

VOICES FROM THE CULTURAL BATTLEFRONT: ORGANIZING FOR EQUITY

Where do you see hyper-capitalism in your own community? Participants elaborated on the economic analysis with one descriptive sentence. Here is a sample of responses from our New Orleans gathering on December 6th & 7th, 2007:

CHRISTOPHER BURTON, STUDENTS AT THE CENTER, NEW ORLEANS, LA:

Less than 50% of the people in my high school graduated in my graduating year 2005. Frederick Douglas High School, here in the inner city of New Orleans. No, wait, 50% of those who were seniors. If you started in first grade...

BRUCE FRANCE, MONDO BIZARRO, NEW ORLEANS, LA:

After the storm there should have been a wealth of construction jobs that pay \$25 an hour at least, and that was not the case. It's not about illegal immigration. I speak a little Spanish and I spoke to some folks. Some people were actually hired from places like Peru from companies like Halliburton. They didn't come illegally, they came very legally, were hired to work for less, and the jobs didn't go to folks who live around here.

VICTORIA MEEK, SOUTH DALLAS CULTURAL CENTER, DALLAS, TX:

2% of the cultural institutions in Dallas get 80% of the arts funding, and that's only 2% of the budget of the city anyway.

MAURICE TURNER, HIGHLANDER CENTER, JACKSON, MS:

There are only two grocery stores in Jackson now.

CARLTON TURNER, ALTERNATE ROOTS, RAYMOND, MS:

My mom has to buy new seeds every year for her garden.

STEVE BAILEY, JUMP-START PERFORMANCE CO., SAN ANTONIO, TX:

Because of the intersection of hyper-capitalism, immigration, and the myth of the American dream, 34% of the children in San Antonio live in poverty.

DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE, PANGEA WORLD THEATER, MINNEAPOLIS, MN:

I'm from the third world, from whatever "the third world" means, from every aspect of it. The economic disparity is just huge in India. My sister who is a clinical psychologist earns 700 rupies which is \$150 a month. My other sister with a PhD teaches language in the high school and earns 10,000 rupies which is \$250 a month. That's looking from outside. In Minneapolis, there are five theaters operating with less than a \$500,000 budget. We're always told it is because of September 11th, the economy got affected. But post September 11th, the larger institutions, *all* white, announced capitol campaigns, like the Guthrie's 125 million dollar capitol campaign. All of them have got all the money!

CARON ATLAS, CENTER FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION, BROOKLYN, NY:

In Brooklyn, I would say that it's developer-driven displacement of people. It's driven a wedge between artists and a lot of community residents, since art is used by the developers now as a new wave of development.

ART MENIUS, APPALSHOP, WHITESBURG, KY:

In Letcher County where the economy was almost totally dependant on coal, the population was 51,000 in 1960 and now it's barely 23,000.

DUDLEY COCKE, ROADSIDE THEATER, WHITESBURG, KY:

Across the mountain from Letcher County is Wise County, Virginia. Recently in the government food line, getting hand-out food, there was a stabbing. It occurred amongst two of the people in the line, fighting over government cheese.

JAMIE HAFT, IMAGINING AMERICA: ARTISTS AND SCHOLARS IN PUBLIC LIFE, SYRACUSE, NY:

I'm the grandchild of a Holocaust survivor and I come from a family of immigrants. As a kid I believed it was all going to be ok if I could just go to a good college. To purchase that very expensive university degree I had to take out an enormous amount in student loans. I see hyper-capitalism when a university degree becomes a commodity, and when my generation becomes tied to the state because we're all \$200 grand in debt for a degree that I don't think is going to get me anywhere I want to be.

VIOLETA LUNA, LA POCHA NOSTRA, SAN FRANCISCO, CA:

Trying to explain to my relatives in Utah how you can live in San Francisco and hear in the same sentence, "million dollar fixer-upper," while at the same time in Oakland across the Bay, we're looking at millions of foreclosures per sub-prime lenders with their predatory lending practices.

SONIA BASSHEVA MAÑON, CENTER FOR ART AND PUBLIC LIFE, OAKLAND, CA:

In West Oakland, which is the oldest African American community in the Bay Area, there is not a single grocery store. West Oakland is surrounded by three freeways and the Bay, so the community is locked in. The percentage of African American and Latino males in the California prison industry is double that of African American and Latino males in higher education.

RHODESSA JONES, MEDEA PROJECT: THEATER FOR INCARCERATED WOMEN, SAN FRANCISCO, CA:

I've got two. One out of every five black men will be killed in the next year by a black man. Black women are the group that's at the highest risk for HIV in America and the world right now.