



Social Justice Today



Social Justice Today is an online, quarterly, not-for-profit journal which seeks to unite academics and other citizens passionate about social issues. We are interested in social, political, pedagogical, and cultural essays which examine issues of civic significance within a social justice framework

Volume 1, No. 2
Summer 2012

Racism and White Privilege

Social Justice Today

Co-Founders: Elvia R. Arriola and Sarah Miltz-Frielink

Issue Editors: Sarah Miltz-Frielink & Dr. Kerry T. Burch

Contributing Authors:

Dr. Bill Ayers, Bernardine Dohrn, Gabriel Frielink, Grace Frielink, Hannah Frielink, Diane Hernandez, Dr. Bill McCoy, Howie Emmer

Graphic Designer: Adam Frielink

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Dedication: This issue is dedicated to Dr. Keith B. Armstrong who has inspired the impulse of democracy and social justice in his students through his teaching and writing.

Editors' acknowledgements: Special thanks to Jessica Heybach for introducing us to Mr. Emmer and his work. A heartfelt thanks to Kristine Frielink and Becky Frielink for taking care of the children during the editing of this issue. Much gratitude to co-founder Professor Elvia R. Arriola for copyediting this issue and setting an example through her work as professor, scholar, and human rights activist.

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Who We Are

Social Justice Today is an online, quarterly, not-for-profit journal which seeks to unite academics and other citizens passionate about social issues. We are interested in social, political, pedagogical, and cultural essays which examine issues of civic significance within a social justice framework. We are seeking essays which explore issues of race, gender, disability, health, social class or sexual orientation and ask challenging questions about the institutional constraints under which we live and work. Equally important, we invite essays that articulate constructive democratic visions that dare to step outside conventional modes of interpretation. Another core aim of Social Justice Today is to revive the lost art of the American essay in the tradition of Emerson, Thoreau, W.E.B. DuBois, and Susan Sontag, to mention a few exemplars of this genre. The hope is that our writers and readers will question their assumptions, prejudices, and personal/political ideologies in the process.

It is the editors' belief that we often overcome trials and experience transcendence as a result of this type of questioning and examination of thought forms. We urge individuals to reflect upon socio-cultural influences which have shaped personal perspectives and how new experiences have the potential to transform pain and prejudice. In today's post-modern American culture, heavily influenced as it is by degraded forms of commercial culture, social media, the blogosphere, and impersonal online interactions (often replacing face-to-face ones), the need for well-written thought-provoking essays is on the rise. Social Justice Today aims to provide a non-doctrinaire forum for publishing essays which ask fresh and difficult questions that provoke dialogue and stir up passion for public affairs.

Writer's Guidelines

A well-written essay written in Chicago Style may range from 8-20 pages in length (double-spaced). An ideal essay may begin with a personal narrative, which propels the writer to critique and ask questions about various oppressive practices. The writer could examine how these practices are shaped by thought paradigms and belief systems and as a result may present a counter narrative or point of view. In addition to American essays, we will consider well-written Q and A dialogue pieces, short stories, and poetry with a social justice theme. Our fall issue will focus on immigration, globalization, and the militarization of the border, which means we are looking for manuscripts with those themes.

Please send completed manuscripts attached in word via email to editor@socialjusticetoday.org for consideration. Please put SJT submission in the subject line. We do not accept simultaneous submissions.

Notification via email regarding the status of your essay will occur approximately two weeks post submission. This is a quarterly publication. Our next writer's deadline is September 1, 2012. A short bio about the writer must accompany the submission.

Due to the fact that this publication is entirely run by volunteers, has no advertisers, and is unfunded, writers will not be paid upon publication. However, writers can use this opportunity to build their portfolios, curriculum vitae, or resumes. It would be paradoxical for this publication to accept any payments for publication due our commitment to social justice and equity issues. This not-for-profit publication will remain run by volunteers as part of our commitment to social change. If you have editorial experience and would like to volunteer to help edit a future issue, please send an email with your experience and interest to sarah@socialjusticetoday.org.

Dear Reader,

In the summer issue of *Social Justice Today*, we draw attention to invisible systems of privilege as we confront the effects of racism in contemporary American culture. The contributors share personal narratives which illustrate both how people of color encounter racism and how some Whites have increasingly become more awake to their privilege. It is indeed challenging for those of us who enjoy majority-status in mainstream America to learn how to be aware of the plethora of privileges we benefit from on a daily basis. This type of learning means we have to open our eyes and re-evaluate everything we think we earned in life on our own personal merit. We have to grapple with difficult questions—such as “How much of what I think I have accomplished in life has been a result of my White privilege? How many jobs, loans, apartments, and opportunities became more accessible to me because of my skin color?”

A unique feature of this issue is a dialogue on race between three adults and three school-aged children—Gabriel, Grace and Hannah Frielink—who previously read, along with their mother, sections of Bill Ayers’ and Bernardine Dohrn’s cogent book, *Race Course: Against White Supremacy*. They pose straightforward yet penetrating questions based on their reading of the book and their perceptions of the race problem in America. In asking these questions, they not only offer a child’s perspective on the history of racial discrimination in the United States, they also raise difficult educational concerns about our responsibility as moral actors to respond to and explain racial and social injustice within our schools.

It is a pleasure to introduce readers to Howie Emmer’s remembrance of his participation in the seminal events of the 1960s—from his activism in the early days of SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) to his later involvement in both the civil rights and anti-war movement. Very few of us around today are fortunate enough to recall personal memories of hearing both Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X speak in person during this tumultuous period of our national history. It is a testament to their inspiration on Mr. Emmer's political education that he is as engaged in the struggle for social justice today as he was forty years ago.

As always, this publication aims to ask questions, provoke dialogue, and revive the spirit of democracy in the hearts of those who have to the courage to “open their eyes, be astonished, and act.” From teachers, scholars, and parents to community members and activists, we have a moral obligation to confront the effects of racism and re-envision a more peaceful world for our grandchildren to live in—so that someday they can not only struggle toward, but also know a more just society—one closer to how it should be.

Sincerely,

Sarah Militz-Frielink & Dr. Kerry T. Burch
Issue Co-editors
Social Justice Today

Don't Give up the Fight: 42nd Commemoration Kent State May 4th, 2012

By Howie Emmer

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share some thoughts. I am a father and I can't imagine what it's like to have your child taken away from you. I am proud to be with you today to commemorate the events of May 4th and the lives of Allison, Jeff, Sandy, and Bill.

I am honored to speak on the same panel with Dr. Melba Beals.

The civil rights movement was the spark that set other movements of the 1960s in motion. Leaders of SDS had been involved in the southern civil rights movement. Tom Hayden, a founder of SDS, made his first notes about the Port Huron Statement in a jail cell in Albany, Georgia. Nonviolent civil disobedience, initiated by the civil rights movement, was taken up by the movement against the war in Vietnam.

For me, the civil rights movement challenged the idea that we lived in a democracy. While growing up in the 1950s and early 1960s, I heard a constant drumbeat that our democracy was the humane alternative to Soviet communism. Constant lynchings and murder of Black people in the South, including the murders of children in Birmingham, the assassination of Mississippi NAACP leader Medgar Evers, and the torture and maiming of 14-year old Emmet Till, painted a different picture. The federal government, the center of power of our democracy, turned a blind eye to Southern violence in the early days of the civil rights movement and Southern local authorities were actively involved in white supremacist hate-mongering and violence in many cases. In the early 1960s, apathetic complacency was the reaction on the part of most citizens to the extreme brutality meted out to Black people and civil rights activists. The civil rights movement challenged "freedom and justice for all" and I asked myself: Do we live in a democracy?

Like others of my generation, I was inspired by the civil rights movement. As a high school student I joined student CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, in Cleveland. The humanity of the civil rights movement spoke to me as a young person trying to figure out who I was. I was inspired by the courage, sense of commitment, and spirit of civil rights activists. People getting together to fight for their rights, empowering themselves, collectively and individually—that was democracy!

In 1964, I participated in a boycott of the Cleveland Public Schools to protest the inferior education that was meted out to inner city children. When I returned to my suburban school the next day I handed the vice principal a note saying I had been sick—sick of segregation. “Unexcused absence”, he replied and I received a detention. That was the first time I got into trouble for social justice activity.

I heard Dr. Martin Luther King speak twice—in person! His commanding presence, eloquence, and vision of a humane world made a deep impression on me. I was also fortunate to hear Malcolm X speak. What stuck with me was the connection between Malcolm X and the enthusiastic crowd of African-Americans who packed the church, the back and forth between them. Though Malcolm X was blasted in the press for being a hater, I didn't feel that when I heard him speak and felt his criticisms of white society were justified.

I was visiting friends at the University of Wisconsin in Madison during the December holiday season in 1964 and was at a dance, with the rock n' roll music blasting. Suddenly, the music was silenced and a moment of apprehension gripped the crowd. The emergency was named and announced: our government had escalated the war in Vietnam by bombing Haiphong Harbor in North Vietnam.

That moment stayed with me and soon after, when I arrived at Kent State, I joined the Kent Committee to End the War In Vietnam (KCEWV). In 1966, fifteen of us walked in a circle, carrying signs against the Vietnam War outside of Bowman Hall, cordoned off by yellow security tape. A crowd of students jeered and told us to go back to Russia. We set up literature tables at the old Student Union; we carried out dorm meetings and presented the facts about the war. We gained support as people saw Vietnamese children on their television screens, crying and screaming, burned from napalm. Neighbors, friends, and relatives came home in boxes as the death toll among GI's mounted. By 1967, 100 Kent students and faculty members joined in our weekly silent vigil. Later, 400 people signed an anti-war letter we circulated that was published in the Daily Kent Stater. A small group of us had gotten together out of the strength of our convictions and we made an impact on people's thinking at Kent.

I had heard the stories and seen the images of the violence being perpetrated in the South but had not yet personally witnessed state violence. Not until the Pentagon and Chicago '68 where I saw federal marshals, Chicago police, and national guardsmen answer peaceful protests with violence.

Though antiwar sentiment continued to grow, the government wasn't listening and the movement turned from protest to resistance. Columbia University students took over campus buildings because the university was buying up property in the surrounding Black community and to protest campus complicity with the war. People were burning draft cards, pouring blood on draft files, and going to Canada. Vets were coming home and throwing their medals over the wall at the White House. Soldiers in Vietnam were refusing to fight, led by African-American GI's.

At Kent, we also felt frustrated and angered by the government's refusal to listen. We came to see the issues of war, poverty, and racism as linked together. We gave it a name—imperialism. We

too wanted to move from protest to resistance, to sound a more insistent alarm. The slaughter in Vietnam continued and we *had* to stop it! By the war's end, three million Vietnamese had died, the percentage equivalent of 25 million Americans who would have died if the war had happened in our country. We formed an SDS chapter.

Although the antiwar movement was now experiencing a violent response to our protests, we didn't yet know about COINTELPRO, the FBI's extensive program designed to stifle and crush political dissent. In its own words, the FBI was out to "neutralize" and "disrupt" progressive movements. They aimed to "prevent the rise of a Black messiah" and the primary targets of violent repression were the Black Liberation movement and other movements of people of color. In 1976, The Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations determined that a "vigilante operation aimed squarely at preventing the exercise of First Amendment rights of speech and association" had been carried out by the FBI.

Sound familiar? Armed suppression of free speech is exactly what took place on May 4, 1970 on this campus. Targets of COINTELPRO were wide ranging including Dr. King, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, SNCC, the New Left, and the Inter-University Committee for Debate on Foreign Policy. Governor Rhodes' stance in the days immediately before May 4, 1970, echoed COINTELPRO when he stated defiantly that the National Guard would be removed from Kent when "the problem is eradicated". An order was certainly given on May 4 and it is the responsibility of the Attorney General's office to conduct an investigation.

As we had done in the KCEWV, SDS set up literature tables, held dorm meetings, brought in speakers, and carried out a broad campaign of education about university complicity with war and racism, the facts about Vietnam, and about a system we were now calling imperialism. Much is made

of the actions taken by antiwar activists and the actions were important. But the day-to-day work of talking to people about the issues was at the heart of what we did.

Kent SDS protested Richard Nixon when he spoke in Akron. Along with the Black United Students, we took over the SAC building and prevented the Oakland police from recruiting on campus. At that time, the Oakland police, as part of COINTELPRO, were carrying out a war against the Black Panther Party and had murdered Lil' Bobby Hutton. When the university threatened to take disciplinary action against SDS and Black United Students leaders, every single Black student walked off the campus in protest. The university backed down. We stopped campus complicity with racism, educated people about the issues, and the Black students prevented the university from imposing sanctions on us. Direct action had worked.

On April 8, 1969, we held a march to present our four demands to the administration, were met by campus police who attempted to close the doors on us, and we tried to keep the doors open. A few of us were arrested at a campus rally a few days later for that action. We were marched into police custody flanked by two rows of heavily armed off-campus riot squad police holding long truncheons against their chests. This ominous display of armed force foreshadowed the killing of four students and the wounding of nine a year later.

On April 16, 1969, we marched on the Music and Speech building and took it over. The police locked the doors and some 70 people were arrested on various charges ranging from felonies to misdemeanor trespass. These activities resulted in many arrests, some of us were expelled from school, and the SDS charter was revoked. Ultimately, four of us spent six months in the Portage County Jail. About 20 others served 45-day sentences and one of us served time in a state prison.

In the days after Music and Speech, a rally was held of 1,000 students and faculty to demand that the university re-instate Kent SDS. Our SDS chapter remained distant from this initiative

because the group did not take a stand against the war. That was a mistake and we should have built an alliance with those folks and others.

It may be hard to imagine or even understand today why activists took actions like the ones we took. But Martin Luther King had been killed, and our hopes for change diminished. African-Americans in northern cities were sick of being ghettoized, impoverished, victims of police brutality, and treated as second-class citizens. Many cities went up in flames and local police and the National Guard carried out unmitigated violence against Black people, killing, wounding, and beating many. (It was in direct response to these rebellions that the war on poverty came into existence). We felt we had to put the emergency brake on the slaughter in Vietnam and repression of Black people at home. Marching in a circle was not enough.

In Kent, we created an alternate intellectual, cultural, and political reality and that was our biggest challenge to the university. We insisted that the search for truth be accompanied by social responsibility—you should act on what you believe. We challenged university complicity with the war. We told a different story from the mainstream story about Vietnam and it was our story that stood the test of time. We created an environment in which many people took part in public discussion and where our government's policies were hotly debated. Our counter narrative had caught on with many and captured the attention of the entire campus community.

The most important lesson from the sixties is to stand up to injustice. Although we had a significant impact on public opinion, it is a myth that “everyone” was a protestor in the sixties. We were a minority. But we did what we thought we should do and we did affect public consciousness.

Out of the sixties came significant changes. Affirmative action allowed easier access to higher education for women and people of color. An end to the draft. Women's liberation and gay liberation burst onto the scene; an awareness of economic inequality and skepticism about engaging

in foreign wars entered the public consciousness. It is not a guarantee that things will change for the better if you act, but it is a certainty that they won't, if you don't.

Ultimately, in response to Nixon's invasion of Cambodia, on May 4, 1970, over a thousand students gathered to exercise their right to free speech and association, along with thousands of students across the country. For this, four students were killed and nine wounded. In response, 4.3 million students protested and half the colleges across the country were shut down, representing the greatest outpouring of student dissent during that period.

Today, I am involved in the struggle for education justice, the struggle that Dr. Beals so courageously participated in at its start. In December I participated in a "mic check" protest at a meeting of the Chicago Board of Education along with activists from the African-American community, members of Occupy, and others. We took that action because Draconian measures are being implemented by the current Chicago Board of Education and they are not listening to teachers, parents, and community members. Schools are being closed in low-income African-American communities and replaced by charter schools. Students have to walk or be transported long distances to go to other schools, crossing neighborhood boundaries, placing children in harm's way.

Current education policies are making it even harder than before for students from low income families of color to receive a quality public education. These students' schools have less experienced teachers, fewer resources, and large class sizes. Chicago Teachers Union president Karen Lewis correctly characterizes what's happening as "educational apartheid" and people are now talking about the school-to-prison pipeline. The prison population has quadrupled in the past 25 years and there are now more than 2 million people imprisoned in the United States. States spend three times as much on prisons as on education. Distinguished Stanford University professor, Linda

Darling-Hammond, President Obama's education point person before he was elected, writes that the only road to high quality education in the US is the road that addresses inequality. The education justice struggle is about the takeover of the public sector by private sector interests—the 1 %. The chairman of the Chicago Board of Education is a banker while the majority of the members of the mayoral appointed Board—they are not elected—are tied to big money and have business backgrounds. Teachers, students, and families are blamed for the problems in education and kids are turned into data on standardized test score spreadsheets.

The current strategy of solving our economic woes on the backs of public service employees, laying people off, cutting teacher pensions, the threats to social security, Medicare, and Medicaid—this is an unjust strategy! Rush Limbaugh's comments, calling Sandra Fluke a slut are representative of a deep disregard for women's reproductive rights and for women, all too prevalent today. Though advances have been made for LGBT people, all people should have equal rights and equal access under the law regardless of sexual orientation. Bullying and the suicide deaths of LGBT young people is a frightening reality. Climate change and threats to the environment must be addressed and challenged. We must all do what we can about the many issues that need our attention.

I applaud the slogan adopted by the Kent May 4th Task Force for this year's commemoration: Don't Give Up The Fight. Your slogan calls to mind the book written by scholar and historian Vincent Harding that traces African-American resistance from the slave ships to the present called *There is a River*. There is a river of social justice activity that flows in our country—past, present, and future—even though at times it feels like no progress is being made. At times there are great victories and other times we suffer setbacks. The important thing is that we stand up, in big ways and small, and keep the river flowing.

Howie Emmer was a student at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio from 1965-1969. He was a member of the Kent Committee To End the War In Vietnam from 1965-1968 and a member of Kent Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) from 1968-69. Mr. Emmer spent six months in jail after being arrested for actions our SDS chapter took in opposition to university complicity with the Vietnam War effort and racism. He was no longer at Kent when, on May 4, 1970, when the Ohio National Guard fired into a crowd of unarmed students during a protest of the US invasion of Cambodia, killing four and wounding nine Kent State students.

Mr. Emmer was profoundly impacted by the civil rights movement and other movements of the 1960s, and those experiences continue to define who he is and how he sees the world today. He has continued to be involved in and supportive of social justice activities in the many years after Kent.

Mr. Emmer is a retired Chicago Public Schools teacher and worked for 30 years as an urban bilingual/dual language elementary school teacher and literacy coach. He always integrated social justice themes into his teaching. Currently, Mr. Emmer lives in Chicago and is involved in the movement for education justice and for a quality education for *all* children.

Racism in White America: Growing up Hispanic in Fox River Grove

By Diana Hernandez

I am a 21-year-old Hispanic woman from Fox River Grove Illinois. What comes to mind when thinking about that place? Well, let's look at the facts. Fox River Grove is a suburban town about an hour outside the city of Chicago. Breaking it down even further, the population of this town is 5,202. Out of that number of people, 92.4 percent of people are white and only 5.5 percent are Hispanic¹. Unfortunately, this is not the only town where the statistics are this drastic. Research has shown that people tend to move into areas that are largely dominated by people of their own race. With this kind of mind set, there is no way to end segregation. In the past, people of color were segregated by law; now, we are segregated by choice. When I was younger I didn't realize the lack of diversity around me, never paid much attention. Now, it's hard to ignore. I find myself wondering, which is worse, segregation by law or segregation by choice?

As a young child, I was truly naïve when it came to the topic of racism. After a play date with friends, my parents would ask me questions that I thought were rather odd. They would ask me "So, did they ask you about us? Did they ask if we were both Mexican?" I didn't understand why they were asking me this. Sometimes my friend's parents would ask me things about my parents or me in regards to our culture but I never really thought anything of it. It all just seemed like small talk, until one day I overheard my best friend's parents talking. They were standing in the kitchen cleaning up one night after dinner when my friend's mother said to her husband, "Poor girl, don't her parents realize that because they are breaking the law she will never amount to anything?" I was

¹ "Fox River Grove, Illinois (IL 60021) Profile: Population, Maps, Real Estate, Averages, Homes, Statistics, Relocation, Travel, Jobs, Hospitals, Schools, Crime, Moving, Houses, News, Sex Offenders." Accessed April 26, 2012. <http://www.city-data.com/city/Fox-River-Grove-Illinois.html>

13-years-old the day this happened. I was confused but the emotions I felt were clear; I was sad and angry all at the same time.

Being the child of two undocumented Hispanics hasn't made my life any easier. I've been dealing with this burden my entire life but why must it be a burden? I shouldn't have to feel ashamed that I am a citizen of this country just because my parents aren't. "I'm proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free." That is a quote from a song that is supposed to bring us pride and joy to be in America, but for me it just makes me sad. Neither I nor my family is free from discrimination or social injustice.

My parents did not move to Fox River Grove for any reason other than the house my father was able to buy was there. Without realizing it, my father had put his family smack dab in the middle of white America. Throughout my years in elementary school I only remember two other Hispanic children excluding myself. I do not remember even one African American student. Living here wasn't a bad thing; I enjoyed it for the most part. I would hear people make jabs at me for being a "beaner" every once in a while, but it was never frequent and always seemed to be in good humor. I grew up to be, as my friends put it, a "Brown, White Girl."

Going into high school was rough. My town was too small to have our own high school so I went to the high school in a town called Cary, right next to Fox River Grove. Cary is larger than Fox River Grove but still dominated by whites. I never felt "out of place" with the white community because I had grown up in it but this was not the case when I entered high school. In my high school, all the Hispanic kids stuck together. They were loud, wore baggy clothes, and I had nothing in common with them. Everyone in that school was trying to pin me with a stereotype. I'm Hispanic so I must look like them, talk like them, and do the things they do. Being a part of their "group" wasn't something I wanted. To be honest they intimidated me. So even throughout high school, I kept this "Brown, White Girl" persona. The thing is I wasn't trying to be any kind of persona, I was

being myself. The fact that people in today's society don't understand that is a sad realization that there is discrimination.

Stereotyping is something that will never end. Women are bad drivers, black guys carry guns, Asians are smart, men are womanizers, and the list goes on and on. What some people don't seem to understand is that a stereotype stops being a stereotype and starts being a racist comment when you put race into the mix. Some may find this to be extreme, but think about it. Do only black guys carry guns? No. So why would you be more scared of walking down a street with a black stranger behind you than a white stranger? Think about how you sound when you make comments or jokes with race involved. One may say that they aren't racist but you just made a racist joke, how do you justify that? How is that social justice? There shouldn't be any jokes that target any group or minority, but there is. Putting a stop to this should be a demand, not just a passing thought.

When I was 16-years-old I was working at my first job. I had been a cashier for about six months. When working in any retail job, it is a given that you are going to encounter customers in bad moods. This particular day is one that I will never forget. I was in my aisle when a white woman with a lot of groceries came to check out. Being a cashier you have your usual "Hello, did you find everything you needed today?" comments that you say to every customer and this one was no different. I gave her my greeting but she seemed to not have heard me and asked me a question. As I was going to answer her questions she quickly answered it herself and went on about putting her groceries on the belt. I was ringing up her groceries when out of nowhere she looks at me with a disgusted look on her face and says "Do you even speak English?!" My manager happened to have been standing a few feet away from us when this happened and his jaw dropped. This woman had looked at me and decided all on her own that because I was Hispanic, I couldn't speak English. The ignorance some people have is beyond explainable. Sadly, I am not the only person getting targeted with such ignorance.

You turn on the TV or open up your newspaper and the stories are there. Victims of racism, discrimination, and stereotypes are everywhere. There is a show called “What Would You Do?” that did a great experiment to see how bystanders would react if two Hispanic workers went into a deli, tried to order, but couldn’t really speak English. The hired cashier said racist comments to the two hired Hispanic workers and the people around them did nothing.² This kind of reaction from bystanders (who were not hired) is not acceptable. Watching and listening to innocent people get abused that way is just as bad as if you were doing it to them yourself. This is how victims remain victims. When people behave in this manner, it’s hard for me not to start to look at people differently.

As much as I know that other people’s ignorance and racist behaviors aren’t my fault, I can’t help but stop and think if I’m doing something wrong. This was more so a thought when I was younger. When you’re young, it’s really hard not to take things personally and sometimes, all of that really sticks with you throughout the years. An experience I had long ago will be one that I have and still do think about from time to time. I was 13-years-old and was waiting for my mom in line at a grocery store with my two younger sisters. My sisters are a lot younger than me so when I was 13-years-old my sister Jaqui was two years old and my sister Natalie was a newborn. As I’m waiting in line, I hear two women talking to each other about me directly behind me. The older woman said “Wow, these stupid little bitches can’t keep their legs shut, can they?” and then the woman she was with responded with “It’s the dumb Mexican sluts who are teaching our kids to be just like them.” My stomach dropped when I heard them say that. I was a child, barely 13 and these two women who didn’t know me at all had already decided that I have two young children and that I was a slut because I’m Mexican. Why did I have to be Mexican to be a slut? The answer is that I didn’t, but to those women being Mexican meant that I was.

² ABCNews.com. "Confronting Racism in America - ABC News." Accessed April 26, 2012. http://abcnews.go.com/WhatWouldYouDo/story?id=6551048&page=1#.T6HPxPkg_VY.

I have questioned myself when others have put me down. I would ask my parents what it was that I did wrong and they wouldn't be able to answer me. If you get told something enough times, you start to believe it. For a long time, being Hispanic was something I felt ashamed of. I would actually tell people that I was Italian. I had no sense of self. I tried to be someone I wasn't because people who didn't know me were judging me. Where was my social justice? I didn't have any. I was 13 not too long ago. What has been done in eight years to help others be shielded from pain like this? We have to be the advocates for other children that feel the way I did.

No one should ever have to explain themselves when first meeting someone. I have found that I have had to do that many times. As soon as people see me they have an idea who I am, or at least they think they do. Understanding that what you say and do affects other people is the first step to understanding how to make a change. Having social justice for everyone should be a priority.

Understanding the things you can do to break a racist's cycle can make all the difference in the world. My generation of peers seems to be getting further and further away from harsh racism. Educating the ones we love on what's right is a huge step forward to end racism. If you think about it, the people who are racist now grew up with parents who lived in a time where many were this way. Behaving in this manner was socially acceptable back then, but think about the time we live in now. Our everyday lives have advanced beyond what could have been done in the past. We are a people of a time with technology that is perpetually evolving. Why is it that our technology can advance, but our mindsets can't? The answer is they can. We just have to understand what we can do to move forward.

Here and now is when I prove people wrong. I am a 21-year-old Hispanic woman that will get somewhere in life. I am the first of my family to go to college and I will be the first to graduate from college. I was the first to graduate from high school and I graduated with honors. Having the ability to show people that I can do everything they think they can do is a joy to be had. I have been

hurt with other people's words but that does not change me. No matter what I say or do I will always be Hispanic and from now on I will always be proud of that.

In order to belong to a society that has social justice, one must examine the self. Every individual has the power to change the way the world sees things. If one by one we become less racist, we will eventually change America. Does racism still exist today? Yes, but can we change that? Absolutely.

Diana Hernandez is currently a sophomore at Northern Illinois University. She is majoring in Elementary Education. In Ms. Hernandez's free time, she enjoys spending time with her younger siblings who keep the playful side of her alive.

To Buy or Not to Buy: That is the Question

Dr. William C. McCoy

I walked into the well-known department store in Madison, Wisconsin with the intent to purchase a suit. The store, upscale by Midwestern standards, was surrounded by small shops and quaint retailers in a reputable shopping district in the city. At the time, I was working at a local insurance company in a managerial role.

In my youth, I struggled to maintain good credit. I was at a disadvantage at an early age because one of my parents used my name as an extension of further credit. I didn't understand at the time that it is, in some circles, common practice to use your children's name and social security number on a bill when your credit is "jacked up." Needless to say, it was a bit of a shock to learn that my credit was bad before I was old enough to actually have credit.

Even through college, I struggled to pay my bills on time due to a lack of sufficient income. On more than one occasion, my grandmother had to bail me out of a financial jam by loaning money to me. Going to her was a last resort and "the kiss of death." Somehow, she would make you feel 10 inches tall by coming to her for monetary help, all the while telling you that she did not have it and reaching for her purse at the same time. I knew her well and understood that to not pay her back at the agreed upon time was going to make things unbearable for me, so abiding by the established timeline was of the utmost importance, which taught me responsibility.

But those days were behind me. I was now done with my Bachelor degree, working on my Master degree, and living in my own home. I owned two cars (the nicer one of which I left at my grandmother's place for her to use when she felt like it) and by all accounts, I was doing quite well financially. I had more credit cards than warranted, with a credit card for this particular department store as one of my most prized possessions.

When I walked into the store, I automatically understood that my suit was going to cost more than what was hanging on the rack. At that time, the store did not have a “big and tall” men’s section, so I knew I would have to be fitted, and the suit would have to be ordered. I was willing to wait on it and more importantly, I was willing to pay whatever price the suit would cost; after all, the credit limit on my charge card was definitely high enough to pay for anything in the store or in the catalog, and I was always faithful in paying my charge cards off in a short amount of time.

Because I had been to the store a number of times, I went straight to the men’s suit section and began to look around for the style of suit I desired. Interestingly, there was no sales person in the immediate area, but about 50 yards away, in another section of the store, stood a saleswoman. Our eyes met several times as I browsed through the suits, but never did she make an attempt to assist me. At first, I didn’t think much of it: after all, this probably wasn’t her assigned area and she, like me, was probably waiting for the salesperson assigned to the area to return. After a while, maybe 20 minutes or so, it was apparent that no one was in a hurry to come to the area, and the same woman was in the same area looking at me while feigning busyness.

As I realized what was going on, I began to get angry. I knew the woman saw me because every time I looked at her, our eyes met. Not once did she make the attempt to come my way and offer to call a salesperson. Not once did she offer to assist me. To be frank, she never even moved from the area she was occupying. She just kept shuffling racked clothing from one side to the other and staring at me. Maybe it was the casual clothes I was dressed in; after all, I was not in a suit and tie because I was not at work and didn’t need to dress in business professional attire. Darn it! I simply want to buy a suit and go about my merry way!

After a while, I angrily walked out of the men’s section and walked over to the perfume counter. I asked the employee behind the counter to send for the manager of the store, which she kindly did. I told the employee to have the manager meet me in the men’s section, and I headed

back in that direction. About 5 minutes later, a nice lady approached me and identified herself as the store manager. I then explained, in a level and measured tone, who I was and related my latest experience in the store. I pointed to the woman that was still watching me from across the store and let the manager know how customer un-friendly she was. Out of frustration, I asserted what I came in to do and because of my treatment, I not only would not be purchasing a suit, but would never return to the store again. For the record, I let her know that my credit card had a limit high enough to purchase anything in the store, so such treatment was definitely not necessary by her employee. With that, I turned and left the store never to return again.

Hyper-sensitive? I think not. Over-exaggeration? Again, I think not. Racism exists in many forms. This is one tale in many that I could share of situations where my race and ethnicity has become a challenge in the particular societal paradigm that I encounter. How do I deal with it? Well, as my grandmother would say... “What doesn’t kill you will only make you stronger.” And so is life as a strong black man.

Dr. William McCoy is an alumnus of Northern Illinois University and is the resident ethicist for NIU's College of Business. He is responsible for coordinating and directing the BELIEF Program. Dr. McCoy is first and foremost an educator, having worked for various institutions of higher education including Beloit College (program administrator), Cardinal Stritch University (Business Management faculty), and Globe University (Director of Career Services/Service Learning Coordinator/faculty).



In addition, Dr. McCoy has experience in both the non-profit and corporate sectors. He brings a wealth of managerial, leadership and coaching experiences with accomplishments in a variety of management roles including Manager of Management Development & Corporate Quality for Wisconsin Physicians Service; Managing Director of both INROADS/Wisconsin and INROADS/Oklahoma; and Vice-President of the Center for Sight & Hearing.

Dr. McCoy presently serves as the chair of the BELIEF Corporate Advisory Board, the BELIEF Faculty for Ethics team, and the BELIEF student group entitled LEAD. In his spare time, he loves to travel, swim, and cook.

Conversations with Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn: Children Confront Racism in America

By Gabriel Frielink, Grace Frielink & Hannah Frielink with Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn

Prior to the dialogue, Gabriel, Grace, and Hannah Frielink (ages 12, 11, and 9) read sections of the book *Race Course-Against White Supremacy* with their mother, Sarah Militz-Frielink. Upon completion of the chapters, they had specific questions for authors Bill and Bernardine who were kind enough to meet with the children on a beautiful June afternoon. Here are highlights from their conversations.

Hannah Frielink: How did racism start?

Bill Ayers: Oh gosh, that's a good question. I think that is an interesting question, where did it come from? In the United States, we have a particular kind of racial discrimination; it is not the same as it is all over the world. There has been racial discrimination, racial hierarchies, and racial differences as long as forever. As long as there have been human beings, there has been ways of dividing people. There is no real thing such as race, so race is an invention; I mean, we all think we see race, but if you go to a country like Rwanda, the Hutu's and the Tutsi's see each other as quite different. But if you went there, you would say everyone is the same, but that is not true. We construct these things. If you go to Ireland, the Protestants and the Catholics can see each other as different. What is unique about racism or White supremacy in the U.S. is that it was really born out of slavery; it started with slavery. Slavery is an old institution; you can read about it in the Bible. But slavery that is based on race and handed down from generation to generation is an American invention. So white supremacy, American style, comes from slavery. Prejudice: the idea that some people are superior; some people inferior is a result of justifying slavery. So it wasn't that there was prejudice and that made slavery, but there was slavery and that made prejudice. So here we have a hypothetical situation: let's say you are my slave. I have to find a reason to justify that. It doesn't make sense, you're a person; I am a person. Oh, but I could say, you have a braid in your hair, that means that you are less than me or something similar. But the point is, this thing gets passed on, not

only are you a slave, but your children are slaves and their children. That is an institution. That is a peculiar institution born out of slavery.

Bernardine Dohrn: Slavery makes a person property—so owning somebody else. And it used to be until very recently, that children were property. Right? They were property of their fathers. And it used to be that women were property—legally property of a husband or father. And a husband or father could tell his daughter or wife what to do, when to do it, and no matter what he said, she had to do it because she was owned by him. There are all kinds of property relationships, but the American slave trade was based on the idea that the person you owned wasn't a person. They were property; they were called chattel. Slavery means that you actually own this person so you if you wanted to sell this person's child to someone else, you could.

Hannah Frielink: *I wouldn't do that.*

Bernardine Dohrn: You wouldn't do that, but some people did. If a slave owner wanted to sell somebody's child because he could get a good price for a young strong person—an 8 year old say. They just sold them to somebody, and the parents would never see them again. Or if someone got sick or old and could not work anymore, they would sell them. So it really was treating them in ways that is much worse than the way we now treat animals. It was unbelievably terrible to take people's labor and own it and not give them anything back.

Bill Ayers: I was telling them about the Center for Wrongful Convictions. You might not know this, but it is interesting to me. When we abolished slavery in this country, we did away with slavery in the 1860s, and we had the 13th amendment. The 13th amendment says that we abolish involuntary servitude, slavery, except if you are convicted of a crime. So to this day, you can take somebody and say I am arresting you and convict them in a court of law, and they are unpaid labor—that is amazing but it is true, right?

Bernardine Dohrn: The dilemma here about racism and slavery is that it is very very complicated. If you get interested in it, you will be interested for your whole life. Because it is really complicated how it works. Almost nobody in the United States likes to say “I am racist” in present times. When we were your age, many people would proudly say they were racists. Now, nobody says that, so you have to think about what is actually being done, not what is being said. There used to be signs saying, “White Only” all over the country. Bathrooms, water fountains, swimming pools, train stations, bus stations, all schools

Grace Frielink: *Why don't they mention the story of Captain John Brown in my history textbooks at school?*

Bernardine Dohrn: Really?

Bill Ayers: I did not learn about him either growing up.

Bernardine Dohrn: We all knew about him when I was growing up—In my text books. There was a picture of him. But it was a picture of him that was scary. He looked crazy; he had fanatic eyes like you would think a mass murderer would have. And kind of crazy hair. So he looked like a crazy person. Like now how we have pictures of terrorists that make us scared of a mass murderer. Anyway, we knew only that he was off the deep end. But now, we go to the place where he lived and was buried every May—the first week of May in the mountains. Someday you will come. It is a week after May day. He had a farm in the mountains in upstate New York—in the Adirondacks. Beautiful mountains all around, beautiful farm building. A brook runs through it.

Bill Ayers: He moved there to help slaves escape. He was a part of the Underground Railroad. He lived next to a town called Timbuktu. John Brown is not mentioned because a lot of things are erased from history. As you get older, you are going to want to read Howard Zinn's *A People's History*

of the United States. You can learn about John Brown and resistance, women fighters, gay people that fought for their freedom, and all this that gets wiped out of our text books. The story we tell ourselves is that we are nice people and mainly do nice things.

Bernardine Dohrn: Here is the other thing about John Brown. You know, Bill said before that we abolished slavery and that is a little bit not true. It took a war to end slavery and it took the slaves leaving the plantations and joining the army from the North. That was an extraordinary thing. It wasn't White people who decided to free the slaves. That is not what happened. What would have happened if John Brown had not lived? That the war came about, the war to end slavery because John Brown decided it was intolerable that every day people were slaves, every day that people were sold on an auction block and treated like non-human beings. That was an abomination. It was just terrible. And so he, his sons and a whole group of people, including some freed black people decided to provoke the war really. And they had a plan. They snuck up on a military base in a place called Harper's Ferry. You can visit and it is also a beautiful piece of land. It is near Washington D.C.

Grace Frielink: Isn't that where he was captured?

Bernardine Dohrn: It was. He got captured then wounded. But their idea was that this small group of people would surprise them. Seize the arsenal, the military fort at Harper's Ferry and distribute the weapons. Then slaves would have an uprising, come get the weapons and then go back down to fight. It didn't happen that way, but within three months, the war started anyway. People went to battle singing about John Brown and it was amazing. So yes, and he was also very good friends with the freed black community. So he traveled to Canada where people ran away too. Enslaved people ran to Canada. They were able to live as free people there. They also ran south to Florida, where one

very well-known Indian tribe treated black people as equals and citizens—the Seminoles. They married into the tribe. There were two places people could run and escape to.

Bill Ayers: If you were too far into the Deep South, it was hard to go north. So they would go into Florida. Our oldest son, the one you saw in the picture, his name is Zayd. His middle name is Osceola. He was named after the Seminole chief, the Chief of the Seminole Indians partly because he was a resistor to the U.S. Empire, and partly because he took in freed blacks.

Bernardine Dohrn: It is the only Indian tribe that never surrendered to the US.

Bill Ayers: Chief Osceola was captured and died in federal prison.

Gabriel Frielink: *Do you think racism will ever end?*

Bernardine Dohrn: I think that the way it is today will end, yes. However, I think it will take different forms so I will say—yes and no. But I think the way it is today will end, yes. And it will end two ways. One because people like you are going to stand up and say you can't say that, do that, think that. That is unacceptable. So we will change enough people's minds so that it will end. But the other thing that is happening is that the world is coming to the United States and who lives in the United States has changed dramatically, which means White people are becoming a minority. And so the fact that White people have always been able to call other people the minority and call us the majority is very funny. Because it depends on how you count. Are you counting Latinas and Asians? Who else are you counting? What about African Americans? What about Africans who come to America? From the Caribbean? Brazilians? The numbers game is changing. Now we are going to find out what it is like to be a minority.

Bill Ayers: Of course, a minority like in South Africa. They can be hugely racists.

Bernardine Dohrn: But you cannot pretend then. Then you have to have wars and armies and police that are going to enforce your power, like a real tyrant or like a dictator. I think it is an opportunity right now because of the changing, for White people to change their minds. To actually say this is a major part of how I am going to live. I am never going to let something go by, even if it is somebody I like who says something terrible. It is very hard to stand up to it socially. I don't know if you guys have had an experience like maybe with a family member, maybe not a close family member or a relative says something racist. I can tell you I grew up with people in my family who loved saying racist things.

Sarah Militz-Frielink: Yes, we have to call them out or we are passive racists.

Bernardine Dohrn: We have to figure out a way to call them out so they can hear it too. Not just so it makes us feel better. It is very hard to do. Really hard to do.

Sarah Militz-Frielink: The kids had an experience at school with their friend Kasie at the after school program.

Hannah Frielink: Some kid called her the N word.

Bernardine Dohrn: Really?

Sarah Militz-Frielink: Yes, two years ago.

Bernardine Dohrn: Wow, that is very hurtful, what happened?

Hannah Frielink: The person that called her the N Word went to the principal's office and they were suspended.

Bernardine Dohrn: Did the class talk about it? To me, if you don't have a big discussion about it, I mean a real deep discussion, then it is not helpful, you don't want to just punish somebody for their speech.

Sarah Miltz-Frielink: I don't think there was any racism education at the school. We sat down with her mom and her daughter. The six of us had a discussion that was healing, but it was just really hard if you think your kids' school isn't having those conversations about race.

Bernardine Dohrn: Very hard, you know this happened with our kids in our school often. Schools want to pretend everything is good here—that they don't have a race problem at the school. If we don't actually see that all of us have a race problem all the time, really, well we can't make it a part of our life. We always have something to learn.

Bill Ayers: I think that there is always prejudice, the only way racism as prejudice can end is not only if we stand up to it, but also that we end the system where people are pitted against each other. So if we can create a society where we cooperate more, we can get along, let's share, let's share the good things in life. Let's not hoard the good things in life. As long as we have a society where there are hierarchies of winners and losers, there will be racism, sexism, and all kinds of ways to discriminate.

Hannah Frielink: When Black people were burned or hanged, why are the White people so happy about it because that would make me cry if I were there?

Bill Ayers: You mean lynching? You know it's a real tragedy of our country to look at those photos because, yes, it's horrible. It is something that is a part of our history that we have to look at and learn from, yes. That point of terrorizing black people and keeping them in a position of being put down made some people happy. Not everybody, but some people. And looking at those photos is

very disturbing. I can't stand it.

Bernardine Dohrn: I can't either. I use them in my teaching about human rights. Some ways people today think we don't do that today, but as Bill pointed out when going into the prison system or the court system you see similar ways of thinking. What my work is here at the Law school, we represent kids that are charged with crimes in court, so I know I can tell you that if white kids do the same thing that black kids do, because most kids do something wrong while they are teenagers. Most kids do little things wrong, but if you are White, the chances are you will not get arrested for it, and you are not going to go to court for it—almost at all. But for very minor violations of the law, if you are African American or Latino immigrant, you are likely to go to court and then there is a whole series of things that happen to you then that are pretty terrible. Not exactly lynching, but when you watch the system happen, watch them go into court, get convicted, taken off in handcuffs, even for something that wasn't a violent crime, you know, it was just stealing or shoplifting or maybe smoking drugs you see or something like that. There are lots of things you can do other than send somebody to prison, if you decide to send somebody to prison—it is a little like modern day lynching. That is what is so terrible about it—really, slowly putting somebody in a situation like lynching. And the thing that is amazing to me is that white people work in these systems. Judges, sheriffs, prison guards and they go to work every day as if it was normal. That's what is like the lynching in the photos, it is just like: Is this normal, that I am caging people like they were animals?

Bill Ayers: Or executing people in Texas.

Sarah Miltz-Frielink: I just got back from the Texas border; it was an eye-opening place to go. Austin is more progressive, but I noticed they have to post no gun signs on the doors of churches because people want to bring their guns to church. The prison I visited on the Texan/Mexico border was harrowing—especially seeing the undocumented workers in these cells behind the glass with cement blocks for beds.

Bernardine Dohrn: So all I am saying is the lynching thank goodness is in our history. It's hard to imagine, but we do similar things today. It gets lost somehow. It's like war you know. People go to war; people think we are having another war. Afghanistan, Iraq, you just hear about war, you don't really see pictures of war. If we saw pictures of war, we would be as horrified as you are of the lynching.

Bill Ayers: That is a good example because even though those lynching photos are completely grotesque, it is also true that when we go to war with another country, we dehumanize those people. We act as if they are not fully human and all kinds of horrible atrocities happen in Afghanistan and Iraq. When we hear about them, soldiers get arrested and so on. It's all a part of the business of dehumanization.

Grace Frielink: Why did John Copeland and Shields and other medical students dig up graves and use Blacks as subjects against their will?

Bernardine Dohrn: It's an amazing part of the story—John Brown's story. So I think eight or nine of the raiders in the John Brown, Harpers Ferry were black. And some of the White people got their bodies after they were killed and were handed back to their relatives for burial. But what they did to the bodies of the black people was to kind of to make a point that black people were not equal to white people, so they were used for medical experimentation without their families' permission. And it was like a way of saying, "You tried to have an insurrection against us, tried to have an uprising and overthrow our whole system, we are going to show you that your body is worth nothing." So it is an amazing example to me now I think that for the two of them there was a service and ceremony held for them at Antioch. So there were people around the country who were against slavery who

came forward and stood up in that very difficult time and said, “No we're going, even though we don't have their bodies. We are going to have a memorial for them and we think they were heroes. So these things are always fought over. When people stand up for what is right in a time like that, it makes other people have more courage. You know in a very hard time like this they were barely alive when the World Trade Center was hit by the airplanes. You don't remember because you were babies. Well I am only thinking of that as an example of when everybody kind of lost their mind as they said, somebody attacked us, we should go to war.

Grace Frielink: Just like when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

Bernardine Dohrn: I am only saying that since it was a recent time in our history where you know people speak up and everybody is losing their minds and doing crazy things. There were no Afghan people in those airplanes. So why should we go bomb Afghanistan? And now ten years later, we are still doing it. It is really a terrible example. I think when people stand up and say, let's not lose our minds here. A wonderful woman named Susan Sontag did that, right at that moment. At 9-11 she was very important intellectual woman in New York and she said WAIT A MINUTE we can be very sad about what happened here, we should be. But this is a tragedy—not a reason for war. Isn't that interesting, sometimes just words just saying whoa, let's not lose our minds can make a real difference. They can give other people strength to speak up.

Sarah Miltz-Frielink: She is a modern day Henry David Thoreau.

Bernardine Dohrn: He also pleaded for Captain John Brown to not be executed.

Gabriel Frielink: Why have Whites historically kept people of color from having proper burials?

Bill Ayers: Is that true? Why?

Bernardine Dohrn: It is both easy and very hard to take away somebody's humanity because even in a war, you have to look somebody in the eyes. You see actually they are young like you in war. And that they are scared like you. And that they don't want to die and they don't want to kill you, but there you are on opposite sides. I think that because on some level we all know that we are alike because we cry, we laugh, we pee, and we each have a mother and father. All of those things are so much alike about us, so when you decide to say somebody is less than me you have to find a lot of ways to convince yourself and other people that that is true. It's not an easy thing; it's easy and it is very very hard. People's humanity shines out in all kinds of ways. I think some people made themselves feel superior in a lot of tiny little ways that are very strange. Taking away peoples' children when born, raping their women, a million things that seemed impossible to imagine, but one kind of way is not giving people the dignity of death. People died young—a hundred years ago, they died much younger than now.

Hannah Frielink: When my grandmother went to plant flowers and we were looking at gravestones, some were so small, they were kids' gravestones.

Bernardine Dohrn: People used to die at 30 or 40. Now we are very lucky in the United States—most people live a long long time. But I think that your interest in this question is a very interesting one. And you should write and think about it. Because I do think that the handling of the body—whether you cherish people's bodies and make ceremonies of them when they are born and when they die—shows a lot about a society. My sister is a midwife so she has been involved in childbirth for all these years. Helping women, so that's kind of the exact opposite I mean, you're celebrating life, even when they die you are celebrating their life. Unless you want to just insist they are nothing, just dust. While true, we are all dust eventually. But we are not really dust. It's a tricky thing.

Gabriel Frielink: Why did Christians like Henry Ford used to blame everything on Jews?

Bill Ayers: Henry Ford was anti-Semitic. I do think it's like we were talking about racism before. You have to justify the keeping of other people down. The ways you justify it are the ways Bernardine was talking about—dehumanizing other people. That is something that somehow allows you to explain why you are using other people. Why you are stealing from them, taking their land. So when the pilgrims came to America, and they began stealing land and killing Native Americans, they had to justify it somehow and their way of justifying was to say, “God gave us this land. We are Christians, they are heathens. We deserve to live; they are savages, awful and deserve to die.”

It justifies your own privilege. That is why whenever you see other people or feel inside yourself an impulse to say that person is less than me. You have to fight that. We are all equal. Every human being is of incalculable value. We have to believe that and we have to live up to it. That is the hardest thing. It is the most necessary. It is happening today, why do big corporations get to decide who will be president? Why do they get to decide how we spend our money? Why do they get to decide to abrogate all the elections? This is still happening. So we have to fight.

*Sarah Miltz-Frielink: I just wanted to say, I appreciate the sections in your book *Race Course Against White Supremacy* (2009) when you both recounted your experiences confronting your White privilege especially at the birthday party—when several friends gathered to celebrate Zayd's first year of life at the Golden Gate Park. The part that really struck me was when three of your elderly Black coworkers cuddled Zayd and offered Bernardine a quiet word of wisdom. “You must have three children, because one will die, and then the two will have one another.”³³ That was a sobering lesson about how we don't acknowledge or understand our White privilege in many areas of our life such as parenthood. Reflecting upon all the funerals we have attended for young black children, I now have a deeper understanding of how much I benefit on a daily basis as a White parent to White children. Your story is a sobering reminder of the privileges we enjoy as Whites and how many times we are unaware. Is there a way I can help myself and others awaken to this reality of white privilege?*

³³ Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn, *Race Course: Against White Supremacy* (Chicago: New World Press, 2009).

Bill Ayers: The thing about privilege is that it is invisible. It is invisible to those who enjoy it. I was saying to Bernardine when I was riding my bike up the lake on a very windy day, I got on the lake and the wind died. And then I turned around to ride back, and I suddenly realized that the wind was in my face. All the way up, I said there was no wind. Then I turned around and the wind is in my face; the wind is everywhere. That is the important thing to note about it. Partly I was saying earlier to the kids, about being humorous about things. The truth is, there are a lot of ways to awaken people to this. Didactic scolding is often the worst way. People can recognize privileges others have, but it is hard to recognize their own. So in America, for example; we have the privilege of not living in a war zone, how incredible that is! Although that could change any minute, yet we have this incredible privilege growing up in safety.

Bernardine Dohrn: We turn on our water faucet and clean water comes out. I took a bunch of kids from the West side of Chicago to South Africa once, and they were very poor in Chicago. When they went to South Africa to the townships outside the cities they came back and presented to their school assembly their experiences there. They are poor here and they are black. They did not realize that people in a lot of the world, almost half of the world, don't have access to clean water. Who could imagine because you grow up here and turn on the water faucet and you don't think about it.

Bill Ayers: You take for granted what is your privilege and you don't even notice it is privilege. How you alert people to it, we need to understand we are unaware of our own privilege. We need to work to be more conscious of it. We want to tap in with everybody else this idea. The thing is, we want to tap into people's desire to be good people. A lot of what makes us, a lot of things have happened to

us are; you can't think of these moral questions until we see what is at stake. A lot of what goes on is invisible and you have to look deeper and deeper and again. How do you become conscious? That is a life long struggle. How do you help others become conscious? By talking, thinking about it. Most people want to be good. Seeing the ways we are living in a moral world and making bad choices is part of allowing people to make better choices.

Bernardine Dohrn: One question is to ask myself: "Where does this come from?" (referring to an iPhone).

Sarah Miltz-Frielink: It comes from China where many of the factory workers have been dehumanized and subsequently have one of the highest suicide rates.

Bernardine Dohrn: Yes, we have to ask: where is the labor? Also, where are the materials coming from? It turns out that this item, a main ingredient comes from the Congo. A lot of the wars that are happening; it is one of the few places that have the mineral that is essential to this kind of electronic stuff. Therefore there are constant wars because the people who go there to get the minerals are stealing it from the country. So we need to cultivate an impulse to question what we consume. For example, I love Starbucks; I always have this cup in my hand. But where is the coffee coming from, why is the Starbucks CEO making all this money everywhere in the world making all this money for just coffee? It doesn't mean you need to give up everything. Sometimes we give up a lot of things, let go of our things, let go of our desires to always need stuff—while not always the right answer. We need a sense of being aware about everything around us. This table, for example, somebody made it. Did they get paid a living wage? Did they get paid enough for this? Or were they forced to work long hours – 12 hour days with no healthcare or benefits? I think that kind of awareness that things come from somewhere, and that they mainly come from human beings is important to

cultivate.

Bill Ayers: A sense that you can always be more aware, the electricity we take for granted when we turn on a switch, someone is generating it—it came from somewhere.

Bernardine Dohrn: Who could imagine, you turn on the water faucet without thinking about it.

Bill Ayers: You take for granted what is your privilege and you don't notice it is a privilege. Partly we alert people to it; we understand we are unaware of our own privileges too. Ask who lived here before we were here; who lived on this lake, took care of their children, buried their dead? Should we not honor it or be aware of it? Another thing about privilege because we're largely unaware of it when with the over-privileged, we should look to others to explain to us. Here is a quick example: When I was first teaching at UIC, a big urban university, my classes went until 8 or 9 p.m. At the end of class, all the men would leave instantly to their cars, bicycles, or train. All the women would get together in the corner and leave together. I did not notice that for 2 months. Why should I notice that, I am a man? I just left.

Why did all the women gather together? Because the city seems scary to woman at 8 or 9 at night, they wanted to protect each other and go out together. Once I recognized this, and asked if this is what is happening, they said yes. Then I said to all of us, the men, shouldn't we take some collective responsibility for this? It wasn't a matter of beating up the guys saying you 'sexist bastards', you got the privilege, not because you asked for it, or you were being a bad person. As soon as you were aware of the privilege, you have the responsibility to do something about it or you were wallowing in your privilege, and allowing the oppression to continue. That is what I mean: you don't have to imagine yourself constantly whipping everybody into shape. You just have to imagine yourself

becoming more aware of all the things Bernardine was saying and then helping others become aware of them too. So they can act on that awareness—not so they feel rotten. You didn’t choose to be born at this moment, White or male or anything else. Those are things that just happened to you. But you do get to choose who to be in light of those privileges.

Bernardine Dohrn: Another example: when Bill and I were growing up, we never knew a kid who had a disability. We never knew who was blind, deaf or had difficulty speaking or was in a wheelchair. Why? Because those kids couldn’t go to public schools. They were not invited, they stayed home. They were placed in institutions and orphanages. So now we know people who have disabilities can also be brilliant, who can also do anything, who should be able to be social, be friends, fall in love, have fights with people and do all the laughing crazy artistic things that everybody wants to do. And they make our lives better if we are with them. I don’t know if you have kids with disabilities in your classrooms.

Gabriel Frielink: *Mom used to work in a therapeutic day school with kids with disabilities. Once she quit the job to teach college, some of those kids would come to our house and mom would babysit.*

Bernardine Dohrn: That is a great example. You know sometimes there are special schools for kids like that. They are in our schools nowadays; they can make everybody conscious and aware of what it means to be human beings.

Sarah Miltz-Frielink: *When I was reading your book I thought of the New Jim Crow laws, and this idea of the white moderate who is inside of all of us. Lillian Smith warned us during the late 1940s in her book Killers of the Dream, of the white moderate who opposes segregation in schools, but not the segregation of the men’s hearts. The moderate who opposes the lynching of bodies, but not the lynching of men’s spirits. The moderate who opposes the mob on the street, but not the mob in men’s minds.⁴ As agents for healing and*

⁴ Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (New York: Anchor Books, 1949/1963).

social change, how can we awaken the white moderate in ourselves and others, so we are not just opposing what is unjust in law and practice, but also opposing the injustice within?

Bernardine Dohrn: That is a big question of course. We are all products of our time and space.

You three brilliant children are going to be much smarter than we were, even than you were. Right?

Sarah Miltz-Frielink: *Yes!*

Bernardine Dohrn: Because it is your job to be smarter and more sensitive and more humane and more creative than the people that came before you. And you will be. I am confident that you will be. So I think you know, the challenge for all of us is to live in our moment and so our moment fills us with a lot possibility and a lot of what we used to call blinders—things over our eyes that make us not see. You know, I didn't see any people with disabilities because I didn't see any people with disabilities. I didn't see any gay people... that word didn't even exist when I was growing up. I mean, so people were secretive about it, right? Everybody, we all carry within us a lot of arrogance and a lot of wanting everybody to think we are the smartest person. Or the cleverest or the prettiest or the strongest, fastest and so sometimes that leads to great accomplishments. You know, it's not like everything any individual does is wrong, right? Sometimes brilliant things happen. Somebody's talents flower to make us happy; they make beautiful art, but sometimes we want to be in communities too. And how do we balance that? How do we balance our need for being our best selves with also shedding our ickiest selves? Those are life challenges. I don't have any easy answers for that, since I am still doing that because there is no answer. We're born in our moment, I think we were lucky to be born in a moment of tremendous social upheaval, but I think we are in that moment again. And it makes it easier to choose to be part of change and part of social struggle for justice and peace. But sometimes you don't get to choose that, sometimes you have to work where people around seem to not be interested and then that is your assignment too.

Bill Ayers: But what I take your quote to mean also is that we have a responsibility to open our eyes to see the world as it is and that is something you can never finally do. Because you are a finite being in an infinite expanding universe you can never see it all. Your job is every morning to get up, and try and open your eyes again and see what is before you. And then you have a responsibility to act on whatever the known demands. When I think of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or a warrior in Malcolm X who influenced us so deeply forty years ago, what they were saying was “when are we going to be free? We want to be free now. Don’t tell me to wait; I only have this life, I only have this moment. My moment my kids are going to school is now. Don’t tell me to wait and somehow you will work it out. It has to be now.”

And that sense of urgency combined with the sense of realism is the real trick of living a life. So you have to get up every morning with a simple rhythm. Open your eyes, be astonished, and do something. Fail, succeed; go to sleep, wake up the next morning open your eyes again. That is all you can do. And that is a lifetime assignment.

Sarah Mililtz-Frielink: Then the challenge becomes maintaining an urgency to act in a realistic way without losing hope or falling into nihilism.

Bernardine Dohrn: I am definitely an existentialist, not a nihilist. I do think in part you act because it is the best way to live. Not just because you will get results. I actually think it is in human nature to want to resist and stand up and it is part of how you want to be fully human. I can’t imagine, but it isn’t because we are going to win in this lifetime. But I want to be in that river of history, in that stream of history.

Bill Ayers: And the calculus is not a calculus that says if I do this I will win; the calculus is one that says how do I build my identity act-by-act, step-by-step, day-by-day? So as I said when we talked earlier, I want to live empowered, I have to live that every day.

Dr. William Ayers is a Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago (retired). Currently he is the vice-president of the curriculum studies division of the American Educational Research Association. He founded both the Small Schools Workshop and the Center for Youth and Society. Ayers' articles have appeared in many journals including the *Harvard Educational Review*, the *Journal of Teacher Education*, *Teachers College Record*, *Rethinking Schools*, *The Nation*, *Educational Leadership*, the *New York Times* and the *Cambridge Journal of Education*. Ayers has written and edited numerous books. Some of his book titles include *To Teach: The Journey in Comics* with Ryan Alexander-Tanner, *Race Course: Against White Supremacy* with Bernardine Dohrn, *Teaching Toward Freedom: Moral Commitment and Ethical Action in the Classroom*, *A Kind and Just Parent: The Children of Juvenile Court*, *Fugitive Days: A Memoir*, *On the Side of the Child: Summerhill Revisited*, *Teaching the Personal and the Political: Essays on Hope and Justice*, *The Good Preschool Teacher: Six Teachers Reflect on Their Lives*, and *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*. For more information on Ayers' speaking, writing, and teaching, log-on to billayers.org.

Professor Bernardine Dohrn is a clinical associate professor of law at Northwestern University School of Law. She is also the immediate past director/co-founder of the Children and Family Law Justice Center. Professor Dohrn has co-founded the Center for Wrongful Convictions of the Youth. In addition, she serves on many boards and organizations including the Board of the National Coalition for the Fair Sentencing of the Youth and the Advisory Committee to the Immigration Pro Bono Development and Bar Activation Project. Her research and publications focus on international human rights and juvenile justice. Some of the book titles she has co-authored include *A Century of Juvenile Justice* and *Justice in the Making*.

Gabriel Frielink is a 12-year-old boy who enjoys playing basketball, doing tae kwon do, and volunteering for Northern Illinois Pug Rescue and Adoption. When Gabriel grows up, he hopes to be a civil rights activist/professor.

Grace Frielink is an 11-year-old girl who enjoys doing tae kwon do, reading, and making crafts with her grandmother. When Grace grows up, she hopes to be an archeologist.

Hannah Frielink is a 9-year-old girl who enjoys creating artwork, singing, and playing with her cousins. When Hannah grows up, she hopes to be a professional singer.

An Open Letter of Support for Chicago Public School Teachers

June, 2012

Dear Teachers,

As CPS parents, we are writing to recognize you for your work on behalf of Chicago's children, and to offer you our support in the coming months and years. We share your sense of urgency and your aspirations, and we recognize the brilliant, difficult work you do every day, in the biggest and smallest moments of our kids' lives. Parents and teachers are on the same side because we want the same things—better schools for all children, and a better system to support those schools. You see our children in all their complexity and curiosity, in their desire to learn, to be challenged, to be respected, understood, and seen. And we see you.

We know that the recent strike authorization vote received the support of 89% of CPS teachers. In our school, the rate was over 98%. We know that you are voting not for yourselves, but for all teachers, particularly those in schools with the least resources. We take that vote and level of consensus seriously; your independent, collective voice is indispensable to any sensible conversation about education. We want to say—to you and to everyone—that the recent steady drum-beat of contempt from politicians and pundits is unacceptable, and that we, as parents, do not and will not accept a narrative that vilifies or blames you. This is not simply a conversation about wages and benefits, but one about our shared goal of building a just and decent school system for both teachers and kids.

The Chicago Teachers Union's proposals represent a fair set of standards *for everyone*: smaller class sizes; more student access to music, art, gym, and libraries; more counseling time; and yes, adequate compensation and benefits for teachers, who are being asked to work longer hours next

year. All of these are clearly essential to both good teaching and good learning. In our school, in all CPS schools, and in every school everywhere, good working conditions are good teaching conditions. And good teaching conditions are good learning conditions.

During the last day of the school year, we watched you re-organize hundreds of books you donated personally to our school, all of them labeled by hand, by you. One was the first book a small student, in the room helping, had ever read “all by self,” with you cheering. She remembered; you remembered. We have watched you think through everything from questions about math, music, and literature—to the daily social and developmental challenges of childhood. We have heard you sing songs from your own childhoods, and seen you engage our kids with each other and the world, studying everything from bugs to berimbaus. With you, they wrote and signed their own books, traveled to D.C., choreographed and performed dances, solved fractions, slept at the nature museum, read life-changing books, cooked Brazilian cheese puffs, made documentaries, learned English, and sang with seniors at our neighborhood retirement community. You are teaching them to be engaged citizens, like you, people who care about others. That is the lesson we take from your work and your vote.

Seen up-close, the complexity of teaching is breathtaking and often unheralded; you guide our children through their days in more ways than it’s possible to quantify. So we are writing to say that we understand that teaching is deeply intellectual and ethical work. And that we see you doing it beautifully. We see you, and we stand by you.

Your Fans,

Rachel DeWoskin, Zayd Dohrn, Elizabeth Caya, Rob Caya, Dan Cohen, Beth Hobson, Scott Hobson, Julie Kosowski, Seth MacLowry, Stacy Markham