Planting the Seeds of Freedom and Justice

Rev. Phil Lawson and the National Council of Elders — A Lifelong Commitment to Peace, Justice and Freedom

by Rev. Phil Lawson

The National Council of Elders was started in Oakland in 2009. I invited Dr. Vincent Harding, a historian who worked with Dr. King and was a speechwriter for Martin Luther King, and I invited my brother, Rev. James Lawson, a Methodist minister who was a confidante of Martin Luther King, to come to Oakland to speak in 2009. Jim had trained Martin in nonviolence and trained the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the philosophy and practices of nonviolence. Jim said that in the 20th century, the world witnessed the greatest advancements in human freedom that had ever before been achieved in the history of the world. That century saw the greatest advances in freedom and justice and humanity, more than ever before in history. But many people were ignorant of this and did not relish it or learn from it.

Out of that discussion in Oakland came the concept that there should be a National Council of Elders. Elders are, of course, persons of a certain age. But more importantly, many elders are persons who for the last 30, 40 or 50 years, have been working for justice and freedom and empowerment of people in the United States. So we began to gather the names of men and women from the major movements of the 20th century: The labor movement, Dr. King’s movement, the youth movement, the Free Speech movement, and the women’s movement. We began to talk with the individuals from those movements to see if they would be a part of the National Council of Elders for the purpose of teaching the lessons of the 20th century so that we might transfer those lessons to the young people of the 21st century who are engaged in movements and engaged in being human beings and struggling with that in our nation.

Out of that beginning, Jim and Vincent and I began to organize the National Council of Elders. Then, in 2012, in Greensboro, North Carolina, the National Council of Elders was born.

Finding Moral Beauty in the Lives of the Poor

by Terry Messman

For almost 30 years, Peter Marin has been fighting to protect the human rights of homeless people from never-ending attacks by politicians who employ every means at their disposal to banish the poor with an oppressive array of segregation laws. It has often been a solitary struggle. Marin’s steadfast opposition to the efforts to criminalize homelessness has made him somewhat of an anathema to the merchants and city officials who try to eliminate street people from affluent seaside Santa Barbara.

Marin is an uncommonly intelligent analyst of the cruel conditions endured by homeless people in America. A former university professor, prolific author, poet, and journalist for *Harper’s Magazine*, *The Nation*, and *Psychology Today*, Marin is the founder of the Committee for Social Justice in Santa Barbara — and a man who has stood in solidarity with homeless people, in season and out. Above all, he is a gadfly who stings the consciences of conservative and liberal lawmakers alike who try to legislate the poor out of existence. Marin first stumbled upon the hidden landscape of homelessness — an immense and virtually unexplored subcontinent of multitudes cast out of mainstream society — after he graduated from Swarthmore College and Columbia University with a master’s degree in literature and an unquenchable case of wanderlust.

He soon enrolled in a new field of “post-graduate” study by hopping freight trains rolling through the night, riding hundreds of miles across the countryside while doing seasonal work as a crop-picker.

As a restless wanderer riding the rails, he came to greatly respect his companions riding in midnight boxcars and sleeping in hobo jungles. Those days on the road ended up etched indelibly on his mind and heart.

Looking back on those nomadic days in his recent article, “The Moral Beauty of Acts of Goodness and Justice” [Street Spirit, January 2014], Marin wrote that he witnessed acts of sharing and kindness from the hungry and ragged men riding the rails that contained more beauty than could be found in acclaimed art museums.

The men he met in hobo jungles were “quite willing to share with one another and with me their shelter and last bits of food and cared for each other in a way that those with homes often do not.”

Most people don’t enter the encampments of the poor to find beauty and truth, but Marin saw extraordinary examples of what he calls “moral beauty” in the lives of cast-aside people in hobo jungles. A sort of moral inventory emerged when he began reflecting on a list of what he has most loved in his lifetime: The Freedom Riders of the segregated South, the generosity of men in hobo jungles, the resistance of Rosa Parks, unamed and impoverished peasants in Mexico and elsewhere.

"Depression Bread Line." George Segal’s sculpture at the FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C., reveals the poverty of a nation.
Lawmakers Bludgeon the Food Stamp Program

Democrats joined Republicans in passing a farm bill that cuts food stamps, and locks in huge subsidies for wealthy corporate farmers in perpetuity.

by Lynda Carson

Final passage of the $956 billion farm bill received bipartisan support in the Senate on February 4, and soon afterwards, President Barack Obama signed the bill into law. The passage of the bill includes massive cuts to the food stamp program (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) that will affect about 47 million people living in poverty across the nation. Food stamp recipients will receive 90 dollars less per month when the cuts take effect, and in California alone, some 700,000 people in poverty will see their benefits shrink.

The major focus on inequality by President Obama and the Democratic Party during the recent State of the Union address turned out to be short-lived, and laughable. Especially when considering that within a week of the address, the Democrats happily joined the Republicans in passing the huge farm bill that bludgeons the food stamp program, while at the same time locking in massive subsidies for wealthy corporate farmers in perpetuity.

Incredibly, in addition to the nearly $9 billion in new cuts to the food stamp program during the next decade, the farm bill includes language that makes it unlawful to use advertisements to let the poor know that the food stamp program even exists.

This is extremely bad news for poor people in Oakland who are already trying to figure out where their next meal is coming from. Based on the latest census report, Oakland has the highest poverty rate for children in the Bay Area, with more than 27 percent residing in households earning less than $23,000 annually.

With nearly $11 billion in cuts to the food stamp program already in the pipeline, the annual $28 billion in cuts during the next decade will make life very difficult for people living in poverty.

The House Agriculture Committee Chairwoman and Agriculture from using advertisements to let the poor know that the food stamp program even exists. Many of the people we serve are homeless veterans, and clearly many of them are not receiving the services they need. The cuts to the food stamp program are only going to make matters worse for everyone living in poverty. The cuts to the food stamp program will affect about 47 million people living in poverty across the nation. Food stamp recipients will receive 90 dollars less per month when the cuts take effect, and in California alone, some 700,000 people in poverty will see their benefits shrink.

People in the East Bay are already speaking up in support of those living in poverty, and in total disagreement with what many of the Democrats have to say. Eleanor Walden, a former Berkeley Rent Board Commissioner, said, "This is absolutely deplorable. When I was younger, very poor and was raising my family, the food stamp program was the only program available that made it possible to feed my family.”

Lyle Gans, a founding member of East Bay Food Not Bombs, said, "We have to do something about this. We have already seen more and more people coming to our meals because of food insecurity. Many of the people we serve are homeless veterans, and clearly many of them are not receiving the services they need. The cuts to the food stamp program are only going to make matters worse for everyone living in poverty."

According to Gans, Food Not Bombs serves food to around 100 people a day in the East Bay five days a week, and serves nearly as many people on Sundays.

Lori Kosowsky said, "I used food stamps a very long time ago when I got out of college and was in an internship. I had help staying in a house thanks to a friend of mine, but I did not have any food to eat during the internship. The food stamp program helped keep me alive until I could eventually find some work.”

A major split in the progressive community occurred recently in the battle over food stamps when the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), a left-wing policy group, supported the Democrats who are in favor of massive cuts to the food stamp program. Last year, the same kind of split occurred in the progressive community when CBPP and other so-called progressive groups supported rental reform laws, and cuts to the housing subsidies of poor people in the nation’s federal housing programs.

To contact Lynda Carson, send an email to tenantsrule@yahoo.com

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Buried Deeply Under the Rubble

by Jenny Castillo

YoTube has videos about miracles. I saw one recently. It was about an infant in Syria found buried deeply in the rubble of a building that collapsed after a blast.

The men, the child’s rescuers — sometimes four, sometimes as many as six — hear a small cry from a hole completely covered with gravel, very much underground. They begin to dig frantically with their hands to reach the child. They shout for the child to speak out, so they can better determine where to dig.

They dig, they shout, they dig more, they shout even louder, and twice I hear a cry from under the ground.

But where?

Where was the baby? There is no evidence of a structure, only rubble, and the more they dig, they only find more rubble. How can anyone, much less a child, be alive under there?

They dig some more. It was a long time before I see a sleeve. A red sleeve. The rescuers begin screaming desperately, digging away the small stones and gravel. A small hand appears, a baby’s hand.


Many hands dig and dig, frantically telling to each other, and to the baby. I couldn’t understand a word they were saying, but I thought it must have been, “Hold on, we are coming hold on.”

Finally, a small dusty head appears. A baby, maybe six to nine months old, a perfect coating of dust in his eyes and on his face, not moving, perfectly still. I think the unthinkable — that they found him but it was too late.

The men keep digging around the baby, uncovering more and more of his body.

Finally, I see the baby’s head flop back and his eyes open. Then I see him lift his hand to wipe the dust from his eyes. Several of the men try to help him. They wipe his little chubby face. The baby lifts his arm again and wipes. Two of the men help him wipe the dust and put him on the chest to help him breath.

And still they dig. And there is still much yelling going on. Franctic, desperate to get him out. He is only halfway out now. The torso and his legs are wedged deep into the ground.

At one point, a metal bar is needed to move a stubborn piece of concrete. The rescuer gently covers the baby to protect him. The bottom half of the baby is hard to get out, so wedged in he is. His rescuers do not give up.

Finally, with many screams of joy, one man lifts the baby free into the arms of another that holds him really close. Amazing. I thought. That a baby could survive under rubble, buried deep in the ground. That he cried and someone heard him. That they found him and were able to save him. That he lived. Amazing.

Then I thought.... What if Poverty is rubble and many people are buried deep under it? What if they cried but no one heard, and no one came to rescue them? It feels like that, sometimes. Like there is no way out, not enough money, not enough food, but plenty of despair, hurt, loneliness — and so little help.

Being buried deep under Poverty can feel like being buried under rubble.

OK, I say. There are plenty of people with me. Plenty of people, who if no one comes to rescue us. Hell! We’ll just dig ourselves out.

Jenny Castillo is Hope and Justice Coordinator at St. Mary’s Center. Email: san-tana400@aol.com

Food Not Bombs serves a meal at People’s Park. Food stamps are being cut severely even as hunger is increasing.

Lynda Gans photo

Berkeley volunteers respond to the crisis of hunger and malnutrition. Lynda Gans photo

Lydia Gans photo

Street Spirit March 2014
Renewing the Struggle for Civil Rights

by Brian K. Woodson, Sr.

The planet is speaking and too few are listening. The poor are weeping and too few are concerned. The despised and rejected of men are incarcerated, detained and deported.

Engaged, there is no better place than here. And if that conversation is to be there is any hope for human survival on the planet is speaking and no better time then now.

The hammer of hatred and inhumanity is real today as it was in the mid-20th century. If there is to be any hope, it is in the Fannie Lou Hamers, Bayard Rustins, Clay Evans, Joella Stevensons — and all those who gave their life energy to changing this nation, but without which you and I would be lynched or enslaved for the thoughts we share and the lives we live.

I don’t know if there is a place where “we the people” can go to have unmonitored, unauthorized conversations about the state. I am not sure that there is a place where the dissidents can gather to dispute, disagree and discuss. But I do know that the creation of such a place is vital if we are to survive.

I do believe with all my heart that the paradigm of extant power must change in powerful ways. However, there is no hope for human survival on this blue marble sailing through the universe. And if that conversation is to be engaged, there is no better place than here.

And so let us engage to advance to unravel with any depth in the precious few sentences of this article. Even with all the books that have been written and the not-yet that have been revealed, we must be wise enough to know that there is still too much that we do not know.

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VULIFIED IN LIFE, IDOLIZED IN DEATH

Now, considering the struggle for Civil Rights in America, perhaps the first person that comes to mind is the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The icon of the American Civil Rights movement for many reasons. Some of them you may find just and others unjust. I believe he stands as the icon of American Civil Rights largely because he no longer can speak his mind or move his body. It is entirely but not exclusively an American phenomenon to idealize, then idolize in death, the one you vilified in life.

The Kingian principles, ethos and praxis are essential if we are to progress in society. If we are to critique empire and engage in the building up of a beloved community, more and more of us must embrace and understand the movement over which King stands iconically.

My thoughts are not intended to diminish King at all but to contextualize him. For there is a danger of messianic hope if the only solution as seen in the kinds of misguided hopes placed on the Obama election, followed by a largely uncritical view of his presidency.

For this reason, it is important to understand that King was not alone in building the Civil Rights movement and more importantly, it is vital to suggest what a comparable movement would look like in the present. For we must bring the Kingian principles from the shadowed, dusty past to the relevant present.

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McDonald’s and MLK

The teenagers and children who are growing up today are being presented with a view of the Civil Rights movement distorted by the MLK of McDonald commercials. They must come to understand that there is more to what happened than they are being shown. The uncritical young adults who accept the government and corporations recording and inspecting their every thought, purchase and movement must open their eyes to see the full extent of oppression and injustice.

The poor and working class, the homeless and near-homeless citizens of these United States that are dire straits and desperate need of a movement similar to the one whose symbol is Martin Luther King Jr. But no such movement will occur if our time is consumed looking for a Martin instead of working for a movement.

America has a penchant to forget and then manufacture history in ways that suit its political desires. That is the Martin King than it did to anything or anyone else.

Neither the Kennedy nor Johnson administration liked Dr. King. But both opened the White House doors because Dr. King and the movement left them no other tenable option. The American brand of democracy was on trial and the whole world was watching.

The cruel and unjust antipathy which blacks suffered every day could no longer be hidden and ignored. America’s windows were wide open and the world was watching as Bull Connor’s dogs bit innocent children marching in Birmingham, and as Alabama Gov. George Wallace vowed “segregation forever” and a thousand other examples of American evil were being exposed.

The King America wants us to see now wasn’t the King they saw then. Further.

See Renewed Civil Rights Struggle page 5

Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by American Friends Service Committee. The views expressed in STREET SPIRIT are those of the individual contributors, and not necessarily those of the AFSC.

Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, artwork, poems and photos. Contact: Terry Messman

Send Donations to:
American Friends Service Committee
65 Ninth Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
E-mail: spirit@afsc.org
Web: http://www.thestreetspirit.org

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March 2014...
Albany’s shelter program is proving to be a dismal failure that has already cost the city well over $250,000. The trailers are a travesty, set up in a parking lot with no privacy, and with rules and protocols more like a detention facility.

Albany’s Bulb has been home to a population of otherwise homeless individuals for more than 20 years. I have been a resident of the Bulb for seven-plus years.

The City of Albany has had the land earmarked for incorporation into the state parks system for 20 years. However, as the City has never actually made any effort to “prepare” the land for the transfer (as is required), a community has formed on the Albany Bulb.

All the wild vegetation on the Plateau has been removed, presumably to be replaced by something appropriate, though in view of the drought conditions, who knows when it will become green again. The upper trail to the Bulb is being widened for service vehicles, bushes are being chopped down and limbs cut off trees along the way.

The City contracted with Operation Dignity to provide temporary shelter for six months. City officials offered nothing beyond that, even though Albany has no homeless shelter and no housing for very low-income people. There will be nowhere for the evicted campers to go.

“It’s illegal to be homeless in Albany,” longtime camper and spokesperson Amber Whitson comments wryly. “It’s the leaf blower effect. Blowing problems onto somebody else’s sidewalk.”

Whitson points out that there are serious issues concerning the City of Albany’s failure to comply with the housing element, the law requiring a city to “meet its share of the demand for market rate and affordable housing in the region.” Housing advocates have filed suit against Albany officials to demand compliance.

Lawyers for the campers filed a second lawsuit asserting that the shelter violates the Americans with Disabilities Act which requires accessibility for people with disabilities. That litigation is still going on.

City officials brought in the Berkeley Food and Housing Project (BFHP) to help the campers find housing and connect with social and community services. They call the program “Outreach and Engagement.” That program is proving to be a dismal failure. And all this has already cost the city well over $250,000.

The shelter consists of two trailers, toilets, showering kennel and a structure housing a generator, and is set up at the entrance to the parking lot. The trailers are a travesty, with no privacy, with rules and protocols more like a detention facility. The shelters are only open at night, and are closed throughout the entire day.

“They’re horrendously abusive there,” Amber Whitson says.

In reporting on this story, I tried three different times to speak with the shelter managers, but they refused to speak to me. Instead, I was told to talk to city officials.

It is hardly surprising that generally only two or three people have been stay-

Albany Officials Ignore the Needs of the Disabled

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Albany’s Shelter Program Is a Dismal Failure

by Lydia Gans

Hidden away from Albany’s streets, separated from the city by the freeway, is an area where nature and people have been allowed to flourish for years. The Albany Waterfront Trail leads off from the end of Buchanan Street over an area aptly named the Plateau, along a narrow Neck and ending on the Albany Bulb, a bulb-shaped landfill that was created from construction debris and landscaping materials.

The Albany Bulb lies at the heart of the Bulb. Back in the 1990s, people who were homeless created an encampment on the Plateau and the Bulb. Then, in 1999, Albany City officials noticed them and proceeded to clear the area.

They ordered police to raid the encampment, dismantled all the tents and shacks, and evicted the campers. City officials paid a non-profit agency to set up a temporary shelter in a couple of trailers, but did nothing to provide permanent housing for the people made homeless.

Albany officials brought in bulldozers and heavy equipment and tore down broad swaths of the vegetation and dumped all the campers’ belongings.

After this mass eviction, the police patrolled the area from time to time, but soon everything went back to normal. Homeless people returned and settled on the Bulb, for they had nowhere else to go in a city that has refused to build housing or shelters for their homeless citizens for the last 20 years. People continued to walk their dogs and enjoy the art created by the campers and their friends.

Now it’s all happening again, this time on a much broader scale. In the summer of 2013, Albany began the process of transforming the entire area to East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD). Signs were posted listing rules and regulations for what is now the Albany Waterfront Park.

All the wild vegetation on the Plateau has been removed, presumably to be replaced by something appropriate, though in view of the drought conditions, who knows when it will become green again. The upper trail to the Bulb is being widened for service vehicles, bushes are being chopped down and limbs cut off trees along the way.

And the people who are living on the Bulb have been warned that they will be evicted. Camping is not allowed in state parks. The homes they have built for themselves are being demolished.

The City contracted with Operation Dignity to provide temporary shelter for six months. City officials offered nothing beyond that, even though Albany has no homeless shelter and no housing for very low-income people. There will be nowhere for the evicted campers to go.

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Renewed Civil Rights Struggle

The Guantanamo gulag still exists. Drone warfare continues unabated. The economic devastation caused by the uber-rich and paid for by the struggling poor has morphed into more riches for the already rich and more poverty everywhere.

from page 3

Martin wasn’t loved and accepted by all blacks, and all except a few Americans of European descent rejected him. Many African Americans as well as white leaders in the Christian church shunned association with Dr. King and declared his ethos, tactics and theology inappropriate, unwarranted and wrong.

But King never gave up. It must be understood that when one looks to the past, to the very world at the time was in motion. Africa, in particular, was alive with the energy and action that threw off the colonial subjugation of European powers.

The world itself was undergoing drastic change in that era. Global contests questing the validity of power and political construct were alive and engaged all over the planet. Colonialism, with all its abuses, racial injustice and religious antagonisms, was engaged worldwide. The melanin-kissed people of Africa led the world in throwing off the shackles of European domination. The British, French and Belgian powers strained and were capitulating.

Democracy was on trial and its courts were in an American governor’s desk calling witness after witness to the bar of world opinion.

MARTIN WAS NOT ALONE

Martin was not alone. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which he led, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee were not the only voices in the struggle. The great majority were alive with critique and Martin Luther King Jr. was not the only voice of dissent. James R. Lawson of the United States Civil Rights Movement, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, and Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam were very popular figures.

In 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. displays a poster for the Poor People’s Campaign led by SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference). AP photo: Horace Cort

There were other voices as well, some of which were chronicled by Mike Wallace and Louis Lomax in their television production entitled “The Hate That Hate Produced.”

The option offered to the love and peace that Martin King espoused was retributive, hatred and violence. Still, the options with which change would most quickly and most effectively be realized were exposed to the common change that was sought; namely, human dignity, opportunity and respect for the personhood of women and men of America and the world.

The reality of the Civil Rights Movement is now a chapter in American history. The statue of Martin King stands peering over the Washington Mall as a suggestion that we believe that America has changed and now accepts him. But it must be understood that the America we are told to believe he was, but to remember that the work he was a part of needed continuing.

I would like to suggest that, at the moment, it is too quiet on the American Front. The lens of history is of little use if it is not used and taken back in the present. And it is only right readings of the present that future histories will recognize as valid. It falls to us to address the question of change and engage the struggle of our time.

OBAMA WAS NEVER A KING

And although I believe that Barack Obama is an American in an avatar, it is through this lens to him — nor should you — for the solutions to the deep problems within or without our country and experience. Now, five years into his administration, the truth of American intransigence is plain to see and open for inspection. Obama was never a Martin King, except in the sense that mythologizers wish us to see him.

Under his presidency, much of the excesses and abominations of the Bush years were only deepened and threaten.

The continued rape of our women, subjugation of our humanity, mis-education and praxis was exposed and threatened.

And into this cauldron of chaos and conflict Martin was thrown. We can hear his change Martin was thrown. We know of the fountains, lunch counters and bus stations, the Nation of Islam were very popular in Washington, D.C., where King led, and the Student Non-Violent Christian Leadership Conference, which he founded.

The planet is speaking and too few are listening. The poor are weeping and too few are concerned. The despised and rejected of men are incarnated, detained and deported.

There is no doubt as to whose interests are served by our labrghy. We must take up the struggle of our age with the tactics of our history. We must engage to insure that the Commonwealth is employed for the Common Good. If becoming involves the pain of being, and bringing requires the practice of community, then the duty of our time is laid bare before us. We must turn our hearts, our will and help to the poor, huddled masses yearning to be free.

Like the Christ of the Gospels, we must preach the news of alternative economic possibilities, heal the hopes of those who no longer believe, empower paradigms of powerlessness, and release the unjustly incarcerated. The Bible declares this to be the good news of the kingdom of God. I wonder if I suggest that the Lord has no other hands to do this work but our own.

Rev. Brian Woodson is an Oakland pastor and a staff organizer with EBASE, East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy.

March 2014 STREET SPIRIT 5

If Noah saved the world two by two, then the planet now needs to be saved by tens of millions and millions of people, thereby destroying families and increasing the fragility of our social construct. The Guantanamo gulag, which still exists, is emblematic of American imperialism and continues unabated. The economic devastation caused by the uber-rich and paid for by the struggling poor has morphed into more riches for the already rich and a proliferation of poverty in America and all over the planet.

Perhaps Barack Obama would be as good a president as he seems a man were it not for the incessant attacks and demonizations. He has to see the hand of a ubiquitous and militant right-wing media.

Still, his policies, if given half a chance, would likely create more momentous changes to the American Imperial mess. And this we will never know, because anything he says or suggests is met with the most virulent and overhyped hatred.

Ever since Ronald Reagan fired the Air Traffic Controllers soon after his fabricated election... Let me take a side at this为代表的"="the representor then, is bigger than that.

The option offered to the love and peace that Martin King espoused was retributive, hatred and violence. Still, the options with which change would most quickly and most effectively be realized were exposed to the common change that was sought; namely, human dignity, opportunity and respect for the personhood of women and men of America and the world.

The reality of the Civil Rights Movement is now a chapter in American history. The statue of Martin King stands peering over the Washington Mall as a suggestion that we believe that America has changed and now accepts him. But it must be understood that the America we are told to believe he was, but to remember that the work he was a part of needed continuing.

I would like to suggest that, at the moment, it is too quiet on the American Front. The lens of history is of little use if it is not used and taken back in the present. And it is only right readings of the present that future histories will recognize as valid. It falls to us to address the question of change and engage the struggle of our time.

OBAMA WAS NEVER A KING

And although I believe that Barack Obama is an American in an avatar, it is through this lens to him — nor should you — for the solutions to the deep problems within or without our country and experience. Now, five years into his administration, the truth of American intransigence is plain to see and open for inspection. Obama was never a Martin King, except in the sense that mythologizers wish us to see him.

Under his presidency, much of the excesses and abominations of the Bush years were only deepened and threaten.

The continued rape of our women, subjugation of our humanity, mis-education and praxis was exposed and threatened.

And into this cauldron of chaos and conflict Martin was thrown. We can hear his change Martin was thrown. We know of the fountains, lunch counters and bus stations, the Nation of Islam were very popular in Washington, D.C., where King led, and the Student Non-Violent Christian Leadership Conference, which he founded.

The planet is speaking and too few are listening. The poor are weeping and too few are concerned. The despised and rejected of men are incarnated, detained and deported.

There is no doubt as to whose interests are served by our labrghy. We must take up the struggle of our age with the tactics of our history. We must engage to insure that the Commonwealth is employed for the Common Good. If becoming involves the pain of being, and bringing requires the practice of community, then the duty of our time is laid bare before us. We must turn our hearts, our will and help to the poor, huddled masses yearning to be free.
T
two-thirds of the American people agree. As a society, we "ought to see to it that everyone who wants to work can find a job." Most Americans also believe the mini-
imum wage should be high enough to enable workers to avoid poverty. We know how to guarantee every worker a living-
\nA BROAD ALLIANCE

Assuring a living-wage job opportunity is not the exclusive preserve of any single labor union or even of the political party of any one individual or group. The idea has a wide appeal and is embraced by individuals with a great many political and economic dispositions. The public is divided, of course, about how much the government should be required to do, but a majority of the electorate support a substantial role for the government.

We can achieve full employment with-
out increasing the size of the federal government. Rather, the federal govern-
ment can send money to local govern-
ments (where citizens have more impact) to hire public-service workers to meet pressing social and environmental needs. The federal government can be used pri-
marily by creating private-sector jobs. Initial funding of public-service jobs will indeed be from the federal government; but the federal government has a moral obligation to step up and provide the necessary funds for living-wage jobs. If the federal government doesn’t do it, then the states and cities will have to

can be created without
creating "make work" jobs. Almost everyone wants to work and has some useful skill. We can hire the unemployed and give them work that will enable them to be-
n.Regardless of how those individ-
uals are few, and they can make it on their
own or with other sources of support.

Full employment can be created with-
out increasing the deficit. A small tax on
unproductive, dangerous Wall Street spec-
ulation can generate the money needed to jump-start a federally funded jobs pro-
gram. Thereafter, we can hire more work-
ers with increased revenues resulting from a stronger economy, as well as savings from reduced spending on unemployment insurance and food stamps.

We can’t guarantee a job, but we can guarantee the opportunity to earn a liv-
ing-wage job. As a group of working people, we have the ability to do so. The power of the American people, when they decide to act to ensure that everyone has a fair chance to make a decent living, is extraordinary.

FOCUS ON MORALITY

Securing the human right to a living-
\nWidespread support for living-wage jobs is a moral imperative. ...But the eyes of most people glaze over when confronted with all those statistics and theoretical arguments. Let’s focus instead on the moral issue. We are obligated as a human community to make sure that every adult among us who is able and willing to work has the opportunity to earn enough to make ends meet at a minimally decent level. Let’s build strong, clear support for that position and persuade those with the ability to do so to achieve that goal. We don’t have to agree on exactly how to do it. What we ordinary people need to do is monitor whether or not our society has secured for everyone the right to a living-wage job opportunity. Until then, we do need to keep pressing key deci-
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can find a living-wage job. But until some miracle like that hap-
\nApril 28, 2014, will be pushing for a $15 wage should be raised to $10.10 an hour. Research Associates found 80 percent of Americans believe that full-time workers should earn more. And some believe that being a 16-year-old workers differently). They say these workers need to gain experience and boost their skills before they can expect to earn more. And some believe that being forced to work at poverty-level wages and face the threat of homelessness serves to motivate people to strengthen their skills.

But opening this door is dangerous. Once opened, it can easily be opened ever wider — as is happening now with our shrinking middle class. And even with a minimal living wage, most workers will still be motivated to improve their situa-
tion by enhancing their skills.

Every adult who holds down a job should earn enough to make ends meet at a minimally decent level. No human being should be considered disposable and lose the freedom to fulfill their potential. Moreover, the threat of poverty constrains everyone’s liberty, if only because when we see others being oppressed and we have a heart, we are compelled to try to help eliminate that oppression. So long as one of us is not free, none of us are free.

We don’t like to see homeless people and beggars on the street. It gnaws at our conscience, making us wonder whether we should be doing more to help. But let’s not relieve our conscience by blam-
ing the victims of our economy and telling them “go get a job.” With Jesus, let’s love our neighbor as we love ourselves. With Buddha, let’s avoid both self-sacri-
ifice and selfishness.

The federal government has a moral obligation to step up and provide the necessary funds for living-wage jobs. If the government can figure out how to rescue Wall Street, they can figure out how to rescue Main Street.

BUILD THE BASE

Those of us who are committed to this goal already have a great deal of support. In March 2013, based on a survey funded by the highly reputable Russell Sage Foundation, three respected political scient-
ists, Benjamin I. Page, Larry M. Harris and Matthew D. Lewis, found that two-thirds of the American people believe “the government in Washington ought to see to it that everyone who wants to work can find a job.”

The wording in that survey is impor-
tant. As have other surveys, it did not ask people to support a $15 minimum wage. Rather, it used the phrase “can find a job.” As discussed above, that formulation implies assuming a job opportunity. It does not assume that people will make a living by working; it allows the government to keep it regardless of their effort. It does not guarantee a job unconditionally.

Polls indicate the importance of the dis-
\n\nA 2014 YouGov/Huffington Post poll asked, “Would you favor or oppose a law guaranteeing a job to every American adult, with the government providing jobs for people who can’t find employment in the private sector?” In that poll, more peo-
ple supported that proposition, 47 percent, than opposed it, 41 percent. But support for these positions was higher than with the “job opportunity” option.

Various methods are available to create jobs, including providing more support for the private economy. But according to most Americans, the ultimate responsibility rests in the government in Washington, D.C. Others have said that the government has an obligation to take action even if it means using the federal budget to fund jobs. A March 2013 Gallup poll, for example, found that three-fourths supported “a federal job cre-
tion program, in which the government would pay for a job program designed to create more than 1 million new jobs.”

The Bartlett/Skeffington study also found that three-fourths of the public believe the minimum wage should be “high enough so that no family with a full-time worker falls below [the] official poverty line.” That response indicates that an overwhelming majority of Americans believes that full-time workers should earn enough to survive. That wage “that enables them to avoid poverty.”

Different elements of a full employ-
\nSee Movement for Full Employment page 7


can find a living-wage job. But until some miracle like that hap-
\nTo gain that goal, we need to build the embryonic full employment movement. The needs of that movement have already been plant. Now we need to grow it and develop the grassroots pres-
ure that will make it accessible to everyone else. A full employment movement could be based on the following principles.

COMPASSION

Most individuals could do more to im-
prove their situation. Self-improvement is valuable and needs to be supported. But if every unemployed person redoubled their efforts to become more employable, there still wouldn’t be enough jobs to go around. And most people can’t start a new business on their own.

The jobs market is like a game of musical chairs. So long as there aren’t enough jobs, workers are going to be unjustifiably unemployed.

Some people believe that unskilled workers 18 or over don’t deserve a living wage (current law establishes a “youth minimum wage” that treats 16- and 17-
old-year-olds differently). They say these workers need to gain experience and boost their skills before they can expect to earn more. And some believe that being forced to work at poverty-level wages and face the threat of homelessness serves to motivate people to strengthen their skills.

But opening this door is dangerous. Once opened, it can easily be opened ever wider — as is happening now with our shrinking middle class. And even with a minimal living wage, most workers will still be motivated to improve their situa-
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Every adult who holds down a job should earn enough to make ends meet at a minimally decent level. No human being should be considered disposable and lose the freedom to fulfill their potential. Moreover, the threat of poverty constrains everyone’s liberty, if only because when we see others being oppressed and we have a heart, we are compelled to try to help eliminate that oppression. So long as one of us is not free, none of us are free.

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Different elements of a full employ-

The corner of Wall Street and Broadway in New York City. Photo credit: Flatcherk

The federal government has a moral obligation to step up and provide the necessary funds for living-wage jobs. If the government can figure out how to rescue Wall Street, they can figure out how to rescue Main Street.
The Movement for Full Employment

We need a new movement for full employment and living wages.

Roger Blackwell photo from page 6

way or the other, we must assure every- one a living-wage job opportunity.

We would not need total agreement within a full employment movement on all specific methods. Rather, we can respect our differences and focus on building broad support for our basic goal: guaranteeing all Americans a living-wage job opportunity.

PROMOTE TREE FULL EMPLOYMENT

In recent decades, most economists have mistakenly redefined “full employment” to mean something other than the term used to mean and what most peo- ple understand it to mean — namely, that anyone who wants to work can quickly find a job. Instead, they’ve tied full employment to a specific rate of unem- ployment that is supposedly necessary to prevent excessive inflation.

This new definition carries weight, because the economists behind it are highly respected by pundits and politicians who help shape public opinion. These econo- mists define full employment as the “non- accelerating inflation rate of unemploy- ment,” or NAIRU. Wikipedia says NAIRU “refers to a level of unemployment below which inflation rises.” Investopedia defines it as “the specific level of unemployment that exists in an economy that does not cause inflation.”

Thus, by definition, the NAIRU con- sists of an automatic cause-and-effect relationship between some particular rate of unemployment and inflation. That’s why economists give it so much weight. On the face of it, however, this concept is misguided. There is no simple, direct and un- complicated relationship. Reality is far more complicated than that.

The economists themselves can’t agree on what that rate of unemployment is. And the most recent official predictions were wrong. Decreasing unemployment rates in the 1990s, for example, did not lead to any insignificant increase in “core inflation,” which excludes oil prices. Yet economists still talk about the NAIRU as if it were Gospel truth.

Once you accept that no NAIRU has magical powers and you recognize that other factors are extremely relevant, the only logical conclusion is to accept that, given the political will, we can use mea- sures other than creating unemployment to deal with any inflationary pressures that result from achieving true full employment. The NAIRU therefore is a myth. It does not hold the power it is sup- posed to have.

This conclusion is reinforced by an analysis of the historical record. For example, age-setting practices in Sweden and Japan maintained a sustainable bal- ance between wage growth and productiv- ity growth in the 1980s. Rapid worker productivity growth in various countries have restrained wage and price increases. Price controls also have been used to restrain prices, and increased global competition is limiting wages.

We should also bear in mind that we can fund public-service jobs without increasing the deficit (which can be inflationary). Workers in a federally funded jobs program can remain available to take jobs in the pri- vate sector, just as they do when they col- lect unemployment insurance. Also, the amount of money the federal government sends to each region can be based on that region’s unemployment rate: regions with more unemployment can receive more funding. Finally, we can reduce funding for direct job creation as unemployment declines. All these methods will minimize inflationary pressures.

If wages and Social Security keep pace, a modest increase in prices is not problematic (except for Wall Street traders who did not anticipate the increase). The gains from increased employment would be far greater than any potential costs from higher inflation. Even if prices did increase, the rise would be gradual, allowing time for corrective mea- sures, if needed.

Once again, we need not get hung up on trying to reach agreement on exact methods. Rather, we can stay focused on our basic goal: if and only if economic policymakers make unemployment the central issue, they should do so openly with full public debate.

The NAIRU with its alleged automatic cause-and-effect relationship is blatantly wrong. It is a dangerous illusion that we can achieve full employment without adding to inflationary pressures. Creating unem- ployment to control inflation should be the absolute last resort.

We should not blindly trust economists (or any other technocrats). They’ve often been terribly wrong on many important matters in the past. They tend to ignore morality and are too willing to sacrifice the unemployed and working poor on the altar of “economic growth” that fails to lift all boats.

Instead, we should rely primarily on our own common sense and clear logic, and stay grounded in the key moral issue: every adult who is able and willing to work deserves a living-wage job opportunity.

BUILDING THE MOVEMENT

Signs of a contemporary full employ- ment movement have been percolating for decades. New Initiatives for Full Employment (NIFE), an ethnically and racially diverse group of social activists and academics began working together on the East Coast in 1986 to develop a feasible plan for full employment.

From April 1990 to March 1991, the San Francisco-based Solutions to Poverty Workshop developed a concrete 10-point National Program to Abolish Involuntary Poverty.

The San Francisco Antipoverty Congress adopted that program in April 1992, which led to the formation of the Campaign to Abolish Poverty (CAP) and the introduction of the Living Wage Jobs for All Act by Congressman Ron Dellums.

In June 1994, NIFE convened the National Jobs for All Coalition, which was committed to building a new movement for full employment at livable wages.

In summer 1994, an alliance of labor and religious organizations in Baltimore began organizing for a local living-wage ordinance, which was adopt- ed in December. In March 1995, the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee launched its campaign for a living-wage law using Baltimore as a model. In the fall of 1995, Chicago initiated its successful similar effort.

In 1996, the Full Employment Coalition convened a Jobs for All Week, began organizing for a living-wage law in San Francisco, and supported similar efforts in other cities. Scores of cities and counties throughout the country now have living-wage laws.

More than 130,000 individuals have signed the “OUR Walmart” petition ask- ing the nation’s largest retailer to raise wages. The workers who are raising their livelihood by organizing fellow workers.

Fast-food workers organizing with Restaurant Opportunities Centers to increase the minimum wage are asking consumers to sign a petition declaring, “I am willing to pay an extra dime a day for my food so that close to 8 million food system workers and 21 million additional low-wage workers can receive a much deserved raise to help them meet their basic needs.”

In 2013, Congressman John Conyers, Jr. introduced HR 1000, the Humphrey- Hawkins Full Employment and Training Act, which is being promoted by the Jobs for All Campaign. The bill already has 51 co-sponsors. In early 2014, Conyers and his co-chair, Congresswoman Frederica Wilson, launched the first-ever Congressional Full Employment Caucus and convened a public forum on “Employment: A Human Right” that attracted a standing-room-only crowd in the House Office Building.

On March 22, 2014, a public forum on HR 1000 will be held at the University of DC Law School, and plans are afoot for a DC National Day of Action focused on HR 1000 in late May or early June. And on April 29 a national gathering will focus on establishing a $15 per hour minimum wage, was done months ago.

The greatest obstacle to expanding and deepening these efforts is cynicism and pas- sivity. Most Americans believe they can’t change things. They don’t have enough money. They don’t have enough power. They don’t have enough time.

These patterns drive away many poten- tial activists. If we want to build an effec- tive full employment movement, we need to develop new ways of organizing.

More Effective Methods

Like the rest of our society, most activist organizations get wrapped up in facts and figures and policy prescriptions, and fail to affirm underlying moral values. They rely on tapping anger and fear, and neglect deeper feelings of love and faith. They aim to score victories by defeating opponents, rather than seeking win-win solutions. They focus on the outer world and ignore the inner world. They aim to change others and overlook the need to change themselves. They overlook the need to empower people.

They lecture, often with a shrill tone, and try to “educate,” rather than engaging in authentic dialog. They function like an impersonal machine that uses people until they use them up. They tend to believe that some one person must always be in charge — that individuals must either dominate or submit — rather than collaborate as equals.

They have too many boring meetings. They don’t sing and dance enough. They are too serious. They don’t have enough fun. They forget to love the universe and the life force that gives it.

These patterns drive away many poten- tial activists. If we want to build an effec- tive full employment movement, we need to develop new ways of organizing.

Full Employment Clubs

One method that could help is to group a network of “full employment clubs” that attract new members with contagious hap- piness. The members of these clubs could share meals, socialize informally, and sup- port one another in their personal growth, community organizing, and work.

These self-governing clubs would engage in a wide variety of activities. They would organize similar efforts with different methods. Some members might create support networks for unemployed workers, or lobby their Congressperson.
Peru who bravely stood up to armed troopers, black schoolchildren “who walked into white schools while people screamed at them on all sides,” and certain Vietnam vets “who fought in a war I hated,” but also taught so much about courage, love of comrades, and sacrifice.

When he looks back at these crucial moments of inspiration, Marin can also see a small group of homeless friends marching slowly across the entire breadth of the North American continent. On Martin Luther King’s birthday in 1989, they set out on a cross-country march from Santa Barbara, California, to the negative Housing Now! demonstration in Washington, D.C. It took the small band 10 long months to walk 3,000 miles from the West Coast to the nation’s capital.

At some indefinable point, the march became something more than a protest for human rights. It became a pilgrimage, a procession that Marin found no less holy than the peace pilgrimages of Buddhist monks marching for the sanctity of life.

At heart, it all says, “Art as Marin wrote: “I believe now we crossed not only the country but a far region inside where the soul has its home.”

These experiences on the road were crucial in the formation of his conscience, and his personal friendships with the homeless friends he traveled with on these journeys helped give his later activism a profoundly personal dimension.

Peter the Mariner

As he reflects on his years of advocacy, the insights that emerge are rare and the comforting kind. They tend to be more unsettling than inspiring, as if his thoughts have taken shape in the dark night of the soul. Like the apparitions of a dead-tired traveler on a midnight train.

Marin is a poet, and during our interview, I involuntarily recall the shipwrecked seafarer from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s epic poem, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” The Ancient Mariner is a haunting figure, shaken by his own conscience, who has been condemned to wander the earth as a penance for killing an albatross on his nearly ruinous voyage.

For the rest of his life, the Mariner is compelled to teach the hard lessons he learned while adrift at sea — lessons about the darkening of the human heart by the saving grace of kindness. The Mariner calls for love and compassion for all things great and small.

He prays for love who loves best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

I can’t help but realize how closely Marin’s very name echoes that of the Mariner, and how his life’s journey seems reminiscent of the haunted seafarer. Peter the Mariner. Both mariners saw the tragic consequences to their humanity, and a shocking jolt to the conscience of a nation gone wrong.

The Personal is Political

The personal is political, as the saying goes. In the case of Marin, the personal is poetic. Marin’s poetics and his political activism both stem from his personal connections to homeless individuals.

In a land where homeless people are endlessly persecuted by every cop, politician and businessman, it is almost a revolutionary act when a poet finds beauty in their lives, and restores their stolen dignity.

After my own 30 years of homeless activism, Marin’s poetry is one of the few things I have discovered that is of lasting value. His poems enable us to see the sacred beauty of people living on the streets all around us. That is an amazing accomplishment in a culture that has almost unanimously concluded that the lives of the poor have no value at all.

Renaissance artists often painted beautiful portraits of the nobility and royalty. Marin’s poetry turns that world upside down by portraying the lives of homeless people as sources of great artistic beauty. Marin sees nobility disguised under shabby overcoats and finds beauty hidden inside cardboard boxes, in the people that America forgot. His poetry illuminates and transforms, so that we no longer see only victims laid low by poverty. Rather, we see into the human soul — shining, sacred and somehow everlasting. That is not to say that his poem cycle romanticizes homelessness. His poems offer stark glimpses into the despair and suffering of the streets, the lonely men suffering from the agonies of poverty and the massive, hidden victims laid low by poverty. Rather, we see into the human soul — shining, sacred and somehow everlasting.

Finding Moral Beauty in the Lives of the Poor

“Forgotten Man.” Painting by Maynard Dixon. Alone and forgotten, a desolate-looking man is avoided and ignored by passers-by.

with no hope of return.
In sleep they cried out to us as do those shipwrecked driven wild by thirst who see on the horizon imagined rescuers.

Just as Coleridge’s Mariner was compelled ever after to warn about the urgent need for love and kindness, Marin’s poetry and activism have become a lifelong call for more compassion, more love.

Marin’s epic poem cycle on homelessness, “Margins,” is an odyssey through the back alleys and broken dreams of what sociologist Michael Harrington once called the “Other America” — the hidden America of poverty. Marin’s poem cycle is just as important as Harrington’s renowned indictment of economic inequality.

The Geography of Loss

In every state of the nation, Marin and his fellow marchers witnessed homeless men arrested for sleeping on riverbanks, homeless women falling victim to hunger and illness and cruel weather, and parents struck down by the loss of their children.

In Marin’s unforgettable phrase, such daily tragedies formed “a geography of loss” that encompasses an entire nation.

The grieved faces melt into one
The cities combine like
Come together
A large hogan roof above a chamber of sorrow
Struggling stretching from sea to shining sea.

These hauntingly beautiful poems serve as an elegy for the oppressed, a reminder of the indifference of the streets, the lonely men suffering from the agony of poverty and the ones who have lost their children. Dante’s underworld, with no hope for deliverance. Yet, Marin offers us often, “What tenderness and acts of kindness because he has personally witnessed this kind of moral beauty on the streets, time after time.

SELL-OUT SOCIAL WORKERS

Marin condemns career-oriented social workers who sell out the interests of the poor people they supposedly serve, and refuse to oppose anti-homeless laws so as not to jeopardize their careers.

“They don’t know any of the homeless people,” Marin said. “They know them only because they sit across the desk from them as social workers and service providers. They have a program to which people have to apply and they have hoops through which people have to jump. But they’re not on the streets living with people or helping them day by day. They are good members of the privileged class. They don’t identify with the poor.”

The Freedom Riders who risked their lives in the civil rights era found the strength to continue because of their personal bonds and friendships. Marin said, “What the Freedom Riders had on their minds were their sisters and mothers and fathers and brothers. So I think true advocates are speaking for their friends. And I think service providers are the people who sit across the desk from you, whether they work for the state or a private agency.”

Marin’s words remind me of the importance attached to love and friendship by the liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez. In We Drink From Our Own Wells, Gutierrez wrote: “It is a work of concrete, authentic love for the poor that is not possible apart from bonds of real friendship with those who suffer desolation and injustice. The solidarity is not with ‘the poor’ in the abstract but with human beings of flesh and bone. Without love and affection, without — why not say it? — tenderness, there can be no true gesture of solidarity.”

Tenderness. Gutierrez’s tough-minded liberation theologian who courageously denounces government repression in the slums of Lima, Peru, calls out for tenderness. Tenderness is a trait that poets are often accused of, almost as if it were an affliction. Tenderness is exactly the word I would use to describe Marin’s poems about heartbroken and homeless wanderers.

Marin founded the Committee for Social Justice to help represent people who ran afoul of anti-homeless laws. The Committee also proposed innovative solutions to homelessness, including safe camping zones, legalized vehicular camping, and a county loan program to enable homeless people to purchase vehicles to live in — a readily achievable approach to creating the most low-cost housing of all.

Some of these solutions worked, others were turned down by county officials, but they were all based on a practical commitment to helping neighbors in need, rather than brewed up in an academic study of demographics and sociological statistics.

After four people froze to death in a 10-day span a few winters ago in Santa Barbara County, Marin and a few activists succeeded in opening emergency warming centers. The Board of Supervisors had been debating the issue for three years until the activists packed their chambers and demanded the funding to open the centers.

Four years later, the emergency warming centers are still operating — and still saving lives. The centers open when temperatures drop below 35 degrees at night, or when it is raining. With their emphasis on giving life-saving help, the warming centers...
centers are emblematic of the “tenderness” that Gutierrez vouched for so highly.

In 1987, the Homeless Coalition in Santa Barbara succeeded in forcing the city to temporarily suspend its sweeping anti-camping laws after threatening to organize a huge march with renowned activist Mitch Snyder that “would make Santa Barbara Schindler’s List.”

During that struggle, Marin’s seminal article, “Helping and Hating the Homeless: The Struggle at the Margins of America,” was published in Harper’s Magazine. It was then passed from hand to hand through advocacy circles all over the country.

I still remember how strongly his article affected me. It was almost clairvoyant in its vision of what was ultimately at stake in the struggle over human rights. Marin exposed the official who pretend to “help” home- less people by scouring away every last vestige of their presence from tourist desti- nations and pleasant shopping malls, in a mad effort to drive them out of sight and out of mind.

In describing how a woman named Alice had become homeless in Los Angeles, where she wrote her life story stabi- lized by a series of catastrophic blows, fol- lowed by smaller traumatic events, “each one deepening the original wound,” until homelessness became inevitable.

Marin also reported a deeper truth that only he saw with such clarity at the time—a truth of immeasurable importance about a society that produces massive numbers of homeless people. He wrote: “You are struck continually, hearing these stories, by some- thing seemingly unique in American life, the absolute isolation involved. In what other culture would there be such an effort to silence or failure of support from familial, social, or institutional sources?”

This is why Marin insists so strongly that impersonal social workers with their endless, dehumanizing regulations are not the solution to homelessness. Rather, they are only one more facet of the alienation and isolation in American society that reduces vulnerable people to despair.

Peter Marin has been married to Kathryn Marin for his entire life, and the couple has two children. He taught literature at Hofstra University and Los Angeles State College, and was a professor of journalism at USC in Los Angeles and at the University of Santa Barbara. He was a fellow at the presti- gious Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, a think tank run by Robert Hutchins that analyzed major social and political questions in the light of Western history and philosophy.

When he became the director of Pacific High School, a radically experimental high school in the Santa Cruz mountains, Marin believed in freedom and let the stu- dents make the rules for this “school of institutions,” a think tank run by Robert Hutchins that analyzed major social and political questions in the light of Western history and philosophy.

Men in Blue
by Peter Marin

Be good, little darling, or the men in blue some cold night will come seeking you, stamping out your fire, ripping down your tent, tearing all you own in the name of the State. Be good, little darling, or the men in blue, some cold night will come seeking you, trussing up your wrists, twisting back your arm, taking you to prison just for trying to stay warm.

Ark of Loneliness
by Peter Marin

Filing in, one by one, as if into an ark of loneliness, out of the rain, the shelter, its gray emptiness anchored at the bottom by green cots arranged in rows, boots tucked under, men asleep, rocked on the surface of watery dreams by a great storm never to end.

THE BABIES
by Peter Marin

It’s the babies, the babies, the babies—the streets by day the shelter at night and the kids scrubbling and no school and the five of us place to place to place to place hour by hour walking and sitting and waiting to eat. It’s what breaks your heart and your back aches and legs give out one in your arms another on your shoulders two of them tugging at your hands. It’s like a long march a forced journey the Israelites crossing the desert—so hot in the sun you think you’ll faint so cold at dusk you think you’ll die and the shelter miles away and hours before it opens and no sweaters for the kids and all of them crying I want you and you’re always saying no no no no no no so that it gets to be a kind of song one for each you your foot comes down trying for luck not to step on the cracks

Once All of Them Boys
by Peter Marin

Here is the drunk man, here is the one-legged man, here is the man talking to himself in the voice of another, a master. Here is the drugged man, here is the man without legs— four wheels and leathered fists. Here is the naked man in a doorway, here is the huddled man in a womb, here is a bogy man, frightened. Here is a man adrift on a raft, here is a man marooned on an island, here is an infantry-man left to die here is an old man left on an icy floe. Here is a learned man, mindless. Here is a dancing man, lame. Here is a working man, idle. Here is a kind man, gone bad. Here are the men, once all of them boys hopeful of futures, anxious for joys, now adrift in a subway with its dirt and its noise.

GALLUP
by Peter Marin

Where the town stops, my life begins. To the east, low twitl bulbles. To the west, white snowly peaks. In my heart, a vacancy beyond belief.

Not One
by Peter Marin

The poor line the hall on your way to the bathroom. They wait at the foot of the stairs when you go to the mall. They’re in the backseat backing out of the driveway on your way to the store. And they dine beside you on your way to the bathroom. They hold up no signs. And you’re always saying no no no no no no. They never put their hands on you. They keep their eyes shut. They hold up no signs. But crossing the streets you will know them from dreams though their faces turn away. There is not one who does not see you: you must change your life.

The Shelter
by Peter Marin

Women and kids to one side, men to the other, intake workers weeding out the drunks and bums— makes you think of the camps. You been here before? You promise to work? Can you prove who you are? It’s like crossing a border, it’s like entering heaven, as the keepers of the gate, with blank implacable eyes, decide who lives, who dies.
Interview by Terry Messman

**Street Spirit:** You have been involved in homeless activism for nearly 30 years, ever since the massive increase in homelessness in the 1980s. In your experience, is the current level of poverty unprecedented in the United States? And what is your understanding of the relationship between homelessness and poverty?

**Peter Marin:** Yes, it is unprecedented. But I think homelessness is what happens to people when they fall out of poverty. I think it’s very hard for us to understand that, because we do have certain social mechanisms — certain programs like welfare and disability insurance — which are actually, in a way, set up to keep people in poverty, right? You now know that you’re never going to get out of poverty. It’s enough to keep you continuously in poverty until something goes wrong — and then you fall into poverty, and that’s how it’s normally occurs when none of the other programs have worked, or when you’ve come to their end, or when you’ve violated whatever rules there are, and when your money dries up.

**Spirit:** Do you expect that the rates of homelessness and poverty will lessen or increase in the foreseeable future?

**Peter Marin:** It’s impossible in boom times, rents go up, and gentrification occurs. When new buildings start going up, they start tearing down the old parts of cities. It’s when people have more money to spend and invest that the little pockets where the homeless people manage to survive begin to disappear.

**Spirit:** Why do boom times make things worse for people living in poverty?

**Peter Marin:** Because in boom times, rents go up, and gentrification occurs. When new buildings start going up, they start tearing down the old parts of cities. It’s when people have more money to spend and invest that the little pockets where the homeless people manage to survive begin to disappear.

**Spirit:** Newspapers carry cheerful articles in the real estate sections about how rising rents are good news for upper-class homeowners and renters. You’ve written in your book that this is bad news for poor people who end up evicted due to rising rents and gentrification.

**Marin:** That’s right! And this is a very interesting mechanism that I don’t think anybody, including the Obama people, have really started to confront face to face — and that is, as you start to make things better for the middle class, they become worse for the poorest of the poor.

**Spirit:** It’s counterintuitive because people think a rising economy will lift all boats. Why is it that a rising economy for the rich often makes things worse for the poor?

**Marin:** Rents begin to go up and people have more money. This happened many years ago in San Francisco, in Santa Barbara, in Chicago and New York. The skid row parts of the city become valuable as real estate because people are going to build new buildings, tear them down, and put up housing for the well-to-do. And in good years, or boom times, this process speeds up considerably.

**Spirit:** How do you think this affects people who feel they have to invest it somewhere and housing and land are one of the best places to invest it. So they begin to look to those areas for profits — and their profits are really high. But in making those profits, they tear down the parts of the city which belonged to the poor. Also, when people have more money, they begin to move into buildings in the city, they begin to remodel lofts, to build apartments. Even in Harlem, in New York, that’s going on now. And what you find is that the areas which once belonged to the people of different occupations and ethnic backgrounds for long periods of time, are now subject to invasion from outside. You can see that in San Francisco, and in other large cities. All of a sudden, there are posh restaurants where there used to be rundown taverns and places where poor people used to eat or drink, where they used to get haircuts, where they used to play pool, and where they used to live. All of these places vanish completely and cities are quite happy to see them vanish. They encourage this process. I suppose it’s also going on in Oakland, right? This is great for the city. It’s great for young people with money, and this is great for the businesses that appeal to young people with money. The only ones who get caught are the poor people.

**Spirit:** In Oakland, a writer called it "The Tale of Two Cities," with one city for the rich, and an entirely different city for the poor. The wealthy enjoy an economic growth on poor people are left behind.

**Marin:** There are two economies — and this has happened in a way that I think will become more permanent. Theoretically, you once could use the school system to rise up out of one class and into another, but that no longer works — and we can see that in places like Chicago and Atlanta, where there is a lot about the “Super Zips” — the zip codes in which the rich live. What happens in those areas is that the rich subsidize their school system with music programs and arts programs and athletic programs. So it turns out, of course, that the children of the rich have an advantage when they're in public schools, are getting a totally different education than the children of the poor.

**Spirit:** Many people first become involved in fighting against the huge disparity between the rich and the wealthy is going on everywhere, particularly in the early 1980s. It’s now 30 years later. Does it surprise you that homelessness has persist ed so stubbornly and has only grown larger in the last three decades?

**Marin:** No, it is not surprising. Look, years ago, I would go out and lecture about homelessness. People would ask me: What’s going to make it better? I would say, “It’s not going to get better.”

**Spirit:** Why such a gloomy prediction?

**Marin:** Because what’s going to take it to make it better is going to take basically the whole political system to change — which is unlikely. You know how much disability payments are — $800 to $900 a month, maybe, for those who can even qualify. It was that amount 20 years ago.

**Spirit:** Twenty years ago, if you got disabled, the whole purpose of disability benefits was to give you just enough to scrape by on. So you could eat in diners, and get reasonable medical care if you were impoverished. But you could get by. Now, 20 years later, disability payments are exactly the same amount that they were back then. But what is the cost of a room, if there are even any more hotels that happened to all the hotel rooms in the Bay Area?

**Spirit:** The rents skyrocketed in price or the hotels were torn down and gentrified. We’ve seen a massive number of evictions for profit.

**Marin:** Exactly. Exactly. Now, have you heard a local or national politician talk even once about raising disability payments?

**Spirit:** No, the battle recently has been on cuts to benefits even. A few people may oppose cutting them too severely, but that’s about it.

**Marin:** Right, and no one says that the purpose of disability was to make it possible for people to survive without being on the streets, so let’s raise them to the level it was back then.

**Spirit:** That’s right. If rents have tripled and quadrupled, let’s triple or quadruple the benefits, just so people have a chance to remain housed.

**Marin:** Yeah, and this is for people who we know cannot work through no fault of their own. This is for people who maybe have worked 20 years, and are not able to work now! And also, it’s so much harder to get disability because they’ve tightened all the requirements. Now, even when you deserve it, it’s hard to get because they have all these rules.

**Spirit:** I have a friend who is a medical advis er to the disability program, so I hear these things all the time. The rules have tightened up, and what’s going on with disability is going on everywhere. You know the welfare rules. If you have a man in the house, you don’t get welfare!

**Marin:** I don’t think anybody really understands that. The first thing I would do is change the welfare rules so that anyone could get welfare. But welfare is still mostly only for women. There are a few exceptions in a few states where they have juggled the system a little.

**Spirit:** But does anybody understand that the welfare rules destroy the black family because it drives men out of the house and onto the streets just so the women can get money from the government? No, nobody seems to understand that. These things are unconscionable.

**Marin:** When welfare was begun under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the program was for welfare for women, work for men. So we had the work programs of the CCC and the WPA. [The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration were programs launched under Roosevelt’s New Deal to put men back to work during the Depression.]

All the work programs of the 1930s were for men and welfare was for women who they thought at that time should stay in the house. But we don’t have work projects any more, even though we know we have an infrastructure crisis going on in America. But has Obama or anyone else talked about a new federal work program for the unemployed and the homeless? No! So what do men get? They get general relief, which is $90 a month.

**Spirit:** In many areas, they may get general relief or general assistance for only three months out of the year.

**Marin:** So that’s unconscionable! But who confronts any of this? It’s true we have an argument about unemployment, but unemployment is not for people at the bottom of the system who have fallen through the cracks of the system. I don’t usually like to use the word hopeless, because I’m not without hope for the future. But this situation is fucking hopeless. And the politicians who are supposed to deal with it are hopeless.

**Spirit:** In the 1980s, Reagan drastically slashed federal housing programs. Since then, public housing has been cut by every new administration until now it has been decimated. Yet no one is calling for a massive investment in low-income housing.

**Marin:** Let me give you a local example of that. In Santa Barbara, we have a little bit of affordable housing because they make an attempt to produce it, but I think the minimum it costs is $50,000 a unit. It’s not easy to put up affordable housing.

**Spirit:** We build housing, yes, but we know we can’t build enough housing for everybody. So now we have the problem of what to do with everybody else, and yet when they say...
they're going to buy a vehicle and live in it, we tell them they can't.

So all the discussions seem to me absolutely senseless and disgusting because we are not really concerned about people getting off the street and sleeping inside something. Because if we were concerned about that, we'd make laws that permit them to sleep in RVs, and we'd make laws that permit them to put a tent over them. So we've lived somehow where we build a small amount of affordable housing, but we forbid people at night from putting a cardboard box or a tent over themselves. And if the police find it, they rip it up or they tear it down.

Spirit: So even though it is not costing the system anything, they won't let people crawl in a tent or sleep under a box. The police raid and destroy every camp.

Marin: That means the whole debate about housing is an absolute and total lie. It's a lie because the people who are talking about it are not really interested in protecting the poor. They know they're supposed to protect them, but they're not. We have maybe 4,000 to 6,000 homeless people in Santa Barbara County, and we are happy when we manage to get 200 or 300 people off the streets in a year. But that means all the thousands and thousands who are breaking the law every night they're outside on the street. Now, that's not a rational system. That's a crazy system.

So am I right in using the word homelessness is increasing? No. The sad part is that we had Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, and then we've had crap and bullshit in the 80 years since Roosevelt. That's all it's been.

Spirit: What an indictment! Someone needed to say that! We need to begin here, by telling the truth about how federal officials keep stashing public housing. Do you think the U.S. government should play a massive role in subsidizing low-income housing, like it did during the New Deal?

Marin: Absolutely. One of the government's first responsibilities would be to see that there is adequate housing for all of its citizens. Just as one of the other major requirements would be to provide enough food, and adequate education to allowing people to find an appropriate place in the world as adults.

No one should starve. We know that. Right? This is what the government must do. It has a moral responsibility to make sure that the capital is distributed properly.

Spirit: Why is housing the highest priority of all?

Marin: Because it is so necessary for human survival, basically. Abraham Maslow listed the hierarchy of human needs? You begin with what is necessary; then what is deferred, and then what is preferred.

We know that food and housing are the necessary things. If government has any responsibility, it's either to see that people have these necessities, or not to interfere with their creating them. In many places, the government has now made so many rules about what kind of housing you can put up, that if you're going to build poor is so expensive that it has to satisfy zoning regulations everywhere.

Spirit: You said that almost no politicians today has enough courage to even read the newspaper or look at the news any more, because if you do, you're overcome with a set of worries about — not yourself, so much — but the people you love, or the people who will be here after you're dead and gone, and I don't think many people know how to deal with that.

Even when the government is just to occupy a demonstration or a political movement of one kind or another, I don't know who has the courage today to say that they know how to get us out of this fix.

Spirit: How would you explain to a new visitor to our country — someone who knew nothing about us — why the richest nation in the world has a massive problem of poverty and homelessness?

Marin: You know, I think all of this is fairly explainable in terms of our nation's history, and in terms of the Protestant ethic. It's a country that has always been dominated by a particular elite which sets the rules, and which has access to power in a way that other people do not.

What if we looked at America as it were a Latin American country? There are countries in which the rich essentially trades back the presidency every four to eight years, and it makes no difference whether the ruling party is in power, or one of the other parties. The rich get to be rich and the poor are going to be poor because it is kept that way intentionally. I think America is exactly like that.

Spirit: In what ways is modern society just as exactly like that?

Marin: Because both political parties are dominated by people with money. Both parties are dominated by people who are in certain places. Yale or Harvard, the University of Chicago. We have an education system that produces an elite. When the elite people grow up, they may have political differences with one another, and they may argue about a few small things, but they don't argue about turning the system upside down or really changing it.

You know, I taught at those schools as a teacher or a visitor or a teacher. Even when people in power gain access to those schools, I've seen the way these schools take poor young students, and work very hard at making them a part of a particular class to which they're going to belong in the future. And that's the class that maintains power and doesn't rock the boat.

I taught journalism at the University of Southern California, and a student wrote me a paper in her senior year that had to do with her father being a garbage collector. She wrote in the paper, "This is the first time in my four years at USC that I've been willing to tell anybody that my father was a garbage collector." Because the garbage collector knew what's expected of you in that new class. And if you want to make it into that class, then you behave.

Spirit: So you keep your father's employment a hidden, shameful secret.

Marin: Absolutely. It was made clear that several colleges, I was teaching at a college called Warren Wilson College, a little college outside Asheville, North Carolina. In the middle of a talk I was giving — of course, a talk about how the school needed to be changed — a young woman came up to me in tears and said, "I'm from here and I want to tell you that in the three years I've been here, everyone has made me feel like trash."

I agree, and I'll listen to the ways it feels when you are at one of those good schools without the social background that is required to belong there. I think that goes back in time in a way that nobody notices it. When I went to Swarthmore College, I was led to believe that I was better than other people. I knew we...
Street Spirit Interview with Peter Marin

“Treating people as if they were exiles, worthless and animals is immoral. To not help them immediately is immoral. The deepest immorality is that if you’re not going to help people, you have absolutely no right to punh them.”

from page 11

SPECIAL, and special, of course, means bet- ter. And if you go directly into your pro- fession and become a lawyer or a doctor or a teacher, you become that knowing you are helping people who are your infe- riors. No one will ever put it that way, but I don’t think you can avoid that feeling.

That was back in the days when I got the opportunity to knock all the way with some of the homeless men who traveled on the trains, and rode on them out to California. I was out here in California when seasonal labor was gained to bring the crops in and the homeless men. The crop-picking was done by laborers who rode up and down the West Coast on freight trains. It was harvest west which was done by men who traveled on the trains, helped to pick the crops, and then moved east again follow the grain. Men and women rode on the trains and ended up in the hobo jungles and free of the oppressive labor that has never changed. People who live in large cities begin to see homeless people as nuisances. These people don’t like to move. They don’t like being asked for money. They don’t understand the homeless as being of the right to take care of themselves. People just naturally say, “We were poor once.”

Marin: When I taught at the university here [UC Santa Barbara] and I would have my stu- dents go out and spend time with the home- less, they would refuse to talk about the way the homeless smelled, and how they feared them. Remember, these are people who are like outlaws. We look at them and we know they are not safe, according to any of the rules of the rest of us believe.

It’s very hard to get people to accept homeless people as “us.” The homeless look differently and they live differ- ently. People are really afraid of them. They walk by them or they see them camping in their neighborhoods. And everybody is nervous about them. They actually make us nervous because they exist in a different reality. When people are reduced to living on the streets, they become “other.”

And it may just be visual. But there’s also a sense of capacity to survive, the capacity to take risks, had nothing to do with the class that people naturally think that people who are homeless people.

I believe that people who are on the mar- ket for the first time, they knew they’d ever been poor. Do you see that? There are a lot of people in white to help them.

Protestants, but Catholics. The Catholics knew they’d ever been poor. Do you see that? There are a lot of people in white to help them. The Coats by Peter Marin

Let each man with two cents
explain to the mirror
why God should not punish him
like others have none —
freely, at once, antibody falling,
and those without coats
huddled on city corners
or crumpled in doorways
or standing, hands over
at the concert-hall door.
 Didn’t they fight your wars?
Didn’t they pave your roads?
Didn’t they tend you gently
when injured at the hospital
you ached for human touch.
Night after terrible night,
they shine themselves away
in dumpsters, in burnt buildings,
in the back seats of junked cars
on the far edge of your cities.
You crowd your bedrooms in the dark,
you huddle under your silk sheets,
unseen, they bend over each sleeper
and touch with bloodied palms
this face, that breast,
given the task by a god
why God should not punish him
like others have none —
freely, at once, antibody falling,
and those without coats
huddled on city corners
or crumpled in doorways
or standing, hands over
at the concert-hall door.

Anarchists are the right to
keep the town pretty and to keep them-
away so they don’t have to look at them
any more. That’s the sense that I get in my
own town, Santa Barbara. The attempt to con-
quer the homeless is really an attempt to
preserve the aesthetic middle-class society,
to keep the town pretty and to keep them-
selves safe. Yet it is deeply immoral.

Spirit: Why do you say it is deeply immoral?

Marin: Because if you look at it clear-
ly, treating people as if they are exiles,
worthless, and animals, is immoral. To
not help them immediately is immoral. From
my point of view, the deepest immorality
is that if you’re not going to help people, you
have absolutely no right to punish them for
what they’ve done.

People who live in large cities begin to see homeless people as nuisances.

Spirit: In your article, “The Moral
Beauty of Acts of Goodness and Justice,”
you described meeting people in hobo
jungles who shared food and clothing.
You write, “It’s hard to imagine a ma-
ner of life that we find all around us. We’ve
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Street Spirit Interview with Peter Marin

“The liberal politicians are just unspeakably awful because they worry more about their careers than they do about the poor.”

This was a big thing if you were raised Jewish like I was. This is what went into my mind at the time: “We were poor, we were poor, we were poor.” So be nice to poor people, I knew you could count on your neighbors, so I knew the people on the street who had nothing were not unlike my grandfather. I knew in my bones, so there was not an abyss between me and the poor.

Spirit: Well, that brings up a crucial point. Nearly all elected officials in the U.S. are well-off or outright rich. Do you think that helps explain their lack of comp- passion? Is it one reason why they pass laws that banish the poorest citizens?

Marin: What class consciousness real- ly means is that there is an abyss between you and people unlike you.

There are several levels to this. One is that there are people who don’t want our help, or we think they don’t want our help, because they are drunks and don’t want to be sober, or they are homeless and they don’t want to apply for housing, or they are ex-wardens who can’t talk to social workers because that schoolteacher tone of voice which you sometimes hear from social workers drives them up the wall, they stalk them out of the office. Some veterans have seen too much of death to really partake in the giggling, exhausting, bureaucratic rigmarole of the shelter system.

One of the arguments is that they don’t want help and yet, if we just leave them alone, they will ruin the street in their bad behavior. So the argument is that if we don’t destroy those homeless camps, we’ll be “enabling” them to go on being homeless. We should banish the word “enabling” from the language.

So let’s do everyone a favor, and if we destroy their camps, then they will have no place to go and they will have to come in and talk to social workers and go into recovery programs. That’s one theory. The other is the aesthetic notion.

In my town, the little town of Santa Barbara, the argument is that we can’t afford to have homeless people on the streets. They are keeping our downtown clean, attractive downtown with really good business, but they are nervous about their futures and their livelihoods, because life is not so easy for them either. They are not giant corpora- tions. I don’t want to defend them, but my point is that these politicians who vote to banish the poor are the ones who are the distorting factor.

Merchants are always going to do what these merchants do. It comes with the ter- ritory of running a business, but I don’t want a town that might affect their busi- ness. I don’t think the homeless affect their business, but they are nervous about their futures and their livelihoods, because life is not so easy for them either. They are not giant corpora- tions. I don’t want to defend them, but my point is that these politicians who vote to banish the poor are the ones who are the distorting factor.

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Street Spirit Interview with Peter Marin

Marin: Absolutely. I used to stay in shelters when I was a kid. They take your clothes, give you pajamas, turn the lights out at 8 at night. At 6 in the morning they wake you up, and no matter what the weather is, you have to go back out for the day, even if it’s pouring down rain — and that’s it. So I know something about being housed. And I’ve had to sleep under a tree for one of them, if I had a choice.

Spirit: So a large part of the resistance to living in shelters has to do with their freedom.

Marin: We have a culture which has largely lost any sense of the value of freedom, or being left alone, or living your life on your own terms. That they have no respect for, as if it is a good thing. So they don’t understand that certain people, among them the younger generation, actually value the notion in the value of being left alone, or living your life on your own terms, as opposed to the help of the price of institutionalization.

I think the point is that some people think that there is a complacent tradition, which is an adventurist, inward tradition. I think that some homeless people have more of that than we think. If one of the things you want to see is a condition of the time in finding companies. They may be a little strange and have a skewed way of seeing things, but many of them see the world on their own terms, as if they were seeing it for the very first time.

It is the point that they preserve some of that and don’t lose it. And there is something terrifying in the fact that the rest of us don’t understand that. They preserve life as it is freely lived, outside institutions.

But I don’t want to romanticize homelessness. I think a lot of what we’re talking about is the tremendous unhappiness where people are reduced, pushed out of society almost like animals. But part of our animal nature is to think that something good will come back stronger than before.

I think true advocates are speaking for all the people who are exhausted and helpless who want to clean up the slums, and they wanted to do it for the same reasons: It was hygienic, it was modern and it was efficient. Whether they did it out of a desire to help, a genuine empathy for the poor is another question entirely. I would say the distinctions we provide the services that people are protecting rights is this: Service providers are dealing with social problems and the freedom-fighters are dealing with individuals.

Spirit: So the people trying to protect human rights are dealing with the individual cases, whereas the community providers are dealing with the system?

Marin: Yes, that’s just what I think. I think that’s always the case. I think that what I see as this whole movement is a throwback to the 1960s with young people doing the Freedom Riders in the South during the Civil Rights era when they were doing the Freedom Rides, they had on their minds were their lives were at stake and the narrow and fatuous. They were thinking of people.

So I think true advocates are speaking for all the people. I think service providers are the people who sit across the desk from you, whether they work for the state or a private agency.

Spirit: You warn against lumping millions of people into the one catch-all category of homeless. There are many different kinds of people who go into different kinds of departments. What are some of the mistakes of being homeless?

Marin: It’s one of the strangest things in the world to be in a room full of homeless people, and to see that whatever you are thinking about homelessness, you see only any point only to some of them. For instance, the people living at the Albany Bulb are only a particular segment of the homeless population — the freedom-fighters or whatever we want to call them.

First of all, there’s women with kids. The welfare rules are such with women and kids that it’s immediate. If a woman is on the streets, they don’t necessarily come off the street if they are an immediate threat to themselves or others. Otherwise, if they’re just hungry or ill or clothed or destitute on the streets, they don’t necessarily come with assistance. So they’re on the streets, more and more.

Then, of course, we have military vet groups. There are people who’ve been in war, who’ve been in battle.

The number of vets on the streets varies from time to time depending where we are. The number of Koreans who’ve had to die in their 50s, so all of the Second World War vets are gone, many of the Korean vets are gone, and we’re beginning to see some in Vietnam.

Now, we’re getting the vets coming back from Iraq and some of them are ending up on the streets.

Spirit: That’s the point where the war went wrong.

Marin: At one point, I remember seeing the figures from our area that, in the general population, one out of every nine males are veterans. But if you go to the streets, one out of every two men have seen service in a war. So that’s rather an astonishing number of people who have seen battle and what we now call post-traumatic stress drive people into the streets.

We have fewer and fewer services for men than for women, and also the shelter services for men require such a level of humiliation that men just say, “screw it,” and don’t accept the help that they’re offered because it’s so bad it comes. So we have men who receive less help than women, who come from broken marriages, who have lost their jobs, who have made mistakes, and have few resources, so you get a lot of them on the streets.

These are guys who may be badly socialized and may have drugs, loves, drug usage, drop-outs, social drop-outs of all kinds, and a certain number of men for whom the German word “wanderlust” applies. That’s people who can’t stay in one place or stick to one job for a long period of time. I know a lot of guys like that. They are very hard workers, but they can work for a week and that’s it. And they’re out the door because they can’t do the same job over and over again.

They’re different denizens. And then there are what in my town we call “the travelers.” The young kids who are still out there who just sort of take off, and you see them down the street in the different groups, playing the guitar or asking for money. They just move from town to town.

A lot of them are veterans by choice or by necessity, not by their own family care system, because they come out of that system and there’s no place to go and they’re not fit for doing anything, and somehow they get back on the streets.

And then there are the drunks. God help them. The drunks sort of cut across all categories, but there are people who are just so, there’s no job they can’t get, or don’t want jobs, and just end up end up on the streets and live on the street. There’s a sort of familiar curve which ends badly.
ign in the trailers, often none at all. And even if there was food, it was food that who have stayed in the trailers are not Bulb resid- dants, but are from the city streets.

People are not even permitted to bring food into the shelter. Kim, a young woman who has special dietary restric- tions, managed to bring in what she need- ed, but was forced to hide in a dark corner to have it in the shelter.

Two men were banned from the shelter after urinating in a garbage can. One can hardly imagine the “community” to which people who have stayed in the trailers and Bulb resi- dents, but are from the city streets.

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from page 1

Council of Elders was instituted when 23 elders gathered from all of these various movements — the farm workers movement, the labor movement, the cultural movements of the 1960s and Dr. King’s movement.

We organized in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the National Council of Elders made this statement as part of the Greensboro declaration: “We will undertake with you the work that we have been called for, doing everything in our power to bring a greater measure of justice, equality, and peace to our country and to the world.”

The National Council of Elders will have hearing sessions around the nation this year, in 2014, wherever elders are gathered. Elders have formed themselves into an organization to listen. We will listen to the community, listen to the cries of our people, to the concerns of our people, to the pains and suffering of our people, so that we can get some understanding of how we can provide skills and tools for our young people to manage in this world today. We elders have a very special responsibility.

I began my own personal journey as a young man back in 1950, before the movement of Dr. King and Rosa Parks, when a group of young people, myself included, went to Washington, D.C., the summer after we graduated from high school, and began to learn and practice nonviolence as we tried to desegregate Washington, D.C. In 1950, Washington, D.C., was segregated into white and black lunch counters and swimming pools and other places.

Recently, someone asked me what inspired me to get engaged in the work for justice. I answered that I was not inspired, I was propelled, I was compelled because I was born in 1932 in the midst of the Depression. I grew up in segregation in northern Ohio, with segregated white lunch counters and schools. And people didn’t know, don’t want to hear, what it was like for Blacks to live in the South. I watched my parents scrape to provide for the family. They worked several jobs just for us. They hid what we had from the social service case workers.

I know what it was like, it wasn’t nice for us at all. It wasn’t right or pretty, it wasn’t fair at all. I had my suitcase to talk to, she’d listen and I’d feel better. She went through it too. You’ve got to live it to understand.

In His Steps by Johna Wilcoxen

The single criterion for judgment offered by Jesus in his account of the World’s Final judgment is our behavior toward the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the homeless, the sick.

Jesus we pray for this frail, elderly woman, age 92, who lives in fear of eviction by a wealthy landlord. As we pray that the path to prosperity is not the highway to homelessness, I remember the way you have dreams. Let us all share the M.L.K., Jr. dream because although we have a River of Tears let us not have another year of darkness, homelessness, or hunger.

The Eye of God is Watching. What Will He See?

by James E. McGee

We call it America, the beautiful. Beauty it is, but things that have happened in the past are definitely not beautiful.

How many men have fallen because of their color and their beliefs? We think of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy and many others who died because they were Black or because of the way they dressed.

Martin Luther King and Malcolm X championed the cause for Racial Justice. And the Kennedy brothers were killed because of their supportive stands. Rosa Parks supported Equal Rights in riding a public bus. And Martin Monroe died because of her association with the Kennedy brothers.

Many more Black men, women and children died because of the color of their skin. And we ask Why they DIED?!!

You and We get our Heaven and Hell Right here on Earth. God Bless Us All.