

Beacon Press

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

March 17, 2008



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

I'm happy to report that the press continues to show excellent results and to win accolades:

Uncertain Peril: Genetic Engineering and the Future of Seeds by **Claire Hope Cummings** has made a very strong beginning. It has received starred reviews in both *Library Journal* and *Booklist*, which called the book “a meticulous and lucid exposé . . . this wake-up call should renew public debate about our food and land use.” The author has also been featured on several radio shows, including NPR’s “On Point.”

Nancy D. Polikoff’s *Beyond (Straight and Gay) Marriage* is also creating a storm of media attention. Polikoff is in the middle of a twelve-city book tour, giving her the opportunity to spread awareness about the unseen intricacies of the marriage debate across the entire country. She is also appearing on many local radio shows. Richard Labonte, whose “Bookmarks” column is run in many LGBT papers and websites, wrote: “[Polikoff] suggests, rather radically (but rightly), . . . that straight people as much as gay people are oppressed by the fact that most benefits are bestowed only on married couples.”

First Freedom First, by **Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy** and **Rev. Barry W. Lynn**, was also recently published. As Walter Cronkite put it, “Gaddy and Lynn have provided us with a volume that informs and challenges, as well as inspires and guides us on issues of vital importance to all of us—our founding fathers’ vision for religious liberty and their constitutional guarantee of separation of church and state.” Rev. Gaddy has been very active on **Beacon Broadside**, giving us several posts on religion being used as a political tactic in the presidential race.

Kai Wright’s *Drifting Toward Love* critically deviates from standard portrayals of LGBT people as white and affluent. The book addresses intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and speaks to the fact that kids and teenagers living these intersecting oppressions need role models and safe places to live. *Time Out New York* praised the book as “intimate, at times heart-wrenching.”

Mary Oliver is as productive and popular as ever. Her Seattle reading in early February created a frenzy when the 2,500-seat Benaroya Hall sold out in record time and fans resorted to paying up to \$100 for tickets being sold on Craigslist. As John Marshall of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* put it, “poet as rock star may be a strange



notion outside of places like Russia, but Oliver has become a poetry phenomenon.” Her newest volume, *Red Bird*, has just shipped and is already flying off the shelves.

When the Rivers Run Dry, a strong backlist title by **Fred Pearce** (who also wrote *With Speed and Violence*) has just been selected for a second freshman reading program. Between the two programs, 9,000 college freshmen have received copies of the book, which is about the growing world water crisis. We will publish Pearce’s next book, *Confessions of an Eco-Sinner*, in October.

Among our newly acquired titles:

We are proud and saddened to announce that we have acquired **Rev. Forrest Church’s** *Love & Death*. The beloved senior minister of the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York has just learned that he has terminal cancer, and his final book will be dedicated to his thoughts on topics that have been so pervasive in his work: love and death. We are rushing production in order to have the book in time for this year’s General Assembly.

Award-winning political humorist **Kate Clinton**, an icon of the LGBT movement, will publish her new book with Beacon. It will include a diversity of topics: sexual hypocrisy, global warming, gay marriage, 9/11 and its aftermaths, intelligent design, girls gone wild, boys gone to war, electoral reform, families of choice, and much more.

Journalist and foreign correspondent **Stanley Meisler** will write the first complete history of the Peace Corps for Beacon, tracing its evolution through the past nine presidential terms. Relying on a variety of historical sources, including new material in national archives, presidential libraries, and anecdotal personal narratives, Meisler, who was himself a volunteer for several years in 1964, is committed to writing a “warts and all” history. We will publish the book to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps in 2010.

The advances in technology that allow for convenience in our everyday life often come at the detriment of our privacy. Legal journalist **Frederick Lane**, author of the forthcoming *The Court And The Cross*, is writing a new book in which he will show the ways in which we have sacrificed our privacy for the benefit of technology. Lane will ultimately explain the need for legislation that protects our privacy in the face of new everyday technologies such as online ads targeted to emails we have written or searches we have performed.

BOB HERBERT

Sharing The Pain

Now that the economic crunch is reaching those near the top of the pyramid, there is finally a sense that the U.S. is facing a real crisis.

Forget about a soft landing. The stock markets continue to tumble. The dollar has weakened. The subprime mortgage debacle has morphed into a full-fledged panic. And Joe Stiglitz is telling us the war in Iraq will cost \$3 trillion.

Maybe now we can stop listening to the geniuses who insisted that the way to nirvana was to ignore the broad national interest while catering to the desires of those who were already the wealthiest among us.

We have always gotten a distorted picture of how well Americans were doing from politicians and the media. The U.S. has a population of 300 million. Thirty-seven million, many of them children, live in poverty. Close to 60 million are just one notch above the official poverty line. These near-poor Americans live in households with annual incomes that range from \$20,000 to \$40,000 for a family of four.

It is disgraceful that in a nation as wealthy as the United States, nearly a third of the people are poor or near-poor.

Former Senator John Edwards touched on the quality of the lives of those perched precariously above the abyss of poverty in his foreword to the book, "The Missing Class: Portraits of the Near-Poor in America," by Katherine S. Newman and Victor Tan Chen. Mr. Edwards wrote:

"When we set about fixing welfare in the 1990s, we said we were going to encourage work. Near-poor Americans do work, usually in jobs that the rest of us do not want — jobs with stagnant wages, no

An economic crisis
ascends
the class ladder.

retirement funds, and inadequate health insurance, if they have it at all. While their wages stay the same, the cost of everything else — energy, housing, transportation, tuition — goes up."

The economic pain and anxiety felt for so long by the poor and the near-poor has been spreading like a stain in the middle class as well. It's hardly been a secret. But neither the Democrats nor the Republicans have stepped up to this fundamental long-term challenge, and that includes the three remaining candidates for president.

No one will tackle the crucial issue of employment in a serious way. The cornerstone of a middle-class life in America (and that means the cornerstone of the American dream) is a good job. The American dream is on life support because men and women by the millions who want very much to work — who still have in their heads the ideal of a thriving family in a nice home with maybe a picket fence — are unable to find a decent job.

For years, families have been fighting weakness on the employment front with every other option imaginable. Wives and mothers have gone to work. People have been putting in more hours and working additional jobs.

And Americans have plunged like Olympic diving champions into every form of debt they could find.

As Andrew Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union, told me some months ago: "Workers are incredibly, legitimately scared that the American dream, particularly the belief that their kids will do better, is ending."

It is. The dream is in grave danger because the ruling elite stopped looking out for the collective interests of the society and all but stopped investing in the future. We are swimming in a vast sea of indebtedness, most of it bringing no worthwhile return.

Former Senator Bill Bradley, in a conversation the other day, described the amount of public and private indebtedness in the U.S. as "ominous." In his book, "The New American Story," Mr. Bradley said:

"For almost a generation, America has cheated our future and lived only in the here and now. Economic growth depends on the level of investment in both physical capital — machines, infrastructure, technology — and human capital, which consists of the combined skills and health of our work force."

Instead of making those investments, we've neglected our physical and human infrastructure, squeezed the daylight out of the work force (now a fearful and demoralized lot) and tried to hide the resulting debacle behind the fool's gold of debt and denial.

Americans save virtually nothing. They have looted the equity in their homes and driven their credit card balances to staggering heights. Meanwhile, the Bush administration has claimed colossal new standards of fiscal irresponsibility. At some point, to take just one example, someone will have to pay the \$3 trillion for the war.

This craziness is not sustainable.

Without an educated and empowered work force, without sustained investment in the infrastructure and technologies that foster long-term employment, and without a system of taxation that can actually pay for the services provided by government, the American dream as we know it will expire. □

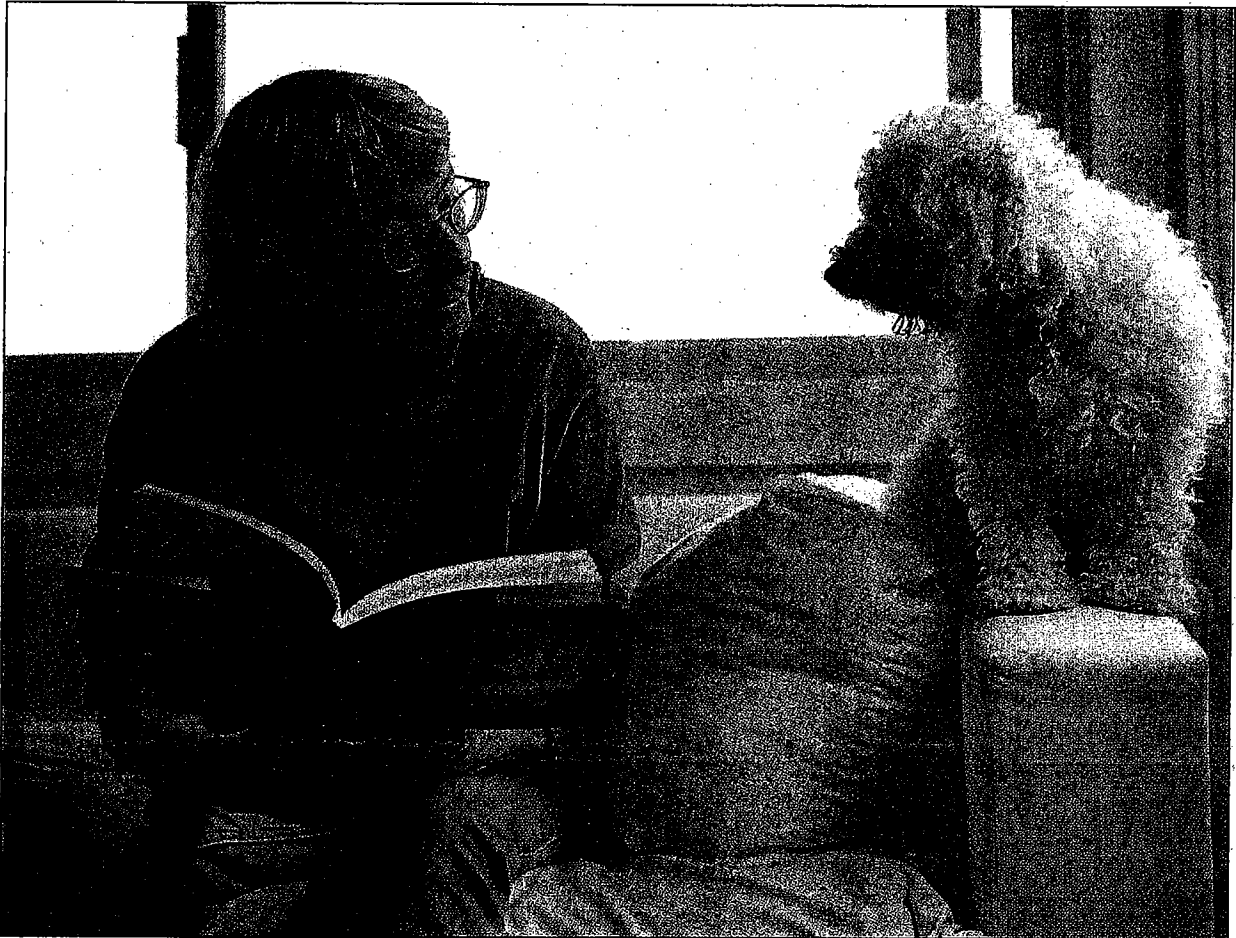
David Brooks is off today.

Newman & Chen / *The Missing Class*
The New York Times
3/11/2008

"Connecting with the audience is magical for the audience, but also for her."

- Helen Atwan, *Oliver's editor*

Poet or rock star?



Mary Oliver has won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, but she's not above addressing poems to her trusty dog, Percy.

RACHEL GIESE BROWN / © 2005

Those Days

When I think of her I think of the long summer days
 she lay in the sun, how she loved the sun, how we
 spread our blanket and friends came and
 the dogs played, and then I would get restless and
 get up and go off to the woods
 and the fields, and the afternoon would
 soften gradually and finally I would come
 home, through the long shadows, and into the house
 where she would be
 my glorious, welcoming, tan and hungry and ready to tell
 the hurtless gossips of the day and how I
 listened leisurely while I put
 around the room flowers in jars of water—
 daisies, butter and eggs, and everlasting—
 until like our lives they trembled and shimmered
 everywhere.

— From "Thirst" by Mary Oliver

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Mary Oliver's sold-out appearance sparks a ticket frenzy on Craigslist

BY JOHN MARSHALL
P-I book critic

Here's a Seattle popular culture quiz. Pick the item that doesn't belong:
 a) Seattle's 2,500-seat Benaroya Hall sold out in record time.
 b) The box office besieged with requests for more tickets.
 c) Anguished fans seeking tickets on Craigslist.
 d) A reading by a poet.

Smart money would be on D), but smart money would be wrong. Poet Mary Oliver's appearance Monday at Benaroya Hall is the fastest sellout in the 20-year history of Seattle Arts & Lectures. It is sparking ticket action on the local Craigslist, where tickets to rock concerts and sports playoffs are regularly bought and sold, but rarely to poetry readings.

Take that, Minneapolis. The Twin City may have supplanted Seattle as the country's "most literate city" in an annual survey but the Oliver sellout demonstrates that Seattle still has its zealous literary enthusiasts.

So does Portland, which did not merit inclusion in the top 10 literate cities. Oliver's appearance there on Tuesday is also sparking a ticket frenzy. The 2,700-seat Schnitzer Concert Hall for

Portland Arts & Lectures has already sold out.

The Northwest may just be the epicenter of popularity for Oliver, a reclusive, 71-year-old poet from Provincetown, Mass., who is known for her direct, positive verse set in the natural world. She has won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, but her work is not

SEE MARY OLIVER, C2

