Beacon Press

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

March 17, 2008

BEACON 150

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.

BEACON 150

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 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."

An economic crisis ascends the class ladder.

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 daylights 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. □

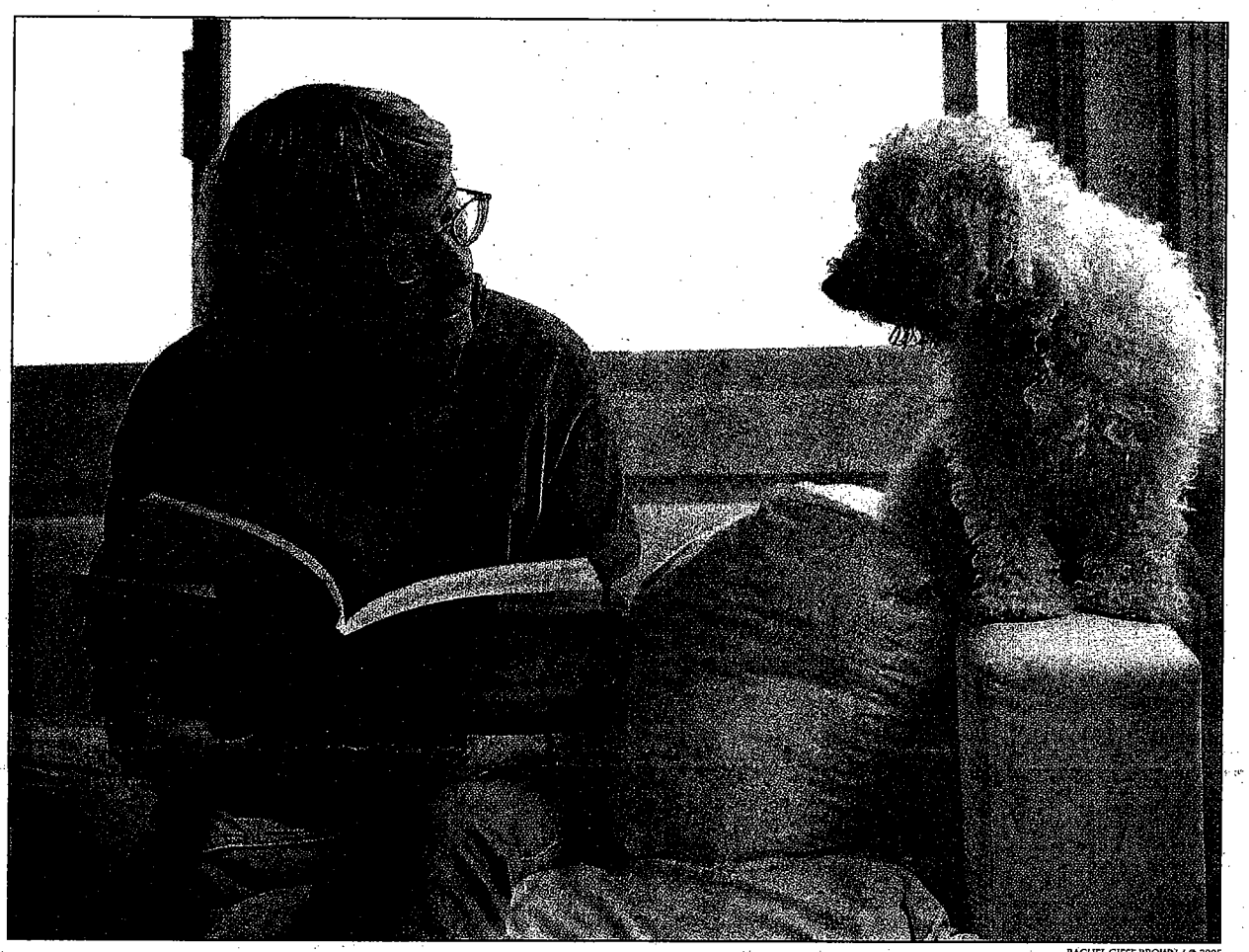
David Brooks is off today.

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?



RACHEL GIESE BROWN / © 2005

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

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

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

MARY OLIVER: Sorry, fans – there is no secret stash, no waiting list

FROM C1

the dense verse favored by academia. Oliver has even been known to address poems to her trusty dog, Percy.

"There's a very great concentration of Mary Oliver fanatics in the Northwest," says Helen Atwan, Oliver's editor, who heads Beacon Press, the poet's publisher. "She's a premier poet of nature, and Northwest people are so attuned to that. Mary could be a rock star there."

Poet as rock star may be a strange notion outside of places like Russia, but Oliver has become a poetry phenomenon.

She regularly dominates the national poetry best-seller list put out by the Poetry Foundation. The current list has four Oliver titles in the top seven spots, including her most recent book, "Thirst," in the pre-eminent position. There are more than half a million copies of Oliver's work in print.

Seattle readers have contributed to those robust totals. Oliver's "New and Selected Poems, Volume One" has been one of the all-time best-selling volumes at Open Books, the poetry-only bookstore in Wallingford.

The fervor of Oliver's Northwest fans was demonstrated when she last appeared in Seattle in November 2005. Not only did Oliver sell out the 900-seat Town Hall in a week, her fans bought so many copies of her books at the reading – 600 – that her appearance was the second-most-profitable author event hosted that year by the University Book Store, according to Stesha Brandon, the store's events coordinator.

Brandon even became aware of a congregation on Bainbridge Island where Oliver's work provides frequent inspiration. Grace Episcopal Church's vicar, the Rev. William Harper, often quotes Oliver in his sermons; music director Ann Strickland composed a Mass with Oliver's work; one Oliver poem has become an unofficial church anthem, especially its closing line ("oh what is that beautiful thing/ that just happened?").

At Town Hall, another element of the Oliver mystique was on display. As Brandon recalls, "She is a spectacular reader of her work, just phenomenal."

For years, Oliver did very few readings. She preferred to remain ensconced in Provincetown with her longtime partner, photographer Molly Malone Cook, who died in 2005.

Cook and Oliver were a couple for more than four decades, a period recounted in last fall's bittersweet volume, "Our World" (Beacon Press, 85 pages, $24.95). The book combines Cook's photos with Oliver's poetry and prose of remembrance.

The loss of her partner increased Oliver's interest in giving readings. Pent-up demand often results in sellouts. While the poet rarely gives interviews, she has been gratified by the support, reports Atwan.

"Mary really does love public appearances," Atwan says. "I have been with Mary when she has flown into a city after endless airport delays and she gets there with no time to catch her breath. She is exhausted and then the minute she stands at the podium, she is totally energized. Connecting with the audience is magical for the audience, but also for her."

"There's a very great concentration of Mary Oliver fanatics in the Northwest. She's a premier poet of nature, and Northwest people are so attuned to that."

– Helen Atwan

Despite all this, Seattle Arts & Lectures had some initial hesitancy in scheduling Oliver. Margit Rankin, the group's executive director until last summer, had attended Oliver's Town Hall event and was impressed. But she worried that 2008 might be too soon for another Oliver appearance, and there would not be enough interest to fill the larger Benaroya Hall.

Rankin believed that only three living poets could fill that hall. Arts & Lectures had already hosted two of them (American Billy Collins and Seamus Heaney, the Irish Nobel laureate); their appearances had indeed sold out the hall. Oliver was the other poet in the trio, so the decision was made to schedule her in 2008, although Rankin concedes, "I don't pretend to have known she would sell out by the end of October."

Oliver's sellout at Benaroya did catch many by surprise, including staff members at Arts & Lectures. After all, last season's event with horrormeister Stephen King didn't even sell out. Many of its author events have but that usually occurs around the day of the event, as was the case with Frank McCourt of "Angela's Ashes."

Oliver fans who hesitated lost. Many have continued to call the box office of Arts & Lectures with tales of woe and creative offers ("I would dress up like a tree and stand in the back of the hall and not let out a peep," said one).

Some fans have surmised that there must be a secret stash of Oliver tickets (there is none). Others ask to be included on a waiting list in case any extra tickets turn up (there is no such list).

Craigslist has become the last refuge for some Oliver fans. Action on the site dwindled as her Monday appearance approached, with nary a ticket seller listed Friday after previous sellers had asked as much as $100 a ticket. Two hopeful ticket seekers remained on the site.

Jessica Gigot, a 28-year-old plant pathologist, is "a closet poet," as well as a longtime admirer of Oliver's work. Gigot has been willing to pay as much as $50 a ticket, and hopes to buy two tickets.

"I'd love to . . . invite my partner," Gigot says. "He reads Mary quite a lot, but I like her more."

Roland Crane, a 47-year-old consultant from Tacoma, searched Craigslist repeatedly for days before finally purchasing Oliver tickets at $100 as a surprise for his partner, Cheri Rae. The 45-year-old massage therapist has a deep appreciation for Oliver because her poem, "In Blackwater Woods," provided such solace when her son died at the age of 10.

Oliver's work is now with Rae wherever she goes, literally. Last summer, she had the last line of Oliver's "The Summer Day" tattooed on her forearm – "Tell me, what is it you plan to do/ with your one wild and precious life?"

As Rae explains, "That is my daily meditation."

There is one ray of hope for Oliver fans without Benaroya tickets. Oliver will be returning to the area for an Earth Day event on April 22 at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma. Most tickets will go to students, staff and faculty, but 50 tickets at $20 will be sold to the public in February (check for exact date at plu.edu//~wildhope, or 253-535-7411).

However, lining up now at PLU is not advised.

P-I book critic John Marshall can be reached at 206-448-8170 or johnmarshall@seattlepi.com.

Oliver / *Our World*
Seattle Post-Intelligencer
2/4/2008

DEPT. OF MEDICAL ETHICS

GUINEA-PIGGING

Healthy human subjects for drug-safety trials are in demand. But is it a living?

BY CARL ELLIOTT

On September 11, 2001, James Rockwell was camped out in a clinical-research unit on the eleventh floor of a Philadelphia hospital, where he had enrolled as a subject in a high-paying drug study. As a rule, studies that involve invasive medical procedures are more lucrative—the more uncomfortable, the better the pay—and in this study subjects had a fibre-optic tube inserted in their mouths and down their esophaguses so that researchers could examine their gastrointestinal tracts.

Rockwell had enrolled in many previous studies at corporate sites at places like Wyeth and GlaxoSmithKline. But the atmosphere there felt professional, bureaucratic, and cold. This unit was in a university hospital, not a corporate lab, and the staff had a casual attitude toward regulations and procedures. "The Animal House of research units" is what Rockwell calls it. "I'm standing in the hallway juggling," he says. "I'm up at five in the morning watching movies." Although study guidelines called for stringent dietary restrictions, the subjects got so hungry that one of them picked the lock on the food closet. "We got giant boxes of cookies and ran into the lounge and put them in the couch," Rockwell says. "This one guy was putting them in the ceiling tiles." Rockwell has little confidence in the data that the study produced. "The most integral part of the study was the diet restriction," he says, "and we were just gorging ourselves at 2 A.M. on Cheez Doodles."

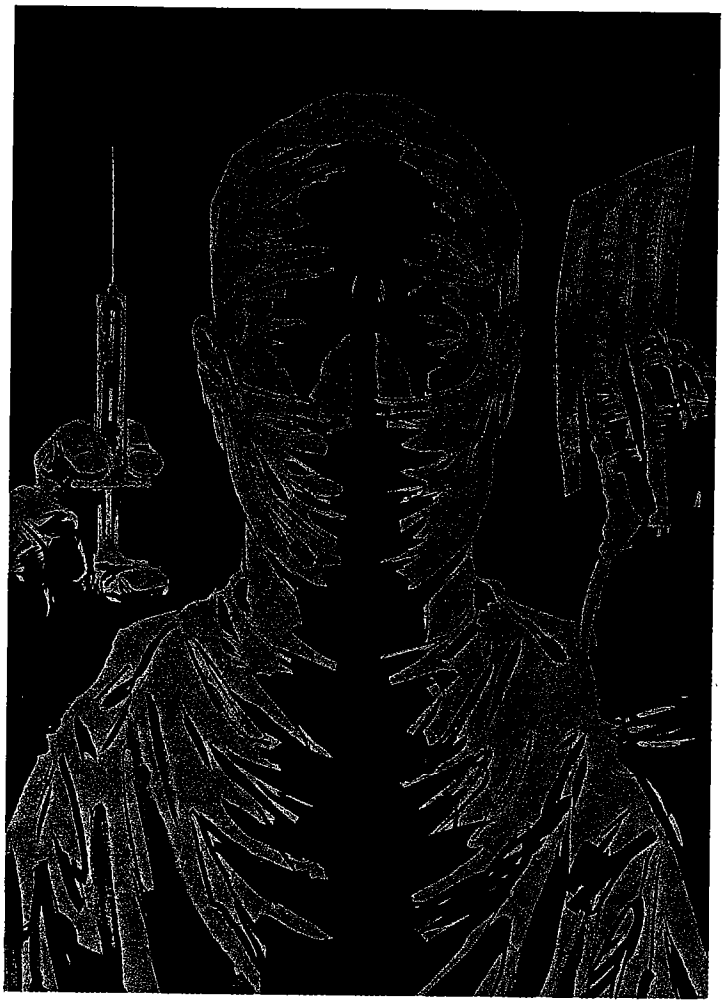
On the morning of September 11th, nearly a month into the five-week study, the subjects gathered around a television and watched the news of the terrorist attacks through a drug-induced haze. "We were all high on Versed after getting endoscopies," Rockwell says. He and the other subjects began to wonder if they should go home. But a mass departure would have ruined the study. "The doctors were, like, 'No, no!' " Rockwell recalls. "'No one's going home, everything's fine!' " Rockwell stayed until the end of the study and was paid seventy-five hundred dollars. He used the money to make a down payment on a house.

Rockwell is a wiry thirty-year-old massage-therapy student with a pierced nose; he seems to bounce in his seat as he speaks, radiating enthusiasm. Over the years, he estimates, he has enrolled in more than twenty studies for money. The Philadelphia area offers plenty of opportunities for aspiring human subjects. It is home to four medical schools and is part of a drug-industry corridor that stretches into New Jersey. Bristol-Myers Squibb regularly sends a van to pick up volunteers at the Trenton train station.

Today, fees as high as the one that Rockwell received aren't unusual. The best-paying studies are longer, in-patient trials, where subjects are often required to check into a research facility for days or even weeks at a time, so that their diet can be controlled, their blood and urine checked regularly, and their medical status carefully monitored. Occasionally, they also undergo invasive procedures, like a bronchoscopy or a biopsy, or something else unpleasant, such as being deprived of sleep, wearing a rectal probe, or having allergens sprayed in their faces. Because such studies require a fair amount of time in a research unit, the subjects are usually people who need money and have a lot of time to spare: the unemployed, college students, contract workers, ex-cons, or young people living on the margins who have decided that testing drugs is better than punching a clock with the wage slaves. In some cities, like Philadelphia and Austin, the drug-testing economy has produced a community of semi-professional research subjects, who enroll in one study after another. Some of them do nothing else. For them, "guinea-pigging," as they call it, has become a job. Many of them say that they know people who have been travelling around the

country doing studies for fifteen years or longer. "It's crazy and it's sad," one drug-trial veteran told me. "For me, this is not a life. But it is a life for a lot of these people."

Most drug studies used to take place in medical schools and teaching hospitals. Pharmaceutical companies developed the drugs, but they contracted with academic physicians to carry out the clinical testing. According to *The New England Journal of Medicine*, as recently as 1991 eighty per cent of industry-sponsored trials were conducted in academic health centers. Academic health centers had a lot to offer pharmaceutical companies: academic researchers who could design the trials, publications in academic journals that could help market the products, and a pool of potential subjects on whom the drugs could be tested. But, in the past decade, the pharmaceutical industry has been testing more drugs, the trials have grown more complex, and the financial pressure to bring drugs to market swiftly has intensified. Impatient with the slow pace of academic bureaucracies, pharmaceutical companies have moved trials to the private sector, where more than seventy per cent of them are now conducted.



Volunteers are paid not to do things but to let things be done to them.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

This has spurred the growth of businesses that specialize in various parts of the commercial-research enterprise. The largest of the new businesses are called "contract research organizations," and include Quintiles, Covance, Parexel, and P.P.D. (Pharmaceutical Product Development), a company that has operations in thirty countries, including India, Israel, and South Africa. (About fifty per cent of clinical trials are now conducted outside the United States and Western Europe.) These firms are hired to shepherd a product through every aspect of its development, from subject recruitment and testing through F.D.A. approval. Speed is critical: a patent lasts twenty years, and a drug company's aim is to get the drug on the shelves as early in the life of the patent as possible. When, in 2000, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services asked one researcher what sponsors were looking for, he replied, "No. 1—rapid enrollment. No. 2—rapid enrollment. No. 3—rapid enrollment." The result has been to broaden the range of subjects who are used and to increase the rates of pay they receive.

Most professional guinea pigs are involved in Phase I clinical trials, in which the safety of a potential drug is tested, typically by giving it to healthy subjects and studying any side effects that it produces. (Phase II trials aim at determining dosing requirements and demonstrating therapeutic efficacy; Phase III trials are on a larger scale and usually compare a drug's results with standard treatments.) The better trial sites offer such amenities as video games, pool tables, and wireless Internet access. If all goes well, a guinea pig can get paid to spend a week watching "The Lord of the Rings" and playing Halo with his friends, in exchange for wearing a hep-lock catheter on one arm and eating institutional food. Nathaniel Miller, a Philadelphia trial veteran who started doing studies to fund his political activism, was once paid fifteen hundred dollars in exchange for three days and two G.I. endoscopies at Temple University, where he was given a private room with a television. "It was like a hotel," he says, "except that twice they came in and stuck a tube down my nose."

The shift to the market has created a new dynamic. The relationship between testers and test subjects has become, more nakedly than ever, a business transaction. Guinea pigs are the first to admit this. "Nobody's doing this out of the goodness of their heart," Miller says. Unlike subjects in later-stage clinical trials, who are usually sick and might enroll in a study to gain access to a new drug, people in healthy-volunteer studies cannot expect any therapeutic benefit to balance the risks they take. As guinea pigs see it, their reason for taking the drugs is no different from that of the clinical investigators who administer them, and who are compensated handsomely for their efforts. This raises an ethical question: what happens when both parties involved in a trial see the enterprise primarily as a way of making money?

In May of 2006, Miami-Dade County ordered the demolition of a former Holiday Inn, citing various fire and safety violations. It had been the largest drug-testing site in North America, with six hundred and seventy-five beds. The operation closed down that year, shortly after the financial magazine *Bloomberg Markets* reported that the building's owner, SFBC International, was paying

Columbia Magazine
THE ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Reviews

You Can't Say That

by Nan Levinson

From the Palmer Raids to the Patriot Act: A History of the Fight for Free Speech in America
by Christopher M. Finan (Beacon Press, 352 pages, $25.95)

In November 1919, federal agents raided a community center in New York frequented by Russian immigrants, rounded up hundreds of students and teachers, and vandalized the classrooms. So began the Palmer Raids, a response to the threat of foreign radicalism after WWI, in which thousands of supposed subversives — primarily members of American Communist parties — were arrested, though most were never charged with any crime.

In October 2001, Congress passed the Patriot Act, empowering the fed eral gov ern ment to round up and deport hundreds of noncitizens it suspected of terrorist connections and expand its authority to conduct covert searches and collect information about American citizens. We don't yet know the extent of these programs because they are secret, but, as in the earlier campaign, people are currently being penalized, not for their actions but for their ideas, affiliations, and words.

With a little historical license, the intervening era could be called America's freespeech century; during this time, the government, as well as organizations that sprang up to suppress or defend various forms of expression, struggled to determine what the 45 words of the First Amendment really mean. Christopher M. Finan '92GSAS, president of the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression and chair of the National Coalition Against Censorship, has documented these fights in his comprehensive tour of free-speech controversies over the past nine decades.

Finan writes gracefully about the episodes, and he explains their significance with insight and occasional wit. He relies heavily on the work of other writers who have focused on specific issues in greater detail and nuance (a bibliography would have made tracking his sources easier), but if he charts little new territory, he has drawn a valuable map, with routes and boundaries clearly delineated.

Though the skirmishes he describes show America at its most intolerant and silly, Finan portrays the larger war as being won. That's true to an extent — even with the current retrenchment, the First Amendment is remarkably generous in what it protects — but censorship will always be with us. The instinct to ban offending words or images is too powerful to litigate or legislate out of existence. Thus, Finan's history serves as a useful reminder that, for all its glory, the First Amendment has been put to the test as often as it has been honored.

Finan organizes his review of this testing more or less by decades, beginning his chapters with an anecdote about a controversy, then circling back to fill in details, historical context, and legal benchmarks. Many of these stories will seem the stuff of familiar headlines: the government swinging from openness to secrecy and back again, money buying legal favor, fundamentalists pushing to substitute church for state, new technologies causing panic, civil libertarians caroming from optimism to despair to internecine warfare, and everybody, it seems, chanting, "I'm not in favor of censorship, but..."

Governments tend to censor in the name of national security, which often includes business interests, moralists, and reformers in the name of propriety and protection of the weak. The reasons remain remarkably consistent, as do the effects: covering other people's mouths, ears, and eyes, purportedly for their own good. The sticking points are words that make us feel unsafe or that challenge authority — frequently confused — and portrayals of sex.

(American depictions of sex have long been a dance of approach and avoidance; our way of accommodating that friction seems to be to excoriate and entice simultaneously — and then feel bad about it.)

Finan begins with national-interest issues, linking the Espionage Act of 1917 to the repression of radicals and immigrants, then moves on to the persecution of labor activists in the 1920s. He dates the birth of the civil liberties movement from this time, charting in detail the founding of the ACLU and the tactics of Roger Baldwin, its resourceful first executive director, who understood that when the government is hostile and the courts supine, enlisting public sympathy may be the only tool available to the politically oppressed.

The early years of the ACLU exemplify the face-offs that still typify free-speech fights, along with the capacity of the fighters to convince themselves that bad legal decisions and rotten laws could have been worse. Finan also sets up the everpresent tension between compromise and radicalism. Supporting popular speech is easy; it's the offensive words and ideas that put the First Amendment — and civil libertarians — to the test.

Until the 1930s, the courts read the First Amendment as applying only to the federal government. Then came the Depression, which, Finan writes, "created a new tolerance for ideas that had once seemed radical and a new appreciation for those who defended free speech." Civil libertarians were suspicious of the New Deal at first, as were the anti-Communists who, after the war, hounded individuals in the government, schools, and entertainment industries with loyalty oaths and blacklists. The chill of this second Red Scare lingered into the 1960s, when the government harassed political activists in the civil rights and antiwar movements with domestic spying and other destabilizing activities. But this time, Congress and the Supreme Court resisted, instituting significant First-Amendment safeguards for incendiary speech, student speech, and journalism.

Finan also dives into waves of American culture wars, marked by suspicion of intellectuals and by ever-futile attempts to wall off "good" art from "bad" porn. We learn about the Scopes trial, which challenged the teaching of evolution in schools; the Comstock laws — Finan labels this "the first national censorship regime" — which used the postal system to ban racy novels and information on such topics as birth control; the give-and-take over what can appear in books, magazines, movies, and comic books and on radio and TV; the dustups over public funding for the arts in the 1980s and 1990s; and the backlash against permissiveness stoked by the unlikely alliance of right-wing evangelicals, who sought to protect "family values," and left-wing feminists, who sought to protect women. He also examines prominent free-press victories that expanded protection for dissenting views by prohibiting prior restraint and making it harder for public figures to silence journalists through libel lawsuits.

In the final chapter, Finan presents his most original material, reporting from an activist perspective on our post-9/11 era, with its extreme government secrecy, reignited fear of foreign influences, and vilification of dissent. Temporarily shedding his historian's voice, he offers a firstperson account of ongoing efforts to guard civil liberties in the face of a collective national shrug. He notes that most Americans were frightened into accepting repressive measures they might otherwise have resisted and didn't think the Patriot Act affected them anyway until the infamous Section 215 came to light. It allows the government to monitor what anyone takes out of a library or buys at a bookstore. It also prevented librarians and book - sellers from so much as mentioning that the feds had visited them, a restriction they refused to accept. Their resistance helped loosen the gag and add a little accountability to the reauthorized Patriot Act in 2006. And it minted some of Finan's recent freespeech heroes, such as board members of the Vermont Library Association, who led the fight to repeal the offending provisions, and their senator, Bernie Sanders, who took their fight to Congress.

Of the post-9/11 crackdown, Finan writes, "As in the past, the greatest threat to free speech came not from individuals or private groups but from government." Governments do have the power to stifle speech, but so do churches, schools, employers, editors, and sometimes even our neighbors. Censorship is ultimately a transaction between people, and it is individuals who fight it most effectively, often one by lonely one. Finan introduces a host of well- and lesser-known advocates in all their complicated humanity, including the many jurists who upheld the First Amendment with thrilling eloquence.

So maybe the real story of free speech in America is how we came to understand the need to tolerate expression we dislike and to believe that persecuting people for what they say and think is un-American. We still do it, but somebody somewhere can be counted on to rise up to call it unworthy — of ourselves and of our nation. To Finan, that is notable progress. "We are fortunate to live in a country that includes many brave souls," he concludes. "They have made freedom of speech one of the glories of American civilization."

Nan Levinson is the author of Outspoken: Free Speech Stories. *She teaches at Tufts University and is working on a book about the antiwar movement of Iraq veterans.*

JOSH REYNOLDS *For The Times*

SHARED: *Poet Mary Oliver, near her home on Cape Cod, has put together a book of photographs by her late partner, Molly Malone Cook.*

A time for us

BY SUSAN SALTER REYNOLDS

Our World

Mary Oliver, photographs by Molly Malone Cook
Beacon Press: 88 pp. $24.95

USED to be, if you telephoned the poet Mary Oliver, her partner Molly Cook would invariably answer. She'd ask you to hold on a moment, feign footsteps and return to the phone as Oliver, making no pretense at a different voice (editors across the country routinely played along). Cook was, for many years, Oliver's agent. Oliver, everyone understood, was a bit of a recluse. She needed nature and solitude to create her poems. "Writers must . . . take care of the sensibility that houses the possibility of poems," she wrote in "A Poetry Handbook." Cook, who died in 2005 of lung cancer, at 80, was the sociable one.

These days the phone goes pretty much unanswered. "From the complications of loving you," Oliver wrote in "A Pretty Song," "I think there is no end or return. / No answer, no coming out of it. / Which is the only way to love, isn't it?"

Molly Malone Cook was a photographer, but she was far more comfortable promoting the work of others (Edward Steichen, Berenice Abbott, Minor White, Harry Callahan and Ansel Adams, to name a few) in her Provincetown gallery than with the idea of making her own work public. Cook wouldn't put her photographs into a book, no matter how often people, including Oliver, asked. After she died, Oliver decided to do it. She went through thousands of negatives, many never printed, and boxes and boxes of photographs.

Oliver notes, in her accompanying text, that her own work often prompts readers and reviewers to comment on the keen quality of her attention. But watching Cook take her photographs and work in the darkroom, she writes, "and no less watching the intensity and openness with which she dealt with friends, and strangers too, taught me what real attention is about. Attention without feeling, I began to learn, is only a report. An openness — an empathy — was necessary if the attention was to matter. Such openness and empathy M. had in abundance, and gave away freely."

The photographs Oliver has chosen reflect Cook's intuitive relationship with her subjects (even inanimate objects). The little girl on the stoop in New York City looks directly at the photographer, as does a kindly Robert Motherwell and a fierce, almost intimidating Walker Evans. Even though most of the photographs are dominated by a central person or object, there is a lot to look at in the margins, all part of the story. The stance of her subjects — reading a book, looking through a telescope — is always distinctive, creating the mood of the entire composition. The two photos of Oliver could have been taken only by someone who knew the subject well.

Several paragraphs on how the couple ate (simply, and often things that Oliver found on walks near their home, in Provincetown, Mass. — blackberries, bolete mushrooms, orach, clams, mussels) are a fond recollection of a time when there was not much money but plenty of love and creativity and determination. "In all our time

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Susan Salter Reynolds is a Times staff writer.

Oliver / *Our World*
Los Angeles Times Book Review
1/6/2008

together we were rarely separated," Oliver writes. "Three or four times I went away to teach, but usually M. would come with me, and we simply made our home, temporarily, somewhere else. And, while I always loved the stillness I found in the fields and the woods, our house was a different thing, and I loved that too. We were talkers — about our work, our pasts, our friends, our ideas ordinary and far-fetched. We would often wake before there was light in the sky and make coffee and let our minds rattle our tongues. We would end in exhaustion and elation. Not many nights or early mornings later, we would do the same. It was a forty-year conversation."

Cook taught the poet "to see," Oliver writes, "with searching compassion."

AND so, to look at these beautiful, artful, simple, photographs feels strangely intimate. As it does to meet the poet — still raw, two years after Cook's death — in their house overlooking Cape Cod Bay. On this fall day, the water a bright expanse of broken glass, she has agreed to be interviewed, only for the sake of the photographs. She sits curled on the sofa in a black sweat shirt and blue jeans, with a broken wrist from a tussle on the beach with Percy, her dog, and a bad case of bronchitis. "Wasn't it Emerson who said 'My life is for itself and not for a spectacle'?" she remarks. "I have a happy, full, good life because I hold it private."

Through the windows behind Oliver, one can see gannets diving into the water. A friend comes to take Percy for a walk. The house, which was once her office, is full of animals. Apologies for shabbiness. There's a huge Audubon lithograph of a barn owl in the hall. Upstairs are shells, necklaces and talismans. Over the bed are three of Cook's photos. In the corner, with the finest view of the water, is a bed for Percy. Oliver gets up early, at 5, and goes to bed early, except during the baseball season.

Oliver grew up in Ohio. She began writing poetry when she was 13. Writing and walking in the woods were both avenues of escape, but the poet doesn't believe in writing as therapy, or even, really, in talking about her past. "I grew up in a confused house; too much unwanted attention or none at all," she says, and adds, quoting Rainer Maria Rilke, " 'You must change your life.' This is another thing death teaches you. Everything vanishes; not a thing matters."

In 1953, when she was 17, Oliver paid her first visit to the home of Edna St. Vincent Millay, in upstate New York; later, she would move in and help Millay's sister organize the poet's papers. Millay, who died in 1950, was the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Oliver remembers this period with a combination of reverence for Millay and gratitude that she had the good sense to leave Millay's world before getting too mired in someone else's life and work. But it was there, in 1958, that she met Molly Cook. Six years later, the two women moved into the house by the bay. Cook had opened the VII Photographer's Studio in Provincetown in 1960 (before photography was fully respected as an art form) and shortly after that the East End Bookshop. In 1966, Cook hired an assistant, countercultural filmmaker John Waters, who later described her as "a wonderfully gruff woman who allowed her help to be rude to obnoxious tourist customers."

In the 1970s, Oliver and Cook worked as amanuenses for Norman Mailer, who summered for decades in Provincetown, in (Oliver notes with some amusement) the only brick house on Commercial Street. Mailer referred to his relationship with the two of them, she tells me, as "his best marriage." (For a recluse, Oliver is inordinately fond of the literary anecdote. About a third of our conversation is gleefully "off the record.")

The poet and the photographer were full of respect for each other's creativity. "I never showed my poems to anyone but Molly," Oliver says, sipping a glass of white wine. "She rarely said 'good.' She often said, 'You don't need that word,' or, 'Kill the adjectives.' Molly wrote a few poems herself" — Oliver smiles, a little wickedly — "but they were quite awful."

Oliver won the Pulitzer Prize for her 1983 collection, "American Primitive," and a National Book Award in 1992 for "New and Selected Poems." In her acceptance speech for the latter, she acknowledged Molly Cook as "the best reader anybody could ever have. She is the light of my life, and I'd like to thank her publicly."

BARBARA SAVAGE CHERESH *Beacon Press*

A LONGTIME RELATIONSHIP: *Molly Malone Cook, left, was a photographer and, for many years, a literary agent for the reclusive, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mary Oliver.*

Oliver is an ecstatic poet, in the tradition of Shelley, Keats, Hopkins, Yeats and Whitman. She believes in beauty and in the responsibility of the poet to elevate the soul. She thinks she has sometimes come perilously close to a kind of rapture in nature — the Stendhal Syndrome (most famously attributed to Van Gogh), in which the viewer achieves a kind of ecstasy, literally crazy over beauty. "The natural world is full of small and large miracles," she says. In "Blue Pastures," a collection of essays about writing, she referred to nature as an "antidote to confusion" and language as a "tool of consciousness."

"I'd rather write about polar bears than people," she tells me. "The natural world for me is safe and beautiful and leads to sublime thoughts. Beauty leads to virtue. Poetry speaks to that natural world."

She is also a poet of sounds (mutes, liquids and aspirates), playful with language, though she has written in "A Poetry Handbook," and elsewhere, about the formal structure of the poetic line.

MOLLY MALONE COOK *Beacon Press*

MOMENT OF TIME: *A photograph of Mary Oliver in 1964, taken by her partner.*

IT is astonishing that she has been able to maintain such distance from her readers. Just weeks before our interview, the editorial page editor of the Boston Globe named Oliver one of the seven wonders of Massachusetts (along with MIT, the Big Dig and the Great Salt Marsh). It's a quiet cult but widespread and fervid: Her poems pop up at many of life's turning points, including death. Readers go to her for solace, regeneration and inspiration. Her name is passed between generations, with a knowing look. After a few hours in her quiet, exuberant presence, one feels as though the raw sunlight in the room, the brightness of the water, the white wood and flashing wings outside the window are bleaching unimportant details from the day.

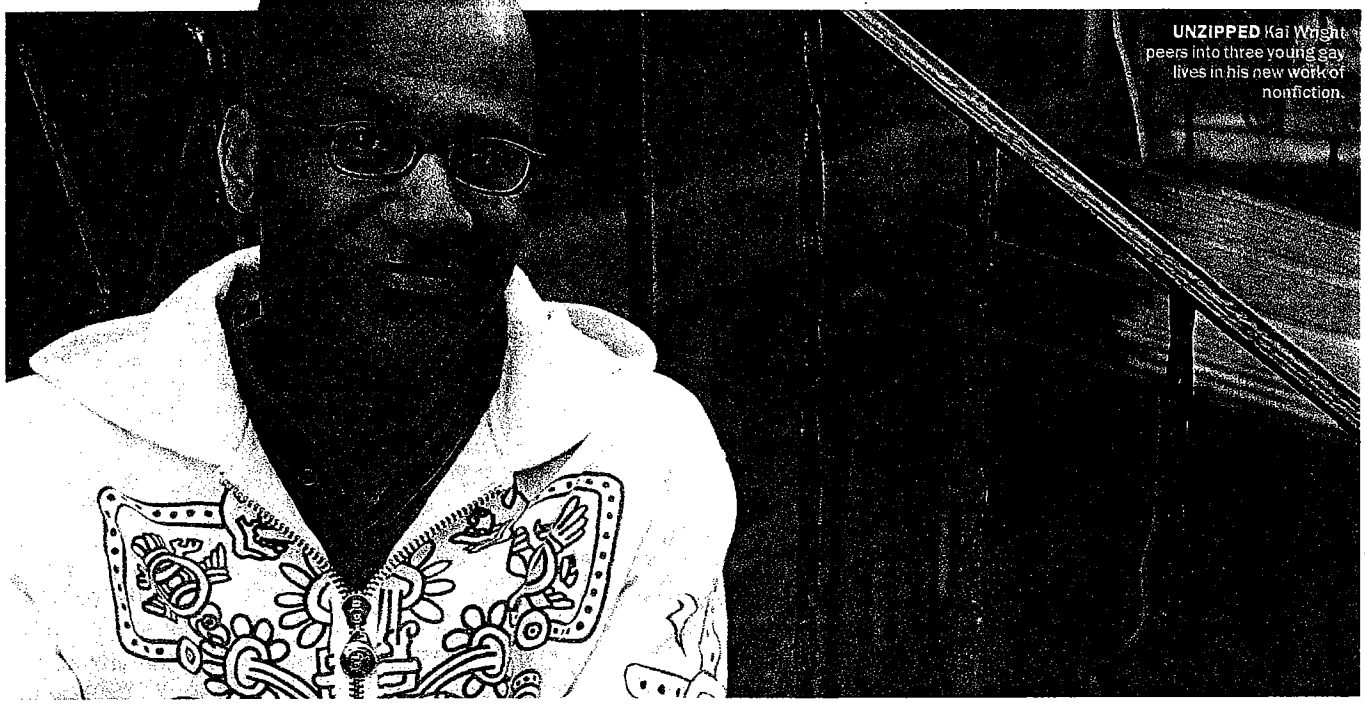
"A consonant cannot be perfectly uttered till joined to a vowel," Oliver declaimed in "A Poetry Handbook." The last photographs in "Our World" are of Oliver, lean in the arms and ankles but with a lushness about the mouth. There's an endless youthfulness in them — something summery and wind-swept. "A Pretty Song" continues:

This isn't a playground, this is
earth, our heaven, for a while.

Therefore I have given precedence
to all my sudden, sullen, dark moods
that hold you in the center of my world.

And I say to my body: grow thinner still.
And I say to my fingers, type me a pretty song.
And I say to my heart: rave on. ■

Wright / *Drifting Toward Love*
Time Out New York
1/17/2008



UNZIPPED Kai Wright peers into three young gay lives in his new work of nonfiction.

Minority report

Race, youth and sexuality collide on the streets of NYC in *Drifting Toward Love*. By **Beth Greenfield**

What if you're gay, and the "community" just doesn't include you? That's the sweeping, frustrating question at the heart of journalist Kai Wright's new book, *Drifting Toward Love: Black, Brown, Gay and Coming of Age on the Streets of New York.* The nonfiction tale is an intimate, at times heart-wrenching look at three young gay men of color who struggle to find a place—a bed to sleep in as well as a scene that allows them to be themselves without fear—even in NYC.

"Here, in what is arguably the gay cultural capital of the world, adolescents who don't fit into heterosexual norms and grow up in neighborhoods [that are] working-class, largely black and Latino, look in vain for their own place to call home," Wright writes. "Pride rallies rarely march down their blocks, and certainly don't linger when they do; the adult, largely transplanted, and almost entirely white and well-heeled world of Manhattan offers them no warmer welcome."

Wright, 34, sat with *TONY* in a Hell's Kitchen café and explained the roots of his new work, which began, in some ways, with a personal connection: The writer, an Indianapolis native and the son of an elementary-school teacher mom and physician father, came out at 23, after moving to Washington, D.C.'s queercentric Dupont Circle. "It started to dawn on me that yes, it was a gay neighborhood, but it was a *white* gay neighborhood, and I was a young black man. I didn't belong. And I didn't feel any better." He recalls that there was a "layering of race over sexuality, and the feeling that there had to be a choice." Though he eventually tapped into a black-gay scene, that feeling of struggle stayed with him as he began working his way into a career in journalism.

"My first reporting job was for the *Washington Blade* in 1997, and in some ways I've really been writing this book since then," he says. There were incidents that fueled his interest in the gulf between the black and white LGBT worlds, including the shock from outsiders after a shooting rocked a D.C. Black Pride celebration in 2001. Wright had tried to do a story for the *Blade* on the incident, but the folks involved wouldn't talk. "They were like, 'Who are you? Go to hell,' " he says. "Ever since then, I've been wanting to pick some young black gay men and dig deeper."

Wright found the perfect entry in 2002, when he left the capital city for New York and became an editor at *City Limits*. There he worked on a piece detailing the passionate fight for the Christopher Street piers, which is still playing out between queer youths of color and wealthy West Village residents. By following that struggle, he was introduced to the three main subjects of *Drifting Toward Love:* "Manny," a Brooklyn teenager who moves through the worlds of Prospect Park hustling, coke abuse and street activism; "Julius," a Floridian foster kid who hops a bus to NYC and enters a life of tricking and sexual violence mixed with community organizing; and "Carlos," a Nuyorican who floats between a group home and a troubled family life. (Wright changed the names of his subjects, even though they didn't object to their use, to protect the folks around them who were not given the choice to be discussed publicly.) Throughout the book, the men fall in and out of homelessness—not surprising, considering last month's New York City Council findings that nearly one third of NYC's homeless youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans.

"It was a *white* gay neighborhood. I didn't belong."

Wright thinks that much of the problem stems from the fact that such a large population of queer young people are never regarded or cared for by others until they have reached a point of crisis, when it's often too late. "For a lot of young queer people of color, [the attention] starts with the problem," he says. "They need to be engaged first as human." That's part of the reason his subjects were so willing to open up to him with their stories, he adds.

The writer's biggest hope for his book, he says, is that it will inspire gay adults—who historically endure their own coming-out process only to distance themselves from the plight of gay youths—to reach out to the younger ones. "What's shocking to me is how little adult gay presence is in the lives of these young people. You have the race question, but then you have the generational question," he says. "And in New York there is this blossoming black middle-class community. But if it just repeats the same pattern, who cares?"

Kai Wright reads from Drifting Toward Love *Tue 22.*
See daily listings.

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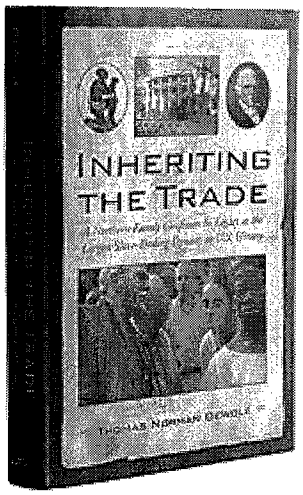

DeWolf / *Inheriting the Trade*
The Christian Science Monitor
2/19/2008

AN HONEST LOOK AT A SLAVE-TRADING FAMILY'S PAST

Thomas DeWolf tells of his voyage into some ugly chapters of family history.

By Marjorie Kehe
posted February 19, 2008 at 2:50 p.m. EST

Thomas DeWolf was 47 before he made a horrifying discovery: An ancestor of his, James DeWolf, was the head of the most successful slave-trading family in American history. The DeWolfs financed 88 voyages which carried about 10,000 enslaved Africans to the New World – and in the process became one of New England's most wealthy and powerful families.

Books editor Marjorie Kehe speaks with Thomas Norman DeWolf, author of "Inheriting the Trade".

Talk about having a skeleton in the closet. The only slightly mitigating factor was the fact that Thomas did not descend directly from James; James was instead the nephew of Thomas's direct ancestor, who was a carpenter from Connecticut.

But that bit of distance wasn't enough to cancel out the shame now associated with the name DeWolf. So when Thomas discovered a way to confront his family history head on, he jumped at the opportunity.

He learned that a distant cousin, Katrina Browne, one of the direct descendents of James DeWolf, was a filmmaker. She was hoping to gather as many DeWolf cousins as she could and to travel with them to Bristol, R.I. (where the DeWolfs had lived and traded), to Ghana (where their merchant ships used to pick up their human cargo), and to Cuba (where the DeWolfs had owned several plantations, all manned by slave labor).

Katrina planned to make a documentary of the 2001 journey, which she hoped would be a voyage of discovery for all involved.

The resulting film, "Tracing the Trade," has since been released and received a good bit of press (see "Family confronts the North's slave-trading past," Jan. 31, 2008). Thomas's book, **Inheriting the Trade**, shares his perspective on the journey; the making of the film; and the larger questions of guilt, shame, and recompense with which the family have struggled.

"How can the damage caused by slavery be repaired? How do we all heal? What are we, as white people, willing to give up? Can giving up something like money make a difference in the world? Are we responsible for everything our ancestors did and everything that will happen in the future? Who are we in respect to all this? Why should anyone care?"

There is much of this kind of musing laced throughout "Inheriting the Trade" – too much, in fact. It's hard at times for a reader not to get impatient and wonder if all this agonizing discussion this will ever add up to anything.

But if the discussion is abstract, the journey is not. The group of 10 family members stand in the places where their ancestors once trod and learn much in the process.

In Rhode Island, they have their eyes opened to the degree to which New Englanders were involved in the slave trade. (And it wasn't just a handful of wealthy merchants – money for the voyages were raised by selling stock to any number of ordinary citizens.)

In Ghana they stand in the prison cells that once held the terrified captives. Thomas in particular is sickened by the discovery that a slave prison coexisted in the same building as a church. The European clergy, apparently, found a way to make peace with the activity going on below them.

In Cuba there is less to see. The plantations the DeWolfs once owned there have disappeared almost without a trace. But even the sight of some crumbling ruins is enough to make an impression.

Then, finally, the journey is done. The cousins return to the US, share some final thoughts and reflections, and then – sadder but presumably wiser – return to their separate lives. For Thomas, "the summer of 2001 faded into a dot on my life's road map."

And if it had, this book would have had lost much punch.

But the summer did not disappear. Instead, it was overlaid with a whole new level of meaning when, in 2005, past indiscretions of Thomas's surfaced and threatened to lay waste to his life.

I won't give it all away here. Suffice it to say, Thomas was forced to take a good look at himself and he did not like what he saw. And as he thought back over his righteous indignation over the acts of his ancestors, he recognized that, "when I pondered the fundamental issues of power, privilege, and selfishness, I realized I wasn't quite as different from them as I imagined."

Thomas's actions do not equate with those of his ancestors, but nonetheless it takes an honest man to write such words and think such thoughts.

And it is that spirit of honesty and the willingness to confront the ugly parts of human experience that give "Inheriting the Trade" its value. Nowhere in the book does any DeWolf find any real answers to their questions about redressing the wrongs of their ancestors. But honest self-examination remains an excellent place to start.

• *Marjorie Kehe is the Monitor's book editor.*

The Washington Post

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

Report: Poor Farmers Looking to Biotech

By MARCUS WOHLSEN
Associated Press Writer

As genetically engineered agriculture takes off worldwide, the biggest growth in its popularity in 2007 came in the developing world, according to a report released Wednesday.

Farmers in 12 developing countries planted biotech crops in 2007, for the first time exceeding the number of industrialized countries where such crops are grown, according to the report from the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications, an industry-supported nonprofit that promotes the use of biotechnology to alleviate poverty and hunger around the world. The report was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and Ibercaja, a Spanish bank.

Of the 12 million farmers worldwide who sowed genetically engineered seeds, the report described 11 million as "resource-poor."

Critics warned the embrace signaled greater corporate encroachment on traditional agriculture. They also said that because so few genetically engineered crop varieties exist, adopting them could trap poor farmers in a cycle of debt to the multinational companies that own patents on the seeds.

And the critics said much of the harvest is used for animal feed, fabric and processed foods and not to people's plates.

"It has almost nothing to do with feeding people," said Claire Hope Cummings, a former environmental lawyer for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and author of the upcoming book "Uncertain Peril," a critique of biotech farming. "It's an industrial commodity for industrial agriculture."

Feed and fiber crops typically precede food in the development of new agricultural technologies, said Clive James, the report's primary author.

More and more land will be devoted to genetically engineered foods, especially rice, as scientists make advances and regulators approve new products, James said, adding that it is not realistic to expect all of agriculture to change at the same time.

The ISAAA advocacy group he was writing for counts several of the world's largest biotech agriculture companies among its donors.

In 2007, a record 282.3 million acres of the world's cropland were planted with soybeans, corn, cotton and other crops genetically altered to resist pests and herbicides, an increase of about 12 percent from the previous year, according to the report.

Reduced pesticide spraying and increased yields have brought down the price of production in "a very significant way and a sustainable way," putting more money in poor farmers' pockets, James said.

"Poverty today is a rural phenomenon. It is concentrated in agriculture," James said. "This technology can make a contribution."

U.S. farms continued to dominate biotech agriculture with more than 142 million acres devoted to engineered crops, led by soy. The country also saw the planting of biotech corn spike 40 percent over 2006 to nearly 20 million acres, driven mainly by the demand for ethanol.

Argentina led developing countries with about 47.2 million acres in biotech corn, soy and cotton.

It was second only to the U.S. in total acreage and followed by Brazil, which had just over 37 million acres of biotech cotton and soy.

India grew 15.3 million acres of genetically engineered cotton in 2007, its only biotech crop.

Spain ranked highest among European countries with about 173,000 acres of genetically engineered corn but 12th overall, behind Paraguay, South Africa, Uruguay and the Philippines.

European countries have been among the most resistant to genetically engineered crops, where health and environmental concerns have long kept them out of farmers' fields. According to the report, eight out of 27 European countries planted biotech crops in 2007, up from six the previous year, totaling about 260,000 acres.

James predicted that European Union requirements for increased use of biofuels would cause that number to rise.

"The momentum of global adoption will just bring Europe along," James said.

washington Blade

BOOKS

The laws of family

Nancy D. Polikoff says winning marriage rights for gays is only half the battle

ZACK ROSEN
Friday, February 22, 2008

Winning same-sex marriage rights remains at the top of the legislative wish list for many gay rights activists, but one lesbian author is urging readers to reconsider the way they look at marriage.

Nancy D. Polikoff, Washington-based lesbian author of the just-released "Beyond (Straight and Gay) Marriage: Valuing All Families Under The Law," believes that there are other ways of looking at the marriage equality movement.

"Marriage for same-sex couples will give same-sex couples what married people have, but that's often the problem in the law," says Polikoff, an American University College of Law professor who also helped develop the laws governing second-parent adoption and joint adoption for same-sex couples in D.C. "A gay man and lesbian...may make a commitment to raise a child that may or may not be a biological child of both of them, or two un-partnered people decide they're going to retire to a home together and need a certain set of protections for the wellbeing of their relationship."

Polikoff, who will be appearing at Busboys and Poets bookstore on Feb. 25, feels strongly that simply dividing relationships into marriage and everything else limits the rights of any kind of family. The impetus for the book was to educate a younger demographic on the true scope of marriage equality as it relates to the law.

"I discovered that a generation of young adults had grown up never knowing that the gay rights movement was part of a movement in support of diverse forms of family," she says. "They grew up believing that if you support same-sex marriage they had addressed all they needed to in support of the needs of LGBT family. I wanted to recapture that history and describe another way to think about the laws of family."

Polikoff has been interested in gay family law since she was in law school, but the issue has gained personal relevance for her as well. The author has a partner of close to 20 years and a daughter, but the message in her book is also relevant to heterosexuals in non-traditional relationships. Polikoff says she's heard a number of personal stories from straight couples that are disenfranchised by existing marriage benefits.

"Somebody on my own faculty is angry about having to marry her partner in order to get health insurance, because at my university the only domestic partners who can cover each other are same-sex — different-sex couples have to get married. That is the wrong way to think about employee benefits. It's better to think that if we have to cover families, let's cover families the way we decide them."

Local lesbian author **Nancy D. Polikoff** will read from her book 'Beyond (Straight and Gay) Marriage' Monday, Feb. 25, at Busboys and Poets. (Photo by Lauren R. Taylor)

The arguments in "Beyond Marriage" become more pointed in light of the 2008 presidential elections. In the book, Polikoff writes that the Bush administration has put $750 million into funding marriage promotion, based on outdated theories and that, in Polikoff's words, "the decline of long-term heterosexual marriage is responsible for all our social problems."

"This is the rhetoric of the right-wing marriage movement," Polikoff says. "[They're spending it on this] instead of actually spending it on programs that would really address poverty, income and equality and the other things that are core social welfare issues...It's not something I've heard the presidential candidates talk about, but I'm hopeful that any Democratic administration would try to address social welfare issues directly without trying to argue that everyone getting married is the way to solve those problems."