

Lex. refugees in the Great Recession

Is the American promise a reality?

By Beth Connors-Manke

In August, I began a series on refugees in Lexington. In my first installment, I looked at the work of Kentucky Refugee Ministries. The piece ended by invoking the famous sonnet on the Statue of Liberty written by Emma Lazarus:

*“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

The poem, entitled “The New Colossus,” sets a contrast between the old and rich-with-tradition culture of Europe and a more pragmatic, welcoming America. The poem rejects a “brazen giant of Greek fame” that stridently conquers land after land in favor of the “Mother of Exiles.” Just before asking for tired, poor, and huddled masses, the Mother of Exiles declares, *“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!”* The implication is that America has the ability to assimilate those who have been expelled by more rigid cultures, cultures that eliminate the unwanted rather than absorbing them into the life of the nation.

After I finished that article, I sat wondering why it seemed natural to end by citing “The New Colossus.” Obviously, the poem is attached to the American icon of immigration and beckons to refugees who have been oppressed and ill-used. But why, when we think about refugees, don’t we herald the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, the documents that assure political and personal freedom? Why is it the sympathetic Mother of Exiles rather than the tenets of democracy that we trumpet?

One answer is that the image of the Mother of Exiles is human and comforting while the Bill of Rights doesn’t qualify as warm and fuzzy. True. One may also be tempted to believe that America *really is* the Mother of Exiles to those who seek her shores; those in that camp may find the sonnet an artful commemoration of the spirit of the nation.

As I’ve been working on this refugee series, I’ve been trying to understand what the U.S. offers to refugees. Does America really give sympathy to the tempest-tost? Does the U.S. extend its most prized possessions—political freedom and economic stability—to those who arrive on its shores? Does

continued on page 3

Bank funds MTR

Demonstration aims to get people to close JPMorgan Chase accounts

By Danny Mayer

Friday, October 30
Main Street

Before

1:23 P.M. I am maybe fifteen yards behind them leaving from Phoenix Park, but I am already on the Chase side of the street, so really only a couple yards behind, at most. They number twenty, maybe, though more are on their way once class lets out. In five minutes time, some will be sitting on the downtown steps of J.P. Morgan Chase Bank, their arms entwined; others will be holding up signs for passing automobiles.

“They” are largely a group of student or student-age activists standing and sitting in front of Chase Bank in downtown Lexington. They are here together as part of a larger national day of action to call attention to—and to stop—the practice of Mountain Top Removal (MTR), a brutal and destructive practice of extracting coal that has systematically managed to destroy the ecological, socio-cultural, and economic landscapes of, among other places, large swaths of Kentucky lying 100 miles east of here.

Other people like themselves, in places like Seattle and San Francisco and Phoenix and Huntington and Charleston, also gathered in front of Chase. The bank, described on its website as “a leading global financial services firm with assets of \$2 trillion and operations in more than 60 countries,” also happens to be one of the major banks funding mountain top removal. As such, demonstrators throughout the nation were staging happenings in front of their local and regional Chase

banks to get them to publicly urge their corporate headquarters in New York City to quit funding mountain top removal, and for bank-holders to withdraw their funds from these banks should they fail to do so.

Here in Lexington, the twenty demonstrators arriving to the bank several yards before me were about to sit in front of Chase for three hours on this windy fall day not just for reasons of awareness, but for reasons of action.

I found out this backstory when I bumped into Marty Mudd, a physics graduate student at UK who was stationed at Chase a little after 1:00 P.M. that Friday. He was waiting for the demonstrators to arrive from where they were gathering at Phoenix Park, ideally so that any other late-arriving demonstrators (or, as it turns out, journalists) would know where things would be taking place. He was going to withdraw funds from his account once the demonstration began and hoped to meet with a regional manager in the office. He had started a list of names to get pledges from other Chase bank customers to withdraw their funds. It was a brilliant move. Hit the fuckers in the only place they care about: their bank vaults.

It was also a move with a history: two decades ago, as our national government and many corporations located in the U.S. continued to support a racist apartheid rule in South Africa, college students began demanding that their colleges divest themselves of investments in companies doing business there. Their activism in the early 1980s helped force both the U.S. to withdraw support of the country

continued on page 2

Silver Creek to Camp Nelson

3 Days on the Kentucky River, part 2

By Troy Lyle

Morning on Silver Creek

There’s nothing like the smell of coffee and bacon in the morning.

Though the morning’s coffee tasted a bit funny from my new percolator—like most things, the percolator needed to be broken in before hitting its stride—the bacon was something else. Thick sliced and perfectly seasoned. Otter had brought it back from his father’s farm in Dixon, Ky. As he put it, “The hog was free ranged, fed only corn and vegetables, no slop or hormone boosted feed.”

You could taste the difference. The entire life of this hog was painstakingly monitored so our morning’s sowbelly reached maximum succulence. It all had purpose, right down to the attentive butchering done by local Amish. Add in some locally harvested eggs and bread, cooked in the remnant bacon grease, and we ate like kings.

night sky. One filled with many more stars and planets, and a Milky Way, not to mention a moon of such immensity a few of us lost sleep.

Slipping Back Into the Silver

It didn’t take any of us long to break down camp, repack the kayaks and canoe and get back on the water. I was first in my Dirigo. I paddled slightly ahead and, while filling my bowl, floated upon three deer—a doe and two fawns—who had walked right up to the edge of the creek for a good morning drink. They didn’t mind the smoke rings I playfully blew into the treetops, nor my foul breath. I was an integral part of the river bottom now, one of the regulars. I felt like their prodigal son being welcomed back to a Kentucky River I had all but forgotten in recent years.

Next came Otter and Pack. Last was Rush. After knocking clumps of mud from our feet, the result of our hasty scramble down the mucky banks



Taking a breath just past Lock 9 on the Kentucky River.

About the time that the coffee and bacon smells saturated our surrounding Silver Creek campsite, Rush returned from his morning jaunt. He awoke daily before any of the rest of us and took long walks around the fields and bluffs around our campsites. Having slept wrapped in a tarp and a sleeping bag seemingly purchased in the 1970s, he could only manage about 5 hours a night. To make matters worse the moon had played havoc with him. As Rush put it, “that moon was intense...I was actually colder once it went down...like it was radiating heat or something.”

The intensity of the night sky was something we all noted during our breakfast meal. It’s amazing how many more stars are visible when you get outside city limits, outside the confines of light pollution. It is estimated that within a city the size of Lexington, some 50 percent or more of the night sky is lost in the glow of a sleeping city. And in maximum light areas such as downtown, that number can increase to as high as 65 percent. At 65 percent you can barely make out the North Star, much less the Milky Way. All this light aimlessly projected to the heavens so we can find our way to the local McDonalds, see our way across the mall parking lot or, I dare say, feel safe in our own homes. Ridiculous!

Here we were some 10 miles from Lexington, and less than 4 miles from Nicholasville, and it’s as if we were looking into an altogether different

of our campsite, we assembled at the mouth of the Silver for our morning smoke fest. There’s nothing like being high in the early morning at the junction of small and big bodies of water merging together. The rush of blood to the head, the awakening of the soul, teases the mind, relaxes it.

Acclimated to the wild after a night of sleep, we each broke rank and paddled at our own pace, finding our individual rhythms within nature. Out front once again, something deep within me began to stir. For the first time in nearly 10 years I felt the call of the wild. I felt a strong urge to paddle right out into the unknown forever. To a land that I tilled, sowed and feed myself upon; to a small home I built from cedar posts and mud; to a place where I hunted for deer and turkey and fished for crappie and trout; to a world that functioned on some ancient circadian rhythm, in harmony with itself and the land.

In truth, I wanted to be Harlan Hubbard. I had read how he and his wife, Anna, spent 34 years living off a riverbank on the Ohio River by tending goats, gardening, canning, fishing, weaving, gathering wood and scavenging for useful items that washed ashore along the river bottom of their Trimble County home. I wanted my own Payne Hollow, where I could make music with friends, paint in the early morning light, write by candlelight and ride a shanty boat from Heidelberg to

continued on page 6

Contents

- 2 — The Neighborhood
*Courts wanted. Apply within.
An Odd installation.*
- 4 — Film & Media
*Moore in love.
Review: Paranormal Activity.*

- 5 — Culture
Ponty: singular, and in town.
- 7 — Opinion
*Cool on coal.
Eva & Mike.
Letter to the editor.*

- 8 — Comics
*I’m Not From Here
Creekwater: Fishtowne*

In the next issue

- Return of “Misadventures.”*
- Glenn reviews No Exit.*
- Benton being Benton.*

The Neighborhood

North of Center is a periodical, a place, and a perspective. Keep reading to find out what that means.

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Generously Odd: deliciously strange

By Amber Scott

The dangling hands in the window of the Loudoun House in Castlewood Park are tempting, luring you into their grasp without moving a muscle. Something about them turns you from an upstanding gallery patron of the Lexington Art League into a cowering fool lying in the middle of the floor.

Each hand reaches for you, each with different levels of success at drawing you into its clutches. The piece, *Brain Cloud* by Richmond, Virginia artist Debbie Quick, makes you think, makes little bursts of ideas bubble up from your head and, if you're looking at it the right way and experiencing it like a weirdo, float up into the pillowy mass connected to the ceiling.

Brain Cloud is a head trip, as are most of the pieces in the LAL's latest exhibit *Generously Odd: Craft Now*. Curated by EKU art professor and artist Travis Townsend, *Generously Odd* was narrowed down from 1,600 submissions into the 61 pieces of art on display through December.

Unlike most of the LAL's exhibits, *Generously Odd* is saturated with installations, a type of site-specific, three-dimensional artwork designed to transform the perception of a space. The walls are doodled on, enveloping you with drifty little bits of strange. The fireplaces have become towns full of competing and nearly identical churches. Nooks and crannies

are mouse playgrounds inspired by a strange stream of consciousness drizzled with anxiety. Even dishes, everyday dishes like cups and plates and pitchers, have taken on a more expressive and comfortably unsettling façade.

"Artists are interpreting 'generous' and 'odd' in a lot of different ways," said Townsend. "Some of the pieces are strange and some of them look strange, but they're really dealing with things we're all familiar with, these little idiosyncrasies and random associations we all have. They have resonance even though they may seem so far out there."

As the exhibit itself twists superficially odd and makes it extraordinarily common, the individual pieces turn strange into beautiful.

Take the hair. Actual human hair sacrificed in the pursuit of craft that becomes a necklace fit for the winner of individual immunity and a modern locket that cherishes a person beyond what a photograph ever could. Out of context it could be creepy, maybe even

gross, but here, in this treasure chest of strange, you start to see hair as a fabric or a feather, just another adornment to glamorize and provide texture.

"In contemporary craft, artists are exploring traditional craft materials in a brand new way," said Townsend. "A lot of people are dealing with the idea of function or the idea of adornment in ways that aren't typical. It's a fuzzy area, contemporary craft, and it's one of my favorites."

That fuzzy area explored by the pieces of *Generously Odd* certainly shift craft out of the safety of cross-stitch and scrapbooking and push it into the realm of art. With that push come some unfamiliar feelings, most of which are also wholly satisfying ones even if they do leave you in a pile on the floor.

For more info on Generously Odd: Craft Now, go to www.lexingtonartleague.org or plan to attend a free Art Talk lecture with Curator Travis Townsend at LAL @ Loudoun House on Nov. 12 at 7 P.M.

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Coal (cont.)

continued from page 1

(by changing popular opinion) and rich multinational companies, who exist solely to make profit for itself, to see that their support for apartheid would mean significantly less returns on their investment.

During

1:30 P.M. On Main Street, in front of the Chase Bank steps, several pounds of coal are getting spread out in front of the five sitting activists. The number will later grow to seven and, when I am leaving nearly two hours later, to ten students sitting their asses down in front of Chase. Later still, I will see a picture in which I note twelve sitting. Smiling. Happy.

In front of these citizens, another group of students hold up signs for ongoing traffic. Another rides around on his bike, operating as a messenger ferrying information between the different small groups. Two more respectfully approach ongoing pedestrians. They ask if people are interested in why they are standing in front of Chase this windy and clear fall day. If passersby answer yes to that question, the greeters mention Mountain Top Removal and Chase's financial support of the practice, and if they are also Chase account holders, if they'd consider closing their accounts. Throughout the day, most people answer yes to the first question, at least. They are interested.

Five minutes into the protest, Ed McClanahan materializes out of nowhere, beating the first cop to the scene by a full four minutes. He will be a bike cop, and within one minute's time will inform the activists that "there's nothing wrong with [their] signs, but [they] can't obstruct the sidewalk." Two more cops arrive at this time, in separate cop cars. Julia Peckinpagh, a sophomore student at Transy and one of the street greeters, is approached by one of the police and asked/told to clean up the coal from the sidewalk.

As Peckinpagh, on all fours, cleans up the coal, a fourth cop arrives. A fifth will arrive within ten minutes.

Marty and Peckinpagh and some photographers head inside Chase so that Marty can withdraw his funds. He asks to speak with a local bank manager but is told that he needs to submit a letter to the corporate office in order to do so. He calls corporate and leaves a message,

but they don't get back in touch with him on Friday. Leaving the bank's inner sanctuary, he comes outside to say that nobody will speak with him.

A couple minutes after Marty and Peckinpagh emerge, the Chase security technician tells one of the police: "We want them out of here. Off our property." This apparently includes press, so we all relocate to the bottom of the Chase steps.

We settle in to several hours of chants, periodic bursts of MTR information read out with a megaphone, and periodic bursts of cars honking their horns.

This last bit surprised me a bit. I expected the stray horns, but I did not expect the sheer numbers and types of cars honking. At times, Main Street sounded like Fifth Avenue a couple hours before rush hour. Sporadic bursts of horns, long heavy-handed horns. Compact car horns, pick-up truck horns, even the long bellow of a USF Freight truck horn. New and clean cars, old and dirty ones. Black, white. Old, young. At least here in Kentucky, this is not a small, disconnected, focus group. It *is* the state.

After

I left the gathering of young activists about an hour early to hightail it back to BCTC for a meeting. On my way down Main Street heading toward my truck on Deweese Street, I stopped to talk with a man from Forensic Services who, like the several of the protesters there that day, carried a video camera. He was about to film the by-now nearly thirty peaceful demonstrators sitting in front of Chase and holding signs for passersby.

When I asked why he would be filming these people, he responded simply, "For the police." No shit, I thought.

What I said instead was, "I know that. What *for* the police department. How do you plan to use this video?"

"Hopefully, we won't need to use this," he responded with a light chuckle. I began to get agitated. I hate it when people purposefully evade answering questions. It's intellectually and morally lazy, harmful.

"OK, so how would you use this. What might it's purpose be in the hands of the police department, for whom you are taping this?"

The guy immediately changed his expression. "I can't answer that." Lt.

Roller, who had earlier been one of the five cops observing the protesters, had called him in. I'd have to get in touch with Roller, who was now gone.

In the past week, I had heard that type of chicken shit response several times, given by the same type of low-level functionaries who are always required to dole out the same non-answers. Thirty minutes earlier Darrel Hiler, the Chase security guard, gave me nearly the same answer when I asked if I could speak with anyone at Chase for a comment on the demonstration. "No," he replied. That person does not exist, or do they just not want to comment, I asked. "There is a person, but no comment," he replied.

Several days earlier, when in the midst of severe budgetary problems UK CEO Lee Todd and his Executive Board met at the top of the 18 floor of Patterson Office Tower to rubberstamp a new Coal Lodge for already-pampered UK basketball players, he and most of the rest of his chicken shit compadres didn't have a low-level functionary to separate themselves from those questioning students who actually decided to act on the civic values the school's

brochures claim to care about. So Todd and his pack of thieves just left. Retreated to a private room and waited for the kids to just shut the hell up and go home, watch some basketball, maybe follow Coach Cal on Twitter.

But if my final image of that demonstration on Main Street means anything, things may be changing, at least for the moment. Not many people can afford to get to Rupp these days; some people like to also keep the lights off.

As I walked away up Main Street toward Elm Tree, I looked back over my shoulders to see the Forensic Services technician filming protesters. As he filmed them, the students, unaware at the moment of getting surveilled, began one of several call and shout responses.

"Whose coal?" OUR COAL!

"Whose streams?" OUR STREAMS!

As I moved farther away, the last line seemed to mutate, and OUR STREAMS! turned into OUR STREETS! In my mind, I began to alternate the two, streams and streets, in tandem with the fading cadences.

To my right a stream of cars flowed down Main, honking their asses off.



DANNY MAYER

Activists sit in front of the Chase bank building on Main Street.

Refugees in Lexington (cont.)

continued from page 1

America sometimes offer sympathy *in the place of* political and social integration into the nation?

A Sympathizer’s Life

Here’s the backstory to “The New Colossus” and Lazarus’s life.

Lazarus was born on July 22, 1849 in New York City. Both sides of Lazarus’s lineage were well-established Jewish families in Manhattan. Scholars speculate that Lazarus’s family had Sephardic ancestry that lived in Spain and Portugal until 1492.

The Sephardim are descendents of Jews who left Spain after Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella decreed that all Jews who would not convert to Christianity be expelled from the country. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, “Throughout the medieval period in Europe, the Sephardic Jews were treated as elites among Jews. Many times they had a secular education and often had great wealth. In the 18th century, the Sephardic Jews who lived in Amsterdam and in London tended to discriminate against non-Sephardic Jews who wanted to pray at their synagogues by forcing them to sit separately from the rest of the congregation.”

This family history becomes an important factor when one considers Lazarus’s involvement with Eastern European and Russian Jewish immigrants. In 1881 Lazarus witnessed the first wave of Russian Jewish immigrants arriving in New York. Jews had long lived under oppressive and harsh conditions in Russia, but when Czar Alexander II was assassinated in 1881, Jews were blamed for the murder and pogroms—massacres of Jewish communities—ensued. Mass immigration at that time brought many Russian Jews to the U.S.

Consequently, Lazarus became involved with activism and charity

comes to shove—especially when jobs are at stake—we can quickly become xenophobic. Some feel that what America has to offer to the “wretched refuse” is sympathy, not full participation in U.S. democracy, in the U.S. economy, or even in the U.S. health care system.

From what I could tell from my time at Kentucky Refugee Ministries, refugees—people persecuted in their

end up homeless and starving. “But you have to take a job, even if you don’t want that particular job,” the group was told. The refugees were going to have to make hard choices and give up things that were not essential.

What counts as inessential for a refugee in Lexington? Individual cell phones, Internet at home, cable TV—all things that link you to a larger world and help you pass the time in a foreign

isn’t given the tools or the means to do those things. That, in a nutshell, I think is what’s really hard about the situation.”

“She feels like there are a lot of laws and requirements in this country. Yet she didn’t grow up here, and she doesn’t have the know-how or the language to comply with all of those things. She’s always asking for time. She says, ‘I know it is going to take time to adapt, and I need to do it little by little.’”

Watching her Congolese friend and other refugees try to navigate the American system has led Arms to question whether resettled refugees are really given a clear sense of what awaits them. One of the women with whom Arms works has said, “If I had known it was going to be like this, I would have never come.”

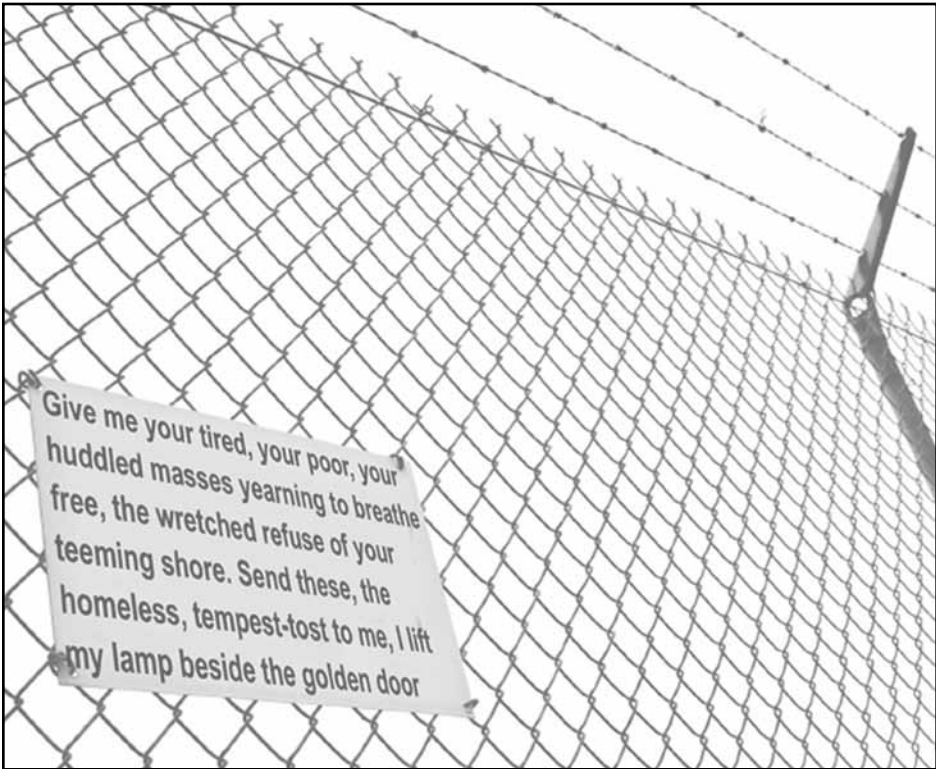
Arms sees the dilemma for refugees as a trade off: “I’m sure some refugees would tell you that they are very lucky, and they feel like things are so much better than they had in their home country. But it’s a trade off: they’re leaving huge hardships and suffering mostly in terms of being able to put food on the table or basic necessities, but at least it was a kind of hardship that they shared with everybody around them. It was familiar to them, and they understood how to navigate it. So here [in the U.S.] all these basics are taken care of, but they feel helpless—and it’s almost a worse feeling to feel helpless.”

However, with the recession, things that may have been assured in the past for refugees resettled in Lexington—work and the ability to pay one’s rent—are more questionable now.

In reality, it’s mostly bad luck that these refugees ended up in the U.S. when the economy couldn’t welcome them. KRM, its volunteers, and its donors are doing their best to mitigate the bad winds of fate for the refugees. What the dire nature of the current situation demonstrates, though, is the bottom line for refugees: they need a place that can accept them culturally and economically, ensuring personal and political rights.

Lazarus’s “New Colossus” ends with the wretched arriving on American shores, but the question is where do they go from there? Sympathy may help soften the difficult transition to a new place, but it doesn’t ensure that their needs will be met. That’s the practical side of welcoming refugees, one that needs to be more recognized in our national vision and developed at the level of the social service and legal systems. This would mean, too, that we re-envision why and how we welcome refugees. We would need to see them not simply as poor souls seeking comfort, but as individuals needing personal and political freedom and work—the things we as Americans hold very, very dear.

If you are interested in joining Kentucky Refugees Ministries’ work, you can contact the agency at 859-226-5661 or krmlexington@gmail.com.



A passage from Emma Lazarus’s “The New Colossus adorns a fence surrounding the Statue of Liberty, but the sentiment seems largely forgotten.

own home countries—don’t show up on U.S. shores because they only need sympathy. Like everyone else, they need personal and political rights, the ability to take care of their families, and work.

In August, I had the opportunity to observe one of Kentucky Refugee Ministries’ orientation sessions. This particular meeting was just before KRM was to have a review from its head office. As well, at that time KRM was preparing for the arrival of seven

land. Essential? Good shoes that can be worn to an interview.

To take the edge off the worry, one man joked that he couldn’t find shoes at the store. His feet were too small for the men’s section.

The meeting was an eye-opener, showing just how desperate KRM’s clients feel and just how dismal their situation is right now with the recession. These refugees find themselves in the precarious position of having to depend on an unfamiliar system rather than support themselves.

Earlier, I had talked with Rochelle Arms who volunteers with KRM refugees. She spoke of a woman with whom she has worked: a mother who is acclimating to the U.S. while also caring for her children.

“My Congolese friend has to be reliant on all these other people. If she could just learn to drive, she would be so much better off. And that would also then give her more hope. I think she’s often felt really depressed about being so helpless here. I think anything we can do to help her get to a more self-reliant place will also raise her morale. And her kids see that. It’s good for them, too, to see that their mom can do things, and for them to feel proud of her. Rather than to start to feel that she’s depending on them for interpreting and understanding this new world—it puts them in a hard position.”

Arms went on to describe how challenging the U.S. social service and legal systems are for refugees like her friend: “She’s being asked to do a lot of things very quickly when she

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work for Jewish immigrants. Various critics claim that Lazarus saw a difference between her place in America as a Sephardic, assimilated Jew and that of the recently arrived Russian Jewish immigrants fleeing pogroms.

Sympathetic as she was to Jewish refugees, Lazarus did not imagine that all Eastern European Jewish immigrants could assimilate to American life. Old world beliefs and a lack of education, Lazarus believed, would preclude their transformation into Americans. Nor could the U.S. “absorb so immense a heterogeneous body as the Jews of the persecuted districts of Eastern Europe and Northern Africa would form,” she wrote in *An Epistle to the Hebrews*. A proto-Zionist, Lazarus believed that Eastern European Jewish refugees should be repatriated to a recolonized Palestine.

In short, the poet who penned our iconic sonnet about America’s welcome had sympathy for fellow Jews fleeing persecution, but in the grand scheme of things did not seem to have faith in their ability to assimilate to American culture—or have faith that American society could assimilate them.

Let the huddled masses come, but also let them go somewhere else.

Living as a Refugee in Lexington

Lazarus is an interesting and illustrative example of the ambivalent attitude many Americans hold toward immigrants and refugees. We want to believe that the U.S. is the Mother of Exiles, but when push

new families so the non-profit was especially busy.

The agenda for the session centered on information about the review, announcements about school and work, and addressing participants’ concerns. The KRM staff encouraged the refugees to air, as best they could in sometimes broken English and through translation, their feelings and frustrations.

One man, part of the Bhutanese contingent, expressed frustration with his language learning and worried about not having a job. He knew his boys would be ok at school, but he was anxious about money and running out of financial assistance.

He was not alone in his fears. Other men voiced their concerns; the anxiety in the room was palpable. A man in a yellow shirt said that the International Organization for Migration had told them overly positive things about the U.S. right now, and the fact was that there were very few jobs.

Although one man reminded the group that it was “better to go hungry here and sleep in peace,” it seemed to be little comfort to those who had no idea how they were going to stay afloat in a place where they didn’t know the language fully, didn’t understand the culture, and had no employment. Right now, for these refugees the U.S. is far from the bucolic promised land of Lazarus’s poetry.

Realistic and pragmatic, one of the KRM staffers assured the group that their office was not going to let them



Dancers perform at the Living Arts & Science Center’s Day of The Dead Festival, held annually to “remember and honor family members and to show a colorful and mocking defiance of death,” according to the Center’s web site (<http://www.laslex.org/>). Photo by Brian Connors-Manke.

Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story*

Exposing the ugly realities of America's economic fairy tale

By Michael Dean Benton

“There’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.”
— Warren Buffet, (listed by *Forbes Magazine* in 2008 as the Richest Person in the World, worth \$62 Billion: *NY Times* Interview, November 26, 2006)

Capitalism: A Love Story (2009) is a fitting film to mark the twentieth anniversary of Michael Moore’s celebrated first film *Roger and Me* (1989). In *Roger and Me*, Moore examined the effects of the decision of General Motors CEO Roger Smith to close the Flint, MI factory, which caused 30,000 workers to lose their jobs, and how this decision economically devastated Moore’s hometown of Flint, MI. *Capitalism: A Love Story* catches America in the throes of a larger-scale economic disaster in which everyday workers are losing their jobs, homes and lives, across the nation, while those in the upper echelons of the economic elites continue to reap huge profits. To make matters worse, the Bush initiated and Obama administrated Bank/Finance bailout has totaled in the trillions of dollars. As too-big-to-fail institutions continue to return to the trough for new tax-payer funded handouts, working citizens continue to lose everything without any safety net offered to help them out.

This is the major focus of Moore’s newest documentary. He seeks to understand and explain how we essentially moved from a struggling democratic nation, at least outwardly, that attempted to develop a more equitable society, to a literal “modern day plutonomy” centered upon what John Tasini has termed “The Audacity of Greed.”

The phrase “modern day plutonomy,” as explained in the film, is lifted from a leaked 2006 Citigroup report (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/6674229/Citigroup-Mar-5-2006-Plutonomy-Report-Part-2>) in which the financial giant recognizes the fact that the top 1% of the upper-class dominate American wealth and are supported by the rest of the top

10%. The smart investor, the report continued, will invest in stocks of companies that cater to these wealthy elites because all signs indicate that they will get richer while the rest of America will lose economic ground. In fact, the Citigroup report cites an IRS report that the income inequality in America is at its highest levels since the Great Depression of the 1920s and that it is steadily worsening. The original Citigroup report was circulated to only the wealthiest of clients and was not intended for the broader public’s eyes. The report points out the plutonomy’s greatest strength is that those who are not a part of the plutonomy (everyone else) are generally kept in “the dark” about the realities of our economic situation. The cynic amongst us might add that not only is everyone else kept in the dark, but that they are actively misled to irrationally target others with their insecurities and anger (immigrants, gays, socialists, France, Muslims liberals, etc...).

The sad reality is that most of this manipulative propaganda, including the talk show pundit led teabagger rallies, are funded by the same people who are reaping enormous profits before and after the economic crisis. Once again, as cited in the Citigroup report for their wealthiest clients, what the wealthy elites should fear the most is that the ignorant public will become aware and angry about the true cause of the last 30 years of stagnant wages, the increasing income inequity, and the current economic crisis. The reason they worry about the “laborers” awareness of these realities is, again, from the report: “RISKS—WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

Our whole plutonomy thesis is based on the idea that the rich will keep getting richer. This thesis is not without its risks. For example, a **policy error** leading to asset deflation, would likely damage the plutonomy. Furthermore, the **rising wealth gap** between the rich and poor will **probably at some point lead to a political backlash**. Whilst the rich are getting a greater share of the wealth, and the poor a lesser share, *political enfranchisement remains as was — one person,*

one vote (in the plutonomies). At some point it is likely that labor will fight back against the rising profit share of the rich and there will be a **political backlash** against the rising wealth of the rich. This could be felt **through higher taxation on the rich** (or *indirectly* though higher **corporate taxes/regulation**) or through trying to **protect indigenous** [home-grown] **laborers**, in a push-back on globalization — either *anti-immigration, or protectionism*. **We don’t see this happening yet, though there are signs of rising political tensions.** However *we* are keeping a close eye on developments.” (“Plutonomy Report, Part 2”: Citigroup, March 5, 2006: p. 10)

The humanity, or genius, of Michael Moore’s newest film is how he brings us into the lives of everyday working people to illustrate the devastation of this rising plutonomic reality. We are brought into the drama of families being evicted from their multi-generational homes. We witness how taxpayers fund law enforcement as eviction enforcers for the plutonomic order. We witness Irma Johnson, the struggling widow of Daniel Johnson, an employee of Amegy Bank, learn that her husband’s company has taken out a “dead peasant” insurance policy that allows them to collect a tax free \$1.5 million payout when he dies. We listen to the individual story of a Wal-Mart worker of another grieving spouse who learned his wife had been similarly insured without her knowledge (or consent) by the corporation. We learn the larger scope of many giant corporations who insure their employees, unbeknownst to them, as a multi-billion lottery in which the employees become worth more dead than alive.

We also learn the history of how we have arrived at this moment. We learn about Franklin Roosevelt’s fierce battle to regulate Big Business and the institution of equitable taxes on the wealthiest members of society, including the revelation of his proposal of a second Bill of Rights that would guarantee certain economic rights to all Americans.

Furthermore, we learn how the very rich thrived under this new tax system and how the country’s

material and social infrastructure was strengthened by these funds. We also learn about the huge corporate propaganda effort that slowly demonized the New Deal taxes, the Labor Unions that fueled America’s new middle class, and the manipulation of the general populace to fear, if not actively hate, the federal government that could possibly protect them.

There are many highlights of those who actively fought to bring attention to these problems and/or struggled to defend their own civil rights from the abuses of the system. Highlights of active resistance include a depiction of the 2008 factory sit-in by UE, Local 1110 workers at Chicago’s Republic Windows and Doors. Another moving sit-in takes place in Florida in a working class neighborhood where neighbors join together to help a struggling family re-occupy their family home after an eviction. Significant voices raised in opposition to the plutonomy include VT Senator Bernie Sanders who discusses “democratic socialism” and the brutally honest priests/bishops who condemn the exploitative nature of contemporary unchecked capitalism.

Perhaps most tragic and sad, are the workers who believed the propaganda of the capitalistic system, and now are facing evictions from their family homes.

This is but the tip of the cinematic iceberg that Michael Moore presents us in his documentary masterpiece. As always, Moore does not neglect moments of humorous relief from his critiques, but in this film he shows a restraint that befits this most serious of issues.

He ends the film with a call to American citizens; I just hope that someone is listening. Sadly the corporate media film reviewers have done their best to demonize and dismiss this film in order to ensure that people avoid it. I hope you choose to investigate the film and the issues for yourself. It is the least we should expect of democratic citizens!

Capitalism: A Love Story is currently showing at *The Kentucky Theater* in downtown Lexington, KY (<http://www.kentuckytheater.com>)

Movie review: *Paranormal Activity*

By Stan Heaton

My wife hates horror movies. She gets into them and can’t get out, clenches her fists, tucks the nearest blanket tightly under her chin. It’s funny to see, but it leaves me without a movie-mate for anything scarier than *Scream*. So, I use bribes. For her to watch *The Exorcist*, I had to drive everywhere over the holidays. It was a fair trade and one that we repeated for *Paranormal Activity*.

The film follows Micah (Micah Sloat) and Katie (Katie Featherston), a young San Diegan couple plagued by a devious, demonic entity. The movie takes on a documentary style, but it’s presented as a piece of evidence in an investigation, and it begins when Micah buys a camera and sound equipment to record the strange events.

The movie succeeds on a lot of levels, but first and foremost, it’s legitimately scary. It makes your hair stand up and your heart pound. And it doesn’t try to achieve horror with jumpy gags and gory murders. Instead, *Paranormal Activity* returns to the bread and butter of the genre: the terror of seeing and the dread of not seeing. The audience is only allowed to witness the entity’s effects, never the entity itself. Because you can’t see the threat, you have no way of predicting its next move. You’re left feeling powerless and vulnerable, and the film’s got you. Every corner of every hallway

and every empty doorframe is turned into a site of potential attack. There are footsteps with no feet, bed sheets move by themselves, and the movie reminds you that subpar teen slasher remakes aren’t what keep you awake at night.

As in other movies that use the handheld camera technique (*The Blair Witch Project*, *Quarantine*, *Cloverfield*), the frame shakes, but it’s not the nauseous, puke-into-the-popcorn bouncing of those films. The camera in *Paranormal Activity* is frequently stationary and unmanned, looking on at the scenes. Part of the horror is created this way. So much of the movie suggests that the objects the audience can see and hear have real world equivalents. In fact, writer/director Oren Peli goes through a lot of trouble creating the illusion that the diegesis is a real stage that the camera and microphones objectively record. The opening minutes of the narrative are spent checking audio levels, adjusting lighting, and placing the camera so that the bedroom scenes are framed properly. Establishing the movie as a record of the real encourages the audience to treat the narrative as real. Once the entity begins to encroach on the film world, the viewer begins to feel like his own world is being invaded as well.

Despite this attempt at realism, the film cleverly acknowledges that the movie couldn’t happen without the camera. In the middle of the film,



Katie Featherston and Micah Sloat in Paramount’s *Paranormal Activity*.

Katie suspects that Micah’s camera antics might be the cause of the increasingly terrifying encounters with the entity. When she suggests that Micah stop using the camera, his response is, “Uh, hello? . . . It’s a little late for that,” as if to suggest, “We’re in the middle of a movie here!” There are also several moments where Micah’s obsession with carrying the camera to places where the horror happens becomes an obvious necessity of the film’s existence. For example, he frequently gets caught up in the excitement of a paranormal moment and rushes off toward the action, only to turn back to retrieve the camera for the sake of documentation and for the sake of the audience.

Another great strength of *Paranormal Activity* is the way it switches

from funny moments in Micah and Katie’s relationship to terrifying moments in their bedroom. In the bedroom scenes, the film uses intertitles with date and time information to literally cue the audience when it is appropriate to get scared. It’s an effective technique that made everyone in the theater around me suck in their breath every time one of these scenes came around.

After leaving the theater and returning to my own bedroom, I started feeling some of the effects of the movie’s horror. I kept my feet inside the covers, and I slept fine, but my wife had her bedside light on at five in the morning, trying to keep the demons at bay. I guess *Paranormal Activity* was worth a few car rides to see the in-laws.

Culture

Lexington burns on November 14 Meanwhile, Jean-Luc Ponty fiddles at the Singletary Center

By Nick Kidd

I’ve never been a fan of jazz-fusion. It’s not that I can’t appreciate the virtuosic talents displayed on such recordings—it’s just not my cup of tea. Arguably, fusion tarnishes the rich history of jazz by placing it in the crude,

classical and jazz and has subsequently led to Ponty establishing himself as one of the most innovative violinists in jazz history. Ponty’s parents were both classically trained musicians and music teachers. (His mother taught piano; his father, violin.) Reared in such a

In 1969 Ponty met George Duke while touring and recording for World Pacific in America. Ponty discovered that he and Duke shared an interest in fusing jazz with rock music, and the two teamed up to record *The Jean-Luc Ponty Experience with The George Duke Trio*, a record widely considered one of the first-ever jazz-fusion albums. George Duke was also playing with The Mothers of Invention around this time and he introduced Ponty to Frank Zappa, leading to Ponty’s appearance on Zappa’s *Hot Rats* and, five months later, his collaboration with Zappa on *King Kong: Jean-Luc Ponty Plays the Music of Frank Zappa* (Blue Note). All but one of the songs on *King Kong* were arranged and written by Zappa and half of them had already been released on previous Mothers of Invention albums. Nevertheless, the album helped both artists’ reputations for completely different reasons: Zappa was able to prove himself as a legitimate jazz composer; Ponty showcased his ability to play anything Zappa threw his way, from fusion’s rock rhythms to avant-garde free-form passages. These appearances thrust Ponty’s career down the path of jazz-fusion, which would grow to become quite popular by the mid-1970s as rock’s growing adventurousness coincided with many jazz players’ movement away from hard bop. By ’69, musicians from the previously walled-off genres were playing together with increasing frequency, and albums like The Mothers of Invention’s *Uncle Meat* (which came out the same year as *King Kong*) showed that rock composition was starting to edge toward more daring terrain, marking fertile ground for jazz’s virtuosic players who’d opted not to dive into the often-tepid waters of the growing avant-garde.

1975. He sold millions of records while with Atlantic, landing a dozen straight in the top five of the Billboard jazz charts. The jazz-fusion that marked Ponty’s early solo career was similar to what he’d made with the Mahavishnu Orchestra in the mid-seventies. But around 1983, after his prolific run of records began showing signs of creative stagnation, Ponty started recording synthesizer-backed compositions to play over, signaling a step away from the fusion camp and toward the contemporary and pop jazz he’s been playing, more or less, ever since. Ponty’s heavy use of synthesizers and sequencers from this era meant fewer contributions from collaborators, translating into a diminished presence of funk and fusion on his subsequent recordings. This progression allowed Ponty to shine as a truer solo artist than possible on his earlier records because he often played over his own synthesizer-driven compositions, diminishing his reliance on the improvisations and rhythms of guests. On his 1991 album *Tchokola*, Ponty broadened his sound once again by releasing an album built atop the polyrhythms of West African music, venturing into yet another creative idiom. In 1992 he released *No Absolute Time*, which combined both the sequenced backing tracks prevalent on his 80’s records with his new-found explorations of African music. His growth during this era resulted in a uniquely hybridized sound that’s both worldly (in its African percussion) and otherworldly (in its heavy use of electronics). Since *No Absolute Time*, Ponty hasn’t released many studio albums, though he’s toured the world several times over on the laurels of his back



Ponty’s 1969 recording of Frank Zappa compositions, entitled King Kong.

visceral hands of rock players who rely heavily on muscular rhythms. But, when taking the music landscapes of the late 60’s and early to mid 70’s into account, fusion seems both appropriate and inevitable. For better or worse, it’s allowed musicians from both rock and jazz to work in new tongues to explore uncharted sonic territory. Pioneering jazz-fusion violinist Jean-Luc Ponty will be playing a concert here in Lexington at the University of Kentucky’s Singletary Center on November 14. Ponty is credited with creating an exciting place for violin in jazz with bop-influenced phrasings informed more by horns than traditional violin. Ponty has given his instrument a unique voice throughout his career not only by playing in the style of horn players like John Coltrane and Miles Davis, but also by his use of electronic effects, such as Echoplex, MIDI, delay, reverb, phaser, wah-wah, and distortion on his violin. He has been a longtime player of the five-stringed electric violin and was one of the first known jazz players to use the Violecta. His accomplishments and adventurousness as a player and composer have brought him global acclaim while his penchant for sonically branching out has kept his a fresh and relevant voice in music since the 1960’s. Ponty’s Lexington appearance offers a glimpse of a gifted, courageous artist who’s never shied away from innovation to keep his career alive. He’s a musician who stands on hallowed ground in the creative employment of his instrument and he deserves recognition for being a jazz-fusion pioneer (in spite of my feelings about the genre). Ponty’s upcoming performance also gives me a chance to share some of Ponty’s story, a story that has strong ties to fusion but has its roots in both

musical family, it comes as little surprise that Ponty quickly grew into an accomplished violinist, entering the Conservatoire de Paris when he was sixteen. Two years later, after graduating with the Conservatoire’s highest award, the Premier Prix, Ponty joined the symphony orchestra Concerts Lamoureux. During his stint with the orchestra, Ponty also began playing clarinet for a local Parisian jazz group, picking up the tenor saxophone shortly thereafter. This was an important era in jazz history, dominated by records like *Kind of Blue* and legendary players like John Coltrane. Ponty, like many others, was greatly influenced by this period of American jazz and he longed to incorporate his violin playing into the language of horn players like Coltrane and Miles Davis. He soon abandoned both clarinet and saxophone and dedicated himself to developing his violin playing into an expressive style similar to what was being created by jazz saxophonists of the day. Shortly after leaving the Concerts Lamoureux, effectively choosing jazz over classical, Ponty released a bop-styled LP in 1964, *Jazz Long Playing*. This release was also indebted to European jazz players and composers and helped Ponty gain reput as a soloist and bandleader. Three years later, just after appearing on the live record *Violin Summit* with fellow French jazz violin heavyweight Stephane Grappelli, Ponty was invited to play for the first time in America at the Monterey Jazz Festival where he was enthusiastically received. After returning home, Ponty toured extensively throughout Europe and soon landed a deal with an American record label, World Pacific Records, on the strength of his growing reputation in Europe and the buzz surrounding his performance at Monterey.



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After releasing four noteworthy American recordings in 1969 alone, Ponty returned to Europe and toured extensively with The Jean-Luc Ponty Experience. Ponty found his talents were en vogue thereafter, leading to high profile opportunities such as playing on two Elton John songs from *Honky Chateau* (a #1 record in 1972) and an invitation to tour with The Mothers of Invention in 1973 (leading to Ponty’s immigration to America). After two tours with the Mothers, Ponty joined the John McLaughlin-led Mahavishnu Orchestra for two tours and two albums in 1974-75. McLaughlin, from England, had emigrated to the U.S. just four years before Ponty to join Tony Williams’ jazz-fusion band Lifetime. (Williams had gained fame playing in Miles Davis’ “Second Great Quintet” from 1963 to 1969.) Through his connection to Williams, McLaughlin was invited to play on Miles Davis’ legendary fusion records *In A Silent Way*, *A Tribute to Jack Johnson*, and *Bitches Brew*. (McLaughlin had also recorded *Love, Devotion and Surrender* with Carlos Santana in ’73.) Thus, it wasn’t long after moving to America that Jean-Luc Ponty found himself playing amongst some of the most distinguished players in jazz-fusion history, though fusion was still quite young when he joined Mahavishnu in ’74. After a couple records and tours with the Orchestra, Ponty began his career as a solo artist by signing with Atlantic Records in

catalog while maintaining a strong influence of African music in his repertoire. Two of his most recent studio records, 2001’s *Life Enigma* and 2007’s *The Acatama Experience*, were critically well-received additions to the Ponty catalog, helping Ponty reassert himself for the new millennia as an innovative composer and player whose gifts remain a force to be reckoned with. With Ponty’s tendency to switch styles just as you start figuring him out, it’s fairly pointless to predict just what’s in store for his November 14 Lexington performance. One thing is certain, though: when Ponty’s playing, something new is just around the corner.

Selected Ponty discography

Live at Donte’s (Blue Note, 1969)

Open Strings (1973)

Upon the Wings of Music (Atlantic, 1975)

Enigmatic Ocean (Atlantic, 1977)

Storytelling (Columbia, 1989)

Jean-Luc Ponty in Concert (J.L.P., 2004)

The Acatama Experience (Koch, 2007)

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Silver Creek to Camp Nelson (cont.)

continued from page 1

Highbridge, or even further, down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, out into the Gulf of Mexico.

Paddling to Paint Lick

By now the sun had risen above the Palisades and mid day was upon us. We had just passed Hunters and Sawmill Runs, and at some point on the Madison County side of the river, the land of Blue Moon Garlic. Now all that was left was the straight paddle to Paint Lick Creek. I looked back at the others after another nip from the bottle.

Each enjoyed the beautiful day in their own way. Pack worked hard on his paddling technique, purposely alternating his sitting position to reduce strain and maximize thrust. Otter’s path appeared as drunk as ever as his yak wobbled forward across the river like a cross-eyed chicken. Rush stared into the heavens and periodically sang out, searching for signals, testing for echoes.

Having spent most of Friday pushing forward and paddling hard, we decided to set up camp early the next day in an attempt to free up more down time. What we really wanted more than anything was to play and explore.

We entered Paint Lick Creek together and paddled a mile upstream to a small shoals that required a minor portage. As Pack dragged his canoe across the rocks blocking our passage and explored further up creek, the rest of us looked around for a suitable nearby spot to camp. At first we didn’t see any place to camp. The creek was relatively deep here at the shoals and what land presented itself was far too rocky for setting up tents or sleeping.

Luckily Rush noticed a flat ravine roughly 20 feet above the last riffle. He and I went to inspect. What we found was the most beautiful of camping spots. There was wood everywhere, solid yet soft ground to sleep on, and a primo view over the creek to a field of hay bales on the other side.

After quickly assembling camp and stacking firewood, we decided to enjoy the afternoon exploring the creek, the adjacent field and the palisades to our rear. We camped on the Madison County side. Across the creek from us was Garrard County, and back down at Paint Lick’s mouth and across the Kentucky River sprawled Jessamine County. It isn’t often you get to spend an afternoon in three Kentucky counties. Realizing the treasure that lay ahead we took an extra pull or two

multi-colored assortment of fingerling potatoes we harvested earlier that week. Fucking awesome. Next came Otter’s pork chops, some of Rush’s Cumin cheese and a baguette. Dessert consisted of two small Moon and Star watermelons Pack and I raised at our Keene farm.

I can’t remember ever having a better meal. Life is always more fulfilling when you have the least. It’s as if all the world’s conveniences only serve to derail what’s truly important—fellowship, community, nature.

Pixelating Away on the Paint Lick

After dinner we decided to take a trip back down the Paint Lick to the open river. By now I was half way through a bottle of 10 year scotch and the evening’s third bowl.

It was another moon soaked night, every bit as intense as the night before. I contemplated wearing my sunglasses, but judgment got the better of me. I had no more than stepped into my kayak when BAMMMM—nature called.

Being inebriated and honestly unsure as to whether or not exiting was an option, I decided to lighten my load over the side of my yak. Clear of mind and sensing my inebriation, Pack immediately hatched a plan to help me out. He paddled up alongside me and docked on my port side, the moon light illuminating brief flashes of a devilish grin on his face as we floated lazily downstream, our boats now horizontal to the current.

Turning to me, he instructed, “Dirigo, grab my hands. My vessel and I will act as a steadying force while you cantilever your rear the other way, over starboard.” Pack’s fiendish plan almost had its intended effect, as I nearly went in before I could even unbutton my trousers. There was no choice, I had to head to shore.

Pack, Rush and Otter went ahead without me. I quickly made my way back to camp and relieved my situation. I couldn’t have been more than 5 minutes behind them. Despite my paddling hard, I couldn’t hear them.

The moonlight played tricks on the smooth pools of Paint Lick, suddenly making the creek foreign. I couldn’t tell where the water ended and land began. It reminded me of a psilocybin experience from earlier this spring. I had eaten an eighth out in Keene and managed to lose my way back to the farmhouse, which I later discovered was only some 100 yards from where I sat to recover and ride the mental storm out.

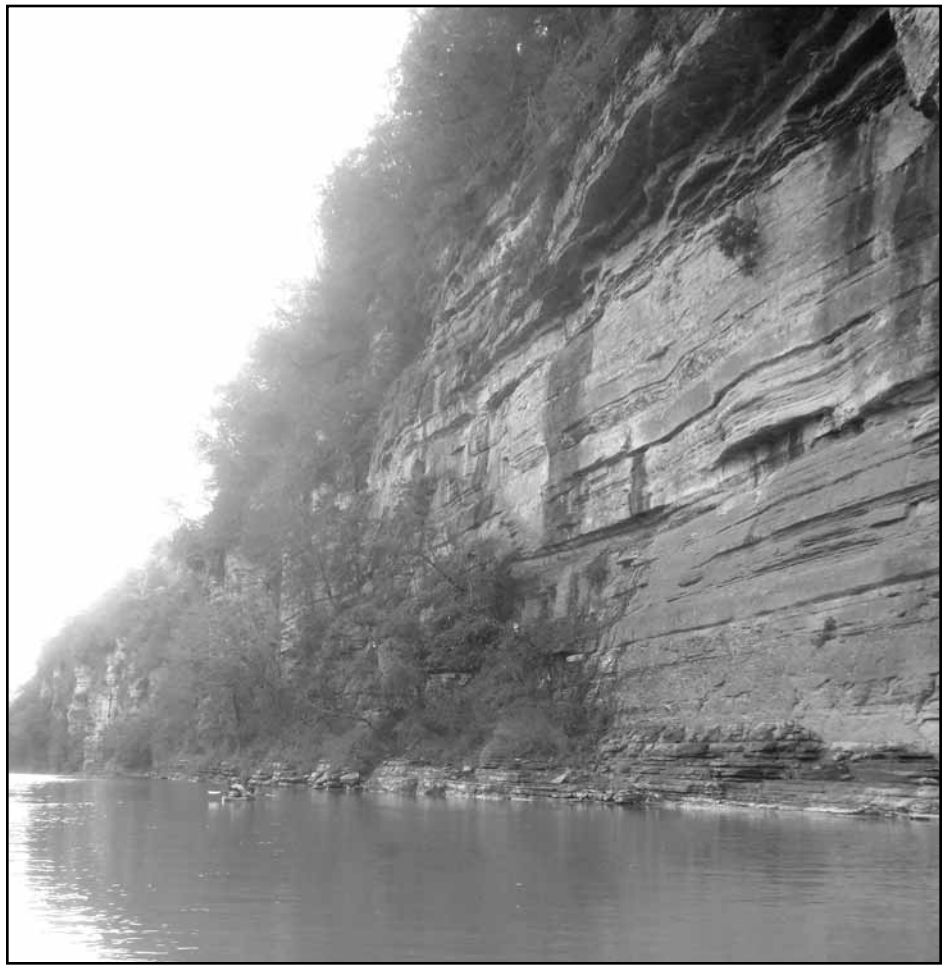
Paint Lick this night were not unique. The intense shadows and insanely bright moon reflections broke up the entire party; we all paddled the twisty creek alone, in a quiet sublime awe.

Here is Rush’s journal entry of our night on Paint Lick:

“The highlight of the trip was the moonlit paddle on Paint Lick for god to file away in his vicariously lived pleasure spot that shoulders the other great memories of the universe. The full moon rising, the stars bright, Dirigo attempting to poop off the side off his kayak, the black ink shadows on the still water so intensely contrasted by moonlight almost too bright to bear, the glowing ‘things’ on the banks that looked like earthbound stars, fish slapping the water as loud as a .22, and when we finally made it to

couldn’t afford to miss our take out time, so Sugar would have to wait for another day. An hour later we floated up to Lock 8. This time there was no construction, or should I say destruction, like what we saw at Lock 9. Instead Lock 8 appeared before us as an overgrown and long forgotten relic from some distant past, like a scene from *Planet of the Apes* or *The Omega Man*. To make matters worse we espied no direct route up and around the lock. You can’t float down dams or locks. They’re deathtraps, full of undertows and black holes.

I would have loved to travel the Kentucky in its heyday, back in the 50s or 60s when all the locks functioned and the state paid a lockmaster to operate each. It must have been a charge to have witnessed the numerous shanty



DANNY MAYER

The pack keeps pace on the Big Muddy.

the Kentucky, we were greeted by a full moon view over Madison County, the big dipper on the horizon of Jessamine County, and a great horned owl to sing to us. After some quiet floating and a slow meander back up to the rocks where we had our tidy camp 20 feet above the creek, we had a long slow walk in a well tended, 40 or so acre field scattered with round bales. It was heaven under the moon.”

My last memory was the sound of my tent zipper closing as I peered out one last time into the night. My vision not yet secure, I stared aimlessly while soft flames flickered, casting shadow dancers who swayed me into sleep.

A New Day

Rush once again woke before any of us. He regaled us with stories of his morning adventure as food was being prepared.

“I took a morning walk on the quiet cliffs and then a morning float on the creek with an otter couple. They were concerned about me, not only because of my presence, but because their home was in the roots of the dead Sycamore tree just below our camp. They swam around within a few feet of me and would pop their little seal like heads above the water and watch, and watch, and watch me some more. I left them some boiled eggs and sprouted grain pita bread as payment for our stay.”

Good karma! As per usual breakfast rocked. We fried the last of Otter’s ham steak, broke what leftover baguette remained and heated some channa masala from the Co-Op.

By now we were starting to become a well oiled team. We broke camp and reloaded our boats. Our plan was simple for this Sunday. We needed to make Camp Nelson by 5 P.M. for take out. That left 11 miles to paddle and a portage—all in 6 hours.

It took our small armada 2 hours to make the mouth of Sugar Creek. We rowed half a mile up its winding, corkscrew bends before deciding to head back to the big, muddy Kentucky. We

and paddleboats, the barges full of sand and bourbon barrels, or the week-enders simply enjoying an afternoon on the river. Back then this river had a purpose. Now it’s an afterthought, or worse, a reservoir for Lexington’s water supply. What a loss!

Downstream Naked

In the absence of a functioning lock, portaging Lock 8 required a fierce group effort. First we sent Rush and Otter up the bank with a rope. Once they scaled the 25 feet to flat land, they dragged each vessel, complete with gear, up the sloppy slope. No small task, but they managed. Once atop, we tag teamed each boat by carrying, two at a time, the kayaks and canoe some 250 yards around the lock and down the other side to the lower river.

Apparently, my brain and body sizzled from exhaustion, as I fell into the water at our post-portage put-in below the lock. In retrospect, I should have taken my time and caught my breath before trying to reenter my Dirigo. I didn’t. I stumbled forward, unsteady yet confident, stepped in the kayak and fell face forward into the cold, dark water, fully clothed.

Luckily the water was only 3 feet deep, else I would have drowned. At this point I didn’t have a single dry item to wear. I unfortunately left my second set of clothes out the night before, and they were dew soaked. I had but two choices: sit in nasty wet clothes for the last 3 miles of our journey, or paddle into the sunset naked and proud.

I chose the latter. October nakedness was a great choice. I had wanted to get out of Lexington, to free my mind, to return to the primal. As I stepped out of my Dirigo for the last time, my ass and balls finally freed from their sheltered existence, I couldn’t help but recall the sage observation made by Harlan Hubbard in his book *Shantyboat: A River Way of Life*:

“A river tugs at whatever is within reach, trying to set it afloat and carry it downstream.”



from the pipe while Otter and myself guzzled away at the Laphroaig.

Buzzed and burning with desire we disbanded. Rush portaged and paddled up the next riffle, traversed the muddy bank and headed into the open fields of Garrard. Pack mulled over various tarp tent techniques. I helped him out, making sense of the physics to construct a shelter and storage space from the single tarp. It was a chance for me to practice my knots. Should we use the Clove Hitch or the Bowline? Maybe the Sheepshank? Meanwhile, Otter worked his way back down the 20 feet or so to the water.

We reconvened for dinner over a pan of delectable goulash. I was at the helm and let my euphoria get the best of me. I decided the best use of Otter’s organic sausage would be to fry it up in a pan with some red onion and a

The intense moonlight pixelated my eyesight and made navigation very precarious. Even more intense were the luminescent, glowing, miniature orbs on the banks. At the time I thought they were fireflies sent to guide me to safety. I later learned it was foxfire, a luminescent fungi usually found in rich soil or on decaying logs. Its light is the result of a chemical reaction within the fungi pigment molecules—real trippy shit!

Amazingly, traveling down a creek that was going in only one direction, I felt lost, like some storm swept lotus eater out at sea off the coast of North Africa. Disoriented, I could make sense of none of this. Not the creek, nor the shore.

When at last I reconvened with everyone at the confluence of the Kentucky River for one beautiful night of paddling, my experiences on the

Opinion

They shoot...they score! Big Blue’s domain of greed, power, and corruption

By Andrew Battista

The University of Kentucky continues to receive national media coverage for the embarrassments that take place on its campus and in its administrative meetings. The latest shameful news is that the Board of Trustees met last week to consider whether or not their university would accept Joe Craft’s proposed gift of \$7 million and the handcuffed obligation to spend it on a new dorm for its basketball players. The new dorm would be required to have the name “coal” in it, mainly because Craft is the CEO of Alliance Coal, LLC, an energy firm that extracts resources from Kentucky and other Appalachian states yet locates its corporate offices and public relations firm in Tulsa, OK.

As expected, the Board of Trustees didn’t spend much time worrying about the ramifications of their decision and quickly voted to accept the gift and move forward with plans to build the new “Wildcat Coal Lodge.” The idea that private industries can strong-arm university policymakers and push their brand vis-à-vis naming college buildings has disconcerted many people recently, and now left-leaning national media outlets have turned their attention to UK’s “Wildcat Coal Lodge” controversy, and not without condescension and pity.

For instance, consider what sports journalist Dave Zirin, an editor at *The Nation* and the host of *Edge of Sports Radio*, had to say on MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow Show last week. Zirin smirked that building a “green” (i.e., energy efficient) dorm and then naming it after coal is like opening a vegetarian restaurant and calling it McDonald’s. He lamented that the coal lodge would disrespect the legacy of Joe B. Hall, the championship-winning coach for whom the current dorm is named. And he argued that the name is just plain dumb.

Their short conversation, albeit misguided in its guffawing focus on the idiocy of naming buildings after coal, did cover important ground. Maddow pointed out that private industry holds inordinate influence in college athletics, yet their five-minute interview is another reminder that we need to supplement our news diet with better sources than cable television coverage.

Joe Craft has already donated millions to the University of Kentucky Athletics Association so it could build a new basketball practice facility. Yet what neither Maddow nor Zirin seemed to realize is that Craft contributed only \$6 million to that previous project, the total cost of which—\$30 million—forced the university to dip into its coffers, which ultimately come

from state tax payers. At the time, the decision to build a superfluous practice facility defied advice from university teaching faculty, who protested that UK cannot in good conscience subsidize the Athletic Association while the university is clearly suffering from a “crisis in undergraduate education.”

Now, Craft has organized a group of influential coal barons, bankers, and other Lexington moguls to form a group called “The Difference Makers.” A *Kentucky Kernel* feature story recently listed these people, many of whom turn a profit by exploiting Kentucky’s land, people, and economies. “Difference Makers” like Craft, Luther Deaton of Central Bank, and Ted Doheny, Executive Vice President of the mining machine manufacturer Joy Global, have access to the highest percentage of concentrated wealth in the state. While they could use their financial clout and resourcefulness to raise money for the university’s general education fund, they choose instead to feed its already bloated athletics department.

Craft’s group had the audacity to announce their plans during an on-campus forum designed to showcase the university’s reliance on the non-renewable resource. Almost all of the university’s electricity comes from burning Kentucky coal, and various university leaders met to discuss the

future of coal and our responsibility as an institution to seek alternatives. Instead, it became another forum for Kentucky’s coal industry to advance its agenda vis-à-vis UK programming.

Back to Maddow’s question about corporate influence in higher education. Doesn’t this decision by the Board of Trustees constitute an egregious violation of the line between

continued on page 8

Letter to the Editor

As a regular contributor to *North of Center* I was disturbed to notice in the latest edition (1.12: 10/21/09) that an essential picture for my essay “A Different Hope: What I Learned in Pittsburgh, Part 2” was left out. It was agreed that this picture would be on the cover of this issue and that it was essential to illustrate the “mainstream media’s complicity with the police state” aspect of the story.

I realize we are all working for “free” (and freedom of expression), and, that most of us are overworked wage slaves in our regular, paying jobs. Thus, in the spirit of positive comradeship, as opposed to negative finger-pointing, I propose:

1. Show my fucking picture—Now!!!
2. Print a formal apology to my readers.
3. Provide a statement that this “accidental” oversight is not actually an act of your own compliance with the police state.
4. Change your drug of choice when formatting the publication to one that will actually increase your attention span.

Once again, this critique and suggestions are provided with love and affection.

Solidarity, Michael Dean Benton

Editor responds:

1. *We apologize to your readers.*
2. *In the interests of debunking the suggestion that our failure to run Benton’s image was an act of our “compliance with the police state,” we offer some greater context on the matter: two weeks before it appeared in print, NoC agreed to run the image in question on the front page as a visual counterpart to Benton’s second installment of his riveting narrative on the G20. In fact, this was the plan right up until the moment that the author welched on his commitment to produce a wrap-up piece on the Boomslang event at the very last second, via Gmail chat-line—this after a night out drinking with socialists and a mere two hours before the paper was set to go to print. Benton should have been fired, but since he collects no paycheck from us and is an ox of a writer, all we held dear to him was the picture. Far from an act of compliance with the state, the paper’s “failure” to release the photo was a classic case of good ol’ fashioned revenge.*
3. *Caffeine and methedrine it is!*

The picture in question appears below.

Address your correspondence to
noceditors@yahoo.com.

Don’t cry for me, Lexington Thriller in the year of the death of the King of Pop

By Beth Connors-Manke

If I say the name ‘Eva Perón,’ I’m willing to bet my *North of Center* salary (a monthly meal at Al’s) that you think of a blonde Madonna in *Evita*, standing at a window, recognizing the people. “Don’t cry for me, Argentina” is also floating through your head.

Now think of Michael Jackson at a window, addressing his subjects. You know that scene, too. Little Prince Michael II dangling over the balcony with Jackson fans below.

Oh, the figures who move us. Born out of wedlock, Eva grew up poor and dreamt of becoming a movie star. As a teenager, she moved to Buenos Aires to pursue her dreams; she did well as a radio actress and even better as a politician. In the 1940s, she and her husband President Juan Perón set out to remake Argentina, gaining popular support from the folk, from workers and labor unionists. At one point, the masses even demanded that she run as her husband’s vice president.

Latin American author Jorge Luis Borges writes a story of the country’s grief after Evita died in 1952 after a bout with cancer. Historical records show that the country was seized with sorrow, activity shutting down and Buenos Aires running out of flowers. In Borges’s story, “The Mountebank,” an impostor fakes Evita’s funeral in order to appease the emotional needs of the campesinos too far from Buenos Aires to attend the official ceremonies.

In the story, a charlatan dressed as General Perón goes to a small town and sets up a pasteboard coffin over two sawhorses. A blonde mannequin lays in state. Rural folk pay a few pesos to view the body. They cry and wail. They pay to come again.

Borges claims that this type of thing actually happened—and more than once, in various places in the country.

As I taught this story last week, I asked my students to imagine this in the American context. Could something this surreal happen here?

Of course it could. We’ve been in the middle of it for months, since Michael Jackson’s death in June. There have been mass mourning and carnival, especially here in Lexington. Friday night’s epic re-enactment of *Thriller*

was (hopefully) the culmination.

The crowd was as thick as I’ve ever seen it downtown. From Elm Tree to Limestone, people sidled up to each other, all pressing to see the dancing

who vied for tickets to Jackson’s memorial did. Those zombies roamed the streets of L.A. in tears, desperately hoping to be present with Michael, if only after his death.



The King of Pop, in Papier-mâché.

on Main. There was the “official” Michael, the one who led the 500 zombies down Main to the new courthouse, and other versions of him, strange versions. Little children dressed as Jackson in the red jacket, the fedora, the ponytail, the glove. A huge Michael head and arms (each part controlled by a different person—only the gloved hand waved) made of paper-mache.

There was also the shrine dedicated to the King of Pop that glided behind the zombies and brought the Latin and the American together. On the float, a large gold crown with the words “POP KING” was circled by devotional candles with pictures of Jesus on them (I spied one of Jesus as the Sacred Heart), the kind found in the Hispanic foods section at Kroger.

If Evita was the beloved leader of downtrodden workers in Argentina, MJ in his death has finally and fully become the Patrón of all the undead—the many zombies roaming the American landscape in their everlasting sorrow and pain. Like Evita, Michael’s combination of unhappy circumstances of birth and overwhelming celebrity couldn’t be anything but carnival, a carnival we are willing to pay admission for, as those

Friday night, there weren’t many tears over Michael, not that I could see at least. We have accepted his death and now embrace his ghoulish resurrection. He can now lead rest of us poor souls who probably won’t make it to heaven and are doomed to wander the earth in our petty agony.

And that makes us dance.



This photo was censored by North of Center.



Creekwater, Chapter One: Fishtowne Brine Manley & J.T. Dockery



UK coal (cont.)

continued from page 7


corporate advertising and education? It does, but she should have focused on the fact that such uneasy collaboration has been going on for a long time, mainly out of sad necessity. I'm currently sitting in the William T. Young library, writing in the Toyota Reading Room, a space that's been subsidized by a predatory multi-national automotive company that's done more to dismantle union labor in Kentucky than any industry except coal mining.

Universities like UK willingly turn to corporate deals and agreements because they feel as if they need the money. They are underfunded by state legislatures to be sure, but more often than not, universities simply allow billion dollar companies to profit off of their clientele. They get little in return. A good recent example is UK's decision to allow Apple Computers to build a store in its Student Center. Apple expands its computing and music empire while occupying a space where hundreds of potential customers, who occupy Apple's ideal demographic, stream in every day. And what does Apple have to pay for such premium space? Nothing to UK; the company leases space from Follett, another corporation that's purchased prime space in UK's Student Center.

What Maddow and Zirin also neglected to mention is that the Board of Trustees' vote is just one example of a longstanding partnership between the interests of big coal in Kentucky and University of Kentucky athletics. Two weeks ago, Friends of Coal sponsored a men's basketball practice, which UK students could attend if they first subjected themselves to watching women's volleyball and men's soccer games. Friends of Coal also sponsors replays at home football and basketball games. The formula for the coal industry, and many other industries in Kentucky for that matter, is simple: find the product people in the state care about more passionately than anything (Kentucky basketball) and find ways for them to associate their positive passion toward it with their own product (in this case, coal.)

Lee Todd won't do anything to stop the "Wildcat Coal Lodge" from coming to fruition because, as Zirin pointed out in his conversation with Maddow, he sees all things university related as a business transaction. Todd hasn't actually taught in a university since the early 1980s. He's a former board member of IBM, and he's slavishly devoted to the values of the marketplace.

The sun is not shining bright on my old Kentucky home today.



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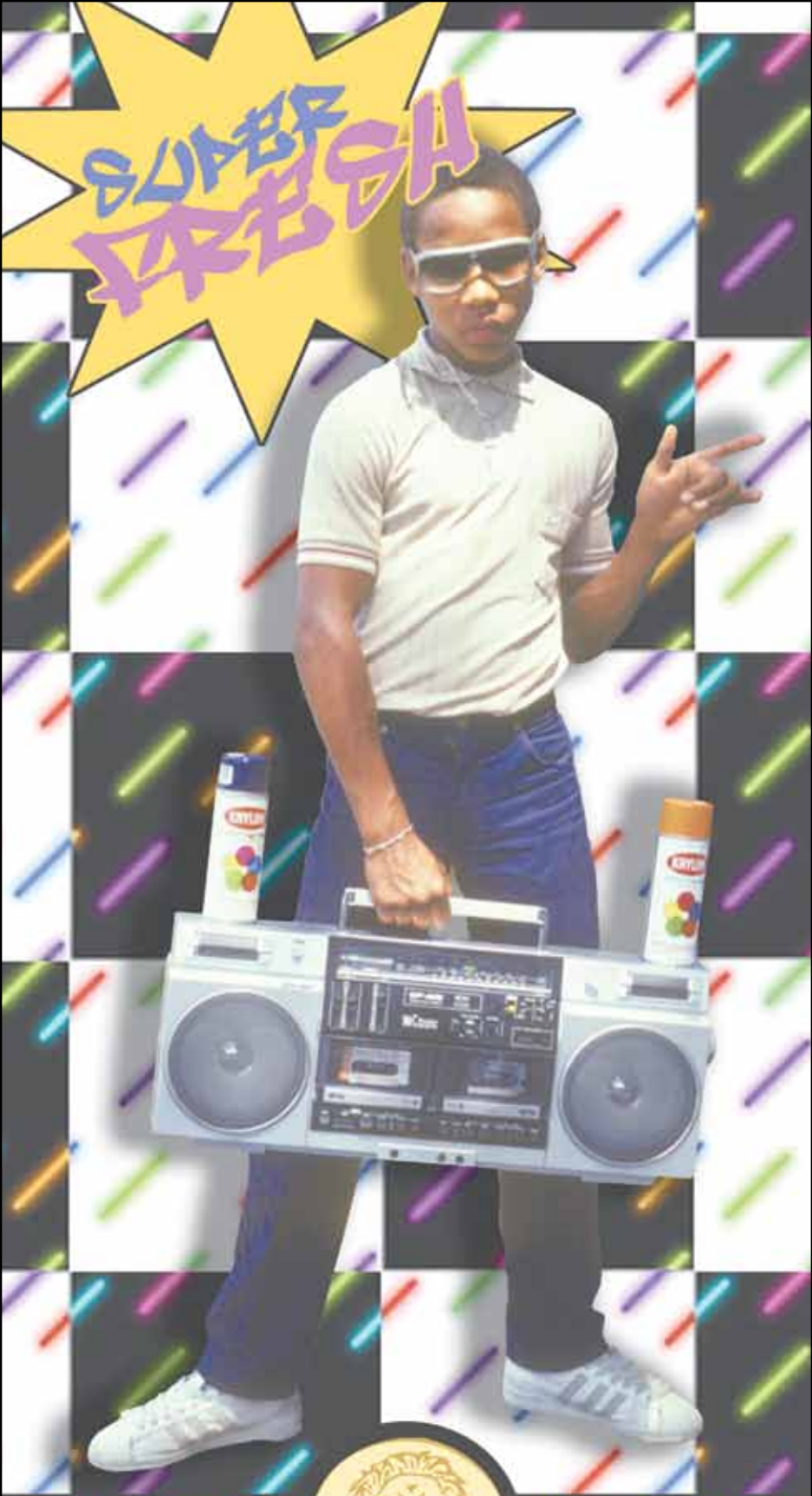
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