Jordan Downs Residents Continue to Call on Housing Authority to Address Toxic Lands

WRITTEN BY THELMY PEREZ

On Valentine’s Day, Jordan Downs residents staged a press conference and action at the walls of the contaminated site inside their community. Since September 2013, residents have asked the Housing Authority (HACLA) for transparency regarding the contamination at Jordan Downs and the health risks of exposure to the toxins that are known to exist there. HACLA has responded by telling residents that “soil at the site contains low levels of materials such as lead” and that “there is currently no risk to residents.”

However, HACLA’s own environmental studies found lead at levels as high as 22,000 mg/kg, dramatically higher than the State of California’s 80 ppm standard. Additionally, HACLA’s own environmental consultant, hired specifically to determine the site’s health risks to humans determined that “the site does pose an unacceptable risk to residential users, due to lead and Aroclor-1254 in the soil matrix and naphthalene in the soil vapor.”

Los residentes de Jordan Downs siguen pidiéndole a la Autoridad de Vivienda a hacer frente a las toxinas en la comunidad.

ESCRITO POR THELMY PEREZ

(In)Justice Realignment?: As Lee Baca resigns, questions around Sheriff violence and realignment continue to loom

WRITTEN BY JAS WADE

It has been nearly five years since federal judges ordered California to reduce its prison population, also known as realignment. The federal mandate of California prisons followed decades and generations of violence against people incarcerated in state prisons including death, deficient health care, malnutrition by way of atrocious and infrequent food provisions, involuntary sterilizations, sexual abuse and the general terror faced by many of our loved ones incarcerated in state prisons and jails. In fact, as many of us remember, the courage of California’s Pelican Bay Hunger Strikers brought exposure to the extreme violence and human rights abuses taking place at the hands of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). The conditions inside of prison walls are beyond horrific and a clear demonstration of state violence.

The three federal judges overseeing realignment are mandating that California prisons, which now hold 118,435 inmates, shed 6,271 of them and get within 137.5% of design capacity for the state’s 34 facilities. This clearly shows the current extreme overcrowding in the state’s prisons as well as the extreme policing and criminalization of our communities at a time when crime rates have been decreasing for years. The number of prisoners affected by realignment does not include federal prisons, county jails, juvenile detention centers or any of the private prisons California is funding in Arizona, Oklahoma and Mississippi. Governor Brown’s administration has leisurely pursued a realignment policy for nearly two years now that is nowhere near in compliance with the court’s order – going so far as to take their protest to the U.S Supreme Court twice and losing in a 5-4 decision in 2011.
Housing Watch

WRITTEN BY STEVE DIAZ AND THELMY PEREZ

HACLA Commission Changes

Every time there is a Mayoral change, it is often followed by a change in City Commissioners. Mayor Garcetti has been gradually announcing new candidates for each of the City’s Commissions and recently nominated several people to the Commission for the City’s Housing Authority. In January, the City Council approved Maria “Lou” Calanché and Shane Murphy Goldsmith as city wide representatives and Daria Nunez as a resident representative. These Commission appointments are significant to tenants and those concerned about the human right to housing since the Housing Authority oversees more than 6,500 units of public housing units and over 47,000 Section 8 vouchers in the City of Los Angeles. Also, the LA Human Right to Housing Collective has for many years worked to increase accountability and transparency within the Housing Authority, and the Commissioners are crucial to that process.

So who are the new Commissioners?

Shane Murphy Goldsmith is the President and CEO of Liberty Hill Foundation, a foundation that supports the work of many community-based organizations throughout Southern California. Before working with Liberty Hill, among other places, Shane worked as a deputy in the office of then-Councilmember Garcetti. Shane Murphy Goldsmith is a local nonprofit housing developer.

Maria “Lou” Calanché has been working with tenants from public housing the majority of her life. Lou was born and raised in the Ramona Gardens public housing community in Boyle Heights and since 2007 has been working on to improve the quality of life for families in that same community. She helped create an organization called Legacy LA, which transformed an old armory into a youth center and has been activity involved in the LA Human Right to Housing Collective over the years.

Daria Nuñez has been a resident of Pico Gardens for 26 years. She is an active member of the Dolores Mission Jesuit Parish and Proyecto Pastoral, serving on various committees like the Safe Passage initiative, which promotes safety for children going to and from school, and “Base Communities.” Where residents see, reflect and take action on issues affecting their community. Ms. Nuñez is also a board member of PICO affiliate, LA Voice, whose mission is to transform LA into a city that reflects the human dignity of all communities, especially those in greatest need. In 2010, Ms. Nuñez co-founded a community led initiative called “Safe Summer, Safe Youth,” which employed 10 youth and served more than 75 youth from Pico Gardens through an 8 week summer enrichment program in response to cuts in LAUSD.

These changes could be critically important in ensuring tenant voices and demands will be heard and responded to by the Housing Authority’s Commission and staff, yet nothing is guaranteed. Tenants active in the Housing Collective will be working diligently to ensure positive changes are implemented by the new Commission.

~ Honoring Black History Month ~

“Choosing love we also choose to live in community and that means we do not have to change by ourselves. The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, move against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others.”

- bell hooks

La Vivienda En Vela

ESCRITO POR STEVE DIAZ | TRADUCIDO POR THELMY PEREZ

Cambios a la Comisión de HACLA

Cada vez que hay un cambio de alcaldía, a menudo es seguido por un cambio encomisionarios de la ciudad. El alcalde Garcetti ha anunciando, poco a poco, los nuevos candidatos para cada una de las Comisiones de la Ciudad y recientemente nomino a varias personas a la Comisión para la Autoridad de Vivienda de la Ciudad. En enero, el ayuntamiento aprobó Maria “Lou” Calanché y Shane Murphy Goldsmith como representantes de toda la ciudad y a Daria Nuñez como representante de los residentes.

Estos nombramientos de la Comisión son significativos para los inquilinos y aquellos preocupados por el derecho humano a la vivienda ya que la Autoridad de Vivienda supervisa más de 500 unidades de viviendas públicas y más de 47.000 cupones de Sección 8 en la ciudad de Los Angeles. Asimismo, la Colectiva Pro el Derecho Humano a la Vivienda, que trabaja durante muchos años para aumentar la responsabilidad y la transparencia dentro de la Autoridad de la Vivienda, y los miembros de la Comisión son cruciales para este proceso.

¿Quiénes son los nuevos comisarios?

Shane Murphy Goldsmith es Presidente y CEO de Liberty Hill Foundation, una fundación que apoya el trabajo de muchas organizaciones comunitarias en todo el sur de California. Antes de trabajar con Liberty Hill, entre otros lugares, Shane trabajó como subdirector en la oficina del entonces Concejel Garcetti y con una organización sin fines de lucro de desarrollo de viviendas económicas.

Maria “Lou” Calanche ha estado trabajando con los inquilinos de vivienda pública por lamayoría de su vida. Lou nació y se creó en la comunidad de vivienda pública Ramona Gardens en Boyle Heights y desde 2007 ha trabajado en mejorar la calidad de vida de las familias en la misma comunidad. Ella ayudó a crear una organización llamada Legacy LA, que transformó una antigua armería en un centro juvenil y ha estado involucrada activamente con la Colectiva Pro el Derecho Humano a la Vivienda con los años.

Daria Nuñez ha sido residente de Pico Gardens por 26 años. Ella es miembro activo de la parroquia jesuita Dolores Misión y Proyecto Pastoral, sirviendo en varios comités, como la iniciativa de Camino Seguro, que promueve la seguridad de los niños que van a la escuela, y “comunidades de base” donde los residentes ven, reflexionan y tomar acción sobre cuestiones que afectan a su comunidad.

Sra. Nuñez también es miembro de la junta directiva del filiado de PICO, LA Voice, cuya misión es transformar LA en una ciudad que refleja la dignidad humana de todas las comunidades, especialmente esas más necesitadas. En 2010, la Sra. Nuñez co-fundió una iniciativa comunitaria llamada “Verano Seguro, Juventud Segura”, que empleaba a 10 jóvenes y atendió a más de 75 jóvenes de Pico Gardens a través de un programa de verano de 8 semanas de enriquecimiento como respuesta a los recortes en el LAUSD.

Estos cambios podrían ser de importancia crítica para asegurar que las voces y demandas de los inquilinos serán escuchadas y respondidas por la Comisión y el personal de la Autoridad de la Vivienda, sin embargo, nada está garantizado. Los inquilinos que trabajan en la Colectiva de Vivienda estarán trabajando diligentemente para asegurar que cambios positivos sean implementados por la nueva Comisión.
Affordability of Public Housing Under Attack

WRITTEN BY THELMY PEREZ

LA might just have one of the nation’s fiercest public housing resident movements ever. Over the past couple of years alone, the Housing Collective’s public housing tenant committee has grown to include 9 of 14 public housing communities who work together to address systemic issues and housing policies stemming from the City’s Housing Authority (HACLA). Over the last few months, the Community Connection has reported about the proposed privatization of Jordan Downs and HACLA’s underhanded attempts to keep the public in the dark about the nature and extent of the contamination in the community. Meanwhile, another harmful HACLA policy has been proposed and must be addressed.

At January’s monthly HACLA Commissioners meeting, CEO Doug Guthrie nonchalantly announced that instead of raising public housing flat rents (set rents that do not fluctuate with a family’s change in income) by the 3% approved by the commission for 2014, LA’s public housing rents will be raised to 86% of LA’s fair market rents as early as June 2014. Currently, the flat rent for a 1 bedroom public housing unit is $664, far below LA’s average market rent for a comparable unit. LA’s fair market rent for a 1 bedroom apartment is, in fact, $1,083, then LA’s public housing flat rent for a 1 bedroom would skyrocket to $866, leaving many families unable to afford their homes as soon as June. Due to the utter lack of information from HACLA regarding how much rents will actually increase in June, the Collective can only speculate about the actual impact to families this increase will have.

“What we can do is begin organizing to inform and activate more residents to stop this unfair increase,” said Daisy, resident of Mar Vista Gardens. “This could have been the largest ever resident opposition. Yet the only outreach meetings to residents or non-profit organizations and collaboratives was when HACLA was ready to approve the plan. How can we trust that HACLA will act in the best interest of those families who cannot afford it?”

The announcement raises several questions, such as who opposed the plan? County Supervisors believed there was too much opposition to the plan. The announcement raises several questions, such as who opposed the plan? County Supervisors believed there was too much opposition to the plan. The announce...
Know Your Rights: Self-Defense Against Police Attack

WRITTEN BY JOHN RAPHLING

“If a [police] officer uses unreasonable or excessive force while arresting or detaining a person, that person may lawfully use reasonable force to defend himself.” (CalCrim 2670) This statement, from the standard instructions given to juries in our courts, is the law here in California. If a police officer attacks us, using unreasonable force, even if he has the right to arrest us, we can fight back, legally. We have the right to defend our bodily integrity, even from a police officer.*

Of course, as with any of our dealings with police, it is never as simple as what the law claims to allow. First of all, we have a legal requirement, under Penal Code section 834a, to submit to an arrest. But, if the arrest is unjustified, it is not a crime to resist or refuse to submit to that arrest -- as long as we don’t resist with physical force. An unlawful arrest, one in which the officer doesn’t have a good reason (probable cause) to arrest us, does not give us the right to physically fight back.

In reality, we may not know whether or not the officer has probable cause to arrest, even if we have done nothing wrong. Police have probable cause if they reasonably think you did something criminal or if someone told them that you committed a crime. It is generally safer to cooperate with arrest, while firmly asserting your rights (“I do not consent to a search of my person or property; I do not give up my right to remain silent and will not speak to law enforcement.”), and sort out the legalities in court.

However, if the officer uses unnecessary force in the course of detaining or arresting us, we may respond with physical force. As with the right to self-defense against a non-police officer, our force has to be proportionate. If the officer pushes us, we don’t then have the right to break his skull with a crowbar. We can push back if necessary to defend ourselves.

The difficulty is determining what force used by a police officer is unnecessary or excessive. Police have legal authority to use force needed to make an arrest. So, if we start struggling first, they have the right to use physical force to control us. Their force has to be reasonable to the amount of resistance. If we push a police officer away, they don’t have the right to shoot us. But, they do have the right to overcome our resistance, and they are very good at exaggerating the amount of resistance we put up in order to justify their violence. Practically speaking, if we start the fighting, they will probably get away with just about any violence they do to us.

If police are using physical force, even that we believe is excessive, it is best not to give them the excuse to seriously injure or even kill us by fighting them. Instead, we should look out for each other, observe and film police violence, report it immediately to LA CAN or other organizations concerned with police accountability and violence, file complaints and be willing to go to court to defend our brothers and sisters.

Some police violence, though, is unquestionably excessive, and likely to cause serious injury or death. We can’t wait around for the courts to sort out the legalities of an extremely violent attack. In those situations, we have to fight back to defend ourselves. We have that right. And, just as if the attacker were a regular civilian, we have the right to defend each other.


Disclaimer: This column provides a very general and incomplete explanation of basic legal principles, and may not apply to the specific facts of your case. Please consult an attorney concerning you particular situation.
COMMUNITY HEALTH

To Your Health:  
Baking Soda  
WRITTEN BY CARMEN VEGA

That good ol’ leavening agent that mom used for baking has a multiple uses for our health and around the house. I remembered using baking soda as a mouth cleanser and my mom saying, “Gargle with Sodium Bicarbonate!” Recently I had an instinct to research other Baking Soda remedies and uses, and I discovered that it has many useful applications.

So after a recent visit to the dentist, I got the little orange box at my favorite bargain spot, the 99¢ Store. I always prefer more natural measures and non-toxic alternatives. I realized after I began to brush with Baking Soda that it was extremely freshening. Sores went away and, as I continued to use a small amount of it before my regular brushing, I noticed plaque disappearing as well.

Baking soda regulates pH balance - neutralizing acidity and balancing alkaline. It makes for a great gargle to prevent or relieve sore throats associated with a cold or flu. I also discovered that mixing 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda in an 8 oz. cup of water can help reduce inflammation (from arthritis, gout, fibromyalgia, and other diseases) in the body.

There are a myriad of uses as a deodorizing agent for the body and the home. It can be used to deodorize under arms and to eliminate fungus such as athlete’s foot. Around the house, it can be used as a scouring agent to clean pots and pans, and even to clean dishes. It can also eliminate odor in your refrigerator.

Baking Soda, or sodium bicarbonate, is a leavening agent used to make the dough rise (as it were). So, if we can eat it, we can be sure that when using it to clean it will not leave toxic residues or fumes like other cleaning items.

As always, do your research and/or consult with a health practitioner before using any alternative remedies.

For more information on the many uses of Baking Soda:
http://www.naturalnews.com/036960_gout_arthritis_home_remedies.html*
http://www.care2.com/greenliving/51-fantastic-uses-for-baking-soda.html#ixzz2sKHxeELa

Pop Up Market Dishes:  
Cauliflower “Mashed Potatoes” 
WRITTEN BY SEAN GREGORY

Every Wednesday from 1pm - 3pm LA CAN sells local, organic fruits and vegetables at the James Slauson Park Community Center at Pueblo Del Rio (53rd and Compton). Here is an easy and tasty recipe for Cauliflower “Mashed Potatoes,” which can be made with the fresh produce we sell.

Ingredients:
1 head of cauliflower  
3 tablespoons milk  
1 tablespoon butter  
2 tablespoons light sour cream  
1/4 teaspoon garlic salt/freshly ground black pepper

Directions:
1. Separate the cauliflower into florets and chop the core finely.
2. Bring about 1 cup of water to a simmer in a pot, then add the cauliflower. Cover and turn the heat to medium. Cook the cauliflower for 12-15 minutes or until very tender.
3. Drain and discard all of the water (the drier the cauliflower is the better) and add the milk, butter, sour cream, salt and pepper and mash with a masher until it looks like “mashed potatoes.” Top with chives.

Los Platos del Mercado:  
“Puré de Papas” de Coliflor  
ESCRITO POR SEAN GREGORY

Cada miércoles de 1pm -3pm LA CAN vende frutas y verduras orgánicas y locales en el Centro Comunitario del Parque James Slauson en Pueblo Del Rio (53rd and Compton). Aquí es una receta fácil y sabrosa para “Puré de Papas” de Coliflor, que se pueden hacer con los productos frescos que vendemos.

Ingredientes:
1 cabeza de coliflor  
3 cucharadas de leche  
1 cucharada de mantequilla  
2 cucharadas de crema agria  
1/4 cucharadita de sal de ajo / pimienta recién molida negro

Instrucciones:
1. Separa la coliflor en ramitos y picar finamente el núcleo.
2. Traiga aproximadamente 1 taza de agua a fuego lento en una olla, agregue el coliflor. Tape y baje el fuego a medio. Cocer la coliflor durante 12-15 minutos o hasta que esté tierna.
3. Escurrir y tirar toda el agua (el más seco de la coliflor es el mejor) y agregue la leche, la mantequilla, la crema agria, la sal y la pimienta y puré con un machacador hasta que quede como “puré de papas.” Añade el cebollino en la parte superior.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION  |  FEB - MAR 2014

THE VOICE, THE PULSE, OF OUR VILLAGE
During Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Weekend, Los Angeles
Joined Cities throughout the Western Region to Demand
the Protection of Civil Rights for Everyone and Highlight
the Homeless Bill of Rights

WRITTEN BY GENERAL DOGON

On Saturday, January 18th community-based organizations, activists, students, friends, children, homeless folks and tourists from around the world convened in Venice Beach to promote civil rights, call for a Homeless Bill of Rights, and to demonstrate that public space can be shared by everyone, not just the privileged. The purpose was to not only commemorate the spirit and legacy of Dr. King, but to continue the legacy by fighting for a statewide homeless bill of rights and standing up against the unjust laws criminalizing homelessness and extreme poverty in Los Angeles.

The Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) coordinated a dozen similar events on January 17 through 19 and is leading efforts to pass Homeless Bills of Rights that establish: (1) the Right to move freely, rest, sleep, and pray in public spaces; (2) the Right to occupy a vehicle; (3) the Right to serve and eat food in public; (4) the Right to legal counsel for infractions; and (5) the Right to 24/7 access to existing public hygiene facilities.

While the ultimate solution to homelessness is safe and affordable housing, housing and food costs are still far out of reach for many of the 39 million people living in poverty in America today. Laws and police practices that criminalize basic life sustaining activities such as lying down to rest, sitting on benches, sharing food, sleeping in legally parked cars, and simply moving through public spaces are a threat to human rights for all.

Last year, a California Homeless Bill of Rights was introduced (Assembly Bill 5, Ammiano) and passed through the Assembly’s Judiciary Committee, but ultimately stalled in the Appropriations Committee. Momentum is building across the country to protect the human rights of the most poor, who have been increasingly criminalized over the past decade for basic life-sustaining activities, as Bills of Rights have passed in Connecticut, Illinois and Rhode Island. Supporters declared that, despite crime being down in Venice and along the boardwalk, the Venice Beach LAPD detail would be increasing policing in the area to end curfews, beach and boardwalk closures, restricted access to public restrooms, illegal seizures of personal property, and over-regulation of vendors and free speech activities on the Boardwalk. Dozens of people gathered near Rose Avenue on the Boardwalk the morning of January 18th, with the weather near perfect, to exercise our right to share and eat food and collect signatures in support of a Homeless Bill of Rights and against the current nighttime closure of the beach and boardwalk in Venice. The reception was overwhelmingly positive, with vendors and performers hanging up signs in support and hundreds of people signing the petitions.

The weekend’s collective actions ended on Sunday morning with a rally in front of LAPD’s substation between Venice Beach and Boardwalk. Supporters gathered to the MLK Day action by performing a flash mob to the tune of Wild Cherry’s Play That Funky Music: White Boy, called We Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere Rich Boys, signifying the unjust calls for more police and enforcement by wealthy residents and businesses in Venice, Downtown LA, and other gentrifying neighborhoods. Speakers again shared their personal experiences, their commitment to civil rights, and other thoughts that strengthened the collective spirit and ensured that everyone understood the struggle continues after the weekend of actions.

One Homeless Bill of Rights supporter who goes by the nickname “Green Eyes” shared, “I loved this event. We did a great job because people all around Venice were coming up to me asking what we were doing and then all agreeing they were doing a good thing. But I feel we still need more actions like this until we get real change.” The growing coalition working to protect and promote civil rights and access to public space in Los Angeles agrees.

Disappointingly, but not surprisingly, the City of Los Angeles responded to the MLK Day actions with more enforcement and criminalization of homeless people in Venice. For example, no trespassing signs were posted in Windward Circle and those who had remained there after the weekend had their belongings illegally destroyed, and some were cited and threatened with arrest. A week later, Councilmember Bonin announced that, despite crime being down in Venice and Downtown LA, and other gentrifying neighborhoods, he would increase police presence in the area to “end and resist the current brutal and discriminatory policies and practices of the City of LA. Los Angeles Homeless Bill of Rights supporters meet monthly and everyone is welcome to join in the fight to bring equal rights to everyone, not just the privileged.

Monthly meetings are held on the 1st Saturday of each month at 10:00 AM at Chuco’s Justice Center (1137 E. Redondo Blvd, Inglewood CA 90302). For more information call LA CAN @ 213-228-0024 or email Eric Ares at erica@camgress.org.

The Superbroke Brass and Tin and Strings Electric Marching Band join Homeless Bill of Rights supporters for a Venice Boardwalk Second Line parade.

“We who in engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Growing Justice: Residents Plant New Garden at Star Apartments

WRITTEN BY A.M.

At this moment, there are organic seeds underneath the soil of the Star Apartments Garden. On January 24, numerous Downtown organizers and residents came together in order to improve their environment. LA CAN collaborated with Skid Row Housing Trust and other members of the Skid Row Garden Council to have this beautiful edible result. We are slowly growing out of being dependent on supermarkets.

That night the fourth quarter moon rose, which has a decreased gravitational pull – this is best time to cultivate, harvest, transplant and prune. We planted various herbs such as sage, lavender, thyme, basil, oregano, and rosemary. These all can be used for aroma therapy teas to enrich ourselves and our community.

Los Angeles resident Thomas Ozeki described that he is an experienced gardener and came because he was curious and wanted to share his knowledge. Another Garden Council and LA CAN member, Marina Gonzales, said she wanted to learn more deeply how to work with the land. She wants to see every urban environment produce healthy options as well as understand the cultivation process.

LA CAN and Skid Row Housing Trust believe this and other community gardens can contribute to a healthier lifestyle and help create habitats for native birds and insects. Green spaces remove carbon dioxide from the environment and add oxygen. Their leaf surfaces can also trap as much as 85 percent of particulates in the air. Along with architectural enhancement, it can significantly reduce surface temperature as well. The Star Apartments has the largest community garden in Skid Row, and is also part of a network of about half a dozen gardens operated by the Garden Council.

Humans have grown plants atop structures since antiquity. The ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia (4th millennium BC–600 BC) had plantings of trees and shrubs on aboveground terraces. We continue this tradition by sowing justice and harvesting peaceful change - one planter at a time. Namaste, A.M.

Above: The Skid Row Garden Council planting at the Star Apartments.

Jordan Downs Residents Continue to call on Housing Authority to Address Toxic Lands

Until recently, residents had full access to the site through holes large enough for adults to crawl through. Youth were known to use the holes to cross the site as a shortcut to and from Jordan High School. Residents and advocates demanded that the holes be closed immediately and that warning signs be placed on the walls to warn residents of the health risks of entering or getting near the site. HACLA closed the holes, but refused to put up the signs.

That is why, on Valentine’s Day, residents and advocates put up signs on the walls of the site, warning residents of the health risks associated with lead, arsenic and TCE: known to cause cancer and brain damage, among other health hazards.

Viene de la página 1

Los residentes de Jordan Downs siguen pidiéndole a la Autoridad de Vivienda a hacer frente a las toxinas en la comunidad

Hasta hace poco, los residentes tuvieron acceso completo al sitio a través de unos agujeros suficientemente grandes como para que atravesen adultos. Se conocía que los jóvenes usaban los agujeros para cruzar el sitio como un acceso directo desde Jordan Downs hacia la Escuela Secundaria Jordan High. Los residentes y defensores exigieron que los agujeros se cerraran inmediatamente y que se colocaran carteles de advertencia en las paredes para advertir a los residentes de los riesgos para la salud de entrar o acercarse al sitio. HACLA cerró los agujeros, pero no les dio el permiso para instalar los carteles. Por esta razón, el día de San Valentín, los residentes y defensores colocaron carteles de advertencia en las paredes del sitio contaminado, advirtiendo a la comunidad sobre los riesgos de salud asociados con el plomo, el arsénico y el TCE: toxinas conocidas por causar cáncer, daños en el cerebro y otros peligros para la salud.
It’s Only My Opinion, but...

WRITTEN BY AL SABO

(In)Justice System Strikes Again: When you see and hear a man, Kelly Thomas, pleading for his life while being beaten and then find him dead several days later, how could you find the perpetrators of this crime not guilty? That’s easy! The crime was committed by three police officers. Cops are very rarely found guilty of this type of crime. Why? The system is stacked against the victim - with trials often times taking place in pro-police districts. But the main reason why it is difficult to convict a cop is because prosecutors rarely file charges or aggressively seek a guilty verdict.

How should you try a cop? Choosing an independent prosecutor instead of one from the District Attorney’s or City Attorney’s Office would be a good start.

Police Officers: They are no different than you or me. They have good days and they have bad days. They make mistakes. They, as all humans do, sometimes lie or embellish to cover their own butts. So why do people always believe what the cops say? They lie in court like citizens do at times. Only they are in court more often than most citizens, so they have more opportunities to lie or contort the truth.

Jaywalking Tickets: Contrary to what the LAPD would have you believe, most accidents involving pedestrians are primarily the cause of motorists. If pedestrians cannot step off the curb when the “Don’t Walk” hand starts flashing, why shouldn’t motorists have the same ability to slow down rather than to speed up when the numbers are counting down?

If they’d slow down, they would be always prepared to stop safely. Also, who could better afford an expensive ticket: a new car owner or a citizen who caught a metro to Downtown? Cars run lights constantly, yet rarely get ticketed - unlike many pedestrians in Downtown L.A.

Also, citations seem most heavy in Downtown and MacArthur Park. Is there any good reason for residents from the poorest areas of the city to be the most targeted and most ticketed? Why can I cross in the middle of the street in Westwood but not in my neighborhood? The real reason for the ticket is gentrification - forcing lower income residents to leave and relocate, but to where?

Pershing Square: City Hall and the Downtown Business Improvement Districts would rather see the park turned into a photo opportunity for tourists than a park for use by the actual downtown residents. If the City wanted a park for its citizens to enjoy, they would stop stripping it of the amenities that make it friendly. Who would visit a park with no restrooms, no water fountains, no grass, no park benches, picnic tables, no shade trees? Here’s an idea: how about a walk-through fountain or an attraction like a carousel? That would bring folks to the park.

Broadway: The latest rendering of the “new” Broadway has it changed from six lanes to three. Where does that put Huizar’s “new” Broadway: The latest rendering of the “new” Broadway has it changed from six lanes to three. Where does that put Huizar’s “new” Broadway? What would happen to the infrastructure in place? Where would folks to the park. And, yes, the “No Parking” signs are confusing. Having 24-hour parking might slow down rush hour and early morning traffic, but then maybe that would incentivize people to take the Metro to Downtown. Edward Snowden: If he would have stopped after reporting how Americans are being spied upon, he would have been my hero. But he didn’t stop there. By informing others how we spy, even at times on our own allies, he stepped over the line and instead of a whistle blower, he became treasonous.

TPP: The Trans Pacific Partnership that President Obama is promoting is a huge mistake. It will enable corporations and multinational companies to lobby the government of our nation and no other, 2,000 poor people descended on Washington D.C. from both southern and northern cities to meet with government officials to demand jobs, unemployment insurance, a fair minimum wage and education for poor adults and children.

A struggle for genuine equality - including desegregation and the right to vote - were essential, but Martin Luther King, Jr. knew that African-Americans and other minorities and poor people would never be able to prosper as full citizens until they had economic security. So after the Civil Rights Act was passed, he decided that it was important to focus attention on economic inequality and poverty as well. Many Native American and Latino leaders from poor communities also pledged to work on what became the Poor People’s Campaign.

In the U.S., poverty has increased and the most extreme form of poverty, homelessness, has exploded in the decades since the Poor People’s Campaign. 3.5 million people a year go without housing every year. A California Homeless Bill of Rights would guarantee homeless individuals the right to exist in public space as others do in their homes - to sit, sleep, move about and engage in life sustaining activities that must be carried out in public places because of homelessness. Homeless people must have rights to eat and share food, to public restrooms, to sleep in vehicles if there is no other form of shelter, and to legal counsel if being prosecuted for a citation.

Homelessness doesn’t go away when the police push people away from parks and benches or throw people in jail. Affordable housing, mental health care, healthy food - the same things that the Poor People’s Campaign was aiming to achieve in the 1960s - are the real solution to homelessness. Los Angeles, like so many other cities, is running amuck. Gentrification and incarceration cannot continue to be the way the powers that be address homelessness. It not only strips homeless individuals of their rights, but also costs the government millions. We need the State of California to step up to stop this madness. A California Homeless Bill of Rights would do exactly that.

Like Martin Luther King Jr. said, “It didn’t cost the nation one penny to integrate lunch counters. It didn’t cost the nation one penny to guarantee the right to vote. The problems that we are facing today will cost the nation billions of dollars.”

The way we are dealing with homelessness today will continue to cost this city and nation billions of dollars. We need that public investment directed to long-term, sustainable solutions - not criminalization, prison and jail expansion, and expanding the police state. Until then, however, we need the rights of all people - both the housed and unhoused - to be protected. I myself am homeless and survive daily on these streets. I have rights just like you do. So let’s pass a Homeless Bill of Rights.
Remembering Amiri Baraka

WRITTEN BY PETE WHITE

It was a sweltering summer day in June 1998, June 18th to be precise, when I boarded a plane headed to Chicago. My destination, an unfor- gettable one, was the Black Radical Congress [BRC]—a gathering of young and old left lean- ing activists determined to plot a course that would disrupt the full scale assault on the Black community. The occasion would serve to influ- ence my strategic thinking and unapologetic commitment to fight for the survival of Black communities in the United States.

Founded in the tradition of the Negro Con- vention Movement of the 1830s and the Black Power Conferences in the 1960s, the BRC was an attempt to create a agenda for action in Black America. It explicitly set a goal to bridge the gap between 1960s and 1990s activists utilizing intergenerational dialogue circles to transfer knowledge and air concerns. Addition- ally, it openly set out to attack gender issues and poor folks out of Skid Row because it will lend to this gathering, and what an indelible mark he would leave on me.

One could only imagine the amount of energy present in the rooms throughout the BRC and there were certainly a lot of good and not so good memories that fueled the energy. Ad- ditionally, any time the organizational equiva- lent of alphabet soup shares the same space, there were certainly a lot of good and not so good discussions and debates that were held.

Upon my arrival at the University of Illinois, Chicago, it became abundantly clear that my “well-read” understanding of Black liberation movements would be enhanced and chal- lenged. I was joined by 2,000 plus attendees, both young and old, dressed in everything from dashikis to hip hop gear and everything in between. Civil rights titans surrounded me at every turn and the mood was festive, feisty and celebratory.

One of the most transformative elements of the entire congress. I was privileged and honored to be tapped to join a small meeting that represented the inter-generational transfer of knowledge ambition. It was here that I met Amiri Baraka. During a particularly long back-and-forth between rep- resentatives of the Revolutionary Communist Party and US Organization, young organizers, like me, grew restless. We began to challenge the process and goals laid out for the BRC and pushed back against the taking of space to rehash old beef.

Of course, some folk in the room did not take kindly to this form of assertive leadership and attempted to dismiss our voice, but not Amiri Baraka. Certainly not big in stature, Amiri Bara- ka’s voice was huge in this room of civil rights titans. He demanded that the room stay true to its purpose and challenged his generation of leadership to shut up and listen. Moreover, not afraid of the fight, he in no uncertain terms challenged the theoretical contradictions being glossed over during those heated debates. He told one academic that will remain unnamed, that “his pocket full of credit cards and frequent flyer miles was proof that he had long aban- doned the revolution.” He went on to say that while he shared some of the same privilege it did not stop him from fighting and hearing the voices of those on the front lines.

It was at that moment, right after Amiri Baraka implored his generation to shut up and listen, that I found my “voice” in this contemporary movement for human rights. I shook his hand and gave him a nod but I never had the oppor- tunity to thank him properly.

I guess this is my thank you to Poet Laureate Amiri Baraka. Presente comrade…PRESENTE!

OPINION

Why do you think Chief Beck refuses to meet with the residents of Skid Row?

Tanya

“He’s scared to face his own decisions and be held accountable. He has the authority to change things, but he’s taking sides with those with money and power and ignoring the community’s pleas for assistance.”

Wendell

“Maybe he hasn’t been asked the proper way. He does have a busy schedule. But he does need to come down here. He needs to see for himself how his officers are not holding up to the law. He is a public servant. He needs to come down and hear about our issues.”

Ariana

“Chief Beck refuses to meet with Skid Row residents because of his ego. We have been asking him for a long time now and he has made NO effort. Any other neighborhood asks for a meeting and it happens. The Safer Cities Initiative was created to shove homeless and poor folks out of Skid Row and Downtown. But the people fought back and are still here. Now it’s his ego that refuses to give in.”

Jeff

“Chief Beck refuses to meet with us residents of Skid Row because it will validate our collective voice and immediately require LAPD to respect our voice. LAPD wants to continue its dominance and control of our people without any negative recourse. We in Skid Row are worthy of having our collective voice not only heard but respected”
Hotplate
WRITTEN BY CAROLYN SCHAUGAARD

Mother, yes he was there for me. He had a hotplate and seemed to be waiting there for me, as he could see I looked for him again. I gave him a dollar but didn’t take the hotplate. Then we shared and I gave him my phone number and told him about living at the Women’s Center. He said he had bills to pay and that’s why he was selling the hotplate because they left him without money. The last thing he said to me was not to forget him and I said I wouldn’t. Then as said he went to clean up as he carried his hotplate through the street like the one I used with my husband, Gerry.

~ Honoring Black History Month ~
“When an individual is protesting society’s refusal to acknowledge his dignity as a human being, his very act of protest confers dignity on him.”
- Bayard Rustin

~ Honoring Black History Month ~
“Grab the broom of anger and drive off the beast of fear.”
- Zora Neale Hurston

~ Honoring Black History Month ~
“Good morning, Revolution: You’re the very best friend I ever had. We gonna pal around together from now on.”
- Langston Hughes

~ Honoring Black History Month ~
“We will prevail because we have proven to the world and to ourselves that we are not fringe elements or special interest groups or so-called minorities, without us there is no legitimate majority. We are the mainstream, we have become ‘the people’ and we let our elected leadership beware the awesome possible wrath, the awesome possible wrath, of a mighty multi-foliate and faithful people whose deepest hopes have been rekindled and whose needs have not been met.”
- June Jordan

FEATURED COMMUNITY CONNECTION VENDOR OF THE MONTH: CHRIS KAIHATSU

I’ve been a vendor for the Community Connection Newspaper for four months. I’ve been glad to distribute the paper for donations of one dollar in the Downtown Los Angeles area. It’s been a good thing for me to help cover my day-to-day expenses while I transition to a better way of living.

I find that making Community Connection available is beneficial to the Los Angeles Community Action Network Community as well as those who get it from me and read it. As the name suggests, it facilitates connections both ways— for those who need some help in their lives as well as for those who are looking for appropriate ways to give and get involved. I never expected to receive compliments while distributing the newspaper, yet that’s exactly what happens on a regular basis.

The printing press is as essential tool for any community and its growth, and I’m very pleased to be a small part of this one for the meaningful work it does in Los Angeles.
(In)Justice Realignment?

Federal Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote, “A prison that deprives [people incarcerated] of basic sustenance, including adequate medical care, is incompatible with the concept of human dignity and has no place in civilized society.”

Governor Brown’s strategy to reduce the state’s prison population has resulted in more intense overcrowding of county jails. Up to 25,000 people with low-level offenses and parole violations have been moved to county jails from state prisons, no longer to be counted as part of California’s state prison population yet still incarcerated although they are eligible for early release. Ingrouping to moving people from state prisons to county jails, Brown has transferred incarcerated people to out-of-state prisons through a three-year contract extension with private-prison giant Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). This contract with CCA that began with past-governor Schwarzenegger has continued with Governor Brown - there are currently 8,302 people incarcerated in out-of-state private prisons. Lastly, instead of building prisons to release, Governor Brown is seeking to fund more County-level cures throughout the state, to then fill with people currently incarcerated in state prison. His intentions toward realignment are of containment – not making a difference to cure, or fiscally responsible – as seen in his aggressive pursuit in maintaining incarceration by any means in his responses to the federal mandate.

The California State and County Board of Corrections held a meeting in the beginning of the year to allocate an additional $500 million to counties throughout the state for more jail construction, as a result of California Senate Bill 1022. Fifteen counties were approved to receive funding for new jail construction and expansion. Due to the organizations and communities fighting to stop jail construction and push for community-based alternatives to incarceration, Los Angeles was among several counties whose request for more funding to go towards new jail construction was denied! Groups that rallied and were present for this meeting included CURB, LA No More Jails Coalition and Californians United for Responsible Budget (CURB), a statewide group organizing to curb prison spending by reducing the number of people in prisons and total prisons in the state. In addition, Governor Brown had granted a 2-year extension to cut California’s prison population to a level originally ordered in 2009.

Under realignment, people convicted of certain non-violent or non-serious ‘crimes’ serve their sentences in county jails rather than state prisons, solely to prevent the increase of the current overcrowding of people in state prison. Instead of just incarcerating people in a remote location, communities and families across the state and here, throughout the County of Los Angeles, are demanding community-based alternatives to incarceration. We are pushing lawmakers and Governor Brown to reevaluate state and local policies that are enabling the influx of people from our communities into county jails; there needs to be a reduction in the flow of people into the system. Laws that criminalize people’s practices of survival, laws that criminalize people’s struggle and existence, laws that criminalize mental illness or addiction, programs like the Safer Cities Initiative – these are unfortunately just some of the many subjective race, class and gender-based laws and sentencing patterns that when repealed or decriminalized could not only reduce current prison and jail populations, but also make our communities safer for everyone. Lawmakers and political officials must follow the leadership of impacted communities that are calling for community investment. We are calling for a shift in priorities; community investment and “safety” looks like housing for all homeless and low-income residents, an education system that supports and nurtures the full capacity of all students, meaningful mental health services, health care, healthful and affordable food, and resources coming in that are facilitated by the Real leaders of our communities, who know best our own needs, needs for the time to revise California’s priority of punishment over public safety. The biggest public safety issue right now is state violence: police brutality, all forms of abuse inside prisons ranging from the withholding food to widespread sexual abuse, and the notorious deputy on inmate violence inside Los Angeles County jails.

In addition to the human rights abuses at the State level, under Sheriff Leroy Baca’s 15-year leadership of the largest law enforcement agency in the country, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department (LASD), violence and brutality against inmates has become profoundly integrated into the LASD’s culture. The department has been under intense scrutiny and exposure over the past three years. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit against the department on behalf of several inmates that survived brutal beatings and targeting by deputies – details of the violence were laid out in the 86-page complaint filed in 2011. Later, the County convened the Citizens Commission on Jail Violence (CCJV), a body of people that subpoenaed and questioned rank and file deputies as well as Baca himself, and issued a scathing report calling for significant reforms. In his response to CCJV’s interrogations, Baca proclaimed that if the people of Los Angeles did not like his leadership, “don’t elect [him],” while also denying any accusation of abuse or mismanagement. Yet a federal civil jury found Baca personally responsible for the brutal beating of an inmate, which was a first for a sheriff. The FBI has also been investigating the Sheriff’s department, placing informants inside County jails to gain intelligence on patterns of abuse and corruption and even FBI informants were not exempt from experiencing the terror of LASD deputies. In early December and continuing into February, federal prosecutors have indicted 20 LASD deputies, lieutenants and sergeants.

This avalanche of attention on LASD and exposure of decades-long corruption and abuse, now being made public, is not new information to many of us in the community. In fact, for generations in our communities, we know quite intimately the viciousness of the state and its inhumane treatment of people incarcerated in state prisons and county jails and the cooperation of elected officials and law enforcement agencies in sustaining such a violent culture. Amid the growing revelations of Baca’s failed management, corrupt hiring practices, instigation of deputy violence and overall rotting of LASD’s reputation, on January 6th 2014, Sheriff Leroy Baca publicly endorsed the creation of a civilian oversight commission to oversee the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department – a move he once rejected but now tactically approved.

The following day, January 7th 2014, Leroy Baca announced his resignation as sheriff of LASD. Baca’s resignation is definitely an end-all solution to the deeply ingrained problems of LASD. It is, however, a victory for the people currently and formerly incarcerated in LA County jails, their families and communities who have suffered under his brutal leadership for the past 15 years. Leroy Baca continues to serve on the Board of State and Community Corrections; he was seen at their last meeting! The legacy of perpetuating state violence and deputy-on-inmate violence is why we need Baca out of all political and law enforcement spaces.

The momentum to protect our children, brothers and sisters behind bars is growing. We must continue to fight any new jail construction that is being proposed - there is currently a proposal to build a new women’s jail in Chouwilla that coalitions like LA No More Jails and others are protesting and organizing against. We must continue to demand the release of our loved ones incarcerated by outrageous mandatory sentencing laws and the criminalization of poverty. We must continue to fight for the dignity and power of incarcerated people and their families, and we must demand the implementation of a civilian oversight and review board of the sheriff’s department, one that has subpoena power and the power to influence the policies and structure of the sheriff’s department. This is surely an important tactic in ending Sheriff violence in Los Angeles County jails. We must continue to break the silence around law enforcement and other state violence; there is resilience in our stories and selves, there is resilience in supporting and caring for one another.

As Assata Shakur declares: “It is our duty to fight for freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and protect one another. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”
The Community Connection is a street newspaper and a member of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers. The Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) is a membership organization comprised of low-income, homeless and formerly homeless residents living in Downtown and South Los Angeles, and surrounding communities. LA CAN’s staff and core members write many articles that appear in the Community Connection. These generally appear without a byline, attributed to LA CAN as a collective.

Articles by contributors who are not LA CAN core members and/or personal opinion/experience articles receive a byline. These articles do not necessarily represent the views, opinions and perspectives of the Los Angeles Community Action Network.

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