
Bienville House Center for Peace and Justice

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Fall 2011

Op-Ed

Listening to Ken Rudin and other media pundits denounce the poisonous political atmosphere of 2011, I was reminded of my return to the US in December 2004, after over 15 years abroad. I regularly heard lamentations about the rudeness and disrespect that Americans showed towards their political opponents. It struck me as odd that these pious pronouncements were coming from a media and political establishment that was virulently and universally threatening, insulting, torturing and physically attacking so many foreigners.

I was living in the UK when the attacks at the WTC towers and their aftermath virtually saturated the news for years afterwards. During this period, the voice of America as we heard from government officials, pundits and commentators in the British media was full of hate and threats. Just to hear an American accent began to feel slightly scary.

In the immediate aftermath I constantly encountered expressions of sympathy towards the US as I traveled through Europe and the Middle East. Yet I sensed a sting in the tail from these comments. People of many nationalities would say “it must be so shocking for Americans, since it’s the *first* time they experienced this in their *own* country”. Few were crude enough to say so directly, but all seemed anxious to subtly remind me of whatever suffering their own countries had experienced, not when sending their soldiers to fight thousands of miles away, but at home.

Certainly our national trauma in the wake of the 9/11 attacks was understandable to the whole world. Ten years on, however, I believe we have to remind ourselves of an important truth. Yes 9/11 was the only attack of its type that we

suffered on our mainland within living memory. In the bigger picture, however, it was hardly the first time that *anybody* was attacked.

We may feel that those who attacked us are the most evil and cruel people who ever lived. But even if they were almost the only ones to attack us, they were not the only ones to attack anyone in a cruel and inhuman way.

To be sure, anyone who challenges the might of America must be desperate almost to the point of being suicidal. Nonetheless, peoples and nations around the world have suffered trauma that would have felt very much like what we experienced from 9/11. Yet most eventually had to reconcile, to some degree, with whomever they blamed for their suffering.

The 9/11 attack seems to have left us believing ourselves to be uniquely targeted. In the traumatized aftermath of 9/11 2001, such a sensation was understandable. Ten years on, the memory of that trauma should make us feel more deeply connected with our brothers and sisters of all nationalities around the world, who have experienced similar grief and fear. Above all, we should be very sensitive not to carry out actions that will cause similar trauma to others.

“Dear America-Your 9/11 is our 24/7-Love, Palestine”. Should that tweet, circulating earlier this month, offend us? Today we should recognize when other nations are experiencing something like what we went through. We must accept that it is traumatic for *any* people to be subjected to such massive destruction. I find it hard to imagine that we will achieve mutual respect in our internal politics, until we relearn basic respect for the rest of humanity.

Fareed Aboul-ela

☞ In Memoriam ☞ Sarah Peckham

It seems like our progressive community was just starting to recover from the loss of Doc Reich and Paula Henderson when the news came in early spring that Sarah was terminally ill. How could this be? Sarah was so active and full of life – and still so young. She was so happy and excited during the Christmas holidays because she and Irvin were going to be grandparents. But it was true and Sarah passed away on August 9th with Irvin at her side.

Many of you came to the “Silent Auction” fund-raisers held every December in Sarah and Irvin’s lovely home on Government Street. (We just found out recently that all the beautiful tapestries and wall hangings on display were

Sarah’s own creations.) She and Irv would open up their house and their hearts and just let us pile in with all our “treasures” that we no longer wanted. They hosted a lot of other events, but Sarah once told me that she liked our Bienville House gatherings the best because we always “brought the best food!”

A beautiful memorial service was held for Sarah at the LSU Faculty Club – some of you may have attended. We were struck by the same theme that ran through everyone’s tributes: Sarah and Irv had a good life together, and she loved every minute of it.

Julie and Ma’moun Sukkar

Invisible Children to Visit the Baton Rouge Community

Invisible Children is a non-profit organization that uses film, creativity and social action to end the use of child soldiers in Joseph Kony's rebel war and restore affected communities in Central Africa to peace and prosperity (see www.invisiblechildren.com). Staff members from the organization will visit the Unitarian Church, 8470 Goodwood Blvd, on Sunday, October 23, 2011. They will participate in worship services at 9:30 am and 11:15 am, and show a documentary film featuring a story about a boy named Tony. From the Unitarian Church website: "It is a story that takes us out of our neighborhood, out of our country, perhaps out of our comfort zone. October 23rd is United Nations Sunday, a time to acknowledge the small planet and our connections to the world. We host team leaders from The Invisible Children project who are in the region and making a stop at our church. This Sunday, you may wish to carry cash or credit card for a tee shirt, jewelry, or a DVD."

Diana Dorroh

Second Annual Reich-Henderson Writing Competition

We are officially launching our campaign to get out the word about the second annual Reich-Henderson Writing Competition, which seeks to highlight local students’ experiences with promoting peace and justice. Once again, we will be inviting high school juniors from Louisiana to submit essays for award consideration. Essays must be submitted by the end of February 2012. Writers of the top three essays will receive cash awards, and the winner will be invited to read his/her essay at the next Wade Mackie Award Banquet. As our announcement flyer and competition details are finalized, they will be available at the Bienville House website: www.bienvillehousecenter.org

Baton Rouge Theater Activist to Visit Belfast & Jenin

Dylan Baniewicz is a playwright, composer and facilitator of community-engaged theatre. She graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor's in Theatre Studies from Louisiana State University in May, and over the course of her undergraduate studies received training in theatre performance, design and criticism. She composed and recorded scores for university productions, as well as debuted compositions for small chamber ensembles. Her original plays and incidental scores have been performed in Louisiana, North Carolina, New York and Northern Ireland.

Dylan also gives workshops using theatre techniques to encourage dialogue and healing. She has worked with actors on rehearsal techniques, educators on integrating drama into the classroom, and on-campus organizations to dynamize dialogue on LGBTQ issues. She regularly volunteered with the Baton Rouge C.A.T.C.H. Program (before it lost funding several months ago), facilitating improvisation workshops with youth.

Earlier this year, Dylan joined a team of theatre artists in Galliagh—a disadvantaged suburb north of Derry, Northern Ireland. Together, the team used theatre games and rehearsal techniques adapted from a canon of theatre-for-social-justice practices with a core group of about thirty community members. Most had never stepped onto a stage in their lives. Twice a week, Dylan huddled with them in a drafty room sharing tea and thin ham sandwiches. They walked, filling out the empty spaces, making images with their bodies of jealousy, conflict, and love. Dylan asked, probably a thousand times, “What do you notice?” From these explorations she helped the community develop three plays—one about religious sectarianism, one about domestic violence, and one about substance abuse. The original plays were performed before a Galliagh audience in order to spark dialogue and imaginative solutions to the troubles they bespoke.

Recently, Dylan departed for a four-month venture abroad, and Bienville House is among those sponsoring her trip. From September 26th-November 1st, Dylan will work with at-risk youth in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Youth will play theatre games and explore techniques that stimulate self-reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving. The Derry Playhouse invited her to give these workshops as a member of the International Cultural Arts Network, or ICAN, after the runaway success of her work in Derry earlier in the year.

Following her work in Belfast, Dylan will travel to The Freedom Theatre in Jenin, Occupied Palestine. Along with her colleague Ben Rivers, Dylan will facilitate workshops with youth artists and allied community workers in leadership skills and applied theatre approaches to community dialogue and trauma recovery. Under occupation, Palestinians experience daily incursions: harassment, torture, confiscation/destruction of property and restricted movement. The far-reaching effects for youth living in this environment are most clearly evident in high levels of traumatic stress disorders, family violence, sexual violence and suicide. The Occupation has also interrupted economic development, resulting in severe unemployment and poverty. By facilitating workshops, trainings, performances, dialogue events and political actions, it is hoped that Dylan can directly support the greater movement towards peace, justice and democracy in Israel-Palestine.

Upon her return to Louisiana in February, Dylan anticipates giving workshops, performances and master classes to disseminate her experiences abroad to the Baton Rouge community. Please don't hesitate to contact her at cbaniewicz@yahoo.com with your questions or concerns. Additionally, if you are interested in following her work abroad, email her with subject line, “Add Me,” and she will invite you to follow her blog filled with pictures, poems and essays as she travels.

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