

# Small farmers against corporate giants

## A Colombia-Kentucky conversation

By Betsy Taylor

The global economy is devastating small-scale farming. Can small farmers create global solidarity to fight for a more level playing field? Last October, a leader of Colombian small farmers visited Lexington—catalyzing fascinating discussions that showed both the promise and the limits of such global solidarity-building.

For three weeks in October, John Henry Gonzalez Duque toured the southeastern U.S. to communicate a grassroots, South American perspective. Gonzalez Duque is a small farmer from the southwest part of Colombia and co-founder of the Small Scale Farmers Movement of Cajibío. Gonzalez Duque’s tour of the U.S. was sponsored by Witness for Peace, a grassroots group which began in the 1980s struggle against U.S. involvement in Central American wars and now works for “peace, justice and sustainable economies in the Americas by changing U.S. policies and corporate practices which contribute to poverty and oppression in Latin America and the Caribbean.” Carlos Cruz (who works in Colombia on Witness for Peace’s international team) traveled with Gonzalez Duque and provided excellent translation.

On October 18, Professor Rebecca Glasscock organized several events at Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC) for students and the general public to engage with this courageous Columbian. As I listened to these discussions, I swung between hope and despair. The hope came from the power, practicality, and eloquence of Gonzalez Duque’s moral and political vision. I felt the shock of recognition: his points echoed recent conversations with farmers at Lexington Farmers’ Markets and in Kentucky citizen groups like the Community Farm Alliance and the Sustainable Communities Network. Can widely scattered farmers’ movements be maturing into a vision for a new economy that can build common political platforms in North and South America? Can struggles against common global forces create solidarity across highly localized struggles?

But, that is where the despair comes. Gonzalez Duque arrived in Lexington on October 21, just five days after President Obama pushed Colombia-U.S. trade agreements through Congress, agreements that candidate Obama had described in 2008 as potentially complicit in the murder of labor and other activists, in the displacement and immiseration of small scale



Discussion during John Henry Gonzalez Duque’s Witness for Peace tour. Photo courtesy of Carlos Alejandro.

producers, in ecological devastation, and in job loss. If we listen to Gonzalez Duque’s reports from South America, we learn a lot about the structural forces that make President Obama different from candidate Obama.

**Mobilizing a minga**

Gonzalez Duque’s vivid photos and stories conveyed the creativity and scope of social mobilization in Colombia in recent years. The mission of

his organization is “to promote a decent and dignified life for small scale farmers, with water and food security and land ownership rights.” In 2008, they joined a people’s congress of activists from across Colombia which included a public debate with Colombian president Alvaro Uribe, followed by a 400-mile march of over 50,000 people to Bogota, the country’s capital.

*continued on page 5*

# Guerilla tree planting

By Dave Cooper

Because our little house in the Joyland neighborhood is about 50 years old and the backyard is pretty overgrown, we get lots of “volunteer” trees coming up in the fencerows and in the garden: hackberry, cherry, water maple, and the occasional oak or redbud. I don’t believe that trees and

plants have feelings, but it still makes me feel bad to pull up a struggling little tree and throw it on the ground, where it will die a miserable, slow, and painful death from dehydration.

So about five years ago, I started trying to find new homes for all the little volunteer trees that came up in

*continued on page 6*



How to kill a tree: surround the trunk with bricks. North Limestone at Church St. Photo by Dave Cooper.

# Gold: no good for U

## Why public higher education shouldn’t wager on precious metals

By Andrew Battista

Most people agree that the U.S. economy imploded because brokers were placing wagers on whether or not people would be able to pay their mortgages. The idea of mortgage debt became a speculative bubble that could not be sustained. Now, in place of one collapsed futures market, the real estate and mortgage industry, the country has developed a twinkle in its eye for another: precious metals commodities trading. Our infatuation with gold in particular is as intense as it’s been in at least a century. One needs to look no further than the Discovery Channel, which features a reality series about modern-day speculators who solicit benefactors to fund backcountry mining expeditions. These working-class men, caricatures of American ingenuity, take a fleet of expensive equipment and ravage our last frontier, the Alaskan tundra, as they look for shards of gold now selling for \$1700 per ounce on the market.

Another place to look for gold fever is at our top colleges and universities. Some of the United States’ public, land-grant institutions, which are ostensibly charged to prepare citizens to be engaged in an interconnected democracy, have fueled this gold rush by investing portions of their endowments in the metal. Last year, several major news venues took notice when the University of Texas bankrolled one billion dollars, or about five percent of its massive endowment, in gold. The university’s investment manager, Bruce Zimmerman, went on CNBC to brag that his team had actually taken possession of “the bullion,” or 6,643 physical gold bars that are kept somewhere in an undisclosed New York City vault.

Zimmerman explained that the decision to sink a billion dollars into hunks of metal was a “hedge against currency devaluation,” and for a while, he looked shrewd. The price of gold ballooned over the summer, which earned an estimated billion dollars for the university’s fund at the peak of the bubble. As I watched Zimmerman’s interview on television, I tried to imagine what would happen if the University of Texas started sending out flakes of gold in an envelope each month to retired professors in lieu of direct deposits into their bank accounts.

At the University of Kentucky, it’s a little harder than at Texas to know where the endowment is dispersed. I haven’t been able to find out if UK has its hand in the gold market, but I do know that board of trustee member James W. Stuckert is a longtime beneficiary of gold futures. Even though he primarily works as the CEO of Hilliard Lyons, Inc., he’s done some side consulting over the last twenty years for Royal Gold, Inc. According to Forbes, Stuckert earned over \$150,000 in 2010 for what appears to be an advisory role on Royal Gold’s board of directors. Not bad for a part time gig.

**Gold’s sad investment**

There are many sad ironies in Texas’s investment portfolio, not the least of which is, as Thomas Frank says in *Harper’s Magazine*, that one of our nation’s most highly-reputed bastions of intellectualism has adopted an investment strategy that is fundamentally anti-intellectual. No serious economist, teaching at Texas or elsewhere, would ever argue that the gold standard

*continued on page 7*

Contents			Coming soon		
2—Neighborhood	4—Region	7—Nation	Disabilities and sexuality		
Misadventures: Manifesto	Finest worksong	Judging health care			
Cave paintings	Mountain love	8—Comics	KY river escapades		
Traffic flow	Delmar von Lexington	I’m Not From Here			
Rupp misgivings	6—Transportation	Lexington Public			
Discarded	Let there be light		Corporate personhood		



# Manifesto

## Misadventures in the city

By Beth Connors-Manke

I'm wary of manifestos, but nonetheless I'm now offering mine. When *NoC* closed up shop for our annual holiday break, I was feeling cynical. On national news, I was listening to yahoos rail against American families receiving governmental assistance because of lost or downgraded jobs. Newt Gingrich was bombastically recommending that Occupiers give up their lazy ways and "go get a job right after they take a bath." Even here in Lexington, the response to the New Life Day Center on Martin Luther King showed the degree to which some are willfully ignorant of the struggles—shared by many—brought on by this recession.

For weeks, I chewed on the idea that Americans seem to hate the poor. In discussions, friends and I floated theories about why that might be the case. The best reason I could furnish was that a fair number of Americans believe that their fate could never be that of the Castor family on government aid, or of Jacob who needs a day center to shield him, at least temporarily, from the challenges of living on the street.

However, from experience, I know that I'm not far from needing a governmental safety net, not far from losing everything—even with a good education and a strong work ethic. All it takes is one serious illness, a spouse who can't find a job, and a mountain of medical debt.

Believing that many Americans hate the poor didn't leave me with much recourse. I could sputter and spit like other ideologues ramming their rigid

view down people's throats, or I could assert a different way of being in the world, a different set of values.

So here it is: What I want for me and mine, I want for you and yours.

That's my principle. One line that I hope will help me combat, or at least help me keep my sanity, during the toxic political discourse saturating our lives this election season.

Manifesto Platform 1: Education. I received a strong education, and I want that for all children, especially for the kids in my neighborhood. That means supporting the public school system in general and the schools in my area in particular. For me, that includes investing in William Wells Brown Elementary and Arlington Elementary, the two schools closest to me.

Manifesto Platform 2: Housing. A home is a basic need, without which one cannot easily raise a family, hold a job, stay healthy, or build a future. There are many ways to ensure that affordable and decent housing are available to everyone. I advocate for the creation of an Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) in Lexington.

Manifesto Platform 3: Freedom from coerced labor. Human trafficking has recently garnered more attention, including in Kentucky. If the term is new to you, here is how it is defined by Kentucky law (as reported by the *Lexington Herald-Leader*): "human trafficking is a criminal activity whereby a person is subjected to forced labor or commercial sexual activity through the use of force, fraud or coercion. In the case of juveniles, the commercial sexual



activity does not need to involve force, fraud or coercion."

According to state Rep. Sannie Overly, who introduced the Human Trafficking Victims Rights Act (House Bill 350), "Victims can be adult men and women, but unfortunately the incidence of trafficking children has risen at an alarming pace in Kentucky, and we need to stem the tide before we lose this battle." KY Rescue and Restore and Not For Sale are two organizations that fight this modern form of slavery; other smaller groups and ministries also exist in central Kentucky.

Note that none of my platforms include the desire to buy more shoes than I can ever wear, build a ginormous house, monopolize natural resources, or control

a SuperPAC. If I want those things for myself, by definition, I can't want them for others because they are premised on a skewed distribution of resources and power. All this is to say that, when political candidates tell you to think only of your needs (whether they be in terms of health care law, tax policy, financial regulation, or immigration reform), they are telling you to destroy your own community. Without good schools in my area, there will be more crime by youths. Without safe and decent housing in Lexington, more families will fall apart, more individuals will lose their already tenuous hold on their job. Without a vigilant fight against human trafficking, we'll be living in a slave state again—only this time it will live in the shadows.

THIS IS AN ADVERTISEMENT

Christian L. Torp, Esq. PLLC  
Criminal | Civil | Family | all other areas of practice

Licensed by the Supreme Court of Kentucky to  
practice all areas of law in the Commonwealth and by  
the United States District Court for the Federal Court  
of the Eastern District of Kentucky

P.O. Box 861  
Lexington, KY 40588

www.torpinlaw.com  
christian@torpinlaw.com

Phone: (859) 231-7885  
Fax: (859) 309-0252

# Occupy Art: all in this together

By Clay Wainscott

Cave paintings are like science fiction only in reverse. Here are Paleoliths who don't weave or cook in pots making art with sensitivity, humor, and uncanny technical facility. It's hard to fathom. My neighbor informs me their brains were actually larger than modern man's, and they were hunters and so had the leisure time to tell stories, play flutes, and draw.

I once had a job servicing mechanical voting machines and a lot of them were kept in county jails. Incised on jail cell walls through fifty layers of gooey yellowing enamel were the pictorial musings of our current crop of humans, a sample admittedly bored and down on their luck. Well these guys in caves were different. They weren't fascinated with body parts—they wanted to paint the animals who shared their forests, some now extinct tens of thousands of years.

Why were they painting deep in the cave? Archeologists speculate. Maybe it was sympathetic magic, somehow imagining these images would give them power in the hunt, or some other religious or ceremonial purpose. In any case it was so long ago all anyone can do is guess.

My guess is that artists, our oldest documented profession, haven't changed that much in all this time. I imagine their conversation being about a place somebody had found where the rain wouldn't wash their paintings away. A place out of the wind, out of the cold, and deep in a cave. It's possible to imagine modern artists thinking that way. The paintings are in the caves because they were a quiet calm place to work and the surfaces were almost fresco-like already—worth the muddy crawl.

It's more difficult to explain how the artwork could be so good. Art doesn't pretend to be the thing itself but something more mysterious. Marks of charcoal and ochre applied to a cave wall enter the complex labyrinth of our modern perceptual field and we think that's an ox, that's a lion, that's a bear. The European cave bears, extinct twenty thousand years, who occupied the cave after its walls had been decorated didn't see antelope, didn't see the rhinoceros, didn't see themselves. Only humans translate marks on a flat surface into living reality.

These images in caves aren't realism, not even close. In one, four horse's heads appear in succession, like four jacks fanned. Their necks are too thick and their muscles too small. They all have different coats, and the one in front seems to neigh. There's something about it that goes way beyond just pictures of horses. The artist applied a visual poetry because he knew I'd see it better that way, and I have to nod back. It works. I see horses moving, hear them snort and stamp, and smell them too. I see lions nerving up to attack an unaware beast grazing on the next cave wall prominence twenty feet away. I hear the artists laughing and admiring each other's work.

'All in this together' means something else when you realize it includes those artists. They bought a ticket when they left evidence of who they were and what they'd seen in a visual form all humans coming after would understand. Animals don't comprehend art and neither will the most complicated machines, ever. Art is totally human, and through art we know each other and ourselves—that's its job.

Read Clay Wainscott's blog at [ownin-gart.blogspot.com](http://ownin-gart.blogspot.com)

# A matter of value

By Danny Mayer

The central question surrounding the Rupp Opportunity Zone concerns its value. Will the capital outlays—human, monetary, carbon—necessary to redevelop the 50 acres surrounding Rupp Arena match or exceed the value projected to spring from the end-product? That is the question, and as usual, the answer depends on where you stand and how you define value.

The 47 appointed members of the Rupp Task Force have answered that question positively. This unelected body, not a single publicly elected representative serving, spent \$350,000 to issue a report calling for a \$300 million renovation of Rupp Arena and construction of a new city convention center. To this body of vested UK boosters, downtown developers, bankers and other city business leaders, any capital servicing the Rupp environs is certain to provide a good return-on-investment (ROI). If designed well, they argue, any money shoveled into the small urban sliver of expensive Fayette County land will unlock private investment and provide enough economic returns to benefit the entire city.

Yet for the Fayette County resident who does not live, own property or run a business adjacent to Rupp Arena, is not affiliated with the UK Athletic Association, and does not attend conventions, arena concerts or UK home basketball games, the public investment will surely hold less value. The privately-funded Rupp Task Force subcommittee on Finance, chaired by big-time UK Athletic Booster Luther Deaton, has already outlined several local funding streams—park and water/sewer funds were both mentioned—that the city may need to capitalize upon. For non-downtown taxpayers (most of the city), this means that freeing up local money to pay for the Rupp transformation will have direct negative costs: at least some money earmarked for the entire Lexington community and our own unique neighborhoods will re-route into downtown.

For a Fayette County resident, then, valuing the Rupp project might be understood better by a simple cost comparison

between development funds and projects. In Lexington's ninth district, for example, outgoing council member Jay McCord has generated \$2.5 million for park development, with the majority of that money coming from private sources. This investment has resulted in over 100 acres of new park land opening up across the district. At Shilito Park where much of the money was directed, funding produced a 2.25 mile healthway trail, improvements to a number of baseball fields, a resurfaced tennis complex, space for soccer and lacrosse, and expansion of a disc golf course. In addition, the \$2.5 million investment netted other area parks playground equipment, four more healthway trails, a dog park, rain gardens, native plantings and a "sensory garden." In the Ninth District, the \$2.5 million in public/private funds have built community value by creating publicly accessible spaces of healthy activity, leisure and transportation. Park upgrades have also built property value and connected geographically disperse suburban neighborhoods and people, from mall rats on Nicholasville Road beyond New Circle to Unitarians attending church on Clay's Mill nearby Man O'War.

In contrast, consider the plans submitted by UK booster Luther Deaton's finance subcommittee. Unlike the Ninth District funds stewarded by McChord, initial funds directed to Rupp will produce nothing of value. Deaton's group allocated most of the first \$2.5 million in Rupp funds—all public money from the city or state—to achieving what the privately-funded Rupp Task Force had pretended to do: \$500,000 will pay a real administrative staff; \$600,000 will pay a real program manager to create a real plan of the area; \$450,000 will create a real financial feasibility study; \$200,000 will provide an arts facility feasibility study; and \$500,000 will clean-up the site. City business leaders have called for an initial \$300 million investment to be poured into Rupp's 50 downtown acres. In terms of value for city residents, that *should* work out to a project with 120 times the value as McChord's Ninth District funding for parks. It won't even come close.



“We must not forget why one-way streets were created in the first place: to relieve traffic congestion,” writes David Shattuck about the latest traffic talk.

FEBRUARY 2012

# Dispelling the 2-way myth

By David Shattuck

In 2005, people from throughout central Kentucky identified their top 5 likes and dislikes about the region. “Traffic blew away the competition in the dislike category,” wrote the *Herald-Leader* in November 2006. Lexington is by no means unique in this regard. In the last 40 years, traffic has consistently outpaced forecasts. In early 2006 the Texas Transportation Institute predicted that if things continue as they are, by 2013 “midsize regions such as Omaha will have traffic problems that larger areas like Cleveland now have, and larger areas such as Cleveland will experience traffic problems that very large areas like LA or New York have now.” So to be safe, we should assume that Lexington’s traffic will soon look about like that in Nashville or Charlotte just a few years ago: we will experience big city traffic congestion.

Indeed, these days may already be upon us. In 2002 the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for central Kentucky calculated the “travel rate index” for Lexington’s major roads at 2.81; this means it takes nearly three times as long as it should to travel these roads; by comparison, the average index for Los Angeles is 1.50!

State engineers report that traffic on New Circle between Russell Cave and Georgetown Road has tripled from 1964 to 2001; there is every reason to believe that traffic on Main, Vine, High and Maxwell Streets has experienced similar increases as well in the last three decades. Over time, traffic always seems to get worse, never better (unless roads are expanded, such as the recent extension of Newtown). According to the Brookings Institute, the U.S. will add 50% more houses, offices and shops over the next 25 years, which of course means even more traffic clogging our streets.

Yet a few developers, city planners, and Mayor Gray seem intent on making Lexington’s traffic problems worse. Since 2001, they have insisted that converting Lexington’s downtown one-way streets to two-way traffic will help revitalize downtown. As a Sacramento planner put it: “Motorists who are forced to drive more slowly may notice businesses they might like to visit.”

**The 2-Way thesis**

The zany notion that two-way traffic will help revitalize downtowns has its

origins in a single paper presented in the early 1990s by Orlando architect/planner Walter Kulash and his firm, Glatting Jackson. Kulash’s premise is that two-way traffic will force cars to slow down, making streets more user friendly for pedestrians and businesses. (In a future column I will dispel these myths).

That one way streets move traffic more efficiently is beyond dispute: seven lanes of a two-way street are needed to match the capacity of a four lane one way route. So converting Main and Vine, or High and Maxwell, for instance, to two-way traffic could effectively cut traffic capacity—the ability to move cars through traffic—in half. Kulash’s own analysis shows why conversion would necessitate unacceptable traffic delays in Lexington. He reasons that “[m]ost downtowns have a well-developed street grid; this abundance of alternate routes is the inherent advantage that downtowns have over [suburbs], where all traffic is generally forced onto the one or two available arterials.”

Lexington is unlike “most downtowns” in this regard, for there is no “abundance of alternate routes” for getting from, say, the Masterston Station or Meadowthorpe area to UK or Chevy Chase. . As Fred Pope wrote in *Business Lexington* in early 2006: “Lexington’s streets flow like the spokes on a wheel, outward from the hub of downtown. It is a design made for congestion.” During a phone conversation on March 1, 2007, LFUCG’s Max Conyers stated that downtown Lexington lacked a grid system sufficient for a successful two-way conversion. Businessman Howard Stovall confirmed this fact to *Chevy Chaser Magazine* last August. Stovall stated that “[i]f Lexington had an effective grid system so one could get across town without traveling Main and Vine, that would be one thing, but we don’t.”

Even in cities with an effective grid system, two-way conversion would cause significant congestion. According to Kulash, “in most downtowns, the delay penalty will be small for the through traveler. For instance, a decrease in average arterial travel speed of 5 miles per hour over a one-quarter mile segment of network yields an additional three minutes of travel time.” Let’s apply this “delay penalty” to Lexington’s streets, with the caveat that I am a lawyer, not a traffic engineer.

Currently one can drive from one end of downtown to the other in three minutes or less, driving 25 miles per

hour on Main and Vine, and stopping at no more than two traffic signals (such as Rose and Broadway) when the signals are working properly. During peak traffic hours, one could not expect to drive much faster than 10 miles per hour on a two-way Main or Vine, a reduction of 15 miles per hour. Based on this assumption, *it would take 18 minutes to get from one end of downtown to the other*—an estimated half-mile—from Broadway to Midland, if Main and Vine were converted to two-way traffic. And this doesn’t include the delay brought about by the inability to time traffic lights and by the absence of turn lanes such a conversion would necessitate.

We must not forget why one-way streets were created in the first place: to relieve traffic congestion. Lexington drivers know traffic congestion; the average commute in this town exceeds 20 minutes. Lionel Hawse noted in a letter to the *Herald-Leader* in November 2006: “There was a reason for going to one-way streets 40 years ago. On-street parking and left-turning traffic made driving in downtown exasperating.” As Stovall wrote in *Business Lexington* in December 2006, the streets were made one-way because things were “a total mess,” with traffic gridlock “especially at the corner of Main and Rose.”

**The LDDA, the Master Plan, and the traffic study**

In the summer of 2004 the Lexington Downtown Development Authority (“LDDA”) was formed. LDDA raised \$450,000 from local “stakeholders”, including Keeneland, banks, utilities, law firms, and James Gray Construction Co. In December 2004, the *Herald-Leader* reported that this money would fund a study with the idea of developing a “Downtown Master Plan.” The paper quoted developer Bill Lear as saying Lexington needed two-way traffic but that it wouldn’t happen unless part of a master plan.

The Master Plan was released in summer 2006. The Plan’s 17 recommendations included the conversion of all downtown streets to two-way traffic as well as the creation of a “linear park” to run through the middle of Vine Street. Of these 17 recommendations, Bill Lear told the *Herald-Leader* that street conversion was by far the most significant.

A traffic study was to have been completed as part of the Master Plan, but that didn’t happen. Instead, a traffic

study which cost taxpayers \$100,000 was completed in spring 2007. The Traffic Study is like an elephant in a room; it has received remarkably little public attention, most likely because its conclusions are at odds with developers’ and city planners’ wishes.


The study, conducted by Entran of Lexington, revealed five areas “that likely would become congestion ‘hot spots’ if streets were converted to two-way.” Not surprisingly, these “hot spots” are at precisely the same locations which led planners to make these streets one way in the first place. Significantly, Maxwell Street, in its entirety, is one of these “hot spots”. Conversion of Vine, moreover, is not feasible unless the Transit Center is relocated, a proposal that no one contemplated seriously until federal stimulus monies became available.

Furthermore, by making unrealistic assumptions, the study understates the true impact conversion would have on traffic congestion, since it makes assumptions that are unrealistic. For instance, assuming Main and Vine are narrowed to 1 lane in each direction, with a center turn lane, the model says it will take an additional 10.4 minutes to travel from Broadway to Midland on Vine. But to travel from Midland to Broadway on Main, under this scenario, would take only an additional 2 minutes, a time that would certainly surprise anyone who has ever traveled Main during peak hours. And the devil is in the details; actual traffic impact cannot be determined until it is known how the Main/Vine pair will be configured at either end.

More important, the study makes assumptions concerning housing density and bike/bus use that border on wishful thinking. For instance the study assumes that, by 2030, increased density and bus/bike use will lead to a 50% reduction in interzonal auto trips within the downtown core. Yet a Department of Transportation study concluded that “doubling an urban area’s density would, at most, reduce the total number of car trips by 10% to 20%. No U.S. urban area has managed to double its density or to reduce car travel by these magnitudes.” In addition, even if bike use approached that of Portland, Oregon, which boasts the most bicycle commuters of any U.S. city, only one in ten of us would be riding a bike instead of driving a car to work. And, of course, it is not likely that Lexington’s bike commuter rate could ever match Portland’s.

Keturah

540 Third Street



KETURAH / 540 THIRD STREET

12.4.10 / 3:31 PM / 32° F

Though the sidewalks were sheathed in ice on this freezing Sunday afternoon, Keturah did not hesitate to step outside and sit on the old chair for us. We met her at Metro Alternative Shelter Housing of the Bluegrass: home of the blue chair for 4 years before someone sat on it and broke it.

*Image and text by Kurt Gohde and Kremena Todorova, Discarded project.*



# Mine strikes and commie labor songs

By John Hennen

Everyone understands the importance of music to social movements, and no song of working-class justice is more widely known than “Which Side Are You On?” written by Florence Reece in 1931. Florence was embroiled in the 1931 Eastern Kentucky coal strike, when thousands of Harlan and Bell county coal miners struggled for survival against local coal operators and law enforcement. Florence performed her masterpiece hundreds of times in the next half-century and never failed to inspire the spirit of militant resistance to economic, social, and political oppression.

Many may not realize, however, that the organized resistance to the “gun thugs of J. H. Blair” during the 1931-1932 Harlan and Bell county mine war was led not by the United Mine Workers of America, but by a competing radical alternative to the UMWA, the National Miners Union. Convinced by the Great Depression that capitalism was on the road to extinction, the NMU rejected the capitalist accommodation practiced by the American Federation of Labor and the UMWA. Instead it promoted a radical vision of social revolution, class solidarity, and workers’ control of the means of production.

When the Black Mountain Coal Company imposed a ten percent wage cut in February 1931, hundreds of Harlan County miners walked out to protest the latest in a litany of unsafe, unfair, and penurious practices by the company. Already suffering from short hours, earlier pay cuts, arbitrary firings, threats, and layoffs, strikers apparently decided it was better, as one allegedly said, to starve on strike rather than at work. Strike leaders, many of them veterans of a 1922 strike supported by the United Mine Workers, turned again to the UMWA for help.

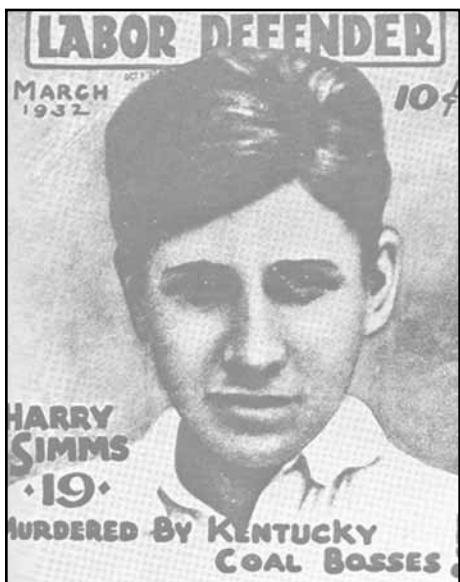
But the failed 1922 strike, and the ensuing years fighting legal and political

offensives against unionization in the Appalachian coal fields, had practically destroyed the UMWA. When the 1931 strike began, UMWA vice-president Philip Murray welcomed the potential influx of new members but, following a massive and militant Bell County rally sponsored by the UMWA, Murray lost his initial enthusiasm. He and union president John L. Lewis concluded that the independent mobilization of the Harlan and Bell strikers reflected the type of radical independence—anathema to Lewis—that would undermine union discipline. The union’s commitment to financial and material support in the form of food and milk for striking families evaporated just as the action spread to twenty-three Harlan and Bell county operations with nearly 6,000 miners. When the UMWA pulled out, the strike’s momentum collapsed and the strikers and their families were left without work, income, or prospects.

Into the void left by the UMWA came the National Miners Union. The NMU was the American Communist Party’s radical challenge to the conservative UMWA, founded during the Party’s so-called “third period” that began in 1927. The “third period” represented a change from American Communism’s traditional tactic of “boring from within” established trade unions in order to seize control of the labor movement. The NMU was founded as a “dual union” to compete with, rather than influence, the UMWA. Local civic leaders in Harlan and Bell were exponentially more fearful of the NMU than the “bread and butter” unionism of John L. Lewis. To discredit the more radical union, they focused on its “alien” leadership, despite the fact that Eastern Kentucky Holiness preachers Jim Grace and Finley Donaldson, along with Andrew Ogan and Sam Reece, reflected indigenous leadership within the Kentucky NMU.

**Resistance is a family affair**

Reece, a veteran local organizer



*Radical actions, radical reporting: Harry Simms was a 19-year old organizer for the National Miners Union who was assassinated by Knox County deputies in February 1932. His murder was a front cover story for the Labor Defender, a now-defunct radical labor magazine from the 1920s and 1930s.*

dating back to the 1922 strike and a longtime dissident within the UMWA, was targeted for special attention by the Harlan County Coal Operators Association. After a violent battle between strikers and deputies at Evarts in May 1931, Sam and Florence Reece’s home was raided by Sheriff Blair’s deputies. “When the thugs were raiding our house off and on,” Florence Reece recalled, “and Sam was run off, I felt like I just had to do something to help.” The result was “Which Side Are You On,” perhaps the most popular and enduring anthem of the labor movement down to this day.

It was logical for Sam Reece to work with the NMU once the UMWA pulled its support from the strike. The NMU sponsored soup kitchens for starving families when the local Red Cross, pressured by the Operators Association, withheld assistance from striking families. The ideological posture of the

American Communist Party—whose insistence on racial equality and, more importantly, embrace of atheism later alienated many of its original supporters—initially was of little concern to the hungry.

By early 1932 the Harlan-Bell strike failed, and soon the Communist Party’s dual union idea was abandoned. Many of the NMU’s most committed radical organizers rejoined the conventional trade union movement and soon invigorated the mass mobilization of industrial labor that swept the country by 1934. Working-class militancy forced the reform administration of Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt to support a new institutional framework, represented by the Wagner Act of 1935, which established systematic protection for the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively.

Mobilized in part by former NMU radicals within the new Committee on Industrial Organization (later the Congress of Industrial Organizations), the UMWA re-entered the Eastern Kentucky fields by 1936 and, with the protection of Wagner, grew rapidly. In a sense, then, Eastern Kentucky fighters like Sam and Florence Reece, and the radical leftists of the NMU, laid the foundation for the American middle class.

*A much-expanded version of this essay was published as an introduction to Harlan Miners Speak: Report on Terrorism in the Kentucky Coal Fields, a reissue of the 1932 report put out by the University Press of Kentucky in 2008. The author suggests that interested readers also take a look at David C. Duke’s Writers and Miners: Activism and Imagery in America, and Alan Banks, “Miners Talk Back: Labor Activism in Southeastern Kentucky in 1922,” which appears in Confronting Appalachia Stereotypes: Back Talk from an American Region. Pick up copies at Morris Book Shop or the Wild Fig Book Shop.*

# I Love Mountains Day returns in Feb.

By Stanley Sturgill

I live at the foot of Kentucky’s highest peak, Black Mountain, in Harlan County. I am retired with 41 years service to the mining industry. My wife and I have lived in Harlan County most of our lives. We have raised our family here, and we want to continue to remain here.

And I want to see my grandkids grow up here and find meaningful work and get as much joy and comfort from this beautiful part of Kentucky as I have.

That’s why I’ll be attending I Love Mountains Day.

I made my living as a coal miner and federal coal mine inspector, but I know that is not the future for my grandkids. However, I do believe there is a future for them here if we are allowed to be successful in bringing much needed new jobs to our area.

But first we have to stop the destruction that’s going on right now.

Surface mining and especially mountaintop removal are quickly destroying our mountains and drinking water. They are not responsible ways of mining. Strip mining and mountaintop removal are done in order for the coal operator to mine the most coal in the shortest possible time with the least

possible number of workers.

And it also brings the most destruction to our land, water, and health. It’s just not right that a coal company could have the backing of state legislators and the governor to allow the annihilation of the mountains and water. Once our mountains are gone and our water is poisoned, there will be nothing left.

The governor wants to hide behind the claim that this is about jobs, but people know that strip mining and mountaintop removal do away with jobs. If the governor wants to put a shot in the arm of our economy, then he needs to wake up and stop the surface mining that not only hurts our chances to create a new

energy economy, but that actually does harm to our health, our economy, and drains resources from the state budget.

Right now, with legislation that’s before them, the Kentucky General Assembly has a great opportunity to invest in programs and policies that will lead to thousands of new jobs for Kentuckians, especially coal miners. We could pass legislation and promote cooperation—as many other states have already done—that are proven successful

## I LOVE MOUNTAINS DAY

- Tuesday, February 14, 2012
- 12 noon: Gather on the front steps of the State Capitol in Frankfort
- 12:30 P.M.: March and Rally
- To learn more and register, go to [www.kftc.org/love](http://www.kftc.org/love)

for spurring job creation, helping grow new businesses, and providing brighter prospects for the younger generations.

Even though I am now retired, I depend on the mountains even more—the streams for my drinking water, the trees for holding our beloved mountains in place and helping to replenish our environment with wonderful mountain fresh air, and their beauty to uplift me each day. I pray generations to come will be able to enjoy the same peace I am presently anointed with.

That’s why I’m asking *North of Center* readers to join me and hundreds of other Kentuckians to take a stand—for our mountains, our water, our kids, our future—at I Love Mountains Day.

I Love Mountains Day takes place on Tuesday, February 14. You are asked to gather on the front steps of the State Capitol in Frankfort at 12 noon for a 12:30 P.M. march and rally. To learn more and register, go to [www.kftc.org/love](http://www.kftc.org/love).



*Demonstrators gather in front of the Kentucky state capital building during last year’s I Love Mountains Day. Photo by Jeff Gross.*



“Gonzalez Duque spoke about how political space shrank as terror escalated between left-wing insurgencies and right-wing repression.”

FEBRUARY 2012

# Small farmers (cont.)

*continued from page 1*

They call such a people’s congress, a “minga.” “Minga” is an old Quechua word meaning “collective work” and connotes autonomous self-organization. In recent Andean indigenous and peasant movements, the word has been retooled for use in contemporary struggles to refer to deliberative grassroots councils leading to visions for action. (For more on this as a kind of “policy making from below,” see anthropologist Deborah Poole’s article in *NACLA Report* in February 2009).

These Andean movements (like the Zapatistas in Central America) are transforming pre-state, pre-hispanic organizational forms, and philosophies of democracy in order to solve twenty-first century problems. Each year, the national minga focuses on a theme such as land-territory-sovereignty, or social and community resistance. A minga brings activists together from diverse movements across Colombia, including indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, women’s groups, trade unionists, and students. These mingas proactively and collectively envision a society and economy that will secure their rights and take care of nature. They then draft the laws they would like elected government to enact in order to manifest this vision.

In discussion, Gonzalez Duque noted similarities between mingas and the people’s assemblies springing up in the Occupy movement, Tahrir Square, and elsewhere. He eagerly visited the Occupy Lexington encampment on Main Street, and while there, recruited an individual to attend his evening talk. Gonzalez Duque was also very interested in citizen struggles in Kentucky which parallel Colombia’s, such as movements against mountaintop removal and for local food and small farmers. He was excited to learn about the writings of Kentuckian Wendell Berry and was disappointed not to be able to visit him. The evening event at BCTC included a delicious meal with local vegetables and meats contributed and cooked by the participants (many associated with Witness for Peace and other social and environmental justice organizations), which provided a lively, happy setting for sharing stories and building solidarity.

Gonzalez Duque mixed creative, network-building hope with hard-headed analysis of macrostructural trends that threaten his moral goals. Colombia now, he said, must be understood within the last 45 years of history. He described how loans from the U.S., the World Bank, and others have been used to justify waves of neoliberal “structural adjustment policy” since the mid-1960s, including the privatization of water, education, and health services, the dismantling of protections for workers and national business, and the preferential treatment of U.S. multinational corporations and direct foreign investment.

## Neoliberal effects

Columbia’s history shows the close connections between neoliberalism, militarization, and violence. Gonzalez Duque spoke about how political space for civil society shrank as terror escalated between left-wing armed insurgencies and right-wing government and paramilitary repression. The U.S. has poured money into the Colombian military (over \$10 billion in the past decade according to Amnesty International), primarily through “Plan Colombia,” which was set up in 1999 to decrease narcotic traffic and counter-insurgency.

However, the effect of Plan Colombia has been to devastate small farmers and to destroy the conditions for alternative rural economic development besides coca production. Mass toxic fumigation from the air (to combat coca growing) severely damages water, fields, people’s health, and ecological mega-biodiversity. Paramilitary groups with shadowy support from official and corporate entities are key in the horrifying violence against labor and other activists. The International Trade Union Confederation estimates

that over 2,800 trade union leaders have been murdered since 1986, and 51 assassinated in 2010. (However, the number could be much higher.) This military and economic violence has displaced five million people—almost ten percent of the population, more than any other country in the world.

I dread the blather of another presidential election year: highly packaged talk circling so far from actual national and world problems, or what ordinary citizens think and need. Outside of that political spotlight, seasoned and tested political and moral visions are emerging in diverse citizen movements around the world. The lively, warm, and substantive talk between North and South America that happened at BCTC on October 18 suggests how much these diverse movements might have in common, if common political platforms can be built.

But, how can we translate this citizen energy into real political action and policy change? The real change must come at the commanding heights of global trade and finance, where corporations that are larger than most nations have primary control over policy writing and first access to elected politicians whose campaigns they largely fund.

## The two Obamas

In 2008, John Nichols applauded candidate Obama for opposing a NAFTA-style trade agreement between Colombia and the U.S., saying that his moral stand showed a clear understanding that America needs to fundamentally change the macrostructures of foreign trade.

But, on October 12, 2011, President Obama pushed “Free Trade” agreements with Colombia through Congress



*John Henry Gonzalez Duque, from Colombia and co-founder of the Small Scale Farmers Movement of Cajibío. Photo by Carlos Alejandro.*

against the vehement opposition of the large majority of his party, labor unions, many mainline faith groups, and peace and justice citizens’ organizations. In 2011, Nichols excoriated President Obama for ignoring strong data suggesting the negative impacts on American workers.

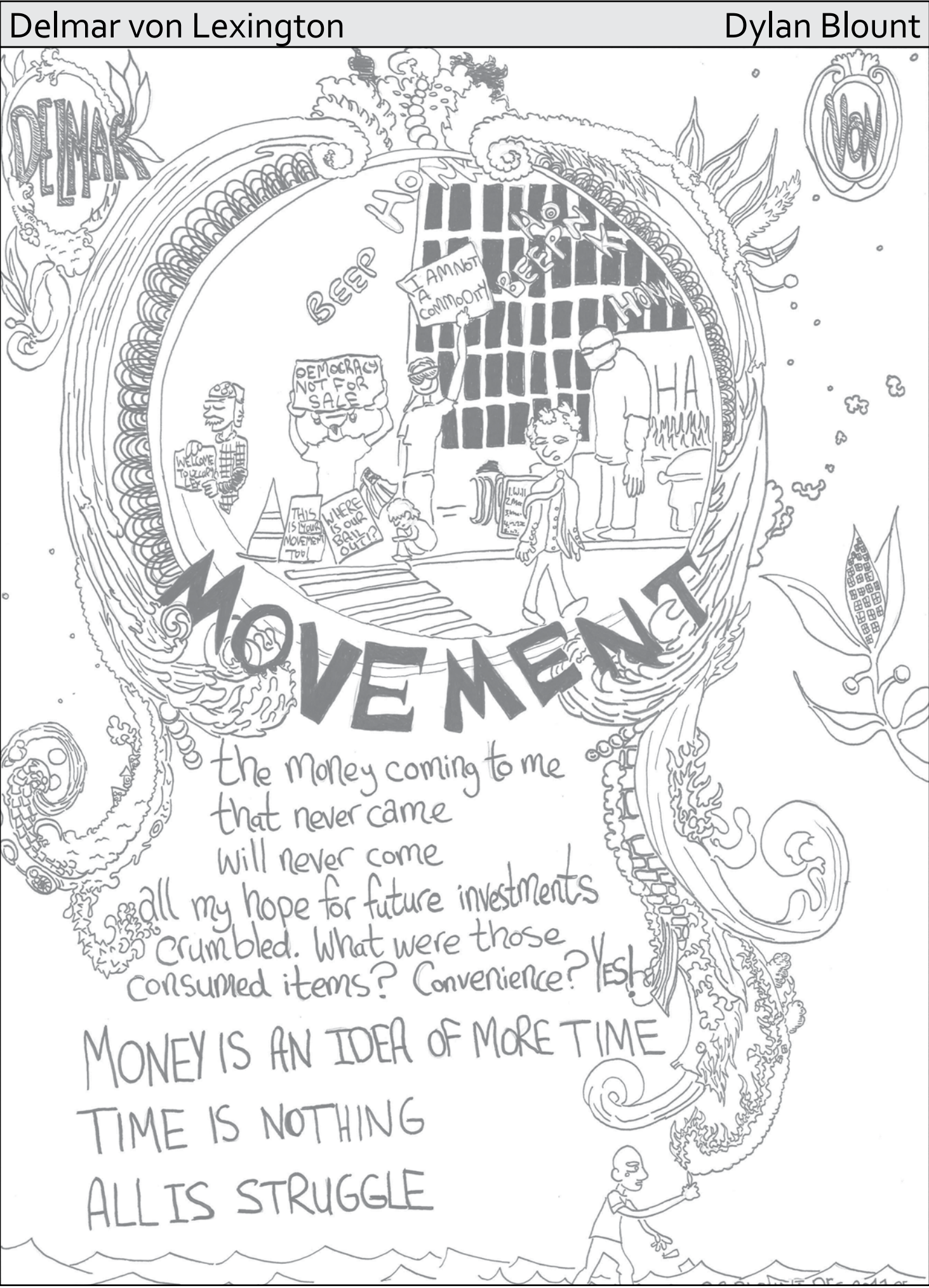
However, it is as important to ask about the impact on Columbian workers and land. Obama claims that the affiliated Action Plan which describes desirable environmental and social justice standards is sufficient. Unfortunately, these standards are mere descriptive

goals without enforceable mechanisms to punish human rights violations and any failures in meeting social or environmental benchmarks.

Some people act as if it is an obscure puzzle that candidate Obama (with all that intelligence and eloquence) seems so different from President Obama (so timid and small bore in policies and programs). I would argue that things look much simpler if you follow the money. Curious about how the Colombia-U.S. “free” trade treaty passed? Go to the White House website where an April 2011 announcement lists the large corporations (or their trade groups) who supported this treaty. There is not a single organization on this list that represents civil society, small farmers, faith or labor groups.

Many of the corporations which are listed by name, or represented by lobbying groups on this list, have been receiving preferential treatment from right-wing Colombian governments for years (e.g., Caterpillar, Monsanto, United Fruit, Occidental Petroleum) and many are closely linked with the Colombian military which depends on U.S. military aid (e.g., Dyncorp, Lockheed Martin, Dow Chemical). Some of the U.S. corporations have had power in Colombia for decades and, in the last 10 years, some have been sued or fined for paying paramilitary squads to kill labor activists (Coco-Cola, Drummond, Chiquita).

This corporate-driven U.S. trade policy is antithetical to the vision of democratically planned, small scale, and sustainable economy which John Henry Gonzalez Duque shared with us last October—and which found such resonance among Kentuckians working for local food systems and social justice.





“You wouldn’t drive your car at night without lights, so why would you ride your bike *on that same road* without lights? There is no justification.”

# You, you light up my life

## Out on the streets, that’s where we’ll meet

By Captain Comannokers  
*NoC* Transportation Czar

A television commercial that recently caught some attention featured a wave of night cyclists cruising the streets in a futuristic, neon dream. The commercial had more people talking about the super-cool, glowing rides than the actual product it was trying to promote (cell phones), but that’s the way the marketing world works sometimes—as long as you’ve got ‘em talking, you are still in the game. You’ll actually have to check with college marketing classes or *Mad Men* to confirm that last statement, but it seems like something they’d teach you, or a line those witty writers would use.

The conversations revolved around how cool the bikes looked and where you *could* get one. There was also debate as to whether or not you actually could get one, or if the commercial was more CGI trickery than bike realism. A simple search of glow-in-the-dark bikes reveals

a catalog of manufacturers promising to ship you the glowiest thing on two wheels!

Sorry to deflate your tires, but the rest of the article is neither about celebrating the bikes in the commercial, nor about debunking the websites that claim their glow bike can be seen through pea soup-like fog. Rather, it will concentrate on the less cool issue that the commercial brings to light: making yourself visible on your bike at night.

The positive first: the number of cyclists in this town who make some appropriate effort to either light their bike or themselves has increased in the last five years. That’s just a simple observation from my riding at night, of which I do a considerable amount. If I were to wildly throw around numbers, I would say it used to be less than 20 percent and now it is closer to 35-40 percent.

The negative, then, is that most bikes still don’t have lights on them. And that just doesn’t make any damn sense.

Many times this column may seem to favor cycling over other modes of transportation—but not on this issue. Reflectors aside, cyclists who don’t have some sort of lighting (ideally, we are talking both a front headlight and some red lights affixed to the back of the bike, or yourself, or your bag) are putting themselves and others in danger. And, well, that kind of sucks. Which means I am stating that a majority of cyclists in this town kind of suck! You wouldn’t drive your car at night without lights, so why would you ride your bike *on that same road* without lights? There is no justification.

Is it out of laziness that folks do not purchase some lights? Surely, it can’t be because they feel their bike is just too damn sweet to be altered for greater visibility. I’ve seen your bikes—they ain’t that sweet. Granted, I think it would be nice to see more bikes sold with lights standard, leaving companies to force the issue more. Commuting numbers

continue to rise, so start equipping bikes that represent that shift.

I’ve been in a car a couple times over the last few months when I felt incredibly lucky that I didn’t hit an unlit cyclist. Usually it has been a medium-trafficked road that has minimal street lighting. Driving along at a normal rate of speed and paying full attention, I still didn’t see the cyclist a few feet from the curb until that last second. And why would I? They didn’t have lights on. When I finally spotted the cyclist, my startled heart skipped a beat. I don’t like that feeling and no other motorist does either.

I’m not sure how close we are to having bad ass Tron-looking vehicles streaking through the dark, but in the meantime, please, make a concerted effort to have sufficient lighting on you and your bike. In doing so, you really will light up my life! This is your captain, over and out.

*Cyclists and drivers alike can continue the conversation at [noclexington.com](http://noclexington.com).*



## Tree planting (cont.)

*continued from page 1*

our yard. There are lots of good places to plant trees in Lexington. For example, because of sewage overflows and persistent flooding, the city of Lexington has bought up about a dozen homes in our neighborhood and torn them down. The city maintains the vacant lots by planting grass and keeping them mowed. But grass doesn’t absorb much rainfall, so it doesn’t do much to reduce the flooding.

These vacant lots are great places to plant water-loving volunteer trees. My partner Patty and I dig up the seedlings in our yard and place them in 5 gallon buckets, making sure not to expose the roots to the air, which dries the roots out and can kill the seedling. Then we push a wheelbarrow full of buckets over to the vacant lot, or median, or city park, and dig a hole, making sure that it is deep enough to allow the main tree root to point straight down (not curved). We mulch the tree, using grass clippings, wood chips, or leaves, and then place a five-inch long piece of black corrugated drain pipe around the base, to protect it from the city weed-whacker crews and the giant mower machines. Adding a wooden stake makes it look like an officially planted tree.

I have also planted trees in the front yards of vacant houses. I have planted trees in front of our neighborhood school,

Mary Todd Elementary. Patty has planted many fruit trees in the Mary Todd Park. I have also planted many trees in other city’s parks: after our friend Stuart Butler passed away, the Bluegrass Group of the Sierra Club allocated \$100 to plant a memorial tree in his town of Versailles. At that time, Patty and I had dozens of nice seedlings growing up around the backyard and in the compost pile, so we dug them all up, drove out to Versailles and planted 20 seedlings in the cute little city park behind the Woodford County Courthouse. Stuart was a good tree-hugger, and I think he would have been both pleased and amused by our little guerilla tree-planting raid on the city park.

Oh, I forgot to mention: I never ask permission from anybody before I plant these trees. Lexington’s trees are under attack, and guerilla tactics are the best way to fight back.

I have watched too many KU-sanctioned tree crews butcher trees underneath power lines. I have seen too many neighborhood trees mangled by topping, and I have seen downtown Lexington completely almost deforested over the past ten years. We used to have beautiful trees all along Main Street, providing cool shade in the summer for pedestrians and cyclists. During the holidays, these trees were filled with gorgeous twinkling little white lights. But during Mayor Isaac’s administration, nearly all

the trees along Main Street were removed because they were supposedly overgrown.

It made me so sad and angry when the city did this. I counted the rings, and those nice downtown trees were about 35 years old, so the shade and green beauty those mature trees provided won’t return for a long time.

Neglect and abuse of our urban trees is everywhere you look in Lexington. Many downtown Lexington trees have been killed by laying bricks around the base, so the tree slowly dies of thirst. Trees in city parks are being accidentally killed by weed-whacking, which removes the bark and kills by girdling. During construction projects, heavy machinery around the base of mature trees compacts the soil and prevents the tree roots from getting the oxygen they need. I have even seen established mature trees completely encircled by newly-poured asphalt parking lots.

Then there are some unscrupulous tree companies, who solicit business door to door, frightening older homeowners by telling them that their mature shade trees are diseased and might fall onto their house at any minute: what they don’t tell the homeowners is that after charging them a healthy fee to remove the tree, they sell the firewood as a side business.

Many government maintenance people just don’t like trees—they only

see the problems: trees interfering with power lines, buckling sidewalks, and the additional costs of leaf collection and clogged storm water sewer grates.

What most people never consider are the monetary benefits that a healthy urban forest provides. Trees clean and cool the air, provide home for songbirds, as well as beautify the city streetscape. Trees soak up rainwater, reducing flood run-off. Trees raise property values—real estate experts will tell you that each mature tree adds \$5,000 to \$10,000 to your home’s value. And, they reduce your utility bills by providing shade in the summer and blocking wind in the cold months.

And did you know that trees have been shown to lower crime? It’s because trees provide cool shade and lower the temperature in urban city areas—and any police officer will tell you that crime goes up with the temperature.

So I don’t ask permission anymore. I have guerilla-planted hundreds of trees around Lexington in the past five years, and plan to plant hundreds more. In April, I will be guerilla-planting native Bald Cypress trees in retention basins. Bald Cypress is a beautiful native swamp tree that soaks up water and doesn’t lose its branches, so this should help reduce some of the flooding around town.

Does this sound like fun? It would be great if you would do it, too.

# The magic potion

## Affordable Health Care Act heads to U.S. Supreme Court

By Jack Stevenson

The health care legislation promoted by the Obama administration and developed into law by the U.S. Congress, the Affordable Health Care Act, will be reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court to determine whether the law is constitutional. According to the Associated Press news agency, 26 states have filed legal challenges to the new health insurance law. The U.S. Court of Appeals in Atlanta, Georgia, ruled that the U.S. Constitution does not confer to the United States Congress the authority to require private citizens to buy medical insurance from a commercial for-profit insurance company. The U.S. Supreme Court will hear the case in March and will probably release a decision this summer.

The requirement for individuals to purchase medical insurance is called the “individual mandate.” The U.S. Supreme Court may decide if either the interstate commerce clause or the tax clause of our Constitution grants Congress the authority to impose a “mandate” that requires individual citizens to purchase medical insurance.

If you and your friends were discussing the merits of universal health care, it seems unlikely that anyone would suggest that it depends on the interstate commerce clause of our constitution. But that is exactly the issue before the Supreme Court or, at least, one of the issues. The U.S. Constitution grants the U.S. Congress authority to “lay and collect taxes” and also grants Congress the authority to “regulate commerce. . . among the several states” (interstate commerce). That yields a question: Does the requirement for individual citizens to buy health insurance from a for-profit insurance company constitute interstate commerce? If the answer is yes, then the Congress acted within its authority.

Another argument is that the requirement to purchase medical insurance or pay a financial penalty for failure to purchase insurance is actually a tax. The U.S. Constitution grants Congress the power to tax. The Court may decide whether the insurance purchase or penalty for failure to purchase is a tax. If it is not a tax, then the health insurance law could not be justified by the constitutional tax clause.

The Affordable Health Care Act also expands the Medicaid program. Medicaid is administered by the several states and the cost is shared by the federal government and the states. The adjutants general of 26 states object to the burden placed on the states by expansion of the program and contend that it constitutes federal “coercion” of the states. The Supreme Court will hear their argument.

The Court will also consider the relevance of the 19th century Anti-Injunction Act. The argument, here, is that the court should not decide an issue prematurely, that is, before the law is implemented. The major provisions of the Affordable Health Care Act take effect in 2014. Reliance on the Anti-Injunction Act doctrine would delay any Supreme Court challenge to the health care law until the year 2015. If the Supreme Court adopts this view, the Court would, we assume, not decide the individual mandate issue at the present time. However, the health care law runs to 975 pages, and it contains other miscellaneous provisions that the Court may or may not decide.

The new law requires insurance coverage from birth to age 65 when a citizen becomes eligible for U.S. Government Medicare. Forty percent of lifetime medical costs occur during those first sixty-five years of life. The commercial for-profit insurance companies will collect premiums for 65 years and sustain 40 percent of the lifetime medical costs. Sixty percent of medical costs occur after age 65 and become the responsibility of the tax supported U.S. Government Medicare program.

Supreme Court decisions are difficult to predict. However, the current Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Roberts has been friendly to business organizations. The Affordable Health Care Act diverts a river of money, a continuous income stream, from citizens to health insurance corporations.

Whether the health insurance law, if implemented, will result in delivery of good health care, remains to be learned. During the past 79 years, 13 presidential administrations have looked at the health care question. None, to date, has found the magic potion.

## Precious metals (cont.)

*continued from page 1*

is something the United States Federal Reserve could or should maintain. In fact, most economists, even some conservative ones, would argue that the current gold rush is nothing more than a new futures market, a special one that rises and falls with the degree to which people are disaffected with the federal government, taxes, Barack Obama, and, well, just about anything.

Those who put their gold where their mouth is seem to think that trading in precious metals is a way to evade the bitterness of the present. For these people, gold is the currency of a post-apocalyptic world in which interconnected economies have imploded and only strong, self-sufficient people survive. According to so called “metal-heads,” gold is not subject to the foibles or contingencies of Wall Street, the whims of government, or the avarice of financial institutions that speculate on other people’s hypothetical bank accounts without consequence. People who are suspicious of governments trade in gold because they think it’s stable and finite.

Nevertheless, the reality is that anyone can “print” more gold at any time by mining it (if you’ve seen the Discovery Chanel show, you know that I really do mean anyone). Gold is just one among many arbitrary signifiers of value, albeit a signifier that has some profound natural barriers to access. The process of digging through the earth to find gold flakes can be time-consuming, expensive, and dangerous. Still, from the vantage point of public institutions of higher learning, buying gold isn’t so much of an investment strategy as it is an ideological statement that our nation’s public institutions have no right to make. An investment in gold is ultimately a wager that the United States will fail. For public

universities to gamble against the success of our own democracy is insidious, not only because those very same institutions are supported by the federal government, but also because investing in gold undermines the very ideals on which our public universities were founded.

### The Liberal Arts

Say what you will about the United States, but at least we are a nation that realized from the start how important education is to a sustainable democracy. Thomas Jefferson, who played a big role in setting our country’s course, established a public university system because he knew that it would make the new democracy possible.

In a letter to George Wythe in 1786, Jefferson wrote, “Preach, my dear Sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people. Let our countrymen know that the people alone can protect us against these evils, and that the tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance.”

At the core of Jefferson’s vision was an education in the liberal arts, the pursuit of knowledge from many spheres and from many perspectives. A liberal arts education is holistic; it covers all knowledge that is befitting of one who lives in a free society. A liberal arts education prepares students to be excellent citizens, critical thinkers that draw on many disciplines as they interpret their experience in the world.

Unfortunately, there is a connection between what is happening to liberal arts programs and university endowment hedge funds. Even as universities momentarily turn profits on commodities market speculation, they turn around and cite constricted federal

Winter fun is hard on the back!

Happy & Healthy  
Backs Yoga  
Sundays, 11am

Lexington Healing Arts Academy252.5656

budgets as reason to reduce liberal arts funding.

Not surprisingly, the University of Texas is a great example of this pattern. While Zimmerman and his fellow gurus upped their stake in a wager that inflation will ruin America to make the university a billion dollars in a few months, the Texas administrators respond to shortfalls in federal funding by slashing liberal arts programs. According to *The Daily Texan*, UT Austin’s student newspaper, UT Vice President and chief financial officer Kevin Hegarty announced that in the next year, the College of Liberal Arts will be forced to cut \$3.5 million of its \$4.7 million dollar budget. Is any other sector in the university expected to make such sacrifices?

The cuts at UT Austin are among an increasing trend in higher education to destroy liberal arts programs in the name of fiscal expediency. Louisiana State University has cut its programs in Latin and German, and SUNY Albany announced in the fall of 2010 that it will respond to statewide budget shortfalls by cancelling its French, Italian, Russian, Classics, and Theatre majors altogether. All faculty, tenured and non-tenured, were released. It seems that under the current economic order in most universities, administrators will no longer justify liberal arts disciplines because the cost to educate students in them is not offset by the revenue they generate. Education gets reduced to the laws of the marketplace. Money becomes the measurer of man.

These announcements are typical of higher education’s ongoing and near-wholesale transformation from service-oriented centers of education to corporatized industries that swear by the rules of our capital market. Higher education has priced out everyone, save our nation’s upper-middle class and elite. Those who do get the opportunity to attend college will work their way through watered-down curricula, which unfortunately have minimal opportunities to study literature, history, language, theology, rhetoric, and culture. Meanwhile, the gurus that run

our university endowments make wagers that our nation’s economy will continue to fail.

At stake is not simply the future of liberal arts inquiry, where students can pursue knowledge in all quarters. It is the sustainability of American democracy, an interconnected society that implores its citizens to seek knowledge. The survivors in a crumbling democracy will have to do a little more than figure out how to find alternative currencies to replace the over-inflated US dollar. They will have to figure out what kind of critical thinking makes the idea of democracy possible at all and whether that kind of learning can be traded for gold on a futures market.

*North of Center* is a periodical, a place, and a perspective. Read on to find out what that means.

**Editor & Publisher**  
Danny Mayer

**Features**  
Beth Connors-Manke

**Music**  
Buck Edwards

**Design**  
Ghostnote Editorial

**Contributors**  
Michael Benton  
Andrew Battista  
Dylan Blount  
Captain Commanokers  
Stacey Earley  
Kurt Gohde  
John Hennen  
Wes Houpp  
Michael Marchman  
Kenn Minter  
Sunny Montgomery  
Kremena Todorova  
Clay Wainscott

Address correspondence, including advertising inquiries and letters to the editor, to **[noceditors@yahoo.com](mailto:noceditors@yahoo.com)**.

Unless otherwise noted, all material copyright © 2012 North of Center, LLC.

Want to help build community and solidarity in Lexington’s neighborhoods?

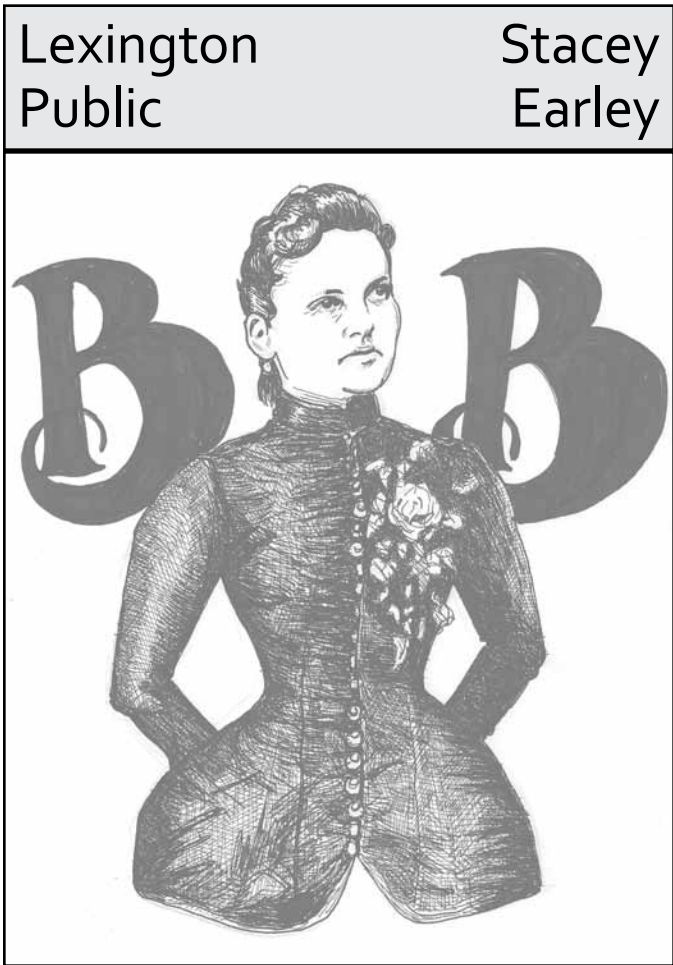
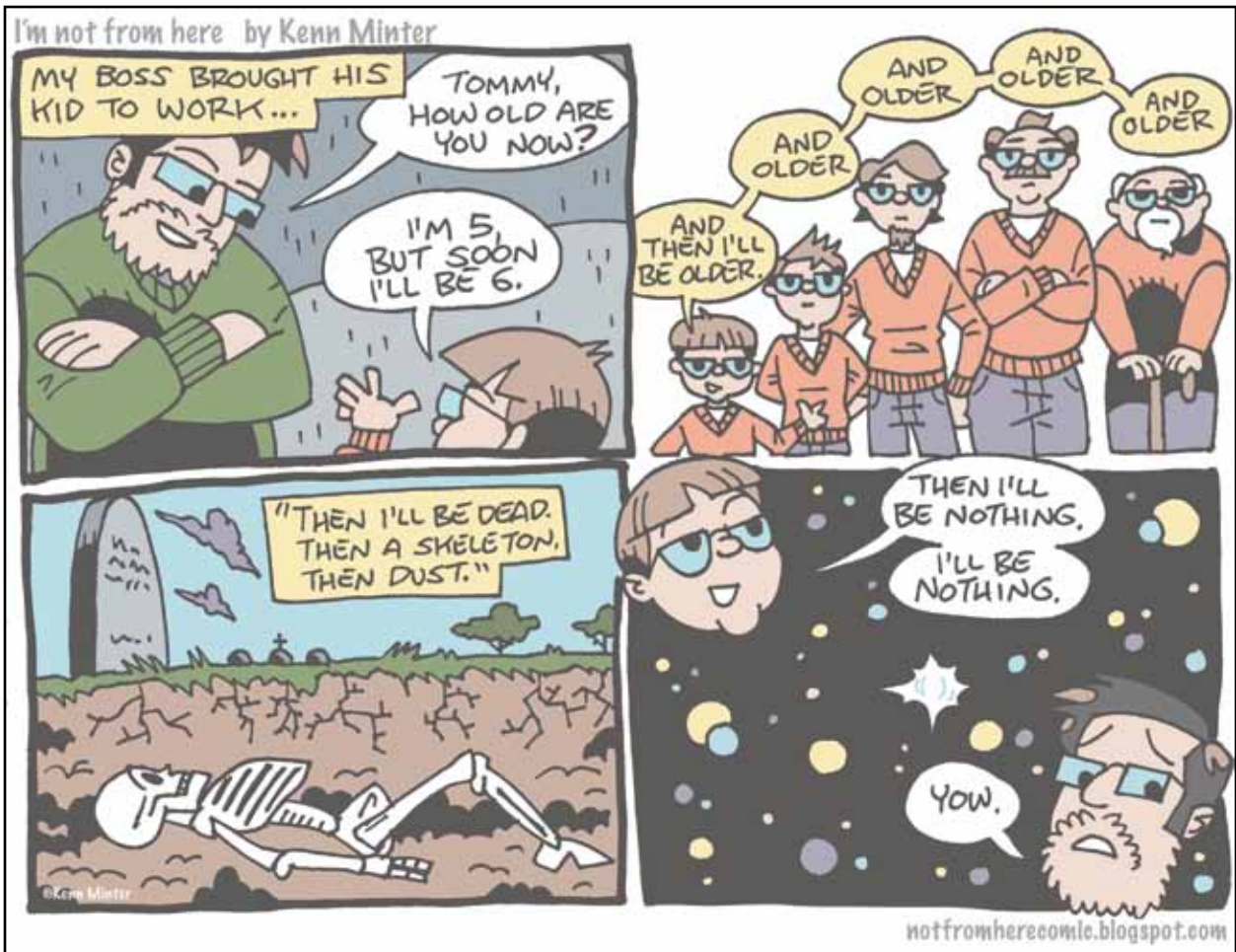
Want to help foster a municipal politics and local economy where everyone’s voice is welcome and decisions are made by citizens?

Join us every Friday at 5:30 at Natasha’s (Main and Esplanade) for the

LIBERTARIAN MUNICIPALISM  
READING AND ACTION GROUP

Contact [martin.mudd@gmail.com](mailto:martin.mudd@gmail.com) with inquiries, or to be added to the email list.




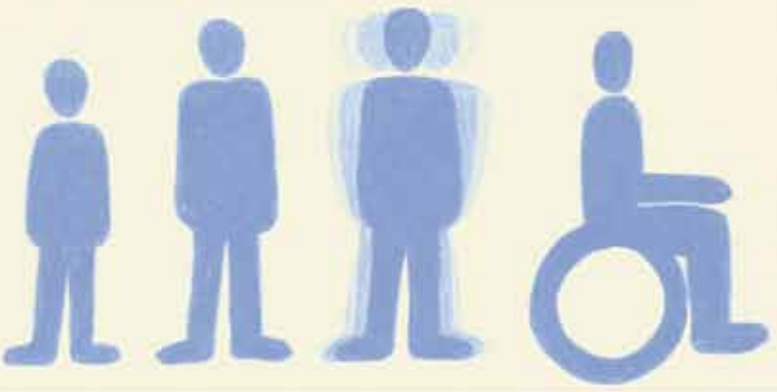


Coming up this month in live music:

<b>APPALACHIAN REGGAE</b>	<b>Friday, February 10</b> Ras Alan <i>Singetary Center, 7:00 - 9:00 P.M.</i> <i>Free; open to the public.</i>	<b>ELECTRONICA</b>	<b>Saturday, February 11</b> Ellie Herring record release party <i>with Skeleton Hands and John the Baptist</i> <i>Al's Bar, 10:00 P.M.</i>	<b>THRASH GRASS</b>	<b>Saturday, February 25</b> The Bloodroots Barter <i>with Louisville Vessel</i> <i>Al's Bar, 9:00 P.M.</i>
					

New poetry from Accents Publishing

I'm Fine, but Thanks for Asking  
Jude Lally



**Three-Legged Dog**

Your bark is fierce

When someone knocks on the door  
they may feel scared  
and think *BEWARE OF DOG*

You sound so tough  
and menacing  
with your foul howl  
and gruff ruff

Then as you  
hobble to the door  
to greet them  
you lick their outstretched  
hand;  
they're relieved to see  
most likely they could  
outrun your beastly bravado

Three-legged dog—  
*you prove  
no impairment  
prevents one's voice  
from causing an uproar*

**Praise for Jude Lally**


With his new book, *I'm Fine, but Thanks for Asking* poet Jude Lally proves that "no impairment prevents one's voice from causing an uproar." Whether confrontational—addressing "single-serving friends," or introspective—connecting to parents and loved ones, or quiet meditations on loss and longing, these poems touch the reader in a profound way. Jude Lally's new collection tells heartbreaking stories with wry humor and unflinching honesty with a voice that deserves to be heard.


—Richard Taylor

**Where to buy it**

*I'm Fine, but Thanks for Asking* is available for purchase directly from the author for \$12 by sending mail to [judelally@hotmail.com](mailto:judelally@hotmail.com), or by contacting him via his Facebook page.

You can also buy the book online at [accents-publishing.com](http://accents-publishing.com) or at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), and you'll find it on the shelves at Lexington's Morris book shop.

 **Accents Publishing**  
an independent press for brilliant voices

 **amazon.com** **the Morris book shop.**

**Upcoming reading**

Jude will be one of the featured readers at the famous Holler Poets Series at Al's Bar on Feb. 29 at 8 PM.

