

Phi Theta Kappa Honors Institute
Cordier Lecture Series
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I want to thank Susan Edwards and her colleagues for inviting me to join you today. I'm very impressed by the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Program and its decision to focus on the paradox of affluence and very appreciative of the opportunity to share my thoughts on this theme with you today.

My presentation is entitled *Pathways Out of Poverty through Green Collar Jobs: The Role of Scholarship in Improving Quality of Life for Urban Residents*.

I'm going to start by talking about the paradox of affluence, then talk about my work on green collar jobs and work force development in the hopes of conveying to you how the paradox of affluence has motivated me to use my training and position as an academic to try and improve people's lives rather than simply analyzing and describing their experiences and conditions.

In your packet on the *Paradox of Affluence*, the term "affluence" is defined as "*an abundant flow or supply, abundance of property, wealth*" and the term "paradox" is defined as "*a statement that is seemingly contradictory*". In the packet, putting these two terms together is designed to make us think about whether affluence or abundance is as desirable as it seems. We are supposed to ponder if affluence and wealth creation are as uniformly positive as they are presented to be.

I think this is a false issue – surely, we all agree that increases in wealth and abundance can bring desirable outcomes. Study after study has shown that affluence leads to increases in life expectancy, improved health outcomes, and increased leisure time, all highly desirable outcomes.

The paradox of affluence does not stem from the problems of abundance, it stems from the fact that immense increases in economic activity, development, and affluence around the world have benefited a very small proportion of the world's population. The richest one fifth of the world's population consume 75% of the world's economic product while the poorest one fifth of the world's population consume less than two percent. In other words, the paradox of affluence is that the benefits of economic growth are distributed so terribly unequally.

In the last 6 decades world trade has increased by a factor of 14 and the global economy has increased exponentially, but rather than lifting all boats, affluence has resulted in increased social and economic inequalities between people and places. At an international scale:

- As many as 3 billion people, including half the population of Africa, are living on less than \$2.00 U.S. dollars per day.
- More than a fifth of the world's population lack access to safe drinking water.
- More than two billion people have no access to modern energy sources and rely on biomass.

- Almost two thirds of urban populations in Africa, Asian, Latin America and the Caribbean have no hygienic means of disposing of their human waste.
- More than 3 million people die each year from air pollution – two thirds of them impoverished, the vast majority women and children who die from indoor pollution caused by burning wood and dung.

At a national scale, in the United States, even in the 1990s, when unemployment and inflation were at their lowest points in many years, poverty rates in the U.S. remained high with almost 20% of children living below the poverty line in 1998. In 2006, as affluence has increased, the number of children living in poverty rose to 25% – that's one in every four children in the wealthiest country in the world living in poverty!

A central dimension of the paradox of affluence is the fact that the last six decades of economic growth and affluence have been achieved by (1) pillaging and degrading the planet's natural resources almost beyond repair and by (2) profoundly exploiting human labor, including children as young as six years old. In terms of environmental degradation:

- The burning of fossil fuels and destruction of forests has resulted in the highest atmospheric carbon dioxide levels in 650,000 years-- temperatures are warming and by 2020 its likely that the Artic Ocean will be ice free during the summer -- profoundly affecting the ocean tides and climate.
- Nearly one in six species of European mammals is threatened with extinction and all currently fished marine species could collapse by 2050.
- The number of oxygen depleted dead zones in the world's oceans have increased from 149 to 200 in just the last two years (2006-2008), threatening fish stocks.
- Urban air pollution causes 2 million premature deaths per year, mostly in developing countries.
- The decline of bees, bats and other vital pollinators across North America is jeopardizing agriculture crops and ecosystems.
- There are huge strains on fresh water supplies in the countries with the largest populations. (bullets above and here from State of the World, 2008).
- The dumping of grain surpluses produced in the affluent countries of the world into the poorest countries of the world has resulted in monopoly control over the price of grain, the end of food self sufficiency in these countries, and the displacement of thousands of small farmers (Michelle Shadarosky, Global Food and Fuel Crisis).

In terms of human exploitation:

At the Sewon Nike factory in Jiaozhou City in the Shandong Province of China 20,500 young women are employed to sew Nike sneakers (

<http://www.nlcnet.org/campaigns/archive/chinareport/NKsewon.shtml>)

- The company never hires anyone over 25 years of age, at which point the workers are fired.
- Young women workers are required to work 11 to 12-hour shifts, six days a week.
- Their starting wage is 20 cents an hour, \$10.01 a week, \$43.37 U.S. per month for a 49-hour workweek.
- The company's direct labor costs in China are less than 9 percent of what they were in South Korea so when they work in China instead of paying workers \$7,200 a year as they did in South Korea, the company can pay just \$650.60 a year to workers, an annual savings of \$6,549.40 per worker.
- Forty percent of Nike's footwear is now made in China. Nike also has 70,000 workers in Indonesia, who earn 19 to 21 cents an hour, and 45,000 workers in Vietnam, who earn 20 to 23 cents an hour.
- Because the wages of adult workers are so low, children are forced to work to supplement their families incomes. One in six children between the ages of 5-17 works in the Philippines, half between the ages of 5-14
(<http://www.angelfire.com/ab2/relgroup/stats.html>)

Another factor in the paradox of affluence is that affluence, and poverty, are not randomly distributed.

Race, ethnicity, gender, family structure, and parental education all have a significant effect on the likelihood of a person experiencing affluence or poverty and lead to the intergenerational distribution of poverty wherein children raised in poverty are more likely to be poor as adults and forced to raise their children in poverty. In the United States, the poverty rate for Blacks in 2006 was three times as high as the poverty rate for Whites (8.2% vs 24.3%), and twice as high for Hispanics (20.6%) vs. Whites.

And although poverty is often described statistically as I've just done, this is insufficient. "Ethnographic studies reveal that being poor involves more than simply having a "low income." It is more than an economic inconvenience easily overcome with increased initiative. Rather, poverty affects one's total existence. It can impede adults' and children's social, emotional, biological, and intellectual growth and development. More than half of poor families in the United States experience at least one of the following deprivations over the course of a year-- eviction, utilities disconnected, telephone disconnected, housing with upkeep problems, crowded housing, no refrigerator, no stove, or no telephone. Ethnographic studies expose the "sting" of these deprivations, the humiliation of being poor and perhaps needing welfare assistance, the coping mechanisms used by both adults and children, and the myriad of ways people try to make sense of their lives and carve out a sense of respectability in a society that places a high premium on wealth and material possessions" (Seccombe, 2000).

Another dimension of the paradox of affluence stems from the fact that natural resources are extracted and processed in one country, transformed into products in another, and

consumed in yet another. Since wealthy industrialized countries import the vast majority of the material resources they need, people in industrial nations benefit from consuming imported resources but do not suffer the burdens associated with their extraction or production -- these environmental burdens are experienced by the poor developing countries and people that supplied the raw materials and finished products in the first place (Pinderhughes, 2004:3).

The important point to understand at this juncture in my presentation is that each of the components of the paradox of affluence that I have been describing are not driven by the invisible hand of the market but rather are a consequence of carefully constructed economic and institutional policies and practices that intentionally concentrate wealth, power and privilege and perpetuate social inequality.

For me, these four components of the paradox of affluence--

- 1) That the benefits of economic growth are distributed unequally;
- 2) That the last six decades of economic growth and affluence have been achieved by (1) pillaging and degrading the planet's natural resources almost beyond repair (2) profoundly exploiting human labor;
- 3) That affluence and poverty are not randomly distributed;
- 4) That environmental burdens are disproportionably experienced by the poor nations and people that supplied the raw materials and finished products to affluent nations and people in the first place...

are inextricably interconnected and central to my work which focuses on the need to link opportunities to address environmental challenges with opportunities to address social inequality.

For the past three decades my work has focused on how to improve quality of life for people living in cities. I am interested in how we can manage cities in ways that are more environmentally and socially responsible.

Almost every city in the world facing major urban environmental and social challenges:

- Millions of tons of garbage produced in their jurisdictions;
- Running out of landfill space;
- Community opposition to incineration;
- Almost complete dependency on fossil fuels;
- The rising cost of petroleum;
- Problems associated with coal plants and burning coal;
- Declining water, waste, and transportation infrastructures;
- Traffic congestion;
- Rising rates of asthma and other respiratory impacts associated with air contamination;
- Weak food infrastructures and associated public health problems;
- Rising food prices;

- High rates of poverty and social inequality that are tied to the dynamics of race, gender and class.
- Declining quality of education in low income communities
- High rates of violence
- Increasing rates of incarceration

The practical, every day responses of urban authorities to these urban environmental challenges led to the emergence of the green economy and are what fuel its growth and the growth of jobs within green sectors related to recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, public transit, open space maintenance and conservation, and many other areas of work related to improving environmental quality.

Unfortunately, most efforts to address urban environmental problems in the United States are developed as narrow environmental projects -- rarely do policy makers and planners consider how responding to environmental problems can also address social problems.

The unfortunate consequences of not linking efforts to improve environmental quality with efforts to explicitly address social inequality, is that all too often projects designed to improve urban environmental quality actually end up harming low-income people and communities as neighborhood improvements lead to displacement and gentrification.

In terms of the green economy specifically, if left to develop on its own the green economy will be structured almost identically to the pollution based economy, and people with limited education and labor market skills will either be rejected or offered the lowest paying, least desirable jobs. I wanted to figure out how to ensure that the green economy could be structured to welcome and provide opportunities for the least affluent amongst us.

It is in this context, that I focus on green collar jobs and green collar work force development which, from my perspective, can serve as a catalyst for new urban policies that promote neighborhood improvement that rather than resulting in gentrification can serve as a foundation for reducing social inequality and promoting social equity and justice.

I define green collar jobs as “manual labor jobs in businesses and other enterprises whose products and services directly improve environmental quality” (Pinderhughes, 2006). I identify 22 sectors of the U.S. economy in which green collar jobs are found. They include jobs in sectors such as:

- energy efficiency,
- green building,
- recycling and green waste composting,
- hauling and reuse of construction and demolition materials and debris (C&D),
- manufacturing jobs related to large scale production of appropriate technologies
- public transit jobs,
- solar installation, and
- weatherizing and insulating buildings.

My focus is on manual labor jobs which can function well as entry level work force opportunities for people with barriers to employment:

- People without a high school education or GED,
- People who've been out of labor market for a long time,
- People with limited labor market skills,
- Reentry populations.

One of the main reasons I focus on jobs for people with barriers to employment is because work provides people who have been out of work for a long time with much more than a paycheck. Work provides a structure around which people organize their day and make sense of time. Work provides people with a way to use their energy and develop a sense of themselves in relation to community and society. Earning money provides people not only with material goods and services but with a sense of independence and contribution to their family system.

However, as we all know, not all jobs are equal and though we want people to work, we cannot train low-income, already marginalized populations for poorly paid, dead-end manual labor jobs. So before we can advocate for pathways out of poverty through green collar jobs we need to be sure that these jobs are worth advocating for-- in terms of wages and working conditions; the long term vibrancy of the green economy; occupational and educational mobility; and the dignity and meaning of the work itself.

My research on green collar jobs, which you can find at my website at San Francisco State, was designed to answer this question – are green collar jobs high quality jobs that are worth advocating and fighting for as pathways out of poverty?

My study, which was conducted over two years, with Bay Area employers about:

- the mission of their firms
- the work involved
- how they advertise, recruit and hire workers
- the networks they use
- what they value in employees
- if they provide on the job training
- wages and benefit structures
- under what conditions their firms thrive or are hindered
- structural conditions of their firms
- whether they own or lease their property,
- the potential for physical expansion in their location,
- the importance of affordable, industrial land,
- their willingness to bring in workers with barriers to employment, and
- their willingness to work with job training programs and under what conditions?

The businesses that I looked at included for profits and non-profits and unionized and non-unionized shops. I interviewed employers in all 22 sectors except for large scale manufacturing, all of the firms I looked at had were small, meaning they had under 200 employees.

After two years of in-depth research with employers, my research revealed that green collar jobs are very good jobs and that they are worth advocating and fighting for, for the following 6 reasons:

- Good wages

- Excellent health benefits – full benefits on day 1, many for whole family
- Many additional benefits – 401K and travel allowances
- Work involves a lot of autonomy and independent thinking, as well as team work leading to high levels of job satisfaction
- Opportunities for occupational mobility
- Meaningful, community-serving, dignified work force opportunities because they are local jobs that directly improve environmental quality.

Second, I learned that green collar jobs can definitely function as pathways out of poverty for folks who have been left out of the pollution based economy for the following 5 reasons:

- Have low barriers to entry (can enter with limited experience/knowledge of sector)
- Employers provide on the job training
- Opportunities for advancement in firms and sectors
- All 22 sectors are poised for dramatic growth
- Employers are experiencing a shortage of skilled entry level workers in all 22 sectors

After conducting research with employers I studied the most successful work force training programs in the country and talked with low income people who are unemployed about their level of interest in green collar jobs that improve environmental quality. When I was satisfied that I knew enough I was ready to use what I had learned as an academic to create a practical program that would directly improve people's lives. I designed a model to train men and women with limited labor market skills for jobs in the green economy.

The model is designed to train low income men and women with barriers to employment to secure living wage, family supporting jobs. It is being piloted in Oakland, through the *Oakland Green Job Corps* program; in Cleveland through the *Pathways out of Poverty through Green Collar Jobs* program, and hopefully soon in Philadelphia as well.

It targets people who are unemployed or employed in low paying jobs that do not have a high school degree, have been out of the labor market for a long time, were formally incarcerated, and/or have limited labor market skills and experience.

This is an approximately 3-6 month training program that utilizes training in the classroom and on-the-job training to provide clients with direct services: The model has six (6) essential components:

1. **A soft skills component** designed to prepare people to enter the world of work – this includes: basic literacy skills (math, English, writing, computer, oral presentation, basic communication skills), life skills, world of work skills and wrap around case management services.

2. **A hard skills component** that includes training leading to OSHA Safety Training Certification and skills related to local green labor markets. Oakland training focused on green building, energy efficiency and solar installation. The Cleveland program focused

on in green building, construction demolition, energy efficiency. The Philadelphia program would focus on storm and waste water management and landscaping.

3. **A fiscal management skills component** that responds to the fact that most people entering job training programs are caught in a cycle of debt; they need to learn how to think about and manage money, they need to be connected to banks that don't charge them to open saving and checking accounts, they need to learn how to save and spend within their means and goals.

4. **An environmental education component** that functions to reconnect people who may not have had positive experience in school to the world of learning and education. It is designed to give them a sense of the world of work into which they are entering and its importance in society. It goes beyond jobs skills and can be a transformative component that motivates people to pursue additional training and education and to become engaged in civic society and environmental and environmental justice issues.

5. **An internship component with case management services** that I call the "engagement period" between employee and employer – the period before they get married. The goal is for interns to be paid during this period either an hourly wage (as in Oakland program) or a stipend (as in Cleveland) while they get to know each other. During this period, it is essential that trainees receive case management services to anticipate and resolve problems that may arise on the job related to things such as problems with transportation and childcare issues, etc. The goal of the internship with case management services component is to increase the potential for success on the job by anticipating and dealing with problems early in the person's green collar work experience.

6. **A Green Business Council component** that is designed to bring employers in the sectors for which people are being trained are brought together to work with the job training program staff. As I stated earlier, to develop a job training and placement model I studied the most successful workforce training programs in the country in order to understand why they were successful and found that the key to their success was very strong ties to businesses, sectors and industries. The Green Business Council is composed of the owners and managers of green businesses in the sectors for which people are being trained locally. In the Oakland program, the Ella Baker Center has pulled together 14 employers working in solar energy, energy efficiency and green building who have all committed to taking internships from the Oakland Green Job Corps program, informing the development of the program to ensure it meet their needs as employers, and hopefully to hiring people on permanently after their internships.

In conclusion, what I've just described to you is an example of how academics can go beyond examination and theory and use our training and position to actively promote social change and advocate for the things we think are important and value. The norm is the academy is to research and analyze; to develop theory and ideas about how things function and to explain why things are the way they are. The paradox of affluence could easily be discussed at the level of theory only. We could spend years researching and describing whether affluence produces happiness, whether affluence is desirable in a global context, and the environmental consequences of all countries around the world pursuing affluence.

You are here because you are emerging leaders who have the capacity to use your knowledge and your skills to confront and address the profound economic and social problems that we face as a society and globally. Studying the paradox of affluence should not only be an intellectual exercise for you but will hopefully lead each of you to ask yourselves how you can use your professional training to address the contradictions and paradox of affluence, inequality and environmental degradation.

Brief biography

Raquel Pinderhughes is Professor of Urban Studies at San Francisco State University. Her teaching, research, and community activism focus on improving quality of life for people living and working in cities. Her areas of expertise include: sustainable urban development, urban infrastructures, environmental justice, green collar jobs/green collar work force development & training, appropriate technologies, urban agriculture, community food security, and local food systems. She has worked on these issues in Cuba, Brazil, India, and the United States. Her textbook, Alternative Urban Futures: Planning for Sustainable Development in Cities throughout the World focuses on planning and policy approaches and appropriate technologies that can be used to minimize a city's impact on the environment while providing urban residents with the infrastructure and services they need to sustain a high quality of urban life. The book's focus is on ecologically and socially responsible planning and management of urban infrastructures related to water, waste, energy, transportation, and food systems. Pinderhughes is a nationally recognized expert on green collar jobs, defining the term to describe manual labor jobs in firms or other enterprises whose products and services directly improve environmental quality. Her landmark study, Green Collar Jobs: An Analysis of the Capacity of Green Business to Provide High Quality Jobs for Men and Women with Barriers to Employment, informs understanding of how to harness green business growth to fight both pollution and poverty and the model she developed from that study was used to develop training programs in the cities of Oakland and Cleveland. The study can be found at <http://bss.sfsu.edu/raquelrp/>. Pinderhughes is Director of the *SFSU/Delancey Street College Program*, an innovative program that provides ex felons and drug addicts with an opportunity to pursue a college education on site at the Delancey Street facility; and Director of the *Willie Brown Jr. Center's Internship Program*, which provides students who have faced situations that were an impediment to their pursuing a college education with an opportunity to gain public sector work experience and develop professionally in their fields of interest. She works with several non-profits that use the opportunity to improve urban environmental quality to provide low-income youth and adults with green collar job training and work.

Discussion questions

- 1: Can green collar jobs function as pathways out of poverty and, if so, how and under what conditions?
2. Can green collar jobs function as the centerpiece for a new urban agenda and, if so, how?
3. Is the green economy here to stay or is it simply a sexy, trendy response to current changes in consumer spending and private investment?
4. Why is it important to link efforts to improve urban environmental quality to opportunities to address social inequalities?
5. How can scholars be involved in social change and directly contribute to improving quality of life for urban residents and what structures best facilitate their doing so?

6. How can the work you are currently engaged in function to bring positive change and what does “positive change” mean to you?

Recommended readings

1) Pinderhughes, Raquel. GREEN COLLAR JOBS: An Analysis of the Capacity of Green Businesses to Provide High Quality Jobs for Men and Women with Barriers to Employment (2008) can be found at www.bss.sfsu.edu/raquelrp/

2) Green Collar Jobs in American Cities (2008) can be found at www.appolloalliance.org

3) Pinderhughes, Raquel. Alternative Urban Futures: Planning for Sustainable Development in Cities throughout the World. Rowman & Littlefield (2004).

Brief presentation abstract

Poverty and unemployment are significant problems in the U.S. and there is an urgent need for stable living wage jobs for low income adults, particularly those with barriers to employment such as: not having a high school or GED degree, limited labor market skills, being incarcerated, and/or being out of the labor market for a long period of time. My work on green collar jobs, which I define as “manual labor jobs in firms or other enterprises whose products and services directly improve environmental quality”, has shown that green collar jobs represent an important category of work force opportunities for adults with barriers to employment because they are high quality jobs, with low barriers to entry, in sectors poised for dramatic growth. My presentation will focus on two aspects of this work: first, pathways out of poverty through green collar jobs and second, how scholars can be involved in social change and directly contribute to improving quality of life for urban residents.