

Beacon Press

25 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108-2892

TEL 617 742-2110

FAX 617 723-3097

www.beacon.org

October 20, 2007

To: UUA Board of Trustees
From: Helene Atwan, Director
Re: Beacon Press Board Report



Last year Beacon was proud to launch a renovated website, including a shopping cart. This fall, we are launching a brand new media initiative, with the support of the Unitarian Universalist Funding Program: A Beacon Press blog, known as **Beacon Broadside**. Check it out at beaconpress.typepad.com.

Meanwhile, the fall season is well underway, with admirable results thus far:

Eboo Patel's *Acts of Faith* has been drawing acclaim left and right. Among other things, *Good Morning America* has taped an interview with the author, the book was mentioned in *Newsweek's* July cover story on Islam, and a review in *The Boston Globe* calls *Acts of Faith* "visionary...It is the tale of a man's increasing understanding that traditions of mercy, compassion, and social justice are embedded in every faith, and accessing them is the key to creating a pluralism that enhances faith rather than threatens it." The book is already in its third printing.

Another of our recent books on religious experience in the United States is ***Plain Secrets***, by **Joe Mackall**, who impressed us all with his intimate and insightful account of the Amish way of life practiced by his neighbors. *The Boston Globe* lauded this book as well: "Mackall folds in a succinct and engaging history of the Anabaptist religious tradition and the polity of the Amish church. This added context greatly enhances the more personal stories," and the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that Mackall's prose is "as graceful as it is unsentimental."

Mary Oliver continues to read to packed audiences across the country. ***Our World***, which joins text by Oliver with photographs by **Molly Malone Cook**, her partner of forty years who died in 2005, has just been released. Oliver's next volume of poems, ***Red Bird***, will be published in April, and we're proud to announce the recent acquisition of a collection of new poems by Oliver to follow that one. The Pulitzer Prize-winning poet was recently heralded by *The Boston Globe* as one of the seven wonders of Massachusetts (the only human on the list).

Katherine Newman and **Victor Tan Chen's** just-released book ***The Missing Class*** is off to a commendable start. This examination of the situation of millions of people in the U.S. living in the gray area between "poor" and "middle class" features a foreword by John Edwards, who writes, "*The Missing Class* is a call to action to change America. Like other books that transformed our nation, it will inspire us to work for an America that doesn't ignore those in need...an America where the family you were born into or the color of your skin never controls your destiny."



In my last report, we had just released **Meredith Hall's** *Without a Map*, and it was already earning praise. By now the book has proven itself to be a huge success, having even spent two weeks on the *New York Times Book Review's* Nonfiction (extended) Bestseller List. Most recently, a review in the *Washington Post* raved: "Each chapter of *Without a Map* is polished and elegantly written...the structure is shapely and the book yields poignant insights."

A few of our exciting and newly acquired titles include:

Alan Collinge's groundbreaking *Student Loan Scam* will analyze the predatory nature of the student loan industry, including its history and the impact on the citizenry, and will offer solutions for the current crisis. Collinge is an activist for student loan justice and founder of StudentLoanJustice.org, a grassroots organization and Political Action Committee.

Photojournalist and activist **David Bacon** is the award winning author of over a hundred articles and two books about labor and immigration. His new book will be an urgent examination of local, national, and international forces that cause immigration.

Legal journalist **Frederick S. Lane** will use a mix of legal history and political analysis to expose, in layman's terms, the Religious Right's high court offensive, in *The Court and the Cross*. As Americans watch for major Supreme Court rulings on controversial issues such as abortion, prayer in school, and end of life decisions, this timely book will detail the Right's unrelenting efforts to destroy the wall separating church and state and, ultimately, to do nothing less than declare the United States a Christian nation.

Helen Benedict's *The Lonely Soldier: Women at War in Iraq* will be an in-depth and eye-opening book about women in the military, based on interviews with over thirty female veterans of the Iraq war. The author found that these veterans were extremely isolated and also experienced a high level of sexual assault and harassment from male soldiers and recruiters. Given that over 160,000 women have served in the Middle East since 2003, the war is clearly changing the role of female soldiers for the future, giving a real urgency to these issues. Benedict is a professor of Journalism at Columbia University.

Finally, the UUA's own **John Buehrens** is teaming up with **Rebecca Parker** to provide an accessible but deeply reasoned discussion of the intellectual and theological basis for progressive religion in *A House for Hope*.

In finding his faith, he thinks of others

By Adam Mansbach

The defining issue of the 21st century, Eboo Patel argues in this slim, visionary book, part coming-of-age memoir and part call-to-action, will be religion. Building institutions committed to fostering tolerance and interfaith dialogue, he writes, is the only way to avoid ceding the very concept of faith to religious totalitarians of every creed — and only by working as hard to nurture young people as violent extremists do to radicalize them can progressive people of faith compete.

The founder of the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), Patel is an Indian-American Muslim, and his personal journey toward understanding and embracing the faith into which he was born constitutes the through line of "Acts of Faith." But Patel's story is bigger than that: It is the tale of a man's increasing understanding that traditions of mercy, compassion, and social justice are embedded in every faith, and accessing them is the key to creating a pluralism that enhances faith rather than threatens it.

Patel's path begins in the Chi-

cago suburbs; he realizes as a child that to be Muslim is to be marginal, and he dedicates himself to academic excellence in an attempt to transcend all that separates him. In high school, he realizes that he and his diverse group of friends possess no language to discuss their beliefs or customs. It is a silence that strangles, and the shame Patel feels when he fails to

Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation

By Eboo Patel

Beacon Press, 189 pp., \$22.95

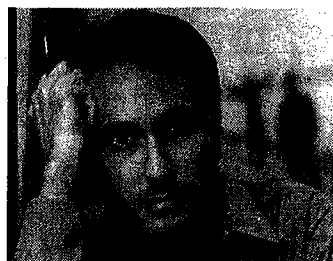
take a stand against the anti-Semitism that surfaces at his school marks him.

Such incidents catalyze a period of reevaluation and reflection. Fascinatingly, as Patel works to liberate himself from the confines of an identity proscribed by fear and persecution, it is the black American experience of rage and reconciliation that provides the closest experiential corollary. The humanity and insight of James Baldwin's work, a touchstone through "Acts of Faith," prove particularly inspir-

ing — illustrating Patel's notion that religion is the new race.

As religious terrorism flares worldwide, Patel revisits the faith he once rejected, seeking and locating fortifying veins of diversity and openness that stand in stark relief to popular American conceptions of Islam. Simultaneously, he begins looking for, and then creating, communities committed to challenging not just the unspoken prohibitions against religious dialogue, but also the inequity and stratification that underwrite these gulfs in communication. Patel's teachers range from the Dalai Lama — who encourages him to be a better Muslim — to Patel's grandmother, who, when he visits her in India, "models what that means" through her quiet, tireless charity. The pantheon of his "faith heroes," likewise, grows to include Mahatma Gandhi, Catholic Worker House founder Dorothy Day, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Martin Luther King Jr., and — eventually, as Patel learns to access and connect with Islamic legacies of social justice — Muslim exemplars like Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Aga Khan.

The Interfaith Youth Core is



NUBAR ALEXANIAN

EBOO PATEL

born not just out of Patel's convictions, but of the persistent lack of youth outreach he sees across faith lines, and the insular, abstracted nature of interfaith religious conferences. Patel narrates the difficulties he faces in convincing skeptical religious leaders that bringing young people together to perform social justice work and discuss their beliefs will pay faith dividends — and also the way those doubts are ultimately allayed by the enthusiasm, friendships, and renewed commitments of the participants. As "Acts of Faith" ends, the IFYC thrives, and a shining vision of the possibilities of interfaith cooperation and pluralistic discourse lingers.

Adam Mansbach's next novel, "The End of the Jews," is forthcoming from Spiegel & Grau/Doubleday in March.

The Nation.

August 13/20, 2007

Interview with Katherine Newman

THE 'NEAR POOR' ARE JUST ONE PAYCHECK, ONE LOST JOB, ONE DIVORCE AWAY FROM POVERTY.

The Missing Class

EYAL PRESS

Sociologist Katherine Newman is best known for her richly documented, fine-grained portraits of the working poor. In books such as *No Shame in My Game* and *Chutes and Ladders*, she has chronicled the experiences of low-wage workers struggling against formidable odds to lift themselves out of poverty. Unlike many economists, Newman focuses less on statistics than on the barriers and opportunities people encounter in their daily lives, shedding light on the fault lines of the nation's class divide through intimate accounts of families and neighborhoods. In her forthcoming book, *The Missing Class*, written with Victor Tan Chen, Newman has turned her attention to the travails of the "near poor," a vast pool of workers who are neither officially destitute nor comfortably middle class. Recently, *Nation* contributing writer Eyal Press caught up with her at her home in Manhattan.



Who are the "near poor"?

The near poor are people with household incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000 a year for a family of four, or 100 to 200 percent of the poverty line. And there are actually almost twice as many of them as there are people under the poverty line—57 million in the US. They represent, on the one hand, an improvement, forward motion, the promise of upward mobility. But their lives are not stable. They truly are one paycheck, one lost job, one divorce or one sick child away from falling below the poverty line.

Are the members of this class in a more precarious situation today than, say, ten or twenty years ago?

More precarious than in the late 1990s, yes, but not twenty years ago. The reason is that we had this golden period between about 1997 and 2002, when we had record low unemployment, high example, welfare reform propelled a lot of people into the labor market. Meanwhile, No Child Left Behind created a system of high-stakes tests for kids in the public school system. Nobody was thinking about what these two policies would mean when they collided behind the closed doors of a family. But in a family, these things are colliding all the time: the demand placed on parents to be in the labor market and the demand placed on kids to pass those high-stakes tests, which they're far less likely to do if parents aren't around to take them to the library, read to them, look over their homework. There are stories in the book about mothers who had been able to go to their kids' schools, couldn't go anymore, didn't realize they were falling off the deep end, and then that kid ends up on Rikers Island.

growth, low inflation, and that's part of what propelled these people forward—employers were looking for more of them, and opportunities opened up. That's less the case today.

What kinds of neighborhoods do the people you're describing live in?

Like the poor, the near poor tend to live in places that have serious problems of infestation—rodents, cockroaches—which means they have very high rates of asthma, childhood asthma in

particular, and high rates of lead exposure, since their apartment buildings are older. They are also in neighborhoods with fewer consumer options, places not well served by the big chain stores that have the lowest prices. So basically the poor and the near poor are soaked—everything they buy is more expensive than it should be. It's like a huge tax on them, and there are also health consequences—your access to a decent diet is compromised; it's harder to get fresh fruits and vegetables. Problems like obesity are very pronounced in this population. But the neighborhoods of the near poor are less segregated and have a more diverse income mix than those of the "real" poor.

You call this a "missing class." Is it missing from the consciousness of Republicans or Democrats?

Pretty much both. John Edwards wrote the foreword to this book, so it's on his radar screen, but I haven't heard anybody else talk about these people, neither Republicans nor Democrats. I don't think the political parties reach out to them very much.

Yet I take it that what happens in Washington does have an impact on their lives.

Some of the policies set in motion over the past decade have had a particularly pronounced effect on the near poor. For But when we say it's about family, we're really talking about the burdens people face in simultaneously trying to combine family responsibilities with the demands of the labor market. And we don't make it easy for them to do that. In Italy, you have access to full-time, high-quality childcare from the time your child is an infant. Similarly in France. A lot of families I studied who didn't make it out of poverty were the ones where the childcare options were so dangerous they couldn't leave their kids, so they ended up dropping out of the labor market, which isn't good for them or for their children. I don't think conservatives have much of an answer to this. The only answer I hear them giving is that poor people shouldn't have children at all.

-more-

The Nation.

continued

Is there more, or less, awareness today of the challenges facing the working poor than when you began your research?

There's greater recognition now that we actually have a population called the working poor. I think that attempts to beat back some of the more successful policy innovations, like the earned-income tax credit, have failed in part because there's recognition that these people exist, that they should be supported and that we need to do something about their health insurance. What I don't see is much attention to fostering mobility out of working poverty. We seem to feel that as long as we've taken people off public assistance, our job is done. But it isn't done—it isn't good enough in a country as wealthy as this to replace welfare-dependent poverty with working poverty.

Yet welfare reform has not led to the disaster some people predicted. Haven't those who feared this, including yourself, been proven wrong?

What I didn't anticipate, and I don't think anyone anticipated, was that in the late '90s we would have really tight labor markets, a roaring economy, very high growth, very low inflation. We basically had the opposite of a perfect storm—we had perfect weather, and that provided a lot of mobility opportunity even for the people I study. But welfare reform won't receive its real test until we see a big recession and we can see what happens to people without any safety net beneath that. We haven't seen that, so it's not easy to know what it would mean.

In your previous book, *Chutes and Ladders*, you told the stories of two groups: the "high flyers," who succeeded in climbing out of poverty, and the "low riders," who didn't. What was the main difference between them?

For the most part the difference is explained not by their desire for upward mobility but by their family circumstances. Everybody wants a better job and everybody is willing to work for it. But women who had children and no one to help them with those kids were much more likely to get trapped—they couldn't get more education, which limited their job options; their contact with the labor market was more fragile and episodic. Whereas the people who could afford childcare or who worked out elaborate arrangements with extended family members were able to stay on the job, get more training and move upward.

That sounds like an answer conservatives would love—it's all about family.

If you could take the platform of the Democratic candidate for President and insert three provisions for the missing class into it, what would they be?

Universal, high-quality, early-childhood education would be very high on my list, because the more we can do for kids when they start out to level the playing field, the better off the whole country will be in the long run. Universal healthcare would be hugely important, not only because of its health consequences but because it frees up income for other things. And opening up and maintaining access to higher education, because the people on the losing end of this economy are the poorly educated. Instead, I fear we're going in the opposite direction—we're seeing increases in public higher-education tuition, which will make it very hard for new generations to succeed. ■

THURSDAY, MAY 31, 2007

THE BOSTON GLOBE

BOOK REVIEW

Stirring discussions of race and education

By Chuck Leddy

Born in 1954, the year the US Supreme Court issued its landmark school desegregation decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Beverly Daniel Tatum sees our nation in steady retreat from *Brown*'s legacy of equal educational opportunity for all. Her provocative and important book consists of four research-rich, concisely written essays on race and education, including examinations of the "resegregation of our schools," the need for educational curricula and staff that respect the diverse communities they serve, the challenges of interracial friendships, and the inherent racism of standardized testing.

Tatum's first essay on school resegregation is straightforwardly powerful in its assertion that state and federal courts have worked quietly and consistently to undermine the letter and spirit of *Brown*. Tatum shows how housing patterns in cities such as Boston have created a landscape of de facto segregation that gets reflected in increasingly segregated schools.

Attempts to work around these housing patterns and create larger school districts encompassing both urban areas and predominantly white suburbs have been struck down by the courts. The author cites the example of Detroit, whose plan to include suburban schools in its desegregation efforts was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1974.

**Can We Talk About Race?
And Other Conversations
in an Era of School
Resegregation**

By Beverly Daniel Tatum
Beacon, 147 pp., \$22.95

Tatum does a fine job explaining white flight from urban schools (in 1970, 59,000 white students were enrolled in the Boston public schools; by 2000, only 9,300 were enrolled) and the impact this has had in diminishing the overall educational experience. While the statistics are sobering, she spends little time discussing the larger political backlash against desegregation

and civil rights in general. This backlash, a feeling that the nation had gone too far in pursuing a civil rights agenda, has been a constant, dominating theme in American politics from Richard Nixon down to George W. Bush.

The book's second essay is a historical argument tracing the anti-immigrant, racist roots of standardized testing in the United States. The early proponents of such testing, Tatum persuasively shows, were wedded to a philosophy "inherently rooted in the racism of the eugenics movement" and wanted to use testing to limit opportunities for incoming immigrant groups as a way of maintaining American purity.

Tatum cites recent research that suggests intelligence isn't a single characteristic but an ability to adapt well to different environments. She also shows how standardized testing promotes stereotypes and can work to inhibit intellectual development. Finally, Tatum offers practical suggestions for educators to subvert damaging stereotypes (i.e., "avoid overprais-

ing for mediocre work").

In her insightful essay on interracial friendships, the author asserts that such relationships succeed only when race is openly placed on the table for discussion. She uses an example from her own life, in which both parties felt free to raise the often-difficult issue of race. Tatum learns from her friend "Andrea" too, especially about the presence of homophobia in the black church.

In her final essay, Tatum examines higher education and how it can better serve an increasingly diverse society. She includes discussions about reforms at Spelman College, in Atlanta, where she is president. What Tatum seeks to do above all is trigger sometimes-challenging discussions about race, and infuse those discussions with a reality-based focus on how race affects us all. Her latest book does that beautifully, asking tough questions, and patiently, inclusively seeking answers.

Chuck Leddy is a freelance writer who lives in Quincy.

