

ran the risk of destroying it. Thinking like Douglas, they assumed that the only hope of holding the party together . . . was "to agree to disagree, to respect 'the right of the people of each state to decide these questions for themselves.'"

Yet here are the MFDP and SNCC talking like Lincoln: Any person can advocate political neutrality who does not see anything wrong in Jim Crow Politics, slavery by another name. But no person can logically say it, who does see a wrong in it . . . They contend that whatever state wants Jim Crow Politics has a right to work it out in their state. So they have it, if it is not wrong. But if it is a wrong, they cannot say a state has a right to do wrong.

The 1941 Attorney General Circular 3591, WWII veterans like Amzie, who came back to a purpose, the 1954 Supreme Court decision, the Montgomery bus boycott, the sit-in movement, the full blown Civil Rights Movement, signaled an end to America's second Constitutional Era. Certainly the Mississippi Theater of that movement rang the curtain on Mississippi's eighty nine year reign, 1875 to 1964 as a one party white Democratic state. Moreover, as quiet as it's kept, that effort rang the curtain on the national political party arrangements put into play in the years 1875 to 1877 when Republicans blinked and Democrats winked.

Agriculture dominated the economic arrangements of the first Constitutional Era, 1787 to 1865, Industrial machine technology dominated the second, 1875 to 1954, and Information computer technologies dominated the third, 1965 and into the twenty-first century.

In the first era, Mississippi whites home schooled their offspring or sent them to private schools and on to Princeton and/or the University of Virginia. Black slaves learned to read, if at all, on their own dime and at great risk.

In the second era, Conant opened up Harvard and elite Universities to public school students, but nothing interrupted sharecropper education. Sharecropper students, the progeny of slaves, got the education appropriate to their caste and its pre-assigned work.

In all due time, in 1970, ten years after Conant published *Slums and Suburbs*, the nation transitioned into its third Constitutional Era, the Supreme Court required Mississippi to begin the integration of its public school system. The same year the nation began a forty year documentation of education that included data about four year college graduation. Bad news for Conant and Jefferson. Their vision of a meritocratic national education system produced America's natural aristocrats, had gone South, unless, that is, we agree that the Universe distributes intelligence disproportionately to the wealthy. In 1970, 40 percent of students from the upper quartile of the nation's economy

distribution got their Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree; and forty years later, by 2010, the percent had doubled to 80 percent. In 1970 just 7 percent of the bottom quartile of the nation's economic distribution got their BA's and that percent barely nudged for forty years, just 9 percent got them by 2010 (Mortenson 2013). And just this past week we learned that 51 percent of all of America's public school children live in poverty (A new majority SEF 2015).

What we might double down on is the work needed to realize ourselves as a Constitutional People clothed with Human Dignity. And while it is true that we have lurched backwards and forwards over this endeavor in, roughly, three-quarters of a century units of time, we have managed, across two and a quarter centuries, in-spite of ourselves, to extend the reach of "We The People."

The class of Constitutional People that began with white male property owners has expanded to include men and women of all races and income levels with or without property. That expansion has typically required an alliance of the bottom and the top. Certainly that is how I experienced the Mississippi Theater of the Civil Rights Movement—an earned insurgency, a "We The People" force from the bottom found a few allies at the top.

The Pre Amble opens up a constitutional space: "We The People" did not mean "We the President, We the Congress, or We the Supreme Court." It couldn't since none existed at the writing of that document. Neither is it "We the Citizens," for, there was no nation in 1787 for which allegiance could be pledged. If the Pre Amble had begun, "We The Citizens of the several States," we would have a very different America. But it didn't. "We The People" invites everyone living in America, who takes it as their home, into the Constitutional Conversation.

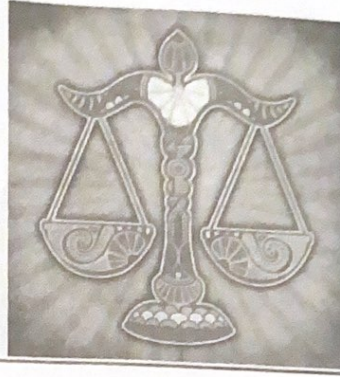
Zook's vision to uplift and universalize into college the reach of Public School Education is the more appropriate vision for this Constitutional Era, the age of knowledge work. The Conant-Jefferson vision of a natural elite based on meritocracy lost out to the Market-based education: Get as much education as money can buy. Even so, "We the People" lies there, biding its time, waiting for its insurgents. Let's lift it up and try to feel its force. Please, say it after me:

"We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

The presumption of innocence is not just a legal concept. In common sense terms it depends on that generosity of spirit, which seeks the best, not the worst, in the stranger.

Blockages become gifts

by Carlos Gonzalez



“The impeded stream is the one that sings.” (Berry, 2011)

For one week, my students and I read and pondered Wendell Berry’s poem, “Real Work” (2011). The last line of the poem is the zinger of an aphorism quoted above that left us all wondering about the many places in our lives where we face obstructions, where the path suddenly narrows or is blocked by something so much larger than ourselves. These moments are never easy and are often spaces that collect fear, shame, and hopelessness. Interestingly, they also can be places where grace emerges if we surrender attachments to moving in the same direction that we have been conditioned to follow, and, instead, allow ourselves to be guided toward the desire of all rivers—the blissful union with the sea.

Time and time again, we are told by prophets and sages that the ocean of bliss for us is not somewhere else, rather within our hearts. The obstacles and impediments are all the delusions and illusions that we create and hold, that take us away from seeking within. These blockages, however, are not curses to fight against, but gifts which call out to us to awaken and surrender to the grace of the present moment, a grace possible to find even when feeling lost in the noise of hegemony.

Reference

Berry, W. (2011). *Standing by words: Essays*. San Francisco: Counterpoint Press (p. 97).

Nature as home . . . antidote to war

by Matthew Rubenstein



Being rooted to me isn't as easy as naming a person or talking about the house where I was raised. For me, roots are both physical and blood related. From the giant oak trees penetrating the limestone foundation to the mangroves that soak their roots in the crystal clear waters of Florida Bay, my roots lie within the South Florida wilderness and the people with whom I share it. From the hiking and camping, to sight fishing and lobstering, there isn't a day that goes by that I don't drift back "home." Over my 30 years, breathtaking scenery, adrenaline-filled moments, and hard lessons learned from long tired nights have washed inside me. Along the way, I've shared those soulful saturations with the people whose passions are the same as mine, creating life-long friendships and memories.

From as long as I can remember, I have always been different. I wasn't like most kids. I didn't want to play video games; and as I got older, I didn't want to fill my nights with drinking and the club scene. I was always drawn to adventure and the outdoors, exploring the Everglades and the expanses of untouched wilderness. It's where I first learned a significant lesson in life, Respect! Like all of life, Nature deserves respect. It is delicate and needs to be taken care of—from the animals that call it home to the plants to the weather. If I take care of it, it seems to find ways to take care of me. In a time when technology has taken over, and all emotion is received in an emoji, left to decipher in an email or text, Nature is real. It teaches me to pay attention to all the little details, how to read it, and how to approach its multitude of species. In the everglades if I misjudge something or disrespect it, I will end up paying for it, for nature makes me accountable for my actions. Today, people often don't reprimand or give honest feedback for transgressions. But Nature does, if we stop to listen.

The family I have built around this outdoor haven of mine always seems to last. Many of us have some friends that come and go, but I enjoy the few

special ones, who are the staples in my life, who seem to have developed from my experiences in the "great outdoors." From father figures, to brothers and sisters, to my love life, I have found everything I need in the outdoors.

My father left my family when I was nine years old, and my mother gave it her all. She worked hard and provided my sister and me with everything we needed. I never really had a father, but my best friend's father was kind enough to provide me some opportunities and life lessons in the outdoors, experiences that led me to become bonded with animals, trees, plants, water, rocks, other people who share the same values. The bonds of Nature and of those human relationships inextricably bound me to a joy and sometimes to a solitude that keeps me alive.

The roots of the outdoors has such a deep hold on me; I have often turned to it for healing. At the age of 19, I joined the Army and got the opportunity to travel and see the world. Yet I was also deployed to Afghanistan, to an area where I conducted mission after mission to ensure, the Army claims, that our freedoms are kept, and that my family never has to worry about terror stepping foot on our soil. With this responsibility came great sacrifice, and the first place I went each time I came home was straight back where I really am free, the natural world.

While deployed in Afghanistan, I lost my best friend. Every time we had shared some "down time" together, we had shared stories of hunting and fishing. It was our way to escape and dream of the days when we would be back home and wake up to the fall breezes and the crisp air—all the signs that hunting season would be upon us once again. We shared stories and pictures and planned future trips. Neither one of us knew that our last evening together would be his last evening. I longed then for those Everglades, for them to soothe my soul.

Every year there will be a day in a hunt when I just sit back and reflect on the days my friend, my comrade in arms, and I shared together. Each memory brings me a desire to be living my life to his expectations. And I reach back to family and the outdoors. They are the constant in my healing process—a healing demanded by war, its memories, its losses, and its aftermath. And anytime I need to step back and slow things down, and see the world from a different perspective, I go straight back to my roots.

Those roots ground me in what matters most in life. It's often easy to get caught up in day to day struggles, and forget to slow down and live. Working, seeking a degree, taking care of relationships—I can sometimes lose my footing, shake my roots. Growing up in nature helps me see that as fast as we come into this world, we can just as easily be removed from it. I also learned that lesson serving in Afghanistan. We can spend most of our time trying to

hide from life, yet in reality life, both vicious and gentle, will find us. Neither does Nature hide reality. If observed closely, listened to attentively, it can offer wisdom, solace, terror, and joy. Hopefully, when it is my time to go, I can retreat back to my roots and watch the sun set for the last time. But if I can't, like most of us, I hope I will have lived my life to the fullest and will take my last breath with no regrets.