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“A New Vision of Citizenship For a Fast-Globalizing and Ecologically Challenged World”

By Laurie Lane-Zucker

Thank you to Gail Weymouth and the Vermont Library Association & Jerry Carbone and the Brooks Memorial Library.

This is the second time in less than one year that I have had reason to be thankful for and honored by John Swan and his life's work. Last summer I was in Florida at the American Library Association's Annual Conference accepting the Intellectual Freedom Roundtable's Oboler Prize for Intellectual Freedom on behalf of Wendell Berry and David James Duncan and their book that I acted as series editor for, *Citizens Dissent: Security, Morality, and Leadership in an Age of Terror*. John Swan chaired the Intellectual Freedom Roundtable for a long-time and it was during that tenure that the Oboler Prize was created.

I am delighted that this, my first speaking engagement since founding The Triad Institute at the beginning of the year, is taking place in Vermont. While Connecticut-Yankee born and bred, I spent a number of years living in Vermont as a student at both Middlebury College and Bread Loaf, many more years working closely with individuals and organizations throughout Vermont, and much of the rest of the time trying to figure out a way to live permanently in Vermont. Alas, the closest I got to being a full-time Vermonter is where my family and I finally settled, Great Barrington, MA, in the Berkshires.

Some call the Berkshires “Norman Rockwell country” as the renowned painter was based in nearby Stockbridge. I have my issues with this characterization, however, as I believe that

while Rockwell lived and worked in the Berkshires, the values his paintings emphasize, among them fidelity to family, community, and country at times seem to be better distillations of rural Vermont than rural Massachusetts. Indeed one might conjecture, though I have yet to find any evidence to support this claim, that Norman Rockwell suffered from the same deep-seeded Vermont-envy that has afflicted me since my first trips up here as a child.

Your mountains are higher, your lakes larger, your spaces seemingly wider, your towns quainter, your reds are redder, your greens greener, your politicians bluer (and I must say much more exciting, *Scream* and all), your ski runs longer, your Subarus shinier, your lattes more organic and traded more fairly, your religion...well, let's try to keep religion out of this for at least a short while, your ice cream more progressive, your mac and cheese cheesier, your milk whiter, your nights darker, your stars brighter...you get the idea.

Or, at least, it just seems that way.

So in the end I prefer an alternate description of the Berkshires, one that has emerged to my knowledge recently and was used with great frequency during your former governor's run for the White House as well as in several recent letters to the editor at the *Berkshire Eagle* that promoted the idea of succession to the Green Mountain State (seriously). Anyway, my preferred term is Baja Vermont.

So I come to you as a Baja Vermonter and as the instigator behind a new organization, the Triad Institute, to speak about citizenship in a fast-globalizing and ecologically challenged age. Given the relative awe and great affection that I feel for Vermont in general and, specifically, Vermonters in person, I am reminded of the story of the old, weathered Vermont farmer at work clearing a new field, using his team of draft horses to move boulders, one by one, over to a stone wall, just as farmers used to do many years ago. Hearing a noise, the farmer raises his head from his work and looks toward the road, where, barreling along toward him he sees a very large black SUV, thirty cylinders under the hood, darkened windows and all the other necessary and unnecessary accoutrements — a veritable urban

assault vehicle perfect for a relaxed drive in the country, secure from all outside threats, domestic and foreign.

The farmer looking on, the vehicle suddenly screeches to a stop in front of the farm, its all wheel drive braking system functioning like the technological wonder it was intended to be. The driver side window drops to reveal the face of the driver, a younger man with slicked back hair and dark sunglasses staring slack jawed at the farmer. Looking down the farmer goes back to his work moving boulders, apparently unconcerned that he is suddenly the source of much interest and pastoral entertainment. For about fifteen minutes the man with the hair and sunglasses stares beadily as the farmer and his team move one boulder over to the wall and return for another. Finally, unable to abide his curiosity any longer, the man emerges from his behemoth. He walks a few steps toward the farmer, who has paused in his work and is now looking at him with a passive face of indiscernible emotion.

“What are you doing?” asks the younger man.

“Moving rocks,” replies the farmer.

“Where did they come from...the rocks?” inquires the younger man, tipping down his sunglasses to see better.

“Glacier brought ‘em,” the farmer responds.

“What?”

“Glacier.”

“Oh...” A moment’s pause, and then the younger man asks,

“Where did it go.....the glacier?”

“Went back for some more.”

So hopefully, even as a Baja Vermonter intruding upon the Promised Land of Enlightenment and Good Works, I will try heartily to not come off too much like the driver. All cylinders and little substance. Too much exhaust and too little refinement. If nothing else, the fact of my encroaching forehead should distinguish me from the story’s more lustrously headed hero.

What has brought me to this point — this interest in enlightened citizenship — in my professional career, is somewhat difficult to track. Here are a few noteworthy points on that trajectory. My father, Jack Wolf Zucker, who was twenty years older than my mother, and who died when I was quite young, was born of Russian Jewish immigrants who came to this country in the late nineteenth century, fleeing religious persecution and seeking economic opportunity. My father was a self-made man. A very interesting man to boot. He started out as a chiropractor and homeopath in New York City, decades before such endeavors were either widely respected or financially viable.

Continuing those later as hobbies, he decided with his best friend Joe Pope to start a company, Eastern News Distributors, in 1948. My father’s principle interest in starting Eastern News was to create distribution channels for high quality, small-circulation or “niche market” periodicals that served under-addressed cultural, political, and philosophical issues. Eastern News was instrumental in creating an abundant marketplace for such magazines as *The Progressive*, *The Nation*, *Paris Review*, *New Politics*, *Foreign Affairs*, as well as *Architectural Digest*, *Art in America*, *Organic Gardening*, and a host of others. Eastern News paid special focus to serving under-served immigrant communities, choosing to distribute, for instance, foreign language translations of *Readers’ Digest*. My father was a social utopian, a theosophist, and an ardent pacifist, who despite being deeply outraged by the fascist oppression (and later, extermination) of the Jews, so believed in the principle of non-violence that during World War II he became a conscientious objector and spent time at the Tennessee Valley Authority work camp for his beliefs.

My mother, Jane Lane Lee-Kirby, is of English, and decidedly unpacifistic Scottish stock, with a father who was a veteran of World War I and in the home guard during World War II and a bloodline tracing, I am told, back to very martial Robert the Bruce. She grew up an Anglican in war-torn southern England. Her childhood was defined in large measure by the seemingly constant stream of German bombers that flew over her house on their way into London, the ear-splitting blasts, the shaking ramparts, the hours spent in shelters or walking gingerly amid the rubble and bomb casings, the rationing of food and supplies, and near-constant hunger. Orphaned in her late teens, my mother, like many of that epoch, family and country ravaged, became for a time rootless, studying art in Italy before moving to Vancouver and then on to Boston and finally, New York, where she was first hired by and then became married to, the president of Eastern News.

As for me, my early years were not nearly as eventful. I grew up in George Bush's hometown of Greenwich, Connecticut, and attended Salisbury Preparatory School, Middlebury College, where I studied English and Classics, as well as Edinburgh University, Columbia University, and the Bread Loaf School of English. My first work was in film, and I was on that track, and in the middle of two masters degrees, when one day I came across on the newsstand, a high-quality, small circulation magazine called *Orion*. I instantly fell in love with its high ideals, its extraordinarily fine writing and art, and most crucially, its timeliness and poignancy. I was very moved when, a short time later and many years after my father's death, I found out through reading the fine print on the masthead that the magazine's sole distributor was a company called Eastern News.

I offered myself part-time while I continued my studies at Columbia, and came on initially to help the magazine in a variety of editorial and administrative functions. Within a few months, however, we decided to start an organization, The Orion Society, and I was asked to shepherd it into existence. It soon occurred to me that a) this is what I most wanted to be doing with my life, b) that I could not do this part-time, and c) that to do it, I would have to leave my two graduate programs mid-stream and go full-tilt. That is what I did, and in the intervening years, I had the extraordinary opportunity to work closely with, learn from, and in many cases form lasting friendships with, some of the great visionaries of our time.

And while I now want to move on to the main focus of my talk, I would like first to invoke some of my teachers by name, for as Wendell Berry said in 1994, when we honored him with an award, if one were to begin to subtract from me the influence of all who have helped bring me to where I am today, I would very quickly disappear altogether. And so with that I wish to recognize, in no particular order, knowing that I am leaving many out: Wendell, John Elder, Barry Lopez, Scott Russell Sanders, Terry Tempest Williams, Richard Nelson, Robert Michael Pyle, Pattiann Rogers, Gary Nabhan, Peter Matthiessen, Gary Snyder, David Orr, Rick Bass, Oren Lyons, Homero Aridjis, Ann Zwinger, Kim Stafford, Jane Goodall, Robert Hass, John Hay, David James Duncan, and Marion Gilliam.

I will begin to speak about citizenship by referring to a radio dialogue I heard recently where the pundits were discussing why so many Americans still believe that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein was in cahoots with Osama Bin Laden. The lead pundit said this about those Americans, “I do not think that they are ignorant, they are misinformed.”

Not ignorant, but misinformed.

Let’s look at these two words. *Ignorant*, according to Webster’s New Blue State Collegiate Dictionary, means “destitute of knowledge or education.” *Misinformed*, according to that same dictionary, means “given untrue or misleading information.” Now I would have looked up these same two words in Rove/Cheney Red State Theologically Correct Dictionary, but it seems to have been borrowed by one of my children and not returned. Probably hidden behind some bush. My guess, however, is that that authority, the bible, as it were, of the beltway, would probably define *ignorant* as “the preferred state of awareness” and *misinformed* as “faith-based policy.”

Now in such polarizing times, despite this attempt at crass political humor, I am not necessarily aiming to further the impression of many that we are headed toward a second American Civil War, as illustrated, for instance, in the two maps widely circulated on the

internet after the election comparing the 2004 state electoral breakdown of red and blue states with that of the slave-holding and free states in the mid-nineteenth century (which, if you haven't seen them, are essentially the same map). Nor am I particularly keen to promulgate the broadly accepted idea of an unbridgeable divide among our citizenry and that there is on the one hand the secular, the spiritual, the pluralistic, and metaphorically minded and on the other the religious, evangelical, dogmatic, literal-minded.

I bring them up not so much to further such distinctions as to reveal some of the principle challenges to finding a form of citizenship that works productively, sustainably, inspirationally, artfully, and justly in a time of tremendous change and challenge. A time where, as Thomas Friedman describes, communications technology, the liberalization of markets, and other aspects of globalization have “flattened” the world, while global warming, aquifer depletion, species mega-extinction, soil depletion, excessive consumption in the industrialized world, and poverty and over-population in the developing world portend a very different kind of “flattening.” A time when, as George Soros declared last October, perhaps sensing imminent defeat in the November 2nd election, we need to ask “what is wrong with us?”

What is wrong with us that we sanction systematic corruption at the governmental level, where the deliberate falsification of intelligence, the wholesale handing over of our wondrous natural heritage to industry, the placing of corporate profiteers in charge of environmental protection, our public health, and our airwaves, is considered okay, or worse, business as usual. What is wrong with us?

Now, I am certainly not interested in name-calling. That is why I say “us.” What is achieved by naming someone “ignorant,” or a “hick” or, on the other hand, calling someone “Godless” or “elitist.” Not much. Just more polarization. But while I do not see much virtue in name-calling, I am deeply interested in identifying conditions that present serious challenges to effective citizenship — how, for instance, ignorance and misinformation together can create a double-headed hydra, where the more of one opens the door to more of the other.

I am interested in fundamentalism, domestic as well as foreign, and in the power of collective denial, because as Paul Krugman wrote in late March, “Democratic societies have a hard time dealing with extremists in their midst. The desire to show respect for other people’s beliefs all too easily turns into denial: nobody wants to talk about the threat posed by those whose beliefs include contempt for democracy itself.” Krugman continues, “It’s true in the United States, where dangerous extremists belong to the majority religion and the majority ethnic group, and wield great political influence.”

I am interested in the corporate conglomerating media, and the way so-called news and entertainment and political posturing are mixed seamlessly together into a swirl of contempt for the average viewer’s intelligence and discernment. Consider Larry King Live on CNN, one of the “better” shows. On any given night he might have live war coverage from the “front lines” in Iraq or Pamela Anderson discussing her surgeries, Dick Cheney arguing for greater executive autonomy in reaching energy policy decisions or Sylvester Stallone touting his new magazine, “Sly,” which is about, no joking, whatever Stallone thinks about....Sly’s views on depression, Sly’s views on women, Sly’s views on the war in Iraq, Sly’s views on Sly’s last film....

There is certainly much else that contributes to *acitizenship* (“the state of not being a true citizen”). Our startling lack of knowledge about geography, biology, and climatology, for instance. Our ignorance of the deep scholarly research over decades by theologians that reveals the highly edited, at times contradictory, and supremely political nature of the New Testament, and our distrust of religions and ways of living and knowing other than our own. Our bewildering array of molecular technologies that serve as often to distance us from real experience as they do to enhance our ability to connect with each other.

These are but a few of the many, many obstacles to true, effective citizenship. And if there were more time, it would be well worth going on with that list. At least to get it out further into the public discourse. Indeed each deserves its own talk. But many of these things this

audience of real life Vermonters probably knows, or at least intuitively. And it may be that it is the Baja Vermonters like me who are just catching up.

The greater question, however, the greater challenge, is how do we fix it? How do we become good citizens? Do we have a vision, or can we create a vision, of the citizen that works for our time.

I would like now to propose one to you. I call it triadic citizenship, and that is where my new organization takes its name. The Triad Institute was actually going to be called the Tripartite Institute, but then I had a conversation with John Elder, one of my oldest mentors and friends, a Vermonter (of course!), and a trained classical musician. He suggested, when I first proposed the name Tripartite that I might consider the name Triad, as it was not only a much nicer name (with which I wholeheartedly agreed) but that in music the triad are the three notes that form the tonal basis for all music. As a non-musician I did not know this, but as an amateur aesthete, I liked it very much.

So what is the Triad? What is Triadic citizenship?

The concept first found its way to me when I was working as series editor on a recent book by Terry Tempest Williams, The Open Space of Democracy. In my foreword to the book, reflecting on some of her passages describing her work as an activist, I wrote this (it begins with a quote from Williams):

“Williams writes, ‘In the open space of democracy, we are listening — ears alert— we are watching— eyes open— registering the patterns and possibilities for engagement. Some acts are private some are public. Our oscillations between local, national, and global gestures map the full range of our movement. Our strength lies in paying attention to what sustains life, rather than what destroys it.’ ”

“There is an essential artfulness, suppleness, and fierce advocacy at the core of such a stance on living. One is simultaneously a citizen of a place, a citizen of a nation and its many

places, and a citizen of the world. The realization that these forms of citizenship are fundamentally connected and need to become tripartite facets of our identity, seems to me to be a principal challenge for those living in the twenty-first century.”

So the name “triad” refers to a tripartite concept of citizenship that is simultaneously deeply local or “place-based,” national, and multinational/global. A triadic citizen is at once a citizen of a place, a citizen of a nation and its many places, and a citizen of the world. Together, they form a pyramidal set of mutually informing and reinforcing awarenesses, and this, I would argue, is exactly what we need and must expect from a citizen in the 21st Century.

So now let me share just a few additional thoughts about each of these three facets of triadic citizenship.

Local Citizenship

Triadic citizenship requires a deep knowledge of and commitment to ones community. Seminal writers and educators such as Wendell Berry, John Elder, Scott Russell Sanders, David Orr, and Ms. Williams have long emphasized that the path to social justice and ecological healing must start in ones own “homeground.” It must begin at a personal level where ones web of relationships provides an authentic touchstone to ones experience of the world. Without a deep engagement in the continuum of ones own place, an individual becomes vulnerable to a myriad of negative influences from “absentee,” ill-intentioned, or otherwise unwise decision-makers. Without, for instance, experiencing first-hand the deterioration of main street culture caused by big-box stores, the deleterious effects of industrial farming on local family farms and agriculture, the impact of downwind particulate pollution on a child’s asthma, the disenfranchisement of voters due to fraud or manipulation, or the inattention and/or spin given to key issues of concern by a conglomerated commercial media, such matters become mere abstractions and lose their immediacy.

Local citizenship begins with education. I have been involved for many years in the development of “place-based education,” which I believe is one of the most effective

methods of cultivating local citizenship (I would refer you to David Sobel's recent book, *Place-Based Education*, for a comprehensive review of the pedagogy and practice of place-based education). Place-based education provides a means of inspiring stewardship and an authentic renewal and revitalization of civic life.... As the pedagogy of community, place-based education [aims for] the reintegration of the individual into her homeground and the restoration of the essential links between a person and her place.... Place-based education challenges the meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community?

Local citizenship, therefore, is an all-important foundation for a new vision of citizenship. It grounds our sense of identity. It makes issues real and immediate. It is a crucial touchstone for the other two parts of the triad, national and global citizenship, which all too often become stuck in the realm of abstractions. Likewise, however, these other two sides to the triad bring an important complementarity and balance to local citizenship, ensuring that it does not become bogged down in a quagmire of provincialism and myopia.

National Citizenship

On November 2, 2004, America spoke and for many the election turned on the issue of "moral values." In principle, the ascendancy given to moral values by so many in the United States is a good thing.

As the dominant influence in the world and as a beacon of democracy, Americans and American leadership need to evince moral clarity and the values that guide our actions here and abroad need to be founded upon an honest inquiry into what constitutes our moral compass.

It is also crucial to understand that the search for a moral values-based vision of America is a process that evolves over time and is open to new ideas, information and challenges. A moral American democracy, according to the Founders, was not based on one imposed interpretation of truth. The Revolutionary War was fought and the Constitution written to

protect from that kind of demagoguery. As Garry Wills wrote last autumn in *The New York Times*, in a post-election essay that bemoaned the apparent move toward fundamentalism in the United States, “America, the first real democracy in history, was a product of Enlightenment values - critical intelligence, tolerance, respect for evidence, a regard for the secular sciences.” The current reality, clearly, is a marked departure from this history.

An effective inquiry into moral values and leadership needs to be based simultaneously, and without exclusion of the other, on faith *and* reason, on personal rectitude *and* just action toward others. To be concerned about the lives of the unborn but neglectful of the impact of mercury poisoning from power plants on those unborn as well as young children and women of child-bearing age is not moral. To believe in the spread of freedom across the globe without engaging in a dialogue with other nations about the best ways of achieving that end is not moral.

To care about "family values" and community without embracing a notion of inclusiveness, without regard to religious affiliation, sexual orientation or racial makeup, is not moral. To extol the virtues of democratic principles while undermining the right of free speech and a free press is not moral.

To declare that homeland security is a priority but to willingly obscure or ignore the immense threat of global warming is not moral.

The fact that many Americans base their voting patterns on such a flawed or simplistic understanding of moral values has profound implications for the United States and the rest of the world. In terms of foreign policy, the past several years provide ample evidence that a mindset of polarities — “for us or against us,” good and evil — that exempts more nuanced and sensitive approaches, undermines peace and security both at home and abroad. Domestically, it highlights a failure of our educational system — of, among other things, our ability to distinguish between the need for cultivating, in John Dewey’s words, a “spiritual democracy,” and the need for maintaining a clear separation between church and state.

The fact that one of the two major political parties in the United States has based its success on such thinking and the undermining of these historical barriers is nothing less than a tragedy.

There exists an urgent need to counter the dominant worldview through the advancement of an enlightenment understanding of the roles and responsibilities of national citizenship, both within the United States and as actors on the world stage, and to neutralize what I call the “fundamentalist drag” that is weighing down our progress, as American citizens and as global humanity, toward a more just, peaceful, and sustainable place.

So as the second part of the triad, a new vision of engaged and circumspect national citizenship is paramount. The lack of a far-reaching and just citizenship, which helps us transcend our all-to-human baser instinct of greed and the temptation toward the bald use of our accumulated power, not to mention our vulnerability to wanton fear-mongering, is absolutely crucial. When we Americans step into the ballot box, we are no longer acting on the basis of one-person, one-vote, but rather on behalf of innumerable others around the world, whose lives hinge on our choices.

Global Citizenship

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

(Prologue, *The Earth Charter*)

Those are not my words. They are from the prologue to a document called the Earth Charter (as you may know, the Chairman of the drafting committee, Steven Rockefeller, is a Vermonter).

Signs of an emerging multinational or global citizenship that responds to the challenges of a rapidly globalizing and ecologically challenged world are growing. Documents like the Earth Charter and Precautionary Principle provide important frameworks for a new global ethic of citizenship. Additionally, as writers like Paul Hawken, Rebecca Solnit, and Jonathan Schell have noted, the recent outcry of world public opinion against such things as the Iraq War and World Trade Organization, represent the emergence of “a new superpower” — an enlightened, engaged and vociferous global civil society.

What has been somewhat less recognized, however, has been the rapid growth of grassroots organizations in every region of the world. While estimates vary on the exact number of social justice, environmental, anti-nuclear, economic, cultural/artistic, folkways, health, agricultural, and other grassroots NGOs, it would be safe to say that this number runs at least in the hundreds of thousands (there are over 30,000 in the United States alone). Probably between 1 and 2 million worldwide.

It is through these groups, individually and collectively, that the good, real work is being done. It is through these groups that progressivism, which Bill Moyers presents in such fine historical detail in his recent book, Moyers on America, that progressivism is currently being reformulated, reframed, reimagined, rethought, and a new language and political bearing created.

It is through these groups, their proximity to the ground and to their communities — their “place-basedness” — their increasing understanding of and savviness toward national and international processes and dynamics, that for me the greatest hope resides. At my last organization, The Orion Society, in 1997 we began to create a network of organizations

throughout North America, now numbering over 700, and if you want to get a sense for the amazing diversity of the kinds of work I speak of just go to their website. OrionOnline.org.

My new organization, The Triad Institute, has established a strategic partnership with Paul Hawken and the Natural Capital Institute as well as one with Ken Ausubel's and Nina Simon's Collective Heritage Institute and their extraordinary Bioneers Conference to take this global in a big way. Through a variety of publishing, educational, and networking ventures we are going to help this astonishing collection of good, healing work become even more of a bulwark of free-thinking, freedom-loving, hope-and-justice-filled, Earth-defending, neighbor-loving individuals and organizations. My dream, finally, is to create a great working monument to citizenship and progressive values, a Center that embodies and fulfills the new progressivism's immense promise and vitality.

In the final part of my talk, I want to try to leave you with a sense of optimism by describing three mortifying failures. These three incidents are interesting to me because of their potency, a potency that resides not in the initial, perceived failure, but in the extraordinary transformative process that each failure put into motion, ultimately offering great hope and a powerful example. And I know that many people, like George Soros, have been feeling the tremendous weight of perceived failure in recent months.

The first incident took place several months ago in our town of Great Barrington. At a school committee meeting a vote was taken to decide the name of a new elementary school that had just been built. For months, there had been discussion about naming the building after our town's most famous son, W.E.B. DuBois, the father, for many, of the American Civil Rights Movement, founder of the NAACP, and a person who Martin Luther King Jr. said was his greatest influence. W.E.B. DuBois was born and grew up a stone's throw from the Housatonic River, just down the street from where my children are growing up now. Like my children, he was the product of the Great Barrington Public Schools, he went on to Harvard and a distinguished life of scholarship and social justice advocacy. Interestingly, he was also a fine writer of the natural world and an outspoken advocate for the local environment, writing in the local paper as a young man that the cleaning up of the polluted

Housatonic River (a process we are still engaged with today) was not simply a moral act but a crucial step toward the renewal and strengthening of community life.

In advance of the school committee meeting of a few months ago, there were numerous letters written to the Berkshire Eagle in support of naming the school after DuBois, and a number against with those decrying the facts of DuBois later life when he moved to Ghana, Africa and declared himself an admirer of Karl Marx. I do not have the time to go into the details of the controversy, but suffice it to say, because of the controversy, the school board voted to name the school not after DuBois, but after the great flowing watercourse that runs behind the school. So this September, when my kids enter the new school for the first time, they will be attendees not of W.E.B. DuBois Elementary School but of Muddy Brook Elementary School.

Angry and passionate letters of outrage besieged the Eagle's offices in the days after the school board's decision. Charges of racism and provincialism were rife. Still, the decision was final and the failure of the pro-DuBois faction complete. Or so many thought.

That was then. Today, several months on, there is a new grassroots organization devoted to championing the life and work of Great Barrington's most famous son. That organization recently called a meeting of anyone interested in supporting its efforts and over 200 people showed up. A new ballot initiative was written that, if approved, would place signs declaring Great Barrington the home of W.E.B. DuBois on our main artery, Route 7, both entering and leaving the town. Two weeks ago, the town voted on this proposal, and it was approved with a 2-1 majority. Furthermore, a portion of the Housatonic Riverwalk is being named after DuBois. A museum is being envisioned on the site of his birthplace. And countless other projects are being proposed and considered.

The second failure that I wish to share with you is that of a similarly famous or infamous American, depending on your point of view. A Vermonter. Howard Dean.

As a passionate and unrepentant advocate for Governor Dean, I was crestfallen by his loss in

Iowa, and, like many, rather startled by his exuberance in defeat. A crushing and embarrassing failure. Or so many thought.

I want to share with you my own experience of this failure. The day after Iowa I was in a terrible mood. The only thing I could think of doing was to sit down and write. What I wrote I submitted to the Berkshire Eagle and they kindly printed it. Here is what I wrote:

While brooding on Howard Dean's post-Iowa caucus rebel yell, a line from Whitman's poem "Song of Myself" suddenly came to me, and things started to make some sense:

"I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world."

It took 150 years, give or take a few, but we finally have an actual, authentic recording of Walt Whitman's most famous contribution to the language: The barbaric yawp.

Dean's much-publicized yell was not so simplistic as many pundits declare. He was not "imploding" or acting "unpresidential," he was simply articulating in one word all the exhilaration, outrage, maddening complexity and contradictions inherent in the American condition.

Howard Dean's story, while still being written, already borders on archetypal. The reason for this is that he somehow contains within himself something essentially, and yes, primally American. He is an extraordinary, ordinary man. How else can one explain his 600,000+ signers-on and the tens of thousands of small donations? How else can one explain the for-profit media's unremitting hostility mixed with fascination? (A recent study showed that more than 50 percent of Dean's press coverage has been negative, as opposed to a little more than 20 percent for all the other candidates -- and this was

before the yawp).

This something that attracts us to him also repels. Interestingly, this how the rest of the world views us Americans. This something is also revealed in the extreme highs and lows of our historical occupation of this land, in the brutal ravaging of Native American cultures by early European settlers, in the audacity displayed in Philadelphia at the nation's founding, the horror committed by brother against brother on the bloody battlefield at Antietam and on the streets of Charleston, the glory we glimpsed in black and white when a booted foot made the first human imprint on the moon.

I believe our country's love/hate affair with Howard Dean in part stems from the fact that many of our citizens have yet to fully grieve for the losses of Sept. 11. These Americans were pre-empted from this necessary process by a leadership that quickly declared its intention to "smoke 'em out of their holes," fingered an "Axis of Evil," produced the Patriot Act, and lied to the country in order to invade Iraq. They've continued to affront our moral sensibilities on multiple fronts with their wholesale assaults on the environment and public health. The outrage at this behavior, expressed by the hundreds of thousands who took to the streets to protest the Iraq War, and in the unprecedented tidal wave of support for the previously little known candidate from Vermont, has not yet been quenched, and won't be until the perpetrators are vanquished from the political scene.

Dean is The Raw American. He is untranslatable. His story is bigger than we can at present tell. And while he is more than ready for America, the question is whether America is ready for him.

We do need a leader like him, because in these times, we cannot afford someone less. But do we have the courage to have him?

Maybe he is too much like us.”

So the paper printed that and it got some decent play on the internet. End of story.

Not really. Not for me. Not for Howard Dean. For me, what happened after that initial failure, the loss in Iowa of my candidate, was more important than the loss itself. I processed it. I wrote something. I grieved. Heck, I may even have screamed. And then I moved on. More focused and expectant than I was before. A year later, I started a new organization devoted to answering the question, What is a productive and enlightened citizen in a fast-globalizing and ecologically challenged world?

And Governor Dean. Well he moved on. And despite all the scorn and belittlement heaped on him after the Iowa failure, despite being called in so many circles a flame-out, a has-been, Howard Dean now runs one of America’s two major political parties.

The third and final “failure” stems from the previously mentioned book project with the American writer and great patriot Terry Tempest Williams. The book is called *The Open Space of Democracy*. When we published this volume last autumn, we decided to send her on something we called The Open Space of Democracy Tour during the month before the election. One of the stops was in Sanibel, Florida, at Florida Gulf Coast University. A few weeks before her visit to Florida, the University’s President, William Merwin (who has absolutely no connection to the great poet and essayist, William S. Merwin of Hawaii), who is a sizable donor to the current occupant of the White House and his political party and the University’s Board of Trustees, all of whom were appointed to their positions by Florida Governor Jeb Bush, against strenuous dissent from the faculty, voted to postpone the engagement until after the election fearing that their students might be swayed by what they feared would be “politically one-sided presentation.”

Notably, they did not feel the same way when they allowed to move forward a visit to campus by Dick Chaney, a week before, and in the very same room, where Williams was to have appeared.

As you might expect, Terry and I were mortified by this turn of events and we wrote impassioned letters to President Merwin, pointing out the obvious political partisanship and serious first-amendment issues implicit in their action.

But, sadly, we are in 21st Century, post-September 11th America, where actions like the torture and killing of innocent prisoners (the “pulpification” of innocent prisoners), held without due process, in places like Guantanamo Bay, or Abu Ghraib, or Bagram, Afghanistan, flow directly and irreducibly from a directive handed down from the bosses in Washington that the Geneva Convention does not apply to individuals held in connection to the war on terror. Including, it seems, people whose sole fault is to have chosen the career of taxi-driver.

21st Century America where the Patriot Act gives the rights to local law enforcement to demand the library records of any citizen, for any reason, and that if the librarian were to disclose such requests to anyone other than their immediate superior, that that librarian would be breaking the law and could go to jail.

21st Century America where the industrial production and dissemination of toxic mercury into Americans’ bodies and ecosystems is lawfully protected by something called the “Clean Skies Initiative,” where the wholesale selling off of intact and diverse ecosystems is federally mandated by something called the “Healthy Forests Initiative.”

21st Century America where politicians, eager to feed the beast that is the evangelical right’s ministry on Capitol Hill, fight to replace so-called “activist judges” with those who, realizing the Founding Fathers’ greatest fears, take “God,” or at least their interpretation of God’s will, into account. Where the mind-numbing dogma of so-called “intelligent design” trumps not only Charles Darwin, but also the very senses that infuse our mortal lives with richness, beauty and complexity, and which ultimately, and perversely, removes the divine from creation.

21st Century America where the very real threat of global warming is dealt with through a studied disregard of facts, the cultivation of denial, and pandering to American's basest instincts of greed and fear — representing a stunning and reprehensible lack of morality and moral leadership.

So this is the America, the mindset, the reality, in which our Open Space of Democracy Tour was voted out of the engagement in Florida. The Tour, and Williams' book, which ironically were about how to create a space for productive dialogue in polarized times, was told to go away. To come back some other time.

David James Duncan, in his upcoming book *God Laughs and Plays*, which will be Triad's first publishing effort, recalls the co-father of psychoanalysis, C.G. Jung, who he notes was an admirer of Jesus. Duncan writes, "Jung struggled hard to love his neighbors back in the early 1930s. But by 1934, Jung had concluded that when psychosis reaches a national scale it has become more powerful than truth, more powerful than reason, and far more powerful than any truth-telling individual."

What is wrong with us?

So Terry's failure, our failure, to open minds and hearts and a true space for democracy in Florida, was set in stone and carried down from the mountain on the backs of President Merwin, his Board of Trustees, and Governor Jeb Bush. Business as usual had won out over open hearts and free minds. We had lost.

Or had we? Within twenty-four hours of the vote to postpone, the President's office was besieged by fierce letters of protest from members of the faculty and the student body. The local papers in Naples and Ft. Myers wrote front-page stories on the controversy. Within two days of the vote, the Associated Press and dozens of newspapers across the country and abroad picked up the story. It was the top story on the Chronicle of Higher Education's website, and letters of protest started to pour in from around the country. Letters came from past Poet Laureates, well-known scholars and academic administrators, and notably, the

Intellectual Freedom Roundtable of the American Library Association, the same Roundtable that John Swan headed up years ago. The great poet, W.S. Merwin of Hawaii, obviously stung that such an act had been perpetrated literally in his name, wrote a brilliant letter of outrage to his counterpart at the University.

Then came the most inspiring acts. The students of the university, including over a dozen different university clubs, the College Republicans and Democrats among them, defied the administration and wrote to Terry inviting her to come and speak on that same day that she had been turned away. Furthermore, they got together and raised her travel and room and board. She came. She spoke to a crowd of hundreds, including the red-faced president. And people were changed.

The transformative power of failure. Whether it be at the community level, on the national scene, or globally, there are immense opportunities to grow, and grow strong. To build a movement whose roots run deep and whose branches spread far. A movement that nurtures what in our hearts tells us are the only truly just, truly sustainable, truly inspirational (and yes, truly Christian) values. Love of family, love of neighbors and community, love of humanity, and love of the more-than-human world. A love that, as the author, David James Duncan writes, quoting Mother Teresa, a love that “let’s my heart break so fully that the whole world enters in.”

Thank You.