

UPTOWN EYE

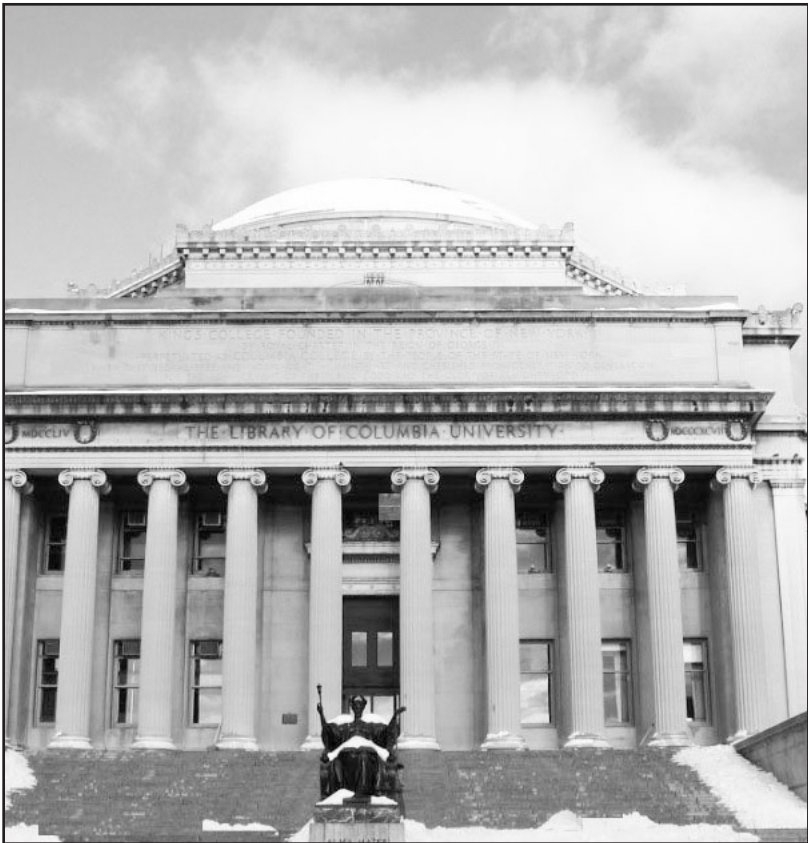
Fall 2004

WEST HARLEM ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION
WE ACT for ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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VEA VERSION EN ESPANOL AL REVERSO 

IVORY TOWER VS. COMMUNITY POWER



Columbia University



WE ACT's Jamillah Jordan protests at Columbia University in October

When Universities & Communities Collide

By Ursula N. Embola

Northern Manhattan is abuzz. Two words with an oddly familiar ring to them are fast becoming the preoccupation of community groups, government bodies, business entities and residents alike. The words, of course, are "Columbia expansion".

By now just about everyone concerned with community building in New York, and in Northern Manhattan in particular, is aware of Columbia University's plans to expand its Morningside Heights campus into an area of Harlem historically known as Manhattanville. Few would deny that Manhattanville has been neglected for decades, despite its historical and cultural richness. However, the problem with Columbia's planned expansion, as community stakeholders have been protesting over the past two years, is that Columbia's plans, are viewed by many as a community "takeover". Critics fear Columbia's plans will shut residents, businesses, and other stakeholders out.

As a research institution avowedly determined to keep up with larger Ivy League peers, Columbia says it is under pressure to maintain its

prestige and attract the best talent. Columbia must expand and develop its facilities and residential areas to meet these needs say proponents of the plan. However, Columbia's plans do not, as yet, indicate any real benefit to the community it plans to expand into.

Add to this Columbia's history in Harlem, of which many are well aware. The specter of Columbia's 1968 Morningside Park gymnasium —designed with a "public" entrance in the back to accommodate Harlem's mostly black residents, and a "student" entrance in the front to accommodate Columbia's mostly white students— lives on. Student and community protests over this and other issues caused Columbia to close down for seven weeks that year.

Columbia University President Lee Bollinger, perhaps hoping to avert a similar misstep, has proceeded routinely, looking to engender some community input into the process. Nonetheless, there seems to be a growing consensus that this revitalization project in

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From The Editor



Northern Manhattan residents are facing a new crisis. In the past, are decades of neglect by government, developers, and investors. In the present, residents are suddenly besieged with new residents eager to claim a "new" community. And in the future, a mammoth neighboring institution, Columbia University, may christen five million square feet of Northern Manhattan to develop its own brand of Sun City if residents are not permitted a significant role in the development process.

People may argue whether to label this problem gentrification, an affordable housing crisis, or economic development and job creation/retention woes. Actually, all these labels accurately describe a crisis brought on by what has been to date an abject absence of sustainable community development, public involvement, and democratic decision-making.

Some journalists have described Columbia's expansion proposal as the best thing that could happen for Manhattanville. Certainly, the community has seen the potential to be gained from a publicly respected institution such as Columbia, which routinely sees world leaders, both established and emerging, enter and exit its gates. Columbia can only enhance its reputation by pursuing its expansion in partnership with its host community, one struggling to its feet. While Columbia contemplates its encroachment, Northern Manhattan continues to reel from under-funded public schools earning last place in attainment, rapidly disappearing affordable housing stock, high unemployment, neglected arts institutions, uneven economic development, escalating health disparities and a despoiled envi-

ronment. Despite these huge challenges, Northern Manhattan residents remain undaunted and demand that their voices and concerns be addressed.

Obviously, Columbia is not responsible for every problem facing Northern Manhattan neighborhoods, nor should Columbia bear responsibility for righting the wrongs enabled by government and society at large. But Columbia's expansion presents a rare opportunity to partner with Northern Manhattan, its host, to attempt to address community concerns. As a major presence in Northern Manhattan, Columbia bears a moral and ethical imperative to incorporate local voices into its development planning and to mitigate the negative impacts its expansion will have on Northern Manhattan.

Thus far, Columbia's outreach has been perfunctory and superficial at best, though elsewhere in the country there are several inspiring examples of how community/university partnerships thrive during university expansion efforts. The Hamilton Heights neighborhood promises to become the fiercest battleground as Columbia's Morningside Heights campus stretches to meet its Washington Heights campus of Columbia Presbyterian Hospital and the Mailman School of Public Health.

Realistically, Columbia cannot be expected to be proactive for Northern Manhattan without a unified community acting together and encouraging it to do so. As an historically oppressed community, Northern Manhattan residents must throw off the mantle of that oppression long enough to see the value in unity and working for a common goal: a healthy, sustainable, and livable community. Right now, local businesses, residents, and community-based organizations are all striving for the same goal, rooted in

the overall betterment of Northern Manhattan. The road to that goal, however, has many twists and turns, and without unity and trust among community-based organizations that road will lead to a dead end. Elected officials must be part of the unity. They face no paradox in supporting Columbia's growth and simultaneously supporting the community's concern for displaced residents and businesses, loss of jobs, and opportunity for community-identified economic development opportunities in the remaining land available in the Community Board 9 catchment.

Upon achieving some viable notion of unity, a community benefits agreement is the appropriate vehicle for Northern Manhattan to capture mitigation measures to offset the negative impacts resulting from the Columbia expansion. This agreement must be reached prior to the start of the rezoning and Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP).

The footprint of the Columbia expansion is larger than that of the rebuilding of the World Trade Center. This footprint, no doubt, will be significant and far-reaching. Shame on the city government and most of its private foundations for not coming to the aid of an embattled community with few resources to level the playing field of power.

As a community, we must stand up, unify, and speak truth to power. Only then will we empower and embolden our elected and appointed leaders to join us and overcome the obstacles and challenges to consensus on the future of our Northern Manhattan neighborhoods.



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COMMUNITY DIARY

Columbia's Expansion, City Garbage Plan Could Pose Heap of Trouble for Area Businesses

For more than 14 years, Eddy Borrero has conducted business at 2331 12th Avenue, at the corner of 133rd Street and 12th Avenue. Borrero owns Riverside Beer and Soda Distribution and calls the business he once operated with his father, his livelihood. Borrero has seen the neighborhood through the good and bad times. Only a handful of businesses have stayed put here, weathering the years on this swath of Harlem's waterfront: Borrero's is one of them.

Now, with Columbia University pursuing a 30-year expansion plan with most of Manhattanville in its sights, Borrero wonders whether his days as a business owner here are numbered. While Columbia has not expressed interest in purchasing the building in which he operates, the university's short- and long-term interest in Manhattanville is a major factor as Borrero contemplates his future in Harlem.

Borrero is also deeply concerned about plans to reopen the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station (MTS). Though Mayor Bloomberg has announced his intention to shelve those plans, Borrero will not rest easy until a new waste plan is approved by the City Council. He winces, remembering the days when sanitation trucks would queue along 12th Avenue from 125th to 135th Street —idling and blocking



Viaduct near Harlem Piers. Businesses here could be affected by the Columbia expansion and the mayor's waste plan.

deliveries to his business. The stench that emanated from the trucks and the rubbish left in their wake are, likewise, distressing memories. Borrero groans,

recalling the countless tickets he collected from sanitation officers as his own trucks lined the streets, impeded from entering his garage by an endless procession of city dump trucks. Borrero would rather not relive such municipal horrors.

Dreading the thought of a three-fold increase in the number of garbage trucks —the mayor's original plan would have tripled

the MTS's capacity to process waste— Borrero hopes the mayor will not renege on his October decision to leave the MTS closed.

From the Editors:

Mayor Bloomberg recently announced that the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station would remain closed - a victory for the community. The new plan has not yet been approved by the City Council.

the transfer station, at which residents, experts, and businessmen like Borrero vehemently expressed their opposition to the mayor's plan. No one was eager to see the MTS return.

Life has been considerably easier since the station's operations were scaled back in 2000,

confesses Borrero. He says the community has improved vastly since the MTS's partial closure and, as a business owner whose livelihood depends on accessible streets, that he is not looking forward to seeing the city trucks return. Pleased by signs of revitalization and renewal in the community, like the new restaurant that recently set up shop across the street and the soon-coming construction of the new Harlem waterfront park, Borrero is even mildly optimistic about Columbia's expansion into Manhattanville.

However, laments Borrero, "re-opening the station will set this neighborhood back about 20 years."

--Yolande Cadore



Cecil Corbin-Mark addresses Dept. of Sanitation panel at June public hearing.

With Harlem communities suffering under a cloud of air pollution from diesel combustion and grappling with an asthma crisis so acute it earned mention in the Democratic nominee's July acceptance speech, Mayor Bloomberg's plan to reopen the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station

135th Street Transfer Station Stays Shut, As Mayor Reopens Gansevoort

(MTS) sparked strident protestations. In a community already beleaguered by a disproportionate share of environmental hazards, the mayor's announced decision to pursue a different course is welcome news.

"We are appreciative that the city has heard our voices," says WE ACT Executive Director Peggy Shepard. "We understand that we are a disproportionately affected community," says Shepard. "This demonstrates what an organized community can achieve."

The operation of facilities like the trash station —which would have relied on the combustion of diesel fuel to power its trucks— con-

tributes to air pollution and threatens public health. With six diesel-bus depots; two of the city's largest sewage treatment plants; several sanitation diesel vehicle garages; and two outdoor New York City Transit Authority train yards, upper Manhattan already plays host to a hefty share of less than wholesome sites. The pollution from such facilities, primarily the combustion of diesel fuel, is a major trigger for asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

"When the trash station was fully operational, it was the only such facility in Manhattan operating 24-hours a day and drew 93 garbage trucks, one truck every 15.5 minutes, up and down Harlem's narrow brownstone streets," says Yolande Cadore, WE ACT's organizing director and chief coordinator of the 40-member

(continued on next page, first column)

ber Northern Manhattan Environmental Justice Coalition (NMEJC). The battle to forestall the "un-grand" reopening was led by NMEJC, a group initiated by WE ACT for Environmental Justice.

"When the MTS was here, it was very, very hard to do business," said Eddie Borrero, a coalition member who owns and operates Riverside Beer & Soda on 12th Avenue and 133rd Street. "The mayor's decision means I can continue to receive deliveries without city trucks blocking the way and that my customers will be able to park their cars and come in and purchase things," he said.

Though many are thrilled by the mayor's decision to shift gears, the

NMEJC-WE ACT battle to safeguard Northern Manhattan is far from over.

"We will redouble our efforts to protect our communities from other city-run facilities that operate without community oversight or accountability and endanger our health," says WE ACT's Peggy Shepard. Coalition members like Jordi

"...I'm not completely satisfied this issue has gone away."

--Jordi Reyes-Montblanc, Chair, Community Board 9

tone. "I'm pleased with the mayor's announcement," he said. "But I'm not completely satisfied this issue has gone away."

--Christopher Greaves

Reyes-Montblanc, chairman of Community Board 9, expressed relief with a cautionary



Harry Szarpanski and Vaughan F. Arnold, Department of Sanitation



Regina Mcrae, 138th St. Block Assoc.



Rev. Earl Kooperkamp, St. Mary's Church



Mayor Bloomberg and Gov. George Pataki

MTA Slows Its Roll: Attempt to Acquire Private Bus Lines Stalled

Mayor Bloomberg, Gov. Pataki, and Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Chairman Peter Kalikow announced in April that seven private bus lines in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx would be transferred to the MTA this summer. Flanked by Pataki and Bloomberg at a City Hall press conference, Kalikow announced the MTA's intention to integrate city buses into its existing fleet—signaling that already overtaxed depots throughout Northern Manhattan may be slated for the overflow.

Given that the 1998 closure of the Walnut Bus Depot in the Bronx dislocated two hundred diesel buses to Northern Manhattan and led to an upshot in bus idling, a likely decline in overall public health, and a host of service-related problems, the potential for an unwelcome flashback predictably piqued concern here. Over 1200 aging buses were changing hands; but where would they be placed?

Though pressure from WE ACT, Transport Workers Union (TWU)-Local 100, bus riders and community groups perhaps delayed the planned acquisition—the deadline was pushed from July 1st to

December 4th— this caravan of 1200 Manhattan-bound clunkers remains an unwelcome prospect.

"MTA buses have been a big problem for ages," said Flor Sanchez. A long-time resident near the 126th Street depot who once owned a restaurant nearby, Sanchez still cringes, recalling the smoke and exhaust that chased away patrons. The thought of more buses traversing his narrow one-way street is hardly comforting.

"The buses make illegal U-turns... they idle all the time," he said, "many little kids here have asthma as a result." The smell of diesel exhaust is so sharp that Sanchez, after many years here, still has not adjusted.

Diesel emissions, known to precipitate strokes, heart attacks, and asthma are a major concern in Northern Manhattan. A recent Harlem Hospital/Harlem Children's Zone study has found that one in four Central Harlem children suffers from asthma—three times the national average. East Harlem leads the country in childhood asthma hospitalizations. Given current conditions, the impending "integration" of city buses with MTA fleets suggests some untenable consequences for public health in Northern Manhattan. Such a move would surely meet with local opposition.

"Community grievances with the MTA are widespread," says WE ACT Executive Director Peggy Shepard. "New York City Transit Authority President Lawrence Reuter has assured us that the Amsterdam Depot is closed as per his letter of September 5th, 2003," she said. "We expect none of these buses are headed for the Amsterdam Depot."

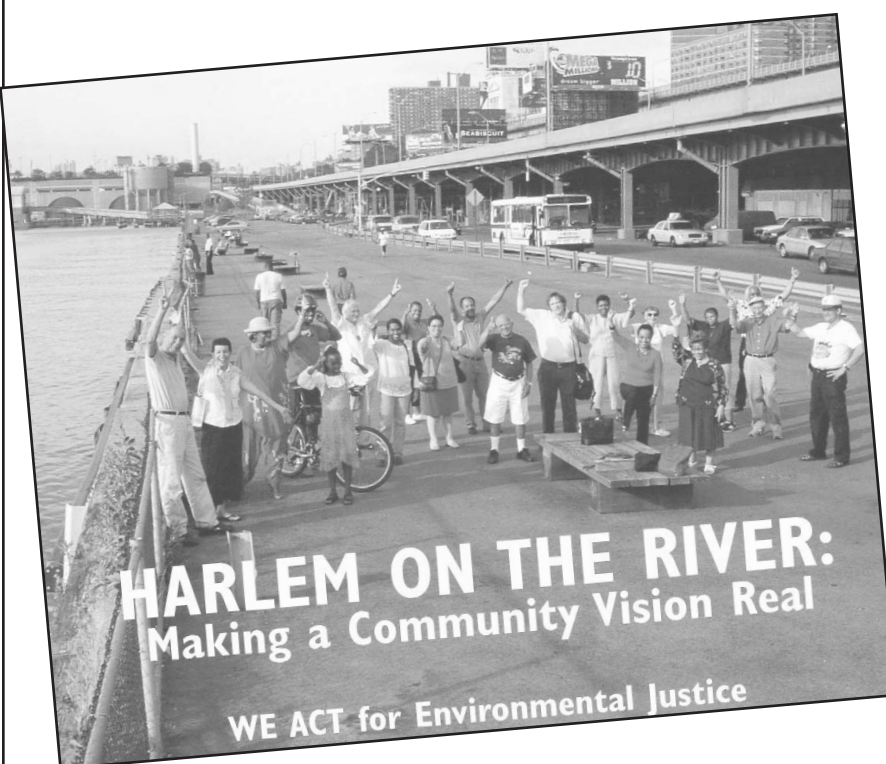
--Christopher Greaves

WE ACT Continues the Fight

As Northern Manhattan already carries the lion's share of Manhattan's environmental burdens, residents are waiting to be reassured that the MTA's newly acquired buses are not Manhattan-bound.

Detailed statistics and maps of the ills afflicting our communities are available at www.weact.org.

Order Copies of Harlem on the River: Making a Community Vision Real!!!



Harlem on the River is WE ACT's self-published handbook chronicling the organizing that galvanized West Harlem and helped reclaim the fate of Harlem's waterfront. With construction of a community-inspired waterfront park just months away, this book gives readers a peek into the WE ACT-Community Board 9 process that helped place the waterfront's future firmly in the hands of the community.

Contact Berlinda Durant
(212) 961-1000, ext. 301
or berlinda@weact.org.

MTA Agrees to Meet Directly With Community Residents



Since June, WE ACT staff and community leaders living near three bus depots in Northern Manhattan have been meeting with representatives from the New York City Transit Agency (NYCT) of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). In the spring, NYCT had essentially approached WE ACT to ask

whether we would be willing to meet with them and discuss our differences. Initially skeptical of NYCT's intentions, WE ACT and community leaders Millicent Redick, Yvonne Mathews, and Charles Perry met cautiously with key personnel from NYCT, including Butch Seay, the head of bus operations, and John Walsh, the head of research and development for the agency.

Predictably, NYCT refused to yield on many of the issues of greatest concern to us--reducing the number of buses in Northern Manhattan, ensuring the timely conversion of the Manhattanville Depot to clean compressed natural gas fuel, and guaranteeing that the Amsterdam Bus Depot, under temporary shut-down, remain permanently closed. However, the talks have been successful on at least one front: Transit has agreed to meet directly with affected community residents from all six bus depots in

a series of "Resident Oversight Council" meetings to discuss and resolve community concerns related to depot operations, and to address broader issues of health and justice in Northern Manhattan.

Community leader Millicent Redick noted, "the meetings have been useful because it's, perhaps, the first time somebody from Transit has actually sat down and listened without dismissing our concerns. Just listening to each other is an important first step - if you can hear me, then we can get ready to move to the next level, which is hopefully correcting the problem. We are just at the beginning of the process, so we have to wait and see, but I'm hoping to see a real relationship develop that is in the best interest of everybody, both Transit and we, the residents, that have been so burdened by their poor operations for decades."

The first meeting of the Resident Oversight Council is

scheduled to take place in October to prepare for meeting with NYCT. In the meantime, WE ACT awaits the finding of a federal investigation of MTA NYCT to find out whether the excessive number of diesel buses garaged in Northern Manhattan violates residents' civil rights. We also continue to organize to put pressure on the MTA to be more accountable to the public, to convert the Manhattanville Depot to Compressed Natural Gas without further delay, and to permanently close the Amsterdam depot and turn the facility over to the community. Over the next year, the MTA will be seeking approval from the State Legislature for its five-year Capital Plan. This is our chance to bring the MTA's track record to the attention of decision-makers in Albany. For more information or to get involved, contact Jamillah Jordan at (212) 961-1000, ext. 322.

--Swati Prakash

Jazzing it Up For Justice

On a breezy Wednesday evening, patrons gathered to celebrate with WE ACT and its partners at our first Jazz for Justice summer event, celebrating community partners who have played an instrumental role in our two major campaigns: The MTA Accountability Campaign and the 135th Marine Transfer Station Campaign. The event was held in a gallery-styled room at Broadway Housing Communities—giving patrons a scenic view of the Hudson River and a not-so-picturesque view of the 135th Marine Transfer Station and the North River Sewage Treatment Plant.

As the evening turned into night, the groovy sounds of jazz pianist Jim Pryor, a former first-place winner of the Great American Jazz competition, entertained patrons. The evening's highlight, however, was the presentation of WE ACT's Environmental Crusader Award to three of our top supporters: Ellen Baxter of Broadway Housing Communities; Father Fabian Lopez of Our Lady of Lourdes Church; and Jay Bermudez, Toney Earl, D.J Smalls, and Mal Liggon of the Transport Workers Union - Local 100. Other highlights included the raffling of a classic SOWETO lithograph by Adger Cowans, won by Gregory J. Anderson, a WE ACT board member.

Proceeds from the event helped to offset the cost of WE ACT's participation in the Movement Activist Apprenticeship Program of the Third World Organizing Center, which provided the organization with two talented and energetic interns this summer, one of whom we have hired permanently.

WE ACT's board and staff send thanks to all who attended and supported the event.

Special thanks go to Johnny Celestin, our wonderful master of ceremonies; Fairway Market, which donated the food for the event; TWU - Local 100; Our Lady of Lourdes; Mt. Sinai Hospital; and Columbia University. If you would like to make a contribution to WE ACT, please call Ursula Embola at 212-961-1000, ext. 315.

--Yolande Cadore



Ellen Baxter, Broadway Housing



Father Fabian Lopez, Our Lady of Lourdes



Johnny Celestin, community resident



Jose Morales, Swati Prakash, Jay Bermudez (TWU), and D.J. Smalls (TWU)



Ofelia Rodriguez, Broadway Housing



James Pryor and Jazz Band



WE ACT Interns Jamillah Jordan, Thomas Bell, and Jasmin Thana

INTERNS HELP GET THE WORD OUT ABOUT WE ACT'S CAMPAIGNS

From June 21st to July 31st WE ACT's organizing was given a jolt with the placement of two participants in the Movement Activist Apprenticeship Program (MAAP). MAAP is a sister program run by the Center for Third World Organizing, based in Oakland, California. For the past twenty years, MAAP has been the movement's flagship organizer training program for people of color. MAAP entails an intense six-week field placement with grassroots community or labor organizations, working on issues that affect people of color. MAAP interns gain experience using the CRAFT technique —contact, research, action, fundraising, and teamwork— a five-pillared approach to organizing. Since 1985, the program has trained more than 300 organizers, many of whom currently hold positions of responsibility within social justice organizations around the country.

Jasmin Thana, a third year student from the University of Oregon, and Jamillah Jordan, a recent graduate from the University of California at Santa Cruz, were behind WE ACT's double-dose of organizing power this summer.

Thana, active in campus organizing around ethical and cultural issues affecting students at Oregon, has been dedicated to fighting social injustice wherever it appears. During her stint at WE ACT, Thana worked on our MTA Accountability Campaign and spent approximately 130 hours organizing residents living near Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) diesel bus depots. With an eye toward creating more transparency within the MTA, Thana mobilized residents to engage the agency and demand more community-friendly policies.

Six of the MTA's seven Manhattan depots are in Northern Manhattan and, with a burgeoning asthma epidemic in the region, many residents are wary of heavy, asthma-triggering diesel exhaust. In light of the MTA's plan to renege on a 1998 promise to convert the Manhattanville Depot at 135th Street to compressed natural gas, a much cleaner fuel, Thana's organizing was critical.

“This summer, I saw first-hand the power of being an agent of change. Informing our communities of the environmental health risks they face and inspiring them to take action against injustice is a great challenge for young organizers.”

--Jamillah Jordan

Meanwhile, Jamillah Jordan, an active member within the Chiapas movement in Mexico, spent her summer educating and mobilizing residents to challenge the imminent expansion and reopening of the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station (MTS)—a waste processing site that sits on Harlem's waterfront.

In July 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced plans to re-open New York City's 8 existing marine transfer stations. Under the plan, Department of Sanitation trucks would carry loads of garbage to the transfer station, where the garbage will be compacted, containerized, and shipped on barges to an unknown destination. The plan met with strong opposition from WE ACT, the Northern Manhattan Environmental Justice Coalition (NMEJC) and a majority of community residents. Bloomberg announced his decision to leave the 135th Street MTS closed this month, representing a major victory for the community. The new plan now awaits the City Council's approval.

If the 135th Street MTS had

reopened, it would have drawn approximately 320 diesel garbage trucks to the facility each day, processed 1,416 tons of garbage.

This garbage station could drastically transform a section of West Harlem on the verge of undergoing major development. With groundbreaking on the Harlem Waterfront Park slated for this fall and Columbia University's plans for expansion

spread the word about the mayor's solid waste plan, and to mobilize other tenants and groups with which they are affiliated.

By all indications, the community was planning to launch a broad-based community effort to defeat the mayor's proposal. Jordan's work with WE ACT has been the impetus for the community's mobilization and organizing initiative. Jordan is now relishing success. Putting her summer in perspective, she concluded:

“This summer, I saw first-hand the power of being an agent of change. Informing our communities of the environmental health

risks they face and inspiring them to take action against injustice is a great challenge for young organizers. My experience with WE ACT has expanded my social consciousness in areas that I knew little about before. I will no longer be just the neighbor next-door, unaware and uninvolved. I now understand the importance of community involvement, collaboration, and change.”

Taking into consideration the MTS's proximity to the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, the Manhattanville diesel bus depot, and a Con Edison pipeline, its presence would substantially worsen conditions in the community.

For more information on how you can participate in our campaigns, visit us online at www.weact.org or call Yolande Cadore at 212-961-1000, ext.316. To learn more about the Center for Third World Organizing-MAAP program visit them at www.ctwo.org.

--Yolande Cadore

CLIMATE CHANGE & you



By Thomas Bell

Climate Change is a serious problem that affects us all. Many of us have already fallen prey to floods, unbearable summers, and drastic changes in our weather patterns. A project called the

Environmental Justice Climate Change Initiative, coordinated by redefining progress, aims to correct the problem of climate change by informing and empowering its core members. Its mission: To educate and activate the people of North America to drive the creation and implementation of just climate policies. This summer twelve young activists were sent to areas where climate change has become a serious problem to begin this effort.

Climate change is the abnormal warming of the earth as a result of human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels for energy by cars and industry. Climate change is not a new phenomenon. Though commonly known as "global warming", climate change is responsible for many other

related phenomena. Drastic changes in our weather patterns, such as heat waves, intense or frequent droughts, floods, storms, and rising sea levels are all effects of climate change. In 1995, a Chicago heat wave claimed over 500 lives-possibly due to human-induced climate change. Record temperatures in France last year claimed approximately 11,400 lives.

One potential remedy for the plight of climate change is the Kyoto Protocol. It commits the 186 signatory countries to binding limits on the emission of carbon dioxide and other heat trapping 'greenhouse gases', which many scientists believe contribute to global warming.

Kyoto requires industrialized nations to cut greenhouse gas emissions to levels slightly below what they were in 1990 by 2012. Developing countries are also committed to emissions targets. The text of the United Framework Council on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted

in 1992 and promoted at the climate summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. The protocol was adopted at the December 1997 Kyoto conference on the UNFCCC. It will come into force on the 90th day after it is ratified by at least 55 parties to the convention, which together accounted for at least 55 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions in 1990. A controversial feature of the protocol is that it permits countries to count 'carbon sinks' —forests and grasslands that naturally soak up emissions of greenhouse gases— as emissions-reducers.

The accord was dealt a blow in March 2001 when U.S. President George W. Bush announced that the United States -which emits 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gases and has mounted a 15 percent increase in emission levels over the last ten years- would not ratify the treaty, citing potential harm to US economic interests.

As it stands today, the treaty must be ratified by 55 parties to the convention, and enough industrialized nations to account for at least 55 percent of their total 1990 emissions. Since the United States withdrew from Kyoto in 2001, the only way it will take effect is if Russia ratifies the agreement.

As we look to the future of our nation, we must ask the question: How can we protect the spaces where we live, work, and play? With a neck-and-neck presidential election coming up in November, where do the candidates stand on the Kyoto Protocol?

President Bush believes that the protocol would be an unfair burden on the United States, because it exempts other population centers, such as China and India, and could harm the U.S. economy. The Democratic candidate, John Kerry, says the environment is a major issue for him. Kerry has not officially endorsed the treaty, but says he plans to work with the international community in an attempt to craft a binding treaty that would go beyond Kyoto. The Democratic platform does not mention Kyoto.

Climate change is a real and serious issue. If you would like more information go to www.ejcc.org, or www.weact.org to get further information about this problem.

Some Effects of Climate Change

- ❑ **Worsening air pollution.**
- ❑ **Rising sea levels.**
- ❑ **More intense heat waves and frequent storms.**
- ❑ **Droughts, wildfires, heavy rains, and flooding.**
- ❑ **Disappearance of species.**

Climate Change Updates

The United Nations' World Meteorological Association issued an unprecedented announcement linking a record month of tornadoes in the United States and the hottest June on record in Switzerland to global warming.

The Observer, a UK-based newspaper reported the following in February:

"A secret report, suppressed by U.S. defense chiefs and obtained by The Observer, warns that major European cities will be sunk beneath rising seas as Britain is plunged into a 'Siberian' climate by 2020. Nuclear conflict, mega-droughts, famine and widespread rioting will erupt across the world.

The document predicts that abrupt climate change could bring the planet to the edge of anarchy as countries develop a nuclear threat to defend and secure dwindling food, water and energy supplies. The threat to global stability vastly eclipses that of terrorism, say the few experts privy to its contents."

Two Harvard researchers and the American Public Health Association recently released a report, which said in part, "poor and minority children are likely to develop asthma at worsening rates due to global warming and air pollution".
(Reuters)

The Congressional Black Caucus released a report forecasting "a difference in the impact of climate change on people of various socioeconomic and racial groups."

--CG

From the Editors:

The Russian Cabinet approved the Kyoto Protocol and has sent it to Parliament for ratification. President Vladimir Putin expressed his support for the treaty this month. If the treaty is ratified, and it appears that it will be, it will come into force without the backing of the United States.

10/6/04

Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training, Spring 2004

WE ACT for Environmental Justice



Spring 2004 Graduates of the Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training

If you had walked into a certain conference room on the seventh floor of the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building on any Thursday evening between March 11th and April 22nd of this year, you might have been greeted by the sight of community leaders gathered in groups of seven around colored poster boards, excitedly discussing their visions for healthy and safe communities. These leaders were among thirty-five who completed WE ACT's highly successful Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training this past spring. This training, the fourth held by WE ACT since 1998, enabled participants to improve their capacity to fight for community environmental health and justice in New York City by learning the scientific and regulatory foundation of environmental health issues affecting New Yorkers, and by learning basic community organizing and advocacy skills.

The training was funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) and the Beldon Fund, and co-sponsored by the NIEHS Center for Environmental Health in Northern Manhattan at the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, and by Council member Bill Perkins. Participants ranged in age from 12 to 60 and older, and were predominantly community residents of color from Northern Manhattan and the South Bronx. Groups represented included the Phipps Community Center in the Bronx,

the parent associations for PS 161 and PS 46 in Northern Manhattan, and New York Garden Trust. The trainings took place from 6 pm to 9 pm and, despite the late hour, participants often stayed longer to finish their discussions about environmental racism and environmental health. Topics covered during the training included asthma and the environment; diesel exhaust and air quality; mold, pesticides and indoor air quality; and cancer and the environment.

The trainings combined guest lectures from scientists and others at the Mailman School of Public Health with hands-on activities, such as group discussions, role-plays, and small group sessions. Guest speakers included Dr. Benjamin Ortiz of Harlem Hospital, Dr. Regina Santella of the Mailman School of Public Health; and Ray Lopez and Sister Susan LaChapelle of Little Sisters of the Assumption. The training culminated with a daylong session on Community Organizing and Environmental Planning on Saturday, April 17th, with Eva Hanhardt of the Municipal Arts Society. During this training, participants completed door-knocking role plays and conducted a mock action against targets, such as the Department of Sanitation and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Participants also completed visual maps and drawings representing their visions for an ideal, healthy community.

On Earth Day, April 22nd, our 35 leaders graduated from the training at an elegant

ceremony at the State Office Building. City Council member Bill Perkins and Vice Dean Andrew Davidson from the Mailman School of Public Health addressed the group. Now armed with a strong scientific basis for understanding exactly how pollution affects our health and what the laws and regulations concerning environmental exposures are, these leaders have enhanced their ability to fight environmental racism in our communities, as one participant noted on the last day.

WE ACT will be conducting another round of the Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training this fall. To sign up, please call 212-961-1000, ext. 315.

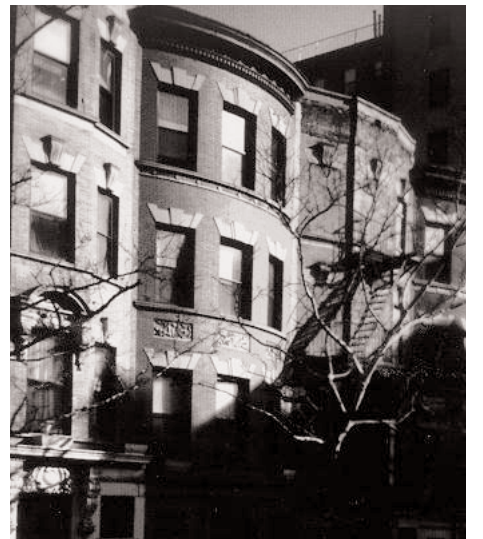
--Swati Prakash



Deepti K.C. and Swati Prakash, far right

TISHMAN CONSTRUCTION CORP JOINS TEAM to CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL SHOWCASE IN HARLEM

WE ACT Hires Harlem Architect For Its NYC Environmental Justice Center



After an intense selection process, WE ACT for Environmental Justice has selected an architect-engineering duo to develop a state-of-the-art “green” building in Harlem. ARUP, an engineering firm with 73 offices in 32 countries and a 7000-member staff, is teaming up with AQ Crusor Architects, a Harlem-based, minority-owned firm, to develop the New York Environmental Justice Center in the Hamilton Heights historic district in West Harlem. With the advice and expertise of Tishman Construction Corp., the “Green Team” is launching one of Harlem’s most innovative projects to date.

“I’m pleased to be involved in constructing the NYC Environmental Justice Center, which will be a catalyst in advancing the residential green building movement,” says Nancy Czesak, vice president of Tishman Construction. “As a showcase of environmentally sustainable design and construction practices, this venue will foster the ideals of environmental health and awareness while promoting activism in the greater community and beyond.”

Selected from a group of 20 respondents and five finalists by WE ACT’s Building Committee, chaired by Nancy Czesak, and Gregory J. Anderson, WE ACT Board Member and senior vice president of Advest, Inc., the ARUP-Crusor pair is coming to the table with top sustainable development credentials and an inspiring vision.

“We aggressively sought this job because we wanted to be associated with a project that reflects our own aspirations,” says Anthony Cursor of AQ Crusor Architects. “WE ACT’s Environmental Justice Center is a rare opportunity to merge architecture and cutting edge technology for the sake of helping to empower the people and heal the earth,” he says.

With its vast light-filled spaces, rooftop garden, high performance heating/cooling systems, and electro-mag-

netic energy-efficient elevator, the New York Environmental Justice Center will serve as a model of energy-economizing design. As an educational showcase –open to the public free of charge through tours and seminars– the Center will demonstrate how the sustainable use of resources, technologies, products, and materials can be achieved in a typical one-to-three family building in New York City. Located at 459 West 140th Street in the Hamilton Heights historic district, it will serve as a major new resource for supporting the advocacy, organizing, research, training needs, and education

New York City Council Member Robert Jackson has given WE ACT’s plan to develop a state-of-the-art “green” building to Harlem a vital boost with a \$500,000 grant from his own budget to help renovate the New York Environmental Justice Center.

of environmental justice/community activists locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

“The Center will act as a beacon for communities and individuals grappling with environmental hazards,” says WE ACT Executive Director, Peggy Shepard. “We expect that activists and researchers will come from far and wide to strategize and find resources to assist them in battling the preventable environmental threats prevalent in too many communities of color.”

Harlem – which suffers disproportionately from the presence of polluting facilities like asthma-triggering diesel emissions, soot-generating bus depots, and a massive trash station– is a fitting site for an Environmental Justice Center. The Center will serve, not only as a model of energy efficiency, but as a base of operations for addressing a variety of environmentally-related public health issues.

“Using energy, water, materials, and

resources efficiently has everything to do with solving the problem of health and environmental impacts locally and globally,” says Ashok Gupta, Air & Energy Program Director at Natural Resources Defense Council. “Greening of the New York Environmental Justice Center is a very important step in bringing the benefits of green buildings to communities that deal with disproportionate environmental impacts on a daily basis,” he says.

Housing hard-to-find books, journals, periodicals and other environmental health publications and multi-media materials such as video- and audiotapes, documentary films, slide shows, and archival records, the Center will help concretize the environmental justice movement’s collective memory and ensure that important materials are protected and preserved. Supported by the library’s resources, the Center will offer workshops and trainings that will facilitate the community organizing, policy development, strategic planning and sustainable development work of the socially and professionally diverse constituencies that comprise the environmental justice movement. With a total building area of over 6,000 square feet over its five floors, the Center will also provide office space for WE ACT’s growing staff and youth program.

“With the selection of this architectural team and with the support of the Tishman Corporation, we no longer have to defer our dream of the past eight years,” says Dennis Derryck, WE ACT Board Chair. “We are finally poised to increase our capacity and continue to meet challenges to public health and environmental justice in our communities.”

--Christopher Greaves

Ivory Tower Vs. Community Power

For WE ACT's Columbia Community Advisory Committee Recommendations, visit www.weact.org

(continued from page 1)

Manhattanville is happening too quickly, and in ways that do not guarantee that people living and working in Manhattanville will not be marginalized.

Of course, Columbia disagrees with this stance. The university's eagerness to move forward with its proposed 30-year expansion project is evidenced by the fact that the school has already acquired over 50 percent of the land in the area—largely made possible by the attractive sums Columbia is rumored to have offered, and the fear some business owners have expressed that plummeting property values could ensue if Columbia pursues eminent domain. Property owners would then be forced to relinquish their land at fair market values.

Interestingly, the Columbia expansion issue has presented itself in other urban communities of color, with a variety of outcomes. Southern California's Figueroa Corridor, a 40-block strip of land that connects downtown Los Angeles and the Staples Center, was, for decades, a source of great friction between the University of South California and a surrounding community comprised primarily of Latinos and African Americans who lived and worked in the Corridor.

Like Columbia, USC's appetite for land had pushed it up against a resistant community. Its efforts to build into the Figueroa Corridor, however, were smiled upon by the City of Los Angeles. Over the years, the university's policies, as evidenced by its redevelopment projects, continuously aroused suspicion among those who represented and were part of the community. From playing a part in the declaration of certain areas as blighted

—much to the surprise of the individuals who lived in those areas—to buying up land formerly occupied by residences and businesses, the university's actions persistently drew the ire of residents.

But what is important about this story, and what Northern Manhattan can learn from it, is the way in which the Los Angeles community banded together, more so in recent years, to ensure the sustainable development of the Figueroa Corridor, which includes projects from developers other than USC.

In 1996, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) was founded as an economic justice and popular education center to build economic power for working class people in Los Angeles. In 1998, SAJE convened the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice, an alliance of 29 community organizations and union locals who met regularly about local development issues.

The end result of this collaboration was the winning of an historic Community Benefits Agreement from the LA Arena Land Company, one of the developers in the Figueroa Corridor, which is, incidentally, owned by billionaires Phillip Anshutz and Rupert Murdoch. Key features of the agreement include the guarantee of living wage jobs, local hiring and job training initiatives, affordable housing, free parking, environmental planning, and parks and recreation sites.

While the struggle between USC and the community is far from over, the resultant Community Benefits Agreement is a significant step in the right direction. The community has clearly demonstrated that it has the power to demand sustainable development measures.

On the other hand, some university-community battles have left communities seemingly vanquished. Case in point: The University of Illinois at Chicago's expansion into the historic Maxwell Street Market neighborhood. In that scenario, UIC is demolishing the old neighborhood to create an expanse of townhouses, condominiums, student lodgings, and university offices, and there is little indication—aside from the refurbishing of a few buildings to appease con-

servationists—that its cultural character will remain intact, or that its former residents are benefiting in any way from the expansion.

This is what people who live and work in Manhattanville fear most. In spite of the fact that much of the area is in need of revitalization, Columbia's actions have angered many community residents and organizations, which have their own vision for Manhattanville.

West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT) has banded together with Environmental Defense, one of the members of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice. Together, WE ACT and Environmental Defense have launched the Harlem Corridor Project, an initiative that will work to ensure that development in the Harlem Corridor—the area between 116th Street and 135th Street, from the East River to the Hudson River, which includes Manhattanville—are planned in ways that take community and environmental needs into account.

Columbia recently disbanded the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) that it had set up to address concerns regarding the expansion. As chair of the committee's Environmental Subcommittee, WE ACT developed environmental criteria for a sustainable expansion, part of a broader report that was submitted to President Lee Bollinger on July 14, 2004. Shortly after receipt of this report, Columbia disbanded the CAC and now aims to address all remaining community-identified issues through Community Board 9.

Columbia plans to begin the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) this fall, which will result in the designation of the area slated for redevelopment as a mixed-use zone, a step that is necessary before Columbia can begin building residential and other facilities in what is now a manufacturing zone.

Once the procedure is initiated, it runs a 90-day span. Community organizations like WE ACT are not against the ULURP, especially since the procedure is required before work begins on the new Harlem Waterfront Park, a project WE ACT and the community have fought vigorously for. The problem lies in the speed with which the procedure is being initiated, with no indication that community recommendations submitted to Columbia through the CAC process are being taken into account.

At a recent slew of Columbia-initiated community meetings, residents and business owners have questioned the university's tactics in buying up land and allegedly pressuring landowners to sell their property. While Mr. Bollinger insists that Columbia would not resort to such tactics, Columbia is acquiring the land it needs and, clearly, not everybody in the community is happy about it.

Once the ULURP results in the expected zoning change, there is nothing to stop Columbia from building on the land it has already acquired. The ULURP should be slowed until there is substantive engagement between Columbia and the community. This must happen soon, if the community is to retain its power to negotiate with Columbia in this matter. Only time will tell what the outcome of this most recent instance of "ivory tower, community power" struggle will be. **A Community Benefits Agreement dealing with identified concerns**

—affordable housing, employment and job training, gentrification, economic development, education, arts and culture, environmental and brownfields issues, and monitoring the implementation of the Agreement—is absolutely necessary if Manhattanville is to retain its historic presence and culture in Northern Manhattan.



Luis Aguas, a Harlem Resident, protests at Columbia University

Community Speaks Out on Columbia Expansion



"The Coalition to Preserve Community supports an inclusive community development plan for West Harlem as exemplified by the CB 9 197A plan. Our large and ethnically diverse coalition has been meeting every month for two years and has been organizing around issues like primary and secondary displacement of residents and businesses which will result from Columbia's plan to level entire blocks.

We must stop Columbia's clandestine scheme to steal businesses and evict tenants, which it is pursuing by having the state declare the area blighted.

(Tenants in two city-owned buildings in the expansion area want to convert to low income co-ops through the TIL program but Columbia wants them vacated.)

Once the area is declared blighted, it will use eminent domain to complete its land grab, targeting businesses that want to stay, and making huge profits by getting zoning changes, which will dramatically increase the value of all its properties.

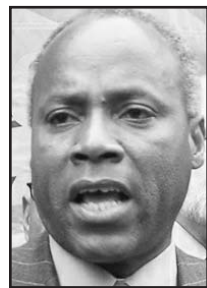
Columbia should integrate its plan to fit the neighborhood, instead of pretending it is not steam-rolling its way over us. Only a codified (legally binding) Community Benefits Agreement in the framework of the 197A plan, with committed long-term funding and resources for the purpose of preserving the real community living here now, will prevent us from being sold out."

-Tom DeMott
Coalition to Preserve Community, Steering Committee



"More time needs to be allocated so that there can be a negotiated Community Benefits Agreement in place and there must be a middle ground between Columbia and the community. Elected officials need to support the Community Board's 197a Plan, because Columbia needs to fit into the community plan, not vice versa."

-Sarah Martin



"The development of this portion of Harlem is long overdue. However, it also presents a good opportunity for debate and, eventually, consensus about what the area should look like. It should be an opportunity for the 'indigenous' community to participate. The businesses that have suffered the bad times here or provided some economic vitality and employment should not be discarded like Dixie cups. Columbia's vision has to be in sync with the community; any proposal put forth must reflect this. We can no longer employ a top-down domination approach here. The key is cooperation. The fear that is racing through the community is due to this aggressive approach. Development should not trigger fear, but optimism. Condemnation should never be proposed or implied as a potential tool. Condemnation is the tactic of a bully, not the tactic of a partner.

I look forward to participating in these discussions. We're looking to develop as neighbors, with an emphasis on neighbor."

-Council member Bill Perkins

UPTOWN EYE

Tools for Schools

Mission

By promoting and facilitating the reuse of office materials, Tools for Schools protects the environment and builds the capacity of New York City's underfunded schools and nonprofits.

Overview

Every corporate relocation or downsizing overwhelms the city's waste stream with functional office furniture and equipment -- the same materials that underfunded schools and nonprofits desperately seek.

Tools for Schools (TFS) bridges the gap by soliciting donations of reusable items from corporations and channeling them to organizations in need.

We notify organizations directly if items match their wish lists. Otherwise we bring the donated materials to our warehouse in Harlem where potential recipients can view them. The only cost to recipients is a small handling fee.

We address the needs of:

The environment by keeping reusable items out of the waste stream.

Schools and non-profits by providing the tools they need.

Corporations by saving them the cost of disposal and earning them a tax deduction for their donation.

TFS began as a volunteer project in 1992 and was established as a 501(c)(3) in 1998. Two years ago, we opened an office and warehouse in Harlem and began operating TFS full-time.

Contact Information

Would you like to donate money, time, or office materials?
Do you know of an organization that could use our services?



Please contact us!

Phone: 646-548-9675

Email: tools4schools@earthlink.net

Website: www.toolsforschoolssolutions.org

Court Throws Out Lead Paint Lawsuits, City Kids Cheer

Two lawsuits seeking to nullify The New York City Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Act (Local Law 1) were dismissed by a New York court in August. Brought by a coalition of landlords and housing groups, the suit sought to repeal the law, which requires landlords to conduct annual inspections for lead paint hazards in apartments where children under 7 reside.

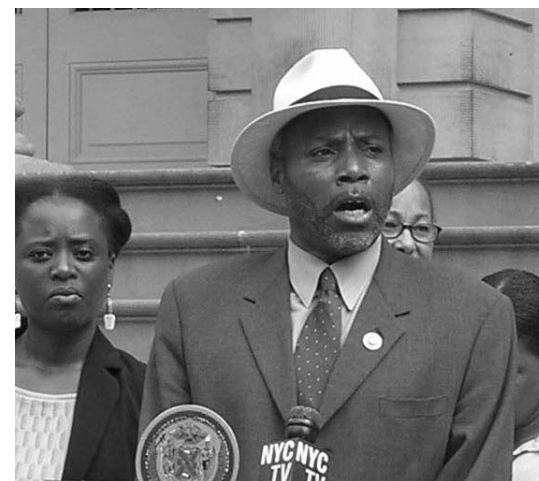
Supporters say Local Law 1, passed in February after a hard-fought battle between landlords' groups and children's advocates, will go a long way in protecting city kids from childhood lead poisoning, a preventable illness known to diminish intelligence and slow mental development. With the law on the books and the suits dismissed, WE ACT is working doubly hard to make sure the law is enforced.

"The battle to uphold this law is far from over," said WE ACT's Basilia Gomez who has worked closely with the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning (NYC-CELP) for over five years. The law's advocates have met with stiff resistance from landlords and affordable housing groups who fear increased liability for incidents of lead poisoning.

"I'm glad this new legislation is finally in place to protect the children in our communities who suffer disproportionately from exposure to lead," said WE ACT's Executive Director, Peggy Shepard.

A staggering 94 percent of children poisoned between 1995 and 2000 are Latino, African American, or Asian.

"The Court correctly rejected the landlords' and banks' arguments that they should be able to raise the environmental



Council member Bill Perkins praises court's decision on lead law.

concerns of their tenants and poor people affected by lead poisoning. Those who are actually affected by lead paint are capable of speaking for themselves and spoke in favor of this law," said Matthew Chachere, a Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation staff attorney who works with advocates and parents in support of the law.

"I'm very glad Judge York [the judge who presided over the case] dismissed this case," said Ms. Zoila Almonte, parent of a lead-poisoned child. "This action is in favor of the children," she said.

Curiously, Mayor Bloomberg —the self-declared 'education mayor'— had sided with landlords and affordable housing developers in vetoing the bill last December. But with strong support from the City Council, the veto was overturned with a lopsided 44-to-5 vote in favor of the legislation. The law took effect August 2nd.

--Christopher Greaves

GLOBAL EYE

WE ACT seeks to make connections with environmental struggles in communities of color beyond our national borders.

The organization was present at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa in September 2001, where the U.S. Environmental Justice delegation supported by the Ford Foundation succeeded in getting environmental justice language woven into official conference documents and recommendations. In 2002, WE ACT participated in the World Summit on Sustainable Development. As our activities and alliances increasingly reach out to the rest of the world, we see it fit to feature global issues showing our readers what environmental justice looks like around the globe. As corporations go global, so do we!

In this issue, let's take a look at what's happening in Colombia, where Plan Colombia, a U.S. government-funded program aimed at drug trafficking is affecting the environment, human health, and the food supply.

PLAN COLOMBIA

By Kizzy Charles-Guzman

PLAN COLOMBIA: IN THEORY

Colombia produces roughly 90% of the cocaine illegally imported into the United States and so, as part of a U.S. foreign policy designed to wage war on drugs, ex-President Bill Clinton implemented Plan Colombia in the year 2000. Plan Colombia is a \$1.6 billion emergency aid package to Colombia that includes helicopters and training for Colombian troops. The plan also funds mass-scale aerial fumigation of illicit coca fields using the herbicide glyphosate. Helicopter gun ships escort the spray planes performing these fumigations. The plan aims to curb Colombia's coca production by 50% by the year 2005.

**PLAN COLOMBIA: IN PRACTICE
INEFFECTIVE DRUG
ERADICATION?**

Opponents of the Plan point out that because aerial spraying of pesticides blankets entire communities, all legitimate crops, fields, and pastures in the area are destroyed, threatening the livelihoods of subsistence farmers and their families. Since coca has at least twice the cash value of any other crop, critics say farmers are likely to increase coca production to recoup losses as quickly as possible.

Consistent with that assertion, the General Accounting Office has noted that aerial coca eradication has had mixed results in Colombia. Between the Plan's implementation in 2000 and 2002, coca production increased steadily, with a decrease after 2002. However, in the meantime, coca production in Peru and Bolivia has

increased in the past few years. Similarly, coca production is said to be migrating within Colombia. Before the Plan, coca fields existed in 12 Colombian states; reports now cite production in all 23 states. In fact, according to a UN Office of Drugs and Crime survey, coca is now being planted in more remote parts of Colombia; with production quadrupling in Boyaca and more than doubling in Cordoba.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Under President George W. Bush, Plan Colombia was renamed the "Andean Initiative" and was expanded to include more military aid to the Colombian armed forces and the police, ostensibly to promote peace between the Colombian government and armed opposition groups. Human rights groups often argue that, as a result, the funds are helping to fuel a civil war between guerilla groups and the Colombian military and sparking regional conflicts between Colombia and its neighbors. The Colombian military has often been characterized as one of the most abusive militaries in the Americas, since paramilitary forces, said to have strong links to the Colombian military, are responsible for the large majority of human rights abuses in the country.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Defenders of the spraying maintain that the herbicide glyphosate, of which an average of 2.7 gallons is sprayed on each 2.5 acres of coca, is not harmful to wildlife, that it degrades quickly, and that it does not pollute water bodies. Critics, on the other hand, challenge these claims with extensive evidence that supports their assertion that glyphosate is very toxic to human, plant, and animal health. For example, a 1993 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) study on glyphosate noted that in California, this compound was ranked



COLOMBIA

LOCATION:

Putumayo, Southern Colombia in South America

HIGHLIGHTS:

- President Clinton implemented Plan Colombia as a "war on drugs" effort
- Much of Putumayo belongs to peasant farmers that grow cash crops of plantains, yucca, and corn
- Aerial fumigations threaten legitimate crops and pastures
- Pesticide spraying contaminates the environment, including the 60% of Putumayo that is Amazon rainforest
- Pesticide spraying is linked to negative health effects in humans and livestock
- Plan Colombia has caused human rights violations; has threatened legitimate livelihoods and forced displacement of women, children, ethnic minorities, farmers, peasants and 12 indigenous tribes in Putumayo.

GLOBAL EYE

third in a class of the 25 top causes of illness or injury due to pesticides. Furthermore, in the U.S., the labels on glyphosate products warn users to avoid applying it to any water body.

Especially because of the shifting winds, which cause the spray to drift into unintended fields, this herbicide has been criticized in Colombia as the cause for the destruction of subsistence food crops and sickness in livestock and humans, especially farmers and children.

SOME OTHER PUBLIC CONCERNS

Francisco Tenorio, president of the Regional Indigenous Organization of Putumayo in Colombia, maintains that "the fumigation has caused damage to our yucca and sugarcane crops and has caused sickness in our children." Critics of Plan Colombia, like the Latin American Working Group, cite health risks that include mild to severe gastrointestinal problems, skin rashes, eye and respiratory problems, and headaches. In many regions, communities report that this blanket fumigation has led to illnesses, destroyed pastures and food crops, poisoned farm animals, and polluted their water.

Finally, the chemicals used in fumigation pose a significant threat to the delicate ecology of the Amazon, with Colombia being home to 10% of all species in the world. The preservation of such a wide diversity of life forms is, then, another important public concern surrounding the Plan Colombia issue.

IN SHORT

Drug trafficking in Colombia has become one of the main causes of social degradation, with poverty, drug addiction, crime, and violence as symptoms of this social malady. However, it is imperative to realize that without a significant move towards promoting socioeconomic alternatives, fumigation will continue to have severe public health, human rights, and environmental impacts, while continuing to push the illicit production of coca deeper into the rainforest and into neighboring countries. Unless we address the underlying issues hampering sustainable socioeconomic development in Colombia, the drug trade will continue to thrive in both producing and consuming countries and increased militarization is unlikely to produce the desired change.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Visit the Drug Policy Action Network's website at <http://actioncenter.drugpolicy.org/action/index.asp?step=2&item=19973> to tell presidential candidates George W. Bush and John F. Kerry to re-think U.S. drug policy in Colombia and the funding of environmental, human rights, and public health crisis using billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars.

**Northeast Environmental Justice Network
Summer 2004 Central Region Gathering**

As an environmental justice organization, WE-ACT works to build relationships on a local, regional, and national level. To that end, WE-ACT is a long-standing member of the Northeast Environmental Justice Network, and a host organization for its central region.

The Northeast Environmental Justice Network (NEJN) is composed of 14 community-based organizations throughout a 12-state area from Maine to Washington, D.C. NEJN is the first comprehensive effort to develop a network in the Northeast. NEJN's mission is to serve its member organizations by building the capacity of those organizations to further the principles and work of the environmental justice movement through education, technical assistance, and capacity building.

NEJN's structure is divided into three parts. The Northern region, which is composed of groups from Connecticut to Boston; the Central region which

covers New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; and the Southern region which covers Delaware, Maryland, and Washington D.C. On the agenda for this year's meeting, held from July 9th through the 10th at Columbia University, were the following objectives:

- To develop a system within the network for supporting individual organizational work and campaigns.
- To take our first steps toward developing our first regional campaign.
- To examine the strengths and weaknesses of our decentralized leadership model and look at the benefits of a centralized network leadership model.
- To give an opportunity for leaders

and members of our respective organizations to participate in grassroots organizing workshops.



Conference attendees at summer gathering.

·And to give new groups in the central region an opportunity to meet our network and participate in the workshops.

Although we did not have the opportunity to develop any new systems within the network, we did begin to plan our next steps collectively.

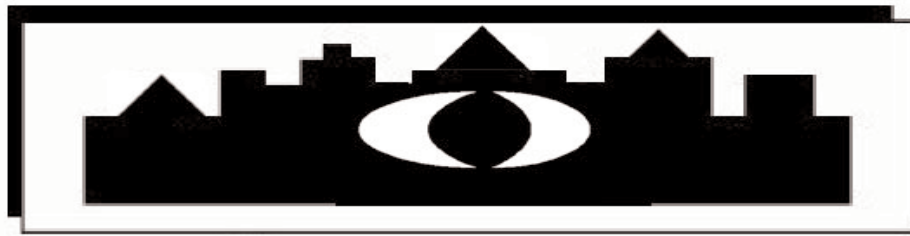
Several new groups from Buffalo, Pittsburgh, the Bronx, and Long Island were in atten-

dance this year. After fulfilling certain membership requirements, these groups may become full members of the network and will be able to participate in its annual business meetings.

The business and organizing training was facilitated by the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO), a grassroots training institution located in Oakland, California. The trainings were about grassroots organizing and fundraising and lasted two days. Judging from post-meeting evaluations, most of the participants seemed to benefit from the trainings. We look forward to working with the groups in attendance as we move forward as a network.

The next NEJN event will be in February.

--Omar Osiris



UPTOWN EYE

Election 2004

WEST HARLEM ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

Vol. IV - No. 4

WE ACT for ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

VOTERS' GUIDE

The Candidates
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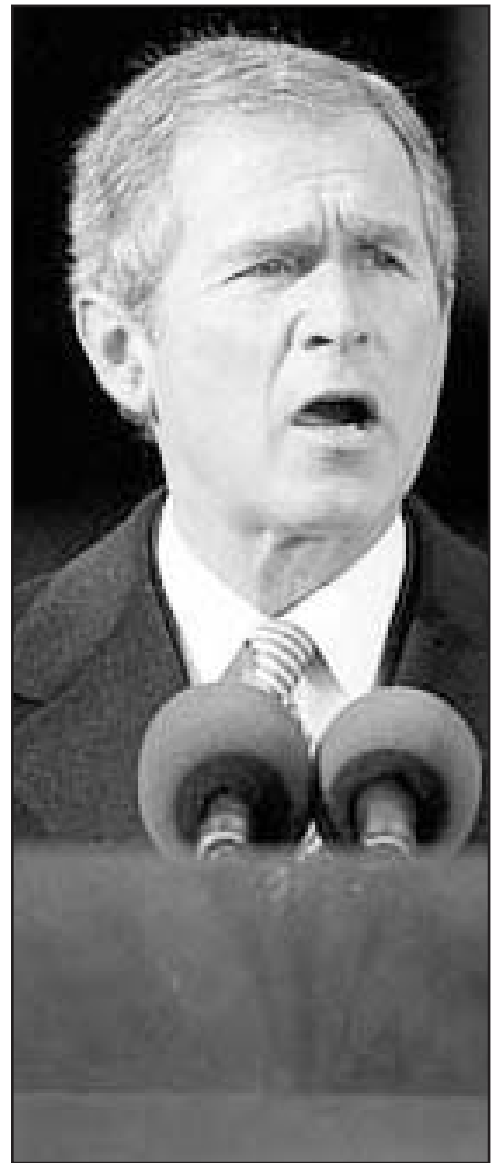
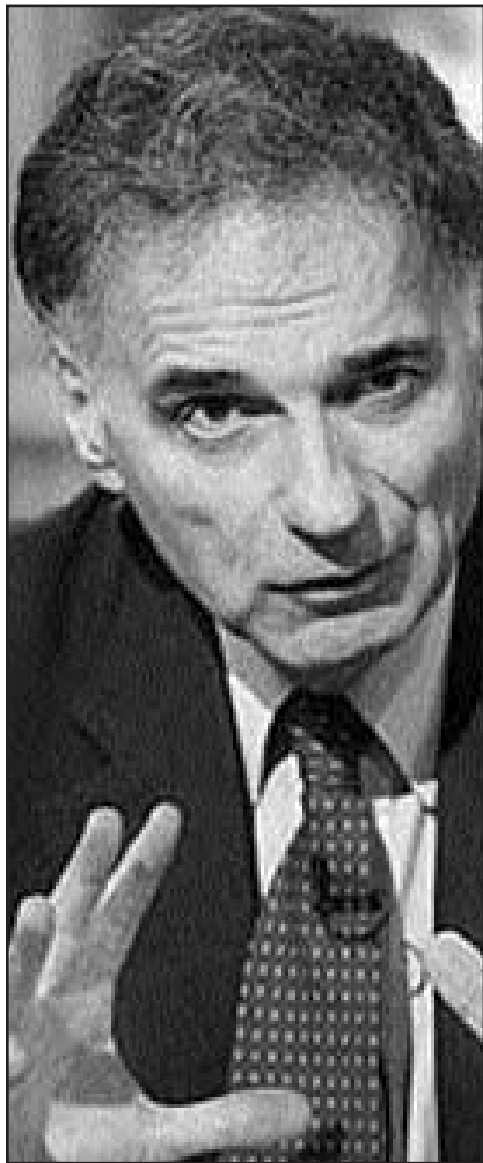
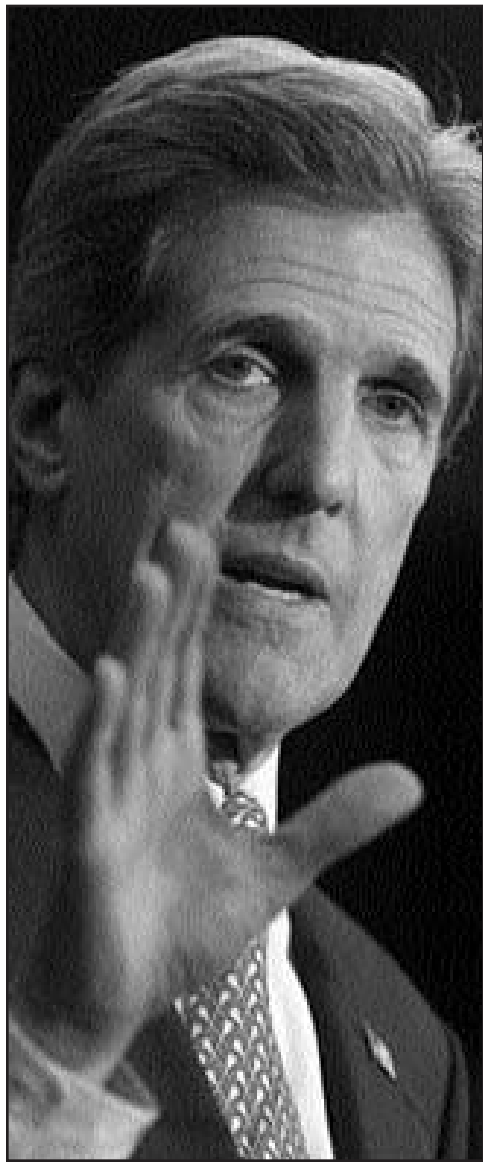


Election 2004
Potential
Pitfalls:
Electronic Voting
& Voter
Disenfranchisement

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A Summary of
Your Voting
Rights

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Anyone's Game?

By Christopher Greaves

WE ACT, Inc. does not support any of the candidates for president.

Readers may note, however, that WE ACT's Executive Director, Peggy M. Shepard is a League of Conservation Voters (LCV) board member. LCV announced its support of John Kerry's candidacy in January. The voting records that follow are by no means exhaustive.

Pres. Bush and Sen. John Kerry on the Environment

This report was compiled from envirovictory.org; *The New York Times* (www.nytimes.com: On the Issues: Environment); Natural Resources Defense Council (www.nrdc.org); League of Conservation Voters: www.lcv.org); Kerry Campaign web-site: www.johnkerry.com; Bush Campaign web-site: www.georgewbush.com; The Guardian: www.guardian.co.uk; *Seed Magazine*: www.seedmagazine.org.

Senator John Kerry received a 96 percent lifetime rating from the League of Conservation Voters (LCV). Bush received an "F"-rating from the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) for his environmental performance from 2001 to 2002, his first two years in office.

CLEAN AIR

Kerry has opposed the Bush administration's efforts to rollback certain aspects of the Clean Air Act. Kerry has taken a stand against the elimination of "new source review", which requires power plants to install pollution control equipment when expanding or upgrading their operations.

In a second term, President Bush says he will work to secure passage of the Clear Skies Initiative to "reduce power plant emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and mercury by 70 percent and help states to meet tougher new air quality standards". (Bush Campaign

web-site: www.georgewbush.com) The Bush Administration's Clear Skies initiative, however, does not address carbon dioxide emissions, the primary cause of global warming. (envirovictory.org, John Kerry Campaign web-site: www.johnkerry.com)

President Bush proposes caps on power plant mercury emissions, which can cause mental retardation and developmental problems in children. The Bush campaign says the president will finalize a rule that will cut mercury emissions from power plants by 70 percent-improving public health and protecting children and pregnant women. The

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), however, issued a press release in February noting that the EPA, under President Bush, was previously requiring "only a 30 percent emissions reduction over 15 years and [allowing] some plants to avoid controls entirely by buying and banking pollution 'credits' from cleaner plants." (<http://www.nrdc.org/media/pressreleases/040227.asp>)

John Kerry says he will reverse the Bush-Cheney rollbacks to the Clean Air Act, plug loopholes in the law, take aggressive action to stop acid rain, and use innovative, job-creating pro-

grams to reduce mercury emissions and other emissions that contribute to global warming. (Kerry Campaign web-site) Kerry specifically addressed the plight of young asthma sufferers in Harlem in his July 2004 acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, saying: "What does it mean when twenty five percent of the children in Harlem have asthma because of air pollution? America can do better. And help is on the way." Visit www.weact.org for more information on the link between asthma and air pollution.

ENERGY

The Bush administration has pumped billions of dollars into the oil, gas, nuclear, and coal industries-- traditional sources of energy in the United States. John Kerry has supported investment in alternative sources of energy, which he believes could reduce our dependence on non-renewable energy (e.g. oil, gas, and coal) and decelerate climate change. Kerry supports special tax incentives that would encourage consumers to purchase alternative-fuel vehicles (AFVs). Kerry has proposed increasing fuel efficiency standards from 24 miles per gallon to 36 miles per gallon by 2015 -a measure which Bush opposes. Kerry's plans, if implemented, could greatly reduce pollution and reduce the country's dependence on non-renewable sources of energy. Since oil, gas, and

coal exist only in limited quantities, many view alternative energy sources -such as wind, solar, and geothermal energy- as vital to the nation's future. John Kerry says his plans to invest in cleaner energy could generate 500,000 jobs. Kerry says he will work to "make America energy independent of Middle East Oil."

Though John Kerry has not offered support for the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, (see Thomas Bell's article in this issue for a short discussion on climate change) Kerry stresses a need to participate in international negotiations to address climate change. George W. Bush refused to sign the Kyoto Treaty in 2001, citing potential harm to national economic interests.

Interestingly, the Bush administration has questioned the science behind

human-induced climate change. President Bush waved away an interagency report on global warming supporting the "prevailing scientific consensus" that climate change is human-induced. A Defense Department-commissioned report on global warming, however, finds "growing evidence" that "abrupt climate change may well occur in the not-too-distant future" and could lead to "megadroughts, rioting, and pandemic." The Pentagon's report recommended that the risk of abrupt climate change "be elevated beyond a scientific debate to a US national security concern." Such concerns have intensified criticism against the Bush administration's decision to pull out of the Kyoto Protocol. (The Guardian: <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,1153513,00.html>)

The move represented a reversal of Bush's 2000 campaign promise to curb global warming.)

The Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-partisan, nationwide alliance of 100,000 scientists released a report entitled "Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation Into the Bush administration's misuse of Science". The report criticized the Bush administration for having replaced prominent scientists on scientific advisory committees with industry-supported "experts", and for censoring reports on global warming, and studies on the effects of mercury on people. (*Seed Magazine*: <http://www.seedmagazine.com/?p=article&id=151&cp=3>)

Pres. Bush and Sen. John Kerry on the Environment

OIL DRILLING

Senator Kerry and President Bush favor drilling for oil in some areas. However, Kerry has opposed the Bush administration's efforts to initiate drilling in sensitive areas such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

PUBLIC LANDS

John Kerry supports wilderness protection and funding for federal land purchases. In April 2003, the Interior Department announced that it "would halt the process of reviewing 262 million acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for potential protection as wilderness and would restrict the amount of BLM land eligible for such protection". Bush also supports logging in national forests as a means of preventing forest fires. (envirovictory.org)

A Look at Third Party Candidate Ralph Nader

Ralph Nader was the Green Party candidate in the presidential election of 2000. As a public advocate, he has often championed issues that have been unpopular with industry, but widely celebrated by the general public. At the time of this writing, Nader's campaign is mired in the Herculean task of getting on the ballot in many states. As the Reform Party candidate -a third party challenging both the Democratic and Republican candidates for the presidency- Nader is engaged in a petitioning process that has encountered several legal and political roadblocks in his late-announced run for the Oval Office.

Ralph Nader proposes a detailed energy policy,

which is outlined on his campaign web-site: www.votenader.org. Called the Ten-Point Plan for Good Jobs and Energy Independence, Nader's plan includes provisions that would promote advanced technology and hybrid cars; invest in more efficient factories; encourage high performance building; increase the use of energy efficient appliances; modernize electrical infrastructure; expand renewable energy development; improve transportation options; reinvest in smart urban growth; plan for developing hydrogen fuel cell technology and hydrogen-powered cars; and preserve regulatory protections that reward workers consumers and protect the environment. The energy

plan, originally drafted by the Apollo Alliance, calls for a \$313.72 billion federal investment that would "shift the burden of energy consumption away from fossil fuels and onto domestic renewable energy markets such as the wind, biomass, and solar energy industries" over a ten-year period. The Alliance's report claims its policies would "reduce transportation-related petroleum consumption by 1.25 million barrels per day; reduce national energy consumption by 16 percent, and put the United States on pace to meet 20 percent of its total electricity demand from renewables by 2020 - more than three times 2003 levels." The Alliance projects that over a ten-year period, the plan would

generate 3.3 million jobs and boost the U.S. economy.

Nader also supports the legalization of industrial hemp. Hemp, which is currently banned in the United States as an illicit substance, could prove useful as a component in fuel and help to "minimize our reliance on petroleum" according to Nader's campaign. Nader also proposes measures to protect our oceans from overfishing, pollution, and fossil-fuel driven climate change. (www.votenader.org)

--Christopher Greaves

ELECTION 2004 POTENTIAL PITFALLS: ELECTRONIC VOTING & VOTER DISENFRANCHISEMENT

After reports of hanging chads, disenfranchised African American voters, and other irregularities were widely aired during and after the debacle that was the 2000 presidential election, many voters are wary of the potential for electoral shenanigans as November 2nd approaches. In response to the hanging-chads fiasco that riveted America for weeks before the Supreme Court decided *Bush vs. Gore*—and, thereby, the election's outcome—Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) in 2002, to avert future election disasters.

HAVA establishes an electoral assistance commission; funding for new equipment and training; provisional ballot rules; statewide computerized voter lists; and new voter identification rules. HAVA, nevertheless, has not necessarily reassured voters that the outcome of this year's presidential race will reflect the will of the electorate. New computerized voting machines, which will be used in many states and throughout Florida this year, may be the chief source of apprehension among voters, followed closely by the potential for voter intimidation and politically driven manipulation of voter rolls. As *The Nation* magazine reported in August, "some 98 million citizens, five out of every six of the roughly 115 million who will go to the polls, will consign their votes into computers that unidentified computer programmers, working in the main for four private corporations and the officials of 10,500 election jurisdictions, could program to invisibly falsify outcomes."

Bev Harris, a widely cited activist who operates a web-site called blackboxvoting.com, which chronicles instances of election irregularities and fraud, writes:

In the Alabama 2002 general election, machines made by Election Systems and Software (ES&S) flipped the governor's race. Six thousand three hundred Baldwin County electronic votes mysteriously disappeared after the polls had closed and everyone had gone home. Democrat Don Siegelman's victory was handed to Republican Bob Riley. (In These Times, August 24, 2004)

Though there are several manufacturers

of electronic voting machines—Election Systems & Software Inc. (ES&S), Sequoia Voting Systems, and Diebold Election Systems—are the market heavyweights. Amazingly, Walden O'Dell, the chairman of the board and chief executive of Diebold Election Systems, is a prominent fundraiser for the Bush campaign. O'Dell drew harsh criticism after stating in a letter last year that he is "committed to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the president next year." Ohio is a crucial swing state, which could tilt the election in favor of either candidate come November. After last year's colossal

misstep, O'Dell said he intended to "keep a lower profile and 'try to be more sensi-

tive" (<http://www.diebold.com/whatsnews/inthenews/executive.htm>)

ES&S also has ties to the Republican Party through Senator Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), a former chairman of ES&S. Sequoia Systems is owned by two foreign firms.

But while such "incriminating" political ties—which are likely not limited to the Republican Party—may raise eyebrows, it is the many technical snafus inherent to touch-screen voting that could make the electorate apoplectic this year.

Case in point: Harris found about 40,000 unprotected computer files on Diebold's web-site. "Source code for Diebold's AccuVote touch-screen voting machine, program files for its Global Election Management System tabulation software, a Texas voter-registration list with voters' names and addresses, and what appeared to be live vote data from 57 precincts in a 2002 California primary election," writes Kim Zetter of *Wired News*. "Harris found that she could enter the vote database using Microsoft Access, a standard program often bundled with Microsoft Office, and change votes without leaving a trace."

A report by Johns Hopkins University last year found numerous flaws in Diebold's programming. Avi Rubin, technical director of the Information Security Institute at Johns Hopkins, told *The Washington Post*, "whoever certified that code as secure should be fired." Rubin said the machines could be programmed to manipulate results and that the machines are easy to hack. Diebold rebutted with a report saying Rubin had reviewed an outdated version of its software. (Brigid Schulte, *Washington Post*)

Critics of electronic voting, including Harris, think a computer-generated paper trail might help solve the problem. Under such a system, voters would be given receipts certifying their vote. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recently signed legislation requiring a voter-verified paper record to back up every electronic ballot cast in California by the 2006 primary election. Nevada is implementing the voter-verified paper trail system this election sea-

son. (California Voter Foundation; <http://www.calvoter.org/index.html>) Although this clearly leaves room for fraud and inaccuracies—the machine could give you a receipt confirming your vote while tallying a vote for the other candidate—it would at least make a manual recount possible.

At present, most widely used touch-screen machines make it impossible to conduct a manual recount.

—Christopher Greaves

“At present, most widely used touch-screen machines make it impossible to conduct a manual recount.”

Let's take a look at some other reasons why some might fret about the outcome of the upcoming presidential election: (compiled primarily from www.movingideas.org; People for the American Way at www.pfaw.org, and *The New York Times* online at nytimes.com/makingvotescount)

1. The 2000 Presidential Election

- In the 2000 Florida elections, thousands of black voters were unlawfully denied the right to vote due to incorrect voter purges, poorly trained and misinformed poll workers, and discrimination. (Voting Irregularities in Florida During the 2000 Presidential Election, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 07/01)

- Postcards were mailed to minority voters in Passaic County, NJ, threatening fines up to \$1000 and imprisonment of up to five years, or both. The postcards warned of "armed law enforcement officers" at the polls. ("Albany Makes Bad Elections Worse", Lorraine C. Minnite, *New York Daily News*, 09/21/04)

- In Wharton County, Texas, a white woman had her home vandalized, received phone threats, and was victim to a cross burning that lit her home on fire for her support of an African American candidate running for sheriff. (*America's Modern Poll Tax: How Structural Disenfranchisement Erodes Democracy*, The Advancement Project, 11/07/01)

2. Recent Incidents of Racial Suppression and Voter Intimidation

- This year, Glenda Hood, a Bush-Cheney elector in 2000, in her new role as Florida's secretary of state attempted to remove more than 22,000 African Americans from the voter rolls. A citizens' group fought to have this list of 22,000 "felons" released, and found it to be full of inaccuracies. As a result, the state was forced to scrap the list. (www.nytimes.com/makingvotescount)

- The editor of the website Truth in Action, Ross Dove, videotapes and photographs voters at polling stations.

This report was compiled from:
 -Center for American Progress
http://www.movingideas.org/activism/networks/voter_intimidation.html
 -Common Dreams Progressive Newswire
www.commondreams.org
 -Wired Magazine
www.wired.com
 -California Voter Foundation
www.calvoter.org/index.html
www.rockthevote.com/rtv_campuscamp_dorights.php

(continued from previous page)

He has said, if he sees "a busload of Hispanic individuals who didn't speak English and who voted," he plans to follow that bus to make sure they aren't voting more than once. (*Bullies at the Voting Booth*, Anne-Marie Cusac, *The Progressive*, 10/2004)

·John Pappageorge, a Republican state Representative from Troy, Michigan was quoted in the *Detroit Free Press* on July 16, 2004 saying, "If we do not suppress the Detroit vote, we're going to have a tough time in this election cycle." Detroit is 83 percent African American. (*What Makes the GOP Want to Mess with Voting?*, Sylvester Brown Jr., *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 09/23/2004)

·During a special election in South Dakota on June 1, 2004 many Native Americans were sent to the wrong polling places or given incorrect information about new laws. Some arrived at the polls with no ID and were turned away when they should have been informed that they could simply sign an affidavit and proceed to vote. (*The Long Shadow of Jim Crow: Voter Intimidation and Suppression Today*, People for the American Way and NAACP)

·In a city council election in Alabama in August, 2004, political opponents of a candidate challenged almost 50 ballots, all from Asian Americans who were likely to cast their ballots for him. (*Bayou Politics are Facing Changes*, Russ Henderson, *Mobile Register*, 08/29/2004)

·In August 2004, Florida state law enforcement officials claimed to be investigating potential voter fraud cases. They visited the homes of voters in some Orlando precincts who had registered by absentee ballot, most being elderly African Americans. (*Suppress the Vote?*, Bob Herbert, *New York Times*, 08/16/2004, free subscription required)

·Earlier this month, the Department of Homeland Security attempted to ban a nonpartisan voter registration group from setting up tables outside of a naturalization ceremony in Miami. (*Nonpartisan Voter Reg Group Sues Homeland Security, City of Miami Beach over Denial of Access to New Citizens*, People for the American Way, 09/15/04)

·In 2004 in Texas, students at a majority black college were challenged by a local district attorney's claim that they were not eligible to vote in the county where the school was located, which was not true. (www.pfaw.org)

A Summary of Your Voting Rights

By Jared DeMarinis, America's Families United

Voting by Absentee Ballot in New York State

You may vote by Absentee Ballot if you will be:

- unavoidably absent from your county on Election Day
- unable to appear at the polls due to illness or disability
- a patient in a Veterans' Administration Hospital
- detained in jail awaiting Grand Jury action or confined in prison after conviction for an offense other than a felony

Applications for Absentee Ballots are available at your county board of elections. You may also download a PDF version of the New York State Absentee Ballot Application Form. Upon completion, applications must be mailed to your county board no later than the seventh day before the election or delivered in person no later than the day before the election. You may also request an Absentee Ballot by sending a letter to your county board of elections. The letter must be received by your county board no earlier than 30 days and no later than seven days before the election. The letter must contain the following information:

- the address where you are registered
- an address where the ballot is to be sent
- the reason for the request, and
- the signature of the voter

An application form will be mailed with your ballot. The application form must be completed and returned with your ballot. If you cannot pick up your ballot, or will not be able to receive it through the mail, you have the right to designate someone.

If you have moved:

You must complete a voter registration application for your new residence

How/Where to Register

You may register at your local board of elections or any state agency participating in the National Voter Registration Act, on any business day throughout the year. Alternatively, you can download a .pdf version of the Voter Registration Form from the New York State Board of Elections website, and mail it to your county board of elections.

Voting Qualifications

- be a U.S. citizen;
- be 18 years old by December 31 of the year in which you file this form (note: you must be 18 years old by the date of the general, primary or other election in which you want to vote);
- live at your present address at least 30 days before an election;
- not be in jail or on parole for a felony conviction and;
- not claim the right to vote elsewhere.

Voting Rights for Ex-Felons:

-New York State permits a person on Probation to vote.

-You cannot vote while in prison or on parole.

-If you are not in prison or on parole and you are registered to vote, you are eligible to vote.

Under the new voter identification rules, first-time voters who registered by mail will be required to show proof of identification such as a driver's license or electric bill. Don't forget to bring identification on Election Day! If election officials prevent you from voting because you are not on the voter list in their precinct, you may cast a "provisional ballot". Election officials must validate or deny each provisional ballot after the election before certifying winners. Request a provisional ballot if you are prevented from voting for any reason.