Homeless Union History Project Meeting

15 April 2011

Present: Willie Baptist, Crystal Hall, Dan Jones, Emily McNeill

Readings: “The Medicalizationof Homelessness and the Theater of Repression” by Arline Mathieu, and “Medicalizing Homelessness: The Production of Self-Blame and Self-Governing within Homeless Shelters” by Vincent Lyon-Callo

Reflections on the Readings

* Useful history of NYC
* Strategic shift from medicalization to criminalization
* Homelessness as a pathology
* Homelessness wasn't a huge phenomenon until the 70s-80s
  + Has become accepted, normalized, treated as inevitable (despite being the result of specific policies), made invisible
* We should make sure to treat poverty as a historical fact, not a natural one
* Poor are as vulnerable to these hegmonic ideas as the rest of us
* Well-meaning people sometimes de-politicize homeless further by telling them they have to change themselves
* Limits on what's possible?
  + We can't change the economy, we can change you though!
* If you're politicized and poor, then you must be crazy
* People aren't sick, they're colonized.
* Historicize the response to homelessness: Shelters vs. Houses
* Shelters serve to passify people: depoliticize by focusing on individual pathology
* Focus on the individual is a method of social control: you're incapable of collective action
* Hegemony
  + To move thinking you have to come up against dominant ideas
  + People are ill-equipped by various education system to deal with history and political economy
  + "I would have been able to liberate more slaves, if they knew that they were slaves"
* Shelter system as example of biopolitcs (human rights + depoliticization)
  + Part of that is de-humanizing people (the basic unit of biopolitics) when they act politically or expose politics
* Leaders are good attacking the weak points of hegemonic ideas at every opportunity
* Alternative mythology on the left that displaces the pathology onto wealthy individuals and policies as opposed to structures

Report back from Willie on a Picture the Homeless Board Meeting

* See as part of this work
* Lessons from NUH are especially useful for that group
* Could use "You're one paycheck away from homelessness" helped to expose hegemonic thinking and false security/divisions behind the word "homeless"
* Have to direct this study around the question of leadership development for PTH
* Struggling with drugs and alcohol as "chemical warfare"
  + Short term fundraising help but can see from NUH history the destruction that can wreak
* Analogy with PUH and Greater Philadelphia First and PTH and Partnership for NYC
* Homelessness in NYC, a key city in the global economic structure, is an achilles heal in the hegemonic argument. It's a key vulnerability
  + Other arguments based around race, drug addiction, gender, sexuality, etc. are weak and counterproductive
  + They know it's a vulnerabiltiy. The existence of homeless people is glaringly political so the homeless are automatically treated as political: with hostility, marginalization, and pathologization
* Use of religion as a source of legitimacy: "Jesus was homeless"...Potter's Field Campaign
* Stories from their campaigns over the years indicate a true picture of the homeless
* Developing an educational proposal for PTH...Arvinetta on the board?
* Vacant housing count/Intro 48
  + -\*\*Housing crisis is not because the system is not working- this is how the system works\*\*

Brainstorming Work Plan for Wiki and Leadership School

* Pull out illustrative stories
* HUH 101 as part of the political economy and history focus for the school in Wilkes-Barre
* Re-worked crisis presentation that focuses on issues of homelessness and housing...homelessness in the '80s and then also looking at foreclosures and at the connections
* Also what was the NUH, how did it come to be, general outline- timeline, what was going on, why did it happen at that time, what did they do, also the demise
* Pamphlet !?
* Book project with an eye towards housing crisis: What do people do when they are made homeless?
* Use homelessness to talk about a higher level problem than income inequality
* Problem wasn't that slaves made less than masters...it was embedded in their relationship
* Bring King (Beyond Vietnam) into the discussion
* Also to talk about scarcity vs. abundance
* Ideological questions: How does hegemony obstruct organizing in marginalized communities
* However we use it has to be explicitly replicable

Thoughts from Dan on Netwar

All these different fields in the past 10 years have taken on this network concept of thinking

* Networks as organizing principle
* No one has figured out what makes a network a network
* What holds networks together is narrative and story telling
* When you move into a networked narrative creates depths

Denotative

* Story that you’re telling

Performative

* Offer people a role in the narrative

Pragmatic

* Story with solution, role
* Transformative power
* People in network able to transform mechanisms in which narrative is told

Coming up with narrative framework around uniting leaders

* Coming to PI gatherings
* Doing local work
* Developing media and communications infrastructure, education and pedagogy

How networks get structured

* Concepts as verbs instead of nouns
* Networking structuring process vs. structure

Central point and everything connected or everything is connected to each other or whole set of hubs

* Things are always changing and shifting

Some define as not a question of power

* New thinking is hetereogeneity of the nodes, have freedom to operate independent
* In hierarchy, ranks linked into hierarchy, military

To have a story – certain homogenization

* Have to not get freaked out with a certain amount of hierarchy

Network vs. industrial vs. agrarian forms of organization

* Many to many relationships, vs. one to many
* Form of organization that’s unlike more static industry situation in stable communities
* Constant movement of capital – produces more fluid forms
* Network allows you to relate to other sections of the poor – HU only related to homeless

Netwar is the way networks fight

* John Aquila
* Willie has YouTube video
* CFR – social media and political power
* Willie to forward links

Scale-free – networks as opposed to hierarchies

* Come to understand how whole network operates based on local relationships, digging into local relationships
* Hierarchies – see everything at once

Growth

* Networks start from tightly connected nucleus and grow out

Preferential attachment

* When a new node connects it connects at two points
* Tendency for node to attach where there’s already the most links
* Come in through a group that’s already attached to a lot of groups

Fitness factor

* How you understand new kid on block and getting a lot of links
* Are people built for network, seems to undermine preferential attachment
* How does Google or Twitter work? Coming in late to internet

Many Martins vs. One Martin

* Chris Sprowal

Doctrine of swarming

* Hit one place simultaneously or many places simultaneously
* One day of protest vs. conducting a campaign
* Take Off The Boards Campaign (1988)