

I Am New York City

Stories of strength and struggle from
NYC community based organizers.

“Without struggle, there can be no progress.”

*—motto of Frederick Douglass, the American slave who fought his way
to freedom and became a hero of emancipation.*



What you hold in your hands is a story of your neighbors; they are activists and organizers. They are a vital part of New York City.

We see a city that has been directly impacted by the Republican agenda; an agenda that penalizes poor people, drains jobs, marginalizes immigrants and wages unjust and brutal wars in our name. With this Republican Administration brazenly exploiting New York City for political gain, we have compiled interviews with New Yorkers who are making positive change in our communities. This is a small sampling of the voices who are truly making this city and country a better place.

As Republican delegates and dignitaries descend upon New York City, international media close in tow, the world is asking what matters to New York City. Our town is more than a whirlwind tour of the Met, Broadway, and Yankee Stadium. We bring you the stories of the New York that we know.

August 2004

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Full interviews and more can be found at:

www.IAmNewYorkCity.org





Sista II Sista, a Brooklyn-wide community-based organization located in Bushwick, is a collective of working-class young and adult Black and Latina women dedicated to working with women to develop personal, spiritual and collective power. Sista II Sista is committed to fighting for justice and creating alternatives to the systems we live in by making social, cultural and political change. Sista II Sista members Priscila Torres, Adjoa Jones de Almeida, Marleny Encarnacion and Liza Rosa answered these questions collectively.

How were you first exposed to the issues Sista II Sista addresses? What makes them meaningful for you personally?

Marleny: The issue we work around is violence against women of color. I was first exposed to this issue when two young women who I knew from my neighborhood were raped and murdered in 2000, when I was 17 years old. I think it's important to show the reality of this community; that cops don't really do what they're supposed to do.

Priscilla: These issues affect us, our families and our community as a whole. I think of the next generation. I think of my little sister; I don't want her to grow up in a world that is so male-dominated, where every time she goes out she is getting harassed or when she goes looking for a job, she's getting paid less than others.

How did you become active in combating violence against women?

When we first came to Sista II Sista, we went to the Freedom School and starting talking about different community issues. We started to realize that things that seemed common actually weren't and that the situation was bigger than it seemed. People usually think that the most common kind of violence against women is domestic violence. But they don't think about all the other forms of violence that affect us every day, like getting harassed on the street.

What kinds of activism do you undertake at Sista II Sista?

We use a lot of different strategies: surveys, block parties, door knocking, flyering and tabling. We've also done street theater—we acted out different situations on the street and other folks in Sista II Sista, acting as passersby, tried to get people to have a discussion around what they saw happening in the skit.

the video is finished we're planning a community video tour in people's homes, hair salons and churches. We want to get people talking about this issue.

What do you wish was more widely understood about violence against women?

That there are many different forms of violence that we need to confront and that people need to stop blaming women for the violence we experience. It affects our whole community, not just women. We need to be creative about the solutions we find for this issue because it's proven that putting more people in jail does not stop the violence. Instead we need to build our ability to hold ourselves accountable for the choices we make in our personal lives. We need to work together to hold our communities accountable for allowing interpersonal violence to happen.

What keeps you committed and active in the face of opposition?

Marleny: Living in Bushwick, I've struggled through my teenage years. I want to create change so that other young women know that they have a voice and that they can change things.

What challenges does this problem face?

Sista II Sista



Right now our organizing project is focused on Sistas Liberated Ground (SLG), a geographic violence-free zone in Bushwick maintained through community accountability. We're also working on our second video project, which looks at violence against young women of color from our perspective. Once

Adjoa: The solution to this problem depends on communities coming together to envision a different way of dealing with violence. It means linking personal transformation with larger social/political transformation.

Poor women of color facing violence are now even more vulnerable. They feel trapped because there are no options for good jobs, day care, public education, social services.

How has the current administration affected the women Sista II Sista works with?

Poor women of color facing violence are now even more vulnerable. They feel trapped because there are no options for good jobs, day care, public education, social services, etc. We can't live because rents are going up and wages stay the same. Immigrant women work the hardest and get paid the least.

How do you envision the future for Sista II Sista?

We want to see Sista Circles (small circles of women working on community accountability for violence), starting up throughout our neighborhoods in building complexes, schools, churches, and parks—wherever young women feel that there is a need for them. ☞

SISTA II SISTA

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Angel Seda of FIERCE!

FIERCE! is a community organizing project for Transgender, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Queer, and Questioning (TLGBTSQQ) youth of color in New York City. They are dedicated to exploring and building power in their communities through a mix of leadership development, artistic and cultural activism, political education and campaign development while taking care of themselves and each other.

Angel Seda (AS): My name is Angel Seda. I am a young male gay latino activist organizer. Seems like a long title [laughs].

You have mentioned that a large part of your work is creating “space” for queer youth? Why is space for queer youth important?

AS: A space is the most important thing to have. Just a space to be themselves for at least one minute a day or an hour. Because we can't do that in our communities; we can't do that in the Bronx or Brooklyn because we'll get stabbed. We can't do that in Queens or even Staten Island or other areas. People come to the Christopher Street Pier from so many different areas—I know a girl that comes down here from Yonkers. That's because she can't express who she is there. She can't walk with her partner and hold her partner's hand because she's afraid of getting hurt. So a space is definitely important for queer youth to be able to test out what we're doing, what we want to do, and see if we really want to commit to this individual—and not have all the stigmas of whether it's right or wrong but just do regular stuff.

How were you first exposed to queer issues in general? How were you politicized?

AS: I was first exposed when I came into this community. I started noticing that shit was fucked up. A lot of people were fighting constantly; there was a mass of drugs; there were people who were HIV positive, not taking care of themselves; crystal meth. And I noticed that those were problems: a lot of people with body image issues, communication issues, and unresolved anger. I started becoming politicized when I started going to programs within different organizations like the New York Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center and FIERCE and just learning about the issues hand to hand by building community with the people. You really need other people who know the issues. You can't just say you know the issues because they affect you. You need others who have the same issues as you so they can give you different perspectives on it.

Do you remember the first FIERCE meeting you attended or your first meeting at the Center? What was going through your head when you first really thought about being politically involved?

AS: Definitely. The first meeting that I went to, I went with a friend and she just grabbed me along to a meeting and we went. It was the first meeting for a couple of us. And I remember thinking “I want to know what these people know. I want to further my knowledge. This sounds so dope.” I thought about the issues already but

I didn't really understand the political aspects of the issues or how those issues actually happen, why they are important—how quality of life policies and curfews and other issues affect communities. I was just amazed and wanted to keep on coming for more. Then I got invested in the process. There was an open hand, people wanted me to find out, they wanted to help me find out, help me become politicized, help me become an organizer. That support helped a lot.

Organizing is hard. What keeps you going when you wake up in the morning?

AS: I do it because of the people. I think about the friends I have and the community I've built for myself. And also about myself and where I want my life to go. It makes me want to work as hard as I can to protect all those people. We don't call each other, we're not at each other's houses, so seeing each other at the pier helps a little bit.

AS: I envision it to, at some point, break the systems of oppression that are set up to keep us down. I feel like we're going to succeed in our battle. And I might not be there to see it but I know that someone else is because I'm putting the work into it now. People have natural instincts for changing shit and there are a lot of

people in our community who come out in that way—they start changing things and they just say I got a voice, you know, what the fuck, I could do a lot more—and they keep pushing

themselves. I want to have kids. I want my kids to be able to express

When you start loving people, that is when you really start becoming a protector or an advocate. There are a lot of leaders who don't know they are leaders because of the way they're treated either at home or by society or by work.

What would be different if there weren't groups like FIERCE?

AS: If there's a problem, somebody's gonna raise their hand up and get out there to fix it. I believe in human nature in that way, because we all love each other at some point. When you start loving people, that is when you really start becoming a protector or an advocate. There are a lot of leaders who don't know they are leaders because of the way they're treated either at home or by society or by work.

How do you envision the future?

themselves as who they are, if they want to be straight, if they want to be trans, whatever they want to be. So I envision the future different. 🏳️

FIERCE!

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I feel like we're going to succeed in our battle. And I might not be there to see it but I know that someone else is going to be there to see it because I'm putting the work into it now.



Bree Picower & Sally Lee

New York Collective of Radical Educators



Who is paying for this messed up educational system? It's 8-year-olds, instead of the administrations, the principals, the teachers.

The New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE) is a collective of public school teachers, both past and present, committed to social justice in education. NYCoRE staged a bake sale in front of Senators Schumer and Clinton's offices to bring attention to the disproportionate funding of the military compared to education. NYCoRE is currently involved in the battle against high stakes testing with a workshop to educate the public. Bree Picower and Sally Lee are NYCoRE members.

What is NYCoRE all about?

Bree Picower (BP): NYCoRE is about looking at the broader issues of social justice and their connections with education. For example, one of the issues around the war was the way recruiters disproportionately attack high school students of color in low-income communities. It's written into No Child Left Behind that high schools have to give their students' contact info to the military for recruitment purposes. Parents can sign a letter to opt out of that, but most schools don't let them know about it. We designed a curriculum to educate students about militarism and to give them tools to counter recruiters.

How would you like education to change in this country?

Sally Lee (SL): The public school system comes out of the industrial age of America: preparing different classes of students for different types of work. The revolution in education will be about opening up avenues for every child to feel empowered as a citizen with equal rights in our soci-

ety. In Republican and Democratic discourses there is talk of "every child having a chance for the American dream" and we're not saying anything different. We're saying that we need to look at how schools are structured, how pedagogy is shaped, how teachers are trained, and how to give all students the same feeling of entitlement.

BP: At NYCoRE, we try to understand the practices and policies that reinforce the racist and classist structure of the status quo. Our main campaign at this point is an anti-high stakes testing campaign. High stakes testing disproportionately affects students of color and low-income kids and serves as a gatekeeper to keep them behind.

How has this administration affected education?

BP: No Child Left Behind is based on accountability, which is not a bad idea. Any dedicated teacher wants to be held accountable and wants students to perform at high standards. The rhetoric isn't bad; it's that they are basing accountability on a test score. When kids in the suburbs have outrageous privileges and opportunities, and kids in urban areas have the exact opposite, and you're holding them to the same standard, that's not true accountability.

SL: From Bush to Bloomberg, from Snapple in the schools to the billion dollar testing industry, education is being run more and more on a corporate business model. Republicans are trying to treat education like the

commercial sector. Education will never succeed if run like a capitalist venture.

BP: The transferring of federal money for education to private corporations through test companies, charter schools, voucher schools—they're taking money from public schools and putting it into the private system. When you take that money you're dooming public schools to failure. Then they say, "Look, this system is bankrupt, we need another model."

What should the public understand about testing and education?

BP: The testing issue has been framed as retention vs. social promotion. Bloomberg has gotten this through by saying, "People who are against this policy just want to pass kids on without giving them the skills they need." However, the research tells us that retaining students doesn't give them the skills they "missed"—it increases their chances of dropping out. Once the chances of dropping out are increased there's an increased chance of going directly to prison. And the reality is—and the *New York Times* has documented this—who's in summer school since this policy went in? Kids in the un-

der-resourced and overcrowded schools with less qualified teachers. They're primarily Black and Latino, low-income children and English language learners. Who is paying for this messed up educational system? It's 8-year-olds, instead of the administrations, the principals, the teachers, the misallocated funds. It shifts the blame of educational failure from the schools and the system to the children.

In this educational environment, what are the rewards for you?

SL: Putting our voices out there—saying that these policies are ultimately sending students to jail and to a life of no economic opportunity—and having people say "All right!" We may never know what this work has impacted on the whole, but we've contributed to the spirit of speaking out.

BP: Teaching can be a very solitary and isolating experience, and a like minded community keeps teachers going. We're stuck in a system we disagree with, yet we want to do everything that we can for our students. NYCoRE gives us an opportunity to fight against this system while working with individual students. ↻

NYCoRE

New York Collective of Radical Educators

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Or join their email list by writing to:

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DRUM (Desis Rising Up and Moving) is a community-based social justice organization of working class and poor South Asian immigrants and immigrant detainees and their families in New York City. Desi is a common term used by people of South Asian descent to identify as people from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Guyana, and Trinidad. Their mission is to organize low-income immigrant detainees and South Asian immigrant communities for racial justice, immigrant rights and an end to detentions & deportations. DRUM's organizing campaigns are accountable directly to low-income South Asian youth, undocumented families and imprisoned immigrants. They are committed to building unity through joint work with progressive forces in other people of color and oppressed communities. The long-term vision of DRUM is to build a social justice movement amongst South Asian immigrants in the United States that is led by poor and working class South Asians, and is progressive and rooted in global justice.

Shoshi

Desis Rising Up and Moving

Could you introduce yourself and describe how you got started in DRUM?

Shoshi: I am 18 years old and I live in Jamaica, Queens. I am a youth organizer with DRUM.

After 9/11, even before 9/11, a lot of our South Asian community members have been targeted by government officials for minor visa violations and have been detained for many years or for many months. Especially after 9/11 they have been targeted just because they have a Muslim name; they have been put into detention and faced deportation. DRUM organizes the family members to fight this kind of injustice. DRUM has a youth program called "Youth Power" and I started interning with them in 2001.

Why have you continued working with DRUM past your internship?

Shoshi: Coming from a low-income, undocumented South Asian family, I know the hardship that each Asian individual faces growing up in New

York City, and DRUM works exactly for what I stand for—they empower low-income families and low-income women of color. It is really important for someone to do this kind of work in our community because not a lot of organizations are out there organizing in their own community and fighting injustice.

What are some of the hardships that you or other people working with DRUM are facing?

Shoshi: Most of the members of DRUM are directly affected, especially their family members. One woman's

husband was deported last year. She was pregnant and she had a two-year-old daughter who was going through serious brain surgery. We demanded humanitarian parole but he was not released. Their only breadwinner left and the mother is now working two jobs, supporting two kids, going through a lot of hardship. There are so many families like that. Personally, when I came here in '96, I found my mother worked 24 hours a day but was only getting \$300 a month because she was a domestic worker. So I saw her getting exploited by upper class families. I was growing up, going to high school here, maintaining a high GPA and having to work part time somewhere because my mom was not able to pay for regular stuff. And then when I was going to college I couldn't get any financial aid or scholarships because I don't have proper documentation.

It's not only me. There are thousands of other youth who are facing the same problems as me living in this country. Most of us, we grew up here and we were basically raised here, but we are still not considered human or treated as that. As a regu-

lar teenager you really don't know what is going on out there. You are just brainwashed by the media or the latest style or something.

Can you talk a little bit about your life and how the life of your community changed after September 11th?

Shoshi: Right after 9/11 there was a really, really big sense of fear in the community; a fear where people were afraid to go out of the house. Most people in our community, our base, they are undocumented low-income families. They are really afraid to speak their mind, to speak of their situation to the media or to other people because they are afraid that they are going to get detained or they are going to get deported or they are going to get attacked in general. That fear was created by the government, especially the PATRIOT Act and different laws that came out targeting our community members. I was really horrified.

What do you think are the biggest challenges that you are facing right now in getting some of this work done?

Shoshi: DRUM is a women-led organization and our community is a very patriarchal society so some

Right after 9/11 there was a really big sense of fear in the community... fear created by the government, especially the PATRIOT Act and different laws that came out targeting our community.

community members don't take us seriously; we have to work hard to build relationships with people. On top of that, DRUM has only been around since 1999, we only just got our office, we don't have many resources, the foundation world has not been fruitful so we have to do a lot of grassroots fundraising. We feel that whoever pays you ultimately owns you, we want our community members to own us and not some foundation.

What is your dream of how things could change?

Shoshi: I think the root cause of the problem is capitalism. When we can eliminate capitalism somehow, life will be much better, people will be happier. One of my fantasies for now is to have amnesty—legalization for all immigrants in America. ☺



DRUM

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Talleggh Smith & D

NYC People's Referendum on CAFTA & t

Español

En menos de un año y con mínima participación de la sociedad civil y el congreso, la administración Bush ha presionado para que sea aprobada la negociación del CAFTA—el Tratado de Libre Comercio entre Centro América, Republicana Dominicana y Estados Unidos—. Creada a partir del NAFTA, el CAFTA tendría las mismas consecuencias, representaría un retroceso para los derechos laborales y humanos y dañaría profundamente las economías locales. Las asambleas legislativas de todos los países involucrados tienen que votar antes de que CAFTA se

Community Voices Heard, Iglesia San Romero, Todo el Barrio con Vieques, el Harlem Tenant's Council, la Iglesia St. Mary, Jobs with Justice, el Centro Tamboril Cultural. Ésta, es una entrevista con dos voluntarios: Domingo de la Cruz y Taleigh Smith. Domingo es un autor, historiador y activista prolífico en la comunidad dominicana. Taleigh, trabajó con niños huelepegas de la calle, en Managua, Nicaragua, antes de llegar a Nueva York.

¿Si no estás ya envuelto en política y que a lo mejor sólo lees el periódico o ves las noticias, se les hace a ustedes que es muy difícil saber mucho de este tema?

pia el agua! Precios subieron, pero mientras tanto no ganan igual que antes con sus pequeños negocios o con sus fincas. Ahora ganan un salario muy bajo en las maquiladoras. Así que cualquier persona, una campesina, una mujer que ni se ha graduado de sexto grado, que nunca fue a la Universidad, que no es parte del sindicato, ¡que no tiene nada! ya sabe lo que es el “Libre Comercio, ALCA o TLC”... así, y no como una teoría. No es que los nicaraguenses o los dominicanos están escuchando lo que está pasando en México. Ya han establecido zonas del libre comercio con muros y policía, vigilancia, guardando espacio donde las empresas de afuera pueden venir y construir su maquiladoras.

Domingo de la Cruz (DdC): El tratado de libre comercio en la forma que está ahora planteado ocasionaría mayor pobreza en la Republicana Dominicana. Ante la presencia masiva, digámoslo así, de productos agrícolas estadounidenses subsidiados desaparecería la posibilidad de mantener la agricultura nuestra, porque el costo que le representa a un dominicano producir, es exactamente el precio de venta a que lo vendería los EE.UU. ¡Es imposible competir! Necesitamos un tratado donde los países como la Republica Dominicana puedan mantener la posibilidad de desarrollarse. Se necesita entender la situación económica social, pero en especial [se necesita] ayudar a los países, a que sus gobiernos actúen pensando en la gente, pensando el la persona, pensando en los dominicanos.

¿Como va pasar el proceso de cambio?

TS: A menos que revolucionemos el proceso entero de negociar tratados comercios, las desigualdades e injusticias crecientes sólo provocarán más violencia y destrucción. Tenemos salarios mínimos, horas garantizadas, beneficios, leyes ambientales, pero los Tratados de Libre Comercio, sobrepasan todo eso. Además cuando se firma el documento para hacer ese tratado posible ni consultan a la gente. La consulta, el referéndum, no es una idea que nosotros inventamos. Eso empezó en Brazil cuando comenzaron de hablar de la ALCA. El pueblo

en Brazil empezó con una consulta y dijeron “Mira, hay que informar a nuestros vecinos de lo que esta pasando aqui, porque libre comercio nos costará nuestra tierra, salud, escuelas, agua y sustentomira.” Informaron a diez millones de personas en Brazil [de lo que el TLC significaba] y 90% votaron en contra. Ahora nosotros estamos haciendo la misma cosa, junto con otros por todas partes del continente.

¿En que manera están informando a la comunidad?

DdC: Lo primero que hicimos fue la elaboración del documento de oposición que se representó a miembros del congreso. Lo que estamos

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aprueba. El congreso de los EEUU votará el acuerdo, hasta después de las elecciones de noviembre

Docenas de voluntarios y organizaciones se han unido en La NYC Consulta Popular del CAFTA y el ALCA, para informar a sus comunidades y crear una fuerza de oposición. Ellos han colectado votos durante más de un año y han organizado foros comunitarios y visitas a los representantes del Congreso, aquí en Nueva York y en Washington DC.

Entre los muchos participantes de esta organización se encuentran: CISPES,

Taleigh Smith (TS): En Nicaragua donde viví antes de venir a NY no hay una persona que no esté afectada por esto. El gobierno es forzado a acomodar libre comercio con la eliminación de impuestos de la importación. Empezó a cobrar a las familias para la educación pública de sus niños, la asistencia sanitaria, el agua y la electricidad. Hay familias que tienen que escoger entre mandar a sus hijos a la escuela pública—que ahora cuesta plata—o comprar agua limpia. ¡porque el gobierno ni lim-

Domingo de la Cruz

the FTAA

haciendo es contribuir a que la comunidad dominicana, —no solamente en el estado de Nueva York sino en otros estados—, comprenda el asunto y ayude con la comprensión el asunto en la Republicana Dominicana. Para esto ya comensaremos una seria de reuniones mas amplias a incorporar la mayor cantidad de dominicanos a la discusión. Además hemos organizado otros foros en clubes dominicanos. Dos en Tamboril en Washington Heights y uno en el Club 30 De Marzo que está aquí en el Bronx. Pero además el 19 de julio estuvimos en Washington en una comisión amplia.

¿ Ahora qué se les hace mas importante, poner presión al congreso o informar a la gente?

DdIC: Las dos cosas al mismo tiempo. En Washington, en una conferencia de prensa hablamos ampliamente sobre del tratado de libre comercio. Fuimos al congreso y visitamos oficinas de aproximadamente 20 congresistas. Entregamos el documento y hablamos con los asistentes ampliamente con relación del asunto. Hay cinco ó seis congresistas de los que visitamos que han fijado su posición públicamente diciendo que este tratado no conviene, pero que no se va discutir este periodo [legislar], sino que será después de las elecciones.

TS: El congreso no va a escuchar si solamente somos diez personas. La única posibilidad de no pasar ese tratado es que el congreso vote que no, o que el congreso dominicano lo rechace, o el congreso en Centro América. Cada país tiene el derecho de votar en sí o no, pero no pueden cambiar nada. Aceptan todo o rechazan todo. Así, si hay mucho interés económico, van a aceptar condiciones malas—no tienen el derecho de negociar por mejores condiciones. ↻

La NYC Consulta Popular del CAFTA y el ALCA será parte del Bloque de Solidaridad Latinoamericana y Caribeña en la marcha masiva en contra de la Convención Nacional Republicana el domingo, 29 de agosto, reuniendo en 20th St y la 6ta Avenida a las 10:00am. Planean también una demostración más pequeña dirigida a la delegación hispana republicana. “Ven a ser parte,” Domingo invita. “Tenemos que demandar que nuestros gobiernos actúan para el beneficio del pueblo.”

English

In the course of one year, with limited civil or congressional approval, the Bush administration aggressively pursued negotiation of CAFTA—the proposed free trade agreement between Central America, the Dominican Republic and the United States. Modeled after NAFTA, is feared to bring about the same consequences—namely regressive labor and environmental practices and the disabling of local economies to the benefit of large corporations. Before becoming law, CAFTA must be voted on by the involved countries' leg-

Romero, Todo el Barrio con Vieques, Harlem Tenant's Council, St. Mary's Church, Jobs with Justice, and the Centro Cultural Tamboril. Interviewed are two volunteers, Domingo de la Cruz and Taleigh Smith. Domingo is an author, historian and prolific activist with the Dominican community. Before coming to New York, Taleigh Smith lived in Nicaragua, where she worked with glue-addicted street kids.

If one is not already involved in politics and perhaps only reads the newspaper or watches the news, does it seem to you to be very difficult to know much about this issue?

We need a trade agreement that allows for the development of countries like the Dominican Republic. There is a need to understand the socio-economic situation, but there is especially a need to help countries to get their governments to act on the behalf of the people, thinking of the person, thinking of the Dominicans.

islative bodies. U.S. Congress is waiting to vote until after the November election.

As a force of information and opposition dozens of volunteers and organizations have come together to form the NYC People's Referendum on CAFTA & the FTAA. The people's referendum has been collecting ballots for over a year, and has organized community forums & visits to congressional representatives here in the city and in Washington, DC.

Among the many involved are CISPES, Community Voices Heard, Iglesia San

Taleigh Smith (TS): In Nicaragua, where I lived before coming to New York, there is not one person who is not affected by this. The government is being forced to accomodate free trade by eliminating import taxes and charging families for public education, healthcare, water and electricity. Now families must choose between sending their kids to the public school—that now costs money—or buying clean water because the government doesn't even clean

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the water. Prices went up but they don't earn as much as they used to with their small businesses or farms. Now they earn a very low wage in the factories. So any person, a farmer, a woman who has not even graduated from sixth grade, who never went to the University, who is not part of the union, who has nothing, already knows what free trade is. It is not that the Nicaraguans or the Dominicans are hearing about what is happening in Mexico. They have already established zones with walls and police, surveillance, guarding a space for foreign companies to come and construct their factories.

Domingo de la Cruz (DdIC): In its current form the Free Trade Agreement would cause greater poverty in the Dominican Republic. Before the massive presence of American subsidized agricultural products, the possibility of sustaining our agriculture would disappear because what it costs a Dominican to produce is exactly the same as the retail price of U.S. agricultural products. It is impossible to compete. We need a trade agreement that allows for the development of countries like the Dominican Republic. There is a need to understand the socio-economic situation, but there is especially a need to help countries to get their governments to act on the behalf of

the people, thinking of the person, thinking of the Dominicans.

But how is the process of change going to happen?

TS: Unless we revolutionize the whole trade negotiating process, the growing inequalities and injustice will only provoke more violence and destruction. We have minimum wages, guaranteed hours, benefits, and environmental laws—the free trade agreements supersede all that. In addition, when they sign the document to make the treaty possible they do not even consult the people. The “consulta”, the referendum, is not an idea we invented. That began in Brazil when they were talking about the FTAA. So the Brazilian people began a referendum and said, “Look we are going to inform our neighbors of what is happening here because free trade costs us our land, our health, our schools, our water and our livelihood.” They informed tens of millions of people in Brazil and 90% voted against it. Now we're doing the same thing, along with others all over the continent.

In what manner are you informing the community?

DdIC: The first thing we did was create the opposition paper. What we are doing is increasing the understanding of the situation within the Dominican community, not only here in New York but in other states as well, so that they can also help bring com-

prehension of the situation to those in the D.R. For this we are beginning a series of sizable meetings so as to include many in the discussion. We have also organized other forums in Dominican clubs. Two at Tamboril in Washington Heights and one at Club 30 de Marzo that is here in the Bronx. But in addition to this on July 19th we were in Washington, D.C., as part of a larger commission.

At this time what is more important, putting pressure on Congress or informing the people?

DdIC: Both things at the same time. In Washington, we spoke widely about the free trade agreement at a press conference. We visited the offices of approximately 20 congressmen. We gave them the opposition document and spoke with the assistants widely about the issue. There are five or six congressmen of those visited that have said publicly that this trade agreement is not beneficial, but also that it will not be discussed this period, not until after the elections.

TS: Congress is not going to listen if there are only ten of us. The only possibility of that trade agreement not passing through is if Congress votes no, or if the Dominican Congress rejects it, or the congresses in Central America. Every country has the right to vote yes or no but they cannot change anything. They accept everything or reject everything. If there is a lot of economic interest, they will accept bad conditions. As it is at the moment, they do not have the right to negotiate for better conditions. ↻

The NYC People's Referendum on CAFTA & the FTAA will be joining the Latin America and Caribbean Solidarity Bloc at the massive march and rally against the Republican National Convention on Sunday, August 29th, gathering at 20th Street and 6th Avenue at 10:00 am. They are also planning a smaller demonstration aimed at the Republican Hispanic Caucus. “Join us,” invites Domingo. “We have to demand that our governments act on behalf of the people.”

La NYC Consulta Popular del CAFTA y el ALCA / NYC People's Referendum on CAFTA & the FTAA

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Vivian Stromberg

MADRE

MADRE is an international women's human rights organization that works in partnership with women's community-based groups in conflict areas worldwide. Their programs address issues of sustainable development, community improvement and women's health; violence and war; discrimination and racism; self-determination and collective rights; women's leadership development; and human rights education. Vivian Stromberg is MADRE's Executive Director.

What is MADRE's focus?

Vivian Stromberg (VS): MADRE addresses issues relating to women and their families; issues of human rights. We address economic justice, food security, homelessness, health, refugees and other issues. The communities and countries we work in are conflict zones—they are at war—and post-conflict zones, which are as close to war situations as you can get. We work to strengthen women's commu-

nity based organizations all over the world. The programs vary, but there is always a component based on the immediate needs of the women and their families, in which food, medicine and other aid is provided; a component of long term development—we support community programs and training that enable women to assume leadership roles in their homes and communities; and a component that addresses political advocacy and human rights—women from local organizations that we support work with similar women's grassroots organizations in other countries to affect change in international instruments and international law. A community garden program, for example, addresses food security and political participation on the community level.

Why are these problems meaningful for you personally, and why should they be important to other people?

VS: These are issues that put women and their family's lives in the balance. The conditions that these women and their families endure are a result, directly or indirectly, of U.S. policy. So it's personal because I live in this country. And it should be an important personal issue to every person who lives in this country because the government that represents them is responsible for these issues.

When did you first become involved in this work? What keeps you committed and active in the face of opposition?

VS: I'm 63 years old, and I've been doing this work since I was 18, when a friend took me to a demonstration against the H-bomb. My first significant participation in human rights was in the civil rights movement in this country, and that was transformative. I got into this kind of work to help other people, and then I realized I was other people. I realized that the abuses I fought against weren't just unfortunate but the direct result of a construct. And that construct can be taken apart, as long as we are smart enough, devoted enough and serious enough, and as long as we continue to multiply.

What should more people in the U.S. know about women's rights; really, human rights?

VS: I wish our people knew and understood more about so many things. I wish people understood more about what equality means, and about what democracy means, because people have some pretty weird notions about what democracy is. They think if you can hop over a few homeless people on your way to a voting booth and pull a lever that you've got democracy. That's not democracy.

What are the rewards of this kind of work?

VS: I get to work with and meet some of the smartest, most creative, innovative and energetic people in the world. Working with them gives me a level of hope that if I were working alone I would never dream of having. ✨



PHOTO: LAURA FLANDERS

MADRE

Web: www.madre.org



We want to help influence policy and change, and so the greatest day in our history will be the day that we close. But until that hunger crisis is over, we're here.

Father Bill Greenlaw is the Rector of the Church of the Holy Apostles, home to a soup kitchen that serves 1,200 meals daily. Holy Apostles will also be open as a place of sanctuary during the Republican National Convention.

the whole community; we don't want to be just a soup kitchen, although that's clearly been the major thing that we've done. We want to help influence policy and change, and so the greatest day in our history will be

multifaceted programs, not just single shot things.

Some of our guests have been laid off, but they still have their housing. To them we say, "Pay your rent and come here to eat. Don't buy food and then get evicted," because then the downward spiral begins in earnest when you lose your housing. But the majority of the people we serve have fallen off the cliff, and getting them connected takes a lot. Detox is a huge thing, but detox alone is not enough. Our guests need substantial housing and job training. But it's not just job training, it's also social skills and being able to maintain a job. Many of our guests simply don't have the tools to function in a society where it requires a college degree to

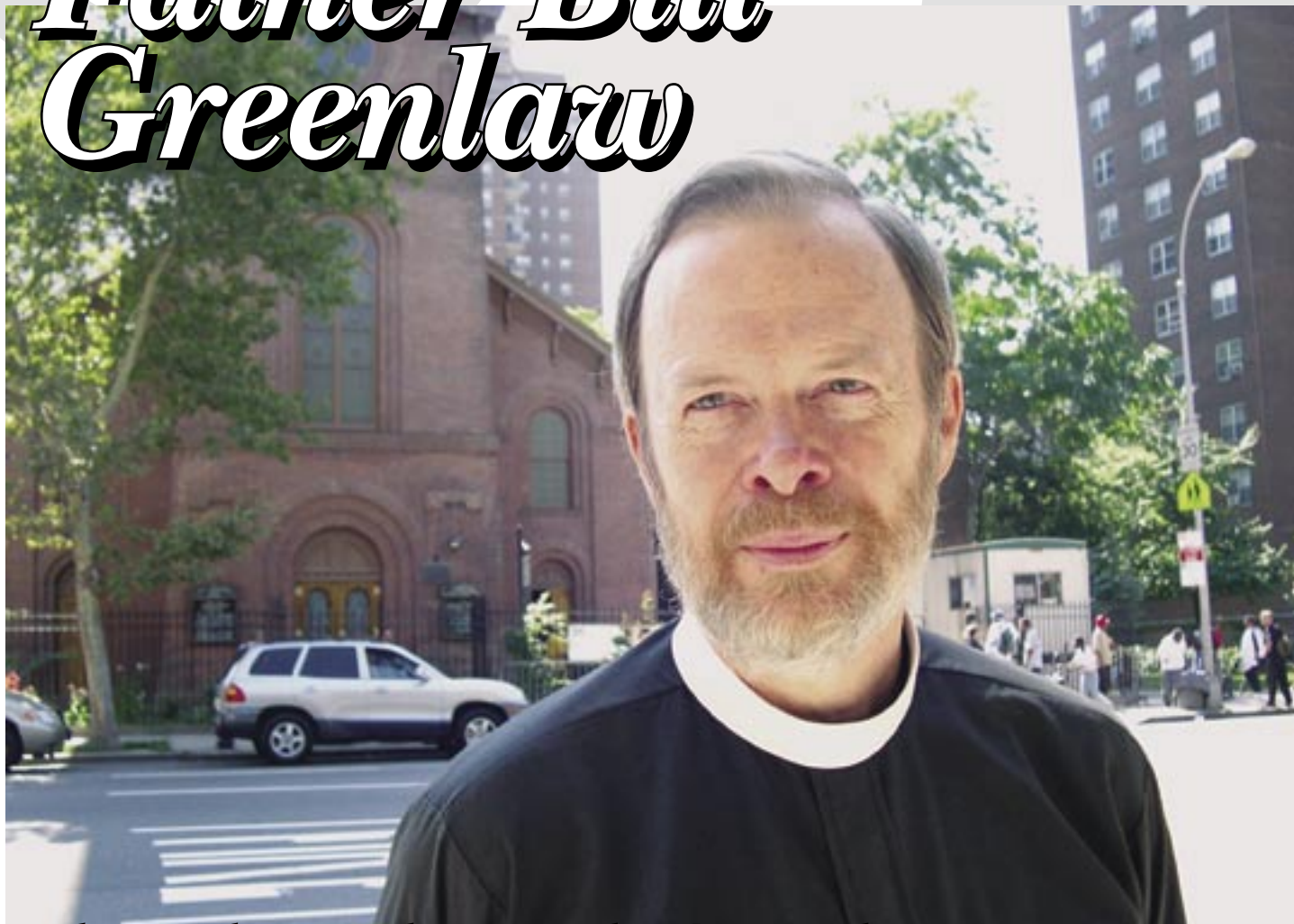
gle, who believe that justice is part of what it's about, are kind of in a minority. We're struggling with our faith, we're asking questions, we're encouraging people to ask questions. We don't dish out answers, shovel them down people's throats. That's not who we are or what we have. That's not to me what Christianity is. To me, that's a violation of our deepest principles, to treat people like that. In an era when people want easy fixes, the religious right is going to provide that. I'm sorry that George Bush seems to want to provide that. I think that we can do better. That's why I live in New York, where there's a critical mass of people of like minds where somehow you can try to hold something together.

Are you going to be serving meals during the RNC?

BG: There was never any question. I've been involved with a group of people and the Department of Homeless Services in New York City, meeting with them. Picture the Homeless is one of the organizations that's most involved with that. The City says, and I want to believe them, that they really intend to keep services open. We're going to be absolutely vigilant to ensure that people are protected. That's one big piece of what we're doing.

The other big piece of what we're doing is that the Stonewalk program is happening. It's a large stone memorializing civilians killed in war. It's coming here on the Monday of the convention. There's a huge program here Monday night. Also, Monday through Thursday nights, the Church is open from late afternoon to late at night as a place of Sanctuary for protestors. The designated protest area is 8th Avenue, just south of 31st Street. That's one block away from here. We're anticipating perhaps a large number of people coming here just to have an air-conditioned place where they can use the bathrooms, get water, coffee, sustenance, whatever, and go back. And so we're here for whatever the need is. ↻

Father Bill Greenlaw



Church of the Holy Apostles

What is the Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen and who does it serve?

Father Bill Greenlaw (BG): Since 1982, our primary goal as a church has been to feed as many people as show up at our door. When I came twenty one years ago we were up to five, six, seven hundred a day. We're now up to twelve hundred a day, and we've never missed a meal. And what doing one thing well did was to create visibility. The media discovered us, and we discovered that we'd be advocates for the people we served, because serving so many people gave us credibility. We're also a major resource for

the day that we close. But until that hunger crisis is over, we're here.

What kind of policies would you look to that could achieve that aim?

BG: We need policies that address the myriad difficulties that the guests we serve have that prevent them from being productive members of our society who are making it. We used to talk about getting people reconnected. Most of the people who come here have never been connected, so "reconnect" is a bit of a misnomer, because our society has never been willing to give them a chance. To deal with this population we need

navigate the welfare system, such as it is after welfare reform. The problem is that the programs that have worked and are out there are incredibly labor intensive and they're costly, and they can only take a few people at a time. But it needs to be said that it's not as expensive as incarcerating people.

You're obviously quite different from the religious right. How do you see the general conception of religion and Christianity changing?

BG: Episcopalians and other liberal folks who want people to think for themselves, who want them to strug-

HOLY APOSTLES Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen

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Yvonne Shields

Community Voices Heard

**COMMUNITY
VOICES HEARD**

Web: www.cvhaction.org

Phone: (212) 860-6001

Community Voices Heard is a membership organization of low-income individuals, mostly women with experience on public assistance, working together to build the power of our families, our communities and low-income people. While CVH was founded by women on public assistance to impact the welfare system, they now focus on economic justice. They broadly define economic justice as multi-issue, and thus include concerns related to welfare, education, our children's schools, job training, living-wage jobs, housing, economic development and other important community issues. Yvonne Shields is a CVH member.

What marked the beginning of your work as an activist?

Yvonne Shields (YS): Myself as an activist? I don't really think about it—you find things that are bothering you and you deal with them. That is how I got involved with Community

They put you in 10 x 10 foot room, with a bed and college refrigerator, where you can't cook. I'm looking for an apartment, for a job, filling out applications for public assistance and for Section 8. Then they tell me that I have to do Work Experience Program (WEP) for 38 hours a week, just to receive my benefits. I have a college degree, I worked for 20 years. Whatever I do, I want it to enhance my abilities to get a job in my field. I went to the Coalition for the Homeless and saw a flyer that said, "Are you tired of getting screwed around by welfare?"—yesssss—"then come to CVH."

What is the Work Experience Program (WEP)?

YS: Indentured servitude. That's what it is—they claim it is to gain work experience in your field to help you get

wrong! There should be some way, if they are not going to give you cash money, to give you credit for your skills and your work.

What actions does CVH take?

YS: One of our actions is dealing with the welfare centers, addressing concerns of overlong lines, misinformation, the problem of people staying there for five hours to be told "no" or that they are in the wrong place. We met with the people responsible for the Bronx region to make changes in the service. Before the last city election, we had a mayoral accountability event along with ACORN and FUREE (Families United for Racial and Economic Equality, another New York City economic justice organization). We wanted to make candidates aware of us. We fought for the Transitional Jobs Bill (an alternative program to the WEP) which was passed by the city council.

Bloomberg and Pataki refuse to meet with CVH. Refuse to come into East Harlem and talk with low-income people. One of the reasons that I work with Community Voices Heard is because we have got to help people understand the brainwashing that is keeping us from the polls. When I talk to people and they say, "I am not voting," I sit and talk with them, to try to get them to understand the importance of using that vote. Down to the council member, on the local level, to show those people who we have in office—who are supposed to be representing the people—that they need to think about us when they are making decisions about our lives. He stole the White House and if we let them do that again... shame. ☹

One of the reasons that I work with Community Voices Heard is because we have got to help people understand the brainwashing that is keeping us from the polls. When I talk to people and they say, "I am not voting," I sit and talk with them, to try to get them to understand the importance of using that vote.

Voices Heard. You're dealing with a system that doesn't follow through with what it promises. With public assistance, you go there thinking that you will be able to begin to put yourself in a direction where you can grow, survive and begin standing on your feet—but there is no help getting to your goal.

In February of 1999 I was downsized out of my job of 20 years. In January of 2000 I was evicted from my Washington Heights apartment of 20 years. I was moved around every 28 days through the homeless system. You have to be evaluated to make sure that the story that you are telling is true.

a job, but it doesn't work like that. They give you an evaluation of what your skills are. My first job was in my neighborhood, where they were training home health care workers. I have experience as a trainer in child care, I have workshop skills, I've worked with computers. I am also a photographer. My job was to sit at a desk and watch the door. When I did see the director I told him about my skills. He said, oh that is good, you can show my assistant how to use Excel. The next day I had to clean the bathrooms, mop a hall a block long and then after I did all that I trained the woman in what I knew of Excel. For all this work I got \$68 twice a month? Now, something is



Amita Y. Swadhin & Ashwini Rao

Youth Solidarity Summer



Youth Solidarity Summer (YSS) is a volunteer collective of artists, activists, educators and students providing alternate education to South Asian youth since 1997. YSS's mission is to provide radical political education for young activists of South Asian descent. YSS aims to build a movement of youth activists engaged in anti-oppression work, and to create a forum to share organizational and political strategies. The long-term goal of the program is to create solidarity among a new generation of activists fighting for social justice.

What is the Youth Solidarity Summer program?

Amita Y. Swadhin (AS): We gather in New York for ten days once a year. Every year we have around 30 students—this year we have 33 between the ages of 17 and 23—all young South Asian folks having roots in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh. We opened the program up to young people who self-identify as radical and who are committed to organizing for institutional change, and for changing models thought



of as traditionally oppressive to ones where oppression doesn't exist.

Ashwini Rao (AR): Basically, the idea is to bring together a group of South Asian participants who identify as progressive, creating alternative spaces within our own communities and critically engaging within our community in terms of the conserva-

tism that exists within the community—joining other struggles for social justice. The idea is to move beyond the sense of identity to an issue-based politics which are articulated by challenging the existing social relations in society and looking at oppression in a different way. The idea is to build a larger community of South Asian activists.

AS: What usually happens after the ten days is that you stay in touch with at least some of the people in the program. It can be frustrating to be someone grappling with politics of South Asian identity within the conservatism of the community, and to only have the South Asian societies on campus to go to, which tend to be very monolithic in terms of politics.

AR: People are working to start other groups like ours across the nation. We also want to start engaging with social justice movements in South Asia, and help connect those participants with activist groups in the United States.

What does the week look like for your participants?

AR: Every morning, we have a workshop. They serve to explore the analytical tools of the systems of oppression. In the afternoon, we attempt to build organizing skills. We're doing three clinics this year: one on how to run a campaign, one on how to do media activism, and one on how to incorporate arts into activism.

AS: Every night, the participants attend panels telling them about activist work being done in New York:

Being either second or first generation immigrants, many of us live in the communities that are being profiled; many people that we know have been deported or detained.

one on immigration and labor, one on queering the movement, one on racism and imperialism, and one on resistance movements in South Asia. We're also going to take a community field trip to show them the larger world of New York activism.

What do you wish were more widely understood about the issues that are important to your group?

AS: We're not a single-issue organization. I think solidarity building is something most organizations really struggle with—a lot of us get caught up with single-issue organizing. For us, it's really an intersection of many issues. I wish more organizations understood that. We're part of an immigrant community, but there are

domestic violence survivors who are immigrants. I don't think enough organizations consider that, and I don't think there are enough organizations that have solidarity with each other.

How has the current administration affected the issues that you work on?

AS: We definitely are not in favor of the Bush administration, but we also weren't in favor of the Clinton administration. In 1998, when I was a participant in the camp, Clinton had just bombed Sudan, and we went down to Times Square and protested. I think the issues that we're involved with are just highlighted with Bush in power. New York schools have really suffered with the war machine. Being either second or first generation immigrants, many of us live in the communities that are being profiled; many people that we know have been deported or detained. Many of our friends have been beaten up, particularly after September 11. Bush's response to September 11 has only exacerbated the profiling of our community. But I really want to stress that we were certainly not pro-US militarism that was already occurring under the past administration.

AR: The Bush administration became a flashpoint, but I don't think of it as a Bush administration versus Clinton administration issue. I look at it as a state versus people issue: as long as the state is all powerful and is only protecting corporate profits and wealth, there's going to be an underclass that suffers. 🐞



YOUTH SOLIDARITY SUMMER

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Email: yss-info@proxsa.org

Lalman & Kara

Joya

Adebanjo

How We Resist

these images are part of the "how we resist" project, which smacks on the map our day-to-day resistance to the ills we face as oppressed peoples of color – black & brown, queer, womyn, men, working class, immigrant, youth, elders (etc., etc., na'mean?) – living and worming in the grimy apple.

Andrea ACB

Nelson

asif



Another world is not only possible, she's on her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing.

-Arundhati Roy



Cover Paintings and Photo by: Andrea ACB