by Zachary Bowin

This fall 38,000 students will head to the UC Berkeley campus to pursue an undergraduate or graduate education. While UC Berkeley prides itself on its diverse population of students who bring to campus their own unique stories, cultures, values and experiences, the university also emphasizes the commonalities that unite all of its students.

Campus staff, faculty and student orientation counselors repeat ad nauseam that students are special — the chosen few who are getting a world-class public education that will open the doors to opportunity and success. Furthermore, this view is engrained in on-campus culture where discussion focuses around internships, graduate schools and potential employers. An unhealthy competition exists where the goal is not to get a good job, but the best job. I know this because I experienced it as an undergraduate. And even now, in my current Masters in Social Welfare program, and while I am a proud Golden Bear who feels fortunate to have received a great education at Cal, the education I received on the streets as a homeless man shortly after graduating was even more enlightening.

Michael Rowland and Zachary Bowin became close friends while living on the street.

Blues for the 99 Percent
The Corporate Attack on America’s Roots Music

by Bonni McKeown

“Somebody has been cashing checks and they’ve been bouncing back on us. And these people, the poor class of Negroes and the poor class of white people, they’re getting tired of it. And sooner or later it’s going to bring on a disease. A disease that’s going to spring from midair and it’s going to be bad. It’s like a spirit from some dark valley, something that’s sprung up from the ocean.” — Chester Burnett (Howlin’ Wolf)

Howlin’ Wolf offered that profound insight in an interview at the Ash Grove in Los Angeles in 1968. Wolf was a powerful performer and band leader, and one of the greatest and most passionate blues vocalists of all time. One of the most important founders of the blues, he was perhaps a modern-day prophet as well! In the cotton fields and levee camps of the early 20th century South, African Americans kept on creating their music. In both churches and juke joints, singing held the community together as Jim Crow oppression threatened to keep people confined in a slavery-like caste system. Songs could convey things too dangerous to speak about — long work hours, low pay, and unfair racist bosses.

Blues helped people survive and occasionally to protest. Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Little Walter and Willie Dixon traveled to Washington to play at the Poor People’s encampment two months after Martin Luther King’s death in 1968. As Buddy Guy quoted Muddy in a Rolling Stone interview on April 25, 2012: “Blues. The world might wanna forget about ‘em, but we can’t. We owe ‘em our lives.”

Renowned jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, on CBS This Morning on April 6, 2012, said after sitting in at an Alabama juke joint: “Blues are good for the soul. Their rhythms are inseparable from the American identity. They encompass the optimism of American identity. And they’re not naive. Blues tell us bad things happen all the time, and they do, and we can engage with them.”

Marsalis described the friendly, healing atmosphere of America’s hard-to-find juke joints: “Humility is the foundation of humanity ... When you reach out to someone, when you’re empathetic, that’s your humanity, when you’re together ... Music brings us together in thought and feeling, and emotion.”

Blues is the opposite of exploitation, subjugation and separation of people by rule of fear. Blues insists we’re human, imperfect, yet there’s Spirit in us. We can get it together.

We need blues now more than ever. New Jim Crow shuck up on America and legalized racial discrimination via the War on Drugs. New Jim Crow has shot the Bill of Rights full of holes and put millions in...
The broken windows theory of policing conceptualizes poor people as things to be removed and not people who are struggling to survive.

by Jesse Clarke and the Western Regional Advocacy Project

On July 31, members of the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) organized a march to the Union Square Business Improvement District in San Francisco to protest the way businesses and local officials use a combination of private security forces and city police to harass and banish homeless people.

Advocates from three states converged on the Union Square Business Improvement District as part of a national campaign to build a multi-state Homeless Bill of Rights and demand the right for all people to engage in the necessary activities of sitting, lying, eating, and sharing food without being criminalized.

The march was another essential step in building a movement towards the elimination of poverty and homelessness and advancing the fight for the Right to Rest.

The Western Regional Advocacy Project is coordinating this fight against the criminalization of poor and homeless people’s existence in Colorado, Oregon and California.

All three states are considering legislation for a Right To Rest. California’s legislation was authored by Senator Carol Liu, SB 608.

The march kicked off with a boisterous rally at Powell Street BART Station at the cable car turnaround, a San Francisco tourist destination. Weaving through the Friday afternoon commuters, shoppers and tourists, more than 75 protesters waved colorful placards demanding “Hourly Human Rights.”

**DISCRIMINATORY POLICING**

“We are back to the days of Jim Crow laws and Anti-Okie laws,” said Lisa Marie Alatorre of the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness. “The BIDs are promoting discriminatory policing practices to simply remove people deemed unwanted from certain parts of town. We are marching today to tell the BIDs that we are here to stay and we will have our Right to Rest.”

The march moved up Powell Street to the Union Square Business Improvement District office in the heart of San Francisco’s premier shopping district, where they were met by police. Huge cardboard cutouts of jail appeared and protesters spilled off the sidewalk and into the street.

The crowd then moved into Union Square proper where they met by police. Protesters called for a return to San Francisco to protest BIDs in the near future.

Discriminatory policing is practiced in places that BIDs have been established in their communities. BIDs have been relentlessly policing poor and homeless people for simply existing in public space. “The Union Square Business Improvement District is not actually interested in creating a safer San Francisco for everyone, but solely interested in protecting the interests of wealthy San Franciscans and keeping poor and homeless people out of sight,” said Coral Feigin of the Western Regional Advocacy Project.

A recent street outreach survey conducted by organizers at WRAP shows that 79 percent of people on the streets who received a ticket from the police assumed that it was a result of their economic status. Also, 74 percent of street-involved people have seen private security guards harassing, policing and displacing people from the public sidewalk.

At the same time, only 28 percent of people surveyed in San Francisco know of a safe and legal place to sleep.

The vast majority of this harassment has been occurring at locations within Business Improvement District boundaries. Enforcing laws meant to target homeless people simply is adding more stress and struggle into people who are already struggling to even survive.

The Union Square BID, which gets 96 percent of its funding from raising property taxes in the district, spends over two million dollars on what it calls “Clean & Safe” expenses such as policing, security cameras and other surveillance technology.

The main focus of the BID’s idea of safety involves citing, harassing, incarcerating and displacing poor and homeless people through the discriminatory practices of enforced sit/lie legislation.

As the demonstration came to a close, protesters called for a return to San Francisco to protest BIDs in the near future.

**LAWS THAT BANISH AND EXCLUDE**

The United States has a long history of using discriminatory and violent laws to keep “certain” people out of public spaces and out of public consciousness.

Jim Crow laws segregated the South after the Civil War and Sundown Towns forced people to leave town before the sun set. The anti-Okie law of the 1930s in California forbade poor Dustbowl immigrants from entering the state. Ugly Laws swept the country and criminalized people with disabilities for being seen in public.

Today, such laws mostly target homeless people and are commonly called “quality of life” laws or “nuisance crimes.” They criminalize sleeping, standing, sitting, and even food-sharing. Just like the laws from our past, they deny people their right to exist in local communities.

Today’s “quality of life” laws and ordinances have their roots in the broken-windows theory. This theory holds that one poor person in a neighborhood is like a first unrepairable broken window. If the “window” is not immediately fixed or removed, it is a signal that no one cares, that disorder will flourish, and the community will unravel. This theory conceptualizes poor people as “things” to be removed, and not people who are struggling to survive.

**BIDS AND POLITICAL REPRESSION**

Nowadays, we have Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) collaborating with police enforcement to keep business neighborhoods flourishing by removing poor people from visible spaces.

BIDs are made up of a group of property and business owners deciding to assess or tax themselves in order to invest in a more “safe and attractive” consumer environment. There are well over 1,000 of these special districts throughout the United States and Canada. Their main function is to drive homeless people away from the BID by hassling them, enforcing the sit/lie law and other discriminatory tactics, and by notifying law enforcement when quality of life offenses are being committed, thus criminalizing homeless and poor people’s existence.

We are right back to Jim Crow laws. Sundown Towns, Ugly Laws and Anti-Okie Laws. We have gone from the days when people could be told “you can’t sit at this lunch counter” to being told “you can’t sit on this sidewalk,” from “you’re on the wrong side of the tracks” to “it is illegal to hang out” on this street or corner.

We will only win this struggle for social justice if we use our collective strengths, organizing, outreach, research, public education, artwork, and direct actions. WRAP and our allies are continuing to expand our network of organizations and cities and we will ultimately bring down the whole oppressive system of policing poverty and treating poor people as “broken windows” needing to be discarded and replaced. Our liberation is dependent on your liberation.

Protesters condemn the harassment of poor people by security forces of the Union Square Business Improvement District in San Francisco. The sign says: “A right delayed is a right denied.” — Dr. Martin Luther King.

On July 31, housing activists marched on the office of the Union Square Business Improvement District.
Frederick Sleepers Demand Repeal of Camping Ban

by Steve Pleich

In response to recent drastic cuts in homeless services, a group of grassroots activists and concerned citizens have come together in Santa Cruz to petition the local government to repeal the Camping Ban and create safe sleeping places for unsheltered persons.

The group has organized a series of actions, including Community Camp Outs at the City Hall, to protest the increasing criminalization of homeless people.

Frederick Sleepers is a coalition of groups, including Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs, HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom), Homeless Persons Legal Assistance Project and the Camp of Last Resort.

Frederick Sleepers and HUFF coordinator Rabbi Phil Posner puts the goal of the group in perspective. “The right to sleep is the right to live,” Norse said. “This is a cry of conscience. If enough people hear it and join together, things will change.”

Frederick Sleepers takes its name from the Freedom Riders of the 1960s. Founding member Rabbi Phil Posner describes the sleeping ban and the lack of safe sleeping spaces in the city.

“Santa Cruz has 116 acres of parks, including two reserved for dogs to play,” Posner said. “Having to sleep on a side-walk is both uncomfortable and unhealthy. Surely we can spare a few acres where people may safely sleep, without fear of breaking the law!”

“As a 1961 Freedom Rider, I served 39 days in the Mississippi penitentiary fighting discrimination. I and others will continue to resist discriminatory local ordinances which forbid individuals a place and opportunity to sleep. We call upon our City Council to find a way to alleviate homeless suffering.”

Frederick Sleepers held their third group campout in Santa Cruz City Hall on July 26. Several dozen people slept in the City Hall courtyard from sunset until the followings morning. The July 26 sleep-in was preceded by campouts on July 4 and July 19, which were organized after the Homeless Services Center announced in June that the City Hall courtyard would be a sleeping space, and would be losing a significant amount of state-administered federal funding.

In response to the imminent loss of a wide variety of day services, a coalition of homeless rights groups, including Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs, joined together to host a series of free breakfasts next to the center. The City Hall campouts are the next step in that response and are now focused on the broader issues surrounding the criminalization of homelessness.

Says Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs co-founder Abhi Samuels, “Being a part of the Frederick Sleepers actions is where we need to be as an organization that works for social justice. We will continue this fight until justice is done and people can safely and legally sleep.”

The coordinated actions have drawn some response from City Hall. Santa Cruz City Councilmember Micah Posner says that he is willing to place the repeal of the camping ban before the council for a full public hearing.

“My intention,” he said, “is to place the issue on the City Council’s agenda this fall by asking the council to either repeal the anti-sleeping ordinances or begin a process to identify a place in the city for homeless people to sleep. If you don’t want to locate a place for them in the city, what makes you think that they will disappear? If you do support a legal place, what would it be?”

Frederick Sleepers is asking the entire community to join them in these ongoing actions, but is mindful that participation at the community campouts is an act of civil disobedience because it involves the violation of multiple local ordinances.

One such ordinance closes the court yard at City Hall to the public between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Another is the primary focus of these actions: the city’s camping ban, which prohibits sleeping in public with or without bedding between the hours of 11 p.m. and 8:30 a.m.

But even with this admonition, Frederick Sleepers believe the issue is important enough to put themselves in harm’s way. Says longtime homeless advocate and attorney Ed Frye, “Sleep is not just a constitutional right, it is a basic human right whose denial is the very definition of cruel and unusual punishment.”

Frederick Sleepers will continue the Community Campouts at City Hall when the City Council goes back into session after a July hiatus. The first action is scheduled for Tuesday, August 11.

Steve Pleich is a Freedom Sleeper and an advocate with the Santa Cruz Homeless Persons Advocacy Project.

The Brave New World of Centralized Intake in Berkeley

by Carol Denney

About a year ago, a jumble of initi als began to drift into conversa tion in the Berkeley homeless crisis in low-income housing and homelessness.

Nobody seemed entirely clear on what “HCRC” stood for. After a lot of searching, the town for answers, one thing is clear: Nobody is entirely clear on what “HCRC” ultimately will mean for Berkeley.

The initials are easy: “HCRC” stands for Housing Crisis Resolution Center, described as a “coordinated access system ... a streamlined way for homeless people to access shelter, transitional and permanent housing and services,” according to the City of Berkeley’s website.

“Coordinated” always sounds nifty.

But a lot of all intakes and assessments regarding who needs what services, and who “qualifies” for help. It will produce interesting data and require all related agencies to do the same. This kind of data may be useful in measuring and sizing up things in quantifiable ways, which is always powerful in funding services and programs. If you ask the right questions, and get honest answers, you can learn things, qualify for grants, guide programs, and apply funding where funding is most needed.

But the right questions, the honest answers, the best ways to get at the truth are a sticky, tricky wicket. Note the Downtown Berkeley Association’s enthusiastic abuse of a 2015 poll in which the highest of the Berkeley public’s priorities was homelessness. The poll was swiftly used by City Councilmember Linda Maio to excuse a new raft of anti-homeless laws.

Our nationwide housing crisis keeps roaring at a faster and faster pace, almost as fast as developers whip out their wallets and feed the status quo. The Bay Area’s scarce housing “opportunity sites,” once identified to a planning department, tend to become high-end condos for the wealthy. The pressure to kick out long-term and fixed-income tenants is like a powerful firehose, while the parade of high-end housing projects seems impervious to the urgency of the low-income housing crisis.

What we know for sure is the Housing Crisis Resolution Center will be in charge
Selling Street Spirit Changed His Outlook on Life

by Lydia Gans

When a friendly person selling Street Spirit outside the Berkeley Bowl asked me to autograph an article I had written in the paper, I knew I had to write about this man. Ralph Perry has been selling Street Spirit at the Berkeley Bowl on and off for the last 12 years. He is 64 years old.

Watching him offer the paper to the shoppers as they come by the Berkeley Bowl, I can see he likes what he’s doing. He talks about the different reactions he gets from people passing by. Sometimes they’ll say something about the paper. Yet occasionally they can be hostile.

“But every day is a blessing,” Perry says. “God is good. And He brings me closer to more good people.”

Unlike many sellers who never bother, Perry tells me he actually reads the paper. “You find out when you read it that it’s very interesting,” he said. “I live in the street, I don’t have TV or radio. Gives me something to do at night. I walk a lot and I read the paper I pray.”

He gave up the apartment he and his wife were living in when she had a stroke last December. It is a way to save money, but he still has to cover the cost of storing their belongings. His wife is in rehab now and he expects soon to be looking for an apartment. It might not be easy to find an affordable place nearby. And she will probably need help when she comes home.

They knew each other back when they were both students at Berkeley High, and they have been married for 12 years, going on 13.

Ralph grew up in Berkeley. “My childhood was good,” he tells me. “I have loving parents, loving brothers and sisters, 11 of us, so I never was lonely. I love my family, we love each other, we’re close-knit.”

Yet, even in his early years, his life seemed to go in the wrong direction. He describes a continuous round of petty crimes, jail time, and periods of legitimate work. He started when he was 11 years old.

“Me and my brother found a stash of drugs, which were called crystals then, and we decided to learn how to shoot drugs,” Perry says. “That’s when I started.”

He tells of petty thefts and serving time in Santa Rita jail, and then getting married and working at Bay Meadows Race Track. At that point, he explains, “I ran with the wrong crowd again.”

The marriage didn’t last. He went back to dealing drugs, and spent a term in San Quentin. That was the pattern of his life up until 10 years ago. Severely, he could always find trouble when he was young.

“It was fun,” he says, recalling how he made a fool of himself when he was 16. While trying to rob a Winchell’s, he actually ran straight into the door trying to get out. Another time, he stole a package of hamburger meat from Safeway and got caught as soon as he rounded the corner.

Ralph Perry’s life changed for the better as a Street Spirit vendor. Lydia Gans photo.

But somewhere along the way, it stopped being fun. The acts and the consequences got more serious. He talked about being robbed, being shot at, about lucky escapes and being imprisoned.

Ultimately, Perry had to change. “I waited till 53 to grow up,” he admits.

I asked what made him finally stop. “I got tired. It was no longer fun — drugs, the people I’m with, any of it. I don’t need it. I just gave up. I’m tired.”

A cousin suggested he sell Street Spirit “to keep me out of trouble,” he says. It took a while, but it changed him.

“It was something new,” he says. “I had to interact with different people and I’ve always been kind of a withdrawn person. I stay by myself. I’m really not a talkative person. (When) I got out here doing this, I learned how to communicate. Here it’s about communicating with people. When they see I give my heart to it because I believe in God and God knows that I’m here, they see it.”

As he talks, he sees that I’m impressed by what he is saying. He assures me that he tells people they should read the paper. “Yes, you’re helping me but you’re also learning something that we did not know and that’s important, to learn something.”

We look at the lead article in the current Street Spirit about Ground Zero’s campaign of nonviolent resistance to the nuclear arms race, which makes a powerful impression on both of us.

“This has really caught my interest,” he says. “I’d like to know a lot more about it. Now I want to investigate.”

He is facing some major challenges now. Social Security and government assistance won’t go far in providing food and shelter for him and his wife while she is disabled. Getting out to Berkeley Bowl with the Street Spirit every day will keep up his spirits and a roof over their heads.

Artistic Portraits Reveal the Human Faces in Our Midst

by Curtis Burbick

“Spare change? Maybe on the way out?” This is a request I often hear voiced on the street scene in Berkeley, and this is what finally led me to begin producing pencil portraits after meeting these casual friends.

Any one of the trio of individuals I have portrayed might be found just outside the door of a coffee shop, asking for a little help. It had been my habit at first to offer a hand to them by responding with a contribution and some small talk.

Now, since I love to draw, it occurred to me that I might try to capture in my sketch book the energy and experiences mapped on their faces, to capture that engaging look they always wore when our paths crossed.

So I asked each one if I could take their photographs and draw their portraits. In an effort to get their agreement to this, I started showing them some other drawings I had done, and also assured them they would receive a copy of their portrait.

I was quickly warming to this new idea so much, that in getting a “yes, OK,” from Walter, I began snapping a few shots of him and then began rendering his picture. And when a first draft was completed, I approached Nate, and then finally Donald.

After a few months spent at drawing, I’d finished all three portraits, and realized how new and exciting this venture was. The evolution of it initially began for me with the casual befriending of these three, and included observing their persuasive skills at conjuring funds often on cold mornings from passers-by.

This process culminated with the pleasure and joy of my bringing them to life in drawings on the pages of my sketchbook.

This all was quite unique, seeming to have more joy in it than I’d ever experienced before. I should not have taken more time than expected. (“Oh Vincent, I’ve always envied your facility to produce quick results.”)

Are there any other conclusions and rewards? Well, Walter was delighted and wanted a copy for an old friend. Nate always greets me now with a thankful smile. Donald, the very gentle one, spoke proudly and warmly when pondering the copies I gave him.
Speaking Out Against Police Violence and Racism

These recent deaths of young African American men have received a lot of publicity. Yet hundreds more police-inflicted deaths like these have not been reported by the media.

Commentary by Jack Bragen

The American Civil War (1861 to 1865) was the bloodiest in U.S. history, and its most crucial issue was the abolition of slavery. Since then, it has been a long, difficult, and sometimes bloody struggle for nonwhites to receive equal treatment in America. And our country is not there yet.

While the election of Barack Obama to the presidency was initially greeted as a hopeful sign of progress by many, old resentment has flared among white racist people in southern states and elsewhere. Petitions have been circulated in several states advocating for them to secede from the United States — the same historic action that triggered the Civil War.

White police officers across the nation have repeatedly killed innocent African-American men. All too often, they have been getting away with this and are rarely punished by their employers or the courts.

On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner died of a chokehold inflicted by NYPD officers. Michael Brown was murdered by the police in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014, over an alleged theft of cigarettes.

Two days later, on August 11, Ezell Ford, an African American man with a history of mental illness, was brutally killed by Los Angeles police — shot in the back three times after he was physically subdued. Jason Harrison, whose mother had phoned police to have him taken to the hospital when he was in mental crisis and needed help, was shot to death on June 14, 2014, by Dallas police because he was holding a small screwdriver. The police claimed it was a deadly weapon.

These deaths of four young African American men received a lot of publicity. Yet there have been hundreds more police-inflicted deaths like these that apparently have not received much media coverage because mass media have not given them coverage.

When these horrible incidents are recorded on people’s video equipment, it is not unusual for videos to go viral because people who care about these actions to avoid prosecution. When the shooting of Rodny King was recorded with video equipment, it was the beginning of the use of this powerful tool.

We have been told that parents of young African American men must give a talk when they are growing up — not about “the birds and the bees,” but about how to behave when approached by police officers. Black men apparently are automatically presumed guilty by all too many white police officers.

It is ironic that these police murders, and the nationwide protests of these horrific incidents, have occurred while we have a black president. Because the president of the United States does not have unlimited powers, President Obama appears to be helpless to stop the brutality.

It is as though many police officers in our nation have a personal vendetta against black people. The incidents that have been reported are not unique; it is just that people have captured the video on their camera phones. When people see the brutality on television or on the Internet, it becomes a powerful mobilizing force.

President Obama’s election became possible in part due to the help of demographic changes in the United States. The reliance of giant corporations on imported labor in order to avoid paying fair wages to employees has backfired on the very same members of the ultra-wealthy elite, and has allowed a higher number of Latino immigrants into the United States, many of whom have ultimately become U.S. citizens, and have voted.

Furthermore, after Al Gore lost to George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election, the issue of disenfranchisement among African American voters gained more attention. When Bush was put in office, initially via the Supreme Court ruling, millions of conscientious voters were outraged. There were extremely long lines at polling places where African American voters were predominant. There also may have been miscounting in Florida, where Jeb Bush was governor.

By the time Obama ran in the 2008 election, the issue of voter disenfranchisement may have been at least partially resolved because of the public attention it received.

Obama’s election may be one reason among many why a minority of bigoted white people, among them police, have once again directed their violence and dishonesty at African American citizens.

As a Caucasian mentally ill man, I have felt a silly club smacking my head. I have felt handcuffs on my wrists, and I have been incarcerated under the incorrect pretense that my behavior was due to being “on drugs.”

I haven’t always been treated well by police, but I haven’t so far been shot to death. The fact that I haven’t been summarily shot to death could partly be due to not being African American. Yet, it is very clear to me that the U.S. needs some kind of constitutional amendment that will make cops more accountable and less brutal.

It appears that the African-American community will not rest until there is justice, in which police will no longer be immune to legal retribution when they slaughter innocent people. The white racists are outnumbered and are not happy about this.

The horrible massacre of nine people in an historic civil rights church, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 2015, is yet another outburst of racist violence directed against African Americans. Dylann Roof, a young white man, has admitted committing these murders as an act of white racism. It is crucial for all people of conscience to demand an end to the scourge of racism, racially motivated murders, and police brutality.

The United States could either go in the direction of a police state, or the pendulum could swing the other way, and we could see a new era of everyone truly receiving equal protection under the law.

All Shook Up: How Human Beings Are Turned into Categories

When many diverse individuals are lumped into a single category, the result is unfair and terribly misleading.

by Carol Denney

Trying to talk to people about anti-homeless laws is like entering a hall of mirrors. When we are trying to talk about the original laws proposed by Berkeley Councilmember Linda Maio and the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA), and provisionally passed by the City Council on March 17, 2015, or Maio’s middle-of-the-night amendments on June 30, 2015, or the growing mountain of laws targeting “problematic street behavior” in cities nationwide, the discussion tends to indiscriminately group very different individuals into a single category.

Rowdy high school kids, drunk, junks, recently evicted families, homeless women, people recently released from jail, pan-handlers, youth, the LGBT population, people with dogs, people too poor to afford the Bay Area’s skyrocketing rents, people who threaten others, people who urinate in public, people with mental illness, people traveling through town for a concert or job prospect, and people with a lot of belongings who spread through town with no legal place to go, all get discussed as though they are all the same.

It’s dizzying. The composite picture in the minds of people who promote anti-homeless laws is a predictable nightmare.

It’s as though all the groups in the preceding paragraph were put in a bag, shaken together and merged into one, and the ensuing discussions, even honest efforts to find common ground, get shipwrecked because nobody is having the same discussion.

Bathrooms are a great example. The DBA, with no particular objection from the City Council, is well on its way to succeeding in avoiding having a public bathroom in the BART Plaza redesign despite its being the best, most logical place for a public bathroom in the downtown area.

The DBA scrambles to look pro-bahroom in public by promoting BART’s opening its bathrooms (closed as a securi- ty risk after 9-11), and promoting the idea that city garages and other out-of-the-way places could take up some of the slack. But in private documents, they call bathrooms “an attractive nuisance” and recommend against them despite the obvious irony of DBA CEO’s John Caner’s very public and very indignant complaints about the inevitable result.

Let’s have the same discussion about the same issues. Many of the issues we’d like to solve as a community are easy to solve. And perhaps the easiest, in theory, is housing our working class and poor.

If all development going forward were dedicated to addressing our crisis in low-income housing instead of being a Parker game played by politicians on behalf of wealthy developers who are generous around campaign time, we would have a healthy head start.

We could have housed all of our poor and homeless residents — a relatively small number — long ago. Let’s get started.
Island killed an African-American man York Police Department officers in Staten examples occurred in 2014 when New dows policing leads to the deaths of such injustices as “stop and frisk” laws and it offers a detailed narrative of the organizing and political activities of 30 years of homeless organizing in San WRAP, which was created to expose and eliminate the root causes of poverty and homelessness in that region.

In its decade of existence, WRAP has served as a model of community organizing that goes far beyond the single issue of not having houses for people experiencing massive poverty. Its broad-based focus on social justice addresses child abuse and domestic violence, downsizing and layoffs, racism, unlawful evictions and other illegal actions, government budget cuts, inadequate or nonexistent mental health treatment and many related issues.

WRAP has several constituent member groups, and its efforts go beyond the Bay Area. This form of coalition building is a useful guide for other activists seeking to change society at the grass-roots level, especially in a nation that has experienced the greatest degree of inequality of wealth and income in almost a century.

One striking feature of HANDCUFFS is the story of Street Sheet, told through a series of its articles from 1991 to 2014. Street Sheet is published by the Coalition on Homelessness and sold in San Francisco. It contains articles about the problems of the homeless population and the oldest street newspaper in the United States.

Vendors distribute the newspaper on the streets of San Francisco, selling it for $1. The homeless and low-income vendors pay nothing for the papers and keep all the money they receive. These vendors are, in fact, among the most hardworking people working; they might otherwise be holding cups and begging for spare change, perhaps with signs reading “Will Work for Food” or “Have a Blessed Day.”

Each month, Street Sheet reaches 32,000 readers and provides a voice for the voiceless. The paper encourages them to write about life, politics and anything else from their perspective. That vision is a conspicuous and dramatic contrast to the mainstream media in America. The most engaging element of this book is its inclusion of 67 powerful pieces of art, making this volume a striking collection of political, social and conscious art. These works are introduced in an essay by Art Hazelwood, “We Won’t Be Made Invisible: A Homeless Art Movement.”

Hazelwood is a veteran artist/activist whose works have made a major contribution to the recent history of political art, especially in California. He is a board member responsible for making Street Sheet a newspaper where art by and about homeless people has been published and become available to large audiences. Many of his pieces appear in Street Sheet, and his work has graced the pages of Street Sheet for many years. Several of Hazelwood’s pieces appear in House Keys Not HANDCUFFS, allowing readers a splendid sample of his work addressing homelessness, poverty and related themes.

At the State Capitol, activists carry “House Keys Not Handcuffs” posters to protest the steep rise in anti-homeless laws in California. As a curator, Hazelwood has assemcated several exhibitions that reflected his exemplary commitment to using art in the long struggle for social change. “Homeless Street People: Artists’ Responses to Homelessness From the New Deal to the Present,” which ran from 2009 to 2012, is most closely linked to the themes in the current book. This exhibition, which was shown in various California venues, featured both iconic artists from the Depression era and contemporary artists dealing with the seemingly endless struggle against poverty.

In the United States, visual artists have played prominent roles in the civil rights movement, and, more recently, many have been extremely active in demonstrations supporting “Black Lives Matter” actions. Painters, muralists, poster artists, printmakers, photographers and others have also been deeply involved in the Chicano, Asian-American, Native American and other ethnic struggles, the gay and lesbian movement, the environmental movement, various anti-war resistance activities and every other progressive movement.

Eric Drooker’s 2008 drawing for Street Sheet, reprised in the book, is an excellent and unsurprising example of the link between visual arts and the broader struggle for social justice. The artist’s image of a menacing police officer standing in front of a building representing City Hall, with a club swinging in his hand, signifies the dubious policy of governmental repression against the homeless. The Street Sheet headline, “Police Kill Man Panhandling, No Crimes Charged,” harking over the drawing underscores the continued violence against America’s most vulnerable population. Underneath Drooker’s work, the article about cruel and unusual budget cuts underscores official indifference, offering Street Sheet’s readers a partisan yet accurate view of official policy regarding homelessness in San Francisco.

House Keys Not HANDCUFFS is a persuasive reminder of the tremendous work that remains to be done to close the gap between American ideals and American realities. Paul Boden ruefully notes at the book’s conclusion that the government never stopped investing in housing; it merely stopped investing in housing for the poor. Boden and fellow homeless advocates know that there is a desperate need for federal funding for affordable housing.

Beyond that, more fundamental systemic change is required to end homelessness and provide the educational, employment, health care and other services that a decent and humane society should guarantee to everyone. This book represents a small but valuable step in generating that consciousness.
The Revolutionaries
by Lynda Carson

On July 16, Public Advocates, a nonprofit law firm that works on the issues of poverty and discrimination, announced that the City of Oakland was “bowing to community pressure” and inviting new proposals for affordable housing on a parcel of land on Lake Merritt’s East 12th Street after local groups had protested against it as an illegal deal.

Oakland activists strongly condemned the original deal to sell the city-owned parcel of land to UrbanCore, a developer that planned to construct a 20-story tower with 200 units of luxurious, upscale housing. Public Advocates and Eastlake United for Justice charged that the deal was in violation of the Surplus Land Act governing the sale of publicly owned land.

“We are very excited about the city’s decision to comply with the law and address community concerns by re-opening the process,” said Monica Garcia, who lives just two blocks from the site, and is a member of Eastlake United for Justice — a neighborhood group advocating for affordable housing in Oakland.

As we move forward we will work with the community to ensure that affordable housing is built on the E. 12th parcel, and remain true to the idea that people should be used for the public good,” Garcia said.

Now that the land deal that would have illegally benefited UrbanCore has been scuttled by city officials and the parcel is now up for bid as a possible site for so-called affordable housing, the question arises as to what kind of affordable housing on the site it will eventually become.

Many already question whether the so-called affordable housing projects in Oakland and the Bay Area are really affordable to most disabled persons receiving their income through SSI, or are affordable for retired persons on Social Security as an income, face discrimination against the poor and disabled, or are affordable for retired persons receiving Social Security. It is evident that many are not affordable to low-income people.

As one example, in 2014, at the Avalon Senior Housing project located at 3850 San Pablo in Oakland, the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC) required that people seeking housing at this subsidized housing project must have a minimum income of at least twice the rent. Studio apartments were going for $600.00 a month at this project, one-bedroom apartments were going for as high as $712.00 per month, and two-bedroom apartments were going for twice the rent. Studio apartments were going for more than any low-income, disabled persons receiving SSI disability payments and retired persons on Social Security could not afford to reside there due to the minimum income requirements.

In 2014, the average monthly Social Security check for a single retired worker was $1,294.00. Many retired and disabled workers earn much less than $1,294.00 per month as Social Security income or SSI, and as a result, retired and disabled persons face exclusion at many so-called affordable housing projects in Oakland, and throughout the Bay Area.

The average SSI (disability) benefit payment in California was $877.40 per month. The average TANF (CalWorks) family in California is an adult with two children that pays $510 per month in benefits. General Assistance in California during 2014 paid $336 per month to a single person. Food Stamps were $189 per month, and persons receiving SSI/SSP are not allowed in the program.

When taking a closer look at many so-called affordable housing projects in Oakland and the Bay Area, it appears that unless the disabled persons receiving SSI or Social Security benefits also have Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8 applicants), according to their application documents.

The harsh reality at this so-called affordable housing project subsidized by the federal government through the Oakland Housing Authority.

In 2010, Bridge Housing announced that the Ironhorse so-called affordable housing project delivers 99 apartments for families earning up to 50 percent of the local area medium income (AMI). Out of 99 apartments, there are 20 housing units at Ironhorse set aside for those with the lowest incomes residing in units receiving rent subsidies from the federal government through the Oakland Housing Authority.

The Ironhorse project owned by Bridge Housing demands that a person seeking to rent a one-bedroom apartment for $460 per month, must earn between $15,771 to $19,650 per year to reside in what is called Tier 1. The minimum income requirement is way more than the average retired person on Social Security, or a disabled person on SSI earns, and leaves them out in the cold unless they have a Section 8 voucher.

In Tier 2 at Ironhorse, a person renting a one-bedroom apartment that rents for $541 per month, must have an income between $18,549 to $22,925 per year. In Tier 3, Bridge Housing demands that a person renting a one-bedroom apartment for $622 per month, must have an income between $21,326 to $26,200. There are no minimum income requirements for Section 8 applicants (Housing Choice Voucher Applicants), according to their application documents.

The Revolutions Met Today
by Carol Denney

The revolutionaries met today to show the world a better way rather than the men all had a lot to say and the women cleaned up after the men cleaned up after the men all had a lot to say and the women cleaned up after the revolutionaries marched along they chanted and they sang a song they all went on about what’s wrong and the women brought the food the women brought the food and on and on about what’s wrong and the women brought the food the revolutionaries made a pact to blow things up and not look back and always have each others’ back and the women paid the rent the men paid the rent and always have each others’ back and the women paid the rent

At the VA Clinic
by Claire J. Baker
A veteran of Korea shuffles patients and visitors all around the grounds. In spare time, he makes maple and oak canes for younger vets, paints the fresh canes red-white-and-blue.

After an NPR Newscast
by Claire J. Baker
“Birds are on the decline,” especially sparrows and larks, while “twittering people” are on the rise — don’t ask this poet why or now. Dear remaining birds, if you have a song to sing, please sing it now.
I surmised grimly that I was to be put into the Homeless Reservation. I had never heard of anyone leaving there, alive or dead. People disappeared, never to be heard from again. Politicians had arrived at the final solution to the “problem” of homeless people.

I'm not homeless. I have a job and I rent a very nice apartment.

That is obviously not true. You were living in your car.

Under his breath, one of the two men in the van said to the other something I didn't understand. Could he be psychotic?

The other replied, quite coldly. 'Of course he is.'

When we take a rest stop, we will give you some medication that we hope will make you feel better.

My wrists hurt a lot from the wire wound around them, and my hands had gone numb from lack of blood circulation. Can you look at these wires? My hands are going to fall off.

We'll see to your needs when we stop for gas. That will be in another 50 miles.

The van drove endlessly and I realized we were headed for the desert. I surmised grimly that I was to be put into the Homeless Reservation. It had been the word of anyone leaving there, either alive or dead. It was a way that people essentially disappeared, never to be heard from again. Politicians and officials had believed it to be a final solution to the “problem” of homeless people.

Welcome to the Reservation

The van entered the front gate of the facility. At a great distance, I saw barbed-wire fences stretching into the distance. I mouthed an obscenity.

Not another word from you.

The man looked at the sound of my shopping cart rolling, and I saw it strike the bumper of someone's new Camry. The Camry owner got out of his car and was obviously quite angry. I profusely apologized to the Camry owner and gave him my insurance information.

Meanwhile, my vehicle was gone, and I was stranded there with a cartload of groceries. I checked for my cellphone and realized it was in my shirt pocket as usual. I was going to phone for a taxicab, when the van drove endlessly.

Homeless Detention

“Take off your hat and your glasses,” they ordered.

I replied, "I will do nothing of the kind.

“You are under citizen’s arrest. You must cooperate.”

Another of the uniformed men said, “We’re here to help. You deserve a home.

“You’re obviously homeless and you need our help,” said the third. However, his tone wasn’t sympathetic, it was cold.

“We're here to help. You deserve a home.” said the third. However, his tone wasn’t sympathetic, it was cold.

“You're obviously homeless and you need our help,” said the third. However, his tone wasn’t sympathetic, it was cold.

“It is what it is.”

“It is what it is.”

A ride home to a warm bed?

A ride home to a warm bed?

I phoned a cousin who lived nearby. I asked around about a cellphone it was rumored one of the men had. I didn't make any progress for the next week, and didn't want to push it for fear of the guards finding out. Then someone woke me up at three in the morning. He put a hand to my mouth and whispered to remain quiet. I realized this was one of the staff of the facility. It was the cook. The man in the room were busily sleeping, and it would have taken a lot to awaken them.

He led me to the back of the main staff building, and I was terrified that it was some sort of trick that would lead to punishment. Between two of the bricks was a sandline phone that clearly no one would ever notice. The cook retrieved a miniature phone from his pocket, connected it to the phone wire and handed it to me.

“You don’t owe me for this,” he said.

“This is a friend’s gesture. You can talk as long as you want.

I phoned the law office where I had worked up until being detained, and I left a detailed voicemail. I shook hands with the cook, “I do owe you,” I said.

“Don’t worry about it. This should not be done to any human being.”

Back to “Civilization”

When I was taken back to civilization, I was treated almost as badly as when I had been detained. I was dropped off in front of the same supermarket where I had been detained six months previously.

The wires on my wrists were removed, and I stood there, a spectacle in the middle of Monday afternoon shoppers. My cellphone was given back to me. I looked around and saw that the same uniformed man who had arrested me months before stood in the same spot, and stared at me as if he was about to arrest me all over again.

I phoned a cousin who lived nearby. I couldn’t be caught loitering, and I realized I had the same 20 dollars in my pants pocket that I originally had. I went into Starbucks, ordered a drink, and waited to be picked up by my cousin. I wondered if I would ever feel safe again.

It Is What It Is

by Claire J. Baker

I dislike that glib summing up of hurtful experience: “It is what it is.”

What happened to the respectful setting?

A long warm hug? Tears shared? Tissues provided?

A ride home to a warm bed?

Have we forgotten how to be kind as in kind-red?
friends with available space and resources and I was fortunate.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed a theory of human motivation that can also be applied to self-actualization, which aims for an individual to achieve their highest potential as a human being. Self-actualization can only happen if you are able to address four other core needs. In order of importance, Maslow identified the following core needs.

1. Physiological: Food, water, clothing and shelter and sleep.
2. Safety needs for health, employment, steady income, personal security, and a sense of belonging.
3. Love and belonging, including friendships, family, close relationships and intimate relationships.
4. Self-esteem, meaning both respect from others and self-respect, confidence, achievement, and a sense of being unique.

Maslow’s theory does a good job of providing a framework for those hoping to achieve self-actualization. However, it does not go into detail about the individuals who struggle with physiological or safety needs and the personal impact of the daily struggle to meet those needs. As a person experiencing homelessness, daily life is made up of the struggle to meet your physiological and safety needs and overcome the obstacles that arise. Small compromises such as access to a refrigerator, shower, toilet, and bed, were painful reminders of my current situation and the new obstacles to daily functioning. Locating and obtaining food that didn’t require much preparation, along with filling up with a water bottle, were necessities.

Besides water and nutrients, human beings also require sleep. Not having housing puts you at the mercy of the few shelters that exist in your area. Even if you’re fortunate enough to find a shelter, there’s a good chance that you will be turned away due to a lack of beds.

Sleeping in a shelter is already tough because of being in close, crowded quarters with people who snore, talk in their sleep, and who you have no access to a sleeping bag for weeks or are experiencing serious mental health symptoms. Also, rigid shelter rules such as curfew and with limited time for daily activities. All these factors make it even more difficult to get a good night’s rest.

However, despite these difficulties, if you get a bed in a shelter, it’s almost like winning the lottery compared to sleeping on the streets. While I was forced away multiple times from a shelter in Redwood City, and when I asked shelter employees and police where I should go, they didn’t have an answer. It was not uncommon for me to front the social services building and the police station next to the shelter.

The noise from cars, the streets, and free- ways made falling and staying asleep diffi- cult. This was in late October when winter was setting in and temperatures were hov- ering around 20 degrees, so I covered myself in four layers of clothing and the one blanket I could carry in my backpack.

To cope with the situations that didn’t make things uncomfortable, but also potentially deadly, I was lucky enough to be placed in housing in November as part of the housing program that served primarily people with mental illness - those who are considered a giant pool of experimental subjects. People with mental illness - those who are considered a giant pool of experimental subjects are infected with pathogens without being recognized.

People have been unknowingly exposed to pathogens in the environment, on African American people, on children, in the military, in secret, on U.S. soldiers, on unethical experimentation on humans, on medical experimentation involving those with mental illness, and end up necessitating more medications which are often not warned that massive weight gain and diabetes are common outcomes. I continue to take this medication because it works on me to take my aggressive and ill mood away on the streets. However, now I cut out about 90 percent of the refined sugar from my diet, and my blood sugar has been brought down to a normal weight and I was qualified for this recovery program.

Another long-term side effect is not known until years after the experiment. The American people are being railroaded into taking numerous medications which are often not warned that massive weight gain and diabetes are common outcomes.

In recent years, “atypical antipsychotics” have been prescribed to patients with serious mental illness, and end up necessitating more medications which are often not warned that massive weight gain and diabetes are common outcomes. I continue to take this medication because it works on me to take my aggressive and ill mood away on the streets. However, now I cut out about 90 percent of the refined sugar from my diet, and my blood sugar has been brought down to a normal weight and I was qualified for this recovery program.

Unethical Medical Experiments on U.S. Citizens

The U.S. has an epidemic, not of a communicable disease, but rather one of ill health due to excessive drugging.

by Jack Bragen

The U.S. government has a 239- year history of medical experimentation on human beings without our knowledge or con- sent, beginning with unethical experiments that were conducted on slaves. In some cases, lives, including surgeries were performed without anesthesia. Experiments have been conducted by the military, in secret, on U.S. soldiers, citizens, and even children. These experiments have been conducted by physicians - people in whom we put our trust - on African American people, on children, on the disabled, and on those less able to speak up on their own behalf. It is a shocking and disgraceful legacy. People have been unknowingly exposed to radiation. People have been intentional- ly infected with pathogens without being told of this. People have been infected with diseases that they were unaware of. People with mental illness have been exposed to LSD. A man forced into a study comparing three of the newer “atypical antipsychotics” committed suicide.

After only a brief amount of research, I found massive piles of literature reporting on unethical experimentation on humans in the United States. To even begin to report on this subject would take years. So I present my own experiences as a mentally ill human being, I will narrow my focus and report on some recent cases of medical experimentation involving people with mental illness.

It is clear that the American people are considered a giant pool of experimental subjects for drug companies. People diagnosed with mental illness — those who are marginalized in society and who often cannot speak on our behalf - are experimental subjects. People have been used against our own best interests. In some instances, this is considered legal. In the name of science, doctors have experi- mented with medications on people and continue to do so today. In some instances, this is done without our informed consent or knowledge.

When the massively wealthy drug companies come up with new medica- tions for mentally ill people to take, the drug companies have their own self-interests. They are not known because they have been exposed to these med- ications for ten years or more. In recent years, “atypical antipsychotics” have been prescribed to patients with serious mental illness, and end up necessitating more medications which are often not warned that massive weight gain and diabetes are common outcomes.

In addition, typical diabetes medica- tions for type 2 diabetes are not known because they work to move blood sugar from the bloodstream and into the body by the finding. There is a new drug that increases the amount of insulin in the body, which will make people more efficiently metabolized. Thus, in the long run, diabetes medications can perpetu- ate the disease, because they worsen the root cause of the disease: weight.

If you watch any television at all, perhaps you have seen the endless advertise-

ments for newly patented medications. Because of laws that require disclosure of side effects, we hear of a multitude of possible side effects to drugs that are used to treat autoimmune diseases such as arthritis, breast cancer, and diabetes. However, as I prepare to re-examine our own views and biases of what makes a person intelligent.

While I have experienced the normal first hand. If you are here today, you’ll also become aware of this fact when you’re old. This is because this time you’ll be different. Because this time around, I will bring with me the hardened reality of someone who has slept on the street, stayed in shelters, and navigated the complicated social service provider network. These experiences make me critical of educational institu- tion connected me to a local transitional housing program. A steady income, personal security, and a sense of belonging.

Michael Rowland and I both appreciate that opportunities to access medica- tion connected me to a local transitional housing program. A steady income, personal security, and a sense of belonging are due to the opportunities we’ve been given. But, millions of Americans, including those we see at the Suitcase Clinic, are not able to access these resources.

The pressures and obstacles of home- lessness make it a daily struggle simply to survive. I try and help clients to meet these needs as a Housing/Employment Specialist at the Suitcase Clinic. My hope is that some of my own experiences will inspire me with tales from his reading knowledge. However, as I prepare to re-examine our own views and biases of what makes a person intelligent.

The American people are being railroad- ed into taking numerous medications which have complications that may trigger further disabilities and end up necessitating more med- ications. This situation isn’t limited to peo- ple with mental health issues.

The motivating force could be some kind of vested interest, such as a pharmaceutical company, or simply the endless pursuit of massive profits by the pharmaceutical industry. I don’t know what is behind it. However, a point, the U.S. is an epidemic, not of a communicable disease, but rather one of ill health due to excessive drugging.

I was lucky enough to be placed in housing in November as part of the housing program that served primarily people with mental illness - those who are considered a giant pool of experimental subjects. People with mental illness - those who are considered a giant pool of experimental subjects are infected with pathogens without being recognized.

People have been unknowingly exposed to pathogens in the environment, on African American people, on children, in the military, in secret, on U.S. soldiers, on unethical experimentation on humans, on medical experimentation involving those with mental illness, and end up necessitating more medications which are often not warned that massive weight gain and diabetes are common outcomes.
Blues for the 99 Percent
The Corporate Attack on America’s Roots Music

from page 1

prison, starting with people who are black, brown, and poor white. At the same time, Far Cat has picked the pockets of the 99%.

Because of the grip on the political system by the 1%, federal tax dollars that should be paying off the national debt or building bridges and trains and solar panels are going instead to build more bombs.

The nation’s mayors shut down the schools and urban clinics, then wonder why our streets are full of crime and sorrow. People with nowhere to turn, often turn violence on themselves and their neighbors.

As people lose jobs, houses and education, the 1% invest in over-policing (including the military weapons bran-
dished in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014) to hold back the rage.

African American members of the lower 99%, whose blues have been subjected to the oppression and lies of the 1% rulers for 400 years. Now, more than ever, we are forced to experience exploitation from the same beast.

Blues can’t cure society, but it can get people out of the dumps. Kurt Vonnegut, before his death in 2007, called African American music “America’s greatest con-
tribution to the world... the remedy for a world-wide epidemic of depression.”

This is the ground. It’s the root of America’s popular music — gospel, rock, jazz, soul, funk, R&B, hip-hop — even part of country music, Producer and songwriter Willie Dixon often said, “Blues is the root. Other music is the fruit.”

Blues has a call and a response, a rhythm and a swing. The music makes you feel. Watch a blues audience, eyes half closed, tapping their toes — or in the middle of food, standing up out of their seats. The emotions on the singer’s lines. Blues can tell any story — happy or sad, scary or funny. It’s able to solve the world’s problems, and it brings folks together, and that’s a start.

Where to find this healing blues music? Don’t look in the major media outlets. After you knock out that idea, if you look on the singer’s lines, blues can tell any story — happy or sad, scary or funny. It’s able to solve the world’s problems, and it brings folks together, and that’s a start.

The LOSS OF MAXWELL STREET

In the year 2000, I read on the D.C. Blues Society website that Chicago musicians and fans were calling for help. The city was about to tear down Maxwell Street, the birthplace of Chicago blues. Maxwell Street was the century-old, open-air marketplace where people of all cul-
tures mixed and mingled and shopped and dined. With my daughter gone on to college, I was free to pursue another cause.

I hopped a train for the Windy City. Longtime activist and Roosevelt University professor Steve Balkin, known on the street as “the Fray,” took me to the street’s famous 24-hour hodge podge. Nearby on a plywood bandstand cobbled by bluesman Frank “Sonny” Scott, musicians played for hours after hours, protesting the demolition: Jimmie Lee Robinson, the lanky “Lonely Traveler” in cowboy boots, and others. One was a young lady, 16, named Cherie, old Johnnie Mae Dunson Smith. The blues musicians distort what the music is

purely personal. It tells stories. It’s hospitable, it doesn’t deafen; it’s not in a hurry. It’s "I hear you! ‘I hear you!’ "

The BLUES AND COMMUNITY

So, what is the blues supposed to be about on its home turf? Chicago harmoni-
ca player Billy Branch, who started the idea of “Blues in the Schools,” explains community participation to critic David Whiteis in the book Chicago Blues: Portraits and Stories. “It’s call-and-
response, how the audience and perform-
er react to each other.” There’s something in the Black experience that defies — probably, definition... It’s an oral tradi-
tion — “Yeah baby!” “That’s what I’m talking ‘bout! I hear you!”

Music is an important part of our protest. When I was diagnosed with cancer, had taken his own life. But sev-
eral dozen blues musicians were still play-
ing in Chicago, keeping the spirit alive.

I decided to test my early piano skills in another tourist club: the Monday night jam at Buddy Guy’s Legends. The wiry, dark-skinned drummer in Jimmy Bursee’s band, I could see, was really into it. Totally living in the moment of the music, he drove the group with a crisp and swingy backbeat. A world of expressions from joy to pain flickered across his face. At the end of each line of 12-bar blues, he’d add magnificent little rumbles and

The drummer wore a blue-and-red sports jersey and a backwards baseball cap, more in the hiphop fashion than the fed hat and fancy shirt of a bluesman. His wide-set eyes seemed to look in different directions.

One eye, I learned later, had been damaged several years ago by a minor stroke that luckily did not affect his hands or voice. Or was it at the time he fell off the swing as a lit-
tle kid and hit his head?

At the end of the song, the drummer came back from whatever planet he was on. With quick, spidery hands, he switched the drums from a left-hand setup back to right-handed for the next drum-
ner. Then he moved to the front of the stage and picked up a microphone. With a nod to the audience, he hummed a musi-
cal riff to the guitar player and directed the bass and drums to come in.

The music boiled up into a one-chord trance song, something like John Lee Hooker or Howlin’ Wolf would lay down. The groove reached out like a whirlwind. A huge voice swept through the room, pouring out the pain of his soul and many others. It was as if the great, 6-foot-4-inch, 300-pound Wolf had come back to life and was howling through the singer’s slender frame.

This was no imitation; this was blues. Tourists looked up from their catfish and beer, startled. Then they applauded.

As the band took a break, Jimmy Burns began calling us, the wannabe blues musi-
cians, to the stage. When they called, I walked up to the microphone and played the
Chords I learned at Augusta Heritage Blues camp in West Virginia. Most of the guitar guys were used to playing with other guitarists rather than with vocalists and preferred to drown me out. I was glad people couldn’t hear all my wrong notes anymore.

When they had me play, someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was the wiry singer and drummer who had channeled Wolf.

“I like the way you play,” he said. “Not too many folks play piano that way anymore.”

“Thank you,” I said, nearly falling out of my chair. “I’m still learning. I loved your drumming and singing. Who are you?”

He played legends

“Larry Taylor,” he pointed to the band leader. “Jimmie Burns is my uncle. My stepdad was Eddie Taylor. He was on Vee-Jay and other record labels. Tourled all over the world. Played with Jimmy Reed.”

“Wow, you’re the real deal,” I said. Blues, like oldtime Appalachian mountain music, is often passed down in families.

“Yes, I’m a real bluesman. Grew up with it right in my house,” he said. He played on stage with legends like John Lee Hooker, Junior Wells, Albert Collins. The two of them are playing in these clubs these days, some of it ain’t the real blues.

“Some of these youngsters, don’t matter if they black, they ashamed of the blues,” Larry explained. “They used to know how to play. But the old guys, a lot of them are gone. And the younger guys, they’ve played the modern style of R&B for so many years they forget how to do the traditional blues. Or they speed it up all too loud like rock. They act as if they are scared of the feelings in the music. Can’t handle it. They play a song fast so they can get through it. But you could get a lot of people to come out and hear the real blues.”

“The blues societies are always talking Keep the Blues Alive. So why don’t you have your own hand?”

“I thought about it, he admitted. “Band leaders are the ones who make money in this business. Side musicians, they just don’t get paid very well.”

“I told him my dream of playing in a Chicago blues band and promoting a heritage of African American artists. Some ‘southern soul-souls’ artists do get it played. While the vocals come across with soul, much of their music doesn’t have the same sound; synthesized key-boards can’t replace piano and horns.

Sharing the pain and beauty

Heritage blues musicians have the gift of pain and the challenge of sharing it. Their experiences tap into the beauty and the unrealized dreams not only in African American culture, but in all of human life. They can make us feel what they are feeling, and that bond draws people together. The greatest blues artists are the ones who feel the deepest pain. Because they carry so much pain, they are strong and fragile. Appreciation keeps them going.

Fernando Jones, horn and guitar player and song writer, points out in his 1988/2004 book J Blues There When the Blues was Red Hot, that fellow black scholars sometimes fail to allow their culture to take credit for the blues. The late bass player and song writer and producer Willie Dixon often said, “Blues is the root. Other music is the fruit.”

Blues is world wide, but not always valued in the community. The Blues and the Spirit symposia produced by Dr. Janice Monti at Dominican University since 2000 have made a dent in this, giving Black scholars a chance to address the value of the blues. (See http://www.dom.edu/blues-and-spirit.iv)

Fernando also quotes Chicago Black promoter and politician Ralph Metcalfe. “The reason we (Blacks) shay away from the Blues is because of our self-image. We worship the white man’s gods more than being concerned with our own heritage and origins. Blues musicians in the beginning were the traveling min- strels. Black educators do not teach this in schools, that fellow black blues man and women studying and playing the classical music of their culture.

The blockage has to end. Their energy has to be released. When it is, everybody benefits. Blues is the music of survival. Life goes on. We all gonna boogie — all night long!”

Bonni McKewon is a journalist, activist and blues piano player who supports heritage musicians publishing the blues and soul tradition. She wrote the music section of the Maxwell Street Foundation history website (see http://www.maxwellstreetfoundation.org) and has written a blog “West Side Blues” for the Austin Weekly News.

Bonni promoted Larry Taylor and worked with Larry to produce his 2004 debut CD “They Were in This House,” issued in 2011 by Wolf Records. http://www.larrytaylorchicagoblues.com She co-authored with Stéphon of the Blues, a limited-edition autobio- graphy of Taylor, in 2010, and wrote a book called “The Blues and the Blues” based on part of Taylor’s life story. For more infor- mation see www.harletemplate.com

Will they let you be poor anymore by Carol Denney

Will they let you be poor anymore can you just get a room or a bed without three thousand dollars for a month’s rent? Can you afford just last month’s for just a roof over your head

Will they let you be poor anymore with a job somewhere pushing a b  homeless  washing up dishes and flipping a stack won’t even get you a room
do we all have to be CEOs or work for VC-funded techs do we all have to work sixty hours a week at jobs where we’re all nervous

Will they let you be poor anymore and work for an honest day’s pay did it all go to China or India and if it did then let’s all go today

I don’t need much to be happy. I may be poor but not sad

The Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi, is a fantastic showcase for the blues music that was born in the Mississippi Delta.

I have seen Larry Taylor’s personal suffering. He has spoken out about these things since before I came to Chicago, and spoke out again in our book Stepson of the Blues. His singing is deeper, his repertoire broader, his rhythm more profound than ever. Since 2008 he has not been hired to perform in Chicago’s annual blues festival, nor hired by a national or international festival.

Meanwhile, some media are saying blues are now a white thing and that’s all there is to it. This is pure B.S. Portraying the Blues without black people is like portraying my grandmother’s Scotland with mariachi players instead of bag-pipers. You can’t keep the blues alive without ongoing generations of live, authentic, professional African American blues men and women studying and playing the classical music of their culture.

The blues audience), it’s understandable.”

Bonni McKewon is a journalist, activist and blues piano player who supports heritage musicians publishing the blues and soul tradition. She wrote the music section of the Maxwell Street Foundation history website (see http://www.maxwellstreetfoundation.org) and has written a blog “West Side Blues” for the Austin Weekly News.

Bonni promoted Larry Taylor and worked with Larry to produce his 2004 debut CD “They Were in This House,” issued in 2011 by Wolf Records. http://www.larrytaylorchicagoblues.com She co-authored with Stéphon of the Blues, a limited-edition autobio- graphy of Taylor, in 2010, and wrote a book called “The Blues and the Blues” based on part of Taylor’s life story. For more infor- mation see www.harleemplate.com
G

George Orwell sent his landmark novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (alternately entitled *1984*), to his publisher on Dec. 4, 1948. Orwell created this insightful “negative utopia” by closely examining the erosion of individual freedom, governmental surveillance and enforced conformity that were already well advanced in his own time. Orwell’s novel remains a fascinating indictment of a future where human rights and the individual conscience are crushed underfoot by the national security state.

A central component of the plot was the surveillance of the novel’s protagonist, Winston Smith, whose every waking hour was watched upon by the nameless, faceless bureaucrats of the tyrannical regime. When Orwell wrote his book, in 1948, the transistor was still in the early stages of development, and it was not known if it would replace vacuum tube technology. (The first mass-produced AM transistor radios didn’t appear until about 1954.) Thus, there was no way that Orwell could have predicted the invention of microprocessors decades later, or the ever more powerful computers that have enormously magnified the surveillance capacity of both governments and corporations. With modern technology, it has become feasible to conduct round-the-clock surveillance of far greater numbers of people on a more massive scale — and with far less human effort — compared to what Orwell described in 1984.

**Rewriting History**

In the beginning of Orwell’s book, Winston Smith was busy at his job. Tellingly, his position was one of assisting the regime to constantly rewrite history. Orwell’s warning has proven prophetic. In the modern era, Holocaust deniers have attempted to rewrite history; the FBI and CIA smeared political movements with falsely manufactured “evidence” and concealed their own covert actions; and Stalin’s regime rewrote history on a massive scale during the Cold War.

Technology has become increasingly efficient at placing countless people under surveillance and controlling the public. Consumers are enthusiastic participants in this process, voluntarily posting all of their personal information, photos, thoughts and gossip on social media websites. Surveillance cameras are present more often than not, and it is valid to assume they are present in a great number of public and not-so-public places.

The good that might come of this ever-present scrutiny is that crimes are recorded in which, nonetheless, nothing is ever done to the unarmed man being shot in the back. Pressure from citizens is beginning to play a pivotal role in getting us to the point where these injustices will no longer go unanswered. However, someone pointed out to me that there are many times when officer-involved crimes have been recorded in which, Nonetheless, nothing happens to the officer. It can be disconcerting to wonder when and where we are being watched. GPS devices are apparently built into nearly all of our cell phones. Furthermore, electronic technology is so far advanced that one’s dwelling could be wiretapped in such a way that a listening device is not findable.

**Limitless Ways to Spy**

It could easily be carried out with the microphone built into your cell phone, the microphone in your computer, or with a micro-miniature device built into any wall, piece of furniture, appliance or vehicle. You can be monitored with a device mounted atop a power pole across the street. There are limitless opportunities.

In the past, the assumption that you are being watched might get you categorized as having paranoid delusions. However, given the state of technology today, it could be a reasonable assumption.

Yet, even though we know that it might be easy to spy on us, we should avoid falling prey to excessive fear or paranoia. It is important not to leap to any conclusions about surveillance, in the absence of any direct evidence of this.

On the other hand, if Orwell’s chilling prediction of omnipresent surveillance has already come true, most of us might never know. The culture of surveillance and control creeps upward in subtle steps, and most of us are blithely unaware of the change.

If Orwell’s chilling prediction of omnipresent surveillance has already come true, most of us might never know. The culture of surveillance and control creeps upward in subtle steps, and most of us are blithely unaware of the change.

**Worse Comes to Worse**

by George Wynn

Every day an old man, hungry and sick with sleeping bag living minute to minute stumbles coming from Ocean Beach

Every day some young girl or some young boy hungry and sick like a frightened cat living minute to minute rest on the ground and give a shivering prayer on a downtown lonely street

Our City by the Bay is more full of homelessness than you can even imagine

**Gentrification Blues**

by George Wynn

She closes the door of her studio by Dolores Park hands the landlady (who jacked up her rent damn near double) the key “If anyone should ask tell them I won’t be back to Cable Car Land” and begins her long wandering inside America’s abandoned houses

The “war on terror” has furnished our government with a great excuse for violating basic civil rights. In the name of keeping Americans safe, we are losing the essence of what America was supposedly about. The fact that I have the freedom to say all of this doesn’t make it not so. The public has become numb and jaded to the fact that we are constantly being watched.

**Broken by the Government**

The punishment for deviating from what was considered normal in Orwell’s book included being tortured, imprisoned or disappeared. There was not a single space remaining in this totalitarian society for any sort of freedom, dissent or non-conformity.

In 1984, the surveillance apparatus detects Winston Smith’s small attempts at freedom. He is arrested, thoroughly processed by the government and broken down. He is forced to inform on the person he loves and betray his deeply held values. Orwell’s book was a work of fiction. Yet, in the years since he wrote 1984, this same fate has happened in real life to countless dissidents and political prisoners.

In the version of Orwell’s surveillance society which has materialized in the United States, punishment for dissent is often economic. It may involve being excluded, or the loss of employment, or being intimidated by the government. It could mean becoming a political prisoner under the definition of Amnesty International. Or it could seem like a buf- fling amount of inexplicable bad luck. While the particulars aren’t the same as in 1984, we are headed towards a society controlled by fear, and where our freedom is undermined by constant surveillance.

**Orwell Foresaw the Vast Expansion of Surveillance and Total Loss of Freedom**

During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.

- George Orwell

(1903-1950)