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# NEWSLETTER

Winter 2004 VOLUME 9 NUMBER 1



## A COMMENTARY ON COMMERCIAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN OF COLOR AND LOW-INCOME CHILDREN...

By Velma LaPoint...

When I attend meetings about commercialism's influences on children, or when I read about the topic, there is rarely any discussion of its impact on children of color or low-income children. The implication is that the topic is not relevant to these children. This article will highlight the influence of commercialism on children of color and low-income children and actions that have occurred or need to occur to counter such influences.

What do I mean by "commercialism's influences?" One definition is the impact of corporate and industry practices, occurring all together, that produce, manufacture, advertise, and sell products and services to children directly or indirectly through adults in an effort to meet their bottom line, generally at the expense of children's health and well-being. Many corporate and industry products and services have been identified as having adverse or potentially adverse effects on children and adolescents, with increasing information emerging about the impact on children of color and low-income children.

Some areas are: (a) food industry, with a focus on fast foods and rising childhood obesity; (b) polluting industry, which includes toxic products in children's environments in new, existing, and renovated schools; (c) media industries, which have violent, sexual, and other problematic programming on television, radio, movies, videos games, music, and the Internet; (d) fashion industries, including sexualized dress, accessories, and cosmetics; (e) tobacco, drugs, alcohol, and firearms industries, (f) toy industry, including violent, sexualized, and food-linked toys; (g) testing industry, especially the high stakes testing thrust (i.e., over-emphasis on insidious testing vs. emphasis on other high-quality schooling areas) and other curricula areas; (h) gaming industry, where youth may engage in gambling; (i) commercial sex trade industry, where children are victimized; (j) pharmaceutical industry, where children may be over-prescribed medications; (k) credit-card industry, with online

### About this issue...

With any luck, you will receive this issue prior to the official start of spring. We hope that after reading it, you will feel that it was worth waiting for.

Velma LaPoint (page 1) challenges us to face the reality of the impact of marketing on children of color and low-income children. At the bottom of page 6, you will learn how marketing to children is big business.

Ava McCall (page 3) is almost a regular contributor to this publication. She introduces us to an Elementary School that has a very special philosophy and a principal who implements the program.

Meet the members of the Hunger & Environmental (HEN) practice group of the American Dietetic Association. Fern Gale Estrow, chair of HEN, (page 5) describes the mission of the group and invites us all to become active in HEN.

This is our second visit with an innovative food bank, Atlanta Community Food Bank. Lindy Wood (page 7) shows how people of all ages can play a board game while learning about hunger in their community. An interesting look at Monopoly in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We trust you will enjoy this issue and take a few moments to share your comments with us.

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child shopping services through parental deposits, and targeted middle and high school students and undergraduate college students; (l) service employer sector (e.g., restaurants and retail stores), where high school students may be excessively employed part-time primarily to finance the youth-oriented products such as fashion and electronics; and (m) detention centers, jails, and prisons, including for-profit institutions, that incarcerate youth. Many of the corporate and industry products are manufactured in developing countries where the labor of poor children and children of color is exploited (and often illegal) for corporate profit.

The U.S. is becoming more ethnically diverse. African American, Hispanic American, Asian American and Pacific Islanders, and American Indians currently represent about a third of all children--a rate that is expected to increase to almost 50% in 10 years. These children are disproportionately poor, with poverty rates almost double the rates for all U.S. children. What these numbers suggest, given current marketing practices including targeting children globally, are three major issues. First, children of color will increasingly be used in and exposed to commercial messages. Second, the culture of children of color will continue to be used, manipulated, and exploited in commercial messages. And, third, children of color, who are disproportionately poor, will bear the burden of the cumulative impact of certain adversities because of the combination of poverty and institutional racism in many areas of their lives (e.g., schooling, healthcare, housing, parental income and underemployment). It should be noted that, while children of color are disproportionately poor, there is income diversity among these children, with many children living in affluent families and communities.

Commercial messages have a disproportionate impact on children of color, who generally listen to the radio and watch more "screen entertainment"--television, videos, and movies. This is primarily because: (a) they have little access to high quality supplemental education programs after-school and on weekends; (b) the radio and "screen entertainment" are more available and less costly; and (c) the high proportion of single parent families means that children may have large amounts of unsupervised time. Much of the radio and "screen entertainment" programming content is supported by the

commercial interests of media corporations and industries that cross-market products such as food, fashion, electronics and toys. And these products are also cross-marketed with violent, sexual, and even racist content. The marketing generally includes parts of children's culture (e.g., models and celebrities, music, language) and appeals to children's specific needs such as their need for peer approval.

Research has shown adverse or potentially adverse psychological and behavioral outcomes resulting from commercialism's influences, such as (a) violence; (b) academic challenges in schools (e.g., attendance, grades, peer ostracism and teasing, gang membership); (c) ethnic identity, body image, sexual identity, and appearance challenges; and (d) rising health problems (such as obesity and dental cavities among children and adolescents) that have been linked to under-resourced public schools' contracts with soft drink companies, low nutrient fast foods, sedentary lifestyles where children are captured by "screen entertainment," and a lack of high quality food stores in most poor neighborhoods.

The commercialization of childhood is a social problem, yet many communities, especially communities of color and low-income communities, are generally uniformed and unsure about what can be done. We need to have mass education and social marketing to address this problem using strategies and materials that are relevant to low-income communities and those of color. For example, materials can use direct quotes from marketers about how they want to "capture and target" youth and can use messages that relate to how people of color and low-income people are often taken advantage of by the "system." Community organizing approaches can link with professionals and advocacy organizations in these activities. As the U.S. becomes more ethnically diverse, it is important that children of color and low-income children are represented in our professional and advocacy activities that work to counter commercialism's influences.

*Dr. Velma LaPoint is Associate Professor at Howard University. This commentary was presented at the February 2004 Summit of the Coalition To Stop Commercial Exploitation of Children and is adapted from a forthcoming article in the special issue of the Journal of Negro Education, "Commercialism in the Lives of Children of Color: Education and Other Socialization Contexts." Dr. LaPoint can be reached at [vlapoint@howard.edu](mailto:vlapoint@howard.edu).*

### **Stop Commercial Exploitation of Children (SCEC)**

SCEC counters the harmful effects of marketing to children through action, advocacy, education, research, and collaboration among organizations and individuals who care about children. We are a national coalition. Our members include health care professionals, parents, educators, businesses, advocacy groups and concerned individuals.

*For more information, please visit [www.commercialexploitation.org](http://www.commercialexploitation.org).*



## WEBSTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES...

By Ava McCall

**F**or Webster Stanley Elementary School in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, the school's philosophy is, "Instead of expecting a child to be ready for school, we make sure our school is ready for the child." Most schools in the United States are successful in educating and meeting the academic needs of European American middle-class students. Yet how does a school nurture children's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development when they arrive with many talents and strengths, but may not have adequate nutrition, clothing, and health care? Over half of the children who attend Webster Stanley Elementary School come from poverty. During the 2002-2003 school year, 62 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced price lunch. The school staff focuses on meeting all children's needs, including those whose families struggle to provide their children with basic necessities.

One way the school strives to meet their children's basic needs is through the breakfast and lunch programs, which are available year round. For low-income children, they have breakfast and lunch at school at minimal or no charge during the school year. Because Webster Stanley is a school with a significant poverty level, it qualifies for the National School Lunch Program in summer operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The school staff recognizes that low-income children need access to nutritious meals in summer as well as during the school year. Webster Stanley is one of only two schools in Oshkosh, Wisconsin that provides free breakfast and lunch for children during the summer. Their efforts are congruent with recommendations by the Food Research and Action Center's Campaign to End Childhood Hunger. For more information about this endeavor, see [www.frac.org/html/ctech/ctech\\_index.html](http://www.frac.org/html/ctech/ctech_index.html).

Another avenue the school uses to provide for their students' basic needs is the "Kids Closet," which contains winter clothing, such as mittens, hats, boots, snow suits, and coats. The clothes are provided through donations by members of the school staff and the community. When the school staff notices that students need clothing, they respect family rights and dignity by soliciting permission before giving children the necessary clothing. Upon receiving an item, children are assisted in writing a personalized thank you to the donor.

Yet another way in which the school meets family needs is through the school's special health care services. For families who have no or inadequate health insurance, their children may receive free health care through Webster Stanley School's KidsKare Health Care Services. The school nurse provides health exams, treatment for illness and/or injury, medications, and recommendations for other places in the community where families can receive free health care.

For families who struggle to provide their children with school supplies or fees for field trips, Webster Stanley Elementary School's staff ensures all children participate in all educational opportunities and have the necessary learning tools. When students do not have needed school supplies, the staff provides a tote bag filled with such materials. For any children whose families cannot afford the fees for field trips or other special activities, the students are awarded "scholarships" to cover the costs. Partnerships with agencies and service clubs, such as the Oshkosh Noon Kiwanis, provide the essential funding and supplies for these projects.

When adult family members work long hours or more

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### KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE<sup>®</sup> NEWSLETTER

*A PROGRAM OF WORLD HUNGER YEAR (WHY)*

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than one job to provide basic necessities for their children, they may not be able to pick up their children at the end of the school day or assist them with homework. Fortunately, for students at Webster Stanley Elementary School, children may stay at the school, where their families know they are safe, and engage in productive activities through the YMCA's After-School Program. Families pay a small cost for this after-school care. For those students who need additional help with homework or tutoring in different academic areas, family members may elect to have their children participate in the school's before- and after-school tutoring or homework programs at no cost.

Finally, individual conferences with the principal Patti Vickman is a method the school uses to help identify families' needs. After viewing an introductory video about the school, each new family meets with Patti when they arrive at the school. Within the privacy of her office, Patti inquires about the child's strengths, challenges, and learning style. With this information, she is able to make a more informed decision not only about the best classroom placement for the child, but can also inform the family about all the services Webster Stanley offers. Patti's intent is to make the families feel welcome, at ease, and to demystify her role as principal. She endeavors for families to understand that the principal is there to

work with them to meet the needs of the child and family. After some trust has been established during the conference, parents are more apt to either confide some of their family struggles or be open to explore programs of assistance that the school provides. Patti then clarifies the school programs designed to help families meet their children's needs as well as offers printed information about community food pantries, social services, and special programs by the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club. Within a couple of weeks of the family's initial conference with her, Patti initiates a follow-up call to families to ensure their comfort with the transition and confirm they have the necessary resources to support their child's success at school.

Webster Stanley Elementary School offers many avenues for assisting low-income families in meeting the needs of their children. However, they are not content with their current practices and embrace a philosophy of "doing whatever it takes" to meet the needs of their students. More professional development is scheduled for the new school year in which teachers and other staff members increase their understanding of how to deal with the challenges and opportunities of working with children from poverty (see Ruby K. Payne, 1998, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, available from [www.ahaprocess.com](http://www.ahaprocess.com)).

*Ava McCall, Ph.D. is professor and Department Chair of Curriculum and Instruction Department, College of Education and Human Services at University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Oshkosh, WI. She may be reached at [mccall@uwosh.edu](mailto:mccall@uwosh.edu). Her web site is [www.socialstudies.esmartweb.com](http://www.socialstudies.esmartweb.com). She is a member of the KIDS Advisory Board.*



#### KIDS Advisory Board

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**Andrew Steven Halperin**- Attorney.

**Stephanie Kempf**- Author (*Finding Solutions to Hunger*), teacher

**Ava McCall**- Professor and Department Chair, Curriculum and Instruction department, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.



## HUNGER and ENVIRONMENTAL NUTRITION... by Fern Gale Estrow

**M**embers of the American Dietetic Association (ADA), who have a strong commitment to both hunger and environmental nutrition, come together under the Hunger and Environmental Dietetic Practice Group (HEN).

HEN promotes optimal nutrition and well being for all people, now and in the future, acknowledging the interdependence of food and water security, health, agriculture and the environment. We have a vision of all people having access to food from a healthful, sustainable environment. Our members come from diverse professional communities, including but not limited to: clinical nutrition (hospitals and private practice), research, federally funded food programs, governmental agencies, community-based organizations, public health, private consulting. We even have an attorney who specializes in agricultural law.

Our goal is to work with the profession and the public to increase appreciation for understanding of food security, food production and environmental food issues. This is accomplished through identification of the issues and education. We also work with American Dietetic Association around legislation and regulations that impact our areas of focus, providing members as reviewers, introducing proposals for new position papers and helping to establish priority issues that are used as the basis for legislative and public policy actions.

The tools we currently use to accomplish our goals include:

- A quarterly newsletter featuring topics such on community food security, domestic and world hunger, antibiotic resistance, biotechnology. Contributors are HEN members and other respected professionals in these areas.
- The HEN Website ([www.HENdpg.org](http://www.HENdpg.org)) is the first place to go to find out more about our group, the committees and their focus, and offers examples of materials available to members. Beginning this year, all newsletters, fact sheets, tools, presentations at the Food and Nutrition Conference Exhibition (the annual conference of our parent organization) are in our members only area – with access available to both members and “Friends of HEN”. Links to other organizations are being established on an on-going basis and we encourage members and “Friends of HEN” to visit us regularly.
- An active electronic mailing list/listserv providing members and “Friends of HEN” opportunities to share information, reports, conferences of interest, policy updates and discuss areas of interest ranging from biotechnology to the components that contribute to world hunger.
- Fact Sheets The first was on *Hunger and The Environment* as shared in the last issue of this

*(Continued on page 6)*



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newsletter. Others planned include *Myths and Facts about Hunger and Environmental Nutrition* and *Definitions Related to Sustainable Agriculture*.

- Skill Builder Inserts (Part one of two on Grant Writing will appear in our Spring newsletter with a part two being included this summer)
- The HEN Speakers Bureau will work with you to identify professionals to speak about our areas of focus (Food insecurity and obesity, biotechnology, issues related to domestic and world hunger, food sustainability, antibiotic resistance, policy)
- Presentations and speakers at our national convention (2004 will feature *Linking the Food Supply with Nutrition Counseling*) and pre/post conference opportunities.
- Helping organize members to travel to other countries to assist communities in need and learn more about their food ways.

- Developing relationships with groups to share information and further strengthen our common goals.

HEN has introduced a new initiative that might be of interest to you, "Friends of Hen." Friends of Hen provides those who are not dietetic professionals networking opportunities, access to our newsletters, fact sheets, tools and member website.

Come, be a part of a community of people who are interested and active in issues related to how our food is grown, how our eating affects the environment in which we live, and who gets the food produced, along with all of the benefits mentioned earlier. The cost is only \$30 a year and an application is available at our website ([www.HENdpg.org](http://www.HENdpg.org)).

I thank you for taking the time to read my words and hope to meet many of you in my travels. Please feel free to contact me with questions or thoughts.

*Fern Gale Estrow, MS, RD, CDN, Chair of the Hunger and Environmental Practice Group of the American Dietetic Association. She may be contacted at [fg2@earthlink.net](mailto:fg2@earthlink.net)*

## **MARKETING TO CHILDREN IS BIG BUSINESS!**

- From 1992 to 1997, the amount of money spent on marketing to children doubled, from \$6.2 billion to \$12.7 billion. Today they are spending at least \$15 billion,.
- Children influence purchases totaling over \$600 billion a year.
- The average child sees more than 40,000 commercials each on television alone.
- The marketing industry has found that babies are requesting brands as soon as they speak.
- TVs and video games are more likely to be found in bedrooms of children from less affluent families.
- In 2002, McDonald's spent over \$1.3 billion on advertising in the United States.
- In 2000, a federal report from the General Accounting Office called marketing in schools a growth industry.
- 85% of all American parents would like to see children's television programs commercial free.

***To learn more about the problems and find out how you can stop commercial marketing to children visit SCEC's web site at [www.commercialexploitation.org](http://www.commercialexploitation.org).***



## Board Game Becomes Effective Educational Tool...

By Lindy Wood

“**I** get my pay check and then I have more bills than my paycheck!”  
“My car broke down! I don’t have the money to fix it!”

“How am I supposed to pay my rent?”

Over 40% of the people we serve on a regular basis are working people who simply cannot make enough to cover the rising cost of living. Too many people are unaware of this troubling fact. The Atlanta Community Food Bank was looking for a creative new way to introduce kids of all ages to the challenges facing the working poor. A simple board game was designed on a desktop computer and laminated. Buttons were used as game pieces, play money was cut out by hand and, amazingly, it worked! We called it *Feast or Famine the Food Security Board Game*. With the help of this interactive tool, kids of all ages began discovering how difficult, and even impossible, it can be to manage normal expenses on low wages.



The game has gone through several revisions over time (thanks to the generous support of a local design firm) but the essentials have remained the same. Up to six people can play at a time and it should be stressed

before each game that it is not about winning or losing- it is about learning.

- Each space on the game board represents a day in the month of a working person earning minimum wage or slightly above.
- Players place their game pieces in the start box and roll the die.
- Players pull a Payday card when they pass a Payday symbol.
- Players buy groceries when they land on a grocery space.
- When players land on one of the several “Talk About It” spaces they pull a card that has a fact, a question or a quote related to hunger, poverty or advocacy. The cards, along with a Teacher’s Guide that is included with the game, further encourage brainstorming, generate discussion and increase awareness.

A player might earn some extra money by taking on a part time job or they might catch the flu and have to miss work. Some never have enough money to meet all of their bills. Some are more fortunate. I’ve seen kids offer to help each other: “I got a promotion, I’ll lend you \$50.00 for groceries!” Sometimes, players will brag about how much they have or get genuinely frustrated by not being able to catch up:

“OH MY GOSH, this is SO frustrating!” exclaims an 8-year-old boy whose car breaks down just after paying for groceries. I’m playing the game just like everyone else but I can’t get ahead!” “AHA!” I exclaim. “You are getting it!”

Each and every one of these normal responses is a wonderful opportunity to discuss the social systems that surround us. Why do we feel like bragging about how much money we have? Where do we see this in real life? How can we help people in our community?

The final challenge of the game is paying rent at the end of the month. Those who have enough for rent and some to spare are food secure. Those who don’t have enough for rent or have nothing leftover are food insecure. Players learn the meaning of each term and discuss what has happened during the course of the game to contribute to their food security or to hinder it.

I’ve seen hundreds of kids walk away from this game with new understanding of the concepts of food security, advocacy and the challenges facing so many American families. I’ve seen them take what they have learned back to classrooms and youth groups to educate others. I’ve seen kids write letters to elected officials and plan food drives after brainstorming through this game. Educating kids about the issues of hunger should not stop with *Feast or Famine the Food Security Board Game* but it is another engaging tool to introduce these important issues and a helpful resource for taking action.

The game costs \$30.00 plus shipping. If you have interest in/or questions about the game please contact Lindy Wood at [lindy.wood@acfb.org](mailto:lindy.wood@acfb.org).

*Lindy Wood is the Hunger 101 Coordinator for the Atlanta Community Food Bank. The Atlanta Community Food Bank’s mission is to **fight hunger by engaging, educating and empowering our community.***

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*Joan Dye Gussow, Professor Emeritus,  
Teachers College, Columbia University*



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The purpose of **Kids Can Make A Difference®** is to inspire young people to realize that it is within their power to help eliminate hunger and poverty in their communities, their country, and their world.