance.

Unlike many specialized goods and services, food is practical to barter—or, better yet, to gift. Here in Altadena, I’m part of a group that exchanges homegrown produce. We meet once a month in a local park, each bringing whatever surplus we happen to have. We create community and share abundance outside the cash economy. Imagine if instead of only one household every few blocks, all households were growing and trading food? The density of fresh, in-season produce would be so high (except perhaps for some portion of staple crops that could be grown on larger farms outside of town centers) that we’d meet each other’s needs, creating a local, waste-free, cash-free food system.

Ramos-Stierle likes to point out that an entire complex civilization, the Inca, functioned without money or markets of any kind. Everyone participated in growing food. Our societies and economies are reflections of our food systems.

I mull these things over while walking my dog, the sun setting in the L.A. sky. As I walk, I take another bite of a perfect guava, a windfall from my neighbor’s wonderful, sidewalk-facing guava tree. A gift.

Peter Kalmus is a NASA climate scientist (he writes as a citizen, not on behalf of NASA, JPL, or Caltech). His new book is Being the Change: Live Well and Spark a Climate Revolution.
When Chinyere Oteh welcomed her first child in 2009, she found herself in a predicament familiar to many new stay-at-home mothers: Stress was high, but money and time were short.

“I thought to myself, I can’t be the only person trying to figure out how to have a healthy family life as well as make ends meet,” Oteh said. That’s when she remembered an article she had read on time-banking.

Time-banking is a model for trading skills, goods, and labor instead of money—a sort of barter system where members “deposit” hours doing things like teaching, cooking, or repairing things, and “withdraw” hours of other members’ services. It’s been around in the U.S. since the 1980s, and there are close to 500 such banks across the country today.

Oteh started small in 2010. She invited 10 friends in St. Louis to meet and gauge whether there was enough interest to start exchanging. Those who liked the idea invited more friends, and the group quickly grew to 25 people swapping things like lawn-mowing (Oteh’s first ask) for casseroles, mural-painting for help cleaning. The goal was to improve their quality of life and show that neighbors can meet some needs without money—and that everyone has something to offer.

Oteh named the group Cowry Collective after the cowry shells once used as currency in Africa, China, and North America (and a throwback to her own West African and Ojibwe heritage). Each hour earned and exchanged is a “cowry”: You can use one cowry to get an hour of service from anyone else in the time bank.

The collective has 236 members, and more than 2,000 cowries have been exchanged (though Oteh estimates many more hours have gone unlogged).

Mary Densmore has been a member for three years and relies on other members to help farm her two small plots of urban land. Over the years, she’s exchanged services like bike repairs and beekeeping lessons, but these days she usually sends helpers home with fresh food. Cowry Collective has helped her connect with new people and even changed the way she thinks.

“Often I’m [thinking], How much money am I making? That’s real, because I have bills to pay,” Densmore said. “But it’s not really about money—it’s cool to be able to produce something that is able to help me meet my needs.”

—Araz Hachadourian

Cowry Collective members participate in a time bank market, where products and produce can be exchanged for tokens, not cash, at the New Roots Urban Farm in St. Louis, Missouri.
HISTORY SHOWS
CO-OP MOVEMENT LED TO A POPULISM OF HOPE

The waning years of the 1800s bore an uncanny resemblance to the present. The U.S. economy was transforming and globalizing, leaving many hardworking people behind. Then, as now, a populist uprising was underway in national politics against politics as usual. Then, as now, tough-talking contenders tried to position themselves as spokesmen for the people.

That earlier populism shared many of the complaints about widespread economic stagnation and urban elites that animated voters in 2016. But, rather than in the apocalyptic preaching of a reality TV star, the movement’s backbone lay in feats of economic self-help. And this made all the difference. The proposals those populists sought called for fuller democracy, not authoritarian retrenchment.

This was a populism of hope, not a populism of fear.

Lawrence Goodwyn’s classic history of the late 19th century “agrarian revolt in America,” The Populist Moment, recounts a fearsome political awakening among farmers of the South and West, White and Black, and their revolt against the financial power of urban robber barons.

Goodwyn became convinced that “the agrarian revolt cannot be understood outside the framework of the cooperative crusade that was its source.” His history traces an outline for a better kind of populism.

The populist movement culminated with the 1896 election. The populists’ People’s Party reluctantly endorsed the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan, who narrowly lost to William McKinley, and the party imploded. But those populists’ legacy remains with us. A flexible money supply, a progressive income tax, a national farm-credit system, secret ballots—these are (albeit incomplete) outgrowths of their demands. After Colorado elected a People’s Party governor in 1892, it became one of the first states to embrace women’s suffrage.

At work behind almost any great social movement, but rarely noticed in the headlines or the popular mythology, is an engine of counter-economy. It is a source of inspiration and a means of material support. Gandhi regarded homegrown enterprise—memorialized in the spinning wheel on India’s flag—as the core of his independence strategy; the more visible confrontations with British colonizers were a secondary outgrowth. African Americans mobilizing for rights in the 1950s and ’60s depended not just on the pooled resources of Black churches, but also on the land and economic freedom they gained through the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. The language of Black Power was born during Stokely Carmichael’s stay on Black-owned co-op land in Georgia.

The roots of the populist movement and the hope it instilled lay in a network of farmer cooperatives known as the Farmers Alliance. In it, rural people organized by building democratic enterprises that could counter the big-city capitalists. They bought supplies together, sold their products together, and extended credit to each other.

When those enterprises ran against the limits of the dominant economy, the people radicalized. They formulated political demands through the practice of mutual self-help. The Farmers Alliance allied with the urban workers and co-ops of the Knights of Labor, then the country’s largest union. When they entered politics together, they did so from a sense of their own power, not just their powerlessness.

“Insurgent movements are not the product of ‘hard times,’” Goodwyn wrote. “They are the product of insurgent cultures.”

When we ground our fed-up politics in a sense of our own potential, rather than in a need for strongmen, we get very different results. One Farmers Alliance leader explained, “We believe in the farmer voting himself, not being voted by demagogues.” He described the co-ops as “means by which the farmers may have the opportunity to emancipate themselves from the grasp of political tricksters.”

For those who would like to see today’s populist moment turn from a tenor of fear to hope, from fantasizing about walls to reimagining banks, the challenge is not a matter of slicker messaging or tweaks to any political party’s platform. Hopeful populism begins when people feel their own power, when they experience it through economies that improve their lives by their own hands.

Nathan Schneider is a scholar-in-residence of media studies at the University of Colorado Boulder who writes about the economy, technology, and religion. His most recent book is Ours to Hack and to Own: The Rise of Platform Cooperativism, a New Vision for the Future of Work and a Fairer Internet, co-edited with Trebor Scholz. He is a contributing editor at YES!
WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO?
Imagine heading out to run errands at all your usual places, and your phone’s “equity app” has a better idea. Siri might say: “Buy your groceries at one of these other stores, just as close as your regular store.” Or: “There are three coffee shops within 2 miles. You haven’t tried this one before.”

We already get shopping suggestions when we bring up Google Maps, especially when our smartphones are transmitting our GPS coordinates. A similar type of computation is happening behind the scenes at Facebook and Twitter, whose targeted ads can sometimes be scarily on point.

But what if, instead of just boosting sales, those suggestions coming from your phone were designed to address social problems like inequality?

A group of researchers in France and Spain may have solved one preliminary puzzle toward getting us to that point. In the paper “Crowdsourcing the Robin...
Hood Effect in Cities,” published in June in the journal Applied Network Science, the researchers describe a computer algorithm they created that attempts to “rewire” the complex network of commercial transactions and shopping trips people take part in every day. The goal is to redirect more money to poorer neighborhoods so that the wealth differences between rich and poor parts of a city are evened out.

The study used data from 150,000 people and 95,000 businesses in Barcelona and Madrid, and on the surface the pattern of transactions and the money spent revealed that some neighborhoods were up to 5 times wealthier than others. But researchers were shocked to find that if as few as 5 percent of commercial transactions were changed—so that capital flowed from richer to poorer neighborhoods—income inequality in those cities was drastically reduced, up to 80 percent.

“We were not expecting that,” said one of the study’s authors, Maxime Louail of the National Research Institute of Science and Technology for Environment and Agriculture in Montpelier, France. “Actually, I checked the algorithm because I was not sure in the beginning that everything was OK in the code.”

Lenormand conducted the study of the Robin Hood Effect with Thomas Louail of the Paris-based National Center for Scientific Research’s Joint Research Unit of Urban Geography, Juan Murillo Arias of Madrid-based BBVA Data & Analytics, and José J. Ramasco of the Institute of Interdisciplinary Physics and Complex Systems in Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

Their research began as an attempt to use a model in transportation planning that finds the most efficient way people can get to work and extend it into the area of reducing inequality, Louail said.

It also has potential applications in combatting the “neighborhood effect,” a self-reinforcing trend that describes how the relative wealth of a person’s neighborhood affects their own wealth, which in turn accelerates the neighborhood’s own tendencies toward wealth or poverty. Rewiring shopping trips to cross those neighborhood boundaries can decrease the ghettoization urban neighborhoods experience.

But so far, it’s just an algorithm. “One of the first questions you can ask is what extent is this scenario implementable,” Louail said. “What it’s going to take to perform in real life, and how you will motivate people to change their travel destination for shopping.”

The rise of so-called “big data” raises interesting questions about how social scientists and anti-poverty activists approach their work, said Sarah Elwood, a professor in the University of Washington’s Department of Geography who studies the intersection of geographic information systems and technology with social justice and inequality. “We’re seeing more of these sorts of practices that sort of try to get at the behaviors of individual people and try to get them to do something different.”

Guiding and changing individual behavior to instigate social change is possible, both at the grassroots level and as “nudge policies” enacted by governments, she said, yet such small actions don’t address the structural causes of poverty. “It’s important to differentiate between questions of inequality and questions of impoverishment. You can change the degree of inequality in a society without having acted to change the big processes of impoverishment.”

Louail and Lenormand agree. If reversing inequality were the goal, then even an algorithm embedded in a smartphone app would require other measures, such as policy decisions or local government incentives to encourage participation. “But [the solution] is not an app, of course, and maybe I think that the city government, local government somehow could imagine some incentives to help, to motivate people to engage in these kinds of collective enterprises,” Louail said.

“We remind the readers [of our study] that the possible tools of city governance to mitigate inequalities are necessary but they’re not sufficient to resolve everything,” he said. “And so what we proposed is you can articulate or supplement governance with more bottom-up initiatives.”

The researchers see this as an important first step toward using large amounts of data to address social problems. Since their paper was published, they’ve been contacted by people from around the world interested in developing mobile apps or other technology based on their “Robin Hood” algorithm.

Louail and Lenormand are still considering what next steps they might take. Elwood thinks there’s an opportunity to bring other dimensions into the research: “I think big data is going to continue getting bigger, but I believe there are significant aspects of human knowledge, human experience, expressions in social life in cities that we are never going to be able to capture in data.”

“I would want to put their data science expertise together with people who know and study the politics of urban redevelopment, people who think about housing policy, people who think about existing approaches to development in metro areas,” she says. “For me this is the moment for complex research teams that can ask questions from a variety of different standpoints and be more than the sum of their parts.”

Chris Winters is a senior editor at YES! He covers economic justice and politics. Twitter @CWintersWinter
YES, IN MY

HOMEOWNERS MAKE SPACE FOR A BACKYARD TINY HOUSE—AND WELCOME A HOMELESS PERSON TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD
Volunteers help landscape the Seattle backyard of Kim Sherman and Dan Tenenbaum about two weeks before Robert, a 75-year-old man who’s lived homeless for years, moves into his home, right.

YES! PHOTO BY PAUL DUNN
Valerie Schloredt

Two major interstate freeways cross at the edge of the Seattle neighborhood where I live. Last autumn, as winter began to close in, the homeless encampments growing along the freeways wrapped around the hill and took root under the interstate bridge six blocks from my house. Constructions of pallets and old furniture and blankets began to accumulate, and rubbish spread across the walkways leading to the bus stops.

We commuters made our way past the campsites, heads down. Eye contact with the people living there seemed intrusive at such close quarters. On cold dark mornings, with a roaring campfire next to a public walkway, the area seemed chaotic, and maybe even dangerous.

During those daily encounters with homelessness, I often wondered—like so many others across the city and across the political spectrum—“Why doesn’t the city do something?” What people think government should do differs, and the discussion often turns to just getting rid of tent cities and the homeless. This comment from a “Nextdoor” website, from a discussion about a city-authorized encampment, is typical of many: “It’s always easier to say we want to give a place for these people to live when it’s not in your backyard. Crime follows the encampments.”

After several months, the city did do something. Workers came and “swept” the messy encampment at the bus stop, all the material and possessions thrown into dumpsters. Tents were also removed from the grassy slopes along the freeway, far from pedestrians. Passing one day, I saw several small bulldozers churning up the ground so that it was no longer suitable for camping. All that was left at the side of the road was mud.

But the homeless are still here in this Beacon Hill neighborhood, where old and new, prosperity and deprivation live cheek by jowl. In a few square blocks around my house, there are small one-story homes built for working people in the 1940s and modern sharp-angled townhouses, where well-lit windows reveal plush sofas, big screens, and glossy kitchens. Around the corner are derelict RVs, their windows obscured with cardboard, their roofs reinforced with blue tarps to keep out the rain. People live on those streets in old cars and shelters made from pallets and salvaged furniture. Apparently streets of warehouses are where the homeless are allowed, at least for now.

With an economy powered by tech giants like Amazon and Microsoft, Seattle is the fastest-growing major city in the United States. It also ranks high for homelessness, third after New York and Los Angeles. That’s alarming for a mid-sized city where increases in density are not offsetting the rise in population—or the price of housing. At last count, there were 11,643 people experiencing homelessness in Seattle and surrounding King County. Half the homeless people surveyed as part of that study reported having at least one disabling condition, such as a mental health disorder or substance abuse, evidence that the causes of the crisis are social as well as economic. Despite media discourse, furious comment threads, and evolving public policy, it seems there is no government remedy on the horizon big enough to solve homelessness in Seattle.

It’s one thing to discuss homelessness as an abstraction, like that “Nextdoor” commenter who had a problem with giving “these people” a place to live. It’s quite another to look a homeless person in the face and reckon with their humanity. That’s why, a few years ago, Seattle architect Rex Hohlbein started taking portraits of homeless people and posting them on Facebook, with a tagline that resonated strongly with the public: the advice to “Just say hello.” And that’s also why Hohlbein and architect daughter Jenn LaFreniere recently started the BLOCK Project.

Hohlbein’s awareness of homelessness became acute when he met some homeless men on a park bench near his office. One man in particular became a good friend, and Hohlbein invited him in. Soon, his architecture office became a hub for the homeless, with some people taking shelter and others dropping off supplies and donations.

“Suddenly everything that was coming in the door was more compelling than architecture,” says Hohlbein, who left a
successful 28-year career in architecture to do this new work he loves even more. He founded Facing Homelessness, a nonprofit that directly supports homeless individuals. “It’s been an insanely beautiful experience,” Hohlbein says. “Not for one minute do I regret that decision.”

The project is based on relationships—Hohlbein’s stories and photos develop out of friendship and conversation, making a bridge between homeless people and those who follow Facing Homelessness, and perhaps donate goods, money, or services. I see an example of how that works when I visit the Facing Homelessness office—in a church basement rather than an architect’s office—and meet Steve, a thin, bearded man who hugs himself as if he’s cold, even on a warm day in July. “I’m just so tired of being tired,” he says, with a gesture of despair. “I’m tired of sleeping in doorways or in churches. I need to be inside. I’m 54, and I’ve been doing this for 23 years.”

I admire a portrait of Steve on the wall—he’s slightly younger there, with shorter hair and a fashionably trimmed beard. “Well, I have something to show you,” he says, taking an envelope out of his pocket with more black-and-white photos of himself, taken by Hohlbein. All of them capture what you might not notice if you just passed Steve on the street—his gentle expression and the warmth in his eyes.

Steve says that a little over $800 would get him back into Section 8 housing—when he was evicted, he got a bill he couldn’t pay. Hohlbein and co-worker Sarah Steilen assure Steve they will request donations on Facebook and liaise with his social worker to try to get him back into housing.

Later on, I ask Steilen about the condemnation of the homeless I’ve read online or heard in meetings, especially in discussions about the location of sanctioned encampments. There often seems to be little empathy for people whose behavior is less than perfect. How do we evoke greater understanding? She reminds me that most of us have someone or something that supports us: a job, a family, or friends who help us out when we’re in trouble. “Many of the people we help don’t have anyone else who can help them,” she says, explaining the Facing Homelessness approach. “For some of them, the people they are close to have similar problems and can’t offer much support. So they need someone who will accept them as they are and try to give them what they need.”

Hohlbein sees homelessness as primarily the result of people being excluded from society and community. “The beauty of community is that we can change that now, if we turn around and love people instead of judging them, accepting them and knowing that they’re doing the best they can.”

“If we’re really serious about ending homelessness, we have to be honest
about what’s going on here, and that is that community’s not involved—we have completely stepped to the side and let government and nonprofits take over, hoping we’ll hear on the evening news that, finally, we’ve got a solution to end homelessness. It’s never coming, because homelessness has more to do with healthy community than it even does with providing enough shelter.”

That’s where the tiny-house-in-a-neighborhood-backyard comes in, by modeling a community solution to homelessness and allowing people to step up, to offer up some space and invite a new member into their community. And they are.

The build for what Hohlbein and my neighbors Kim and Dan are already calling “Robert’s House” begins on a Saturday morning at 7, when a crew of enthusiastic volunteers turns up to dig the foundation.

Robert’s house will be tiny as houses go. But from the area marked off with surveyor’s string, that looks like about half of Kim and Dan’s backyard. A few days ago, a team of volunteers from a real estate agency cleared away the remainder of Kim’s vegetable patch to make way for the house. In the weekends to come, side beams, pre-fabricated panels, and a roof will go up, and then the “mechanicals”—pipes, plumbing, toilet, sink, and solar panels—will be installed. A landscape architect volunteered his firm’s services to make the most of the space that Kim, Dan, and Robert will be sharing. Robert will have a patio and garden area of his own, and the house will be finished and ready for him to move in by fall.

“Facing Homelessness wanted the first person housed through this project to be Native American,” says Kim, “in recognition of the fact that this is Native land that we’re living on. And Native Americans have one of the higher rates of homelessness.” Kim and Dan were connected to Robert through the Chief Seattle Club, which will continue to give him whatever support he needs after he moves into the house. The three spent

His relationships with homeless people convinced architect Rex Hohlbein, right, to quit his private practice and start both Facing Homelessness and the BLOCK Project.

YES! PHOTO BY JOHN LOK
some time in conversation to make sure their backyard-sharing arrangement would be a good fit, and took to each other immediately. “He is just the nicest man,” Kim says of Robert, “and it’s a honor to get to know him.” Robert just turned 75. He has worked all his life at a variety of jobs, including construction and fishing, and yet has been homeless for nearly 10 years, some of that on the street. He’s currently staying in a dormitory-style shelter and doesn’t want to be interviewed—he’s already had enough media attention.

When I see the site for the tiny house, I remark to Kim that it is generous of her and Dan to give up half of their backyard. “We don’t think of it that way,” she says, looking a bit embarrassed. “I think of this as something I’m doing for me. There is such a negative political atmosphere right now. This project is making me happy. When you look at the problem of homelessness, it’s so huge—but when you do one thing, you start to feel like you’re able to do more.”

Hohlbein’s work is all about that—empowering people to do one thing, and then more. He’s gathered an impressive collection of contributors for the first BLOCK Project homes—including a major construction company that has committed to building the first four houses and donating materials. That sort of help makes a difference. “With the donated labor and materials,” says Turner Construction business manager Ian Klein, “we’re building a project that would normally cost $85,000 or $90,000 for $30,000.”

Building companies are not the only volunteers. When I stop by Kim and Dan’s later in the summer to see how the house is coming along, I meet Lavrans Mathiesen, who says he volunteered because he saw a request on Facebook. A fine woodworker who runs his own business, Mathiesen lives in the neighborhood and has volunteered over five weekends—on wall framing, waterproofing and insulation, erecting panels, and today, when I meet him, on designing trim for the windows. The house is nearly finished.

Thirty households in Seattle have already volunteered their backyards to provide a permanent BLOCK Project home. “Someone compared this to Airbnb,” laughs Hohlbein, “asking people to reimagine their personal space, bringing strangers into their home to spend the night. We believe the BLOCK Project is going to do the same thing to our backyards, that we will no longer see them as our personal sanctuary. Just by being owners of a house in Seattle, we get the right to help people because we have land.”

The paradigm shift Hohlbein is working to create involves not just reassessing personal space and social responsibility, but a different sort of approach to conflict over the issue of homelessness: “Our biggest fear in the beginning was NIMBYism,” he says. “And we decided to just take it on by saying ‘Yes In My Backyard.’ We’re going to turn all the NIMBYs to YIMBYs, and we don’t want to do it in a confrontational way. All the things we’re doing are to bring community together to just bring people right into the middle of it, so that we empower them.”

Countering the NIMBYish position that equates homelessness with anti-social behavior or crime, the nonprofit is working closely with social service agencies that match tenants to homeowners and will provide ongoing support after a tenant moves in. “We also know that the BLOCK Home isn’t right for everybody,” Hohlbein says. “There are people with severe mental health issues, aggression problems, severe violent offenders, Level 3 sex offenders—it’s a small category of the homeless, but it is a category. The thing that we’re excited about is that when the BLOCK Project takes a giant chunk out of the homeless issue, we will be freeing up so many professionals to give their attention to people who really need that kind of care.”

Despite the careful liaison with social services, if even one homeowner on a block doesn’t voluntarily support the presence of a BLOCK House, it will not be built. “We do not want to take someone who is living on the street, that’s living very uncomfortably, and move them on a block only to make someone who was comfortable uncomfortable. We’re not going to be just trading comfort here.

“We believe that time is on our side, and as this project continues to move forward, more and more blocks will have it. There’s enough blocks,” Hohlbein says. “If we provide one on every block in the city, we provide more than enough housing for the unsheltered in Seattle.”

The most obvious solutions to homelessness—subsidized public housing on a large scale and free and effective health care—are probably the least likely to happen soon. Seattle’s latest plan, helping the homeless get into private market-rate apartments, may be unrealistic for low-wage workers in an expensive city. So the vision of a tiny house for the homeless on every block may be more practical than it sounds at first. Los Angeles and Portland, Oregon, are looking at similar initiatives whereby homeowners would gain a backyard cottage by agreeing to rent it, for a period of years, to a homeless person. Those schemes differ from the BLOCK Project in that there would be financial gain for the homeowner.

But what they share is the idea of a small solution of generosity, scaled up, and the assumption that plenty of homeowners might be willing to house the homeless in their backyards.

One Sunday afternoon, exactly where I used to walk past the winter encampment on the way to the bus stop, I visit a community effort to address the needs of the homeless. It’s the Rainier Popup Kitchen: a long row of tables under the bridge where volunteers in aprons are preparing to serve home-cooked food to whoever comes by for a free meal. There is barbecued chicken and a delicious-looking tray of enchiladas, salad, even generous scoops of blackberry ice cream. Once a week, the Rainier Popup folks manage to feed about 150 people, and do it with warmth and hospitality. There are tables and
To have a viable human future on this over-stressed planet, it is essential that we build a solidarity economy that seeks material sufficiency and spiritual abundance for all in balance with a living Earth. We must join in common cause to build local relationships of caring and equitable sharing across the lines of race, religion, and class. Strong and healthy local relationships, however, are only one element of the larger economic transformation required to rebalance our relationship to Earth and achieve a radical redistribution of access to and control of the essentials of living.

Three key statistics reveal the current grim reality:

1. According to the Ecological Footprint Network, we humans currently consume at a rate 1.7 times what Earth’s generative capacity can sustain—and the gap is growing. Consumption at a rate above one further depletes Earth’s capacity to support life.

2. According to Oxfam International, the financial assets of the world’s eight richest individuals now exceed those of the poorest half of humanity, 3.8 billion people. These eight people have ever-growing power to engage in obscene displays of self-indulgent consumption, dictate political outcomes that favor their further enrichment, undermine the legitimacy and credibility of governing institutions, and deprive billions of respect and essential means of living.
3. Our current population of 7.5 billion people is expected to stabilize at 11.2 billion in 2100—a 50 percent increase. All will need food, water, shelter, energy, and other essentials, further intensifying competition for Earth’s dwindling resources and condemning additional billions to lives of desperation.

As drought, storms, floods, fires, and rising sea levels render more areas of Earth uninhabitable, we face a virtually certain future of death, displacement, and growing waves of desperate refugees, threatening the future of every person irrespective of class, color, gender, or religion.

Throughout history, as empires have risen and fallen, people have experienced immense suffering from similar patterns of excess and exclusion. But it always has been more contained by geography. Never have we faced species extinctions and natural systems collapse on anything like the current scale. So dire is this situation that we now face the possibility that we might become the first species knowingly responsible for its own extinction.

A different course requires corrective action equivalent to the scale of the problem we have created. Success requires education and organizing to make the politically impossible politically unstoppable.

The basics are straightforward. We must reduce our burden on Earth’s regenerative systems by approximately 40 percent. And we must share what remains of Earth’s generative capacity to meet the essential material needs of all people: food, water, clean air, housing, energy, transport, and more. We must simultaneously limit the growth of our numbers by making family planning services freely available to all and encouraging their use.

We all depend on the health and productivity of living Earth systems that none among us created. We earn our right to use them by fulfilling our responsibility to care for and restore them to full health and productivity. No one has a right to more than they need so long as others’ needs go unmet.

Here are some of the actions required to simultaneously restore human–Earth balance and redistribute the human share of Earth’s wealth.

Our most urgent need is to replace our use of coal, oil, and gas with wind and solar energy, and switch from farming methods that destroy the soil and deplete water sources to ones that restore soil fertility, clean water, and sequester carbon. We can do this in part with market mechanisms by taxing coal, oil, and gas extraction at the source and distributing the proceeds equally to everyone. Similar measures might apply to the extraction of all other nonrenewable resources.

A society without safety nets creates a powerful incentive for people to hold on to excess assets. No one knows how long they will live or what health or other misfortunes might befall them or their loved ones. Thus, no one knows how much money they may need. Public programs that guarantee health care and retirement security for all reduce uncertainty and, by extension, people’s hoarding mentality.

Some people truly earn their fortunes by making significant contributions to societal well-being. Most, however, involve expropriation of resources of the commons, public subsidies, monopoly profits, financial manipulation and fraud, and/or political corruption.

Those individuals who make unusual contributions to the common good may merit some level of extra material reward, but this doesn’t need to pass on to their heirs in perpetuity. In the tradition of jubilee, every death should be a time for celebratory wealth redistribution to fund educational and livelihood opportunity trust funds for every young person.

In addition to giving to nonprofits, individuals could gift their estates to finance worker and community cooperative-owned enterprises or land trusts. Of course, a sharply progressive income tax would reduce excessive accumulation from the beginning, which is critical to maintaining a healthy democracy.

Organizing as a world of democratically self-governing communities has long had popular appeal. Imagine a world in which each community bears responsibility for living within the means of its own natural land and water endowments, creating a clear community incentive to see to their care and to limit reproduction and nonessential consumption.

And how should we deal with corporations and the excessive power they currently wield? Corporations are creations of government. The only legitimate reason for a democratic government to create a corporation is to serve a beneficial public purpose. Once created to serve that purpose, the corporation must be transparent to the public and accountable to the government of the electorate that chartered it. A corporation has no inherent right to exist or operate beyond that government’s jurisdiction.

As we face challenges unprecedented in human experience, we must rise to the occasion in global solidarity. We share an equally unprecedented interest in a deep cultural, social, and institutional transformation that recognizes our common humanity, fulfills our need to share and care for Earth and one another, and fills the lives of all with an abundance of love and joy.

David Korten is president of the Living Economies Forum, a member of the Club of Rome, and the author of When Corporations Rule the World. His most recent book is Change the Story, Change the Future: A Living Economy for a Living Earth. He is co-founder of YES! Twitter: @dkorten
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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEAR READERS,

Justice is on my mind, and I’m not alone.

Have you read Lori Lakin Hutcherson’s article “My White Friend Asked Me on Facebook to Explain White Privilege. I Decided to Be Honest” at yesmagazine.org? By the time you read this, more than 1.3 million readers will have. That’s more than any other piece in YES!’s 20-year history. Am I thrilled at all the new YES! readers? Absolutely. I’m also terribly sad about the circumstances—the rise in violence and the depth of White supremacy—that led us to publish such an honest and moving account of racism and privilege. I’m so very grateful to Lori for writing it.

At YES! we believe that the forward-looking work of building just, sustainable, compassionate communities can only happen when we look honestly at ourselves and our history. Over the past few years, with support from our donors, we’ve been intentionally focused on diversifying our writers and editors and stepping up our coverage of root causes and solutions related to racial equity, Native rights, and climate justice. That investment is paying off: YES! journalists this year won five awards from the National Association of Black Journalists and the Native American Journalists Association for our coverage of racial justice, Standing Rock, and Native leadership. Columbia University’s Tobenkin award for outstanding reporting on racial intolerance went to our Standing Rock reporter Jenni Monet.

The awards are nice, but what’s really important is what’s behind them: Millions of people becoming more aware of the history and reality lived by people of color in our country and what steps we can take together for a better shared future.

I keep thinking about Lori’s article and how many people it has affected. In my family and among my friends, it cracked open conversations we’ve never had about our White privilege. Research shows that YES! articles shift readers’ thinking and behavior. So I can’t help but imagine: What if this article—and the many others like it—had been published and so widely shared 10 or 20 years ago? Might we be much closer to the world we want to live in? And what if YES! could publish such a piece every day? I want to!

Clearly, there is so much more to share, to understand, and to do. We are honored to be on this journey with you, our readers, and we promise to continue to find and support writers whose perspectives awaken us and communities whose solutions inspire us.

With gratitude,

Christine Hanna

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I became the person I am today because of YES! Magazine. When I joined the YES! team as an editorial intern in 2011, I realized that unlike many of my coworkers and fellow interns, I had never considered myself an activist and was in many ways naive to the issues our world faced—and the actions I could take to affect them positively.

Surrounded by the incredibly passionate, thoughtful, and skilled staff at YES!, though, I dove right in, reading and writing stories of trailblazers fighting pollution and fostering sustainable communities. To this day, I remember that rush of inspiration I felt after hanging up the phone with one of our “People We Love” features; I was so invigorated by her brave efforts that I couldn’t hold back from bursting straight through my editor’s door to share the story. And in the weeks that followed, I found that every which way I turned, there was another story like that one to tell about a person leading the way toward a better world.

That’s the essence of YES!, that it brings people together through stories of positive solutions, connecting a community of change-makers and igniting a spark of innovation. I support YES! as a Dedicated Friend because I believe it has the power to light that fire in each and every one of us to build a path toward a positive future, together. I hope you’ll join me.
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A POWERFUL WOMAN’S SEARCH FOR A DEEPER SENSE OF HOME

YES! ILLUSTRATION BY AVALON NUOVO
THE WOMAN BESIDE WENDELL BERRY

Tanya Berry challenges our assumptions about women’s work, farm life, and small towns, while serving as perhaps the most important fiction editor almost no one has heard of, married to one of the most important American writers almost everyone knows.

Robert Jensen

Standing in her modest kitchen, Tanya Berry explains that a bit of arthritis has made it harder for her to scramble up hills to pick flowers. But she’s expecting there soon will be black-eyed Susans to gather on her walks along Cane Run, and “I’ll get them,” she assures me.

This talk of aging knees is interrupted when she gestures to the vase on the wood stove, between the two rocking chairs that form a snug back-of-the-kitchen sitting room, as the late afternoon sun pours through the window onto the wildflowers. “Here’s my daily thing—this happens once a day. Whatever’s there gets lit,” she says, chuckling about the pleasure she gets. “For any kind of bouquet, whatever you’ve got there, it gets lit up all of a sudden. It’s kind of a wonderful moment.”

Since 1965, in that kitchen, Tanya has had many moments—some solitary; others shared with her husband, the writer Wendell Berry; and lots with family (now including great-grandchildren), friends, and a steady stream of visitors. Lots of green beans canned, dinners cooked, stories shared in their house down the road from Port Royal, Kentucky.

And lots of flowers, because beauty matters, she reminds me, in a house full of paintings, fabric and stitching, and photographs. “It’s an important thing that’s left out of most people’s lives.”

That’s the home Tanya Berry has made, in a rural community that endures—at least for now—because of people like her. Over those years, she has honed skills in farm work and the domestic arts, while serving as perhaps the most important fiction editor almost no one has heard of, married to one of the most important American writers almost everyone knows.

All this started more than a half-century ago with her leap of faith that an artsy city kid could learn, from scratch, what was needed to make a farm home. She grew up mostly in California, moving around often, and the early years of their marriage took them from Kentucky back to California, then to Europe and New York—part of what she once assumed would be a cosmopolitan life with a writer and academic.

But Wendell wanted to go home, and Tanya wanted to put down roots somewhere.

“He needed to be home, and I was flexible because I didn’t belong anywhere in particular. So, I took this on with him,” she says. “It’s not always been perfect. None of it has been perfect. But it’s been right. It’s been the right thing.”

That reflection appears in director Laura Dunn’s film Look & See: A Portrait of Wendell Berry, which began as a profile of the writer but expanded to tell the story of a rural community and its struggles. From the start, Dunn says, she was drawn to Tanya’s view of how art and daily life can intersect in making a home. “I thought I was making a film about my hero Wendell Berry, and it turned out that Tanya is just as much my hero,” Dunn says. “At screenings, I have said the film should be called Bait & Switch: A Portrait of Tanya Berry.”

My interest in profiling Tanya Berry was sparked by the understated power of her insights in that film. After reading Wendell’s work for nearly three decades, I was curious about the home she created with him, so distant from my city experience.

Here’s my portrait of Tanya Berry: This white-haired 81-year-old is a fiercely independent thinker who embraces interdependence. Someone...
with a deep humility who gives others credit reflexively, and a self-confidence that makes her comfortable telling you what she believes she’s good at. A kind person who doesn’t hesitate to offer blunt advice. A woman who kept records of her prodigious canning in the kitchen while also serving as discerning first editor of every novel and short story written by her prolific husband.

“My mother,” daughter Mary Berry says, “is a complicated woman.”

Tanya also complicates assumptions people might make—not only about her relationship to her husband’s work, but about homemaking, farm life, small towns, and a Baptist church.

COMING TO A HOME

Tanya Berry was born in 1936 to Clifford and Dee Amyx, California artists who raised her to appreciate not only formal art, but beauty in everyday life. Her parents had grown up in Kentucky and become part of an emerging counter-culture in the Bay Area’s Mill Valley, sampling philosophies “from communism to Hinduism.”

That life was a bit chaotic and included 20 different schools by the time she enrolled in community college in California. After a year she transferred to the University of Kentucky, where she majored in “everything under the sun,” including music, French, and English. In the fall of 1955 she met fellow student Wendell, and they married in spring 1957. Their first child, Mary Dee, arrived a year later, and Tanya left the university six credits short of a degree. That fall they moved for two years to Stanford University for Wendell’s Stegner Fellowship in the Creative Writing program, then back to Kentucky for a year and a half, and then to Italy and southern France on a Guggenheim Fellowship. Son Pryor Clifford (known to everyone as Den) was born when they returned in 1962, and the family moved east when Wendell got a job teaching at New York University.

Along the way Wendell began publishing—his first novel in 1960 and first poetry volume in 1964—but he wanted to move home, not just to Kentucky, but to Henry County, where he was raised. Wendell was offered a job teaching at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, and the family moved in 1965, settling at Lanes Landing in a house above the Kentucky River. What they expected to be a summer place—when they bought the saltbox house, it had no insulation, no running water, and one electric line into it—quickly became their permanent home.

The critical accolades for Wendell’s poems, short stories, novels, and essays weren’t translating into bestseller sales, and they couldn’t make a living from such a small farm. Additional income came from his two different teaching stints at the university and several years of editing and writing for Rodale Press publications. That job involved a lot of travel, while teaching kept him in Lexington three days a week.

Tanya was regularly in charge of two children and 12 acres (their property eventually expanded to nearly 120, mostly woods). There was a substantial garden to tend, along with sheep, hogs, and a milk cow. Wendell’s fiction lovingly captures the agrarian rhythms and describes the work of the “Port William Membership,” based on one of the communities he grew up in. But for Tanya, it was new territory, full of surprises.

“It seemed like every time he’d drive off to U.K. to teach, something would be out of the fence, on the wrong side of the fence,” she says. “I had to learn, and at the start I had all the wrong instincts about moving animals around.” She did learn, including how to “pull lambs,” helping ewes with the birthing process when necessary.

Tanya offers a “you do what you have to do” shrug about the challenges, pointing out there were always neighbors and Wendell’s relatives for advice and help. But the responsibilities of a farm were at times “pretty scary,” she admits, complicated by the fact that “I didn’t know anything about children, either, having been an only child.”

Her farm cooking also began by trial and error. “I nearly killed the kids off,” she laughs, recalling her interest in health food advocate Adelle Davis’ recipes, including a brewer’s yeast-heavy “tiger’s milk” that she says the children finally refused to drink. (Wendell, passing through the kitchen during the conversation, suggests it was wheat germ, not yeast. Tanya is pretty sure it was yeast. Google suggests it probably included both.)

By all accounts, Tanya’s cooking improved dramatically—family and friends enthusiastically endorse the flavor and heartiness of her meals, with frequent mention of biscuits and pies. She agrees that she ended up becoming a good cook and points to the advantage of having high-quality, fresh ingredients right outside: “You’ve got the gardens, and you’ve got the meat. Jersey cream for making butter and milk for cottage cheese, biscuits and hoe cakes with good flour and good corn meal.”

Sitting at her own farm kitchen table in a neighboring county, Mary has a clear recollection of her mother’s vegetable soup. Across the table, one of Mary’s two granddaughters, 5-year-old Charlcye, offers an enthusiastic vote for her favorite dish made by great-grandmother: “Her chili is amazing! It’s kind of spicy and hot. Not that spicy. Just a little spicy.”

Did she develop a distinctive cuisine, maybe traditional Southern cooking merged with California culinary roots? She’s not interested in the question. There’s nothing that marks them as “foodies,” no upscale cooking implementations in the kitchen (at the moment, one of the stove’s burners is not working) or high-priced designer coffee (it’s grocery-store-ground drip). “I just cook what comes along,” she says.

WHAT MAKES A HOME?

Tanya has cooked “what comes along” for countless visitors. Until it got too big to manage a few years
ago, she fed family and friends every Sunday after church, a tradition now limited to holidays.

That hospitality extends to strangers, a steadily increasing number of whom have passed through as Wendell’s literary reputation grew. Not all are invited in; she draws the line at people who occasionally come to the door unannounced, hoping to take pictures or talk with the author. But people write or call for permission to drop by, which got to be common enough that the Berrys started reserving late afternoons on Sundays for visitors.

Tanya pulls out a guest book started in 1966 (the last entry is 2007, when she finally got tired of asking people to sign) that includes novelist Wallace Stegner and his wife, Mary, composer John Cage, and poet Denise Levertov, along with groups of farmers, journalists, academics, and foreign delegations studying U.S. agriculture—“Here’s one from Indonesia,” she says, paging through the book.

Many of the visitors have been loyal Wendell Berry readers, interested in how rural people have built lives there and how modern life has made that increasingly difficult. Many of them are searching for a deeper sense of home.

Tanya says the young people who visit sometimes seem “desperate for a place, desperate for a life.” Dissatisfied with career-striving in a materialistic consumer culture, these young people ask, “What do we do? Where do we go? How do we make a place? They are questioning the path they’ve been put on,” she says.

Neither of the Berrys pretend to have easy answers.

“We can tell stories about how it has worked for some people, but really there’s no answer,” Tanya says. “We always send them back to [poet and friend] Gary Snyder’s saying: ‘Go somewhere and stop.’” Tanya acknowledges that’s harder to do without the family roots that make it obvious where one might dig in. A lot of these folks “want safety; they want something to enfold them and make a safe place to be,” which she understands. “That’s what I was looking for, to come back here, to be here for my children.”

When people finally find a place to stop, what’s the next step in making a successful home?

“Well, first, you have to be in it,” she says, meaning that people have to commit to staying put, working together, eating together as part of their daily routine. That’s not easy for people with one or more jobs outside the home or living in suburbs that make family and community connections difficult. She recalls the year Wendell was a visiting professor at Stanford, when she found herself in a Menlo Park rental with not much to do except chauffeur children and cook, her only period of feeling isolated and unfulfilled. She couldn’t wait to get back to Henry County.

A big part of their successful homesteading has been the work that Tanya and Wendell have at home, what she calls their “given tasks.” In addition to the labor on the farm and in the house, those tasks involve Wendell’s
writing, and her contribution was the catalyst for one of the few times she has appeared in print.

EDITING WENDELL

Wendell writes in longhand, with a pencil. With his short stories and novels, he reads aloud a first draft to Tanya for immediate feedback, and then goes back to work. From the handwritten pages, she types a draft on her Royal Standard, adding another round of editing. That’s followed by revised drafts until a manuscript is ready for the publisher. (These days, Wendell pays a local friend to put the final text into a computer, a concession to digitized production.)

Wendell asks others for critique of work in progress, but Tanya has been first hearer on all his fiction and first reader on all of his fiction, poems, and essays. As Wendell’s place in literature becomes more widely celebrated—he gave the National Endowment for the Humanities’ prestigious Jefferson Lecture in 2012, and the Library of America is preparing its first volume of his work, due out in 2018—Tanya’s contribution to American letters as in-house editor will be recognized more often.

In 1988, her contribution became a topic of public discussion after an essay by Wendell, “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer,” appeared in Harper’s Magazine. He writes:

“My wife types my work on a Royal [Standard] typewriter bought new in 1956 and as good now as it was then. As she types, she sees things that are wrong and marks them with small checks in the margins. She is my best critic because she is the one most familiar with my habitual errors and weaknesses. She also understands, sometimes better than I do, what ought to be said. We have, I think, a literary cottage industry that works well and pleasantly. I do not see anything wrong with it.”

Some readers were quick to find fault. One letter to the magazine mocked Berry’s “handy alternative” to a computer: “Wife—a low-tech energy-saving device.” Drop a pile of handwritten notes on Wife
and you get back a finished manuscript, edited while it was typed. What computer can do that?” Wendell pointed out that those critics judged without knowing anything about the relationship and without the benefit of his wife’s perspective.

Tanya never responded in public, but those condescending judgments clearly still annoy her. On occasion someone still will say, “Oh, you’re the one who types.” The responses to the Harper’s article can still be a sore subject for family and friends, too.

Granddaughter Virginia Berry Aguilar runs the bookstore and is outreach coordinator at The Berry Center, a nonprofit organization that supports economically and ecologically sustainable agriculture through organizing and education. She bristles at how that criticism ignores her grandmother’s strong will. “She’s telling him what she thinks, and isn’t afraid to say, ‘You got this wrong.’ She is a person who is going to do what she wants to do. And when she asks him to do something as part of their partnership, he does it, because he wants to.”

Wendell has pointed out that it’s difficult to make a public defense of one’s private life, but he asks to weigh in (the only time he does in the four days I’m there). “I want to give you a little of my testimony,” he says. Tanya’s role in his writing starts long before he reads that first draft to her, because as he writes he is thinking about her reaction. Knowing he will read it aloud to her—“to somebody I care about and am trying to impress and cause her to love me”—is especially intimidating, he says, “I’ve been trying to win the affection, all the time, of an intelligent woman. I don’t want to be married to someone who would be impressed by my reputation.”

Wendell credits both their relationship and homesteading for making it difficult to indulge the conceit that writers are special people to be shielded from everyday labor. “I’ve heard writers say, ‘Nothing should interfere with your work, nothing should come between you and your work.’ Well, the way we’ve lived, everything that has wanted to has come between me and my work—lambing ewes, work to do, Tanya’s got something she needs from me, babies when the time came. [Literary] work came second, and I think it’s been very good for the work.”

WOMEN’S WORK

Some critics of the Harper’s article invoked feminism, while Tanya’s family and friends speak of her as a strong, independent woman and role model. So, the inevitable question: Is she a feminist? Mary described her mother as a complicated person, and this is one of those complicated things.

Leah Bayens, director of the Farming Program at The Berry Center, begins by dispelling the myth that “farm wives” are confined to the home; women have always been involved in farm labor. Pressures to differentiate roles sharply based on gender—men in the fields, women in the kitchen—came from outside the farm, such as post-World War II extension programs, attempts to “modernize” rural life, she says.

Tanya says she understands that “women have needed really badly to have a better sense of their worth and their rights, to not be defined only by their partner.” But the term “feminist” doesn’t speak to her experience, especially not “lean-in” feminism that embraces the corporate culture’s definition of success. Moving to Henry County, “I got a whole other picture of ‘women’s work,’ and I changed a lot and got more pleased with the idea of women’s work being good. And when they worked hard, they deserved to be noticed for working hard and for doing good work.”

“I was working here, I was on the farm. I didn’t have a career,” she says. “And I’ve never felt guilty about not being something, not having a label.” For Tanya, “not being something” doesn’t mean not having important work, just that “I don’t have a title that I can retire from.”

Beyond the farm, the other part of Tanya’s “important work” has been making a place for herself and her family in Port Royal.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

When listing her “given tasks,” Tanya includes activities outside the home. Homesteading and homemaking don’t take place in a vacuum, she emphasizes, and there are obligations to neighbors, community.

Paula Perry Sanker, a younger cousin of Wendell’s, has known the family all her life, and Tanya was a constant presence in her early years. Sanker’s mother and Tanya did laundry together in a wringer washer, shared recipes and produce, and worked on community projects. In the early 1970s, when homemaker groups were going out of style, Sanker’s mother and sister and Tanya decided to start one, producing the Port Royal Homemakers Cookbook and holding craft bazaars to raise money for local projects. “She was just always there,” Sanker says of Tanya, “showing up and doing whatever job had to be done.”

Tanya holds no official position in Port Royal, but after five decades she sees herself as a community coordinator of sorts. “I do see a lot of
connections that need to be made. I’m just that kind of person. It’s kind of an art that you take part in.” She has served on the local library board and helped start a group called the Foundation for Excellence in Education, which sponsored lectures and dinners to raise money for special projects for schools and arranged for summer courses taught by local people. In those early years, Tanya says she noticed some folks had trouble getting to the doctor and started driving them, eventually helping to set up a network that could organize the transportation.

But rural communities are not homogenous, and while the Berrys were certainly part of the Port Royal community, they were also different.

It wasn’t only Wendell’s growing fame as a writer that set them apart, but also their politics, such as opposition to the Vietnam War, and some of their “hippie ways.” That included having a composting toilet that got mentioned in a story in the Louisville Courier-Journal, much to teenage daughter Mary’s embarrassment. Wendell was from a prosperous family, and some people in the area “couldn’t understand why someone with a college education would have a privy,” Sanker recalls. “Those people had spent their whole lives wanting a flush toilet.”

Tanya’s approach is not to start with politics. “You don’t always ask people, ‘Did you vote for Trump?’” she says. What’s her strategy when she knows she will be on the opposite side when the conversation gets to politics? “You have to quit being so picky, and so fault-finding, and so snotty about it. You take people and their gifts, and you enjoy them and honor them.” Sunday services help develop those skills. “How else are you going to learn to get along with people if you’re not doing it week after week after week after week?”

Has her longstanding skepticism about conventional theology changed?

Port Royal Baptist Church left the Southern Baptist Convention and then the state convention, and later became part of the more progressive Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Kentucky. In the 1990s, Tanya helped start, served on the board, and chaired the board of the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky, which emerged from people’s dissatisfaction with the Southern Baptist seminary in Louisville.

The Port Royal church isn’t big on membership tests. Tanya says she’s interested in what the tradition has to offer (“I started going to Sunday school and actually reading the Bible”) and tries to listen carefully to others. “I’m with them, and I’m trying to learn from them. I’m not figuring they’re learning from me. I’m learning from them, trying to figure out how they made it through their struggles.”

The summer Sunday that I visit the church, the children in her Sunday school class are gone and Tanya joins the adult discussion group. There’s assigned scripture (Ezekiel 24: 1-13), but the conversation covers a lot of ground about responsibility, the role of chance in our lives, the struggle to understand why bad things happen to good people, and vice versa. Most of the hour is talk about the things that tug at most everyone’s heart and conscience, circling back now and then to scripture. And there are reports about the week’s activities and discussion about who is sick, who just got a cancer diagnosis, who’s going for treatment. That part of the conversation, for Tanya, is as important as the philosophical. “I look on church as where we go for holy gossip. We find out who needs what, including ourselves,” she says.

“The rhythm of my life is connected to it now, Sunday to Sunday. It’s wholly different than what I thought, when I was younger, that a church would be.”

**NEXT GENERATIONS**

Since Tanya’s work of making a farm home as part of a rural community doesn’t fit in the modern economy’s markers of success—salary, status, size of one’s house—how do we evaluate such a life’s work?

Pulling an assessment out of son Den is challenging, given his tendency toward quiet understatement. He agrees that his father’s fame as a writer meant their childhood was “unusual” at times, but says his parents created “a fairly normal life” for the children. Some of the intellectuals in that stream of visitors were interesting, he says, but he preferred time with farmers.

“My home was, is, and will be among the people of this community,” says Den, who worked a few jobs in Indiana and Kansas after high school before returning. On 165 acres, which was once one of his grandfather’s farms, Den raises beef cattle and grows hay for his stock and to sell. His wife, Billie, works full time in a nearby post office (family farms with one off-farm income are common in the United States).

Daughter Mary, the executive director of The Berry Center, isn’t hesitant to offer an evaluation. After completing a geography degree at the University of Kentucky, she came home and never left. As a teenager, she loved farm...
life, and also loved to complain about how her parents “seemed to always do things the hardest way possible.” She felt deprived of television and junk food that was available in other homes, especially the brick ranch homes that she thought marked success.

“Today, there’s no television in her house.”

Mary says family roots on her father’s side are a big part of her connection to the area, but she attributes her rootedness just as much to Tanya. If her mother had not been happy here, Mary says, she doubts that she would have stayed. “If she had been dissatisfied at all, if she had found the place less than what she hoped to have in her life, I think, we would have felt dissatisfied in some ways,” Mary says.

“She absolutely accepted this place, the limits of this place, and in accepting the limits she has experienced—and I’m taking this from her, I’m not trying to put words in her mouth—a fullness that I don’t think she thinks she would have had anywhere else. And I would say that is certainly true for myself, that I also accept the limits of this place and can’t imagine wanting to be anywhere else, and have never wanted to be anywhere else.”

The five grandchildren have all been to college (that last one’s about to finish), and are living in Kentucky and working as teacher, photojournalist, and auto factory worker active in the union. No one in that generation is farming, yet.

Granddaughter Virginia and her husband are scouting farm properties in Henry County. Virginia loved the life and work on the farm with her parents, and remembers the confidence that work inspired. “I knew that if I didn’t milk the cow, there were serious consequences,” she says. “I was part of the home economy. I felt needed and necessary in a way a lot of my friends didn’t experience.”

Like any family, the Berrys have had struggles and rough patches, and Tanya reminds herself, and others, that whatever success they’ve had in homesteading and homemaking is partly due to a lot of luck.

But it takes more than luck to nurture values and teach skills, which continue to be passed down. She said that when Charlyce (daughter of Katie, Mary’s oldest) was asked once if she was going to be a farmer, the girl said proudly, “I am a farmer!” That response clearly pleases Tanya. “Somehow or another,” she says, “Charlyce is now connected to this chain of dealing with animals, and land, and food. Who knows?”

**YOUNG FARMERS**

Tanya doesn’t try to predict the future of rural America but worries about young people who want to find their place on the land. Rural communities aren’t as strong, profit margins are narrower, and high-tech consumer culture is more seductive than when she and Wendell started out. But young people are trying, and she’s grateful for their work to combine traditional and new ideas. “Thank goodness there are a few of them, who will continue taking care of us when we need funerals, and need a meal after church, who are going to visit if somebody’s sick, and keep the knowledge going.”

The day I’m at The Berry Center, Jenny Vaughn and Justin Owings from the nearby Pink Elephant Farm stopped by with out-of-town friends. The two sold their houses in Nashville to finance a CSA, subscription egg operation, and “seasonal micro-dairy” with a herd-share program (technically, people buy shares of the cows that entitle them to milk) on 27 acres. They came with experience in gardening and professional kitchen work but have been learning farming on the job.

Both were ready to work hard but didn’t predict how exhausting it would be, mentally and physically. But they’re dug in, not just to make a living, but to leave something for children they hope to have someday. “Being here, very early on, it has felt to both of us that this is a generational project. What we envision this property being and becoming, we will not be able to finish in our lifetimes and would love for someone to keep working on it,” Jenny says.

At Port Royal Baptist, I meet two couples farming together at Valley Spirit Farm, renting 118 acres they hope to buy, raising grass-fed cattle...
and pastured pork, along with an acre of vegetables to sell wholesale, at farmers markets, and through their CSA. Joseph Monroe and Abbie Scott-Monroe have one child and another on the way (Angus Wilder was born a few weeks after my visit, on Sept. 2). Caleb and Kelly Fiechter have two children, and her work as a nurse provides an off-farm income.

Joseph loves farming but says he also wants to create a home in which children can learn skills, not just farming, but things like patience, “skills of the spirit.” After babysitting in homes in which children seemed to be “filling time” in ways that lacked meaning, Abbie says she looked for something beyond conventional suburban life.

Together they are “striving toward a more minimalist life, trying to move away from consumer culture,” Kelly says, which they hope will be easier in the country. Caleb agrees, but says even when you actively resist a materialistic culture, “modern society kind of creeps in.”

That’s part of what Tanya seems to mean when, in expressing her concerns for young homesteaders, she says “they’re bucking more.” She surprises me by dropping the term “evil” into the conversation.

“The signs of evil are these places you put your extra stuff. What do you call those?” she asks, searching for the term. “Storage units, yes. They’re all over the country now, where people have their extra stuff. The fast food industry—you eat as fast as possible, and alone. The push to make money, to have the vacations, to have the things—it’s ever present.”

This awareness of the social and ecological consequences of modern America’s materialism is not new but spreading, and Tanya has watched it from a unique vantage.

She’s skeptical about the claim that digital technology brings people closer together, and most new technology doesn’t interest her. There’s no computer or internet service in their house, still no television, and she has no interest in a smartphone. “You’re never alone when you’re hooked up that way, when you have that in your pocket,” she says, and the ability to be truly alone with yourself is an important part of life. It makes it possible to be truly with people; it makes creating a home and being a part of a community possible.

**A DEFINITION OF HOME**

In a short note confirming her willingness to be interviewed, Tanya wrote to me, “The strength of a profile/interview so totally depends on the interviewer. I’m at ease with it all.” I take her to mean that any attempt to understand another person is greatly influenced by the interviewer’s life. My motivation is straightforward: I grew up without the sense of home the Berrys worked hard to create, and their children and grandchildren are working hard to continue. Whatever I have built in my adult life, I will always be, in this sense, homeless.

Over the four days I interviewed Tanya, I kept circling back to the question of home, pestering her several times for a definition, which I never really got. But given the cascading social and ecological crises of the modern world—especially the affluent industrial world, especially the United States—it’s a crucial question. Our society is out of touch and out of balance, and needs to find a way home. We need to know what meaningful, sustainable home looks like.

I asked other people, and granddaughter Virginia’s definition of home seems a gentle place to stop the search. “It’s a safe place,” she says, “where people are good to one another.”

On my third day with Tanya, I had an experience of that sense of safety and decency, one of those moments that linger in memory. It requires a bit of my backstory.

The idea to write about Tanya Berry and her ideas of homemaking started nearly three decades ago. When the criticism of Wendell’s computer article in Harper’s appeared, I had just made a new friend who would turn out to be the biggest influence on my life (I eventually wrote a book about him, Plain Radical). Jim Koplin introduced me to the sustainable agriculture movement and suggested I read Wendell Berry, and through our work in the feminist anti-pornography movement, he became my model for striving to be a feminist man.

I asked him what he thought about the Harper’s essay and the criticism.

Before making any judgment, he said, “I would want to take a long walk in the woods with Tanya.”

Koplin—who was born three years before Tanya on a Minnesota farm—died a few years ago, and he was never far from my mind during my visit to Henry County. Many of the questions that came up in conversation with her I had first explored with Koplin years before, and the two have much in common—an appreciation of everyday beauty and love of flowers, the joy of cooking for friends, a critique of a society out of balance. At the end of the trip, I miss not being able to call him and tell him I took that walk in the woods with Tanya.

Driving with Tanya along Cane Run on Ford Lane on a Saturday morning, as she explains the local landscape to me in the detailed way Koplin often did in Minnesota, I feel a surge of emotion, crying gently, but visibly enough that Tanya can’t help but notice. I can’t speak for a few seconds, and finally I tell her that there are moments when the presence of my friend overwhelms me, usually without warning. In those moments, I tell her, “I remember what I lost when he died.” We are quiet together.

Down the road a bit, she points, is one of the places where she likes to walk to pick wildflowers. I think, to myself, “I am in a place where people are good to one another.”

Robert Jensen is a professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin and the author of The End of Patriarchy: Radical Feminism for Men and Plain Radical: Living, Loving, and Learning to Leave the Planet Gracefully.
Aura Bogado

While some accepted the news of Trump’s victory almost immediately on Election Day, the result hit others in waves of grief. Over the days, weeks, and months that followed, initial denial has yielded to belief—often dotted with moments of disbelief, reserved for times when the president says or does something that was previously unimaginable. Disappointment remains. And, for many, so does fear.

What words would you find to communicate any sense of critical optimism to a loved one right now? Radical Hope: Letters of Love and Dissent in Dangerous Times gleans written messages from more than 30 writers to grandparents, children, strangers, and entire generations.

Carolina de Robertis, the editor of Radical Hope, writes that she was thinking about you a few days after the election. You, the person reading this. You, the person who not only survived Election Day, but also the inauguration and the sweeping changes that have taken place since. You, the person who might still feel hopeless but is nevertheless reading a review of a book about hope. De Robertis was writing to me, too. This was published with all of us in mind.

“[W]hat could we do, what must we do,” de Robertis wondered shortly after the election, writing in the introduction about how to get through the new threats facing vulnerable communities. She got to work right away, reaching out to writers for what was then a vague vision to collect “love letters in response to these political times.” She was stunned and humbled by the responses she received, remarking that the letters create “a collective mirror of precisely what makes this society strong and beautiful.”

It makes sense: So many people wanted—needed, even—to channel their energy into something positive after the election. For the collected authors in Radical Hope, letter writing to loved ones was a way to do that. In these letters, writers dive into personal and historical origins to search for hope. In the section called “Roots,” you’ll read letters that point to history and how we got here. Alicia Garza, who helped found Black Lives Matter, writes to “Mama Harriet”—the woman who founded the Underground Railroad. Jewelle Gomez, the author
and playwright, writes to her maternal great-grandmother. Others write not only to elders past, but also to children and grandchildren. The letters are tender in a way letters to loved ones tend to be—while acknowledging the urgency of this moment.

The ability to write what de Robertis describes in the opening as an “essay in letter form”—that gift of including personal details while also knowing there’s a bigger audience—is the thread that weaves Radical Hope together. These essays are personal. That’s the beauty of the epistolary form: The writer shares their vulnerability because they trust the letter’s audience. These letter writers trust that we’ll find hope in their words.

This collection also invites you, dear reader, to participate in creating hope. In the section called “Branches,” you’re made conscious of your participation in this book. Cherrie Moraga, for example, addresses the book’s audience directly: “Dear ‘Radically Hopeful’ Artist.”

At this point I realized that, despite my cynicism, I’m still a radically hopeful person—it would make little sense otherwise to read these letters. So I went back to letters I’d already read, and I noted the intentional ambiguity with which some of the letters are addressed. Many of the letters invite participation. These writers have placed a hope in the readers that we will, in turn, take away some hope from the letters. It’s an engaging process that’s made whole when we, as readers, do find some hope.

And these letters invite us to find personal connections between ourselves and the strangers to whom these letters are addressed. In one letter, Elmaz Abinader, an author who founded Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundation, writes to a woman who stood in front of her in line at the grocery store. Abinader overheard pieces of this stranger’s conversation: torture, jail, Buenos Aires. Abinader imagines the woman survived torture under Argentina’s military dictatorship several decades ago. “You are ahead of me,” she writes, describing the stranger’s physical location in line. But the text also signals that this woman is a survivor of the kind of dictatorship and torture many fear will occur in the Trump administration. By having survived something like it, she’s ahead of that experience.

There’s something devastating about Abinader’s letter in Radical Hope. The stranger in line isn’t the only woman she addresses. Defying time and space, Abinader writes to her grandmother who escaped Lebanon more than 100 years ago. She writes to countless women she’s encountered who’ve survived searches, checkpoints, and despots. She writes to so many women that it creates a shared sense of familiarity among all women who’ve experienced injustice.

“Many of us have not learned how to lose something,” writes Abinader. These women in line know about profound loss. And how to survive it.

Last, these letters address the future. In the section called “Seeds,” writers try to envision a hopeful future despite the political and social turmoil of the present. It’s here that you’ll read Meredith Russo’s letter to her child. “I am not ashamed to admit I am more afraid than ever,” the transgender novelist writes.

Russo’s honesty—that she’s worked to make a better world than the one she grew up with, but that her “hope was misplaced”—is as candid as it is compassionate. You may find tears in your eyes, and you may have to clear your throat as you’ve learned to do so many times under the Trump administration.

What makes the letters in Radical Hope powerful is the way they’re rooted in reality. The writers don’t turn from this moment, but instead accept it and its infinite challenges, just as they understand the past and its persistent legacies. The words here are often written to people we’ll never meet but whose obstacles we already share. There’s hope in imagining we’ll see a different day, together.

Aura Bogado is a journalist based in Los Angeles. Her writing has been published in The Guardian, The American Prospect, Mother Jones, and more.

**In Short :: Books inspiring us**

*Being the Change: Live Well and Spark a Climate Revolution*

Peter Kalmus

New Society Publishers, 2017

It can be hard to find hope in climate change mitigation. But that’s exactly what NASA climate scientist Peter Kalmus does in *Being the Change*. While he’s not your typical government scientist—he commutes by bicycle, meditates, grows and exchanges food—he does approach his life and global warming with the solution-driven focus of one. To Kalmus, individual actions matter. His family cut their climate impact to one-tenth the national average. He finds hope in the data—cutting out some things like flying in airplanes, really does add up—but he also finds it outside the charts and graphs. Ultimately, cutting his personal carbon emissions makes him happier and more fulfilled.


Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore

University of California Press, 2017

“I’m not saying that Amazon is responsible for slavery,” Raj Patel told Seattle radio station KUOW. “I’m saying that all of us are touched by the slavery that’s involved in our cheap consumer electronics.” That fairly sums up the premise of *History of the World*, which draws important connections among many different anti-capitalist movements. In its drive to keep things like labor and food cheap, capitalism thrives at the expense of human and ecological health. —Shannan Stoll
How to Throw a Better Protest Party

Research and illustrations by Jennifer Luxton

Hey, activists: By building art and play into your work, you bring energy and fun to your movement and encourage stronger bonds among participants. Song, dance, and visual props make your direct actions memorable and inviting. The Pacific Northwest-based Backbone Campaign trains budding activists on how to do that. Here are lessons from their Localize This! Action Camp:

Have a Pre-Protest Planning Party

Pre-event coordination invites people who can’t take part in the action to still take part in the movement. And it lets participants get to know each other without the stress of protest day.

Do More Than March

Bike, kayak, or rappel into your action. It’s high visibility, and by using different means of transportation, you’re also making a statement against our reliance on cars. Ask local rental shops to borrow equipment at discounted rates—better yet, invite them to get involved, too.

Wheat Paste Recipe

1. Combine 1 part flour and 4 parts water in a saucepan.
2. Heat to just below a boil until it’s the consistency you need it.
3. Whisk constantly to prevent clumping.

This has a shelf life of just a few days, so only make as much as you can use right away.

Yes to Giant Puppets and Props

Papier-mache or inflatable puppets get your message seen above the crowd. They can become a mascot for your action and a defining feature in photos afterward. Get creative—but consider the weather.

How to Make a Papier-Mache Puppet

Use clay, foam, or bunched-up and taped plastic grocery bags to form the shape of your model.

Then, cover the form in plastic wrap to prevent your paper from sticking to it and layer strips of paper grocery bags dipped in paste to form the shell.

Cut the shell in half to remove it and papier-mache over the seam to fuse it together again. Add structural reinforcements as needed.
HAVE A POST-PROTEST DECONSTRUCTION PARTY

Municipal trash cans stuffed with protest signs are bad public relations. Recycle them. Invite participants to join you to disassemble props and make them available to allied movements.

SMALL DIRECT ACTIONS COUNT, TOO

If big demonstrations and marching shoulder to shoulder for miles isn’t your scene, get sneaky: Use light to project messages onto the sides of buildings. Get personal: Perform your own song with a portable speaker while occupying a public space. Make art about your movement and paste prints around town.
If it feels like you and the people you know have no say over what happens in Washington, D.C., that’s not an illusion. Research shows that ordinary people have close to zero influence on policymaking at the federal level while wealthy individuals and business-controlled interest groups hold substantial sway, according to an analysis published in Perspectives on Politics.

No wonder Americans are frustrated. Two-thirds are dissatisfied with the direction of the country, according to Pew Research Center data. Almost as many feel that they are losing more than winning on the issues that matter to them.

We need stricter gun laws, say 62 percent of Americans in a Morning Consult poll, and 78 percent support mandatory licensing. Yet action is stalled.

More needs to be done about climate change, say 64 percent of U.S. voters, according to a recent Quinnipiac University poll. Seventy-five percent want to see carbon regulated as a pollutant. But federal policy is moving in the opposite direction.

We want government to be accountable to us, but here’s the rub. We don’t have the power to limit campaign spending—which 78 percent of Americans favor—according to a New York Times/CBS News Poll—or enact other policies that would make elected officials responsive to We the People instead of the big money interests.

So-called populists like Donald Trump tap into the frustration, and some—with a tolerance (or enthusiasm) for White supremacy—voted for him. But, with generals and Wall Street executives in the White House, the interests of ordinary people remain firmly outside decision-making circles.

So how do we break through?

Two years ago, I took a road trip through 18 states, interviewing people about how they were making change. I visited struggling communities in the Rust Belt, Appalachia, Indian reservations, and the South, and everywhere I found people who were reimagining and rebuilding their communities, and feeling their power.

The people I visited were partnering up—immigrants and long-time residents, Black youth and elders, union workers and faith leaders—to make change where they live. They were blocking coal and gas projects and producing radio programs and theater productions that reflected a new story of what their communities value.

At the local level, government is more responsive. Seattle enacted a $15 minimum wage. California is moving forward on a climate policy that will adhere to the Paris Accord, with or without federal government involvement. Texas is closing eight prisons in six years, according to the Dallas News.

One of my co-workers at PeoplesHub, Melissa Rosario, lives in Puerto Rico and told me this story of a day following the hurricane. An elderly woman who lived alone was trapped when a sheet metal roof blew off an adjacent building and blocked the entrance to her home. A group of around 10 showed up to help. The woman laughed when she saw them. The helpers had nothing but a few hand tools and seemed unlikely to succeed, and neighbors advised them to wait for some big machinery. But together, they moved the debris. Then the neighbors brought over food and drink, and powerlessness turned to celebration.

Local power is by nature grounded—in ourselves, our values, and our family; in our community and culture; and in our ecological home.

Archimedes said, “Give me a place to stand, and I can move the Earth.” When we have a strong and connected community, we have that place to stand.

And local power brings out joy. When people remove debris after a hurricane or give blood after a mass shooting, it makes them feel better.

Instead of getting burned out, frustrated, and isolated, when we gather, we get energized. The joy generated in those gatherings sustains and empowers us, and builds understanding across divides. And that local power, combined with the local power in other communities, is a foundation for changing things, nationally and globally.

Sarah van Gelder is a co-founder and columnist at YES!, founder of PeoplesHub.org, and author of The Revolution Where You Live: Stories from a 12,000-Mile Journey Through a New America. Follow her on Twitter @sarahvangelder.
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Van Jones, CNN commentator and author of *The Messy Truth*

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