

# Post-MNS, what directions did our anti-classism work go in?

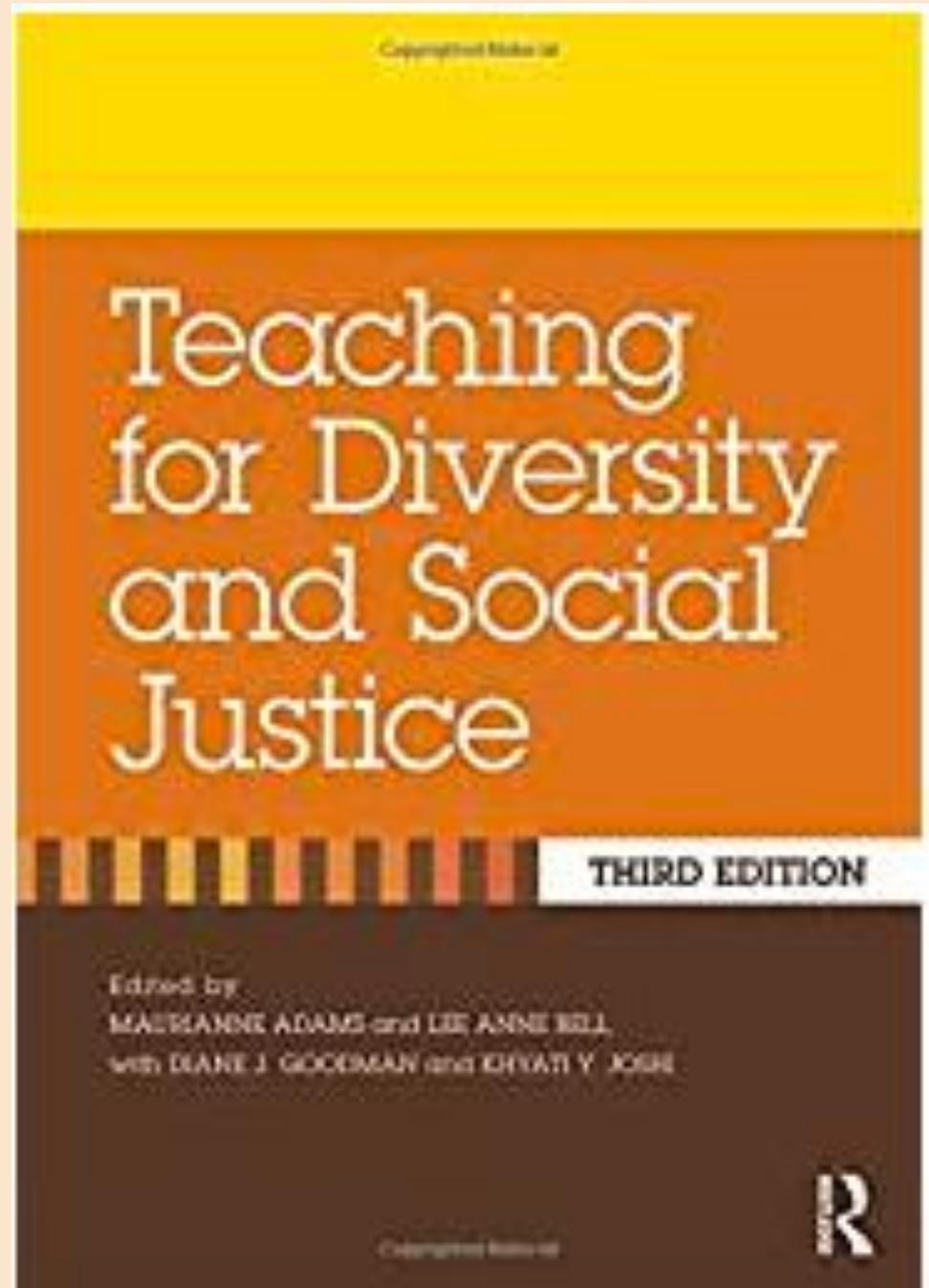


Chuck Collins  
and the late great Felice Yeskel

We planted lots of seeds!

In the growing world of diversity training, MNS was almost unique in including classism.

This widely used book was influenced by MNS oppression/ liberation workshops. Felice and I wrote the classism chapter.



Training for Change, co-founded by George Lakey, where Erika Thorne has long been a core trainer, has offered great classism workshops.

## Our Direct Education Approach



At the heart of Training for Change is a shared practice of training and group learning, which has evolved from over 25 years of work with activists, organizers, and change-makers.

Just as *direct action* directly confronts systems of injustice, our approach challenges traditional education, confronting the beliefs, conflicts, and oppression that keep leaders and groups from being their most powerful – that's why we call it *Direct Education*.

Direct education is about liberation and empowerment. Unlike traditional education, which gives all the expertise to textbooks and teachers, Direct Education invites the wisdom of people's own experience. The practice comes out of popular education traditions – like those popularized by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire – and adds to it. We've learned lessons from dozens of teaching modalities and approaches, making the most useful elements accessible in our training of trainer workshops.

The approach is group-centered. Our trainers build upon group dynamics in the training room and people's own experience to introduce new content and help the



Erika Thorne

# MORE THAN MONEY

Timeless themes & personal stories | Exploring the impact of money in our lives

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A resource from

**BOLDER  
GIVING**  
Give more Risk more Inspire more



## Welcome

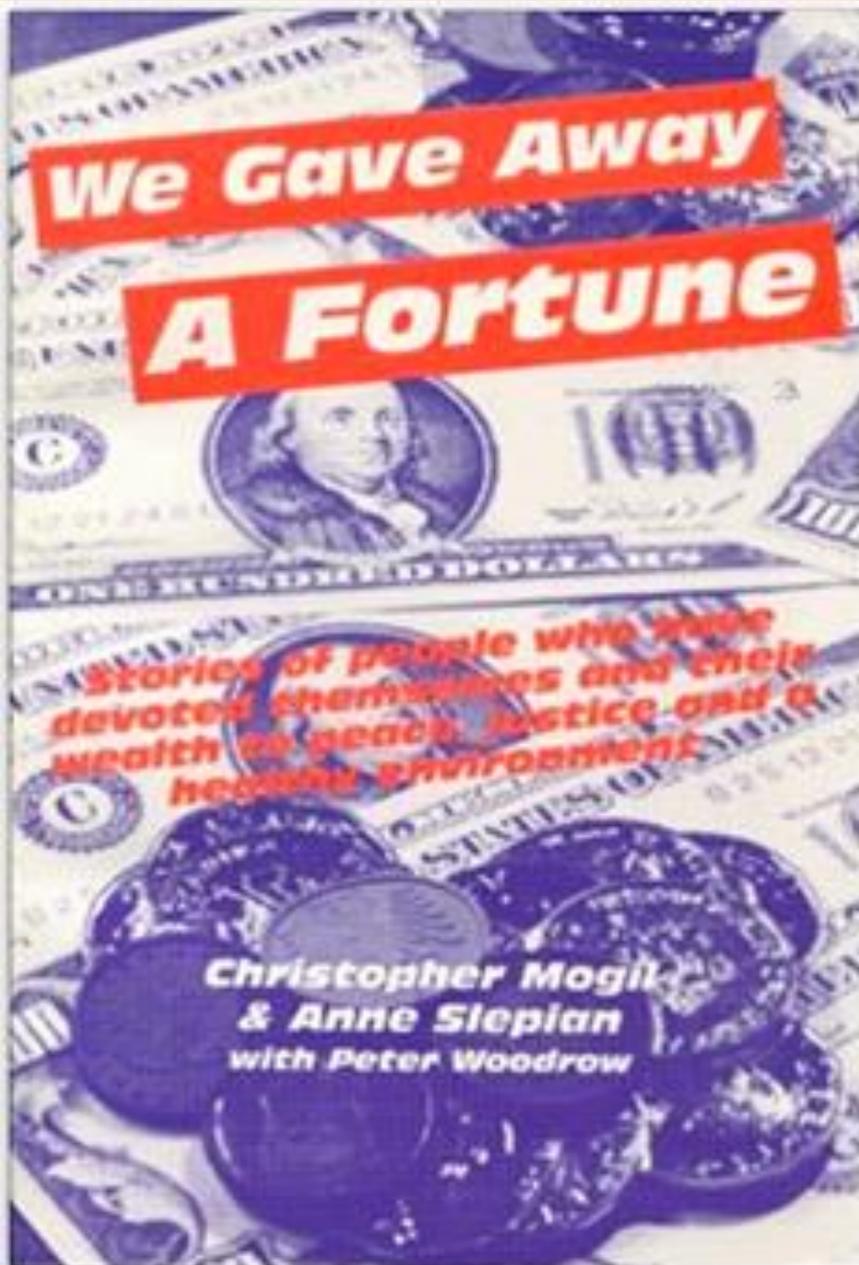
More Than Money Journal, published quarterly from 1993 - 2006, was one of the first public forums where people shared personal stories about the impact of wealth in

## EXPLORE THE ARCHIVES

You can read individual articles online, download free PDFs of full issues, or order print compilations by theme.



Anne (Slepian) Ellinger and Christopher (Mogil) Ellinger focused on organizing progressive rich people for 20 years, inspiring many to give away fortunes, invest with social good in mind, and advocate for the common



Peter  
Woodrow  
co-edited  
their book,  
published  
by New  
Society  
Publishers

Then Anne and Christopher founded Bolder Giving to encourage multi-millionaires to give more away....



... and they helped get Resource Generation off the ground.



Anti-classism is also organizing against economic injustice. I had a series of community organizing jobs for economic justice nonprofits:

for affordable housing, for pay equity for women...



.... and a futile fight to save the welfare safety net

United for a Fair Economy, founded by Chuck and Felice, has been working against extreme inequality since 1994.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar with 'English' and 'Español' language options, a 'DONATE' button, and menu items for 'RESOURCES', 'EVENTS', 'PROJECTS', 'ABOUT', and 'BLOG'. The main content area features the UFE logo and the slogan 'BECAUSE INEQUALITY HURTS EVERYONE.' followed by a registration form. The form includes fields for 'My name is' (with a 'FIRST NAME' label), 'and my email is' (with an 'EMAIL ADDRESS' label), and 'I live in' (with a 'ZIP CODE' label). A prominent orange button reads 'STOP INEQUALITY.' Below the form, a small disclaimer states: 'After your register, you will recieve news and action alerts. We won't ever sell your information.'

## Explore our Projects and Programs

Popular Education

Responsible Wealth

Inclusive Economies

I was UFE's  
Communications  
Director for 9  
years.

There's nothing  
easier to publicize  
than rich people  
saying "Tax me  
more"!

# The New York Times

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2001

## Dozens of Rich Americans Join In Fight to Retain the Estate Tax

*Buffett, Soros and Gates's Father Call It Only Fair*

By DAVID CAY JOHNSTON

SEATTLE, Feb. 13 — Some 120 wealthy Americans, including Warren E. Buffett, George Soros and the father of William H. Gates, are urging Congress not to repeal taxes on estates and gifts.

President Bush has proposed phasing out those taxes by 2009. But a petition drive being organized here by Mr. Gates's father, William H. Gates Sr., argues that "repealing the estate tax would enrich the heirs of America's millionaires and billionaires while hurting families who struggle to make ends meet."

The billions of dollars in government revenue lost "will inevitably be made up either by increasing taxes on those less able to pay or by cutting Social Security, Medicare, environmental protection and many other government programs so important to our nation's continued well-being," the petition says.

In addition to the loss of government revenue, the petition says, repeal would harm charities, to which

many of the affluent make contributions as a way of reducing the size of their estates.

"The estate tax," it says, "exerts a powerful and positive effect on charitable giving. Repeal would have a devastating impact on public charities."

Mr. Buffett, the Omaha investor who ranks fourth on the Forbes magazine list of the richest Americans, said in an interview that he had not signed the petition itself because he thought it did not go far enough in defending "the critical role" that he said the estate tax played in promoting economic growth, by helping create a society in which success is based on merit rather than inheritance.

Mr. Buffett said repealing the estate tax "would be a terrible mistake," the equivalent of "choosing the 2020 Olympic team by picking the eldest sons of the gold-medal winners in the 2000 Olympics."

"We would regard that as absolute folly in terms of athletic competition," he said.

"We have come closer to a true meritocracy than anywhere else around the world," he said. "You have mobility so people with talents can be put to the best use. Without the estate tax, you in effect will have an aristocracy of wealth, which means you pass down the ability to command the resources of the nation based on heredity rather than merit."

The petition is to appear in an advertisement on the Op-Ed page of The New York Times this Sunday and later in other newspapers.

Among those signing it are Mr. Soros, the billionaire financier; the philanthropist David Rockefeller Jr., former chairman of Rockefeller & Company; Steven C. Rockefeller, chairman of the Rockefeller Brothers' Foundation; Agnes Gund, a philanthropist whose family owns stakes in many companies, and Ben

Continued on Page A18

## Dozens of the Wealthy Join To Fight Estate Tax Repeal

Continued From Page A1

Cohen, a founder of Ben & Jerry's. Mr. Buffett and the younger Mr. Gates have both said they will give away most of their fortunes in bequests at death. Many of the signers have longtime affiliations with causes that depend heavily on charitable gifts, including bequests, and they are concerned that outright repeal of the estate and gift taxes would lead to a sharp drop in charitable giving.

A number of the signers are Democrats, and some have contributed heavily to the Democratic Party. But the elder Mr. Gates said in an interview that the idea for the drive was his own and that the support he had received was nonpartisan. Mr. Gates, like his son, has consistently declined to align himself with either of the political parties, and he said he had never given a moment's thought to the party affiliations of those being enlisted.

The petition says that "repeal of the estate tax would be bad for our democracy, our economy and our society," although its backers add that adjustments may be needed to help families passing down farms and small businesses. "Let's fix the estate tax," the petition says, "not repeal it."

Estate taxes are assessed on the net worth of an individual at death. There is no tax on the first \$675,000, and under current law that exemption is to rise to \$1 million by 2006. (Farms and family businesses already enjoy the \$1 million exemption.)

But amounts above that threshold are taxed at rates that begin at 37 percent and rise to 55 percent, the rate that applies to anything greater than \$3 million. The estates of fewer than 48,000 Americans a year — 2 percent of annual deaths — pay the tax. Nearly half the total is paid by the estates of the 4,000 people who die each year leaving \$5 million or more.

President Bush has made repeal of what he calls the death tax a part of his plan to cut taxes by \$1.6 trillion over the next decade. His plan would also repeal the gift tax, which applies to gifts of more than \$10,000 a year

per recipient, and would permanently exempt from taxation all capital gains held at death.

Mr. Bush and Congressional Republicans who support the plan say that estate and gift taxes discourage savings and investment. Repeal, they assert, would increase economic growth by rewarding those who build great fortunes and creating incentives for them to invest more.

Mr. Bush says his plan would save those now subject to gift and estate taxes \$236 billion over the next decade. Critics of the plan say this estimate of the cost to the Treasury is very low, because it does not take into account what tax experts have described as the new ways that repeal would give the wealthy to avoid income taxes.

The elder Mr. Gates, who gained affluence as a prominent Seattle lawyer, said he had not asked his son, the chairman of the Microsoft Corporation, to sign the petition.

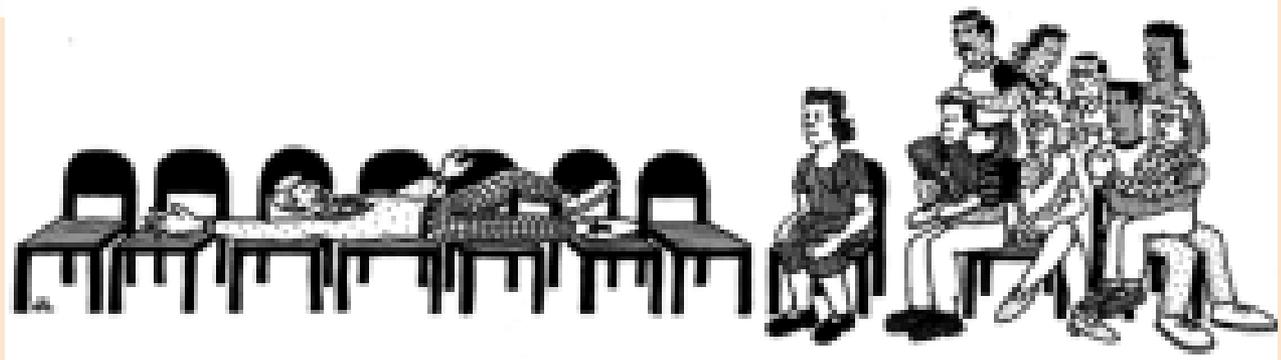
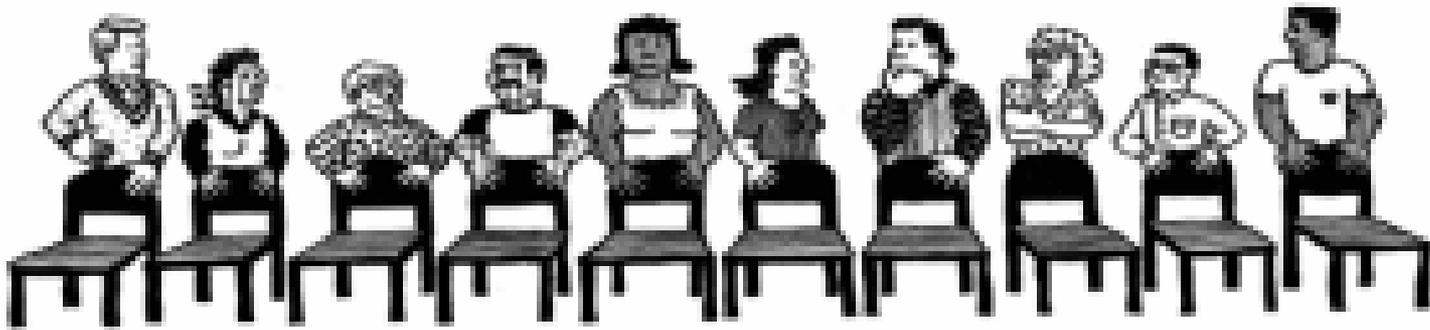
"My son is sympathetic," he said, "but he wants to stay focused on three things: his family, Microsoft and world health," which is the main interest of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The elder Mr. Gates said the money that Mr. Bush wanted to devote to repeal of the estate and gift taxes could be put to better use "to reduce other taxes, which affect the other end of the economic spectrum."

"Ever since I heard that somebody was trying to repeal the estate tax, I have been angry," Mr. Gates said, adding that if it were not for his full-time job, he would organize a group called Millionaires for the Estate Tax. Mr. Gates is president of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has an endowment of \$20 billion.

Mr. Gates is working on the drive with United for a Fair Economy, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization in Boston that wants to narrow the gap between rich and poor. The petition on the estate tax is being circulated among Americans with enough money that they are affected by it, and a spokesman for the Boston group, Chuck Collins, said that of more than 120 such people asked to sign, only four had declined. He would not identify them.

# UFE's popular education work has always been theatrical, in the Paulo Freire tradition





I especially enjoyed performing with the Billionaires for Bush.

(My billionaire name was Mimi Nottieu.)



## Invisible benefits

Guest editorial by Betsy Leondar-Wright

“America is a meritocracy,” my father always told me. The harder he worked, the more money he got; clear cause and effect. From an individual’s prosperity or poverty, he believed he could determine their effort and success. Therefore, the poor black people in a nearby city hadn’t applied themselves.

My father had a legacy that he couldn’t see, a legacy he inherited because he is white. His ancestor, John Prescott, came from England in 1638. The Massachusetts Bay Company granted him land in Central Massachusetts, and he built the first town for white people of color — and he built the first town there. As far as I can tell, none of his descendants have ever been poor. Some of my ancestors moved west in the 1800s, where they may have received land under one of the Homestead Acts, government programs designed to help people of color.

My father is a World War II-era veteran, and he went to college on the GI Bill. Most veterans of color were unable to access these education benefits. The few colleges were swamped with applicants, and many colleges accepted white students only. Job training programs in the South were segregated and under local government control. African Americans were one-third of the job slots in the South but got one-twelfth of the job slots.

My parents bought our first house with a Veterans Administration mortgage. The cheap subsidized mortgages of that era could not be used in mixed-race neighborhoods, or in inner cities. Because many banks only offered government-subsidized mortgages, most veterans of color had to remain renters.

My father’s parents got Social Security old-age benefits, which spared my father from supporting them. This enabled him to pay for our college educations. Social Security initially excluded domestic and agricultural workers, which meant that most people of color did not qualify in the first decades of the program. My father’s hard work and talent make a difference in climbing the ladder to prosperity. But for most white men, the ladder has been an escalator powered by public policy. Historically, for people of color, the escalator has been broken. Sometimes they have had to hike up a fast-down escalator. No matter how hard they worked, they didn’t get the same rewards as white people. Their starting point was lower, and many neighborhoods and schools were closed to them. In some eras and places, laws and



“Man it’s certainly harder movin’ up this way!”

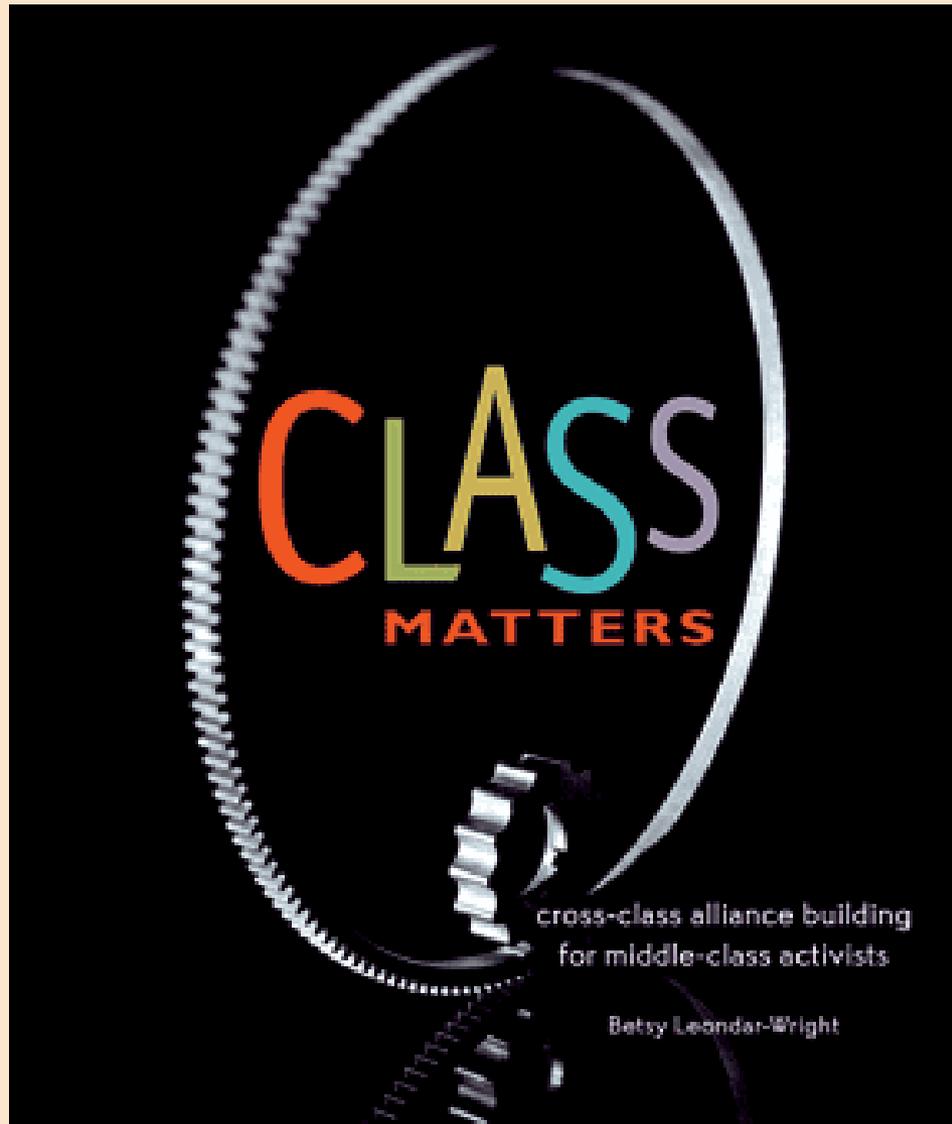
“There is a large racial gap in the amount of the private wealth that exists in the United States. This book is an excellent introduction to what you can do to close the gap.” —Lester K. Born, author of “The Color of Wealth” and “The Color of Money”



Author: Betsy Leondar-Wright, Deputy Director, Center for Public Policy and Administration, MIT School of Public Administration

We did pioneering work on the racial wealth gap

My first book on classism was published by **New Society Publishers** in 2004



# Several MNSers helped found Class Action in 2004

Felice was the co-director until her death in 2011.

Jerry Koch-Gonzalez, Chuck Collins and I were founding board members.

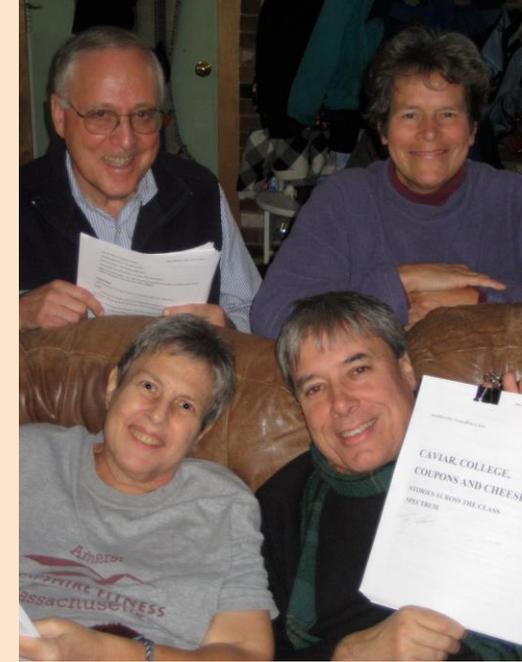
## Class Action's Vision

*A world without classism:*

- Meets everyone's basic needs;
- Treats people from every background, race, class status and rank with dignity and respect;
- Supports the development of all people to their full potential;
- Reduces the vast differences in income, wealth and access to resources
- Ensures everyone has a voice in the decisions that affect them.

# Highlights of 16 years of Class Action

- Hundreds of Exploring Class workshops, by 25+ trained trainers
- Nine annual Summits for first generation college students
- Lots of publications:  
a cross-class dialogue manual,  
a youth curriculum, and the Class Lives book  
(all at [www.classism.org/store](http://www.classism.org/store))

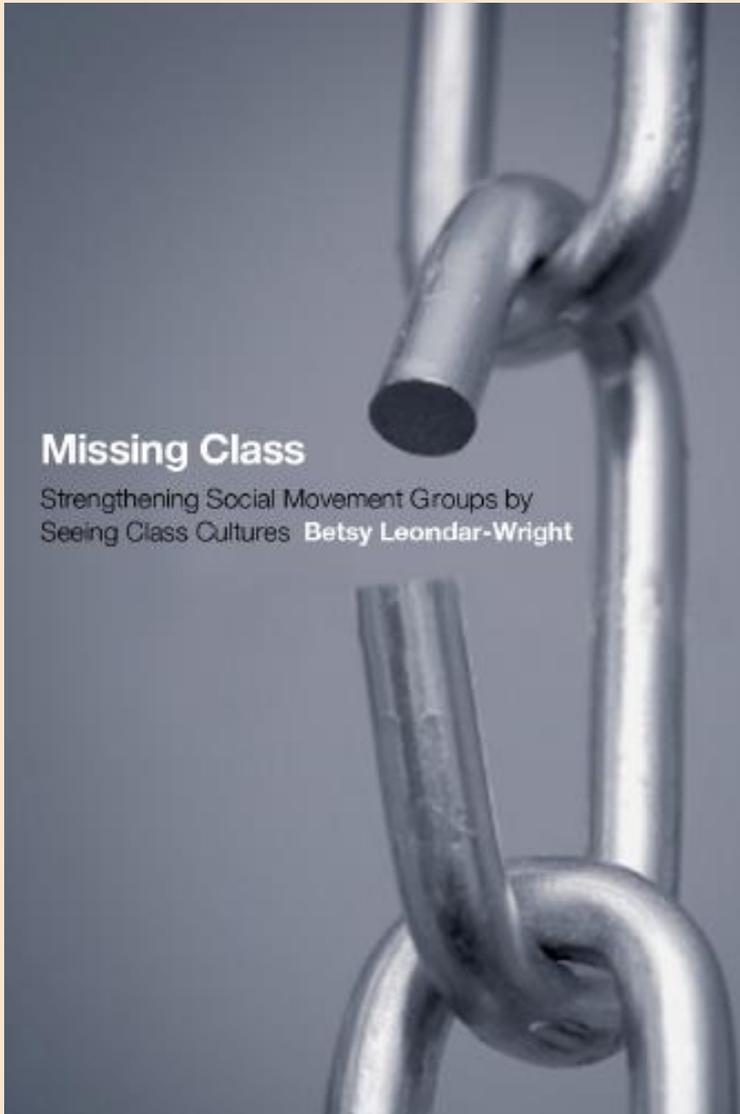


## CLASS LIVES

STORIES FROM ACROSS  
OUR ECONOMIC DIVIDE

*Edited by*

Chuck Collins, Jennifer Ladd,  
Maynard Seider, and Felice Yeskel



My dissertation and book, *Missing Class*, were the basis for Class Action's Activist Class Cultures workshops all around the US.



Online toolkit at [www.activstclasscultures.org](http://www.activstclasscultures.org)

Class Action used my book tour to bring together local groups doing cross-class bridge building. I presented “Cross Class Bridge Builder” awards to community groups that got the most votes by local activists.



My current Class Action involvement is a project on burnout nonprofit jobs, and how foundations can change their practices to prevent them.

## What can be done about low-paid, low-quality jobs at nonprofit organizations?



Staffing the Mission works for change on two fronts, giving both nonprofits and funders concrete ways to make life better for diverse nonprofit employees.

Read more in the [Staffing the Mission Report](#)

**Call for nonprofit burnout jobs stories:**

Chuck Collins continues to write and organize about extreme inequality - most recently about the Pandora Papers wealth-hiding scandal.



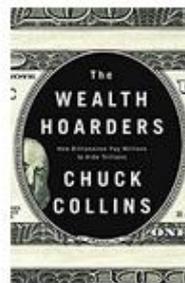
Chuck Collins

+ Follow

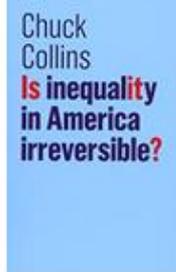
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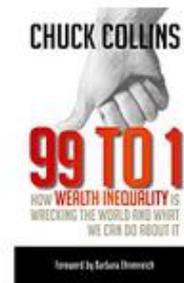
Popular books



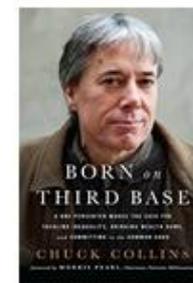
The Wealth Hoarders: How...



Is Inequality in America...



99 to 1: How Wealth Inequalit...



Born on Third Base: A One...

The seeds that MNS planted with working-class speak-outs, cost-sharing and classism workshops have sprouted into thousands of flowers.

